
So I'm a Spider, So What?
OKINA BABA
Illustration by
TSUKASA KIRYU
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Slowly, inevitably, the home that I made for myself is sinking into a sea of flames.
I start running away from the fire.
The complicated nest of spider thread falls away as I easily cut through it.
The last web.
Once I pass through, I'll never be able to come back here again.
Once I pass through, I won't be safe anywhere.
Nonetheless, I push through without hesitation.
I feel an overwhelming urge to look back as I leave, but I resist.
All I can think about now is running away as far as I can.
And so, I've been driven out of my home for good.


Not a chance. There's no way you could ever beat an opponent like that.
What I saw there was an imposingly majestic dragon. My spider's instincts, my human logic, and the cry of my soul all screamed the same thing in unison.



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Okina Baba

Translation by Jenny McKeon Cover art by Tsukasa Kiryu

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KUMO DESUGA, NANIKA? Vol. 1

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Yen On

1290 Avenue of the Americas

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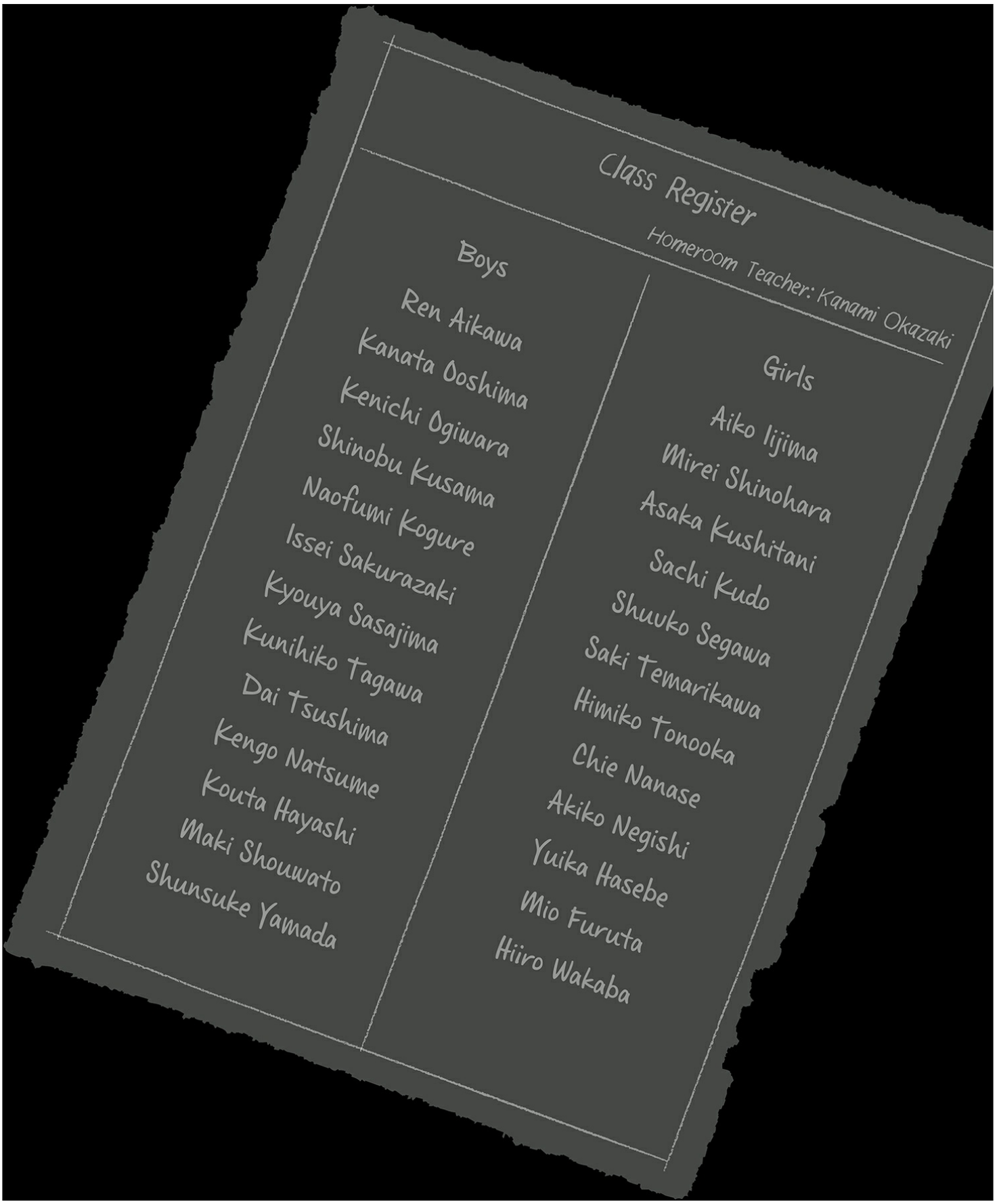
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Class Register
Homeroom Teacher: Kanami Okazaki
Boys
Ren Aikawa
Kanata Ooshima
Kenichi Ogiwara
Shinobu Kusama
Naofumi Kogure
Issei Sakurazaki
Kyouya Sasajima
Kunihiko Tagawa
Dai Tsushima
Kengo Natsume
Kouta Hayashi
Maki Shouwato
Shunsuke Yamada
Girls
Aiko Iijima
Mirei Shinohara
Asaka Kushitani
Sachi Kudo
Shuuko Segawa
Saki Temarikawa
Himiko Tonooka
Chie Nanase
Akiko Negishi
Yuika Hasebe
Mio Furuta
Hiiro Wakaba

Once, there was a world where the battle between Hero and Demon Lord repeated itself time and time again.

During this battle, an enormous space-time spell was fired and exploded in a certain classroom in a Japanese high school.

The spell hit everyone in the classroom, and all of them lost their lives in an instant.

The souls of these victims were scattered into another world, and each was born again in a new life.



1 STARTING WITH A BANG

Gwaaaaah!

I tried to scream just now, but I actually can't even manage a groan.

Is my body messed up that badly?

Okay, calm down.

I don't feel any pain.

The last thing I remember is the onslaught of sudden, monstrous agony in the middle of Classical Literature class.

I probably fainted because of that, but no part of me feels hurt at the moment.

That said, even when I open my eyes, everything is pitch-black. I have no idea where I am.

In fact, I can barely move at all, like something's wrapped around my body.

No, not hypothetically. Like, I can literally tell. I really am bound in something, some material that's hard but has a little give to it.

I can just faintly hear some rustling sounds from outside.

Okay, what's going on here? Have I been kidnapped?

No, let's be real.

What would anyone get out of kidnapping a bottom-of-the-barrel girl like me?

Well, regardless of how sketchy this situation is, I only need to escape.

That's when I hear a loud *CRACK*.

Oh-ho! When I pushed my weight against the thing covering me, it started to

break.

All right, time to finish the job and get out of here!

Putting more power into it, I burst right through, scrabbling out headfirst. Sweet freedom!

The view before my eyes is crawling with spiders.

Wuuuuuh?! Whyyyyyyyy?! Ewww!!

What is with this freaking army of spiders?! Um, excuse me, but why are they all as big as me?! Oh gross, more of them keep popping out of these egg-looking things! Is that what the rustling was coming from?!

Instinctively, I shrink away. My leg bumps into something, and I turn to look.

Hmm?

Is this…it? The thing I crawled out of earlier? Uh…why does it kind of resemble the eggs this spider legion was bursting out of? No, it doesn't merely look like that—it *is* one, isn't it?

I look down at myself more carefully. My neck won't move. Despite that, at the edge of my peripheral vision, I can see what appear to be my legs.

……Spider legs.

Ooooooookay, dooon't paaaaniiiiiic!!!

Th-this isn't what I think it is, right?! Is it, though?! The thing that's super-popular online right now?!

No! Unreal!

This can't be happening, right? Please, say it's not happening!

I glance down again. There are thin, wiry legs, just like those of the spiders wriggling around me.

Concentrating, I try moving them. The spider appendages move accordingly.

Yep. I have to face the facts.

Apparently, I've been reincarnated as a spider.

Unreal.

But right when I feel ready to break down, I hear some crunching noises. Disturbing ones, actually.

Hmm.

It won't do me any good to ignore reality. Right in front of me is a humongous army of spiders, probably my brothers and sisters. Whatever those sounds are, they're probably coming from them.

I slowly bring myself to take in the scene before me. There, one of the spiders is noisily devouring its buddy.

Aaaack! The hell are these guys doing?! Seriously, they're eating each other? Cannibalism?!

As I look on, my siblings begin a bloodbath in their fierce competition for survival.

No, no, no, no! This is bad, this is baaad!

Why should we have to fight one another like this, my brothers and sisters?! Ah, right—for food. I guess they're hungry. Speaking of, I could use something to eat myself.

HUH?! That's a scary train of thought.

Reality got away from me for a moment there. On a battlefield like this, an innocent high school girl like me could fall prey to the wicked ways of men in an instant! Metaphorically and literally!

Times like this call for running like hell.

Fighting? Not happening.

I'm a natural-born homebody. There's no way I could ever challenge something so gross and violent. Ah. I just remembered that's what I am now.

Okay.

Instead of wasting time thinking about stupid crap, I figure I'd better get a move on. But apparently it's a little too late for that. The ground is ominously rumbling beneath my feet. Now what?! The sounds and tremors are coming from behind. Turning around, I find myself looking up at an enormous, giant

spider.

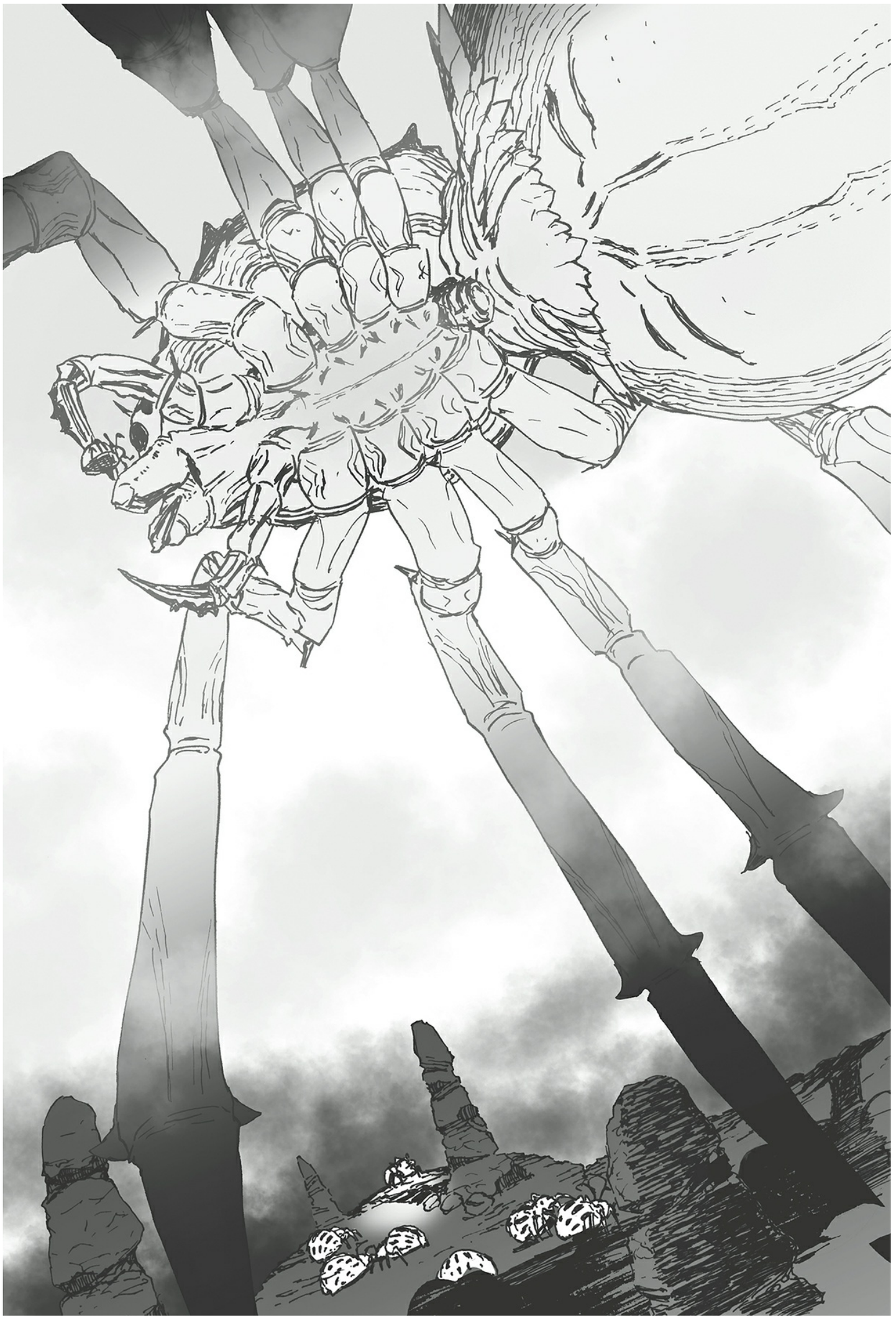
Ooh, might you be Mother? Or perhaps Father?

Whatever.

I’m getting all confused again. Seriously, though—why is it so huge?! This massive arachnid has got to be dozens of times larger than me.

Maybe I’m remembering wrong, but I feel pretty confident there weren’t any spiders this big on Earth!

Ah.



With a brisk snap, the titan skewers a smaller one of its kind with a claw and devours it.

Sort of like she's having a light snack.

Et tu, Mother…?!

Well, I'll think about all this later on. For now, my only goal is to get out of here safely and try to survive!

I run away at full speed. Only when I'm so tired I can barely move do I finally calm down. Luckily, when I turn to check, I find that nobody chased after me.

Oof, I thought I was gonna die. It would've sucked to get killed after only being alive for a couple minutes.

Anyway…now that I've come to my senses a little, I have a lot to think about.

First of all, why did I die?

Actually, now that I think about it, I don't necessarily know for sure that my life ended at all.

I sort of decided on my own that I died and got reincarnated as a spider, but it's not like I actually remember kicking the bucket.

Pretty sure my last memory is of the Classical Literature teacher, who we called Ms. Oka, reading aloud from the textbook.

I'd been dozing off a little when suddenly I was overwhelmed by crushing agony, and then I have no memories of what happened after.

If I did die, it was probably because of that mysterious pain, but…

…I have no idea what caused it at all.

At any rate, the most likely conclusion is still that I died at that moment and was reincarnated as a spider.

Other than that, I guess it's possible that I'm alive, and my spirit is currently possessing a spider, or something similar.

Like, maybe my original body is in a vegetative state, lying on a hospital bed right now.

Or here's an even crazier idea: Maybe I'm not the real me at all, just some total stranger who happens to have the memories of another person.

Maybe the real me is sitting in class like usual, even now.

Well.

It's not like there's any way for me to know for sure. How can I prove I'm not who I think I am, anyway?

I'll end up spouting incomprehensible nonsense like "I think therefore I am" and stuff.

Besides, the most likely conclusion from the evidence is the ridiculous idea that I've been reincarnated, so I may as well throw common sense to the wind.

At any rate, better put all this aside for now.

In the spirit of "I think, therefore I am," I'm just going to assume that I am in fact myself until proven otherwise.

So apparently, I'm a spider now. There's definitely no denying that anymore.

While I was running away, I was able to hop and jump in ways a human never could.

So if I'm a spider, what was up with that hulk I saw before?

Hmm.

Given the circumstances, maybe it really was one of my arachnid parents? I don't know the specifics of spider biology, but I don't think it's that unusual in nature for animals to eat their young. The other spiders were clearly cannibalistic right from birth, so the parent eating its children shouldn't be all that surprising.

If that giant spider was one of my parents, I wonder if that means I'll be that size, too, someday?

Thinking about it makes me feel a little sick.

Okay, forget that part. Let's get back on track.

Let's see. Really, there's one thing that I'm particularly hung up on.

Specifically, the fact that I'm a monster.

The whole "reincarnation" genre is pretty popular in web novels and stuff right now, so I guess it isn't that alien an idea.

Getting reincarnated as a monster, I mean.

So the question is: Am I a normal Earth species, or is this not Earth at all but a parallel world, where I've been reborn as a beast?

Judging by that huge spider from before, my guess would lean toward the latter, but then the difficulty level of surviving here would probably go way up.

This isn't getting me anywhere. I don't have enough information to parse what's going on.

Is this Earth or not? Am I a monster or just a normal spider? If this is a different world, what kind of world is it?

There's a mountain of things I want to know, but I have no way of finding out.

Ahh, if only this were a novel or something, I'd probably have an Appraisal skill that would help me figure it out…

<Number of skill points currently in possession: 100. Number of skill points required to acquire skill [Appraisal LV 1]: 100. Acquire skill?> *Whoa. What? … For real?* A mechanical voice completely devoid of emotion suddenly echoed in my mind. That's surprising in more ways than one.

First, that I'm hearing voices at all.

Secondly, that these "skills" exist here.

Obviously, there's no such skill system on Earth, and I've never heard any voices announcing things in my head before now.

So does that mean this isn't Earth? Probably, yeah.

I guess that gives my "I'm a monster" theory a lot more weight.

Being a monster in a parallel world seems like a recipe for death, but let's not think about that. Nope, nope, nope.

More importantly, it's really real. The Appraisal skill actually does exist! Whoo-hoo! Now we're talking! Finally this is starting to feel like a proper

fantasy reincarnation story! Obviously, my answer is “YES!”

<[Appraisal LV 1] acquired. Remaining skill points: 0.>

Apparently, that used up all my skill points, but I decide not to worry about that for now.

Forget! About! That!

It’s time to use my brand-spanking-new Appraisal skill to examine the crap out of my surroundings!

I pick a nearby rock at random, trying to think [Appraise] as I focus on it.

It worked! Information flows smoothly into my mind.

<Stone>

…Hmm? Wait, what? That’s all?

No, no, no.

That can’t be right, can it? I probably just failed because it’s my first time. Let me try again…

<Stone>

…Huh? Is that seriously it?

No, no, no, no.

It must be that this stone doesn’t have any valuable information because it’s just an ordinary rock! This time, I decide to test my skill on a wall. Maybe that’ll tell me something about the area I’m in. If I could get an area name like “Such-and-Such Cave” and a little description or something similar, I’d definitely feel a lot better.

<Wall>

……I’m not even going to say anything.

I should’ve considered the fact that the skill name, [Appraisal LV 1], went out of its way to mention its level.

For all intents and purposes, this seems to mean a level-1 skill won’t provide me with any useful results.

Maybe raising the level will improve it, but I've used up all my skill points.

Argh! I can't believe I blew everything on a useless ability!

I don't know what other skills were available, but for all I know there might've been some that would've actually been useful at level 1!

No, I should look at it the other way. If this is what Appraisal is like at level 1, surely any other level-1 skill would've been just as ineffective. Yeah, let's go with that. Otherwise, I won't be able to live with myself.

Ugh. Unreal.

At this point, I figure I might as well Appraise myself.

<Spider Nameless>

Hmm? I knew it would say "Spider," of course, but why "Nameless"?

"I am a spider. As yet I have no name." Is it a Natsume Souseki kinda thing?

I mean, I had a name in my previous life, but I guess I don't anymore, since I'm a spider now.

I better put aside my useless Appraisal skill for the time being. If anything, it's only increasing the number of mysteries.

Such as the skill points I used to gain the Appraisal skill. Presumably, I could acquire more skills by saving up more points. I have no idea how to go about acquiring any, though.

Between levels, skills, and skill points, this world feels very video game–esque.

I mean, that could be kinda fun, right?

Although I don't know if I can afford to have any fun at the moment.

Whatever. I'm getting hungry.

There's no point in hanging around the same place forever, so I'll just have to get a move on and see if I can find something to eat.

I thought I'd just walk around for a while, but this cave is WAY too big!

This is all relative to my size, of course, but the ceiling is so high I can barely

make anything out, and the width is just as absurd.

The random scattered rocks help give a little sense of variety, at least, but it still seems pretty darn spacious for a cave. Eventually, I find a path that branches off.

Climbing onto a fairly sizable rock, I try squinting down the path. There's something there…! From what I can tell, it's a bunch of monsterish creatures milling around.

<Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Deer> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Bat > <Bat> <Bat> <Bat> <Wolf> <Wolf> <Wolf> <Wolf> <Wolf> <Wolf>…

Ouch! Was that a migraine?! My stupid Appraisal skill must've gone off on its own, because that sudden explosion of information made my head hurt.

I mean, they do seem kinda like deer if I look real hard, but I don't remember the deer in my world having such shiny, sharp-looking horns. And the "bats" flapping around in the air look more like hideous rodents sprouting devil wings. The wolves, at least, seem normal…except now I see that they have six legs.

Am I supposed to pass through here? Yeah, right. I'm just a tiny newborn spider. The difficulty level is way too high.

I stealthily crawl back down from the rock.

So…there are real monsters. This really isn't Earth.

Not to mention, if those so-called deer and wolves are the same size as they would be on Earth…

Don't think about it! Don't think about it!

Okay, now what?

Ahead of me is a gauntlet of monsters. Behind me is spider hell. Is this for real? Am I in checkmate?

Okay, okay. Calm down, please.

I thought this kind of thing might happen, so I prepared an alternative strategy for just such an occasion.

Well, it actually isn't anything that fancy. I just happened to find a different path earlier. The smaller side road would have been easy to miss because it was right next to this huge one, an unassuming little hole in the wall. Nevertheless, it's about ten feet around, so I'll fit through without a problem.

On that note, I still need to look for food. Hopefully I'll find a way out of this cave, too.

With that decided, time to head out!

This triumphant departure on the next leg of my journey is going great, except that I immediately get lost.

Hoo, boy. Can I say it again? This cave is *way* too big! Seriously, what's with this huge labyrinth?

Why are there so many freaking paths branching off everywhere?

How many, you ask? I gave up counting after it went past ten.

I'm encountering more than my fair share of monsters, too. And since I immediately run away each time, I've completely lost track of where I came from.

Ugh…unreal.

If I want to get anywhere in this labyrinth, I'll seriously need a map. No way am I going to find an exit at this rate.

And then I discover something totally crazy.

There's footprints on the ground. Human footprints.

I can distinctly make out a couple sets of footprints. Which means people have passed through this place. In fact, this is proof that humans exist in this world at all. The big revelation is making me a little emotional.

But now I'm noticing something a little bit…no, more like reeeally alarming.

My body is so much larger than these footprints.

Judging by the size of whoever made these tracks, my own body must be at

least three feet tall…

Nah, I'm sure it's just dwarf footprints.

That's got to be it! Ah-ha-ha!

…Can't believe this. Nope, nope.

Well…then again.

I started to suspect when I saw that giant spider before, to be honest. No matter how I look at it, I'm unquestionably a monster. Thanks a lot!

Ugh, I've been trying to avoid it, but I finally have to face all the facts.

Being reborn as a spider is shocking enough in itself, but I'm a monster spider, too.

This is messed up. So messed up that some people might despair and even end it all. I'm definitely not considering death myself, but this is still kind of a bummer. Well, no use sitting around and sulking, though.

Since this world is clearly different from my own, I don't know what kinds of dangers to expect. For one thing, there's no guarantee that there won't be more gigantic monsters like that spider. And going by my own size, that thing must've been a hundred feet long…

Are humans even able to take down a creature like that? Probably not, right? If there are any boss monsters here, the giant spider is definitely one of them.

So that makes me the offspring of a boss monster, then.

Sounds pretty bad, doesn't it?

Actually, doesn't that mean that if I run into people, they'll try to kill me?

It's to-o-o-tally possible. Actually, chances are good that's exactly what'll happen.

Suddenly, I see something lying on the ground near the footprints.

What's that?

After a closer look, I recognize it as the dismembered remains of a spider.

Yep, the same species as me.

Wow, what skillful dissection. This was probably the work of humans, huh?

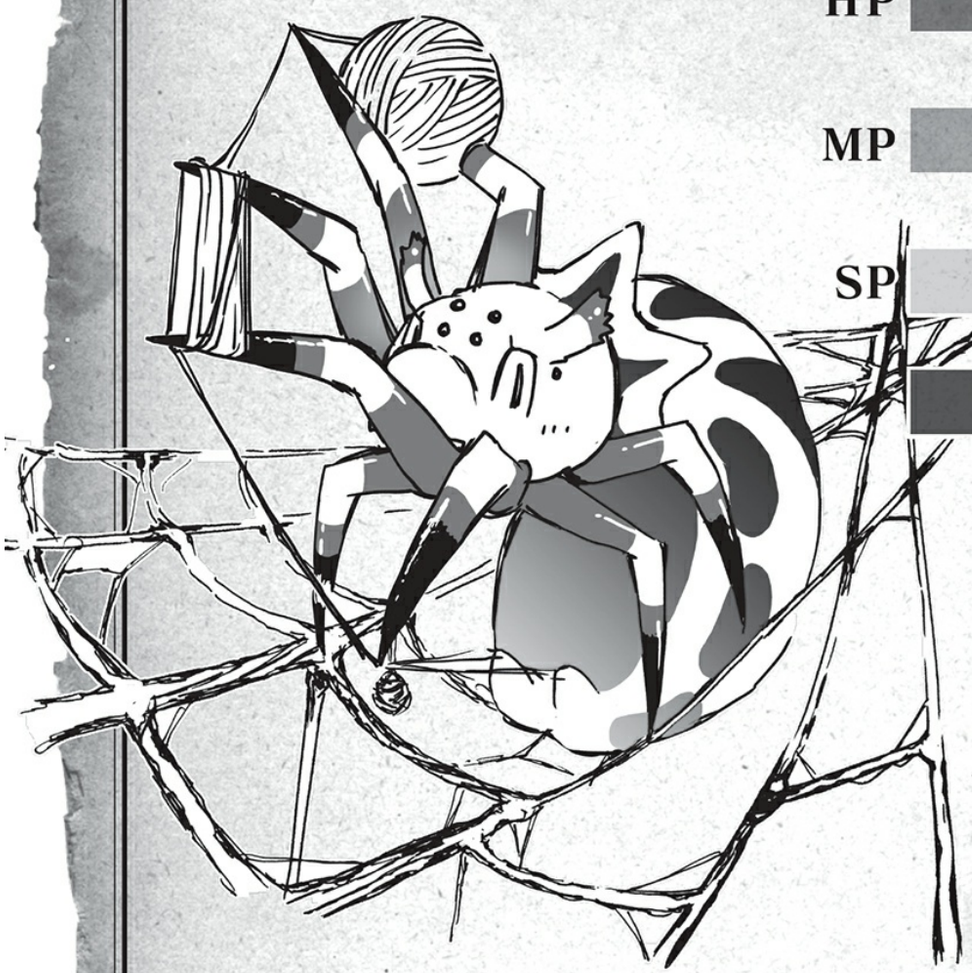
I do *not* like where this is going!

If any humans find me, they're definitely gonna murder me!

Monster Encyclopedia

file.01 SMALL LESSER TARATECT

LV.01



status

HP 26 / 26

MP 26 / 26

SP 26 / 26

26 / 26

Average Offensive Ability : 8

Average Defensive Ability : 8

Average Magic Ability : 8

Average Resistance Ability : 8

Average Speed Ability : 8

skill

[Poison Fang LV 1]
[Night Vision LV 9]
[Spider Thread LV 3]
[Poison Resistance LV 1]

Weak. Danger level F, the lowest possible. In addition to being weak stats-wise, all it knows how to do is charge at opponents head-on, so it is simple to defeat. However, some individuals will occasionally build nests, which makes them much more dangerous. If a nest is discovered, it should be destroyed immediately. Both the spider's thread and the spider itself can be destroyed by fire.



The End of Normal Life

It happened on a completely ordinary day. The kind where you go to school, chat with your friends, take classes, go home and play video games, eat dinner, take a bath, and go to bed. At least, that's how it was supposed to go.

That day, I rubbed my eyes sleepily while I walked to school.

I'd stayed up late playing online games the night before, and now I was paying for it.

Once I got to school, I stifled a yawn as I entered the classroom.

"Morning."

"Good morning."

"Mornin'… What's up? You look hella tired, dude."

I greeted my friends in class, Kyouya Sasajima and Kanata Ooshima.

These two played the same video games as me, so they were basically my gaming buddies.

"Yeah, you're not gonna believe it. I formed a pick-up party with Baldie himself yesterday."

"For real?!"

"Yeah, for real. So I pretty much pulled an all-nighter."

"No way, dude. You serious? When was this? After I crashed?"

Kanata had played with me for part of the evening. He logged out before me, though, saying he was going to bed.

"Dammit. If I knew that was gonna happen, I would've stuck with it a little

longer!”

He seemed genuinely disappointed. But I’d only been looking for a pick-up party in the first place because he’d signed off. If he’d stayed, I probably wouldn’t have wound up with Baldie at all.

“So? What was it like seeing Baldie up close?” Kyouya’s question brought back memories of Baldie’s heroic deeds.

“That guy can’t be human, yo,” I said. “Would you believe he dodged a Besbel Witch’s magic and just charged right at it?”

“Damn, leave it to Baldie. They don’t call him Skanda for nothing.”

“Nah, no matter how good a speedster you are, you need a good arm to pull off a trick like that. It always comes down to this in the end!” Kanata smacked his own arm as he spoke.

True enough. Even if I had the same stats and equipment as Baldie, I doubt I could manage the same feat.

“Ahh… I wanna get reborn into a game world!”

“You wish, pal. Wanna do some level grinding after school?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“I’m in, too. Let’s train somewhere really tough!”

Just as our conversation was wrapping up, the school bell rang, and we all scattered to our desks.

We had no idea that we’d never get to make good on that promise.

“Huh?”

When I got to my seat and began preparing for class, I realized my pencil case wasn’t in my bag.

After a moment’s thought, I recalled taking it out to scribble down some game info in my notebook. I probably forgot to put it back.

“Ah, crap.”

“What’s wrong?” Yuika Hasebe, the girl with the desk next to mine,

responded to my grumbling.

“I forgot my pencil case.”

“Oh, did you? Well, I suppose you can borrow these, then.” Hasebe handed me a pencil and eraser.

“Thanks.”

“Mm-hmm. You owe me a piece of candy.”

“C’mon, you’re charging me?” I groaned, but I smiled wryly and waved a hand in acknowledgment nonetheless. Of course, now I know that this was just another promise I wouldn’t be able to keep.

Then, during our Classical Japanese lesson, it happened.

So tired… I was fighting a losing battle against my overwhelming drowsiness.

“All righty, then. Pay attention, pleeease! Next is page thirty-seven of the textbook, starting on line one. Let’s see… Let’s have Ms. Shinohara translate it, shall we, since she’s peeking at her cell phone in the middle of class?”

“Huh?!”

Hearing her name, Mirei Shinohara squeaked and scrambled frantically to conceal her smartphone.

In the seat next to her, Kengo Natsume was suppressing a smirk, but he was clearly fiddling with his phone, too.

“I wouldn’t be quite so smug, Mr. Natsume. If Shinohara can’t answer, then you’re up next, okaaay?”

Our teacher—Ms. Kanami Okazaki, though we all called her Ms. Oka—had noticed Natsume’s hands, too, which triggered some chuckling around the classroom.

Natsume’s face turned red, and he scowled as the class laughed at him.

The person laughing the hardest was Natsume’s closest friend, Issei Sakurazaki, who had turned all the way around in his front-row seat just to point and laugh.

“Now, nowww. Quiet down, please, claaass. Your answer, Ms. Shinohara?”

In the end, neither Shinohara nor Natsume was able to answer, and another wave of giggles rippled through us.

The mood of the class stayed relaxed as Ms. Oka began to read aloud.

To me, her voice might as well have been a lullaby.

I knew that if I didn't do anything, I'd doze off in no time, so I looked up from my textbook.

Almost all the other students had their eyes on their books.

Most likely, they figured that if they slacked off they'd end up like Shinohara and Natsume.

Ms. Oka was usually very kind and friendly, but if she caught you skipping class or goofing off, she could be merciless.

Meanwhile, my eyes stopped on a particular student.

What caught my attention was the girl sitting in the seat to the front-left of mine. We called her Rihoko, but that wasn't her real name.

It was short for "Real Horror," with "ko" on the end to make it a girl's name.

She was super-creepy, all skin and bones, with a pale and permanently dour face.

I don't like to trash-talk people, but even so, something about her didn't sit well with me.

As if to spite my valiant battle with sleepiness, she was blatantly napping on her desk.

Uncomfortably, I pulled my gaze away from Rihoko.

And then I saw it. The crack.

I don't think anyone else noticed it.

In the middle of the classroom, above our heads in what would normally be empty space, there was a rift in the air. I don't know what else to call it. Not only that, but it was expanding by the second. The tear looked like it would burst open at any moment.

Although I was staring right at it, I was so dumbfounded that there was nothing I could do.

Even if I had been able to take action, it probably wouldn’t have changed what happened…

The crack split wide open. At the same moment, I felt intense, terrible pain.

And then I—no, we—died.



A Rent-Free Home

I know—I'll make a house. A totally breakin-proof house.

I've given up on escaping from this dungeon. If I keep wandering around randomly, the only future I can imagine is some unexpected encounter leading to a dead end. Monster or human, everything is my enemy now. And I don't mean a frenemy or a rival or anything like that. I'm talking the kind that puts your life in danger.

Besides, this place is frequented by humans. It'll be risky to use the exit even if I do manage to find it.

I mean, if anyone discovers me, they'll kill me. And there could be a human settlement right outside.

Which is why I made up my mind to live in this dungeon.

So anyway. If this is my new home, what do I need? Food, shelter, and clothing.

Well, I don't think that last one is necessary for a spider. The temperature here is comfortable enough either way.

The problem is food and shelter.

Q. What is a spider's main diet? A. Other insects.

Oof… That's true, isn't it? That's what I'm gonna have to do to fill my belly.

Although, given my absurd size, I don't think my potential prey is limited to insects. For instance, I could probably eat other monsters, or… I don't want to think about this, but…human beings…

Really, my siblings back there started cannibalizing one another as soon as

they were born, right? The giant parent spider was eating her children like it was no big deal, too, so as far as I can tell, my particular species seems to regard all living beings as potential food.

In fact, in a cave like this, it's probably the only option. Which means if I want to eat, I'll have to take on some other monsters and chow down.

You can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs, after all, and I'm gonna starve to death if I don't eat something, no matter how gross.

At present, I do have one thing that could potentially serve as a food source.

The butchered carcass of the spider I found earlier.

The legs and fangs and stuff had been taken, but most of the main body was still there.

Well, if I eat that, I probably won't have to worry about food for the rest of the day. If I can bring myself to eat it, that is.

Honestly, suddenly having to eat a spider is pretty extreme, and that thing was probably one of my siblings…

Both ethically and visually, I'd really rather not.

So I'm going to hold off on eating the guy for now.

Besides, even if I do take the plunge, that'll only be a temporary solution.

Considering that I'll be living in this dungeon from now on, I'll have to be able to procure food on a regular basis anyway.

But if I want to eat other monsters, that means I'll have to beat them first.

How am I supposed to just jump into combat?

A frail girl like me, who's only ever been good at games, won't stand a chance in a real fight.

And so I conclude that I should start by making a house.

What's a spider without a spiderweb, right?

Spiders create webs with special viscous thread and use them to catch prey, after all.

So if this goes well, my food problem and my shelter problem will be solved all at once.

I think this cave makes for a nice location, actually.

If nothing else, it should be easy to make webs all over the place.

Without further ado, then, time to create my new home!

Carrying the corpse of my sibling on my back, I seek out a good spot where people are unlikely to bother me.

What? Why would I take it with me, you ask?

Insurance. Hopefully it won't come to that, but beggars can't be choosers.

Eventually, I come to a T-junction with no human footprints in sight, so I decide to set up there.

First, I'll have to produce the thread. *From my butt, I guess? I'm pretty sure that's the general area the thread should come out of, so let's give it a shot.*

But by the time I finish the thought, I realize I've already produced a thread somehow. Huh? I don't remember this stuff coming out of me…

On top of that, it's a really long one. Oh man, does this mean I've been walking around with a string sticking out of my butt this whole time?

Wow, that's so embarrassing!

Maybe it's like when you (redacted), so you (redacted)?

Okay, forget about the fact that I made thread unconsciously for now.

Now to make a home, for real this time!

Finished! I look over my work with satisfaction. A magnificent spiderweb is strung up across the cave passage, blocking the area off.

Man, did my natural instincts kick in or something? As soon as I started working, my body just moved on its own and constructed the web in the blink of an eye.

However, instead of totally completing the net, I left a little hole just big enough for me to squeeze through.

Why? For an escape route, obviously.

I'm settling in at a three-way intersection, which is now hemmed in by my webs over each passage.

But if I blocked it up completely, I wouldn't be able to get out.

It's possible, although I doubt it'll happen, that some fierce opponent might slash through my net.

So I left a hole on purpose, so I can get away in case of an emergency.

Now I'm protected by webs in all three directions, plus, an emergency exit is in place.

The ideal den for a shut-in is complete! Ahhh, there's no place like home.

All I need now is for prey to get caught in my net on a regular basis.

If I can pull that off, there's no reason I won't be able to hide out in this place for the rest of my life.

Awesome!

I did go to school, but other than that, I mostly lived my life on Earth as a recluse. I never talked to anyone at school, and once I got home, I always just played games or surfed the net. Most of my dinners involved adding hot water and waiting three minutes or heating something up on the stove. Occasionally I'd mix things up with a box lunch from the convenience store.

My parents both worked all day and usually got home late. And even when they came home, we never saw each other face-to-face. We only did the bare minimum of chores. To be perfectly honest, it was like living with two total strangers. It's kind of impressive in a way, that I can't even remember what my real parents looked like.

Still, I wonder if they were a little bit sad about my death, at least?

Nah, probably not. Although they might be sad about losing what little income I contributed to the household.

I used to earn a small amount of rent money through stocks. If there's anything they'd miss, it's probably that.

That was how cold our family relationship was.

My lifestyle probably contributed to my extreme awkwardness when it came to communicating with others.

Or it might've just been the personality I was born with, not how I was raised.

As a result, I didn't have anyone I could call a friend, and even in game chats I usually didn't say much.

Likewise, my character in my favorite MMO had a reputation for being silent.

My avatar was a somber old bald dude, too. He was a real strong-and-silent type, the kind of good guy who let his actions do all the talking.

And his stats were pretty out there—I maxed out my attack power and speed and left everything else untouched.

But that didn't matter as long as I didn't get hit! I just avoided enemy attacks and plowed through everything with a hit-and-run strategy. The perfect plan, aside from the part that a single hit would probably kill me!

Hmm.

I don't really care about not being able to see my parents or classmates anymore, but it makes me a little sad to think that I'll never see that old bald guy again. I made him a legend for being one of the few free-to-players who could stand up against the pay-to-players, so it's a shame to have abandoned his file like that.

…In short, I'm more attached to a game character than I am to my parents. I've got a knack for this being-inhuman thing, if I do say so myself.

Besides, it's true—I've never been that good at being a person.

Although, I suppose believing it's okay to be a bad person is the first step toward becoming one…

Well, since I'm already a bad person, I might as well say it.

Being a recluse is the best! Whoo-hoo!

A white thread is drawn between my two forelegs.

When I pull on it, it goops and stretches.

Then when I stop pulling, it gradually returns to its original length.

Okay. Nice and rubbery, just like I hoped.

What am I doing, you ask?

Experimenting with my spider thread, of course.

From now on, this stuff is going to be my lifeline, so I figured testing out what it can do should be my first priority.

I started by producing a whole bunch of it, experimenting with whether I could control the thickness, stickiness, strength, and elasticity.

Adjusting the thickness was easy enough.

I couldn't quite make it invisibly thin, of course, but I could get it about as fine as a strand of hair.

In the darkness of this dungeon, that should be really hard to spot.

But when I followed up with a strength test, I discovered that the thinner I made the thread, the more easily it broke.

Well, nothing I can do about that. If you think about it, skinnier would obviously mean more fragile.

Conversely, thickening the thread increases its durability.

The fattest strand I can currently create is a little less than an inch around. Not that different from your average rope, I guess.

Of course, that's only the maximum for a single raw string. If I really want to make a thicker one, I can just bundle together a bunch of them. Sounds like a lot of work, though.

To be honest, I wish I hadn't experimented with the stickiness.

It's easy to assume that all spider threads adhere to everything, but in fact, some aren't sticky at all.

And apparently, the reason spiders don't get caught on their own webs is due to their skillful use of these nonstick threads. I realized this when my instincts kicked in as I built my home.

So I decided to experiment to gain a deeper understanding of it, but instead I just tangled up my whole body.

Well…yeah.

Since you have to make proper use of the sticky and nonsticky fibers, it stands to reason that if you don't, you'll just get caught in your own threads.

And that's how I ended up stuck in my own damn spiderweb like an idiot.

That freaked me out. But seriously, one more wrong move and I might've been permanently caught in my own trap and died the stupidest death possible.

Luckily, by some miracle, I discovered I could still alter the properties of a thread to a certain extent as long as it was still connected to my butt. After that, I tested whether this could also apply to detached threads and found it could, if only a little bit. I guess that's a fantasy world for you.

I took a moment to regroup, then started testing the strength.

I already knew that thinner thread was weaker and thicker was stronger, but I wasn't able to figure out the greatest force it could withstand.

Why, you ask? Because when I produced a maximum-strength thread, I failed to cut through it no matter how hard I tried. Alarmingly enough, I couldn't even chew through it with my fangs.

If I got caught in a web like this, no way could I just slip out.

Even so, I'm sure there could be other, more powerful monsters able to slice right through it, so I have to be careful not to overestimate its strength.

And so, the final experiment, elasticity, has produced the thread that I'm currently manipulating with my clawed legs.

Okay.

This rubbery thread could certainly come in handy. If I fasten a stone or something to it, I could probably use it as a simple sling.

There'll definitely be other practical uses for it, too.

Guess my experiment yielded some satisfactory results after all.

However, there is one problem that I can't ignore much longer—spinning all

that thread seems to have drained my energy.

In other words, I'm extremely hungry.

I've been wanting food for a long time, but now it feels like my life might be in danger.

Strangely, I'm not particularly thirsty, but the degree of hunger I'm experiencing is undeniably way worse than usual.

At this rate, I'll starve to death.

I won't even live to see the sunrise tomorrow. Although, I guess I wouldn't see that anyway, since I'm in a cave.

If I want to avoid that fate, I have to eat something… And all I have on hand is the thing I brought along as backup…

Should I eat that?

Well, my only other option at the moment is dying, so…

If I'm going to live in a dungeon, I have to get used to eating monsters raw, anyway.

All right. Time to suck it up.

Eating my sibling's corpse as my first meal after being born seems kinda irredeemably immoral, but I don't have much of a choice.

Okay, here goes.

Whoa, this is totally gross. So bitter. But I force it down anyway.

I can't exactly afford to turn up my nose at it just because I don't like the taste.

So I press on and finish eating my sibling's carcass.

This is enough to fill my stomach, so I don't have to worry about starvation for a while.

Whew. Thanks for the meal, I guess.

<Condition satisfied. Acquired title [Kin Eater].>

<Acquired skills [Taboo LV 1] [Heretic Magic LV 1] as a result of title [Kin

Eater].> *Uh, what?*

It's the same voice I heard back when I gained the Appraisal skill.

Let's just call this announcer the "Divine Voice" for now.

So what's up with this "title" business?

Is this what I think it is? The kind of achievement reward you get after meeting certain conditions?

Probably, but either way, the one I just got is kinda bizarre and disgraceful…

I mean, just the phrase "Kin Eater" sounds terrible!

Other people can't see this, right? No, I bet they could if their Appraisal skill was high enough.

Ugh…

If someone sees that, they're gonna judge me so hard.

Although, seeing as I'm a monster and all, they're bound to dislike me whether or not they can see my title.

But, aside from the unfortunate wording, this is kind of a big deal, isn't it?

I mean, I even gained two skills at once.

So if you get a title, you can get a skill without using any points. Yeah, this is huge.

I'd assumed there was no way for me to acquire new skills with 0 skill points, so this discovery of other methods is pretty great.

So, my newly acquired skills are Taboo and Heretic Magic.

"Taboo" is a cool-sounding name, but I have no idea what it'll actually do. I can't even come up with any wild guesses.

Uh, excuse me, could I get an explanation, please? I can't use this if I don't know what effect it has.

Wait… By that logic, I won't be able to use Heretic Magic, either.

What now? Am I supposed to utter the spell or something? Wait, I'm a spider, so I can't even say anything…

All I can produce is some kind of…croak? More like a teeth-grinding sound, really…

Well, even if I could talk, it's not like I know any spells, so I'm out of luck either way.

Just for fun, I try thinking [Heretic Magic] really hard.

……Yeah, nothing's happening. Can't use that.

I was excited about the chance to cast some real fantasy magic, aside from the worrying implications of the "Heretic" part, but this sure nips that excitement in the bud.

Maybe it isn't possible to use magic skills right after getting them?

Is it just because I have no idea how, or do I have to study magic first or something?

I don't even know the basics, here.

Huh?

I thought I'd struck gold getting these skills and the title, but what's the point if I can't use it?

Is Kin Eater totally useless or what?

Ahh, now that I think about it…if all you have to do to get the Kin Eater title is make a meal of your own kind, tons of my spider siblings probably have it, too.

It doesn't change the fact that humans can easily kill us, then.

In other words, gaining the Kin Eater title had exactly zero effect on my battle capabilities.

So it's ACTUALLY useless.

I see. No wonder the condition was so easy to meet. So the easier the title is to acquire, the lower its effect, basically.

Still, it's good I learned about the existence of titles at all.

If I can score a bunch more, maybe I'll be able to efficiently build up some skills. Maybe I should try a few things to see if I can rack up a couple more.

Although I don’t know what kinds of titles are out there…

And I don’t have any tools or anything, so there’s only so much I can do.

Maybe if I dance for a while, I’ll get a “Dancer” title or something?

Let me try for a second.

Within a few moments, a huge tremor runs through the thread I’m standing on and knocks me flat on my face.

Ouch. That hurt.

I didn’t get a title for my efforts, either. Just a painful new memory. So much for that.

Composing myself, I bring my attention to the still-vibrating thread. The other end is attached to the bottom of the web in the passageway to my left. Something must be caught there. My first prey.

I approach with caution.

When I get close enough to see the web, I notice something stuck in it with eye-searingly bright, rainbow-colored spots.

<Frog>

Okay. This actually is shaped like a frog.

It’s around the same size as me and shining with all the colors of the rainbow, but at least it still resembles a frog.

This is the first time my Appraisal skill assessed a monster other than myself with an acceptable result.

People always say that frog tastes like chicken, so this should be easy enough to eat.

At the very least, it won’t be nearly as awful as eating my sibling.

If I have one complaint, though, it would be that the color of this frog pretty much screams “poisonous.”

I mean, there’s no way something this obnoxiously colored won’t be toxic.

Besides, since I ate earlier, I’m not as hungry as I could be…

What should I do?

But, right as I'm taking it easy and mulling things over, the frog suddenly launches a desperate counterattack!

That's right, it just spit some super-poisonous-looking liquid right at me!

Crap! Since my guard is totally down, I don't have any time to dodge, so all I can do is mentally curse as the fluid splatters all over me.

Ngyaaaaah?! Hey, what the—?! Ow, ow!

Poison? Is this poison?! Man, it really hurts where that stuff hit me!

Wha—?!

A second shot?! Wait, seriously?! Gyaah! It got me again!!

Ow, hey! This isn't funny! Retreat, retreat!

I force my tangled legs to move and somehow manage to get out of the frog's range.

Wow. That really hurt. Is that what it feels like to have acid dumped over you? I'm not melting, am I?

I'm worried, but of course I don't have a mirror, so it's not like I can check.

Damn. This is embarrassing.

Even if it is stuck in a trap, my opponent is still a monster. I shouldn't have let my guard down.

A cornered rat bites back. Even a frog caught by a snake won't just roll over and let itself be eaten.

Man, that hurt, but it doesn't seem like I'm gonna die, at least. The poison mostly just hit my left side and my back.

A little bit must have gotten into my left eye, too, since part of my field of vision is black now.

Hmm? If my eye isn't working, why is only a small part of my vision missing?

Ah! Maybe I have a lot of eyes, since I'm a spider? That's probably it. A new discovery!

But I have bigger issues to worry about at the moment. The pain isn't going away.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Acid Resistance LV 1].> What?

Inexplicably, the pain is now abating. Is it that easy to earn skills without spending skill points?

Huh?

Wait, what's up with the points I spent to get Appraisal, then?

…Better not think about that too deeply.

Anyway, I'm now the proud owner of an acid-resisting skill. Presumably, this is the result of taking a hit from that frog's poison attack. Oh, but… It didn't happen right afterward, so there must have been other conditions.

It said something about proficiency, so maybe the prolonged acid damage is what did it?

Well, I can think about that later.

Thanks to my new resistance, the ache has mostly died down. In its place, rage toward that frog is bubbling up inside me.

That stupid amphibian thought it could pick a fight with me when it was nothing more than a snack?! Unforgivable!

I've made up my mind. I don't care whether it's poisonous or not. I'm gonna eat it if it's the last thing I do!

With that decided, it's time to charge!

As long as I don't let my guard down, this thing is nothing more than pathetic prey caught in my trap!

The frog spits venom at me three times. Hmph, now that I know it's coming, dodging is no problem at all!

I avoid the missiles brilliantly, then attack directly.

Eat my ultimate technique! Chomp! Bite down!

Bwa-ha-ha! You think this is just an ordinary bite?! I'm a spider! My fangs are venomous!

Just like when I produced thread before, this information somehow comes to me naturally.

Ha! Suffer and die at the hands of my venom!

But just as I'm thinking that— *Splat!* Another shot of poison at point-blank range.

Guhh?! Ow, ow, OW! Even with resistance, it still hurts!

And now I've even let go!

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Resistance LV 1] has become [Poison Resistance LV 2].> Oh, so that's how it works. Wait, now's not the time for that!

Fool me once, shame on me. Fool me three times, I'm gonna kill you!

Stupid frog! Now I'll never forgive you! Not that I had any intention of doing that in the first place, but still! No mercy!

Letting my anger take its course, I bite down a second time. The frog starts writhing in agony.

Bwa-ha-ha! That's right, suffer! Now that I'm getting into this, I give it a few more chomps for good measure.

The frog struggles for a little while longer, but its movements gradually weaken, and eventually it runs out of strength.

Whew. I finally beat it. Considering how much I struggled with my first prey, my future is looking grim. But still, I did it! Sweet!

Might as well chow down! *Munch, munch, munch. Schlurp, schlurp.* Mmm… bitter. Ow.

Is the bitterness poison? And the pain is probably acid, I guess? Well, thanks to my resistances, it isn't too much for me to bear. It isn't exactly delicious, though.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Acid Resistance LV 1] has

become [Acid Resistance LV 2].> Well, the taste may not be to my liking, but the skill increase certainly is.

Besides, this is a special occasion: my first catch in my new home.

Thanks to this fellow, I’m confident my spider thread is strong enough to hold up against monsters.

This level of creature, at least, won’t be able to escape.

Plus, now I know that prey will get caught in the web the way I hoped.

That information makes the whole ordeal worth it.

Thanks a bunch, frog!

I’m still holding a grudge over the acid-spitting thing, though.



REINCARNATION

In the Kingdom of Analeit, there lived a boy named Schlain Zagan Analeit.

As his name suggested, he was a member of the royal family.

He was the child of a concubine of the king and lived as the fourth prince.

But this boy possessed memories of a previous life.

In that life, his name had been Shunsuke Yamada.

I'll be honest: The boy is me.

My last memory from my previous life was of sitting in Classical Japanese class.

At the time, I noticed a crack in the air above the classroom, and that's where everything went black.

Rifts in space weren't a normal occurrence back on Earth.

So whatever happened then is most likely why I died.

Then, inexplicably, I was reborn with memories of my previous life.

Which was how I came to live in this gamelike world where skills and levels are real.

In this world, you actually have a "status."

How can this exist in reality outside of a game? I did wonder about that for a while, but I eventually gave up trying to figure it out.

Instead, I realized it would be more fun to focus on the positives of living in this kind of world. Training would improve my abilities, and it was pretty fun to hone my strength like that.

However, this world has its inconveniences, too.

You can't see anyone's status. The concept exists, yet you have to clear extremely strict conditions if you want to perceive it.

See, there's a skill called Appraisal.

With Appraisal, you can see statuses, but few people possess that skill.

In order to acquire it, just like becoming a judge or an appraiser on Earth, you need a thorough education on how to judge the values of things, powers of observation to figure out the composition of substances, and other such high-level skills. No amateur would be able to manage that.

And even if you could get the Appraisal skill, it's extremely difficult to raise its level, so very few people have it in the first place.

Really, all it actually takes to acquire Appraisal is paying the right amount of skill points.

But even though that's technically possible, you can't get any further once you have it.

Raising the skill level of Appraisal only requires using it.

Every time you use Appraisal, your proficiency rises, and if you reach a certain level of proficiency, the level goes up as well.

However, it's using the skill that's the real problem.

On the one hand, it doesn't require any magical power or energy.

I know what you're thinking: "Couldn't you just use it whenever you want, then?" It's not that simple.

The catch is this: Whenever Appraisal is used, the user gets hit with a headache and a drunken feeling.

The degree seems to vary depending on the individual, but in the worst cases, some people will faint after using it only once, and even more talented users can't Appraise more than two things at once.

Since each use is so rough, using the skill over and over to increase your proficiency would be incredibly punishing.

As a bonus, the Appraisal skill is worthless until it reaches a very high level.

And so, very few people bother acquiring it.

In fact, there are a handful of families that make a living serving as Appraisers, passing the skill down through generations.

So if you're wondering how anyone checks their status, the answer is with Appraisal Stones.

An Appraisal Stone is a magic tool made through a special process, which allows the holder to temporarily use the skill.

The level of the skill allowed by one of these stones depends on its quality. The number of stones in the world that grant level 10, like the one belonging to the royal family, can be counted on one hand.

Naturally, you need special permission to use it, so basically only big nobles close to the royal family have any chance. Since I'm royalty myself, I can technically use it, but it's not like I can do that whenever I want. I pester Anna the maid about it repeatedly, but it can only be used once you reach a certain age.

In fact, it turns out that your first time having your status Appraised is considered a special occasion, so nobility and the like always hold a big, formal ceremony for it.

And I had to go through that ceremony, too.

In addition to the Appraisal, this ceremony serves as the child's debut to greater society.

Your Appraisal results are revealed to everyone present, and all the adults start judging your value right then and there.

I had more skills than the average person my age, so I knew it probably wouldn't be a problem for me. But apparently, if your stats are super-low, your family might reject you, so that's a frightening prospect.

Anyway, me and my younger sister, Sue, a child of the king's wife born around the same time as me, were about to undergo our public debut.

Sue and I had to change into the ceremonial children's clothes for the

occasion and hear about the schedule over and over again.

The current king—in other words, our father—was also attending.

Aside from that, there would be a who's who of other important people present, so making a mistake and embarrassing myself was not an option.

Despite being a kid, I was still a member of the royal family.

I was about to play a leading role in the ceremony, so I needed to carry the dignity of the royal family on my shoulders.

That was a heavy load for a former lower-middle-class commoner.

However, when I saw how majestically my sister was carrying herself next to me, I felt a determination to do things properly that bordered on impatience.

"Are you ready?"

I nodded silently in response to Anna's final check.

"Then please proceed."

Anna pushed us forward, and Sue and I walked side by side through the door to the ceremony hall.

As soon as we passed through the entrance, the ceremonial space loomed large before my eyes.

A red carpet extended from the door in a straight line toward a pedestal, behind which a man stood waiting.

A huge crowd of people lining the wall watched us in silence.

Everyone here was a high-ranking noble.

Sue and I walked across the carpet without a word.

Our steps were measured and dignified, the way we'd been taught to walk in anticipation of this very day.

I could feel the gazes of the assorted nobles piercing me, but I did my best to ignore them.

Eventually, we reached the front of the pedestal. Sue and I halted and knelt down.

Standing at the ready behind the pedestal was the king, our father, Meiges Derra Analeit.

“The Appraisal Ceremony will now begin.” The king’s majestic voice boomed throughout the ceremony hall.

Although he was my father, I’d only met this person a handful of times. He felt more like a high-ranking relative than a parent.

This only made my nervousness worse.

The king was still speaking, but I couldn’t quite process what he was saying.

“Now, Schlain Zagan Analeit. You may rise.”

“Yes, sir.”

I stood up.

“Let the Appraisal begin.”

I advanced onto the stepping stool in front of the pedestal.

Without the boost, I wouldn’t be tall enough at my current height.

A black stone was fitted in the pedestal.

This was the Appraisal Stone. Smaller than I’d expected. If I were an adult, it would fit in the palm of my hand easily.

Masking my surprise, I placed my hands on the Appraisal Stone.

Just as I’d been taught, I thought: [Appraise].

My status displayed with unexpected ease.

<Human	**LV 1 Name**	**Schlain Zagan Analeit**
Status:	HP: 35/35 (green)	MP: 348/348 (blue)
	SP: 35/35 (yellow)	: 35/35 (red)

Average Offensive Ability: 20 (details)

Average Defensive Ability: 20 (details)

Average Magical Ability: 314 (details)

Average Resistance Ability: 299 (details)

Average Speed Ability: 20 (details)

Skills:

Skill Points: 100,000

Titles: None

[Magic Perception LV 8]	[Magic Operation LV 8]	[Magic Warfare LV 6]	[Magic Conferment LV 5]
[Magic Attack LV 3]	[MP Recovery Speed LV 7]	[MP Recovery Speed LV 7]	[MP Lessened Consumption LV2]
[Swordsmanship LV 3]	[Destruction Enhancement LV 2]	[Mental Warfare LV 2]	[Energy Conferment LV 1]
[Concentration LV 5]	[Hit LV 1]	[Evasion LV 1]	[Vision Enhancement LV 4]
[Auditory Enhancement LV 7]	[Olfactory Enhancement LV 2]	[Taste Enhancement LV 1]	[Tactile Enhancement LV 1]
[Life LV 5]	[Magic Mass LV 8]	[Instantaneous LV 5]	[Persistent LV 5]
[Strength LV 5]	[Solidity LV 5]	[Alchemist LV	[Protection

8] LV 7]

[Running LV 5] [Divine Protection] [n% I = W]

>

I could see my status.

At the same time, the results of the status appeared on a screen-like surface at the front wall. The screen was connected to the Appraisal Stone so it could display the results. Apparently, this world had no concept of “personal information.”

For me, the Appraisal results appeared in Japanese, but on the screen, they showed up in the language spoken here. I’d been wondering what would happen if it displayed in Japanese, but I guess the system accounted for that kind of thing.

Voices stirred throughout the room.

The king raised his voice and attempted to calm the crowd, but the tumult continued unabated.

My status must have been unusual to warrant that reaction.

Honestly, I kind of figured something like this would happen.

My magic-related stats were relatively high. Anna had guaranteed that.

By comparison, my physical ability was appropriate for my age.

Well, it was still a lot higher than average, but it didn’t deviate from the standard as much as my magic.

So my stats were pretty unbalanced.

As for the skills, a voice called the Word of God informed me whenever I leveled up a skill or gained a new one, so I already knew about most of them.

But there were two I didn’t recognize.

One was Divine Protection, and the other had a name that looked like

corrupted text.

Curious about these, I tried Appraising them.

<Divine Protection: You are protected by the heavens, making it easier for you to gain the results you desire in any situation.> <n% I = W: Cannot be Appraised>

What's that?

The Divine Protection thing was crazy. Definitely a skill that could be considered cheating.

However, the phrasing "easier for you to gain the results you desire" must have meant that things won't necessarily go the way I want every time. It was still an awesome skill, but I shouldn't depend on it too much.

What I didn't understand was the other one.

Its name and the results of the Appraisal were equally cryptic.

I had no idea what kind of skill it might be.

The fact that the highest-level Appraisal Stone available still yielded this result was especially mysterious.

If this Stone couldn't tell me, there was probably no way to find out the details of this ability.

I didn't get it.

"Isn't that like the duke's daughter?"

"Yes, that prodigy…"

"But His Highness is just as much of a prodigy as her…no, even more so!"

As the nobles continued their chatter, I heard repeated references to a "duke's daughter."

Was there someone else who had similar stats?

I thought Sue was the only one besides me…

"Quiet down!"

In response to the king's exceptionally loud shout, the ceremonial hall finally simmered down.

The king handed me a piece of paper.

It was a record of my results, magically printed from the screen connected to the Appraisal Stone.

I accepted the paper reverently. Then I bowed and stepped away.

With this, my Appraisal Ceremony was over.

Now it was Sue’s turn.

Needless to say, another uproar filled the hall when Sue’s Appraisal showed results similar to mine.

However, unlike me, Sue didn’t have Divine Protection or any mysterious corrupted skills.

Aside from the minor uproar, the Appraisal Ceremony ended more or less without incident.

But our unusually high stats wasn’t the only cause of the disruptions.

Listening in on the nobles with my enhanced hearing, I learned that skill points were normally only awarded when a person leveled up, so having a hundred thousand skill points at level 1 like I did was highly abnormal.

Which reminded me: Sue had 0 skill points, too.

I figured this was probably because I was a reincarnation, but what really interested me was that the duke’s daughter was apparently born with skill points as well.

From what I could tell, her Appraisal Ceremony had been just a few days before mine.

And like me, she’d had incredibly high stats for her age and skill points that she shouldn’t have had.



Apparently, the duke's daughter even had that garbled skill of corrupted text.

A certain suspicion began to well up inside me.

If my hunch was right, then I had to meet the duke's daughter at any cost.

An opportunity came sooner than expected.

After the Appraisal Ceremony, a small reception was held in a separate venue.

The king brought Sue and me to the center of the hall, where we ended up greeting a line of nobles.

The guests were all accompanied by their children, who were mostly the same age as me or slightly older.

So basically, the purpose of this get-together was to introduce young nobles who were close in age.

And that was where I met the aforementioned duke's daughter.

"It is a sincere pleasure to meet you. I am the eldest daughter of Duke Anabald, Karnatia Seri Anabald."

She was a very pretty girl, with fiery red hair and an impressively strong-willed expression.

Her appearance alone was enough to grab my attention, but on top of that, my Magic Perception skill told me she had enormous magical power.

It was right about equal to mine and Sue's.

Duke Anabald, by the way, was one of the most powerful nobles in the country.

His family had held important positions in the country for generations, and they came from a pedigree with connections to the bloodlines of heroes and the royal family.

People born into the duke's family would all undergo a tough, thorough education, and they were brought up with the know-how to support the country.

Even so, the girl in front of me possessed a highly abnormal amount of magic.

It even exceeded that of the red-haired man at her side, who I assumed was her father.

“How do you do? I am Schlain Zagan Analeit. *Yoroshiku*.”

With a certain conviction, I pointedly spoke the last word, meaning “nice to meet you,” in Japanese.

The duke’s daughter’s eyes widened for a moment, then quickly narrowed.

Judging by that reaction, I was positive that my guess had been correct.

“Father. May I speak with this young lady for a moment?”

“Hmm?” The king’s response sounded a little taken aback.

This was only natural, I suppose, since there was still a long queue of nobles with their children standing behind the duke and his daughter, who were the first in line.

But I couldn’t afford to back down here.

“Must I not?”

“Eherm.” The king looked at me, then the duke, and then the line behind him before speaking. “Very well. But do not be long. You are to come back after a short while.”

“Yes, sir. Thank you very much.”

I grabbed the duke’s daughter’s hand like a child and ran off.

Behind me, I could tell that Sue was seething with fury, but I couldn’t worry about that at the moment.

I left the hall and entered a private room that served as a waiting area.

Nobles frequently left parties to discuss business and other private work-related matters, so there were always rooms like this near the assembly halls.

This place was supposed to be soundproof, and a guard was positioned outside the door, so we were safe.

“Whew. We should be okay here.” I was openly speaking in Japanese now.

“I can’t believe it. So the prince is a reincarnation, too…” The duke’s daughter

replied in the same language. “Oh man… It’s been so long since I heard someone else speaking Japanese. I’m getting a little emotional, even.” She seemed as strong-willed as ever, but now her tone was rather light.

“So, if you don’t mind me asking, does the name Heishin High School ring any bells?” I tossed out the name of the high school I attended back on Earth.

“Yeah, of course. So you really were reincarnated into this world from the same high school as me…”

Just as I’d suspected, this girl was a former classmate of mine, dragged into this world by that mysterious crack in our classroom, just like I was.

“My original name was Shunsuke Yamada. What about yours?”

“Pffft!”

When I offered my name, the girl gave an uncontrollable snort of laughter.

“Ba-ha-ha-ha! Heh, ha-ha-ha! You, you’re, you’re Shun?! Shun, a prince?! Ah-ha-ha… That’s not you at all, dude!”

She was roaring with laughter now.

I got a strange sense of déjà vu.

I didn’t recognize the girl in front of me, but her speech and behavior made her a dead ringer for someone I knew very well.

“Y-you’re not…Kanata?!”

“Yep.”

Now it was my turn to burst out laughing.

My former gamer pal, my bro Kanata, was now an aristocratic young lady.

It was like he’d been reborn as the exact opposite of his previous self.

“Hey, don’t laugh. Do you know how depressed I was when I first got reborn like this?”

“Sorry, sorry. You laughed too, though, didn’t you? Now we’re even.”

“I guess. Damn, though, I’m glad we met like this. I’ve been pretty lonely all this time.”

“Yeah. You and me both. I’m glad I found you.”

Kanata and I punched each other in the arm.

At that moment, tears started to spill from Kanata’s eyes.

“Whoa, wha…? Ah, geez, sorry. I swore I wasn’t…*hic*…gonna cry…*hic*…”

Kanata’s sobs grew stronger.

Before I knew it, I was crying, too.

I remembered what it was like when I first realized I had reincarnated.

I definitely couldn’t say that I didn’t miss my old life. If anything, I was full of regrets.

I was still at the height of my youth, and I wanted to spend more time hanging out with my friends. I never even got a girlfriend.

Besides, I felt terrible for not only dying before my parents, but even my grandparents.

When I realized I would never see my family again, my heart sank lower than you could imagine.

I was curious about the state of the school after I died, too.

I remembered the rift in the air and the moment it split open. If I died from that, what happened to everyone else? Kyouya, Kanata, Hasebe who sat next to me… Did they all die along with me?

The thought terrified me.

That morning had been perfectly ordinary, but now I could never see any of them again.

I’d been fighting against that crushing fear ever since I first reincarnated. With no idea what was going on, I suddenly woke up as a baby, so it was only natural that I felt anxious. On top of that, the country of my rebirth wasn’t Japan. In fact, it wasn’t anywhere on Earth. This was a different world entirely.

At first, I didn’t realize.

I couldn’t understand the language, and I rarely got to leave the nursery. So

there were a lot of things I didn't know. At first I thought I was somewhere in Europe.

But the first time I saw magic, I realized that wasn't the case. This happened when a powerful priest performed a blessing on me. I was enveloped in glittering light, and I felt power flowing into me. That was when I sensed the existence of magic for the first time.

Initially, this was exciting to me.

But then I became anxious again.

Could I actually make my way in a world with magic? I had just been an ordinary guy in my previous life.

Back in Japan, I didn't really experience any hardships. But in this world, where I was born into an elite family, mediocrity was not an option.

Could I live up to that expectation? I was worried.

And since I was a baby, I couldn't get my body to move the way I wanted it to, which was scary. Being unable to live without the help of others added to my stress.

What if the people raising me suddenly decided to stop?

I wouldn't be able to do anything but weaken and die.

On top of that, the people bringing me up were maids, not my real family.

Since they had no blood relation to me, there was no guarantee that they'd continue to care for me.

Plus, since I still remembered my previous life, my real parents in this world seemed like strangers.

So wasn't it possible that these parents had just as little attachment to me and could potentially discard me at any moment?

My mind was so worn down that I started having those wild delusions.

Meanwhile, I desperately started trying to learn the language.

Not knowing any words was more frightening than I would have ever imagined.

I didn’t understand what anyone was saying. Who knew that would give me such hopelessness?

It made me feel completely alone.

I worried about being reborn in another world. Fretted about not understanding the language. Agonized over whether I’d be able to make it in the future.

What soothed my troubled mind was the presence of my little sister, sleeping peacefully beside me.

This half sister of mine wasn’t concerned about a single thing.

She was totally carefree, as if there were nothing in the world to be anxious about.

Well, I guess that’s natural for a baby.

A weak little creature that leaves its fate in others’ hands and depends on the world for everything…

That’s what a baby is supposed to be like.

The only reason I was so concerned was that I possessed memories of my previous life.

Then I realized something…

Since I had my memories, I should at least be mentally above my sister.

So why was I so full of anxiety when she was right beside me, being happy?

I was her older brother. *I shouldn’t act so pathetic in front of her*, I realized. *An older brother is supposed to be cool.*

Maybe that was just pretension.

But after that point, I stopped worrying so much. I hadn’t completely gotten over my fears, but I knew I wanted to at least protect my defenseless little sister.

I gradually learned more words, and slowly but surely I began picking up more information about this world from the bits of conversation I caught.

Wanting to regain the range of motion I was used to as quickly as possible, I whipped my baby body into shape by moving around as much as I could.

Thanks to that, I learned to crawl much sooner than normal.

In this way, my desire to show up my younger sister motivated me.

I wanted to be a big brother she could be proud of.

However, I hadn't accounted for the possibility that she would turn out to be a ridiculous prodigy who would imitate me and become nearly as strong.

Kanata must have experienced at least as much anxiety as I did.

I mean, it must be jarring to live your whole life as a man and then suddenly be reborn as a woman.

I tried to picture enduring the stress of newly found womanhood on top of all the fears I'd faced.

That must have been harder than I could possibly imagine.

And then I was reunited with my friend, whom I thought I'd never see again.

I couldn't help being overcome with emotion.

Without thinking, I moved to embrace the weeping Kanata.

At that moment, a thunderous roar came from the door to the private room.

"What was that?!"

Kanata looked flustered.

I panicked for a moment, too, but calmed down once I realized who was standing at the door.

No, actually, I just panicked in a different way.

A second roar blew the door inward.

Standing outside the entrance with a magically fueled fist at the ready was Sue, who'd enhanced her physical strength with magic.

Sue eyed the two of us, then locked on to Kanata.

"Sue, stop!"

If I hadn’t hurriedly thrust myself between them, Sue’s fist would’ve blown Kanata away.

“You can’t have my brother!” Sue muttered, latching on to me instantly.

“Your sister’s scary, dude,” Kanata muttered in Japanese.

That was the day I was reunited with my first classmate.



3 The Egg

The egg.

It's an essential ingredient in cooking, from simple preparations like boiled eggs and fried eggs to more complex dishes like rolled omelets and custard.

They're excellent on their own, but combined with other ingredients, they open up a world of endless culinary possibility.

Yes, the egg is the king of all foods, so much that every refrigerator has a space designed specifically for storing them.

I used to eat them in cup ramen all the time.

Zzz. Yaaawn… Ahhh, I slept well. Almost too much, enough to make me sluggish.

Being able to sleep safely is a wonderful thing. The lazy life is the best. Thank goodness for my little home.

Since I ate my sibling and that frog earlier, I don't feel too hungry.

Maybe spiders can store food longer than humans?

As I wake up with an assortment of idle thoughts on my mind, I feel one of my threads vibrating.

I'm not particularly famished, but it's probably still a good idea to eat whenever I can.

After all, if I miss this opportunity, who knows when I'll get my next chance.

So, what've I got now?

Huh?!

A h-human?!

A man carrying some round object is struggling furiously in my webbing.

He's wearing the kind of clothes you'd expect on an adventurer in a fantasy world.

Maybe that occupation really exists here.

Wh-what should I do?

Wait, this guy's all bloody. Is he okay?

Ah, he noticed me. He looks panicked.

Seriously, what am I supposed to do here?

Ah, he took something out.

Wha—?! It's burning?!

The man throws the item he'd produced to the ground, and it starts spouting a crazy inferno.

Now the man is covered in flames.

What the hell is he doing?!

The fire is spreading to the webbing and burning my net. Did he self-destruct to get rid of my threads or something?

Apparently so. Now he's rolling on the ground, extinguishing the flames on his body.

But now he's covered in burns.

He was already bloodied to begin with, and now he's scorched, too. It doesn't take an expert to see that he probably isn't going to make it.

Nevertheless, the man musters the last of his strength to dash away.

Pretty impressive he's able to run in that state.

Now it's just me and the round thing the man was carrying.

What's this?

<Egg>

I use Appraisal and learn it’s an egg.

It’s about the same size as me, so probably three feet across or so.

Well, this has to be a monster egg. What kind of person leaves a thing like that lying around?

Judging by the guy’s condition, maybe the egg’s parents attacked him?

This thing isn’t going to hatch suddenly, is it?

Or worse, its parents aren’t going to come looking for it, are they?

Yikes, I hope not. Scary.

For the time being, I have to start rebuilding my web, since the adventurer-looking dude burned it down.

I can think about the rest later.

A whole day has passed.

My home is quite peaceful.

Apparently, the egg’s parents aren’t going to show up after all.

Maybe the thief gave them the slip before getting here, or maybe they hadn’t bothered chasing him for the loot to begin with.

I don’t know what happened to the egg thief afterward, but from the look of those injuries, I doubt he survived.

Which means it’s okay for me to eat this, right?

That human risked his life to bring back this egg. It must be a very rare item.

Maybe it’s an extremely delicious one, too.

Since my rebirth, all I’ve eaten is gross stuff like my sibling and a frog, so even a raw egg seems like a much more respectable meal.

I have no reason not to eat it.

So I decide to get down to business.

First, I’ll have to break the shell.

I tap it with my front legs. Nothing.

I hit it again with more strength. Nothing.

Getting desperate, I bang on the shell as hard as I can. Still nothing.

Huff…huff…

Why is this egg so tough?!

At this rate, I can't eat it even if I want to.

But still… *Hrmph.* If you think I'm just some ordinary spider, you're making a big mistake!

Kneel before the glorious wisdom of a former human being!

I adhere a strand of thread to the egg. Then I attach the thread to the ceiling and loop it back down to the ground.

I pull on the cord, raising the egg nearly to the ceiling. It's pretty heavy.

Finally, I let go, and gravity pulls my meal to the ground.

Splat! …Or not?!

Despite falling from close to the ceiling, the egg is completely unharmed. What is up with this insanely tough shell?

Humph. Clearly, I'll need to take more drastic measures.

Okay. Next, I'll drop it on a sharp rock.

Once again, I haul the egg up to the ceiling.

Then I position it above a particularly sharp rock and let it fall.

Now that should definitely be enough to splatter it… Or not?!

In fact, the egg actually *chipped* the rock. What?

Okay, well, I'm not gonna break this thing open.

All right, how about wrapping a bunch of elastic threads around it?

I vaguely remember an experiment where people wrapped hundreds of rubber balloons around a watermelon until it eventually burst.

Maybe that would break an egg, too?

It's worth a shot.

And so I set about creating rubbery threads and winding them around the egg, over and over.

Doing repetitive tasks like this makes me sleepy, so I decide to use the time to consider something that has been bothering me.

Namely, skills.

Of course, there's the question of what exactly these skills are, but that tangent won't yield an answer, so I'm not going to bother.

More important, I want to think about the abilities I currently have and the ones I might be able to gain in the future.

From what I can tell, I've acquired five thus far: [Appraisal LV 1], [Acid Resistance LV 2], [Poison Resistance LV 1], [Taboo LV 1], and [Heretic Magic LV 1].

I also got ahold of Appraisal by spending skill points. Those points are another mystery.

However, I decide not to worry about them for the time being.

Frankly, since I have 0 skill points and no idea how to go about procuring more, there isn't much point in worrying about that at the moment.

Anyway, unlike Appraisal, I obtained Taboo and Heretic Magic by earning a title.

After that, I tried a bunch of other stuff, but I didn't end up with any new titles.

Without knowing what titles are available or what I need to do to get them, it'll probably be tough to gain titles deliberately.

For now, I'll just count myself lucky when I do get one.

I continue winding the rubber thread. I've made a lot at this point, but there's still no visible change in the egg.

At any rate, although I got some skills through titles or skill points, the way I stumbled upon Acid Resistance was totally different.

I think I got that one because I was hit with an attack and took acid damage.

So as long as I can handle the pain of the process, I bet I can acquire more resistance.

For instance, if a fire attack lands on me, will I obtain Fire Resistance?

In terms of self-defense, the more resistances I have, the better.

So from now on, should I always take the first hit from an enemy as long as it won't kill me?

Hmm… Nah. I don't want to get hurt, and there's no guarantee I'll even obtain any resistance skills.

There's no need to put myself in unnecessary danger, at the very least. Yeah, it's not just because I don't want to deal with pain for any length of time.

When I got hit with the frog's attack, I not only received Acid Resistance, my Poison Resistance skill also went up.

So if what the Divine Voice (temporary name) said was correct, that means I had the Poison Resistance skill from the beginning.

Well, I'm a spider, and I use venom, so it's no big surprise that I would be a little more immune to these things.

Even so, though, what kind of system doesn't tell you what skills you have in the first place?

If the Divine Voice hadn't mentioned it, I wouldn't have realized that I had Poison Resistance.

So wait, doesn't that mean I have other skills I don't know about yet?

That would probably make sense, huh? So what kind of skills do I have? Poison attacks?

I wish I could check, but I don't have a way to do that.

Maybe if my Appraisal skill level goes up, I'll be able to see it?

Appraisal…level? Proficiency?

Hey, wait, maybe I could raise that skill level, then?

Proficiency basically just means how familiar you are with a thing, right?

So if Appraisal ranks up based on proficiency like the Resistance-type skills, won't it increase if I just use it a whole bunch?

Since I got it with skill points, I assumed I'd only be able to raise its level with more points, but maybe not.

Still wrapping rubbery thread around the egg, I start Appraising everything in sight.

A ton of useless information, like <Wall> and <Floor>, flows into my brain.

Oof, that's kind of unpleasant. Like getting drunk on too much data.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Appraisal LV 1] has become [Appraisal LV 2].> Worth it! Woooo! It only went up one level, but I feel like I've taken a huge step forward! With some anticipation, I try Appraising myself.

<Small lesser taratect Nameless>

Ooh! Now there's something that looks like a species name, too!

I still didn't get much information, but compared to level 1, when it only provided <Spider>, this is still a substantial improvement.

At the same time, though, why "small" and "lesser"? That makes me sound inferior…

Okay, now my excitement about increasing Appraisal's skill level is dying down a bit. I wasn't expecting much to begin with, but it didn't occur to me that I might be such a small-fry… But that's more or less what I was in my previous life anyway, so I guess it isn't a big deal.

More important, I have to keep Appraising and raising my skill level!

As I wrap the rubber threads around the egg, I do some level grinding on Appraisal.

…It won't go up.

I keep Appraising the wall over and over, but my skill level doesn't rise one bit.

By the way, the result of that analysis was <Dungeon Wall>. Not exactly

helpful.

That isn't such a big deal, but why isn't my level going up?

Hmm.

The most likely explanation is probably that your proficiency only increases the first time you Appraise something. Otherwise, it'd be too easy to level it up, huh?

Just to be sure, I Appraise every nook and cranny of my home. But the skill level doesn't rise.

Looks like I don't have enough proficiency.

Which means that if I want to cultivate my Appraisal, I'll have to leave my house and use it on other things. Thinking back, I did Appraise a whole bunch of monsters when the skill was still level 1.

That might be what got me most of the way to level 2.

Outside, though… *Ugh.* Now that I have this safe, comfortable house, why would I bother going out?

If I want to live in peace, my best bet is to stay a shut-in.

But if I want to raise my skill level, I need to go outside.

There are pros and cons to both sides, but the danger of going outside is a pretty massive downside for sure.

Plus, although this probably isn't the case, it's not impossible the egg's parents are roaming around out there.

Okay. That settles it.

I'm staying inside.

As I continue working on the egg in my home, one of the threads of my web starts vibrating again. It's a special occasion: my second catch. Perfect timing! I was just getting a bit hungry.

I skip a little as I head toward my prey.

…It's kind of surreal for a spider to skip, even for me.

Last time, I let down my guard and took a surprise attack to the face, so this time I approach with caution.

Now, I wonder what kind of prey I've caught this time…?

<Elroe frog>

It's another frog. *You again! Why, dammit?! There are tons of other monsters in this dungeon! What are the odds of catching the same kind of monster twice in a row?!*

Ha…ha…

Whoops, I got a little carried away there. Really, though…

Splat! Noooooooo!

While I'm preoccupied with a one-man comedy act in my head, the frog aims a spit attack right at me. Never in both of my lives have I been so shocked! I'm such an idiot!

Ah… Okay.

The pain brings me partially to my senses. This time, my resistance doesn't level up. Must not have enough proficiency yet. Well, whatever.

I wrap the frog in thread so it can't fight back. Then I bite down on it from above. *Chomp!*

The first frog didn't die after one bite, so this one probably has some resistance, too.

Still, if I immobilize it and bite it once, that should weaken it significantly.

I quickly bring the frog bundle into my house, then go back and immediately rebuild the broken web.

Last time, I left the webbing as it was and ate my prey right on the spot. But thinking about it afterward, I realized I left myself totally defenseless in the meantime.

If other monsters or even humans had arrived right at that moment, I would've been under attack without a complete web for defense.

So this time, I'll restrict the frog's movement first, repair my web, then finish

it off and eat it once I'm fully prepared.

When I return to the frog, I see it wriggling around in an attempt at escape, despite being all wrapped up.

Hmm.

I guess one bite didn't have that much effect.

Chomp! I bite it again.

The first time, I'd beaten the frog by biting it over and over, but that probably wasn't necessary. All I need to do is sink my teeth into it and keep injecting poison through my fangs.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Fang LV 1] has become [Poison Fang LV 2].> Oh! I totally leveled up a skill! This is the first I've heard of this one.

At the same moment my skill levels up, the struggling frog gives one last spasm and stops moving. It's so sudden that I'm a little startled.

Oh, but that probably meant that leveling up my skill increased the potency of my poison. Nice!

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small lesser taratect has increased from LV 1 to LV 2.> Hmm? Hmmm? Ah, my body feels strange!! Huh?! What's going on?! My skin's peeling off?!

Molting? Am I molting?!

<All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Resistance LV 2] has become [Poison Resistance LV 3].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Spider Thread LV 2] has become [Spider Thread LV 3].> <Skill points acquired.>

Wh-whaat?! W-wait a second!!

Did I just get a whole bunch of important information at once?!

Say it again! One more time, please!

The Divine Voice (temp.) remains silent, ignoring my wishes.

Oh man. Seriously…?

No, no.

I have to calm down and remember. Did it say I leveled up? It did, didn't it?

Argh, I was so distracted by the sudden molting that I didn't catch everything!

No, wait, there's no way I'd just randomly start molting for no reason, right?

Maybe my body renewed itself because I leveled up?

At any rate, the old skin is still stuck to me, so I peel it off. Wow, a few areas, like on my back, are pretty messed up. That was where the frog's acid got me. I wasn't able to see it until now, but it looks like a pretty bad wound.

Hmm?

Speaking of which, the part of my vision that was busted is all back to normal!

Ooh! So if you level up, you make a full physical recovery and everything? Very fancy!

Okay.

So this is definitely a level-up. My body feels kind of light and refreshed, too.

It probably happened because I beat that frog and gained experience points, right? I decide to start eating the frog while I process what happened.

Now, let's see if I can remember it one at a time.

I think the first thing it said was that my level went up. The molting started right after that, and while I was freaking out, I think the Divine Voice (temp.) spouted off a whole bunch of other stuff.

Let me see… Skills? That's right—wasn't there something about skill levels going up?

And it was more than one, right? Did two go up at the same time? Why?

Right, I think there was something else before the bit about skills.

Uh… "Skill proficiency level-up bonus," maybe? That's it! It did say that!

In other words, when I leveled up just now, bonus points were added to my skill proficiencies!

So that's why multiple skill levels went up at once.

The skills affected were Poison Resistance and…Spider Thread, right?

Huh, so thread handling is a skill, too. I didn't catch what level it is, though.

But if I keep making spider thread, the skill should improve easily enough, right?

Well, that's handy information.

And at the end, wasn't there something about skill points?

So I guess you get more of those by leveling up, then.

In summary, when I level up, I completely recover health. I think my stats go up, too. Plus, I get skill points.

I can probably test out how much I earned later.

And the most important part is that I received a skill proficiency bonus.

I don't know exactly how many points that entails, but since it raised two skills at once, I bet it was a ton.

So leveling up might be a good way to enhance skills effectively.

Levels, huh…

Since skills and titles exist, I kinda figured levels would, too, but still.

I've been trying not to think about it too much, but boy, this world sure is gamelike.

I was afraid that if I took that view, I might start acting as if I'm just playing a game, but I guess it's too late for that. I have to admit, though—I'm already getting a little excited.

I can't help it if I have the soul of a gamer, all right?

For now, my current goal is to break that egg. It seems impossible at the moment. The shell's just too tough.

Wrapping the rubber threads around it didn't do a thing, it seems.

But if I keep raising my level and improving my stats, I should be able to crack it eventually.

Heh-heh-heh. Just you wait, egg!

I’m gonna break you open and eat you if it’s the last thing I do!

MONSTER ENCYCLOPEDIA

file.02

ELROE FROG

LV.01



status

HP 65 / 65

MP 45 / 45

SP 55 / 55

55 / 55

Average Offensive Ability : 35
Average Defensive Ability : 35
Average Magic Ability : 28
Average Resistance Ability : 28
Average Speed Ability : 30

skill

[Poison Synthesis LV 1] [Acid Attack LV 1] [Injection LV 1]
[Night Vision LV 6] [Poison Resistance LV 1] [Acid Resistance LV 1]

Also known simply as a frog. Its rainbow-colored body is about three feet long. It uses Poison Synthesis to create a ball of Weak Poison, imbues the ball with acidic qualities with Acid Attack, and shoots it at the enemy with Expel. Since its physical capabilities are the same up close or from a distance, it can sometimes catch opponents off guard with its counterattack. Danger level E.



Leaving the Nest

If I want to break the egg, and if I want to survive, I'm gonna have to become stronger.

I don't want to get killed by a monster, human, or whatever else.

And since that egg thief showed up at my doorstep, it seems that humans do come this far out from time to time.

There's no guarantee that the egg's parents aren't lurking around somewhere, either.

Now my spider body is decently agile.

I can jump almost seven feet in the air, and I can climb walls, too.

Before I made my house, I encountered other monsters while I was wandering around outside, but I was speedy enough to avoid them without a problem.

Well, doesn't that mean you're actually a pretty powerful monster, you ask? That's what I thought, too.

But clearly, I was wrong.

How can I be strong when I can't even break an egg?

My best weapons are my thread and poison fangs. I can bind enemies in my web and finish them off with my poison.

This golden combo is my key to victory, so in other words, any situation where it doesn't work will spell my defeat.

My webbing and fangs are essential to me—no, to all spider monsters.

Once I arrived at this conclusion, I stuck with the pattern of rendering my

opponents helpless with my thread before finishing them off.

Using this strategy, I took out my third frog unharmed, and when I finished eating, the Divine Voice (temp.) rang out again.

<Condition satisfied. Acquired Title [Foul Feeder].>

<Acquired skills [Poison Resistance LV 1] [Rot Resistance LV 1] as a result of Title [Foul Feeder].>

<Skill [Poison Resistance LV 1] has been integrated into [Poison Resistance LV 3].>

Hey, I got a new title.

So I can't get one on purpose by doing all those other things, but then one gets dropped on me when I'm not even trying?

Hey, I can't help it if my food is foul!

There's nothing here for me to eat but monsters!

Well, I guess complaining to the Divine Voice (temp.) won't do me any good.

So the skills I got were Poison Resistance and…Rot Resistance?

What does that mean? Can I eat rotten things now, maybe?

That doesn't seem particularly useful, but I guess it's better than nothing.

And I already have the Poison Resistance skill, but judging from what the Divine Voice (temp.) said, it must've added a level-1 skill's worth of proficiency to what I already have.

Well, if my skills get stronger, then so will I, probably.

Although ramping up my resistance isn't going to help me break that egg.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Spider Thread LV 5] has become [Spider Thread LV 6].>

After a while of playing with thr…ahem, I mean, practicing with my threads very studiously, my skill level rose.

Since I now know that my spider thread is a skill, I've been trying all kinds of things with it to earn more proficiency.

Raising the skill level might improve things like the elasticity of the rubber thread, in which case the egg might just break.

Man, sure took a while to level it up, though.

As a result, the inside of my house is now entirely white.

Compared to when I first made it, my home has changed a lot over the course of a few days.

For one thing, I've got more webs.

For a while, I just put one web over each of the three passages of the intersection, but now I have several more set up along the passageways.

My thinking was that a single trap might be easy to break through.

With this many spiderwebs, it'll take some time for anything to get to the center.

Now my home is even safer than before.

That alone wasn't enough to raise my skill level, so I decided to decorate the walls next.

I applied my silk all over the wall, coating it in white.

Of course, these weren't just ordinary decorations.

These wallpaper threads were linked to my webs so that when prey got caught, the fibers would automatically pull away from the wall and wrap around the unlucky victim.

I was extremely proud of this trap, which took a good deal of trial and error to complete.

Around the time I started putting up the wallpaper threads, my skill level rose by one.

After those were all finished, my last project was to string up some invisible strands inside my house.

This thread doesn't have any stickiness, and it snaps with a single touch. If I leave it alone long enough, the natural flow of air eventually breaks it before it's absorbed by the wallpaper threads.

I think I was able to make such fine filaments now because my skill level had reached 5.

These are for enemy detection. The ends of the invisible threads are connected to me, so if something touches them, I'll know what it is.

I developed this detection fiber to counter the inconvenient fact that I can't see behind me.

Since I don't have to worry about my back while I'm at home, I decided to put up a few around my house instead.

My hope is to eventually be able to remotely control these when I explore outside my house.

After all this, I was pretty much out of things to do, so I just started pointlessly stockpiling more thread until I finally reached skill level 6.

Thanks to this, I gained the ability to make high-quality, silklike threads, so I produced a few balls of that and left them lying around wherever.

Of course, naturally producing all this webbing ended up making me hungry.

Which was why I wasted no time devouring the next victim of my web.

All the monsters in this area seem to be venomous, so my poison fangs can't kill them very quickly.

Well, once it's trapped in my web, I have as long as I like to do it in.

As a result, my Poison Fang skill went up to level 4, and my Poison Resistance skill rose to level 5.

So far, I've defeated three Elroe randanels, one Elroe peckatot, one Elroe basilisk, and one finjicote.

In addition, there were two more of the now-familiar frogs.

Is this dungeon a frog-breeding ground?

I've defeated quite a few monsters now, but I still have yet to see any other humans.

Elroe randanels are small dinosaur-like monsters. Three of them attacked me at once, which totally freaked me out.

But all three of them got trapped in my net perfectly, so it was no sweat.

The Elroe peckatot is a bizarre monster resembling a cross between a penguin and a pelican with monkey arms.

The finjicote is a freakishly huge, beelike creature, so large that it took up almost the entire ten-foot width of the passage. Because of that, though, my web ensnared it without a hitch.

The biggest pain in the butt was the Elroe basilisk.

It looked just like a giant lizard, but true to its name, it had some kind of petrification attack. I think it had the same kind of petrifying glare you see in games and fantasy stories—it turned one of my front legs into stone. What a terrifying enemy.

I was so scared that I resorted to a strategic withdrawal, aka hiding behind the egg.

Just then, the rubber threads around the egg all turned to stone and shattered.

Maybe that'd work on the egg, too? Tentatively optimistic, I let it keep using its petrification attack, but the egg was unaffected.

In fact, the lizard wore itself out attacking my shield, so I was able to slip in and finish it off without any issue. What the hell is up with the egg, anyway?!

After that encounter, I had to suffer with a petrified leg until I leveled up and molted again.

Since I got the Petrification Resistance skill in the process, it was an overall benefit, but it was still at least as dangerous as my first meeting with a frog.

Oh, right, like I was saying: I leveled up. Three times, to be exact. Now I'm level 5.

As far as I know, I have the following skills: [Poison Fang LV 4] [Spider Thread LV 6] [Appraisal LV 2] [Taboo LV 1] [Heretic Magic LV 1] [Poison Resistance LV 5] [Acid Resistance LV 2] [Rot Resistance LV 1] [Petrification Resistance LV 1].

I've gone up three whole levels, but my skills haven't changed all that much.

Guess the level-up proficiency bonus isn't as big as I thought.

It doesn't seem like I gained too many skill points with each level, either.

I got all excited when the Divine Voice (temp.) said I had more skill points, but I can't figure out how to obtain any new skills with them.

I try imagining all manner of skills that might exist, but I can't do anything.

When the skill I thought of doesn't exist, the Divine Voice (temp.) won't say a damn thing, and when it does…

<Insufficient skill points.>

…is all it'll say.

The rules for skills are more complicated than I first assumed.

Another day lazily spent. Ah, I love my little home…

What? What egg?

I don't know what you're talking about. I have zero recollection of any big white bundle of rubber threads.

My meals deliver themselves to me without any effort on my part, and the house is totally secure, so I can snooze to my heart's content despite being in the middle of a dangerous dungeon. I've carpeted the hard floor with plenty of soft silk, so it's nice and comfortable, too.

I'm taking it easy as I go about my daily thread-making routine. Ah, this is the life.

Thinking about it now, my days were pretty busy back in my former life.

I didn't pay any attention to it back then, but in retrospect, how did I ever live on four hours of sleep a day?

Before, my life consisted of waking up early to go to school, then coming home and playing video games until I succumbed to the drowsiness.

Yeah, that's just how I lived.

Playing games was fun and all, but looking back on it, I don't know why I went to all that trouble when I was under no obligation to do so. Between my pride in

being among the top free-to-players and caving to the expectations of my peers, I think I was starting to push myself past my limits.

Me, worrying about other people's expectations? What a joke!

I'm totally self-sufficient. Who cares what other people think?

At least, that's what I've been telling myself… But since starting this new life, I've realized that I might have been giving in to that human impulse at least a little. So now that I'm living a life truly without responsibilities, I feel liberated at leaving everything else behind.

In the beginning, I was concerned that I might be unbearably bored with so little to do, but clearly I worried for nothing. I certainly have a lot of free time without the Internet or games, but it isn't so bad.

Perhaps my standards for happiness are just lower than the norm. To be honest, as long as I get to live, that's good enough for me. This present life, with guaranteed food and shelter, is enough to make me content.

So much so that I figure I could probably just spend the rest of my life right here like this.

Although I don't know how long spider monsters live.

And while that sounds nice in theory, I know a time will probably come someday when I'll have to leave this home.

Some unforeseen situation, a change in the environment, the arrival of enemies able to bust through my webs…

More people like the egg thief, or a really strong monster, or—something.

I don't know when, but I'm certain the time will come eventually.

Everything changes, sooner or later.

So, I figure it's probably best to prepare for whenever that time might come.

Yeah, I said all that, but this is way too soon! I'm not ready!

The reason for my panic? One of the entrances to my home is going up in smoke before my very eyes.

I had been just starting to doze off when the fire suddenly broke out.

Slowly, inevitably, the home that I made for myself is sinking into a sea of flames.

And this is how I discovered that my spider thread, which I had assumed to be near invincible, is extremely weak to fire.

But where did this fire even come from?

It doesn't take long to find the answer—a human. There's a man standing among the flames. Not the egg thief, of course. He's holding a torch in one hand.

He must have used that to set my home ablaze.

Damn.

I can't see too well through the flames, but I can spot several more people behind the man.

This fire is no accident. Obviously, they're on a mission to destroy my webs.

Which would mean that they're also aware of the spider monster inside—in other words, me.

If I stay here, I'll either burn to death or get caught by the humans.

Fortunately, the fire hasn't reached me yet, and if I flee through the emergency exit on the other side, I should be able to escape the people, too.

I take one last look around inside my dwelling.

Since my reincarnation, I'd spent most of my time here.

I worked so hard to make this home.

I'd made many discoveries here, too, and the results had brought joy, sorrow, and everything in between.

This place had kept me safe all this time.

In fact, I might've even become more attached to it than I was to my room in my previous life.

That's how powerful the time I spent here has been.

I start running away from the fire.

The complicated nest of spider thread falls away as I easily cut through it.

The last web.

Once I pass through, I'll never be able to come back here again.

Once I pass through, I won't be safe anywhere.

Nonetheless, I push through without hesitation.

I feel an overwhelming urge to look back as I leave, but I resist.

All I can think about now is running away as far as I can.

And so, I've been driven out of my home for good.

As an aside, I should note that the adventurers who set fire to my home apparently discovered a large amount of my balls of thread and that egg that I'd left behind.

Luckily, the fire hadn't reached that far, so they took all of it with them.

I've heard that clothing made with that thread fetches an insanely high price.

They say the king of some country or other bought some, and it became a topic of much discussion for a while.

As for the egg, apparently it stubbornly survived the whole ordeal and successfully hatched sometime later.

I didn't learn any of this until much, much later.

And when I did, my first thought was: *I'm so glad I didn't break that thing open*.



The Hatchling

Sue and I stared at the thing in shock.

In front of our eyes was one enormous egg.

It was about three feet tall.

I was pretty sure the biggest kind of egg in my former world was an ostrich's, but this was clearly far larger than that.

That was because the thing inside was a monster.

Unlike in games, the monsters in this world don't just randomly pop into existence out of thin air.

They reproduce like any other living creature. This egg had come from monster parents.

We were told it had been found in a place called the Great Elroe Labyrinth, and it was a gift to us in commemoration of our Appraisal Ceremony.

A monster egg seemed like a dangerous gift to me, but evidently, if humans raised it from the moment it hatched, a monster could become attached to and serve its human owners.

And this particular creature was about to hatch at any moment.

"You can do it!" Sue murmured encouragingly.

Ever since a few light cracks had appeared in the egg's surface, the creature inside had been battering it desperately.

The first cracks showed up two days before, so it was proving to be a fairly drawn-out battle.

By now, the cracks had extended all over the surface of the egg.

It looked ready to burst open any moment now.

Sue and I held our breath as we watched the situation unfold.

I was tempted to help the poor thing out, but Anna advised us not to. The baby needed to break through on its own, or it wouldn't grow up strong and healthy.

"Ah!"

One part of the shell cracked open, and something like a hand burst through.

The limb flailed about, tearing at the rest of the shell impatiently.

And then, from inside emerged a monster resembling a black lizard.

Its eyes met mine. Somehow, they appeared to be almost glittering with happiness.

"It's so…not cute."

Hearing Sue's disappointed comment, the lizard's mouth dropped open as if in shock.

Did it understand what she said? Of course not, right?

"You think so? I think it's pretty charming in its own way."

Back on Earth, there was a sizable gap between reptile fans and haters, but I definitely leaned toward the former.

I would've been all about this lizard when I was a young boy.

"Congratulations. So it is indeed a baby earth dragon," Anna said as she examined the lizard.

As a half elf, she was older and more knowledgeable than her appearance suggested.

And according to her, this lizard was a baby earth dragon.

A dragon! Just the sound of its name was enough to get me excited.

Even adult earth dragons can't fly, I've heard, but still… A dragon is a dragon.

This little guy was definitely gonna be super-strong someday.

I imagined myself riding on the back of a fully grown dragon. Now that'd be nice…

Apparently, a dragon that lived long enough and reached a high enough level would evolve into a naga. Could I raise this one to do that? Probably not.

"If you don't want it, then I'd be happy to raise it myself. Do you mind?"

"Anything you desire is yours to have, dear brother."

Man, what was I gonna do about this? I had the feeling that my sister was starting to head down a very weird path.

But it worked out to my advantage this time, so I decided to let it slide for now.

I held the lizard in my arms. It was very docile.

When I patted its head, it responded by nuzzling against me happily.

"I'll have to give it a name, huh?"

"May I?"

Anna took the lizard from my arms for a moment.

Then she felt around its lower half. The little guy wriggled in protest, but Anna held it too tightly for it to escape.

"It's female."

With this confirmed, Anna handed the lizard back to me.

The creature had something of an inconsolable expression as I held it.

"A girl, huh? What kind of name should I give her?"

If it had been a boy, I obviously would've given it a really badass name, but a girl should probably have a pretty one.

A cute name probably wouldn't suit a dragon.

"All right, I've got it."

I ran through a few possibilities in my mind, then settled on the last one.

"I'm going to call you Feirune. Fei for short."

This was the name of a big area in an online game I used to play in my previous life.

It was a desert area that seemed to go on forever. In the center was a dragon that served as the area boss, and if you beat it, you could get to an oasis.

That oasis was probably the most beautiful location in the whole game, the most sought-after site for screenshots. At night, especially, it looked like a paradise hidden in the middle of the wilderness.

Her black exterior reminded me of that nighttime scene, so it seemed like the perfect name for an earth dragon.

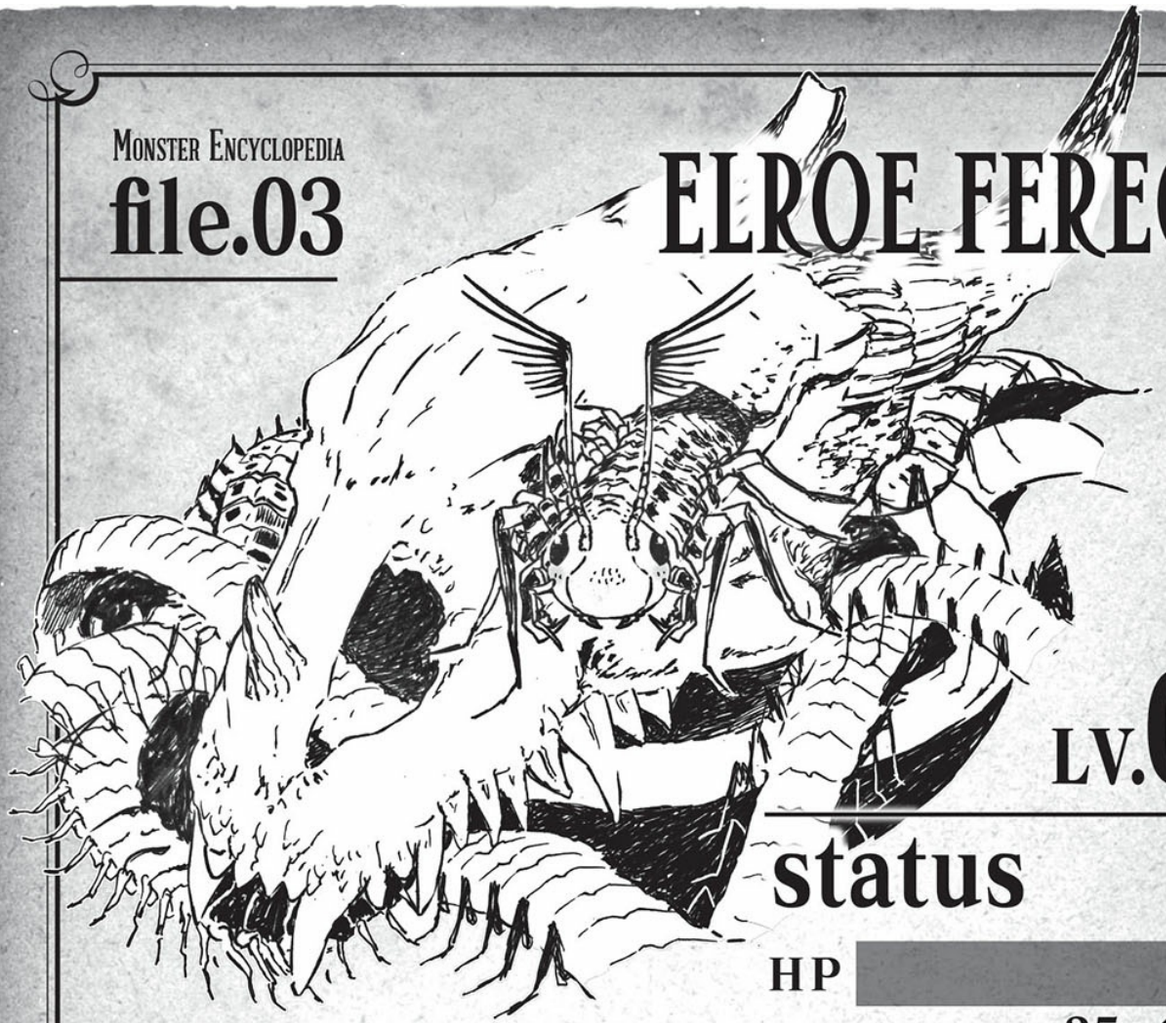
“Nice to meet you, Fei.”

When I called her by name, Fei responded with a happy little *coo*.

MONSTER ENCYCLOPEDIA

file.03

ELROE FERECT



LV.01

status

HP 25 / 25

MP 15 / 15

SP 15 / 15

15 / 15

Average Offensive Ability : 5
Average Defensive Ability : 5
Average Magic Ability: : 4
Average Resistance Ability : 4
Average Speed Ability : 90

skill

[Paralysis Attack LV 1] [Paralysis Resistance LV 1]

Also known as a centipede. An insect-type monster with a multitude of legs. Most of its stats are very low, with the exception of its speed, which is abnormally high. However, despite being endemic to the Great Elroe Labyrinth, this monster lacks the Night Vision skill, making it possible to easily dispatch solitary specimens. The one truly frightening aspect of these monsters is their tendency to appear in large numbers and function as a colony. A single ferect's danger level is F, but a colony can reach danger level B.



My First Monster Battle

Tromp, tromp. My legs are getting heavy.

Part of it is exhaustion from sprinting at full speed for so long, but my shock is the biggest factor.

I lost my beloved home.

Turning into a spider and having to eat nasty food hadn't perturbed my steely heart one bit, but now there's a little hole right in the center.

Ah… I knew a time might come when I would be forced to leave my house, but now that it's a reality, I'm totally in shock.

I had assumed I still had more time, which only made things worse.

At the very least, I'd hoped to stay in that home until I became at least level 10.

Waaah…waaaah…waaaaaah!

All right, that's enough whining. Time to move on.

First, I have to decide what to do next. There are several options:

1. Construct my next home in a different location.
2. Keep wandering aimlessly around this dungeon.
3. Try to find the dungeon exit.

That's all that comes to mind.

From a safety perspective, option 1 is my favorite. However, I feel it may be wise to resist.

Having a home is wonderful.

On top of satisfying my needs for food and shelter, it gives me a life where I barely have to move at all. I would go so far as to say it's an ideal paradise.

However, if I keep resting on my laurels, I'll probably end up a totally hopeless basket case.

Both mentally and physically.

If the only hunting I do is from the safety of my own home, I'll turn into a deadbeat with no ability to deal with any emergencies that might arise.

The current situation is proof enough of that.

At this rate, if I encounter any opponents who can break through my webbing, my only option is to run away.

That's no good. Not if I'm going to get this depressed every time I have to leave my home behind.

More than anything, I feel the ashes of my demolished home smoldering inside me.

No way. I'm not going to let myself keep running away like this. That's right: I'm frustrated.

I'm all broken up that my previous house was destroyed and I couldn't do anything about it. It's maddening that a part of me accepted fleeing as the natural course of action.

At the time, my only thought was to drop everything and run.

But what do I get now that I've actually done so?

Nothing but this horrible shame and regret!

How could I run away again?

There's no way I'll be able to live with myself.

I'm not just upset because my home was convenient. It was such an important place to me.

This might be clichéd, but it was a place where I belonged.

I didn't have anywhere like that in my past life. My "family" was a joke, and I

didn’t fit in at school. I liked playing games, but in the end, that was a world of fiction. I didn’t belong anywhere in reality. I existed anyway out of sheer defiance, or at least that’s what I told myself.

I created my spiderweb home by myself, for myself.

It was a place just for me, where I didn’t have to worry what anyone else thought. And now it’s been taken from me. It’s like my very self has been stolen away. If I surrender now, I’ll never recover my pride and dignity.

“Happy just being alive”?

Ha! That was just my idiotic, peace-loving Japanese self talking.

If I have to live without pride, I may as well be dead.

I realize that all too clearly now.

My home is gone. My pride has been injured.

I have to get stronger so that I’ll never disgrace myself like this again.

And if I want to do that, I can’t just hide away in a new home where I can hunt safely.

I have to build more experience through actual combat.

Which means I should either wander around the dungeon randomly or aim for the exit.

Although, to be honest, there isn’t a huge difference either way.

I have no idea where the exit might be. So really, aimless meandering is my only option.

I don’t know much about this dungeon to begin with. Even though I was born and raised here, I don’t even know its name.

I have no idea how big it is or how difficult. I don’t even know the general makeup of the terrain.

Basically, I’m clueless.

Hmm? I feel like this isn’t the first time I’ve worried about all the stuff I don’t know…

Ah! That's right, this happened when I got the Appraisal skill, too! I totally forgot I had that.

I wasn't able to level it up anymore in my home, but now that I'm out and about, I should be able to.

Since it might be a bit more useful if I raise its skill level, I decide to go on Appraising things.

Well, here goes nothing.

<Labyrinth Wall> <Labyrinth Floor> <Labyrinth Ceiling> Useless as ever, I see.

Ah, but with each step I take, I get more Appraisal results, so my proficiency must be accumulating.

Oof, all that information flowing into my brain at once is kind of discomfiting.

I'll have to suffer with it for a while until I get used to it, I guess…

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Appraisal LV 2] has become [Appraisal LV 3].> And right away, my skill levels up.

It hasn't even been that long since I started Appraising.

So it's this easy to raise skill levels when you're not holing up at home? I'm not sure how to feel about that.

Well, all's well that ends with a rank-up.

Now, what new information will skill level 3 bring? I waste no time in analyzing myself.

<Small lesser taratect LV 5 Nameless>

Hey, it shows my level now. Yippee. *Sigh…* Well, gotta take what I can get, I suppose.

Seriously, though, how high does the level even have to be for this skill to actually be useful? Ugh.

Still, I have to wonder… *How strong is my race, "small lesser taratect," compared to the other monsters in this dungeon?*

This idle thought leads to an unexpected response.

<Small lesser taratect: Young offspring of inferior taratect> Wh…what?

Wait, did I just Appraise the species name in my results? Double Appraisal?

Ooh. Seems like I discovered a pretty important trick!

Well then, in the spirit of investigation, I decide to try Appraising one more time.

<Taratect: A spider-type monster species>

It works! Is this crazy or what?!

So when you Appraise something and get a word you don't know in the result, you can Appraise that further.

Wow!

The explanations are still pretty short and scarce on information, but once I raise the skill level some more, this could be insanely useful!

I might be able to get a whole chain of info just from Appraising one thing.

Hot damn! Sorry for calling you useless, Mr. Appraisal!

I'll definitely work hard to raise your skill level from now on!

I wander about the labyrinth, looking for monsters that could make suitable opponents.

Found one.

<Elroe frog LV 3>

Farther down the passageway I'm hiding in, I see the outline of my sworn enemy: the frog.

Since I have the chance, I decide to Appraise more-detailed information about it.

<Elroe frog: A frog-type monster that lives inside the Great Elroe Labyrinth> Hmm? Wait just a second. There was a very important-sounding key phrase in that description.

<Great Elroe Labyrinth: The largest labyrinth in the world, connecting the continents of Daztrudia and Kasanagara underground> This isn't how I expected to find out my location.

So the dungeon I'm in is called the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

I've been wondering what "Elroe" could be, since it's attached to monsters' names so often, but I didn't realize it was the name of the dungeon.

Wait, so this is the world's largest labyrinth? It must be huge, then. And hold on, how could it connect two continents underground? Does that mean right above this dungeon is the ocean?

Yikes! For real? It must be freaking gigantic.

While I'm at it, I Appraise the names of the two continents.

<Daztrudia: A continent populated by many human nations> <Kasanagara: The world's largest continent>

Huh. If I'm going to escape, then, it sounds like I should avoid Daztrudia with its high human population, but I don't exactly see myself having much of a choice there.

In any case, I've gotten so wrapped up in Appraising that I almost forgot about the frog.

Its back is turned toward me. So it hasn't noticed me yet.

Maybe I should launch a surprise attack? …Too late, now it's spotted me. Dammit!

Hissss!

Maybe I can intimidate it.

Splut!

Huh?!

Hey, what's the big idea?! You're not supposed to just spit at me right off the bat!

I mean, that almost hit me!

Splut! Splut! Splut!

Don't spit a bunch of times in a rowww!

Hey, wait, huh?! I thought I dodged all of 'em! Owww!

Thanks to Poison Resistance, it isn't nearly as bad as that first time, but it still

hurts! Knock it off!

I didn't expect these things to be so damn bouncy when they're not wrapped up in my web!

Splut! Splut! Splut!

Cut it out already! *Blech!* It got me again!

Crap, at this rate I'm gonna get my ass handed to me!

All right! I have no choice but to bust out my special attack!

Splut! Splut! Splut!

I'm not gonna keep falling for the same attack over and over, buddy! It's obvious by now that you can only fire three of those at a time! Don't underestimate the observation and evasive abilities of the gamer they once called Skanda! I'm gonna evade your spit attacks!

I lunge at the frog with my claws at the ready!

Crap, it dodged like I figured it would—wait, it just jumped! It's trying to hit me with its tongue!

Smack! Owww!

There must've been acid on that tongue, too—the spot where it touched me is burning!

Ohhh, geez. This is a serious injury.

If I have an HP gauge, I'm probably getting into the red by now.

One more hit, and I'll be in serious trouble.

Luckily, that isn't going to happen. The winner has already been decided.

Because my thread was waiting where the frog was about to land.

The trick is simple.

I just laid my silk along the dungeon floor as I dodged the spit attacks.

I seem to have a habit of unconsciously leaving it on the ground as I move anyway.

So this time, I used that to my advantage.

All I did was add some stickiness to the thread trail behind me.

Then, I just had to lure the frog over to that area.

I did so by carefully controlling the speed and angle of my claw attack to send it leaping in the right direction.

I wasn't expecting it to counterattack in midair, but…

…as soon as it lands, the frog gets caught in my thread.

Doggedly, I jump in to wind more threads around it.

Then I finish it off with my poison bite!

Within moments of receiving my venom, the frog draws its last breath.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Acid Resistance LV 2] has become [Acid Resistance LV 3].> Another skill level went up.

That should make my next frog battle a little easier.

Honestly, if I didn't already have the Acid Resistance skill, the damage I took might've been too much for me to survive.

Yeesh, that was close. My body is in a sorry state now.

Two spit attacks and one smack from that tongue were enough to put me on the verge of death.

The tongue attack was especially bad. The area where it touched me is concave now, and the impact busted several of my legs.

I wasn't even underprepared this time.

I had kind of figured that if a spider fought another monster head-on without a web, the chances of the spider winning would probably be pretty low.

Still, I think somewhere in the back of my mind was the naive confidence that it would work out somehow or other.

To be honest, it was a lot harder than I thought.

My first real battle was a decidedly narrow victory.

Anyway, with this major injury, I can't move very well anymore.

I have to make a simple home here and focus on nursing my wounds for now.

The "simple home" is really just a basic little nest.

I leave the dead frog alone for later and start spinning a web.

Ugh. Every time I move, a wave of severe pain streaks through my body.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Pain Resistance LV 1].> Oh? A new skill? Sure enough, the pain has subsided a little.

It still really freaking hurts, though.

But either way, this is definitely a good skill to have.

As long as I keep surviving, the skill level will probably go up naturally, so that will be a big help.

Whew. Finally, my temporary home is finished. Now I can catch my breath.

If another monster attacks me right now, I'll be toast.

Oh well. Since I worked so hard to bring this prey down, I might as well eat it.

Yep. Experiencing my first real battle made me realize it all over again.

I'm soooooo *weak*!

I don't think it's just me; I get the feeling that small lesser taratects aren't that powerful as a species overall.

Well, I guess it is a "lesser" species, after all. It stands to reason that I'd have low attack power and brittle defense. My speed seems decent, at least, but it still wasn't enough to dodge that spit attack barrage the first few times.

So stats-wise, I can't even outpace a frog.

The only reason I've been able to beat monsters without a problem so far is that I had the advantage of my spiderweb traps. Obviously, fighting head-on is not my forte. Now I really understand how much I've been depending on my home.

Anyway, this has made one thing clear: I'm not cut out for direct confrontations.

In a face-to-face fight, I'd go so far as to say that everything comes down to whether I can restrain my opponent with my threads or not. In theory, I could just give them a poison bite, but with my lousy stats, I'd probably get smacked down before I could even reach them.

So I'll have to use my speed to confuse my opponent and then create an opening or set a trap like I did this time to catch it in my silk threads.

Seems like this is gonna be my go-to strategy. Unless I build a trap in advance and lead them to it?

In that case, frogs might be a troublesome opponent for me.

After all, they seemed to favor a "fixed turret" strategy where they stay in one place and attack from a distance.

They don't move without a reason, so they won't be likely to jump into my trap on their own.

Sigh.

So many challenges. Now I know my weak points—or rather, I've realized that I have nothing but weak points.

But I can't just give up.

If all I want to do is keep surviving, I could just make a new home.

But that isn't good enough.

Since I've decided I want to live with pride, I can't depend on that cop-out strategy.

For now, though, I need to rest.

How long is this injury going to take to heal? In fact, will it even heal on its own at all?

Well, whatever. Today has been exhausting. I'm well overdue for some sleep to hopefully recover a bit.

So, on that note, good night.

Zzz. Hmm? Oh man, it feels like I fainted.

In fact, I'm pretty sure that's exactly what happened.

Ugh, my body still hurts. I guess a wound that bad isn't gonna heal in one night.

Yawn… Ow, ow! When I try going through my usual stretching routine, sharp pain runs through my broken legs.

Oof, my two middle right legs are in particularly bad shape. It feels like they might tear right off if I'm not careful.

I'm getting really worried about whether this is going to heal after all.

Boing, boing. Hmm?

One of the threads of my web is vibrating. There's a monster caught in my little nest!

Usually I would wake up the instant I felt something catch, but it seems like it's been going on for a while. I must have been sleeping more heavily than I thought.

That's probably due to all the damage I've taken, too.

<Elroe basilisk LV 4>

Aw, man. Those petrifying lizards are tough. Guess I caught another pain in the butt.

What should I do now?

Since basilisks have that petrifying gaze, my web trap won't save me from turning to stone with a little eye contact. In my current injured state, taking a hit from a petrification attack seems ill-advised.

But I don't want to pass up on captured prey, either…

Zwoop.

Oh crap, our eyes met.

Nngah! The ends of my feet got petrified! Ugh, fine then! Clearly I have no choice.

Chomp!

Thanks to my Petrification Resistance, I'm turning to stone very slowly.

However, losing mobility in my front legs is gonna be a big problem. It could get really hard to walk if I'm not careful.

Please let this thing die before my leggy bits get frozen!

Apparently somebody heard my plea, because the basilisk runs out of energy when my legs are about halfway petrified.

Mm-hmm, looks like I can still walk, albeit clumsily.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small lesser taratect has increased from LV 5 to LV 6.> Oh? Whoa! What godly timing!

<All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Fang LV 4] has become [Poison Fang LV 5].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Petrification Resistance LV 1] has become [Petrification Resistance LV 2].> <Skill points acquired.>

Okay, okay. The fact that two of my skills leveled up is pretty sweet.

But that isn't even the best part!

My carapace falls away from my body. I'm molting.

Yes, it's one of the benefits of leveling up: full recovery via molting!

I wasn't sure whether the giant dent in my body would heal, but it's been restored perfectly.

Yahoo! Thanks a lot, basilisk! Also, I'm gonna eat you now!

So, without even trying, I've succeeded in fully healing my wounds.

Now I'm ready for another go at exploring the labyrinth!



Skills

My eyes were glued to the book in front of me.

“What do you think? Impressive, is it not?”

Katia, the duke’s daughter who used to be Kanata, grinned at me smugly.

Since the day of the Appraisal Ceremony, she had started coming to visit me often.

At first I called her Kanata, but that felt unnatural for both of us, so she told me to use her current name instead. Karnatia, or Katia for short.

But Katia still called me Shun.

Since my current name was Schlain, Shun didn’t sound too unusual as a nickname, so Katia insisted on doing it.

Personally, I didn’t mind, but it was annoying that other people assumed things about our relationship, since we called each other by nicknames.

We really were close, of course, but Katia was a girl now.

Because of that, some people got the wrong idea.

Leading the way on that front was my sister, Sue.

Whenever Katia came over to hang out, Sue would seethe and glower at us for a while, then stubbornly take up a position between us.

Every time this happened, Katia could barely suppress her snickering.

I know I aimed to be an ideal brother and all, but how did it end up like this…?

Recently, I had the feeling that she was even envious of Fei.

Getting jealous over your own brother is bad enough, but even over a pet?

Really?

At that moment, Fei was sitting in my lap, gazing with great interest at the book I was holding.

She was so clever that I sometimes found myself wondering if she understood the language here.

But of course, I had no way of knowing whether that was the case, and even if it was, I seriously doubted she'd be able to read on top of that.

"It's a skill encyclopedia belonging to the house of the duke, you see. This one has much more information than the ones you'd find on the streets."

The book contained detailed explanations of currently known skills.

It covered their effects, of course, but it also included the conditions required to learn and improve each one.

It was like a strategy guide.

Incidentally, Katia's manner of speaking in the native language here was very different from her Japanese.

Compared to her manly inflection in Japanese, she'd been brought up to speak the country's language in a register befitting an aristocratic young lady.

Since I knew who she'd been in her former life, the contrast threw me off at first, but I was used to it by now.

We only spoke in Japanese when we were alone, after all, and Sue was usually around whenever we hung out, so I encountered the ladylike side more often, anyway.

"Yeah, this is amazing. Couldn't you get as many skills as you want with this?"

"I'm afraid not. Your time is limited, after all. I believe it would be more prudent to choose which skills are of the highest priority and spend time on them accordingly."

I flipped through the pages eagerly.

Some skills I already knew, while others I didn't.

When I saw unfamiliar abilities with impressive-sounding effects, I couldn't

help but stop and read more about them.

“You and Sue already have all the basic status skills, do you not? In that case, you ought to improve those as soon as possible.”

Basic status skills were just the ones that increased your stats, like life, magic, strength, and so on.

“Those evolve at skill level ten, you know. The effect becomes much larger, and each time you level up from then on, your stats will increase by a significantly higher amount. We won’t be fighting any monsters for a while yet, so we’re still level one. If we acquire those skills now, it’ll pay off in incredible stat bonuses when we level up.”

We were all still level 1.

You could only level up by killing living things, monsters or otherwise.

We didn’t even have permission to go outside, never mind fight monsters, so we had yet to level up at all.

Still, our stats gradually increased as we grew and trained.

However, the changes weren’t nearly as dramatic as they probably would be with a level-up.

“Ideally, I’d prefer to evolve the skills twice before leveling up, but that’s almost certainly too much to hope for.”

There were various benefits to a skill reaching level 10: The skill might evolve, or you might gain other subskills. But the higher the skill level, the more proficiency was required to raise it further, so getting a skill to level 10 was pretty tough.

“If you evolve the skills as far as Fortitude, Stronghold, Skanda, and such, the way your stats go up will alter as well. Reaching that point is ideal. But at the very least, we ought to reach the preliminary stages of those skills.”

“Makes sense. I’m surprised there aren’t any skills that improve your ability to earn EXP or proficiency, though.”

In RPGs, you could sometimes find super-rare items and such that did that, but I guess not so much with skills.

“Indeed. But did you notice anything else unusual?”

“Yeah.”

Having looked through all the skills in the encyclopedia, I knew what Katia was getting at.

Sue had been peering over my shoulder at the book, too, but she didn’t seem to have noticed.

She appeared perplexed, not to mention irritated that Katia and I understood each other.

“There aren’t any item-production skills.”

“Yeah, if anything, they all seem to be specifically for combat.”

Yes, while there were enough skills to fill an entire book, not a single one of them was for production or any other noncombat usage.

There were a handful that seemed potentially useful for production, but all of these were only secondary effects of combat skills.

With such a huge number of skills, it was bizarre that they were all so heavily biased toward one purpose.

Katia and I probably only noticed this because we used to play games back in Japan.

The people of this world probably just assumed that was what skills were for.

“It’s like this whole world is based around combat.” My own muttered observation scared me a little.

A world where you can’t level up without killing things.

Skills that all revolve around battle.

Really, it was as if this world was encouraging its inhabitants to fight.

“Not many people know about this yet, but I’ve heard the Demon Lord’s army is rapidly expanding its ranks and armaments.”

“Then that means…”

“We may be called upon to battle someday. So until then, we should try to

become as strong as we can.”

The only response I could muster to Katia’s grave words was a silent nod.

Fei was shifting uneasily in my lap, so I patted her head to reassure her.



Bonus Stage?

My wounds from that frog healed up nicely when I leveled up, so my exploration has resumed.

Before long, I find my first prey of the day. Now, this is a monster I've never seen before.

It has tons of legs, like a centipede.

Well, might as well Appraise it first.

<Elroe ferect: Status Appraisal Failed>

Hmm? Failed? Aw, man, it doesn't show the level.

So Appraisal can fail, then. I didn't know that.

Not like it makes much of a difference at the moment, anyway.

The frog I fought earlier noticed me, but this centipede hasn't.

This is my chance for a real surprise attack!

Speedily yet stealthily, I sneak up behind my opponent.

Swish, swish, swish… Hello there, time to die!

My ambush is perfectly successful.

In fact, my victory is so complete that it's almost anticlimactic.

I completely bind the creature with my thread. Then, I drive my venomous fangs into it to finish the job.

The centipede looks unappetizing, and sure enough, eating it is totally gross.

On top of that, it must have a weird poison or something, because I feel kinda sick after eating it.

My body has gone weirdly stiff.

Man, since being reincarnated as a spider, I haven't eaten a single meal that could be considered tasty by any stretch of the imagination.

I know it's a luxury, but I really want to eat delicious food again.

Ahh… I wonder if there's any cup ramen lying around somewhere…

Probably not, huh. Giving up on that, I continue my exploration.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Appraisal LV 3] has become [Appraisal LV 4].> Oh, my Appraisal skill finally leveled up.

Recently, I've stopped feeling quite so sick from Appraising a bunch of things at once, so that's nice.

Now, what new info will I get this time?

<Small lesser taratect LV 6 Nameless>

Huh? It didn't change at all?

Wait, no. Underneath my species name are a few colored lines.

From the top, they're green, blue, yellow, and red, with the latter two stuck to each other like a single thick line.

What's this?

<HP Bar>

<MP Bar>

<SP Bar>

When I Appraise the bars, I discover that the first two lines are the hit points that represent my life force and the points representing my magical power, respectively.

I still don't really understand what the "SP" bar is, though.

Appraising it again, I learn that it's Stamina Points.

Maybe it's a physical analogue to magical power that decreases as I move or something?

Hmm? But why are there two gauges?

The yellow bar on top is full, while the bottom red gauge is reduced by about a third.

What's the difference between these two? I don't get it.

But it'll be good to keep an eye on my HP, so if possible, I want to Appraise myself continuously.

I try to do so. *Hmm, maybe it's kind of like this?*

Okay. I think it's actually working.

Now, as long as I don't deliberately cancel the Appraisal, I'll be able to check my HP at any time. That's pretty damn convenient.

Then again, seeing your own health is handy and all, but wouldn't being able to know an opponent's HP, MP, and stuff be even better?

If I know how much HP an opponent has left, I can guess how much longer it'll take to beat them, and if I know when they're about to run out of MP, victory would be as good as mine.

Having even a part of the enemy's information would be a huge advantage in a fight.

Does this mean this skill has finally become cheat-code-level useful?

Heh-heh-heh. I knew it! This is why I acquired the seemingly useless Appraisal skill!

It's certainly not like I had no clue any of this would happen!

Yeah, let's go with that!

Okay, anyway, back to exploring. Oh, hey, another monster.

<Elroe ferect LV 2: Status Appraisal Failed>

I take it all back. This stupid skill is useless. Why fail me when it matters most…?

Sigh. I'm an idiot for getting my hopes up.

At any rate, I should probably do something about the centipede monster I found.

Hmm. But this time, I don't seem to be in a good position for a surprise attack…

It seems like it hasn't spotted me yet, but it's facing this way.

Oh, I just had a great idea!

Sneakily, I start climbing on the wall. Having a spider body is super-convenient at times like this. I keep moving until I reach the top.

Oof, clinging to the ceiling upside down is a little rough. But as long as I brace my legs, it isn't too bad.

Just like that, I continue scuttling along the roof. Hang in there, legs!

Hmm? My stamina gauge is decreasing?

Well, I have to focus on my strategy at the moment, since I've just arrived over the centipede.

Nice, nice. It hasn't noticed that I'm right above it.

I attach a thread to the ceiling, then descend straight down toward my prey.

Then I leap on top of it.

The centipede monster flies into a panic, but it's too late.

Hope you like getting wrapped up in thread! And, *chomp*! Bwa-ha-ha!

Operation "Whoa! Look out above!" was a huge success!

All right, time for another hard-earned meal.

Hmm.

As I eat, I think back to the stamina gauge situation from a second ago.

While I was holding on to the ceiling, it was the yellow upper gauge that decreased.

It had gone down very slowly as I braced my legs.

But now it's fully recovered. Hmm?

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Paralysis Resistance LV 1].> Whoa! So the centipede could cause paralysis?

If I hadn't defeated this guy with a surprise attack, that could've turned out way worse!

I better be more careful with them from now on.

Hmm? Hmmm?

The red lower stamina gauge seems to be recovering little by little…

It was about a third empty before, but now it's going back up.

Why? Did I do something that would make my stamina recover?

…Oh yeah: I'm eating. Aha! So that's it! Now I get it.

In other words, the red gauge displays my total stored physical energy.

So maybe the yellow upper gauge is stamina that I use moment to moment, then?

To test it out, I try dashing around at full speed for a bit.

The yellow gauge empties in the blink of an eye. As soon as it runs out, my strength is exhausted.

Huff…huff…

Geez, how stupid was that, running around right after eating? My stomach hurts. Oof.

But that proved it.

The yellow bar displays immediately available power. When that drops to zero, I get short of breath.

But since that stamina is consumed instantaneously, it recovers quickly, too.

By the time I catch my breath in reality, the stamina gauge has steadily recovered.

The red gauge below that represents my total physical strength. This one also went down a bit when I ran a moment ago.

If the red bar runs out, I'm probably in trouble.

Like, I might not be able to move anymore or something. I'd rather avoid that scenario, thank you very much.

Food and nourishment seem to restore it, so I just have to be mindful of how much I have left.

Swish, swish, swish… Fwump! Spin, spin, spin. Chomp!

Thanks for the meal.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small lesser taratect has increased from LV 6 to LV 7.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Skill points acquired.>

Hey, I leveled up again.

Too bad none of my skills went up this time, but that's all right.

Oh, more prey.

Swish, swish, swish…

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Stealth LV 1].> *Fwump! Spin, spin, spin. Chomp!*

Thanks for the meal.

Hmm? Wait, was there something new in the latest announcement? I think the Divine Voice (temp.) said something just now.

Huh? Skill? Stealth? Does that make it harder for enemies to notice me?

Oh hey, more food.

Swish, swish, swish… Fwump! Spin, spin, spin. Chomp!

<Condition satisfied. Acquired title [Assassin].>

<Acquired skills [Stealth LV 1] [Shadow Magic LV 1] as a result of Title [Assassin].> <Skill [Stealth LV 1] has been integrated into [Stealth LV 1].> Thanks for the meal.

Hmm? I heard something again. A title? Come to think of it, this was the first time I've gotten any titles since Kin Eater and Foul Feeder.

Assassin, huh? It feels like I'm becoming more ninja-like by the minute.

Whoopsie, dinnertime.

Swish, swish, swish… Fwump! Spin, spin, spin. Chomp!

<Condition satisfied. Acquired title [Monster Slayer].> <Acquired skills [Strength LV 1] [Solidity LV 1] as a result of Title [Monster Slayer].> Thanks for the meal.

Ooh? I heard something again.

Monster Slayer? Well, yeah, I've been doing nothing but laying monsters low the whole time I've been in this dungeon. A little late for a title like that, no?

Maybe it's that sort of system? The type where you get a title for killing a certain number of monsters?

Hmm.

Wha—?! Yet another victim!

Swish, swish, swish… Fwump! Spin, spin, spin. Chomp!

Thanks for the meal.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Overeating LV 1].> Again? This sure is a busy day.

Wait, what do you mean, overeating? What kind of a skill name is that?

Does it have a negative effect or something?

……Okay, wait just a minute.

I've been ignoring it all up until now, but doesn't it seem like that voice has been doing its thing a lot today?

Yeah, that thing always does its thing 'cause it does the thing to the thing.

Okay. I should probably calm down for a second.

I've leveled up.

Cool. It was bound to happen sooner or later, with all the hunting I've been doing.

I got a Stealth skill.

That’s fine, too. I’m not sure how useful it’ll be, but it sure beats nothing, and I’ll take whatever I can get.

I received a title.

Isn’t that strange? No, getting a title is a good thing, right? Decent, at least?

But two came in a row, right? What were they?

Uh, let’s see…

Assassin and Monster Slayer. They both sound awfully violent. Well, that isn’t any different from any of the titles I already have, huh? A little late to gripe about that now.

So, Assassin sounds like a ninja, right?

Same for the skills that come with it, Stealth and Shadow Magic.

Shadow Magic… Does that mean I can go in and out of shadows and stuff?

There ought to be some spells to help me hide in the shadows and assassinate things, at least.

But either way, I don’t know how to use it. I told you, I don’t know how this magic system works!

Ugh, can I get a manual already?

I don’t know what Monster Slayer is supposed to be about, either.

What now? Strength and Solidity? Those are such vague skill names that I have no idea what they do, either.

Hmm? Thinking about it logically, maybe they enhance my stats like attack and defense power or something?

Either that, or they’re supplementary skills that temporarily raise stats for a fixed period of time.

The former would be fine, but if it’s the latter, I have no idea how to use it. I try just thinking the skill names like I do with Appraisal, but nothing seems to happen. I guess my only option is to leave well enough alone, then.

So what was that last part? Overeating?

Seriously, is that a negative skill?

Who says something like that to a girl, anyway? You wanna pick a fight with me, Divine Voice (temp.)?

Are you calling me fat?! I'm not! Absolutely not! I just get a little chubby right after eating sometimes, that's all! It goes right back to normal after a good night's sleep! Feast your eyes on these legs, would ya?! They're so slender, they might break at any moment! Human beings only wish they could have stick legs like these! And yet you dare to call me fat?! Aside from right after a meal, I'm super-skinny, thank you very much!

Huff…huff…

…Well, that was pointless.

Nobody really called me fat in my previous life, anyway, so I might've overreacted a bit.

If anything, they made fun of me for being skin and bones…

But anyway, today is actually a big day for breakthroughs, huh?

I haven't gotten this many skills and bonuses at once before. Maybe I could keep on raking them in like this.

What, is that too optimistic? Yeaaaah, probably.

My labyrinth exploration is going smoothly.

In fact, I'm on the verge of bursting into laughter.

This seems to be centipede territory, considering they're everywhere.

These guys are great for grinding EXP. Their senses must be awfully dull or something, because they never pick up on my surprise attacks. As long as I come at them from behind or above, my victory is practically guaranteed. Thanks to that, I'm beating them effortlessly.

Since I've been eating so many centipedes, my Paralysis Resistance skill is already level 3.

I also improved the efficiency of my hunting with various experiments and developed something I call a mobile web. All that means is that I carry around a

small spiderweb. But if I prepare one before getting into a fight, I can wrap up my prey without having to make thread in the middle of battle, so it's pretty handy.

I tried other things, too, like making clothes or detecting enemies with my silk, but those all ended in failure.

I can't wear clothes to begin with, and while it isn't impossible to use thread to sense enemies, it takes so much concentration that I wind up getting distracted and missing what's happening right in front of me, so I ended up scrapping the idea.

Since I have such a large food supply in the form of centipedes, I could afford to do my fruitless experiments.

Today, as usual, I'm hard at work hunting. Hoo, boy. Is this centipede heaven or what?

I hum a nasally little tune as I explore. Well, really I'm just imagining music in my head; I can't actually hum. In fact, do I even have a nose? Well, no use worrying about that.

Oh? The path is broken? Doesn't look impassable, though.

This labyrinth isn't just huge; it also doesn't have any dead ends as far as I can tell.

The path I've been following for a while now just keeps on going, without any blockage.

This is good, since it means I probably can't get cornered if something is chasing me, but when I consider that all the passages in this maze might go on this long, I feel like heaving a hopeless sigh.

The break in the path ahead of me is due to some kind of cliff.

In the middle of the interrupted road, I can see a wide, empty space.

Have I finally passed out of this narrow maze zone?

If so, what kind of place is next? Nothing like the spider hell I first came from, I hope.

I peek over the edge of the cliff cautiously.

<Elroe ferect LV 2: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe ferect LV 2: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe ferect LV 2: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe ferect LV 2: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe ferect LV 2: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe ferect LV 2: Status Appraisal Failed>

And so on and so forth.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Appraisal LV 4] has become [Appraisal LV 5].> Geh! My head!

The information from my Appraisal floods my brain, making it ache as if someone smashed a hammer into it.

Whew, felt like I was going to faint for a moment. That was close.

I guess if you Appraise too much at once, the excessive information literally hurts.

It makes sense that that could knock you out.

……Wait. Enough information that I almost lost consciousness?

Nervously, I peer down over the cliff again.

Really, it’s only about three feet high.

Right below, there’s a wide, spacious area.

But despite its size, the area doesn’t actually feel particularly roomy.

That’s because it’s teeming with centipedes.

Wha—?! What the hell is this?! Centipedes, centipedes, centipedes, as far as the eye can see!

Oof, that’s disgusting. I feel like I’m gonna be sick.

Huh?

What are you all looking at, Mr. Centipedes? Me? C’mon, what would you be interested in me for?

……Okay, I'd better book it. Fly like the wind! I turn around and sprint back the way I came.

Patter-patter-patter-patter-patter!!!

Eeeeek! They're chasing meee?!

I'm sorry I got carried away! Please, let's just call it even!

My yellow stamina gauge is empty. Ugh, it hurts. But I'll die if I stop now!

I have to run for my life if I want to survive!

With the yellow bar gone, the red one begins to slowly decrease.

In the end, I run until about half of the red gauge is depleted, when I've finally managed to lose the centipede army.

Man, I thought I was seriously gonna die back there.



The Second Classmate

I was spending some time alone.

Sue had gone to her mother's place.

Since Sue and I were half siblings, naturally I had no relation to Sue's mother. In fact, since she was the king's wife and I was born to one of his concubines, it made sense that Sue's mother wouldn't be particularly fond of me. So when my sister met with her, I made sure to keep my distance.

I was being sensitive, of course, but I also enjoyed having some rare alone time.

Whenever I left my room, Anna or Klevea, the other maid, would usually escort me, but neither was around today.

I didn't give them the slip or anything. I just told them up front that I wanted to be alone.

Anna was a half elf, a master of magic.

Klevea was a former knight, a hardened warrior so muscular that she could be mistaken for a man at first glance.

I couldn't shake them off even if I tried.

While I technically had more magic power than Anna already, according to her, I was still no match for her without the ability to use it.

Magic could only be activated by someone with Magic Perception, Magic Operation, and a magic skill.

I didn't have a magic skill yet, so I couldn't cast anything.

To learn a magic skill, you had to either pay the requisite skill points or earn

proficiency by using a tool with magical powers, like an Appraisal Stone.

I had skill points, but Anna informed me that there were other restrictions on the acquisition of magic skills.

Apparently, this was because it would be dangerous for someone too young to acquire them.

My physical stats might've been high for my age, but they were still no match for those of an adult warrior.

In other words, I was basically helpless. So, could a weakling like me roam freely, even just inside the castle?

The answer was no.

No doubt somebody was guarding me in the shadows, and I simply hadn't noticed.

I walked through the castle with Fei on my shoulder. My destination was the sporting grounds inside the castle. I was weak for now, but if I kept training, I'd eventually get stronger. The skills and stats that existed in this world were proof of that.

If I trained, the numbers for whatever skill or stat I was working on would go up accordingly.

Like Katia had said when we were skimming through the skill encyclopedia, if I powered up my basic stat skills, their levels would rise.

The most efficient way to increase basic physical status skills was simple exercise.

So I practiced running and weight training on the grounds. By my side, Fei exercised in a similar way. Whether she was just imitating me or was actually training herself was a mystery to me.

Fei was very clever, though, so she probably was trying to train with all her might.

"Whew."

Once I'd worked out every part of my body, I took a break.

I drank some of the water that I'd prepared earlier.

Fei didn't drink any, though. I didn't really understand the physiology of monsters, but I had never once seen Fei drink anything.

As I took a breather, I hummed absentmindedly.

It was a song from Japan, not this world. I used to sing it at karaoke with Kanata and Kyouya…

The thought made me nostalgic.

"I know that song."

Maybe that was why the sudden comment in Japanese made me homesick. Even when Katia and I hung out, we didn't speak Japanese very often.

Surprised, I looked around, but I couldn't find the source of the Japanese voice.

"Down here."

The voice spoke again, and I felt a tug on my arm at the same time.

Looking down, I saw Fei play-biting my arm and pulling on it lightly.

"So, Fei, you're…Shinohara?"

"That's right."

Once I'd calmed down a bit, I listened to Fei, aka Shinohara, tell her story.

To be precise, she wasn't actually speaking but using a skill that allowed her to communicate telepathically. Apparently she'd noticed it when we were looking at the skill encyclopedia, and she'd acquired it using her SP.

"Ah, but you can just keep calling me Fei, of course."

"Right…sure."

I couldn't help feeling somewhat awkward.

I mean, this creature that I'd been treating as a pet this whole time was actually my former classmate.

Since I was a kid again, my sexual maturity and such had been reset to zero, so I didn't see it in a weird way, but it was still embarrassing.

“Aww, I can’t believe you turned out to be a prince, though, Shun. I have to admit, I’m a little disappointed.”

“Uh, excuse me?!”

What a terrible thing to say right to my face.

“I mean, I was reincarnated as a baby dragon, not to mention I wound up as a prince’s pet. Obviously the logical course from here would be to eventually turn into a human and become a princess, right?”

“No, not really.”

“Oh, come on. A girl can dream.”

That’s dreaming a bit too much, if you ask me.

“I mean, how am I supposed to go on without one? You can’t imagine what it’s like to be reborn as something other than a human.”

I hadn’t realized it until she said that.

That’s right. When I was reincarnated as a baby, even a human one, I still panicked.

What must she have felt all this time, being reborn as something else entirely?

Shinohara was right. I couldn’t even begin to grasp it.

“Yeah… You’re right, I’m sorry. That must’ve been hard for you.”

“Yes, I suppose it was. I was able to hear outside sounds while I was in that egg, you know. So I latched on to that with all I had and tried to learn the language.”

“Oh, yeah, I did that, too, when I was a baby. Wait, does that mean when you were cozying up to me whenever I was reading, it was because you were trying to study?”

“Yes, that’s right! Ahh, I was disappointed at first, but it’s a relief to have a friend here.”

A friend, huh?

“Oh yeah, I guess I can tell you, then. Katia’s actually a reincarnation, too.”

“What? Seriously?”

“Yeah. It’s Kanata Ooshima.”

“Are you kidding? But Ooshima was a guy.”

“I know, right? Her gender changed when she got reincarnated.”

“For real? That’s hilarious!”

“I don’t think it’s a laughing matter for Kanata.”

“Ah, I suppose not. Okay, I won’t laugh in front of…her, then.”

Those words surprised me a little.

To be honest, I didn’t have a very flattering impression of Shinohara. In her previous life, she was practically a bully. She constantly picked on another classmate named Wakaba.

The root of the problem was that Shinohara liked an upperclassman who had a crush on Wakaba. Though Wakaba herself had no idea. But apparently, when Shinohara confessed her feelings to him, he rejected her and stated who he liked instead.

Wakaba was the prettiest girl in class…no, in the whole school.

As a result, she became the target of a lot of jealousy.

And Shinohara was the ringleader.

She would harass her almost every day—deliberately saying rude things about her while she was in earshot and hiding her personal belongings, among other things.

Wakaba never gave any sign that she was bothered by it, so it never came to a head, but it was still basically bullying.

“Surprised?”

My thoughts must’ve showed on my face.

“Kinda, yeah.”

I answered honestly. I thought it was probably better that way.

“Well, I had a lot of time to think while I was stuck in the egg. It didn’t take

long to realize that I wasn't human anymore, you see. I thought maybe I was being punished."

Fei's telepathic words berated herself.

"But like it or not, I'm a pet now, you know? So once I was born, I figured I might as well try to serve my owner as best as I could. It's not like I was intentionally trying to atone for my sins, since that seemed like the most likely chance for my survival. But it's a fitting penalty that my 'master' would turn out to be a former classmate."

"Sorry you got stuck with me as a penalty, then."

"Ah-ha-ha! Did that bother you? I was only joking."

"Didn't sound like a joke to me."

"Now, now. Let's just try to stay friendly from now on, right, Master?"

Her voice was dripping with so much sugary sarcasm that I could only sigh.

And so, I had been reunited with my second fellow reincarnation.

Yes, the second one.

When I first met Katia, I began to have a slight suspicion.

But now that I'd met another one, that suspicion turned into conviction.

I believed the rest of the members of my old class might have reincarnated here, too.



7 I'M EVOLVING!

Man… Centipedes are scary. Seriously, what the hell? I never wanna see that many insects again in my life.

Wow. I'm exhausted.

My legs are trembling. Probably because I ran for so long after depleting the yellow stamina gauge—my immediately available energy.

It's definitely time for a rest.

I look back one more time to check whether the centipede army is following me. Sweet, no sign of them.

I lay out some webbing to make a simple home.

The moment I finish the web to ensure my relative safety, all the strength drains from my body, and I collapse.

Wow, I might've gotten a little traumatized.

Those centipedes may be weak individually, but that enormous horde was a major threat.

If that many of them came at me at once, there'd be nothing I could do.

Plus, those guys can inflict paralysis. If I got bitten even once, I'd probably be totally immobilized prey.

After that, all I'd be able to do is wait for them to gobble me up.

The thought alone makes me shudder.

I should've thought more carefully about why there were so many centipedes in that area.

Or maybe what I should've noticed was the lack of other monsters around there.

I mean, on their own, the centipedes are crazy weak.

In retrospect, it was odd that there weren't any other predators around when there was so much prey to be had. I'd considered that maybe other monsters didn't want to eat them because of their paralyzing venom, but in a dungeon chock-full of poisonous monsters, that seemed like a flimsy reason.

More likely, the other beasts either avoided the area, knowing a swarm of centipedes lived there, or wandered in accidentally and got eaten.

Considering that even my speed was barely enough to let me escape, it may simply be impossible for slower creatures. They'd try to run but get overtaken in no time, and once they were bitten and paralyzed, tons of centipedes would swarm around them and…

Scaaaaary.

I guess even lesser monsters have ways of compensating for their vulnerabilities.

In terms of pure fighting ability, I'm on the weaker side, too, but if I make a web, I can entrap and defeat monsters stronger than myself.

So just because something seems weak doesn't mean you can let your guard down.

Let's just say this little encounter drummed that lesson into me very thoroughly.

I was able to stay alive, anyway, and I did make a snack of more than a few centipedes before that incident.

I earned some levels and stuff, too.

Although, despite all the level-up molting I've been doing, I don't feel like I'm getting any bigger.

Molting normally helps an animal grow larger, doesn't it?

I mean, technically I *am* growing in a sense by leveling up, but the size of my

body hasn't changed. After seeing my gigantic mother when I first hatched, I got the idea that I could eventually be that big, too…

But so far, there aren't any signs of that happening.

Since this world has levels and all, maybe evolution exists, too, or something?

Oh, right, speaking of levels…

After I Appraised that whole army of centipedes, my Appraisal skill level went up.

Is this what they call a lucky break?

For the time being, I take a fresh look at my continuous self-Appraisal results. I didn't really have time for that during my pursuit by the centipede army, obviously.

<Small lesser taratect LV 7 Nameless Status: Weak> What do you mean, "Status: Weak"?! That's way too vague!

Plus, calling me weak is… Well, I suppose I realized that already. But couldn't you sugarcoat it at least a little?

The fact that my Appraisal said I'm weak is just more proof that I'm small-fry by this world's standards.

Sigh… That sucks.

No, wait. Didn't I just decide that you can't dismiss something just because it's not very strong?

I have my thread, after all.

Even if my body is frail, as long as I have my spider thread, I'll never be defeated, probably. Maybe.

If you look at it that way, I'm not really weak at all, right?

I mean, I'm biased, but I would say I'm actually kinda strong…

I can trap monsters with my thread, gain the upper hand with ambushes, and bite with my poison fangs once my target is immobile.

Yeah. I have to admit, I play dirty. But I don't have much of a choice, since I'm at such a disadvantage in a fair fight. So basically, I take any help I can get.

I just have to make sure I’m the one setting the pace, playing to my strengths.

Man, if things went that way all the time, I’d never have any problems.

Ugh, so tired. It’s time for sleep.

I’m awake.

I don’t even feel fully rested yet. But my eyes suddenly pop open.

What’s this feeling? I don’t know why, but my intuition is waving huge red flags.

Quickly, I get up and add more threads to my web. Then I notice the source of my premonition.

<Elroe baladorado LV 9: Status Appraisal Failed>

It’s a massive snake.

It looks thick enough to swallow a human whole without a hitch, and its body is at least thirty feet long.

Basically, it seems strong. Not to mention, level 9.

Up until now, the strongest monster I’ve seen is a level 4. So this is a big jump.

Species-wise, the advantage is clear. That, combined with its superior level, means that if we fight fair and square, I don’t stand a chance.

I break out in a cold sweat. I’m like a frog caught by a snake. Except I’m a spider.

My body is stiffening in fear, but I force it to move somehow. Slowly, I retreat in an attempt to put some distance between us.

But the snake isn’t having any of that.

Heedless of the web between us, its head thrusts forward!

Naturally, it winds up caught in the web. But then, the snake thrashes around and breaks through!

I turn around and dart away, fast as a frightened rabbit. I make my escape through the emergency exit of my hastily built web right as the snake bursts through the first barrier and attacks where I just was.

My instincts warn me to run away. But I don’t.

I see it. The snake is tangled up in the webs.

It could rip up the threads, but it couldn’t manage to free itself completely.

The intact web and the busted one are now tangling together around its body.

This could work! This is the advantage I need.

I latch on to the body of the snake as it writhes around.

The moment I bite down on it, I start producing more threads from my butt. Somehow I break through its hard scales and drive my poison fangs into its body! The snake thrashes more violently as the pain of the venom sets in.

As I entrap it with more thread, it struggles even harder.

The serpent slams my body against the walls and floor time and time again, but I hang on with all of my might and determination!

My yellow stamina gauge is running low. Every time I get hit, my green HP bar goes down, too.

And whenever I make thread, the red general-stamina bar decreases as well.

Once the red gauge runs out, I probably won’t be able to produce any more thread.

If that happens, it’s only a matter of time before the snake escapes its bonds.

I have to beat this monster before that happens. I pour all my energy into biting down and pumping out thread.

The snake’s resistance starts to weaken, slowly but surely.

When my yellow stamina bar is long gone and the red bar is down to only 10 percent, the snake finally lies still.

That’s what happens when you underestimate a weakling!

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small lesser taratect has increased from LV 7 to LV 8.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Pain Resistance LV 1] has become [Pain Resistance LV 2].> <Skill points acquired.>

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small lesser taratect has increased from LV 8 to LV 9.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Fang LV 5] has become [Poison Fang LV 6].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Night Vision LV 9] has become [Night Vision LV 10].> <Condition satisfied. Skill [Vision Expansion LV 1] has been derived from skill [Night Vision LV 10].> <Skill points acquired.>

Wow, that was a lot of stuff.

I guess gaining a ton of experience points when you beat an enemy that's out of your league holds true in any world.

I even rose two levels.

The snake sure was a strong opponent. If I fought it head-on, I wouldn't have stood a chance.

It had a strong body and had a strong defense with its protective scaly covering. Judging by the way it burst through my web, its speed was probably high, too. It might've even been faster than me.

Plus, snakes equal venom. No doubt that guy was poisonous, too.

Frankly, even when it was caught in my net, the odds of me winning were probably about fifty-fifty.

All my wounds healed when I leveled up and molted, but before that, my HP was dangerously low. I almost ran out of stamina, too. That was close.

But all that risk makes for great rewards.

When I was overhunting the centipedes, I figured I was getting close to level 8, but I never expected to reach level 9 in one fell swoop.

I'm really pleased about leveling up, but my skill levels have risen a lot, too.

It definitely doesn't hurt to have more Pain Resistance, and Poison Fang is one

of my trump cards along with Spider Thread.

When my Poison Fang skill powers up, that means my attack power increases by the same amount.

Or, to put it another way, Poison Fang is still my only method of attacking.

That could come back to bite me if I run into an opponent with high Poison Resistance. No pun intended.

But what caught my eye the most in this round of leveling up was the Night Vision skill.

Yeah. Come to think of it, it did make sense that I would have that skill.

That must be why this dungeon only seems a bit dim to me despite the total lack of light sources.

Now my skill level for that has gone up, and the scenery around me has become totally visible.

So 10 must be the highest level available. There's no other explanation for this clarity.

Unless 10 just happens to be the max level for the Night Vision skill specifically and not other skills, of course.

Plus, I got a Vision Expansion skill, I think as a bonus for getting Night Vision to level 10. That's great and all, but to be honest, I have no idea what it actually does.

Judging by the name, you'd think my field of vision would be much wider now, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

Well, this isn't the first time I've gotten a skill whose effects I couldn't understand from the name alone.

It'd be nice if I could use Appraisal on skills to avoid issues like this, but I can't.

One of the conditions of Appraisal seems to be that I can only get info on visible things.

So all the information I have about skills at the moment is whatever the Divine Voice (temp.) is willing to tell me.

Since I can't see skills in any form, I can't Appraise them, either. Since the results of my Appraisals are spelled out in my head, this information counts as being "visible," most likely.

But if I raise my skill level further, maybe skills will appear in my status Appraisal checks, and then I might be able to check them out.

Anyway, there's nothing else I can do about it until then, so I'll have to leave the mystery skills alone for the time being.

Now then, since I've finally brought down some big game, I figure I should get to eating it.

First, I rebuild my simple home so other monsters won't attack me while I eat.

Considering how huge the serpent is, I probably won't be able to eat it all in one go, so I decide to settle down in this area until I finish devouring the whole thing.

Thus, I make these webs a little more carefully than my usual temporary nests.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Spider Thread LV 6] has become [Spider Thread LV 7].> Today seems to be my lucky day.

My Spider Thread skill, which hasn't improved in a long time, finally leveled up.

Maybe using it so much during my battle against the snake paid off.

Anyway, now my two main skills, Poison Fang and Spider Thread, have ranked up at the same time.

To be honest, this will probably contribute to my combat capability way more than the base stat increases that come with leveling up.

I'm in a great mood and ready to chow down.

Oh, but before that, I'll have to get rid of the snake's scales. They're way too damn hard for me to eat.

Whew, descaling complete! Wow, that was exhausting. It was a lot more work than I thought it would be.

Since the scales were so hard and firmly attached, it took me a while.

The red stamina gauge, which was restored when I leveled up, dropped by a whole quarter again.

Goes to show what hard work that was.

But now I can eat without reservations! Without further ado, I dig in.

Ew, gross!

It's crazy bitter. That probably means poison, huh?

Considering how bitter this is, the guy must've had some super-potent venom. It probably would've been really bad if it bit me, then.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Resistance LV 5] has become [Poison Resistance LV 6].> Nice. It tastes awful, but skill-wise, this is a great meal.

It's been several days since I defeated the snake.

At least, I think so. There's no real way of knowing how much time passes inside the dungeon.

At any rate, for a while my life was eating and sleeping.

I still haven't finished eating the snake, and new prey keeps getting caught in my webs, so I can't move even if I want to. I only planned on taking a short break, but things are getting dire.

At this rate, I'm going to relapse into my life as a shut-in!

I glance over at the mountain of prey I've caught over the past few days.

Yeah, a mountain. Mountain… In Japanese, that's *yama*… Yamada. Come to think of it, wasn't there someone named Yamada among my old classmates?

Well, that doesn't matter now.

Anyway, my prey is piling up into a mountain.

This is the result of systematically disposing of all the prey getting caught in my web.

Back in my first home, I ate my prey as soon as I got it, but I can't start in on

these until I finish eating the snake, which is why I ended up with this enormous pile.

There haven't been any tough guys that could break through my thread like the snake, so I was able to dispose of them easily.

One of them was a strong-looking level 6, but now it's just part of the prey pile.

Well, a high level doesn't necessarily mean it'll be strong.

I'm level 9 now. Level-wise, the same as the serpent. However, the snake had an overwhelming advantage in terms of straight-up battle abilities.

In fact, without my thread, I probably couldn't even beat a low-level monster.

I'm starting to think that the race of a creature is at least as important as its level. Even at the same level, if one species is superior, then there's essentially no chance of an upset.

To give an extreme example, even if that giant spider, which is probably the strongest monster I've seen, was level 1, I still wouldn't be able to beat it.

Regardless of our levels, with an opponent that big, no amount of strategizing would stop me from getting crushed in an instant.

So besides the difference in level, there was also a big difference in combat ability between that serpent and me.

That said, three-quarters of the snake's body has already disappeared into my stomach. Should I look at it as being three-quarters done with the snake or still having another quarter to go? I still have the mounting pile of monster corpses to tackle after this, so it may be better to go with the latter.

With a stockpile this extensive, they may start to rot before I can eat them.

But I do have that Rot Resistance skill, so eating rotting things probably wouldn't bother me too much.

In fact, it may be better to make myself eat a little to raise my skill level.

Taste?

Considering all the gross poisonous stuff I've been eating this whole time, I'm

pretty sure I can handle a little spoiled food at this point.

Okay.

Just as I thought, I can't leave the area until I've finished digesting this giant pile of food. If I can just finish the snake off somehow, the other monsters aren't terribly big, so I'm sure I could manage.

Besides, if I don't push myself to finish all this, I'm really going to turn back into a shut-in.

I originally intended for this to be improvised housing, but I've spent so much time here, it's getting to be just as big as my previous home.

As I mull over everything, I feel a vibration through my thread. Something is trapped in my web again.

Oh man. Now I'll have even more food.

I never imagined that I'd wind up in a situation where I have too much to eat.

At any rate, I head over to my catch.

It seems to be thrashing about pretty violently. Maybe I caught some big game?

In that case, my staycation is going to be extended again.

I hope it's something small. This is a rather ridiculous problem to have.

<Elroe randanel LV 3: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe randanel LV 3: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe randanel LV 4: Status Appraisal Failed>

So I actually caught three monsters. Ah, these guys showed up in a trio at my old home, too.

Does this monster species only travel in threes?

In any case, this may be even worse than catching a big monster. Mostly in terms of meat quantity, that is.

For now, I add more threads to further impede their movements before carrying them away, web and all.

This is a new technique I've come up with.

It's way more convenient than cutting out a piece of the web every time.

Then I build a new web and head back to the center of my home with the monsters in tow.

Oof, all three of them together are heavy. I should've taken them one at a time, even though that's more of a pain.

Heave-ho! Man, this is annoying.

My body hurts a little bit now. In fact, my HP has even gone down.

Dammit! Good thing I have these guys to take out my anger on. That seems a little irrational, but I don't really care.

And so: *Chomp! Chomp! Chomp!*

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small lesser taratect has increased from LV 9 to LV 10.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Skill points acquired.>

<Condition satisfied. Individual small lesser taratect can now evolve.> … What was that?

As I level up, I receive some really mind-boggling information.

Evolve, it said? Does that mean what I think it means? Like in a certain game series where you raise pocket-size monsters?

<There are multiple options for evolution. Please choose from the following.

- Lesser taratect
- Small taratect

>

Wh-whoa. Okay, give me a minute here. Wait just a moment.

Let me think about this. This can be a huge turning point in a person's life. Although I'm a spider, not a person.

At any rate, I can't make this choice lightly.

Evolution, huh? Well, that's cool. Since this is such a gamelike world, it isn't that surprising to encounter something like this, I suppose. If I start making cracks about that now, I'll never stop.

So if I'm evolving, doesn't that mean I'll power up, too? If the choice to evolve is available to me, there's no sense in not jumping on the chance.

So. Lesser taratect or small taratect.

Based on the names alone, there doesn't appear to be that big of a difference. So which is better: "lesser" or "small"?

Oh, if only Appraisal could be used on the Divine Voice (temp.)! Then I could understand the differences easily.

Hmm. Well, maybe I could take a guess?

My guess is that a lesser taratect would be an adult.

It would take *small* out of my name, after all.

So the flip side to that is that *small taratect* removes the *lesser* part. Would I become a superior species?

But since *small* is still attached, I'd probably still be an immature specimen.

That must be the difference, I think.

In that case, it's easy to pick one. Small taratect should be the way to go, right?

I don't want to evolve and stay as an inferior species, after all. Besides, doesn't *small taratect* imply that there are more evolutionary steps beyond that? Like losing the *small* and simply becoming a taratect, for instance.

I don't know how much I would change by evolving, but at the very least, I'm confident it would make me stronger. In which case I should probably choose the one with more potential for further growth.

A lesser taratect might be able to evolve, too, but I don't want to choose it on the basis of that uncertain hope.

Besides, I don't know how big my body will get if I choose to become a lesser

taratect, which is scary.

If I evolve into an adult, that'll probably mean getting a lot bigger.

I don't think I'll suddenly have a huge growth spurt as soon as I choose my next form, but I can't say for sure.

This is a fantasy world, after all, so I can't rule out the chance of something like: "I'm evolving! *BOOM!* Now I'm gigantic!"

And if that is a possibility, I don't want to risk it.

I doubt I would suddenly swell up to the size of that giant spider, but if I get too big to fit in the passage I'm currently in, that would undoubtedly be a problem.

I did see that huge finjicote monster before, but it nearly filled up the ten-foot-wide passageway completely.

It seemed a little difficult to move around like that.

I'm guessing that monster normally lives in a bigger space, and that particular individual happened to go astray into a narrow passage.

So being too big to move around freely is a real possibility here. In which case, it would be best to stick with my current size. That's another reason to pick small taratect.

Okay. That settles it, then. I'm going to evolve into a small taratect!

<Individual small lesser taratect will evolve into small taratect.> Oh, okay. My evolution started pretty quickly.

The Divine Voice (temp.) is always very abrupt, but I wish it would give me a little more time to emotionally prepare for these things.

I mean, this is my big e-vo-lu…tion…

<Evolution completed.>

<Individual race has become small taratect.>

<All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency evolutionary bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Taboo LV 1] has become [Taboo LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Heretic Magic LV 1] has become [Heretic Magic LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Rot Resistance LV 1] has become [Rot Resistance LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Skanda LV 1] has become [Skanda LV 2].> <Skill points acquired.>

Wha—?! Huh? What?!

Did I fall asleep?

No, it was more like my consciousness suddenly slipped away for a moment or was interrupted for a second or something?

That had to be the effect of evolution, right?

Excuse me, Divine Voice (temp.), if I'm going to pass out when I evolve, a little warning would be nice!

Huh? Am I finished transforming, then?

As far as I can tell, I don't look very different…

Oh, my self-Appraisal stopped.

Okay, time to examine myself to see what's what.

<Small taratect LV 1 Nameless Status: Weak>

Oh! O-oh? Wh-whaat?

My species name changed, so the evolution seems to have been successful.

But level 1? So your level resets when you evolve? Uh, my stats didn't go down or anything, did they? My status hasn't changed from "weak," so I can't tell. Wait, still weak? Aw, man…

The most worrisome thing is that my red stamina bar looks nearly empty now.

That's probably why I feel so sluggish and hungry. I must've used up a ton of energy mutating, right? Good thing I have such a huge stockpile of food.

In the end, my evolution was successful, but it turned out to be risky business.

I passed out and nearly ran out of energy, after all.

If I get a chance to do this again, I'll have to make some preparations.

Since I lost most of my stamina thanks to my evolution, I turn my attention to eating.

First, what's left of the snake.

The large creature took so much work to eat before, but now it goes into my belly with ease.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Resistance LV 6] has become [Poison Resistance LV 7].> As I finish off the snake, my Poison Resistance skill levels up.

That makes two levels I've obtained for that skill thanks to this snake. Yum, yum.

Before I evolved, that much food would've left me full and bloated, but now it has so little effect that I wonder if it vanished into a hole somewhere. It's like everything I ate just now disappeared.

In exchange, though, my red stamina gauge has recovered steadily.

So even after finishing the snake, my stomach isn't bloated. In fact, I'm still pretty hungry. My red stamina bar is far from full, too.

Fortunately, I have a whole mountain of monster meat in my current abode.

Before my evolution, I'd been seriously worried about how I was going to eat it all.

Surely this much food would be enough to satisfy even the extra dimension my stomach apparently has now.

So I start to dig in.

I eat. And eat. And eat.

I scarf it down like there's no tomorrow.

In my previous life, I generally didn't have much of an appetite, but I guess it wouldn't be so bad to be a glutton in this world.

I feel like I could take on a competitive eater now! Seriously, though, what's going on with my stomach?

I’ve obviously eaten more than my entire body mass at this point, yet I can still fit more?

For real, though. My stomach isn’t actually connected to a separate dimension now, is it?

I know thinking about it won’t solve anything, but you can’t help worrying when your own body is involved.

I won’t figure out what’s going on no matter how much time I spend fretting about it, and it’s really starting to bug me…

Argh! Don’t think about it! Don’t think about anything, just keep eating!

I eat. And eat. And eat.

And ea… Oops, there’s nothing left.

Huh? Did I seriously eat all that food I hoarded?

…I did, didn’t I? I mean, it’s all gone.

For real?

My belly is still only 80 percent full. That’s what my red stamina gauge says, anyway. So that still isn’t enough to fill me up completely?

Evolution is scary. Mostly in the sense of energy consumption.

If my next one also occurs at level 10, I’ll probably have to start preparing once I hit level 9.

I’m lucky that I happened to evolve under the perfect conditions this time, but normally, it probably won’t go this well if I don’t prepare.

Man, for real, though—I’m so glad I could beat that snake.

If it weren’t for that, I wouldn’t have made a new home and saved up all this food.

Thanks, snake!

Well, anyway, I’ve recovered for the most part, but my stomach still isn’t full. And since I’ve munched through my entire store of food, there’s no reason to stay here any longer.

Time to escape from being a homebody!

And so I set off once again to continue my aimless journey.

Thank you, second home.

You were only supposed to be a temporary rest stop, but I ended up staying a lot longer than I planned.

Farewell!

I set off in high spirits.

Now, my first order of business is finding more prey to fill me up. After that, well, I'll probably just roam around randomly as usual, but I do want to try to find the exit of the dungeon if possible.

If I do get a chance to evolve again, I'll probably wind up getting bigger.

Even this evolution, which didn't change my appearance much, still had a huge effect on me. This makes it seem all the more possible that with my next step up, I might suddenly turn huge or something.

In which case, I'm a little worried about fitting through these small passageways.

If possible, I at least want to move into a bigger area. So the best thing would probably be to get outside. For one thing, if I stupidly make myself enormous inside this dungeon and the exit turns out to be tiny, I may not be able to leave at all.

The only problem is that if I reach the exit, there's a good chance that I'll run into humans passing through it.

But in the end, I don't really want to spend my whole life in this dungeon.

That gigantic spider I saw when I was born was probably around a hundred feet tall, estimating based on my own size, so it could probably barely go anywhere in this dungeon, let alone outside.

If I keep evolving from one form to the next, I'll probably wind up like that eventually, so I really have to get out of here before then.

That being said, the gigantic spider seemed like a boss monster. Will I really

reach the same size someday? I wonder how many evolutions that would take. By that point, I could probably defeat humans without breaking a sweat, huh?

But if I do that now, I won’t be able to get outside!

Part of me is excited at the idea of becoming so enormous, and part of me is deeply alarmed by it. This is a complicated feeling.



An Adventurer's Soliloquy

I was hunting in the labyrinth with my team of adventurers.

Most adventurers go into these mazes to raise their levels. There are monsters outside, but not nearly as many as you can find inside.

In particular, this dungeon had a lot of indigenous monster species, so materials from them could fetch a high price.

Leveling up and collecting resources. That's why adventurers brave the labyrinth.

"Hey, look at this. It's a web."

I looked to where one of my companions was pointing.

There, glowing faintly in the reflected light, was a web of evenly spaced geometric patterns.

A spiderweb—the nest of a spider-type monster called the taratect that's often found living in the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

"Is there a spider in there?"

"Must be. I'm gonna burn it down."

Taratects are fundamentally weak monsters.

As long as you're careful of their poisonous bite, they're just small-fry.

But occasionally, some of them make webs like this.

These snares are extremely dangerous.

The sticky and durable fibers are very difficult to escape on your own if you're caught. Apparently, it's possible if you have high enough strength, but most

usually consider escape as impossible.

The easiest way to extract yourself is by burning the web away.

The threads are hard to break with brute force, but they're extremely susceptible to fire.

My comrade used the end of his torch to set the web aflame.

It blazed up easily and continued to burn for a while.

"Whoa, hey. It's burning farther into the passage!"

"This is a big nest. You don't think it's evolved, do you?"

My friend's words sent shivers down my spine.

Monsters can sometimes evolve. When they do, they become much stronger than before. The unevolved members of the taratect species are very weak, but when they do mutate, they can become almost impossible to deal with. And that goes double for the ones that make webs.

Once the fire went out, we explored the burned area where the nest had been.

"Hey, look…"

"No way."

My comrade groaned, and I looked up at the heavens as if for answers. Although, all I could see was the ceiling, of course.

Before our eyes, the bones and scales of an enormous snake were scattered on the ground. Along with the skeletons of several other monsters.

If one creature took all of these down, it would be truly terrifying.

The giant snake skeleton probably belonged to a monster called the Elroe baladorado.

It was a high-ranking monster on the power scale.

"Where's the corpse of the thing that was living here?"

"It's…not here."

"There's a thread trailing out of the nest over here. It must have gotten

away.”

I took a look at the thread my friend had found. It was the kind of fiber that spider monsters constantly produce.

If we followed this, we would find whatever built this nest.

“What should we do?”

“Let’s go after it.”

It would be dangerous to let this thing roam around unchecked.

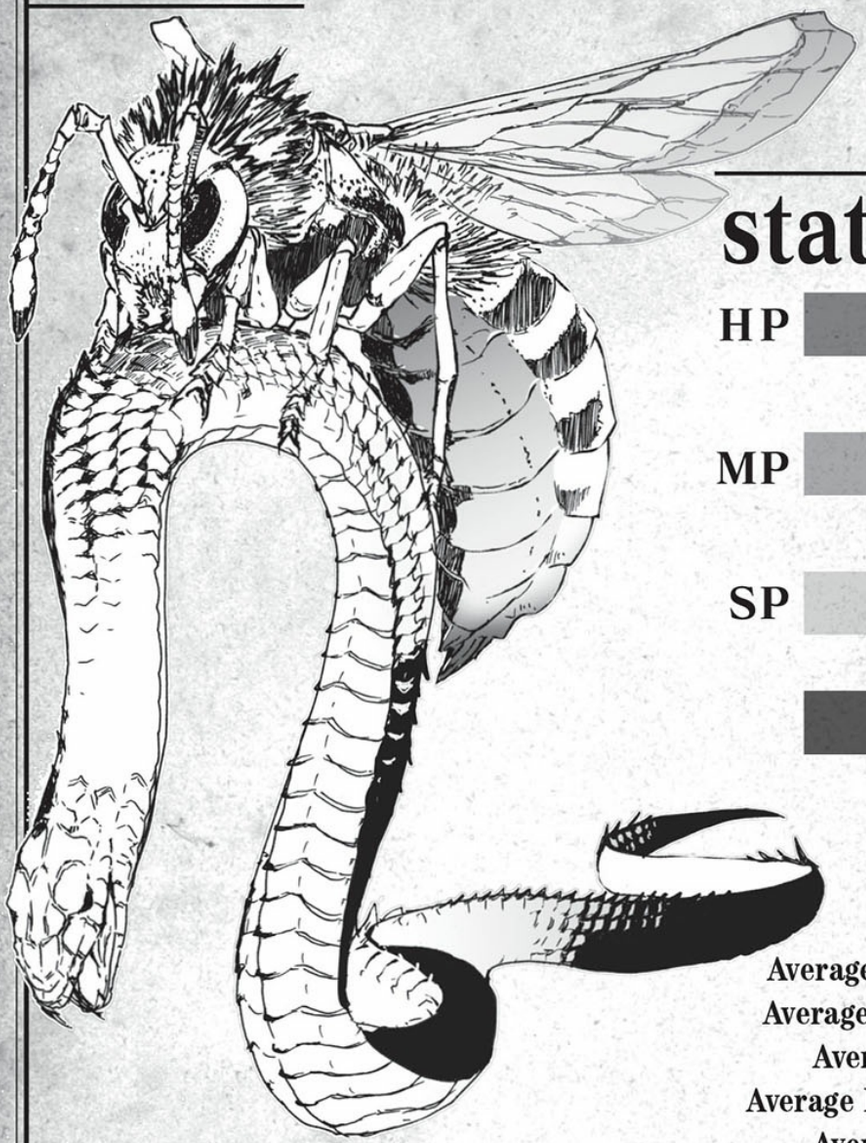
If it was evolved, we might not be able to beat it, but in that case we’d just run for our lives and report this information to the outside world.

MONSTER ENCYCLOPEDIA

file.04

FINJICOTE

LV.01



status

HP 125 / 125

MP 55 / 55

SP 113 / 113

108 / 108

Average Offensive Ability : 60
Average Defensive Ability : 38
Average Magic Ability : 28
Average Resistance Ability : 31
Average Speed Ability : 68

skill

[Poison Sting LV 1] [Flight LV 3] [Poison Resistance LV 1]

Also known as a bee. They form nests around their queen and work as soldiers to defend it. They usually travel in groups led by an evolved form, but some act as individuals. The variety that lives in the Great Elroe Labyrinth is unique in that it possesses the Night Vision skill. The danger level of an individual is D, but with groups, the level increases according to the size of the swarm.



The Fall

I check how much HP I have left.

The green bar is getting desperately low.

I'm just barely alive. Hanging on by a thread.

How am I going to survive?

I have no idea.

How did it come to this?

Even after evolving, I was still depending on surprise attacks to fight, as usual.

I rose from level 1 to level 2 in a flash.

Apparently, the amount of experience needed for leveling up wasn't cumulative.

Since I had evolved and gained a level, I thought this might be a good time to develop new tactics and get new skills with my skill points.

It turned out that I'd accumulated a decent number of points, so I was able to get two skills.

The first was Thread Control.

Just as its name suggests, it allowed me to manipulate my thread.

By consuming MP to invoke it, I could move my thread however I wanted. It was a wonderful ability that was perfect for me, since my spider thread is my chief weapon.

However, at level 1, the thread hardly twitched.

Dammit!

Well, it was still better than magic skills that I didn't know how to use at all, and it should come in handy once the skill level went up.

The second skill…well, that one was a huge mistake.

For someone like me who relies on surprise attacks, enemy detection is of the utmost importance.

Not only for letting me get the jump on other monsters but for making sure I don't fall victim to a surprise attack myself.

That's why I acquired a skill called Detection.

Since I got a huge headache whenever I used it, I decided to semipermanently deactivate it for the time being.

And so, I continued my exploration.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Appraisal LV 5] has become [Appraisal LV 6].> Appraisal! Finally! Now I was getting somewhere!

Assuming that the maximum level really was 10, it should be ready to actually help now! Probably!

I held my breath as I checked my self-Appraisal results.

<Small taratect LV 2 Nameless

Status:

HP: 36/36 (green) MP: 36/36 (blue)

SP: 36/36 (yellow) : 34/36 (red)

Average Offensive Ability: 19 Average Defensive Ability: 19

Average Magical Ability: 18 Average Resistance Ability: 18

Average Speed Ability: 348 >

…What…was…that…?!

What? Whaaat? Whaaaaat?!

Who are you?! You're not the Appraisal I know! My Appraisal was always more of a useless child who was always disappointing me! It wasn't a cool, capable beauty like whoever did this!

Where did my real Appraisal go?!

And what was I supposed to do with the *Useless!* complaint I secretly prepared?!

I was supposed to get my hopes up, find that all I got was a super-pointless new feature, and grumble about it!

Why would you betray me like this?!

Tell me, damn you!

Huff…huff…huff…!

Whoops—got a little worked up there.

I took a deep breath to calm down. *Huh…haah…huff.* Okay, all better!

Ahh…

Wasn't this a bit too much of an evolution for my Appraisal skill? The difference was way too extreme…

But this was what I wanted Appraisal to do in the first place.

I wasn't expecting such a sudden about-face, though.

It was like if a fellow nerd from middle school had the nerve to suddenly revamp their image in high school.

And yes, I'm aware that that's a really weird comparison.

Anyway, this new and improved Appraisal was actually amazing. I could now read my stats, once a total mystery, at a simple glance. There were even hard numbers, which was sure to come in handy from here on out.

But there was one little problem. Was it just me, or were my stats super-low?

I didn't have anything to compare them to, so I wasn't sure how bad they

were, but they sure didn't seem as high as they should for someone who'd reached level 10 and evolved once already.

And then there was the matter of that speed stat.

My speed was ten times higher than my other skills. Weird, right? I know I tend to spec speed, but this is ridiculous.

Well, well, well.

Now I just wanted to compare my stats with those of other monsters.

Although, based on my results so far, the probability that I'd succeed in Appraising their stats wasn't very high.

In fact, I had yet to succeed at Appraising anything beyond another monster's level even once.

But since my skill level had risen, it was possible that my success rate went up, too. It was worth a try, at least.

I went on the prowl for monsters and finally found one that looked sort of like a mouse. All right, Appraisal time!

<Elroe greym LV 2: Status Appraisal Failed>

Ah… Just as I'd suspected, Appraising other creatures' stats was still too hard. Oh well.

Swish, swish, swish… Fwump! Spin, spin, spin. Chomp!

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Fang LV 6] has become [Poison Fang LV 7].> Ooooh. Poison Fang for the win!

Now that I knew how weak my stats were, it was no exaggeration to say that I had no way of attacking without my bite.

So the level of my first and only attack, Poison Fang, was really important.

Anyway, that was just about enough searching for the day.

I fashioned a simple little web on the spot.

Now that my safety was secured, I could eat the mouse…or not. I wasn't actually very hungry. It wasn't that I couldn't eat, but I figured it was better to

save it for the morning, when I would probably be hungrier.

So all that was left was to sleep. Oh, and one more thing.

Nyoooom. Tug, tug. Bloop.

No, I wasn't doing anything obscene. I was practicing my Thread Control.

As a result of my training, I had discovered that I could only control one thread at a time. It moved at about the speed of a snail, too. As long as the thread was touching my body, though, the range in which I could control it was actually pretty large. And the MP consumption was fairly insignificant. The more you know!

For the time being, though, it didn't have much potential to be helpful in battle.

So, before bed, I figured I'd use up some MP to practice more and see if I could raise the skill level. If I did that, the limitations should improve, too.

Since Appraisal turned out to be a late bloomer, Thread Control could probably become useful by level 6 or so, too.

Although it might take a while to get there.

Anyway, once its level was a little higher, there were some things I wanted to try.

For one thing, I was hoping to bring back my abandoned project of enemy detection thread, since my Detection skill turned out to be useless. Dreaming big, I know.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Thread Control LV 1] has become [Thread Control LV 2].> And they say a watched pot never boils!

Nyoooom. Tug, tug, tug. Blooooop.

With the increased level, the thread's range of motion improved a little.

It still wasn't enough to be useful in a pinch, but it was visible progress, so maybe it'd reach the point of practicality earlier than I expected.

I still had plenty of MP, so I decided to keep pushing for more proficiency.

Yaaawn… Ahhh, that was a good night's sleep.

In the end, I had stuck with my practice until I was almost entirely out of MP, and I'd managed to raise my Thread Control skill to level 3.

I had actually planned to keep grinding proficiency until my MP was completely gone, but as I started running low, I got a bad feeling about that.

I couldn't tell you why, exactly, but my instincts told me it would be dangerous to have no MP, so I decided to stop before I hit that point.

After one night's sleep, my MP fully recovered.

Great. In that case, it should be fine to practice Thread Control before bed every night.

Hey, wait a minute. Since I was already fully recovered, couldn't I do it in the morning, too?

I didn't normally use my MP anyway, so if it was going to recover over time, why not let it accumulate while I hunted?

Yeah. That seemed more efficient to me.

If anything went wrong, I could just switch to once a day starting tomorrow, but I figured I might as well try.

And so, I practiced Thread Control. When my MP was just about depleted…

> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Thread Control LV 3] has become [Thread Control LV 4].> …there was a message from the Divine Voice (temp.).

Nice, nice. Easy enough.

Since my MP was getting low, I couldn't check how much the range of movement had improved, but I figured level 4 should make for decent growth.

It probably still wouldn't be any use in combat, but maybe I could at least experiment with making protective clothes with it in my temporary home or something. I was starting to look forward to the evening.

Anyway, it was breakfast time. Luckily, I still had that mouse monster from the day before, so my main course was good to go.

Hmm. Crap.

Eating didn’t recover my MP at all. I kind of figured as much, but still.

However, ever since my evolution, I’d been in good shape.

This was a sign of good things to come. It was like the universe was telling me that it was my time to shine.

Heh-heh-heh. Nothing can stop me now! Hee-hee.

All I had to do was keep getting stronger and making my way through the labyrinth.

I knew this dungeon was unnecessarily huge, so finding the exit was more of a long-term goal.

Anyway, it was time for another day of being my best self! Ha-ha.

Doot-dee-doo… I explored the maze in a great mood.

I mean, with the great shape I was in, none of the monsters in the area could hold a candle to me.

As long as I noticed them before they noticed me, I could beat just about anyone with a surprise attack!

And if not, well, at this point, I might be strong enough to win a fair fight, right?

My evolution probably made me a lot stronger, and my skill levels were getting pretty high, so I probably wouldn’t embarrass myself like that time with the frog.

I mean, I wouldn’t say I was certain I would win, but my confidence was building that I could hold my own, at least.

The thing with the Detection skill was kind of a shame, but still, I was feeling a little chipper thanks to evolving, so…

Come at me, bro! Just kidding.

Huh?

Why did I have such an ominous feeling all of a sudden?

It was like my instincts were screaming at me to get out of there immediately.

I turned around slowly.

Not far down the long, straight path I'd been following, a group of men dressed like adventurers were chasing me.

Oh crap. Humans!

And they were unmistakably locked on to me!

But it was probably nothing my newly evolved self couldn't handle, right?

<Human LV 29 Name: Gordeau Status Appraisal Failed> <Human LV 27 Name: Bardon Status Appraisal Failed> <Human LV 24 Name: Onjin Status Appraisal Failed> <Human LV 27 Name: Jolliere Justeau Status Appraisal Failed> <Human LV 22 Name: Gaikun Status Appraisal Failed> <Human LV 23 Name: Lekin Status Appraisal Failed> Yeah right, idiot!

What do you mean, level 29?!

Even if you count me as being level 12 total, that's still more than double!!

And six humans around that level?! I didn't stand a snowball's chance in hell!

Run!

Ah, a fork in the road.

Right or left? Let's go with…right… Wait, hmm?

I glanced down the path on the left.

<Elroe baladorado LV 9: Status Appraisal Failed> Are you for real?!

It was a lower level than the snake I fought before, but still, how was I supposed to beat one of those if it wasn't wrapped in webs?!

Oh god, a snake in front of me and humans behind me?!

And both parties were totally staring right at me!!

Run away! Down the passage on the right! No way was I taking on a deadly human-monster combo!

What idiot was all, "Come at me, bro"?! Me, that's who!

Nope! No way!

That snake was more like a boss battle than an ordinary mob!

Are you telling me those guys spawned just as often as normal monsters?!

And why were humans choosing now to chase me?!

Waaaaah!

What were all those noises behind meee?! Too fast! How were they able to keep up with me?! My speed was 348, you know!

I thought that was the one area where I was better than other monsters! Who the hell did they think they were, keeping up with me like that?!

Geh?! More monsters in front of me?!

<Elroe randanel LV 5: Status Appraisal Failed> <Elroe randanel LV 4: Status Appraisal Failed> <Elroe randanel LV 4: Status Appraisal Failed> Whaaaat?! Of all the times for this stupid trio to show up!

If it was only one, I could've just slipped right past it! How was I supposed to sneak past a row of three?!

Wh-what am I gonna do?! Come on! Oh god, I don't even have time to thiiiiink!

Okay! Sink or swim!

Still running at top speed, I skittered up the wall!

Yooooooooo! I did it! I actually did it!

Wall running successful! I made it over the three monsters!

I heard a commotion behind me, but I didn't look back!

I didn't know how much time those three would buy me, but I had to make a break for it while I had the chance!

Sorry about that, you guys. This was just another instance of survival of the fittest. Now, sacrifice yourselves to become my meat shields!

Bwa-ha-ha!

By using those monsters, I successfully made it out alive! I probably should have said a little prayer for them as thanks… Wait, huh?

A break…in the path?

Wait, wait, wait—another pitfall like the centipede nest?!

Waaah! No, no, no! I'm running way too fast to stop in time!

Aaaaaah!

I was suddenly hurtling headlong into empty space.

Huh? Oh, wow, what a terribly deep and wide hole. You'd probably die if you fell in here.

Wait, falling?! *I* was falling! Noooooo!

Bungee jumping without a cord? You've gotta be kidding me! Wait, a cord? Cord!



Come on, spider thread, work with me!

I shot out some thread and attached it to the wall!

All right, I'm saved— Whoof!

Ow, that really hurt.

I had stopped falling, but the recoil slammed my body into the wall at top speed.

Man, though, I thought I was gonna die.

Getting chased by a snake and escaping only to fall off a cliff? Not cool.

Maybe I was being punished for getting so full of myself…

Oh, I get it. All right, I repent. I've seen the error of my ways, so can that loud, disturbing buzzing I keep hearing stop now, please?

<Finjicote LV 4: Status Appraisal Failed> <Finjicote LV 3: Status Appraisal Failed> <Finjicote LV 5: Status Appraisal Failed> <Finjicote LV 4: Status Appraisal Failed> Bees.

It was a group of those giant bee monsters that I'd seen only once before. And there was a whole swarm flying around in this hole.

Um… Hello there…

I'm sorry! Please forgive me! For the love of god, don't look at me!

There was only one way for me to get away from the bees that were coming to attack me.

And that way was down!

I dove again! I was falling, but not like before!

I made the thread attached to the wall more elastic and used it to go down safely like a real bungee jumper. After bouncing two or three times, I latched on to the wall and attached a new thread.

Geronimoooo!

I repeated this process a few more times to get down.

All right, I reached the ground!

But the bees were still swarming around above me. I forced my exhausted body to start running again. I had to get out of there as fast as I could.

But I was a few steps too late.

A bee landed on me. Then, I felt a sharp pain in my back.

?!?!?!?!

Ow! It stabbed me!

And something was flooding into my body from the wound, too! Poison!

I didn't have any way to combat something that was attached to my back.

Wait, there was one way.

I still had hardly any MP left, but there was no time to worry about that!

I used Thread Control to manipulate my thread and attach it to the bee on my back. Then I wound the thread around it to constrict the monster.

Heave-ho!

I grasped the thread and yanked the bee from my back, slamming it to the ground like a judo master!

I wanted to finish it off right there, but running away was more important!

I hid myself in the shadow of a rock up against the wall. The giant bees shouldn't be able to get at me in the small space.

Sure enough, after buzzing around and scoping the situation out for a while, the handful of bees that were chasing me gave up and flew away.

I had survived, somehow.

But I didn't come out unscathed. I couldn't see it with my own eyes, but I knew there was a huge hole in my back.

I only had 6 HP left. The other 30 had been lost in that single attack. It wasn't surprising. I knew that my defense was somewhat low. If anything, I was grateful to my spider body for being tenacious enough to survive that awful wound at all.

I was lucky that I had high Poison Resistance, too.

That thing had definitely injected me with poison when it stung me.

I had no way of knowing how much of the damage I'd taken was from poison and how much was from the needle, so I didn't know if my skill had canceled the poison out completely. Still, I had no doubt that if it weren't for Poison Resistance, I would've been dead already.

I probably wouldn't be able to move for a while with this wound. I didn't even know whether it would heal on its own at all.

Meaning the ideal situation would be to level up and fully recover like last time.

That being the case, I really wanted to go and get that bee I'd caught and thrown off me, both for food and experience points.

But coming out from under here seemed like a bad idea.

Maybe I could stick some thread to it with Thread Control and pull it over here a little at a time?

Suddenly, I had another sense of foreboding.

I carefully peeked out from the shadow of the rock.

There, I saw the tied-up bee struggling on the ground. And beyond it, the shape of another monster approaching it, slowly but surely.

<Elroe baladorado LV 9: Status Appraisal Failed> The snake. Did it chase me all that way?!

No, probably not. It was the same level but probably a different individual.

Crap.

There might be quite a few of those snakes around, then, even though they were like boss monsters from my point of view.

If they found me while I was this badly injured, no way was I getting out alive.

The snake slithered lazily toward the bee.

I'm begging you… You can have the bee—just please don't notice me.

But in the end, the reptile didn't do anything to the bee.

Or, to be more exact, it couldn't.

Something ripped through its body at a terrible speed.

Huh? Did my eyes deceive me?

To my view, whatever it was had shredded the snake as easily as so much paper. You know, the snake protected by those super-hard scales. The one just about as fast as I was. And it had no time to react.

<Earth dragon Araba LV 31: Status Appraisal Failed> There it was, calm as could be.

Contrary to its name, it looked more like a wolf.

It had four feet that trod on the ground.

A long tail.

No wings.

What I saw there was an imposingly majestic dragon.

Oh god. My spider's instincts, my human logic, and the cry of my soul all screamed the same thing in unison.

Not a chance. There's no way you could ever beat an opponent like that.

In fact, I couldn't even call it an opponent in the first place. From that thing's point of view, I was nothing more than bait.

Not even prey. I'd be eaten the moment I entered its line of sight.

That was how extreme the difference between us was.

Its high level was barely worth thinking about.

Regardless of level, that thing was out of my league.

The earth dragon Araba started chewing up the scattered bits of the snake, one by one.

I desperately tried to silence my breathing.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Stealth LV 1] has become [Stealth LV 2].> *Shut up! I'm begging you, just keep it down! What am I*

gonna do if that thing notices me?!

Once it was done devouring the snake, the dragon ambled away without so much as a glance at the bee.

Th…thank god.

I had no idea whether it didn't notice me or if it did but didn't care, but either way, I was alive.

By this time, I had already had more than my share of near-death experiences, but that was almost certainly the worst yet.

Even just remembering it now is scary.

No way. If that thing was wandering in this vicinity, I had to get away, stat.

I looked around.

I was at the bottom of the hole I'd fallen down. It seemed to be somewhere around three hundred feet in diameter.

The depth was probably even more than that. I couldn't really tell how high the cliff was.

Above me, a huge swarm of bees covered the area like a ceiling.

I was relieved that they were far away enough that my Appraisal skill didn't kick in.

If it had, Appraising a horde like that at once might have knocked me out.

But if I wanted to return to the area I came from, I would have to go past that swarm.

While climbing a sheer cliff, no less.

Not happening.

I couldn't fight anything off while I was clinging sideways to a cliff.

I wouldn't be able to move quickly or even aim my thread properly.

My strength was fighting in confined places.

The bees, on the other hand, could fly around freely in the air.

There was no way I could win.

But exploring a place that was home to that beast would be a suicide mission, too.

There were a few different passages connected to the bottom of the pit.

Should I risk going down a different path from the one that thing went into?

I couldn’t. With an injury this severe, encountering any monster at all would spell my doom, even if it wasn’t that dragon.

Uh-oh. This might be the end of the line.

So here I am.

Where did I go wrong?

How am I going to survive?

I can’t let it end in a place like this.

I don’t want to die.

And so, I start planning.



An Adventurer's Withdrawal

"Dammit!"

A group of Elroe randanels and an Elroe baladorado got in our way, so we took care of them.

Just when we thought we'd chased down that taratect, these nuisances had to show up.

We lucked out and dispatched the baladorado relatively easily while the monsters were fighting among themselves, but the taratect got away while we were busy.

"What should we do now?"

"I don't think we have much of a choice but to withdraw. We can't chase it any farther now."

"You're right. We'll have to go back and report it to the adventurers' guild."

I nodded toward my comrade.

Given its size, the thing was probably pretty young.

But it still got away from us so quickly. That was no ordinary speed.

A small-fry monster like a taratect shouldn't be able to move that fast.

Obviously, this individual was extraordinary.

If it was already like this as a juvenile, there was no telling how strong it would become if it evolved into adulthood.

If we didn't do something about it before then, it would be too late.

"We'll have to withdraw! As quickly as possible!"

That was the most we could do. We had to return with all haste to report this information.

That way, higher-ranking adventurers and maybe even the kingdom’s troops could take action.

With one last glance at where the taratect had gone, we turned and left.



9 SPIDER VS BEE

After the earth dragon left, I took my time meticulously looking over my surroundings.

No matter how long I looked, though, I still didn't feel safe. But safe or not, I have to do something, or I'll be stuck here until I die.

I use Thread Control to extend a strand toward the bee, which was still restrained on the ground.

Oof, my back hurts. But I seem to be able to produce my silk without a problem.

I slowly and cautiously stretch the thread until it finally connects to its target.

The bee is still struggling, but that doesn't matter at this point.

I just have to recover it before another monster gets to it first.

With every tug, my wounds ache.

The pain is horrible, but my HP isn't decreasing any further, so I want to believe I'm all right.

At long last, I successfully retrieve my prey.

Immediately, I bite into it with my poison fangs, killing it on the spot.

Considering how well my venom seems to work even on other poisonous monsters, maybe my Poison Fang and Poison Resistance skills are higher than my peers'?

Well, that doesn't really matter right now.

The real problem is what I'm going to do next. To be honest, exploring this area is probably suicide. It's possible there are other beasts like that earth

dragon, so my chances of survival appear to be dwindling.

That's no good. I've certainly made it through many a dangerous situation so far, but this is so much more frightening than anything before.

In normal circumstances, I'm reasonably confident in my fighting abilities.

Recently, I've taken to wandering around the dungeon and using tactics like surprise attacks, but in the end, I'm best suited to making webs and letting prey come to me. I mean, I was even able to take down that huge snake with my simple temporary shelter. So if I put my mind to designing a home specifically for defensive battles, no monster will be able to overcome it.

Or so I thought.

That thing will absolutely be able to. Without even batting an eye. That horrifying monster is strong enough.

Thread, poison fangs, surprise, and speed. My fundamental tactics would be nothing more than party tricks to that dragon.

They would fall to pieces in the face of such overwhelming power.

I can imagine it easily.

In my whole life reincarnated as a spider, this is the second encounter I've had with a terrifyingly dominant creature that could crush me with ease.

The first time, incidentally, was when I saw my giant spider mother (father?).

The fact that I have no chance of winning is an issue, sure. But even worse is the fact that it's faster than me.

Even if something breaches my nest, I can still run away. I'd probably be beating myself up about it like last time, but at least I can escape with my life. With my incredible speed, that was never a problem. But that thing can outrun me.

If I fight it, there's no way I can win. And I can't even manage to escape.

Truly, if that thing ever lays eyes on me, it'll all be over in an instant.

What a distressing creature.

If I knew a thing like that existed, I would've just taken my chances fighting

the snake head-on.

And I have no way of knowing if that's the only one of its species lurking in this area.

Scary.

This is the closest I've been to death so far. Frankly, I'm kind of surprised by how frightened I am.

Despite all the ridiculous experiences I've had so far, I never felt any real tension or terror, so I figured I'd left those feelings behind long ago.

But now I know all too well that isn't the case.

The only reason I've never experienced this much fear is that none of those other situations even began to compare with this one. It's not that my emotions died, I just had no need for them until now.

Ha-ha.

It's a little late for that realization now. Why couldn't I have figured that out before I got myself into this situation?

All right, enough wallowing in regret. It's time to figure out what I need to do next.

First, I have to secure some degree of safety.

It would be useless in the face of that dragon, but I should probably still build a web around this small rock enclave.

At the moment, I'm physically incapable of leaving.

So this time, I'm going all in. It's time to make my third home here. Then, if possible, I want to lure in and kill some weak monsters like those bees.

My goal is to level up so that my wounds can fully heal. Until I recover, there isn't much else I can do. In my current state, one little prod from even the weakest monster would be enough to kill me.

It's probably best not to hope that these wounds will heal on their own, too.

Man, I wish I had some kind of automatic HP recovery skill. But there's no use grousing about that. I just have to accept my situation and try to pull it

together.

Anyway, my first order of business is making a base around this little spot.

To be honest, building a nest here probably isn't the best idea. It'll just make my presence more obvious, and if a monster like that dragon finds me, I'm toast.

However, with my severe injuries, I don't have much of a choice.

So I just have to try to level up.

Once I do that and recover from my wounds, I can think about escaping from this dangerous area.

Should I try to go up through the massive swarm of bees or explore down here despite the danger? Both choices seem like they lead straight to hell.

However, now that I've fallen all the way down this hole, I'm practically in hell already. The only question is whether I live or die here. And at this point, that pretty much comes down to luck.

As of this moment, I'd say the scales are tipping firmly in favor of me dying. Will my odds keep decreasing, or can I tilt the scales in the other direction?

Well, at the very least, I'm going to try.

Fortunately, I at least have enough stamina to make a web. One bee is still very large, so it makes for a solid food source.

I'm going to have to use every bit of the stamina this bee provides me to make my new home.

From there, it'll all depend on my skills and my luck.

On the first day, I made as basic a web as possible and went to sleep.

I can't say I slept very well, thanks to the pain in my back, but at least I didn't get attacked in my sleep.

Aside from the possibility of attack, I'd also been worried that I might die of my injuries while I passed out or something, so I was extremely relieved when I woke up safely.

My HP was still at 6, the same as before I went to bed.

I didn’t know whether to be disappointed that it didn’t recover or relieved that it didn’t go down any further.

I spent the entirety of the second day expanding the web.

Thanks in no small part to the pain in my back, building this home was proving more difficult than I expected.

Since bees kept buzzing too close for comfort, I often had to stop working and take cover.

Unlike my previous construction projects, I had to be on the lookout while I set things up, and it wore on my nerves.

When I had a moment to spare, I worked on eating the bee from yesterday little by little, to make sure that I didn’t run out of stamina. In this situation, I couldn’t afford to risk getting any closer to death than I already was. Stamina, especially, was critical to my survival. I needed it to create thread and even move around. So at the very least, I had to take care to save enough stamina for at least one fight.

On top of that, I didn’t know when I’d manage to get food next after this, so I had to be very careful about managing my stamina in case I became locked in a war of attrition.

As I was working, I found out that my Pain Resistance skill had jumped up by quite a few levels.

Last I remembered, it had only gone up to level 2, but in the middle of making my webs, the Divine Voice (temp.) spoke:

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Pain Resistance LV 6] has become [Pain Resistance LV 7].>

So now it was suddenly level 7.

I have no idea how that happened, but my guess is that it went up while I was sleeping.

It certainly wasn’t a comfortable sleep, so if the only condition for increasing proficiency in that skill was feeling pain, there was a very good chance that I’d built up plenty during the night.

In retrospect, I did feel like I heard the Divine Voice (temp.) speaking in my dreams.

It turns out the Pain Resistance skill doesn't actually relieve you of discomfort like you might expect.

It had progressed all the way to level 7 now, but it didn't seem like the pain was any duller than before. Eventually, I figured out that its effect might be more along the lines of "allows you to move around while enduring pain."

Honestly, what the hell.

It didn't hurt any less, and while I could move, at least, my options were still limited.

When I first got the skill, I felt like the pain let up a little, but maybe I was just imagining it.

By the end of the day, my Pain Resistance skill had gone up to 8.

The third day.

I finished eating the bee I'd caught. I also expanded the webs of my nest about as much as possible, so now it's time to move on to the next stage. Namely, hunting to raise my level.

The question is, how am I going to capture prey?

The bees come pretty close, but they must be cautious of me or something, because they haven't actually attacked.

I had hoped they'd just charge right at me without thinking, but things haven't gone so smoothly.

For the time being, I peer up at the bees as I wait for an opportunity.

I've tried indirectly provoking the ones that come nearby, among other things, but they still don't come at me.

As I observe the bees, I notice a few things.

First of all, they generally seem to form groups of five or six. Each squad acts individually.

And the squads have a leader.

<High finjicote LV 1: Status Appraisal Failed>

A more advanced finjicote.

Judging by the name, it's probably a stronger species, maybe even an evolved form.

Most of them are level 1, so that seems like a strong possibility.

Among the normal bees, there are some at level 8 or 9, not far from the level threshold, so presumably they could become leaders of their own squads once they evolve.

This captain bee is a bit darker in color than the regular ones. That's essentially the only difference; their size and shape are the same.

Since the status Appraisal failed as usual, I can't be sure, but it's probably safe to assume that their stats are higher than the basic bees.

Eh, probably still not enough to cleave through my web, though.

They probably realize that, too, which would explain why they aren't making any unnecessary passes at me.

In that case, these bees might be pretty smart.

Occasionally, a squad would break off and disappear into one of the passages at the bottom of the hole.

After a while, they would come back with some defeated prey. That seems to be how they hunt: in efficiently organized groups.

So they really are clever creatures.

There are a few outcast bees that seem to act on their own, though.

More important, the ability of bees to hunt monsters down here is vital information.

That means that not everything here is as freakishly strong as that earth dragon.

Just that little tidbit makes me feel slightly better.

That said, not all the squads come back, so I can't let my guard down too

much. The fact suggests that some monsters out there can turn the tables on the bee groups. Some of the hunting parties that do return are also carrying the corpses of their comrades, so there's no doubt this is a dangerous area.

I continue observing the state of the bees for a while.

Just as I start considering catching a few z's, I get a message from the Divine Voice (temp.).

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Pain Resistance LV 9] has become [Pain Nullification].>

<Condition satisfied. Skill [Pain Mitigation LV 1] has been derived from skill [Pain Nullification].>

My Pain Resistance skill leveled up again.

I didn't even realize it had gone from level 8 to 9. That must have happened while I was sleeping again.

The name of the skill changed to "Nullification," too, and the level counter is gone. I must've reached the proficiency cap.

After Night Vision, this is the second skill I've maxed out.

And it seems like Night Vision was at a high level to start with, meaning this is the first time I've raised a skill all the way to level 10 on my own.

Although I'm honestly not sure if it's worth all the excruciating memories I made in the process.

Well, the derived skill seems likely to actually ease the pain, so that's nice. Not that Pain Resistance was useless, exactly, but still.

At level 1, there isn't much of a change. The stinging in my back is as persistent as ever.

If I raise this skill's level, the pain might get a little easier to bear, so I just have to hope that it rises while I'm sleeping.

So without further ado, I go to bed.

The fourth day.

I'm slowly beginning to run low on stamina, so I'll probably have to take some

kind of action soon.

My target is one of the solo bees. The risk of challenging a whole group is too high.

I don't necessarily think I have no chance to win. But it's far better to err on the side of caution here.

If there are multiple enemies involved, all kinds of unexpected problems could arise. In that respect, it's easier to take on a loner.

Since the outcast bees don't have a captain, their comprehension abilities aren't that strong. Based on my observations from the day before, some individuals willingly venture into narrow tunnels the groups would never approach.

Most likely, the one bee I did catch in my web was a loner that had gone astray in a strange passage and gotten lost.

But then again, I can't imagine that guy made it all the way from this place to my previous nest, so there was probably a different hive closer to that area.

The prodigal bees I've been observing don't seem very smart. In fact, maybe they failed to join the groups for that very reason and resigned themselves to a life of solitude.

Anyway, I think it may be easier to provoke them into attacking me.

But I don't plan on using such a luck-based approach.

Instead, I take out the new weapon I devised yesterday.

It's a thread with a hardened ball of stickier thread attached to the end. I call it the Morning Spider!

Heh-heh-heh. I'm going to use my strength and my Thread Control to swing this thing at a bee in midair.

I'm probably—no, almost definitely—going to miss.

But that's fine.

It should be enough to get my target to recognize me as hostile. After that, it should come down to attack me on its own, I hope.

If I hit it, great. If not, as long as I can get it to look my way and see me as an enemy, I'll count that as a win. After that, I just have to hope that it'll approach my web.

Judging by the way things went yesterday, the outcast bees will come down to check out what's going on around my home every so often, so it should work out.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Pain Mitigation LV 2] has become [Pain Mitigation LV 3].>

While I'm waiting, my new Pain Mitigation levels up.

Huh? This seems like a slow rate of improvement compared with Pain Resistance. I thought it might at least go up to level 5 in my sleep, but it hasn't changed much at all.

However, now that the level has risen, it's clear the skill is working.

So Pain Mitigation really does mitigate pain. Thanks to that, the throbbing in my back is a lot easier to bear now.

It's a pretty bad wound.

I applied some first aid by bandaging it with Thread Control, but there's still a gaping hole in my back.

If I were still human, I know I would've died from an enormous gash like this.

Did I survive it because I'm a spider or because I'm a monster? Either way, it's such a serious injury that it's a miracle I'm alive at all.

I've used Thread Control before to clean it on occasion, hoping to clear out some of the poison while I was at it, but it hurt so much that I thought I was gonna die.

I have to level up as soon as possible to heal. If I leave it as is much longer, it's gonna get worse sooner rather than later.

Festering, necrosis, bacterial infection… I need to do something before any new symptoms appear.

And now, finally, my chance has come.

One of the outcast bees is headed my way.

There aren't any others around. If there were, it's possible they'd rush to the outcast bee's aid.

Since that isn't an issue right now, this is a great opportunity.

I swing my Morning Spider around and around.

Concentrate…concentrate…

Take aim, aaaand…now!

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Concentration LV 1].>

Whoa, I hit it. And I even got a skill at the same time.

Ooh.

I hadn't expected to land a hit, but the Morning Spider managed to smack straight into the bee's body.

Without hesitation, I use Thread Control to wrap the thread around the bee right away. Then I politely invite it into my nest. And introduce it to my venomous fangs.

Okay.

That went as well as it possibly could have, start to finish. Maybe my luck is starting to turn around.

No, no, no.

I can't get carried away. That overconfidence hasn't gone well for me in the past. I have to stay humble.

I take the first step forward by digging into my first meal in a while.

Now then, time to eat.

For the moment, I've secured some food. Given the size of the bee's body, I can stave off hunger for at least a few days with this. Now I don't need to worry about stamina for a while.

Which means I have more options.

And my choice is to expand my nest further. In an upward direction.

I really don't want to explore down here. It isn't a matter of whether I can or can't. I just don't want to.

Nope. I'm scared of the dragon. So that's a hard pass.

Which is why I've decided that I'm going to somehow climb back up to the passage I fell down from.

To that end, I have to find a way around those bees.

If I try to just climb the wall normally, the fliers will get me right away, so I need some kind of plan.

My strategy is to simply keep extending my webs upward.

Well, I don't know if it's a strategy so much as an ill-defined attempt to bulldoze my way through the problem.

I mean, I am a crafty sort, if I do say so myself. But I can't think of any other way to get back up there.

Of course, there are a lot of disadvantages to this plan, too.

For one thing, making more webs will exhaust my stamina.

And unlike normal, I have to build up along a cliff face this time.

Since the circumstances are different, I don't know how much extra stamina it'll take.

This is probably going to end up being a pretty big nest, so the lone bee I currently have on hand won't provide enough energy for the whole project. So I have to find a way to boost my supplies.

On top of that, I might end up having to fight bees for reasons other than dwindling food stores.

They're ignoring me for the moment, but if I keep expanding my nest upward, I'll eventually encroach on their main territory.

It'd be an airspace violation. There's no way of knowing whether they'll let that slide.

Worst-case scenario, it's entirely possible that hundreds or even thousands of bees will attack me all at once. What a nightmare.

Obviously, no volume of web would be enough to protect me against numbers like that. And the bees aren't the only thing I have to worry about.

For the moment, no other monsters have been showing up at the bottom of this pit.

Just that first snake and the earth dragon.

But if that dragon happens to wander by again…

Last time, I was able to wait it out by hiding under rocks, but if I'm expanding my nest, I'm going to draw attention whether I like it or not.

And if I catch that thing's eye, it's all over.

Even now, I'm afraid the behemoth might show up at any moment.

In other words, while success would mean escape from this dangerous hellhole, it's still an extremely risky strategy.

But it doesn't look like I have any other choice.

Even if I do, nothing's coming to me right now.

And so, I make up my mind. Time to expand my nest!

First, the foundation. You can't make a house without a solid base. It's even fair to say the foundation is what makes or breaks a home.

And what better rock to use for construction than…this one!

My first refuge down here.

The stone rests right up against the wall and is pretty hefty: about twenty feet tall and fifteen feet wide. I've decided to use this as the support for my extension.

So far, my webs take up the space between this rock and the wall and a little ways beyond.

First, I seal up the space between the rock and the opposite wall with more thread. Then, I add another strand diagonally from the top of the rock to the

wall. Next, I connect the wall and the rock with more webbing, using that diagonal as a guideline.

Now my foundation is complete.

All I have to do now is build upward from there, one step at a time.

I proceed with my work little by little, pausing to snack on the bee for stamina on occasion.

Along the way, I sometimes notice one bee squad or another watching me, but they still don't conduct any assaults.

Apparently I'm not in their attack range just yet.

Once I finish eating the bee, I decide to call it a day and get some rest.

It's now day five.

The pain seems to have let up considerably. My HP is still 6.

Since it hasn't recovered at all, my Pain Mitigation skill must have risen while I was sleeping.

Not being in agony is a nice change.

I've been able to work this whole time thanks to my Pain Nullification skill, but the weakening of the pain still makes a huge difference.

Of course, the sensation hasn't gone away completely, and the injury hasn't healed, but still. It's definitely easier.

I never suffered an injury this severe when I was a human.

Up until my reincarnation, the most painful experience I'd ever had was when I stubbed my little toe on the corner of a door. Man, that hurt.

But it was nothing compared to a gaping hole in my back.

Since I'm starting to feel a bit better, work is progressing smoothly.

Along the way, another outcast bee comes along. But one of the squads is pretty close by, too. Hmm.

As an experiment, I decide to take a swipe at it. I want to know whether the nearby group will react if a stray gets attacked. If they do, I'll immediately

retreat deep into my nest. And if they don't react, I'm good to go.

I take a swing with the Morning Spider.

Take aim, aaaand…now!

Oh, I got it.

Wow. Am I amazing or what?

I hadn't expected to hit anything at all with this, but now I'm two for two.

Me, the one who came in dead last in my grade for the softball toss during our physical fitness test…

Oops, I was so surprised that I forgot to watch the main bee group's reaction.

The bee squad is…over there. Hmm. No reaction. So if I savage an outcast bee, the others won't come after me.

Is it just me, or is that a little heartless?

I guess maybe you have to be a little cold-hearted to survive in the wild…

Well, if they aren't going to attack, that's a win in my book. Now I can pick off the stragglers to my heart's content. I practically cackle to myself as I collect my prize and finish it off with my venomous bite.

As I hunt yet another vagrant bee (I've lost count at this point), I hear the voice I've been waiting for.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small taratect has increased from LV 2 to LV 3.>

<All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Strength LV 1] has become [Strength LV 2].>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Solidity LV 1] has become [Solidity LV 2].>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Overeating LV 1] has become [Overeating LV 2].>

<Skill points acquired.>

The moment of my long-awaited level-up has arrived.

My skin promptly peels away from my body.

Though I can't see it, I can feel the large hole on my back closing itself up.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [HP Auto-Recovery LV 1].>

Huh? For real?

Ooooh. Now this is unexpected.

Wait, so does the full recovery with each level-up count as auto-recovery?

I'm totally thrilled, but if I could offer one comment of constructive criticism, I'd rather I'd gotten that skill a little sooner…

Then I wouldn't have had to suffer so much this whole time. But you shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth. The only proper reaction is to celebrate finally leveling up and clearing away so many of my worries.

Honestly, that was a close call. Just as I'd originally feared, my HP had started to go down.

When it first dropped from 6 to 5, I felt the certainty of death looming over me.

After that, it continued to slowly ebb, and by the time I leveled up, it had whittled itself down to 3.

That was seriously close.

Thank goodness I suppressed my anxiety long enough to focus on shooting down those bees.

The hunt is going smoothly. Surprisingly, my long-distance attacks with the Morning Spider hit the mark every time.

I can't get over it. Is this another benefit of my spider body?

Probably thanks to that, I gained two new level-1 skills: Throw and Hit. Both of them would probably make my Morning Spider attacks even better.

And with this latest level-up, three of my skills powered up, too.

I don't really know what any of them did, but if they leveled up, I must be earning proficiency for them somehow, so it's possible that I'm benefiting from them without even realizing it.

Well, it certainly can't hurt to level them up, I guess. Although the Overeating one does get on my nerves…

As I work on my webs and hunt more bees, I make enough use of my Spider Thread and Thread Control that they rank up as well.

The Spider Thread skill now stands at level 8, and Thread Control at level 5.

The latter is definitely more useful than I originally thought.

At level 5, I can manipulate threads with vastly superior speed and precision.

Picking up that skill was a great decision.

Pain Mitigation is level 5 now, too, which makes life even easier.

The good thing about this skill, besides the obvious benefit of less pain, is that even if I don't feel the discomfort, I can still tell when I'm in a dangerous situation.

Pain has a function, after all, as a signal alerting you to threats or poor conditions. So if you can't feel it, you won't know when your body is in danger, but with this skill, I can still tell how deep or severe a wound is even if I'm immune to any of the sensations it would normally cause.

It's hard to put an intuitive impression like that into words, but if anything, I'd say it's like I have an awareness of unease or aggravation or something from the wound.

Anyway, thanks to that, there's no disadvantage to the dulled pain.

That being said, the skill is still only level 5, so it's not like pain is completely absent.

Now that I've leveled up, I figure I might as well see how much my stats have changed.

<Small taratect LV 3 Nameless

Status:

HP: 38/38 (green) MP: 38/38 (blue)

SP: 38/38 (yellow) : 38/38 (red)

Average Offensive Ability: 21 Average Defensive Ability: 21

Average Magical Ability: 19 Average Resistance Ability: 19

Average Speed Ability: 369 >

Oh-ho-ho.

My HP, MP, and SP went up 2 points each, as did my attack and defense, and my magic and resistance went up 1 point each.

And then there's my speed. What's up with you, Speed? I think it was 348 before. So it went up 21 points?

That's a little weird, no?

Kind of a big leap compared to my other stat increases, if you ask me…

I mean, my speed bonus for a single level-up is the same as my total for attack and defense? Is this for real?

Never mind that it's greater than my magic and resistance… What the hell?

Oh well. I decide to turn a blind eye to the ridiculously lopsided nature of my stats. It's a little too late for that now, anyway. I finally got my wish of leveling up and fully recovering, so now it's time to focus all my efforts on escaping.

While I was injured, I obviously worked more slowly, and I had to be extra-cautious as well.

So from now on, I'll hunt stray bees whenever the opportunity presents itself, maintaining a steady supply of stamina as I expand my nest.

Right now, my webs span about a quarter of the distance to my goal. There's still a long way to go.

The bees still haven't made any efforts to wage war on me, but I don't know how long that will last. With this in mind, I have to make sure to maintain enough strength to fend off possible bee incursions while I carry on construction.

Still, it's proving fairly difficult.

Just as I guessed, building up a wall is a lot harder than doing it along the ground, so the higher I build my webs, the harder the work becomes.

I have to stretch thick strands from the foundation rock to serve as a base, then secure those with more threads all over the place.

And this is what it's like just a quarter of the way up; it's only going to get harder from here on out.

Nevertheless, I have to do it. I don't know when the earth dragon might pop up again. I need to get out of here before that happens.

In the worst-case scenario, I may have to abandon the nest partway up and hope that my speed will be enough to push through.

It doesn't seem like a great option, but if it comes down to a life-or-death situation, I won't have much of a choice.

In the hopes of avoiding that particular scenario, I do my best to keep building.

I think the time has finally come.

<Finjicote LV 6: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Finjicote LV 4: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Finjicote LV 5: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Finjicote LV 5: Status Appraisal Failed>

<High finjicote LV 1: Status Appraisal Failed>

One of the bee squads is flying right toward me.

This wasn't the attitude of the teams that would periodically buzz by to keep

an eye on me. Without a doubt, these guys are coming to fight an enemy.

At this point, my nest is about halfway up to my target position.

When I initially got this far, the behavior of the bees started shifting gradually, but apparently they've finally decided they can't leave me be any longer.

But it was still only one squad.

I'm not sure whether the bees are underestimating me or if this squad is just a scouting party while the rest hang back to see what'll happen.

At any rate, they're sorely mistaken if they think a single squad can beat me now that I have a nest.

I ready my Morning Spider.

The nest is made up of standard mesh-shaped webs, but I've left gaps large enough to throw a Morning Spider through.

The gaps aren't nearly large enough for the six-foot-long bees to enter, though.

My opponents can't get past my web, but I can attack them from inside as much as I please. Though they could also just fly away whenever they want, so we'll call it even.

The two level-5 squad members fly toward me.

Hmph. As if two at once would be enough for my defenses.

My Spider Thread skill is level 8. Even at a low level, my thread was already impressively sturdy, and it's only gotten stronger with every level since then.

Sure enough, the two bees contact the surface of my nest and are promptly tangled up in the unbroken thread. Despite their mass and speed charging in, my nest didn't take a single bit of damage. It's totally unshaken, literally and metaphorically.

The threads I used to make it are highly durable, with rubberlike elasticity for shock absorption. When a certain amount of weight is applied, the threads flex and soften the impact.

The two bees' bodies weren't enough to trigger that. In other words, my web

withstood the full power of their attack on the basis of its durability alone.

It’s not that the bees’ attack was particularly weak.

As far as I could tell from my observations, these bees are actually rather strong.

I’ve even seen a squad haul back a snake as one of their victims.

They have plenty of advantages: unilateral attacks from the air, venomous needles, and powerful physiques.

Under normal circumstances, they’d be a considerable threat.

Because they stay airborne, most attacks can’t reach them, and they can easily make a preemptive strike.

But that’s exactly why they’re weak to anti-aircraft-style attacks. If you ask me, the success of my Morning Spider attacks has as much to do with their lack of vigilance as it does with my good aim.

Still, in a normal fight, a bee is a formidable enemy. But only normal fights.

My trump card—my home—is not normal.

It has abnormal defensive power, adhesiveness, and my extraordinarily good strategies.

I’m sure these insects have never seen combat tactics like this.

After all, I’m combining all the strengths of a spider with the intellect of a human.

For the time being, I ignore the two bees that rammed into my web and are now stuck. I toss my Morning Spider toward the other three, who still haven’t fully processed the situation.

The leader bee, unable to dodge in time, receives the attack straight to the face. After all, it’s always best to aim for the head first.

Letting the centrifugal force and gravity do most of the work, I swing the leader bee down toward the bottom of my nest.

And just like that, I’ve eliminated their captain.

Without their team leader, the two remaining bees of the squad hang frozen in the air with no idea what to do.

Works for me.

I swat down the higher-level one first with my trusty Morning Spider. As it watches, the last bee finally comes to its senses, but its next tactic is very poorly thought out.

I don't know what it hopes to accomplish, but it simply launches its whole body right at me.

Did you not see what happened to the first two guys, pal?

At any rate, the desperate attack obviously doesn't reach me, and the final bee crashes tragically into my web and stops moving.

Well, that's almost disappointing.

When I first fell down here, those enemies were terrifying, but now that I have my nest, they can't even touch me.

Considering that three body slams haven't been enough to even shake the surface of my web, I doubt they'll be able to reach me no matter how many come at me.

I've just proven how strong my webs are.

Compared to the defensive capabilities of my silk, the attack power of the bees wasn't nearly high enough for a breach.

Honestly, I imagined my home would at least take enough damage to require repairs, even if they didn't break completely through.

There are still hundreds of bees flying around above me.

At first, the number horrified me, but now that I know they can't tear through my webs, it's another story.

Whether there are a hundred or a thousand, if they can't pierce my nest, their stingers will never reach me.

Finally, the chances of my escape are starting to improve.

Feeling exultant, I set about finishing off the bees I caught.

After I repelled the first squad with ease, the other bees started coming at me constantly. I dispatched the second wave as easily as the first, but after that it became a bit of a problem. That was when several squads started attacking at once.

This is unreal.

Well, actually, I guess it's a good idea from the bees' perspective, but still.

As the target, I would prefer it if they didn't come at me in such large numbers, is what I'm saying. Sure, I'm safe and sound in my nest, but it's still an oppressive sight.

Who would want to spend their days constantly surrounded by giant drones buzzing around?

I heave a sigh as I take a look. Bees, bees, bees, as far as the eye can see.

Seriously, what the hell?

With this many of them in one place, the buzzing is getting really loud. It's super-annoying. How am I supposed to sleep?

Besides, if I keep on diligently taking them out, there'll be too many for me to eat.

Sure, I feel like I could eat a lot more than normal because of that Overeating skill, but even that has its limits.

Considering how big one of these buzzers is, acquiring them in bunches of five at a time could be overwhelming.

I mean, my Overeating skill even increased to level 3 because of them. Thanks a lot, bees.

The most annoying thing of all is that dealing with them is totally preventing me from working on my nest.

My primary objective is escaping from this place. Not fighting a bunch of stupid monsters.

And yet, their attacks are so constant that I'm completely unable to continue construction at all.

I have more than enough food by now, so I'd be more than happy to leave them alone, if they would just stop attacking me!

I have no way of getting them to understand that, though.

At any rate, it looks like I have no choice but to use the brief lulls between the bee raids to make progress on my nest project.

At this point, they're so focused on me that leaving the nest at all would be suicide.

Clearly, my previous backup plan of speeding past them isn't viable.

No matter how fast I am normally, I wouldn't be able to use my full speed running vertically, so I can only see that strategy ending in me getting caught and stabbed mid-climb.

Aw, dammit.

Getting delayed like this is the last thing I wanted… I still don't know when that earth dragon might show up again.

Wait… Earth dragon?

Suddenly, I feel a terrible chill run through my body.

What was that…?

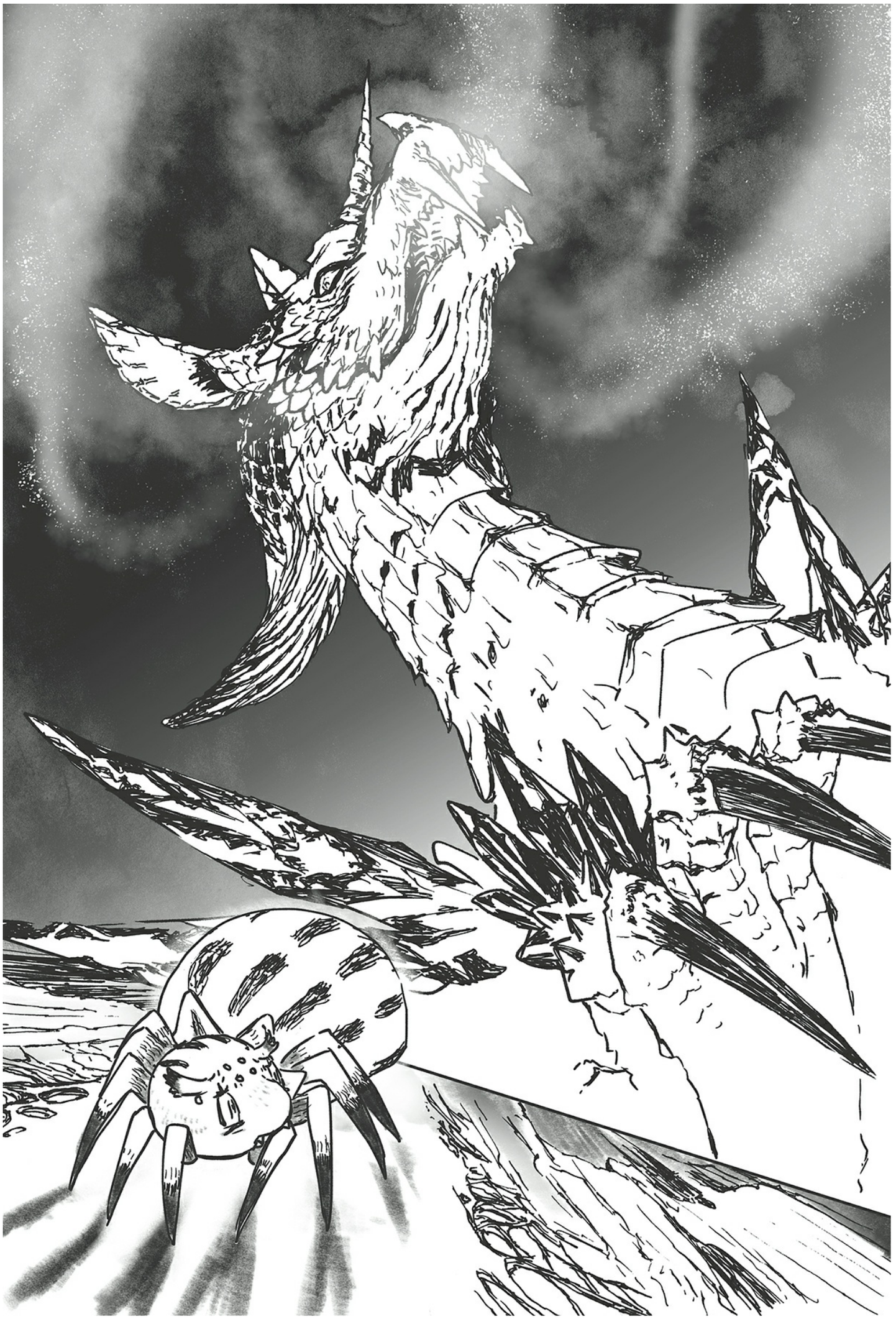
No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, nooo!!!

I can't bear to look.

I can't bear to, but I have to anyway.

<Earth dragon Araba LV 31: Status Appraisal Failed>

My worst fear has come true. And worse yet, it's definitely eyeing my nest.



What am I gonna do?!

No, there’s nothing I can do.

Nothing at all, and I know it.

I sure can’t fight that thing.

The only option I have is to pray that it’ll leave me alone.

But that option gets pulverized in an instant, along with my hopes of survival.

The earth dragon opens its mouth.

Right. A dragon’s strongest weapon is usually some kind of breath-based attack.

A thunderous roar booms out.

The blast whips through the air. A whirlwind of destruction explodes all around me.

I don’t really know what’s happening.

But this much is clear.

My nest has disappeared, along with its rock foundation. For that matter, the wall behind the foundation has a huge hole blown through it, too.

Even the wall opposite is full of cracks.

As the fissures spread, rocks begin crumbling away from the wall.

It’s collapsing.

The single attack has decimated over half my nest. Even the remnants higher up start falling apart along with the wall.

I’m somewhere in that upper part.

It doesn’t seem like the breath attack hit me directly. Still, I’m tumbling down with the webs around me.

Without a spare second to react, I slam into the ground.

Ouch.

My HP is utterly devastated. But somehow, I’m still alive.

I'm not dead yet, but I don't know for how much longer things will stay that way.

The rest is all up to the whims of the earth dragon.

One of my webs lands on top of me.

But that may actually be a good thing.

My body is totally covered by thread now, hidden from view. And none of the falling rocks hit me directly. If I keep hiding here, it's possible the dragon might not notice me.

With the faintest of hopes, I hold my breath and do my best to stop my body from trembling in terror.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Fear Resistance LV 1].> My shaking abates somewhat.

I'm still terrified, though.

My body hasn't stopped trembling.

Help me, help me, help me, help me, help me, help me, help me!

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Stealth LV 2] has become [Stealth LV 3].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Fear Resistance LV 1] has become [Fear Resistance LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Stealth LV 3] has become [Stealth LV 4].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Fear Resistance LV 2] has become [Fear Resistance LV 3].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [HP Auto-Recovery LV 1] has become [HP Auto-Recovery LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Fear Resistance LV 3] has become [Fear Resistance LV 4].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Stealth LV 4] has become [Stealth LV 5].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Fear Resistance LV 4] has become [Fear Resistance LV 5].> The Divine Voice (temp.) pulls my mind back to reality.

Or maybe that's just my new Fear Resistance skill skyrocketing in levels while I'm busy quivering.

At any rate, I have no idea how much time I've spent hiding.

Based on how much my skills have improved, I must've been concealing my breathing for a while.

I wonder if I could tell how much time passed by checking how much my stamina decreased, but for some reason, it hasn't decreased at all.

I use Thread Control to pull the web off my body. Then I crawl out slowly from the pile of fiber.

The earth dragon isn't around anymore.

I'm saved.



TRAINING

Katia and I were lazing around.

The two of us had been working out in the courtyard of the castle to try raising our skill levels.

Well, actually, there were three of us if you count Fei.

Anyway, we had finished for the moment and were resting in the garden, looking at the flowers.

“Ahh, that was tough. My magic-related stats are solid, but my physical stats still need some work.” Since Sue wasn’t around for once, Katia was speaking in Japanese today.

“Yeah. But still, we’ve got better reflexes than we had in our old lives, and it’s nice how much easier it is to improve with training.”

“Totally. It always seemed pointless when we had to run marathons at school and stuff, but every step you run here builds your stamina.”

In this world, both skills and stats only improve when you use them.

Since I couldn’t level up yet, the only way I could strengthen my stats was by training the old-fashioned way.

But that old-fashioned training was all you had to do to get stronger.

It was tough, but when you knew it would pay off, it was a lot easier to stay motivated.

“You may be a girl now, but you’re still boyish on the inside. Personally, I have no desire to work out so intensely.”

“You say that, but you’ve been working out, too.”

“Well, I hardly have much of a choice.”

“Whaddaya mean?”

“Well, I suppose it’s not as immediate now that I’m no longer in that egg or freshly hatched, but I’m basically on the verge of death.”

“Huh? Since when? I had no idea.”

“Well, of course not. I never told you.”

“So what gives?”

“You know that I was found in a dungeon called the Great Elroe Labyrinth, right? Well, turns out I was in considerable danger at the time. Apparently, I was in a spider’s nest, and it nearly ate me.”

“Seriously?!”

“Seriously. But the spider ended up being some inferior species, so it couldn’t break through the shell and gave up.”

“Whoa, sounds like a close call.”

“You might’ve wound up dead before you were even born, then.”

“Right. Unlike in Japan, you can be killed at any moment in this world, so you’ve got no choice but to get as strong as you can. Besides, I have to evolve.”

Evolution occurs when a monster satisfies certain conditions, like reaching a particular level. Usually, it comes with a new appearance, better stats, and so on.

“You heard Ms. Anna, didn’t you? If I don’t evolve from this form within ten years or so, I’ll die.”

Fei’s current species was a monster called an Elroe kolift, which had a short life span.

In order to prolong her life, she had to evolve.

To that end, she had to defeat other monsters and raise her level.

And if she wanted to do that, she had to be stronger.

Unlike us, Fei had a very real need to become more powerful.

That was why she voluntarily participated in our training sessions.

“So? How’re you doing?”

“My Instantaneous, Persistent, Strength, and Solidity skills are all up to level eight.”

I was using the Appraisal Stone in my hand to check my status. It was a level 9, belonging to Katia’s family.

This item could be considered a national treasure, yet Katia casually borrowed it from her home. I had to wonder if the duke was all right with it, but since it was convenient, I decided to just be grateful and use it.

“Your skills sure go up quickly, man. Is it just a difference in natural talent or what?”

Katia seemed a bit frustrated.

Even though we were doing all the same things, I was gaining levels faster. In this world, anyone can get stronger with effort, but the speed of progress varies.

They say it’s due to a difference in talent.

“I mean, they’ve called me a prodigy in the duke’s family all my life. How can you be this much faster than me? You cheating bastard!”

“You should give me some of that talent, too.”

I avoided Katia’s and Fei’s envious gazes. It wasn’t like there was anything I could do…

Katia’s and Fei’s skills had strengthened steadily, too, but not as much as mine. For some reason, Fei had Fire Resistance and Petrification Resistance, so I was kind of jealous of that. But I figured she’d get mad if I said that, so I kept it to myself.

“By the way, have you used any skill points?”

“No, I kinda haven’t been able to commit yet, so I’ve still got ’em saved up.”

“Oh, I think I know what you mean. You want to keep them for when it really matters, right?”

Skill points can be used to acquire new skills or add to the proficiency level of the skills you already have.

Usually, people are born without any, but as a reincarnation bonus or something, Katia, Fei, and I'd had plenty of them since birth.

"You've got a hundred thousand points? You cheating, bourgeois bastard!"

"Hey, that's even meaner than before!"

I really hadn't gotten around to using them yet.

At first, I wanted to acquire magic skills, but Anna told me not to use magic, so I backed off. She probably didn't realize I had skill points, but to take advantage of that and acquire the skills secretly would feel like a betrayal.

Since then, I just hadn't felt like using them.

"Does that mean you two have used some of yours, then?"

"Just the hundred points it took to get Telepathy."

"What about you, Katia?"

"…Only a thousand."

If I remembered correctly, Katia had 50,000 points.

Given her behavior during the conversation, I had assumed she'd used them all up, but she'd barely touched them.

"What'd you get?"

"…I'm not telling."

"What? Come on, just tell us."

"…You promise not to laugh?"

"Yeah, I swear. What is it?"

"Oh, I'm ready to laugh, don't worry."

"Hey! Ugh, whatever. I got Appraisal, okay?"

I didn't laugh, but I probably looked baffled.

Without thinking, I exchanged glances with Fei.

Appraisal is more or less the one skill you shouldn't acquire.

If anything, I was really curious as to why he did it anyway.

"Why would you do that?"

"I couldn't help it! Appraisal is a staple of reincarnation stories. It's tough gathering info in a new world, right? So if this were a novel or something, the protagonist would be super-good at Appraisal. I just wanted to do that, too…"

"But Appraisal is like the number one offender on the list of crappy skills. Why would you spend your points to get it, knowing that?"

"Listen, man, I didn't know that at the time! I was still just a baby when I got that skill! You remember how hard it was not understanding anything, right? So of course I wanted to try and get more information. And as soon as I started thinking about Appraisal, the Word of God spoke to me! So of course I picked it up on impulse!"

Yeah, it made sense when he put it that way.

I did remember my anxiety when I was a clueless baby.

Not being able to understand what the people around me were saying stressed me out, too.

And since the Word of God spoke in Japanese, it's only natural that you'd want to cling to that.

"So is Appraisal as bad as they say it is?"

"Yeah. It sucks. It's totally worthless unless it's a super-high level, I get a headache every time I use it, and as a bonus, you won't get proficiency from Appraising the same thing twice unless you wait a long time in between, so it's ludicrously hard to level up. I do my best to raise my proficiency whenever I have spare time, but I'm still only level four. It's breakin' my heart, man."

Just hearing about it was irritating.

Still holding the Appraisal Stone, I re-Appraised my skill point field.

As soon as I did so, a list of available skills was displayed, along with the required skill points.

I looked through until I found the Appraisal skill.

“Oh, hey, I can get Appraisal for a hundred points.”

“What? For real?”

One hundred points is the lowest number needed to acquire any skill.

Skills that could be acquired for a cheap hundred points were either equally ineffective or particularly compatible with the user.

The fact that Katia had to use 1,000 points to get Appraisal proved that it wasn’t truly an ineffective skill.

Sure, it wasn’t very helpful at a low level, but it could be a major asset if raised high enough. My low price meant I was particularly compatible with the Appraisal skill.

After a moment of hesitation, I acquired Appraisal.

My remaining skill points went down to 99,900.

“I got Appraisal.”

“What? For real?” Katia repeated herself. “Well, don’t come crying to me if you regret it later.”

“Well, I’ll cross that bridge if I come to it. I’ve still got plenty of points, anyway.”

“Nobody likes a man without a plan, you know.”

For the time being, I decided to hang on to the rest of my points for a more important time.



10 Clearing the Lower Stratum

I survived.

I bask in the joy of this fact for a moment. I'm alive. What a wonderful thing.

At the same time, though, panic slowly overwhelms my heart.

What am I gonna do now?

My nest is ruined, completely beyond repair. I look at the site where the breath attack had hit.

There's a huge crater in the wall there.

Ha-ha.

How strange.

Is it even possible to cave in a wall like that?

I thought craters were formed when meteorites or whatever crash into the ground.

So how am I looking at one on a vertical surface? It seems fairly deep, too.

How very strange.

Despite the fact that I'm standing around in a defenseless daze, the bees aren't attacking me. Maybe the earth dragon freaked them out, too. I can't blame them. That thing is a terror. I'm still scared, myself.

Really, what am I going to do now?

I could still try to break through the bees' territory and return to the original passage.

As long as the earth dragon doesn't come back, of course.

I was lucky to have survived this time. But if the same thing happens again, I doubt I'll have the same fortune.

It's like the dragon saw my nest as an annoyance and deliberately destroyed it.

In other words, if I make another one, it'll probably just aggravate the monster even more.

In which case, that option is out of the question. I'm a little too afraid to do it, anyway.

My nerves are totally shot at this point.

The last thing I want to do is provoke the wrath of the earth dragon.

Of course, it's possible that I'm misunderstanding and there's no particular motivation behind the destruction of my nest.

Considering how powerful it is, though, it's entirely possible that it was a calculated move.

But from the perspective of a weakling like me, the result was the same either way. If I run into the earth dragon, I'll die. Simple as that.

I've successfully avoided death twice now.

Both times, I was extremely lucky. However, I don't think luck was the only factor.

Is it possible that despite its overwhelming power, the dragon didn't notice me hiding?

I think so. I want to think so, at least. Otherwise, I have nothing left to cling to.

My one and only means of survival.

Hiding, and somehow staying out of the way of the dragon and far from its territory. That's the only way.

I can only rely on my Stealth skill.

When I got it, I didn't think it'd be particularly useful, but now it's my lifeline.

Its skill level is 5. To be honest, that makes me a little nervous, but I have no

choice but to rely on it.

My mind is made up.

I look at the ground. The earth dragon left some magnificent footprints behind. My gaze follows them toward where the dragon was headed.

There's a single large passage. So it's somewhere down that way. Just thinking about it makes me nervous.

I head in the opposite direction.

Obviously. Who would go after a dragon by choice?

I don't know where this path leads.

To be honest, it would probably be better to ignore my feelings and climb out of the hole, but that just isn't possible.

All logic aside, my heart is completely against this course.

I proceed with caution, hiding myself as I go. If only I had a cardboard box, the ultimate stealth device.

Whew. Am I a little calmer now, maybe?

Come to think of it, my HP took a serious hit when I fell before, but now it's completely recovered.

HP Auto-Recovery is awesome.

If only I'd used skill points for this instead of Detection.

But I managed to learn it of my own accord, so it worked out.

I was too frazzled to pay attention to it earlier, but I wonder how quickly it recovered.

Since my skill level is relatively low, it probably wasn't all that fast, but it seems like it'd be able to take care of small injuries without a problem.

Other than that, I also notice that my red total stamina bar is still full.

Why is that?

This has never happened before, so I wonder if maybe something happened to make it stop decreasing, but I have no idea what that might be.

There isn't a bug where it's actually going down but isn't displaying properly or something, is there?

It sure would suck to suddenly run out of stamina and be paralyzed or something.

But I believe in you, Appraisal! I know I can count on you to always have my back now! I believe in you, although when I think about your track record so far… No, I still totally believe in you! I think.

My Appraisal skill may be due for an upgrade, too.

It's been a while since it last leveled up, after all, and I've been Appraising nonstop this whole time. Considering the giant leap forward when it hit level 6, I have high hopes for the next level-up, too.

Hopefully it will start displaying skills and stuff soon…

Not knowing the effects of some of my abilities is a little inconvenient. And one of the skills I don't understand may be able to help me out of this current situation.

That's probably too much to hope for, but it's a slight chance to improve things a little.

I'm willing to take any help I can get during these desperate times.

Maybe there's a skill that can inform me about enemy locations or something?

If that's possible, I could keep constant tabs on the dragon's location while I traveled.

It'd be nice if I could use Detection, but that's useless.

A map would be nice, too.

I have no idea whether this path will actually lead somewhere safe. I mean, it's just as likely that it'll take me somewhere even more dangerous.

In that case, well, I'll probably die.

Anyway, for now, I have to trust in my luck, bad or otherwise.

Please, I'm begging you, let this path lead somewhere safe.

The path I'm traveling along is pretty big.

Big enough for the six-foot-long bees to fly around unhindered, as well as a fifteen-foot, giant praying mantis–like creature.

<Elroe greshigard LV 7: Status Appraisal Failed>

The giant mantis creature uses its sicklelike claws to intercept a swarm of bees. Unlike a normal praying mantis, this thing has six arms. It looks like an Asura demon.

The bees are trying to attack from the air, but they can't get too close for fear of entering the range of the sickles, so the battle is at a bit of a stalemate.

I hide in the shadows of some rocks, observing the situation. Neither side has noticed my presence.

My Stealth is still working even better than I thought.

As I peek at them cautiously, I Appraise the species.

<Elroe greshigard: A praying mantis—type monster that lives in the Great Elroe Labyrinth, Lower Stratum. It excels at strong physical attacks with its sickles.>

Oh, one of the bees got sliced in half.

Those things must be really sharp to bisect something with a single swipe like that. If they're that strong, they may even be able to cut through my thread.

Well, it doesn't seem to have noticed me, so I figure I'll just scurry on by.

Wait, though.

There are some words in those Appraisal results I haven't seen before.

<Great Elroe Labyrinth, Lower Stratum: An area located between the Middle Stratum and the Bottom Stratum. Populated by many powerful monsters.>

Wow, really? So this place is named the Lower Stratum? Wait, so there's a layer even lower than this?

So there are lots of strong monsters here, too… I almost wish it didn't tell me that. Still, I'm surprised to learn there's a lower level than this.

All I can picture is a hellish place crawling with super-powerful monsters.

I mean, it's the lowest level of the biggest labyrinth in the world!

Monsters always get stronger the farther down you go in a dungeon, and if this Lower Stratum has reasonably strong monsters already, the Bottom Stratum can only be worse.

A whole bunch of enemies in the same league as that earth dragon… Just imagining it is horrifying.

Although I do have one more thought.

Most likely, the area I was in before was the Upper Stratum. There were humans exploring up there, after all, so it's probably connected to the outside world.

In which case, I might've been closer to the exit than I thought.

But I guess that doesn't matter now.

At any rate, I have to escape from this stratum.

And once I get out of here, there's still the Middle Stratum, too. Hopefully, this path is connected to the next floor up. I sure don't want to go down to the Bottom Stratum.

Oh, another bee bit the dust. They're probably gonna lose, then. This praying mantis thing sure is strong. Probably even stronger than the snake.

Which is strange, considering that the snake seemed like a boss monster to me before…

It obviously doesn't compare to the dragon by any stretch of the imagination, but this mantis monster still seems intense.

The snake is rapidly dropping in my mental rankings. What if it's a relative weakling by the standards of the Lower Stratum?

Well, it may be too early to judge something like that. It's possible that the mantis is just exceptionally strong, after all. At least, that's what I think at the moment.

Just as the praying mantis cuts down the third bee, a totally unexpected fate befalls it.

More specifically, a giant spider appears out of nowhere and crushes it in its

jaws.

Huh? Wait…what?

<Greater taratect LV 18: Status Appraisal Failed>

Oh, wow. It's my super-evolved form.

Seriously?

<Greater taratect: Evolved form of the spider-type monster species taratect. A carnivore with powerful venom in its fangs.>

Oooh. So if I keep evolving, I'll end up like that?

It's still small compared to the giant mama spider I saw before, but it does look to be around thirty feet long. It dwarfs the praying mantis.

Wait, it bit that thing and killed it without even whipping out any thread, didn't it?

Does that mean it has crazy-high strength? My strength stat is still only 21… How many times do I have to evolve before I get to that?

Well, at any rate, it's time to take my leave before it finds me. This is one battle I won't win.

Yes, one thing is abundantly clear:

The Lower Stratum is insane.

What about it, you ask? Exactly what you just saw!

My life depends on my Stealth skill even more now.

Maybe I was too hasty with my decision? Should I have tried breaking through the bees' territory after all?

But at least I don't feel the same sense of impending doom that I did around that dragon.

Besides, even the bees could beat some of the monsters here, so it's not entirely unbelievable for me to survive.

Sure, the mantis and that big ol' spider seem strong, but other than them, maybe I can handle the rest? Well, if I see monsters I think I can take, I'll go

ahead and eat them. Otherwise I'll proceed in stealth mode.

As of now, my red stamina gauge still hasn't decreased.

If I can trust that display, then there's no need to panic. I can just take my time until I'm sure I've found prey I can handle.

Plus, I want to avoid messing up and drawing attention from any dragon-class beasts.

I scuttle along sneakily.

Occasionally, I stop to watch some other monsters duke it out, but I don't want to get involved, so I always hurry on before long.

Man, the Lower Stratum is wild. I thought that praying mantis seemed strong, but turns out that's about middling at best down here.

Besides the big spider that devoured the mantis, there's a big lion-looking thing with wings, a giant snake that looks like the evolution of the species I encountered before, and all kinds of other crazy monsters.

Unreal.

To avoid getting involved with any of that, I've been sneaking along as stealthily as possible, which is working for me so far.

I mean, if I get caught even once, it's probably game over.

So I try to keep pushing ahead without stopping for sleep, but that catches up with me eventually, and my unyielding red stamina bar finally starts decreasing again.

I still haven't figured out why it wasn't going down, but in any case, now I'm on a time limit again. I have to eat before this number goes from 38 to 0, or else.

I say that, but I haven't encountered anything I think I could beat, so I decide to go to bed for the day.

I'll be honest—I can barely sleep at all.

Up until now, I've always slept in at least a simple home, but I don't want to risk standing out more, so I go to sleep without cover for the first time in my

spider life.

I'm nervous the entire time, so I don't get a very deep rest.

It's not too terrible, but if I continue without a good night's sleep like this, I know it'll eventually come back to haunt me.

Then again, in my previous life, my average night's sleep was about four hours, so I'll probably be okay for a while.

So sleep is more or less all right for the time being, but food is becoming a real problem.

I have to find a meal in this monster madhouse somehow.

That worries me, but it turns out to be pretty easy to get ahold of some food.

Suspiciously easy, in fact.

It's weird, honestly. The monsters here are freakishly strong. But among them are still some weaker guys like the kind I've seen in the Upper Stratum.

The snakes are one example. Man, I never thought the day would come when I'd refer to those snakes as weak.

The point is, I'm very curious as to what these puny monsters are eating.

I mean, if you're too weak to eat, you're just gonna become the main course yourself, right? That's what "survival of the fittest" is all about, really.

And that's certainly how my time in this dungeon has been so far. But some of these guys are even on the chubbier side. The bees must have targeted them as their main source of food.

So, after observing the various weak monsters for a while, I've come to the conclusion that they all have one thing in common.

They're all poisonous.

It's like a revelation. I have natural Poison Resistance, so I eat that kind of thing without a problem, but most normal creatures won't eat something poisonous.

These guys are weak, but since they're toxic, other monsters won't eat them unless they have Poison Resistance themselves.

By that logic, even if a monster does find me, I might be spared for the same reason.

Still, there's no point in risking it as long as I can just keep sneaking along covertly.

Anyway, I've discovered that these weak monsters have two main sources of food.

One is other small-fry. That seems to be the most common method: fighting and eating one another.

So I figured I'd just wait for a moment when there aren't any badasses around and take out a weakling with a surprise attack myself.

Then there's the other thing, the food source they resort to only when they're truly desperate.

<Elroe gastruch LV 3: Status Appraisal Failed>

This creature is shaped sort of like a flat black insect.

Actually, it resembles an insect, but it kind of acts like a snail. These things stick to the walls of the labyrinth and crawl along slowly in a very snail-like movement. I decide to call them snail-bugs.

There are tons of these snail-bugs in the Lower Stratum.

Anytime I look at the wall, I always spot at least one. That's how many there are.

Why don't the other monsters eat them? There are so many of them! That's what I thought, foolishly, before I ate one myself.

Oh, yes, I was foolish.

I should've at least prepared myself a little more before attempting to eat one. But there's no use wallowing in regret now.

Only after eating one did I truly understand why they are a last resort.

That's right, I did it. I ate one.

I used a thread to pull it off the wall, and I finished it off with my poison bite, never realizing how truly horrific the creature was.

If only there exists a skill that would let me go back in time and stop myself before I ever tried.

It was unbelievably disgusting.

The taste was unlike anything I've ever experienced in either world.

Since my rebirth as an arachnid, I've eaten all kinds of revolting meals, but this took the grossest, most disgusting cake.

It was so nasty that I actually lost some HP from eating it.

You definitely can't call that thing food.

Eating it even made my Rot Resistance skill go up, so that should clue you in as to how unfit it is for consumption.

If I didn't firmly believe in not leaving waste behind, I wouldn't have even tried to finish it.

Anyway, that's how I discovered that technically, I can get food whenever I want. It just happens to involve a lot of suffering.

But I mean, if it comes down to eating something so disgusting it makes me want to die or actually, literally dying of starvation, I would have to choose the former.

So if things get truly desperate, I will eat a snail-bug again.

…I fervently hope that it never comes to that, though.

At any rate, I'm doing my best to forget the whole thing and move on.

The mazelike zone in the upper area was full of branching paths, but this one is just one long passageway.

It's nice that I didn't risk getting lost, but if this path connects to the Bottom Stratum, how am I ever going to get back?

Well, there's no point in thinking about that.

I'm sure it's connected to the Middle Stratum! At least, that's what I keep telling myself.

Now my red stamina gauge is starting to get a little low.

Although I survived eating the snail-bug last time, I really want to leave that as an absolute last resort.

Even now, I can see a few of them creeping along the walls, but that's not whetting my appetite.

I mean, those things are so gross that even other monsters don't want to eat them.

Which is why I want to find a more normal meal while I still have some stamina to spare.

As far as a poisonous monster can be considered normal, anyway.

I mean, I've been eating poisonous stuff for a while now, so it's a little late to get hung up on that. It's not like I don't want to eat something tastier—it just isn't an option… I miss cup ramen.

Okay, front check, all clear! Back check, all clear! No dangerous species in sight! Nice, nice.

<Elroe randanel LV 8: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe randanel LV 7: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Elroe randanel LV 7: Status Appraisal Failed>

In front of me is one of those close-knit monster trios. These guys really do travel in threes no matter what.

However, as I probably should've expected for the Lower Stratum, their levels are pretty high. If this species also evolves at level 10, then they're getting close. Not that they'll ever live to see that future.

I sneak around behind them to catch them unawares. Then, it's time to debut my new weapon: the casting net!

What, is that name too straightforward?

Whatever! Even I can't come up with a clever name for every single thing, okay?

I was rather pleased with myself when I thought of the name for the Morning Spider, though.

But just because I did it once doesn't mean you should expect me to bust out high-quality puns every single time!

Anyway, casting net, go!

Now, don't go thinking this is some ordinary old net. This new equipment… hmm, it really does need a better name, doesn't it…? Oh, right, the explanation.

Yeah, yeah. So when I first throw this thing, it's just a clump of thread, but as soon as it reaches its target— *Bam!* It opens up into a spiderweb and wraps up the victim!

This weapon is a dream team of delicate web-spinning work and careful manipulation with Thread Control!

All three monsters get tangled in the net in no time.

Ha-ha-ha! Now, that's a catch!

As usual, I finish them off with my Poison Fang skill. *Chomp!*

<Condition satisfied. Acquired title [Poison Master].>

<Acquired skills [Poison Synthesis LV 1] [Poison Magic LV 1] as a result of title [Poison Master].>

Oh? Ooh? Here come some new titles! Poison, poison, and more poison!

So, Poison Synthesis and Poison Magic, huh?

As usual, I have no idea how to use magic-related skills, so I'll ignore that for now.

More magic manure for me, I guess.

As for Poison Synthesis, I don't really know what that does, either.

Does that mean poison making? But I'm a spider, so I already create that on my own, right?

Okay, enough about that. I can spend more time investigating my skills later.

I have to finish off the other two monsters and dispose of the trio.

And so: *Chomp, chomp.*

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Fang LV 7] has

become [Poison Fang LV 8].>

Oh? Ooh? Ooooh? Did the forecast today call for a downpour of poison? Well, you won't catch me complaining.

If 10 is the highest level, then 8 must be pretty darn toxic, right?

It sure works well, even on other poison users.

This is even better than the new title.

All right. Now that I've finished off the three monsters, I carry them into the shadows of a nearby rock.

Oof, with my crappy stats, it's tough to carry three monsters like this. Maybe I should've carried them one by one.

Wait, huh? Didn't I do something like this before?

And didn't I regret not carrying them one at a time back then, too?

Hmm? Don't ask me! That doesn't ring a bell at all! I have a great memory, okay? That never happened—that's all! Got it?! Good.

Anyway, I decide to test out my new Poison Synthesis skill a bit while I eat.

Except I can't figure out how to use it, so all I can do is experiment at random.

And so: *Poison Synthesis!* I think, pray—and would've whispered if I had a mouth that could form words.

Somehow, this actually does something.

Like with Appraisal, it's as though text is displayed in my head.

<Poison Synthesis Menu> <Weak Poison> <Spider Poison LV 8>

What's this, now?

Oh, hey. If this is being displayed in my mind, then Appraisal ought to work on it.

<Venom Synthesis Menu: Allows the creation of poison>

<Weak Poison: A very weak poison>

<Spider Poison LV 8: A lethal poison secreted by spiders. LV 8 is very strong.>

Hmm. So Spider Poison is just my original poison?

So doesn’t that mean that by acquiring Poison Synthesis level 1, I just gained the ability to make Weak Poison?

I select Weak Poison to test it out.

A ball of liquid appears in the air in front of me, then drops to the ground and forms a puddle.

Aw, man. Do I need to have a container for this or something? Just for kicks, I Appraise the puddle.

<Puddle of Weak Poison>

Yep. It really is Weak Poison. All righty then.

In other words, Poison Synthesis is a skill that can produce poison without needing any materials or anything, then?

This might’ve been useful if I were still a human, but I’m a spider, sooo…

Well, depending on how I use it, it could still come in handy.

Hmm. I guess producing poison at no cost is a neat trick.

No, wait, what?

My MP has gone down. So it wasn’t at no cost, after all.

Ah, that just makes things even more questionable.

As the skill level goes up, the kinds of poison I can make may increase or something, but since I can already make my super-strength Spider Poison, well… I’m not really feeling this ability.

But I’ll probably find a use for it eventually. If nothing else, it’s still better than those unusable magic skills, right?



The Second Prince

Sue and Klevea were facing off in front of me, practice swords in hand.

Taking advantage of Sue's small physique, Klevea easily deflected her sword as my sister charged.

Sue still kept attacking resolutely, but Klevea's precise defense warded her off easily.

The petite girl attacked with all her might, but the muscular Klevea's swordsmanship was more reminiscent of an elegantly flowing river.

In both appearance and movement, the two of them were total opposites.

Sue certainly couldn't be considered weak, but compared to Klevea's extensive experience in real battle, her skill was bound to fall short.

This was particularly unsurprising given that Klevea had Sword Mastery, the advanced version of Swordsmanship, at level 7.

Sue's Swordsmanship skill was at level 6. So, according to a simple calculation, that was an 11-level difference.

There was no way to compensate for a disparity like that.

Still, there were many times when simple stats could at least prolong a battle.

Sue was invoking both Magic Warfare and Mental Warfare at the same time.

These were skills that could consume MP and SP to raise base stats, and since Sue had so much MP, the improvement Magic Warfare afforded her was nothing to sneeze at.

Her physical stats had gone up a lot recently, too, so she actually had a bit of an edge on the status front.

Still, Klevea was abstaining from Mental Warfare to create a handicap. If she were using it, too, the odds would certainly tip further in her favor.

Even without it, she was likely to win anyway.

Sue's stats could be a bit higher, but that was a slight advantage compared to Klevea's huge lead in fundamental strength and experience.

Sue didn't have a chance of turning things around.

Just as I expected, Sue wore herself out on offense, and Klevea's counterattack defeated her.

Taking a hard thump to the stomach, Sue fell to the ground.

Immediately, Anna rushed over to her and cast recovery magic.

Brushing the dirt off her clothes, Sue stood up with frustration written all over her face. "I lost."

"If you can fight like that at your age, Princess, you'll surely surpass me soon enough. Truly, your talent is a wonder."

"No need to flatter me."

As I was about to walk over to my sullen sister, I heard the sound of clapping from right beside me.

"I don't think that was flattery at all! You really did fight well."

Everyone in the room, myself included, widened our eyes in surprise.

Not even Klevea and Anna, never mind Sue and myself, had noticed this newcomer.

Even when he was standing right next to me, I didn't detect the slightest hint of his presence.

"Julius!"

"Hey. Did I surprise you?" Julius, the second prince and my elder brother by the same mother, chuckled as if he'd pulled off a prank.

"When did you arrive back home?"

"Just yesterday. I wanted to say hello sooner, but between seeing Father, our

older brother, and everyone else, I never got the chance.”

My brother was several years older than me, and he was already working on various things abroad.

So it was rare for him to come back to the kingdom like this.

“Sue, I take my eyes off you for a second and you get even more talented, every time. Your speed of improvement never fails to amaze me.”

Even though Julius spoke kindly to Sue, she only scowled in response. For some reason, she didn’t seem to like Julius very much.

Personally, I liked him a lot, since he was much friendlier than my two other elder brothers.

More than anything, I respected him.

So to be honest, the friction between the older brother I admired and the younger sister I adored kind of bothered me.

“Come on, Sue. Should you really be acting like that toward your own brother?”

“Ha-ha, it’s all right. Sue’s at a difficult age right now,” Julius said sympathetically.

If you counted my previous life, I was theoretically older than him, but Julius still seemed to outclass me in mental age.

“How about you, Shun? Want to practice together like we used to?”

“Could we?! Yes, please!”

Getting to train with my brother Julius? I couldn’t have asked for more.

“All right, I’m gonna borrow this, then.”

“O-of course.”

My brother took the practice sword from Klevea, who shrank away. She was never this nervous around anyone.

I guess it made sense with someone like Julius, though.

“Okay. Ready when you are. Come at me from wherever you like.”

“Right!”

I immediately activated both Magic and Mental Warfare.

There was no sense holding back against my brother Julius.

I focused on using all the power I had.

Then I shot forward, tracing a diagonal strike from below.

My brother effortlessly blocked me.

Though I’d come at him with all my strength, he easily stopped the blow with his sword held in just one hand.

But that was what I’d expected.

He’d never fail to fend off an attack like that.

Immediately, I drew the sword back for my next attack.

Again, he stopped me without a problem.

It was fun.

Even trying with all my might, I couldn’t touch him.

No matter how quickly or powerfully I swung my sword, no matter what complicated techniques I tried, I couldn’t get to him at all.

I couldn’t even begin to imagine how I might get past his defenses.

But that was why I felt lucky that someone so skilled was willing to spar with me.

It was incredibly fun.

However, no matter how much I wished to keep going like this forever, the end would come.

My Magic and Mental Warfare expired.

Breathing heavily, I dropped to one knee.

“Very nice. Your swordsmanship is very straightforward and strong. It’s like there’s no limit to how far your talents might go.”

“Thank…you…very…much…”

I panted out my thanks. Despite how worn-out I was, my brother's breathing was perfectly even.

He really was amazing.

It made sense, since he was a hero.

The strongest human in the world.

Could I measure up to him someday?

If I had one dream in this world, it would be to become his equal.

I couldn't even come close right now, but someday, surely I'd at least be able to have Julius's back in battle.

That was my main goal.



THE HERO AND THE KING

“Here, for you. This is liquor local to the Boudier region.”

“Oh, excellent. I’ve never had this before. I’m excited to taste it.”

The room was clean, but full of documents and papers.

That was where I gave my father the liquor I’d bought him as a gift.

My father was a big drinker. So big that it had become an open secret that he liked to drink on the sly when he was working alone.

So, whenever I came back to the kingdom, I always brought some rare alcohol as a souvenir.

As the king, my father couldn’t simply leave his domain whenever he pleased, so this was always greatly appreciated.

By now, it was our custom to have a drink together whenever I brought it.

“Are you sure you shouldn’t be working, Father?”

“Oh, it’s not a problem. Even if it were, I could just cut down on sleep to make up for it. Spending time with my son when he comes home is far more important than work.”

The only response I could muster was a wry smile.

The work of a king could hardly be so easily dismissed, after all.

“Besides, Cylis has gotten quite good at his work. Even if something were to happen to me, the kingdom would be in good hands.”

“Father, I’ll be the first to admit that my elder brother is very talented, but the kingdom still needs you. Please don’t say such ominous things.”

“Sorry, sorry,” my father apologized lightly, and I sighed.

Father produced two hidden glasses from a shelf and poured liquor into each of them.

“Hmm. What a unique aroma.”

“Agreed. In fact, I purchased it because I took such a liking to the scent. I’m sure it will taste just as pleasant.”

A mellow fragrance filled the room.

After clinking our glasses together, my father and I quietly sipped from our glasses.

“Mm-hmm. What a pleasant mouthfeel. Why, I could drink this all day.”

“I was told it’s popular among women there, too. They say it becomes even more flavorful if you drink it with fruit. Which is why I brought these, too.”

I presented the fruits I’d brought with me. My father took a bite of one, then another sip of his drink.

“It’s very good. Normally I prefer strong drinks, but this sort of thing is nice from time to time, too.”

“I agree.”

He seemed to enjoy my latest offering, much to my relief.

I had been a little worried about whether my father would like this drink, since he usually preferred hard liquor.

But I hadn’t needed to worry.

The two of us continued drinking in relative silence for a while.

Then, I remembered the afternoon’s events, and my lips formed a small smile.

“What is it?”

“Oh, it’s just that I saw Sue and Shun earlier today. I suddenly started thinking about it again, that’s all.”

My two younger siblings showed so much promise that it even surprised a hero like me.

When I practiced with Shun, pretending to be totally unfazed was actually very difficult.

I shouldn't have tried to show off by fighting him one-handed.

Next time we sparred, I'd have to fight normally with both hands.

"I see. What do you think of them, Julius?"

"I'd say they're incredibly talented. Especially Shun. If he had been born a little sooner, it might have been Shun who received the title of Hero instead of me."

It was an honest opinion.

In fact, in terms of pure talent, I felt that Shun and Sue far outpaced me.

Really, the only reason I outstripped them was that I had the stat-enhancing effects of the Hero title.

I probably wouldn't lose to them without it just yet, but they would best me soon enough.

They had the talent for it.

They might still catch me and surpass me yet, Hero title and all.

Hopefully not, though, since that would annihilate my pride as an older brother.

Shun, especially, seemed to look up to me, so if he became disillusioned with me, he might not recover from the shock.

This is a serious situation. I should probably train a bit more so that my younger brother and sister don't beat me. Yeah, let's do that.

"What are you muttering to yourself and nodding about?"

"Oh, I was just thinking that it's hard to preserve my dignity as an older brother."

Come to think of it, Shun seemed to have a certain level of pride as Sue's older brother, too.

He was certainly succeeding there. She was distinctly attached to Shun, to the

point where her jealousy included me.

She'd probably grow out of that soon enough, but for the time being, it was amusing how she seemed to see me as a threat to her relationship with her beloved brother.

"I didn't do right by those two."

Regret shadowed my father's face.

The two of them were born just after the previous Hero had met his demise. That was when I inherited the Hero title, too.

The sudden death of the missing Hero, whose whereabouts and actions were unknown at the time, was a mystery.

I became the new Hero, and the forces of evil rapidly increased their activity.

With so much happening, my father had no time to spare for his two young children. He cared deeply for his family, but above all, he was the king. He had no choice but to put his kingdom first.

My father was very concerned about this.

"You had no choice. There was so much going on back then, you didn't have time to do anything differently."

"But they still won't embrace me. I suspect that's their response, a very clear one…"

"It's all right. I'm sure they'll understand your position in time."

"I certainly hope so."

My father stirred his drink morosely.

"If I may speak honestly, there are times when I resent my position as king. I don't just mean with those two children, either. Julius, I feel I should have done more for you, too. I never wanted you to have to bear the burden of being the Hero. But as king, I have no choice but to send you forth to do a Hero's duty. It may be the right choice as a king, but it makes me a failure as a father."

After admitting his pent-up feelings, my father breathed a truly heavy sigh.

"Father. I am proud to be a Hero. So please, don't say such things. From my

point of view, if the title of Hero were taken from me, I would be nothing."

"That's not true at all."

"That's how I feel. I'm not educated in political matters like my older brother, confident in myself like Leston, or able to form a connection to another kingdom through marriage like my older sister. The only thing I can do is wield my sword on behalf of our people, and all people, as a Hero. So don't worry about me, Father. I am only doing everything I can for my own sake as well as others'."

"Are you sure you don't mean 'willing to do whatever you want' Leston?"

"That's certainly not wrong."

My father and I shared a smile.

From my point of view, you're more than enough of a great father.

So I'll keep working hard as a Hero so that I can be of some help to you.



Still Clearing the Lower Stratum

After continuing along a single passage in the dangerous Lower Stratum for some time, I finally, finally arrived!

A fork in the road! Wait, is this a road?

Hmm.

In front of my eyes is a gargantuan chamber.

I'm not sure if you'd say that the road forks here so much as it spreads out, or maybe just kinda disappears.

How big is the space, you ask? So big that even with my eyes, which should be able to see in total darkness, I can't make out the other side.

Okay. What do I do now?

The single path I've followed so far has been no problem, but I'm not so psyched about this huge, empty area. It sort of feels like going into a desert without a trail to follow, I guess.

Not knowing which direction to head in is intimidating.

Like, I have a strong suspicion that if I just start walking in a place with no visible landmarks, I'll somehow get all turned around and end up right back where I started, you know?

I guess that scenario is less likely with my spider body and all, but I still have no idea which way to go.

As far as landmarks, all I really have are the pillars of rock scattered here and there. But since they all pretty much look the same, they aren't really distinctive enough to work as markers.

There are snail-bugs everywhere, so at least I won't starve in a worst-case scenario, but it still seems like I could easily get lost without noticing.

Oh well. My best course of action is probably to stick with the basics of dungeon exploring and proceed along the wall.

I continue keeping to the right, just as I had before.

This place is seriously enormous, though. It's super-wide. And also super-tall.

The ceiling, which is supported by the rock pillars, seems to be about three hundred feet up.

I can barely see it even if I crane my nonexistent neck.

Thanks to that, despite being inside a dungeon, this area doesn't feel cramped at all.

If anything, despite the place being full of nothing but rocks, there is a certain sense of the majesty of nature.

Here, it really sinks in just how tiny and insignificant my existence is.

Back in my old life, I saw a TV show about unexplored regions and stuff. To be honest, that kind of thing never inspired me. In the end, all that beautiful scenery on the TV screen just seemed like some far-off, irrelevant world to me.

Far from inspiration, all I felt about it was apathy.

I don't even know why I was watching that show in the first place.

But now, I'm actually standing here. This is the world I live in.

It's not irrelevant at all. And I certainly can't be apathetic about it.

Back when I was a human, I don't think just being somewhere had ever moved me emotionally, no matter where it was.

And I never would've experienced this feeling if I just stayed holed up in the nest I called home before, I think.

In that sense, I guess I have to thank those pyromaniac humans who forced me into the outside world.

Man, just remembering it still makes me mad.

Yeah, no. Like I'm gonna thank those jerks! If I ever lay eyes on them again, I'll wrap 'em up like a bunch of mummies, drag them around the dungeon, then bite 'em to death with my poison!

Whew. That brought back bad memories.

I take another look around at the majesty of the dungeon to soothe my injured soul.

<Bagragratch LV 14: Status Appraisal Failed>

A giant monster stumbles onto the scene.

For some reason, its overall appearance suggests it's lazy, somewhat slow, but its mouth sure ruins that image.

It has a huge snout like a crocodile's, packed with scores of jagged teeth.

That mouth, juxtaposed with its monkey-like body, makes for an unbalanced, positively hideous form.

That doesn't soothe my soul at all!

Right, right. This is a dungeon, after all. It isn't just "nature." It's also super-dangerous. Got it, me? Okay, roger that, me.

And so I stifle all signs of my presence as I make a hasty getaway.

Okay, I managed to escape without being spotted.

And then, well, something occurs to me that I don't really want to think about.

This big, huge area can't be the Bottom Stratum, can it?

I mean, I don't know what exactly indicates a change in stratum or whatever, but I suspect a lengthy road that ends up in a much wider area might qualify.

The road has been straight, and I don't exactly feel like I've been descending, but what if it was just such a gradual slope that I didn't notice?

That's possible, don't you think?

No, no, no. It can't be, right?

I just happened to arrive in an open area.

Yeah. Or maybe I even made it to the Middle Stratum! Ooh, that would be nice.

Let's go with that. This is definitely the Middle Stratum.

Wow, so I guess I finally escaped from that dangerous Lower Stratum!

<Bagragratch LV 8: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Bagragratch LV 4: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Bagragratch LV 11: Status Appraisal Failed>

This kinda thing wouldn't be in the Middle Stratum, would it?

Time to become the Invisible Man. Oh, I mean, the Invisible Spider.

Anyway, I have to hide my presence. Then I can just slip out of here, easy peasy.

After I put enough distance between us, I realize I haven't actually Appraised the new species yet.

<Bagragratch: A deformed monster with a huge jaw. They generally form herds and attack prey in groups.> Ahaaaa. So even though they seemed super-powerful, they form herds even bigger than that? Now, that's scary.

Yeah.

Let's just pretend my Middle Stratum theory never happened. The Middle Stratum would never be this tough!

Sigh. I just have to hope that I'm not actually in the Bottom Stratum.

I scuttle along the wall quietly.

After I ate those last three monsters, my red stamina gauge stopped decreasing.

Hmm? Yeah, it was a lot of food, so the gauge was already nearly full by the time I finished the first one, but…

Maybe my Overeating skill is the cause or something?

It could let me stock up extra energy by eating too much.

This phenomenon never happened before I got the Overeating skill, after all…

So maybe that isn’t such a far-fetched theory.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Appraisal LV 6] has become [Appraisal LV 7].> Oh? Ooh? Ooooh?! Appraisal! You’ve come back to me! Now we’re cooking with gas!

After that big breakthrough last time, I can’t help but have high expectations now, though.

You know that, right? If you disappoint me again now, I’ll never forgive you, got it?

You can still clear the bar now that I’ve raised it, right?

We had a good thing going here. Don’t mess it up, okay?

Now, how’re my self-Appraisal results looking?!

<Small taratect LV 3 Nameless

Status:

HP: 38/38 (green) MP: 38/38 (blue)

SP: 38/38 (yellow) : 38/38 (red)

Average Offensive Ability: 21 Average Defensive Ability: 21

Average Magical Ability: 19 Average Resistance Ability: 19

Average Speed Ability: 369

Skills:

[HP Auto-Recovery LV 2] [Poison Fang LV 8] [Poison Synthesis LV 1] [Spider Thread LV 8]

[Thread Control LV 5] [Throw LV 1] [Concentration LV 1] [Hit LV 1]

[Appraisal LV 7] [Detection LV 3] [Stealth LV 5] [Heretic Magic LV 2]

[Shadow Magic LV 1] [Poison Magic LV 1] [Overeating LV 3] [Night Vision LV 10]

[Vision Expansion LV 1] [Poison Resistance LV 7] [Paralysis Resistance LV 3] [Petrification Resistance LV 2]

[Acid Resistance LV 3] [Rot Resistance LV 3] [Fear Resistance LV 5] [Pain Nullification]

[Pain Mitigation LV 5] [Strength LV 2] [Solidity LV 2 [Skanda LV 2]

[Taboo LV 2] [n% I = W] >

Huh? Really? Seriously? My eyes aren't deceiving me?

Wh…wh…whaaaaaaat?!

A real skill list!

Seriously, Appraisal, you're too good to me! You cleared that bar without a problem!

Whoo-hoo! The dog days are over at last!

Appraisal, you're amazing. Thank you. Seriously, thank you!

With this, I can finally use double Appraisal to find out what my mystery skills do!

All right. Whew. Where to begin?

Well, I was just thinking about Overeating, so how about that one?

<Overeating: Allows the user to ingest food beyond normal limitations. In addition, the resultant stamina can be stocked as surplus. However, the user will gain weight proportionate to this. The amount of stamina that can be stocked increases with higher

skill levels.> Oh, whoa! Very nice. That's more or less what I guessed.

So this skill means my stamina won't decrease for a while based on how much extra food I eat.

I'd gain weight, though? Am I really that fat? I don't feel fat.

Maybe it just doesn't make much of a difference, since I'm a spider.

If I were human, that could be a serious disadvantage.

Next, how about this one?

<Strength: Adds to average attack capability by the number of the skill level> Ooh. So that's what it does? So basically, a simple stat-enhancing skill?

Come to think of it, this skill increases when I level up.

I thought my attack power had gone up by 2 when I leveled up, but one of those points was actually thanks to this skill, I guess.

Which would mean…

<Solidity: Adds to average defense capability by the number of the skill level> So this skill is the defensive version of Strength.

Honestly, it doesn't do much, but given how crappy my stats were, I'll take any advantage I can get.

Okay, let's keep going!

Next is one I don't recognize.

Since it's level 2, it must have leveled up at some point, but I must've missed it when the Divine Voice (temp.) mentioned it.

<Skanda: Multiplies average speed capability by the number of the skill level. Also, growth of this stat at each level-up increases by 10x the skill level.> Huh? Uh, wait, excuse me?

Oh, so this skill is why my speed is so much higher than all my other stats. Okay, I get it.

Whaaaaaaat?!

What kind of mega-overpowered skill is that?!

I thought my speed was just because of my species or something, but it's

because of this skill?!

Ooh. Hold up. Is this, like, one of those reincarnation perks you hear about or something?

Ooh! For real?! Whatever god is responsible for this, you rule!

Being born with a rare skill like this has to be the best benefit ever! All hail reincarnation!

They didn't call me Skanda for nothing in that game I used to play!

Woooo! Now, this I could get used to!

So, what's with the other skill I haven't seen before?

<n% I = W: Cannot be Appraised>

Hmm? Can't be Appraised? Why?

Aww, maaan. I can't believe I'm stumbling here after coming all this way.

Well, based on the name, it's probably just a bug or something, anyway.

It's kinda creepy, to be honest, but since I can't Appraise it, there's no point in getting hung up on it any further.

Hopefully it isn't a negative skill or anything.

Oh well. Time to move on to the next one.

<Taboo: A skill given to those who commit a taboo. Must never be raised.> Yikes. Now this is way too deep for me.

That phrasing smells like a curse or some other destructive effect, though.

Man, I don't want that! And it said "must never be raised," but it already went up to level 2 at some point…

Seriously? That takes the wind out of my sails real quick.

<HP Auto-Recovery: HP gradually recovers over time. Can even recover injuries that would not otherwise recover naturally.> <Poison Fang: Attacks using fangs will be given the poison attribute.> <Poison Synthesis: MP can be used to purify and customize poison. Poisons that can be synthesized vary depending on the level. LV 1: Weak Poison.> <Spider Thread: A special skill possessed by spider-type creatures. Can make customizable threads. Customizable Qualities: Viscosity, Elasticity, Resilience, Texture, Strength, Size.>

<Thread Control: Allows the user to freely manipulate thread> <Throw: Improves power and accuracy when throwing objects> <Concentration: Ability to concentrate increases>

<Hit: Improves accuracy rate in any situation>

<Appraisal: Can read information about objects, creatures, etc.> <Detection: A skill that combines all perception systems. Summary: Magic Perception, Physical Perception, Material Perception, Presence Perception, Danger Perception, Motion Perception, Heat Perception, Reaction Perception, Spatial Perception.> <Stealth: Hides signs of the user's presence>

<Night Vision: Allows clear sight even without a light source> <Vision Expansion: Widens range of visible light>

<Poison Resistance: Ability to defend against poison attribute increases> <Paralysis Resistance: Ability to defend against paralysis attribute increases> <Petrification Resistance: Ability to defend against petrification attribute increases> <Acid Resistance: Ability to defend against acid attribute increases> <Rot Resistance: Ability to defend against rot attribute increases> <Fear Resistance: Makes it harder for user to experience fear> <Pain Nullification: Negates any faculty limitations on the body and mind due to pain> <Pain Mitigation: Reduces the sensation of pain. Danger signals to the brain will still continue.> I continue Appraising the rest of my skills in order.

Most of them are more or less what I expected, but there are some new discoveries, too.

For one thing, I've finally found out what Vision Expansion actually does, kind of. Does this mean I can see infrared and ultraviolet light and stuff?

Well, I haven't seen anything like that yet, though. Maybe since the skill is only level 1, those things are still mostly invisible? Or maybe there just isn't any light outside the visible spectrum inside a dungeon.

Well, not seeing that stuff hasn't caused me any problems, so whatever.

Anyway, after examining the resistance skills a little more closely, I discover something kinda unsettling.

Most of the resistance skills are just as the name implies, but there's one that seems a bit inconsistent with its name.

<Rot Attribute: Attribute that regulates the decay of death> What the heck? Freaky.

I originally thought it meant I could eat rotten food or something, but it seems to be creepier than that.

My Rot Resistance skill increased when I ate that snail-bug, so… Does that mean those things have the same attribute?

Yeesh. That would explain why the taste is so mind-blowingly foul.

Well. So snail-bugs are really, truly for desperate times only, then.

Okay, last but not least.

Depending on the results of these Appraisals, my future could change dramatically.

The Appraisal of the three magic-type skills I possess.

These are the skills that I have no choice but to ignore, since I have no idea how to use them. If I could utilize them, though, I'm positive they would come in handy. I mean, if I learned how to use these, I would basically be a magical girl… Well, a magical spider, anyway. Like "Kumoko the Spider Girl" or something.

All right. Appraisal, don't fail me now!

<Heretic Magic: Magic that directly assaults the soul. The available spells depend on the skill level. LV 1: Discomfort. LV 2: Phantom Pain.> <Shadow Magic: Lower-ranking Dark Magic that manipulates shadows. The available spells depend on the skill level. LV 1: Dark Shadow.> <Poison Magic: Magic that manipulates poison. The available spells depend on the skill level. LV 1: Poison Touch.> Oh? Oh-ho-ho? Hmm. Now, that's vague.

Well, it's still leaps and bounds from being thoroughly clueless about these skills, but I still don't know how to use them.

All right, so Heretic Magic is basically a psychic attack type of thing, right?

The shadows and poison bits seem self-explanatory.

So apparently there are spells I can use at level 1.

But how exactly do I cast them?

Maybe if I try thinking about it really hard, like with Appraisal?

Okay then. Here goes… Let's use Discomfort!

…Nothing's happening.

No, maybe it just misfired because I don't have a target. Let's try another one.

Dark Shadow!

…Nothing.

Poison Touch!

…Nope, nada.

My MP hasn't decreased, either. That means it didn't misfire, probably—more like it didn't activate at all.

Man, seriously? Well, I can't say this is entirely unexpected, but still, come on.

Hey, wait a minute. Maybe if I examine the term "Magic" with Appraisal, I'll get some kind of hint.

<Magic: An established phenomenon that allows magic power to be transformed using skills> Yeah, thanks for nothing. Oh well. I guess mastering magic is still out of my reach.

Damn. It looks like I won't be able to call myself Magical Girl Kumoko for a while yet.

Aw, man.

Well, I can't use them, but I figure I may as well Appraise the details of each spell anyway.

<Discomfort: Plants discomfort directly in the soul>

<Phantom Pain: Plants phantom pain directly in the soul>

<Dark Shadow: Makes a shadow darker>

<Poison Touch: Adds a poison-attribute attack to a target upon contact> So Discomfort is a kind of mental attack, like the name implies. And Phantom Pain, well, it isn't too different from Discomfort.

Poison Touch seems like a formidable spell to learn at level 1, but that means it's probably got some kind of weakness.

Dark Shadow's effect is obvious from the name, too, but how am I supposed to use that?

Hmm. Maybe you can combine it with higher-level Shadow Magic or something?

In which case, it probably doesn't serve much purpose on its own.

Well, not like I can use it either way.

I lurk motionlessly in the shadow of the rocks.

<Elroe daznatch LV 23

Status: HP: 786/818 (green) MP: 335/335 (blue)

SP: 779/779 (yellow) : 723/781 (red)

Status Appraisal Failed >

The creature is ambling along slowly, some distance away from the boulder I'm hiding behind.

What the heck is that thing? I don't even know how to explain it. Sort of like a huge freaking fish with limbs? No, not exactly, but that's the best I can manage to describe this bizarre creature.

Well, this mystery monster doesn't really matter, anyway.

Actually, I guess it kind of does. Or it will if it finds me, at least.

But there's something more important than that right now!

That's right, Appraisal is at it again! I can see an enemy's stats!

All I can actually see is HP, MP, and SP, but that's impressive in itself, no?

Its success rate isn't very high, since it's probably only worked once every three or four tries, but it's still great to know even a portion of my opponent's status.

The numerical values of HP, MP, and SP alone are enough to give me a rough idea of how strong something is.

In this case, obviously these numbers mean I shouldn't try going toe-to-toe with this thing. My best strategy here is to value my own life.

It's common sense not to pick a fight with unknown creatures that happen to

wander by, really.

I mean, did anyone else see those numbers?

What kind of HP is that? That's enough to kill me twenty times and still have HP left over!

Now that's what I call inflation.

If this stupid-looking mystery monster has stats that high, then the earth dragon probably had at least four digits of HP.

Unreal.

In the past few days, I've learned one thing: Monsters above level 10 are all way too strong.

I think that's because if they don't evolve at level 10, they're already a high-ranking species.

So if I ever see a monster above level 10, it's generally best to run away from all members of its species, even if I meet one that's still in the single digits.

On the other hand, species that never exceed level 10 are usually inconsequential.

What shocked me, though, was discovering that even the small-fry I'm used to hunting tend to have higher stats than me. Some of them even have HP in the triple digits.

It's like, *you guys are that strong? Really?*

If I fight them head-on, I probably won't stand a chance.

That was when I decided I had to bet everything on the element of surprise.

Even the monsters I think of as small-fry are higher ranked than me.

Meaning that my Spider Thread's ability to render them immobile without a problem is pretty darn impressive.

Without it, I would probably be dead by now.

Stats are important and all, but clearly skills are, too. It sure would be nice if I could see my opponents' arsenals soon.

If I could have that information, it'd be a huge advantage in battle, I think.

I mean, without my skills, my only advantage is my speed.

If I run into an enemy that can counteract my thread with fire, for example, or use an antidote to negate my poison fangs, I'm basically screwed.

Ohhhh man. Skill-based countermeasures could be scary. If I come up against someone that prepared, I'll probably die on the spot!

But, well, other monsters probably don't have the foresight for something like that.

That's exactly why a weak monster like me has been able to survive this long.

Yep, intelligence is crucial. Humanity's greatest weapon.

Sneak, sneak. Right side, all clear! Left side, all clear! Forward, all clear!

<Elroe kohokoro LV 7

Status: HP: 67/89 (green) MP: 21/21 (blue)

SP: 79/79 (yellow) : 54/85 (red)

Status Appraisal Failed >

In front of me is a monster that looks like a huge pillbug.

Well, its body is like a pillbug's, but its head seems more like a rat's. Is it an insect or a mammal? Just pick one, will ya?

I guess it's vaguely armadillo-ish, too, but it gives me the creeps, so let's just call it a pillbug.

In any case, it can probably increase its defense by rolling into a ball. There was that one time a turtle monster gave me a hard time by retreating into its shell, after all.

But all I have to do is wrap it up in my thread before it even gets the chance.

And so, I ready my casting net.

Take this! Direct hit!

Then I simply use Thread Control to give it the ol' one-two.

<Condition satisfied. Acquired title [Thread User].>

<Acquired skills [Thread Control LV 1] [Cutting Thread LV 1] as a result of Title [Thread User].> <Skill [Thread Control LV 1] has been integrated into [Thread Control LV 5].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Thread Control LV 5] has become [Thread Control LV 6].> Oh? Ooh? Hooray, a new title!

Thread User, huh? Now I would've been crazy about that in middle school.

Okay, Mr. Pillbug, something more interesting just came up, so can we wrap things up here?

You don't mind, do you? Oh, you do? Well, too bad!

Mr. Pillbug, meet Mr. Poison Fang. Now, why don't you come under these rocks with me?

Okay, now it's time to take a look at the title I just got.

Since the name is Thread User, I probably got it for working with thread all the time, right?

Hmm? Wouldn't I have gotten it a lot sooner if that was the case? Yeah, good point.

Well, maybe there's another condition. Although I guess there's no point in wondering about that, since I already have the title.

What really matters now is whether I can use it. And this time, I'm reasonably confident. This title is going to come in handy.

Well, since getting it bumped up my Thread Control level, it's already provided some benefits.

Thread Control is becoming more important to me every day, so raising its skill level is fantastic. That alone makes the title worth it.

But right now, my interest is firmly focused on the other skill.

Cutting Thread.

Like, does that sound like a super-cool anime weapon or what?

It's gotta be that thing, right? Where you can cut enemies in half with a super-sharp thread and stuff?

"I-impossible! An invisible attack?! But how?!"

"Something's cutting me! Tch… Is this…razor wire?!"

Does this mean I can do that now?!

Whoa. Awesome. Yes waaay.

But even if it isn't in line with my dorky fantasies, it still sounds like a power upgrade to me.

After all, so far my Poison Fangs have been my only means of attack. Now I finally have another one!

My spider thread is already the main element of my arsenal, but now it'll be a literal weapon, too.

Oh, wait, I haven't Appraised it yet. Better not get carried away before I know what it actually does.

All right, Appraisal time.

<Cutting Thread: Grants a cutting attribute to thread>

Okay. So it pretty much does what it says on the tin. I was worried for a second there that it might be something ridiculous.

So that's one less cause for concern.

The next problems are finding out whether it'll actually work on my Spider Thread, whether I can invoke it properly, and how much of an effect it actually has at level 1.

Oh, hey, good thing I have that pillbug I just defeated! C'mere, I need a lab rat for this.

First, I produce some spider thread.

To start out, I make it as strong as possible and with zero stickiness.

Then, swinging it toward the corpse of the pillbug, I think [Cutting Thread].

Oh! That seems like it did something.

But the thread bounces off the body of the pillbug.

Hmph. I guess it's too much to hope for it to be very strong at level 1.

Oh, but it did leave a bit of a scratch. That's good enough for starting out, right?

So far, most of the skills I've tried at level 1 have been virtually useless, so scratching the hard-looking hide of a pillbug seems pretty good to me.

Oh yeah, how is it consumption-wise? Does it use MP or something? Checking my status, I see that my MP hasn't gone down.

And my SP isn't reducing at all right now because of my Overeating skill's effects, so I have no way of telling whether it affects that reserve. Still, based on my experience with Poison Synthesis and such, it probably isn't cost-free. So although my red stamina bar hasn't gone down at all, my guess would be that it decreased a little in a way I can't tell.

I don't know how much it normally consumes, but its cost effectiveness doesn't seem too poor.

Plus, I'll probably keep my stamina gauge overstocked with Overeating in the future, too, so I bet it'll be fine.

Next, I try making the thread sticky and attack the pillbug corpse again.

Hmm? Hmm. It did seem to activate properly, but it didn't leave a scratch this time.

Well, that's about what I expected.

Experimenting with my spider thread a little more, I discover that there are limits to how it can be customized.

For example, maximizing the stickiness makes it difficult to keep it elastic. It isn't impossible, but the effect is definitely lessened. So combining stickiness and sharpness isn't impossible, either, but it also isn't very pragmatic.

Still, Cutting Thread seems like a helpful skill. It's very compatible with my

usual strategies.

I'll have to raise its skill level as soon as possible.

So, Mr. Pillbug.

I hate to beat a dead monster, since I already killed you, but I'm gonna need your help with raising my skill level here.

I produce more Cutting Thread and strike the pillbug with it over and over.

After beating the crap out of the corpse for a while, I manage to raise my Cutting Thread skill level to 3.

Really, I want to raise it a little more, but by now the remains of the pillbug have reached a state that would be unsuitable for TV—uncensored, anyway—so there isn't much else I can do.

Even at level 3, it doesn't do much in the way of damage, but you know what they say about a journey of a thousand miles or whatever.

Oh, Mr. Pillbug. I think I'll probably never forget you, maybe.

I eat him, of course. As usual, it's repulsive.

In retrospect, I probably didn't need to use him as a target at all, did I?

I could've just hit some rocks or something instead.

Oh no! So the pillbug suffered for nothing?

No, no. He was able to prove useful to me in death, so I'm sure he's probably crying tears of gratitude in the afterlife.

Huh? What do you mean, I'm brutal? I don't know what you're talking about.

Suddenly, I sense another presence behind me and turn around.

<Anogratch LV 8: Status Appraisal Failed>

This is a monster I've never seen before. It sorta looks like a six-or seven-foot-tall monkey.

Since I failed to Appraise its status, I'd like to just ignore it, but it's too late for that—since it seems to have spotted me already. And judging by its eyes, it's not planning on letting me get away.

The monkey charges at me, and at a good clip, too.

In a panic, I hurl some spider thread at it. The monkey dodges it by leaping to one side.

Seriously?

While I stare in shock, the monkey keeps closing the gap between us.

I toss more webbing toward it, but it dodges as easily as before.

Bearing down on me, the monkey swings its arm.

I quickly detach the thread attached to my butt and avoid the monkey's attack.

BWOOM! The arm whips past me with a force I never would've expected from something so skinny.

Hoo boy. If I take a direct hit from that, I'll be six feet under before I know it.

Stats-wise, it isn't necessarily anything I can't handle, but on further reflection, even small-fry, Upper Stratum–class monsters pose a threat to me in a straightforward fight.

Undaunted that its first attack missed, the monkey boldly swings its other arm at me.

The movement is clumsy and imprecise, but the fact is that each one of these successive blows can probably kill me, so I'm still completely terrified.

I'm not exactly a professional boxer, so even an amateur's punches still scare the crap out of me!

Gyaaah! I shriek deep in my heart as I desperately dodge them.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Evasion LV 1].>

This half-baked strategy proves worthwhile, since I get a new skill in the process.

At the same time, the monkey seems fed up with missing, and it swipes at me in an even wider arc.

Now's my chance!

I sidestep the monkey's punch and stick some spider thread to its arm as it flails in the air.

Bwa-ha-ha-ha! It's all over for you now, pal! How's it feel to lo-o-o-ose?!

Hmm?

Just like that, my body goes flying into the air.

Geh?!

The monkey flings the connected spider thread upward, taking me with it.

Oh crap!

I quickly detach the thread from my body. As expected, the monkey slams it onto the ground.

If I hadn't cut it off, my body would've smashed into the floor, too.

I avoided that in the nick of time.

Better yet, now that the thread on its arm is glued to the ground, the monkey's trapped in place.

I quickly shift my position in the air and stick the landing perfectly. Ten points!

Luckily, I wasn't actually too high in the air, so I take very little damage when I land.

Victory is mine! Even if half of it is the monkey's own fault.

I tie more thread around my opponent until it can't move anymore, then finish it off with the usual poison fangs.

The monkey shoots me a wrathful glare and lets out a roar, but it offers no further resistance. Soon it breathes its last.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small taratect has increased from LV 3 to LV 4.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Concentration LV 1] has become [Concentration LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Throw LV 1] has become [Throw LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the

required level. Skill [Hit LV 1] has become [Hit LV 2].> <Skill points acquired.>

I level up with my victory over the monkey, and three of my skills increase in rank as well.

They're all good ones, too, so I'm happy.

As usual, despite my growth, all my stats remain low except for speed. But if I didn't have the Skanda skill, that would be low, too, and all I would have going for me is my thread.

All hail Skanda.

I'm psyched to have a bunch of things improve and all, but I still can't relax.

For all I know, my fight with the monkey might've attracted other monsters.

First things first, it's time to eat my fill.

Hmm. This guy isn't poisonous. For once, there's no bitterness. Still, it tastes and smells kind of funky, so I can't exactly say it's delicious.

I miss the meat from my old life, like beef and pork.

My stamina is already filled to the brim, but thanks to my Overeating skill, this energy won't go to waste. The name "Overeating" initially had me worried that it would have a negative effect, but it turned out to be quite valuable.

Like I said before, stamina is crucial to my survival. I need it for making thread and running and all that jazz, so a skill that can stock up extra stamina is almost essential for me.

If I could use magic, that might reduce my dependence on stamina a little, but there's no point crying over something I can't have.

Anyway, that monkey was a force to be reckoned with.

I've been able to rely on surprise and such for a while now, so it's been a long time since I've had a real head-to-head battle like that.

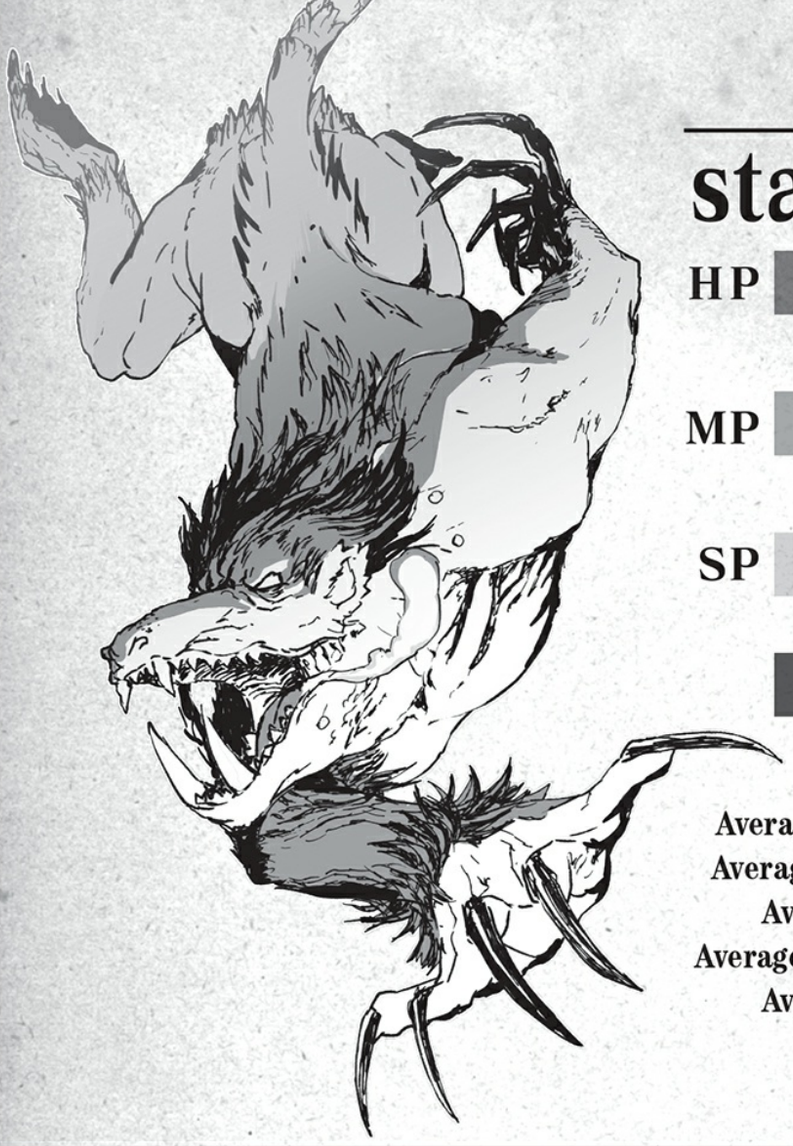
Lower Stratum monsters really are scary. The monkey is probably one of the weaker species status-wise, but it was still a narrow win.

Now then, I'm finished eating the monkey, so it's time to keep moving.

Monster Encyclopedia

file.05 BAGRAGRATCH

LV.01



status

HP 600 / 600

MP 100 / 100

SP 588 / 588

564 / 564

Average Offensive Ability : 559
Average Defensive Ability : 531
Average Magic Ability : 97
Average Resistance Ability : 106
Average Speed Ability : 548

skill

[Throw LV 6] [Hit LV 6] [Spatial Maneuvering LV 6]
[Cooperation LV 6] [Overeating LV 1] [Rest LV 1]

Nickname: giant monkey. An evolved form of the anogratch, with a large, crocodile-like mouth. It sometimes mingles with large groups of anogratches, but they don't cooperate with one another. While anogratches have the unique skill Vengeance, which causes them to fight until the death against any opponent that has harmed one of their own, bagragratches lose the skills Vengeance and Wrath when they evolve. Some say this means they lose the drive to preserve their species, but the truth behind it is unknown. An individual's danger level is close to B.



The Elf Maiden

My father summoned me.

Both me and Katia, no less.

For some reason, I even had to bring Fei along.

All three of us were puzzled as to what it might be about.

“You don’t think it’s about an engagement, do you?”

“What? Whose?”

“You know, uh…you…and me…?” Katia’s insane suggestion left me at a total loss.

“No, it couldn’t be.”

“What’s this? Have you developed a taste for BL or something?”

“Well, it wouldn’t be BL in this case. Look at us, would you? A boy and girl, around the same age, from a similar pedigree. Not to mention, it’s clear that we get along. Would it be that surprising if our parents decided that we should get engaged?”

When she put it that way, it didn’t seem so far-fetched at all.

I was a member of the royal family, after all, and Katia was the daughter of a venerable duke.

From that perspective, we were a perfect match.

“Uh, and you’re okay with that?”

“Man, of course not. I can’t even imagine marrying a dude. But it’s bound to happen eventually, so I figure I better prepare myself.”

“I’m surprised you’ve thought this stuff out that far ahead.”

“Well, excuse me. But honestly, in practical terms, it’s better to marry you than get stuck with some rando I’ve never even met. You know what my deal is and everything… Besides, it’d be kinda bad manners, but we could always mutually break off the engagement if we really had to.”

Was that something you could do?

I’d never even considered the prospect of getting engaged before, but since I was a member of the royal family, that was probably going to come up sooner or later.

In which case it might actually be more convenient to get engaged to Katia, since we’d both be able to just carry on normally.

Except for one small problem.

“What would you do about Sue, though?”

“Ah.”

Yeah.

My sister, Sue, wouldn’t let anyone else near me.

I’d even seen her murderous stare directed at Fei, who from Sue’s perspective was just a pet.

How can you get jealous of even an animal just because it’s female? I wanted to ask her.

But I was afraid her response would be something along the lines of “Why wouldn’t I?”

She seemed to have gotten slightly more tolerant of Katia by now, but if she ever suspected we might get engaged, there was no telling what she’d do.

“Right. She’d probably kill me.”

“Come on, I think you’re exaggerating a little.”

“…Am I, though?”

“I have to admit, I could see it.”

I knew Sue was a little bit out there, but I still thought they were being ridiculous.

As we chatted, two more people—a man and a small girl—entered the room.

Katia, Fei, and I all gaped in shock at the newcomers.

Their ears were far too long to belong to humans.

“Greetings, friends. I am called Potimas Harrifenas, and I have been sent to this fine kingdom as a goodwill ambassador of the elves. It is I who requested your presence here. It is a great pleasure to meet you.”

The man, Potimas, introduced himself in a disinterested tone.

This was my first time meeting an elf.

I knew that they existed, but seeing one up close and in person for the first time drove home that I was in a fantasy world.

“Hmm. So you do have it.”

Potimas narrowed his eyes, and I got an uncomfortable feeling in my gut.

“Oka, these two humans and the creature here have what we’re looking for. I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“All righty, then. Understood!”

“I’ll be on my way, then.”

“Thaaanks for your help!”

Potimas left the room, just like that.

All Katia and I could do was stare, dumbfounded. We didn’t even get to introduce ourselves before he took off.

With no idea what to do next, I turned my attention to the little girl who’d stayed behind.

“Now, now, let me see. I suppose we’ll start with introductions, shall we? My current name is Filimøs Harrifenas. So lovely to meet you!”

Katia and I looked at each other.

How were we supposed to respond to such an introduction from this small

girl?

“You know, if your teacher introduces herself, it’s only proper to respond in kind, I’d saaay! And who might you beeee?”

“My apologies. I am the fourth prince of this kingdom, Schlain Zagan Analeit.”

“I am the eldest daughter of Duke Anabald, Karnatia Seri Anabald.”

At the girl’s prompting, we scrambled to introduce ourselves.

“I see, I see. A prince and a duchess-to-be, is it? Verrry nice. Sooo cute.”

Something about those words jogged my memory.

Her odd manner of speaking had seemed familiar all along, and now I knew who she reminded me of.

Katia’s eyes widened as he realized it at the same time.

“No way… Ms. Oka?!”

“You really oughtn’t to give nicknames to your teacher, you knooow? But that’s corrrrect.”

Before our eyes was our homeroom teacher in our former lives: Ms. Kanami Okazaki, or Ms. Oka for short.

This teacher, who we all called by her nickname, was a bit of an unfortunate person.

Apparently, she’d adopted the speech tic of one of her favorite manga characters in middle school and ended up talking like that all the time.

She went to a university with a strong history program because of her interest in manga about the Warring States period, and she became a teacher mostly out of a desire to meet a younger man.

Overall, a pretty sad excuse for an educator.

However, her pathetic nature actually made her rather popular with the students.

“All righty, then, how about you? The one pretending to be a pet over theeere?”

“Huh?! How did you know?!”

“It’s obvious, you knooow! Really, now, I would think you’d already know that, since we made sure to invite you, toooo.”

Fei looked extremely displeased about this. Probably because she used to misbehave in class a lot and got more than a few reprimands from the teacher.

Maybe she felt a little sheepish about it.

“Uuugh. I’m Feirune.”

“Yes, yes, verrry good.”

The teacher patted Fei on the head.

Fei grimaced a little at this treatment.

“So? Why are you here, Ms. Oka?”

“Why, because I knew you three were here, of cooourse! You’ve become quite the hot topic, you knooow? The young prodigies born of the Analeit kingdom are the talk of the town!”

As we spoke to our teacher for the first time in so long, we all ended up using Japanese.

Soon, we told her our names from our previous lives.

The moment she heard Katia’s old name, her eyes widened, and she murmured something like, “Sooo cute!”

“So you came just to see us?”

“That’s riiight.”

“Okay, I understand how you knew these two oafs were here, but how’d you find out about me? I thought I was blending in pretty well as a pet.”

“Then you don’t realize how unusual you are, my deeear. There are rumors, you knooow? That the prince’s pet is a genius, toooo.”

“What, really?”

“That’s riiight. A normal monster wouldn’t listen to the commands of a person who doesn’t have the Creature Training skill, not to mention working out and

training alongside them, you knooow!”

“Ah, I guess that makes sense. How stupid of me.”

It was disconcerting that the information could leak outside the castle so easily, but I guess there was no stopping the rumor mill.

“But that’s not the only reason I’m here, my deeears. I’m still a teacher, you knooow? I have to at least make sure my students are safe, you seeee. As safe as you can be after being reincarnated, anywaaay!”

She said it jokingly, but I think she actually meant it, and I was kind of impressed.

It hadn’t even occurred to me to worry about anyone’s survival but my own in this world.

I did suspect that my other classmates might be here, too, but I had never considered actually looking for them.

“This world is far more dangerous than Japan, you knooow? If I can ensure your safety, I’d like to do it as soon as I caaan.”

I’d never thought about that, either.

It should have been obvious, given I knew there were monsters and stuff in this world, but since I was safe, I had just assumed that my other classmates would be, too.

Fei had even told me how she nearly died, but at the time, it had seemed to me like a story from far away.

“So you came to protect us, then?”

“Oh, goodness, nooo. Considering your positions, I can hardly just take you away with me, you knooow. But if any of my students wish it, I’ll gladly take them to the village of elves for protection, you seeee.”

“Does that mean you’ve already found others?”

“Oh, yesss. There are eleven students in the elf village, and I’ve managed to contact six others, including the three of youuu. And I’ve located two more, so I’ll be off to visit them next, you seeee.”

There were twenty-five students in our class.

Which would mean there were still six more whose whereabouts were unknown.

But to put it another way, that meant only six students hadn't been found.

In a vast world like this one, it must've been no small feat to find that many reincarnated students.

"You've really been looking out for us, then, Ms. Oka."

"It's my duty as a teacher, of cooourse. Besides, most of them were living as humans in human territory, you knooow. So it wasn't as hard as all thaaat."

"Mostly humans…"

Fei was stunned by our teacher's words.

"Don't worry about it" was the only comfort I could muster.

Despite Ms. Oka's light tone, it was clear she'd been working hard to find everyone.

I bowed my head toward her in thanks again.

"All righty, then. There's sooo much more we should talk about, but I'll be off to enter the school of this kingdom soooon. We can discuss everything then, all riiight?"

Katia and I would be attending that school soon, too.

We were allowed to bring pets, so I was planning to bring Fei with me as well.

A whole new life was dawning on the horizon.



12 Battling Three Hundred Feet Up

Ahhh, so tired. I'm not gonna be able to keep my eyes open much longer.

I didn't realize camping without a simple home would be such a pain.

I thought I could stick it out a little longer, but now I might be in real trouble if I don't come up with a good method of getting some restful sleep soon.

Then again, if it were that easy, I wouldn't be forcing myself to keep exploring until exhaustion threatened to knock me out.

The earth dragon probably isn't going to show up at this point, but now my problem is that I'm in the middle of an area chock-full of other strong monsters. There's no guarantee that one of them won't just break through a basic web with ease.

But that doesn't mean I can go ahead and build a more elaborate shelter here.

I don't want to put down roots in this place. I want to get out of here as soon as possible. It doesn't make sense to spend a ton of time on a new home.

In which case, it makes more sense to build a simple one, but I have no way of knowing whether that'll be enough to keep out the monsters that inhabit this area… I've been going over the same thoughts again and again and now I'm stuck in a mental loop.

I rack my exhausted brain, trying to figure out what to do.

A simple home might work depending on how I make it, right?

Like, instead of setting it up wherever, I could hide it in a hard-to-find nook or something.

I mean, the rocks around here are pretty angular, but they don't necessarily make for the safest hiding spots.

Hey, wait a minute. Maybe I don't have to hide at all?

As long as other monsters can't mess with me, anywhere is fine, right?

In which case, I might know a good place after all.

So I head there right away. "There" being the ceiling, by way of climbing the wall.

Phew… So high! Man, that was scary. Can I really sleep soundly here?

But I haven't seen any monsters around these parts that can fly or climb walls.

Aside from the snail-bugs, anyway.

I haven't seen any bees since coming out into this big space, either, so I figure it might be safe to set up a little home between the ceiling and the wall and sleep there.

And so, without further ado, I start building my web.

Wow, this is seriously high, though. Probably about three hundred feet in the air… How many skyscraper floors would that be?

If I fall, I'll definitely die.

I mean, I have a lifeline, so there's probably nothing to worry about, but it's still scary to work out in the open like this. C'mon, Fear Resistance, get to work already!

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Fear Resistance LV 5] has become [Fear Resistance LV 6].> Okay, I'm sorry. I spoke too soon.

So don't sass me like that, all right? Man, that startled me.

Anyway, now the outer frame is complete.

Hmm. This is totally obvious from the outside, though, isn't it?

If it takes a hit from a long-distance attack like that earth dragon's breath, it'll go down, won't it?

It's probably best to hide a little somehow.

Maybe I can use the rocks lying around on the ground.

I lower myself back down for a bit and look at the rocks. Hmm. These are way too big.

Can I break them down somehow? Maybe with Cutting Thread or something?

I fasten a thread to the rock, activate Cutting Thread, and pull. Hmm… It scores it a little bit but not enough to do much good.

Maybe I can move it like a saw? Ooh, that seems to work, a little at a time.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Cutting Thread LV 3] has become [Cutting Thread LV 4].> My skill level goes up in the process, making my work more efficient.

All right, now I have some diced rock.

I guess I can apply it to the surface of my web as camouflage.

First, I stick thread to the rock firmly, then I climb up the three hundred feet to the nest with the thread still attached.

Okay, now all I have to do is pull it up, and…

Oof! Oh man, that's heavy! Urrghh… C'mon, put your back into it! Heave-ho!

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Strength LV 2] has become [Strength LV 3].> My Strength skill level increases along the way. Even with the extra level, this thing is still a struggle.

Whoof, this is consuming my immediate stamina and my overall stocked stamina at the same time! What a pain!

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Instantaneous LV 1].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Persistent LV 1].> I gained some skills, but I don't have time to check them out right now!

C'mon, pullll!

Huff…huff… Whew.

Finally, I manage to lift the rock into place.

Whoa, on closer inspection, my red stamina bar actually decreased past the Overeating reserves I had.

So that's why it was so painful.

Huh? I thought I had come up with a quick method of getting a good night's sleep, but in retrospect, I actually ended up giving myself more work.

Aw, man, seriously? So much for that. Oh well.

But all the hard work was worth it, since the rock I dragged up and stuck to my nest seems to be hiding me quite effectively.

Now I just need to make a bit of bedding, and…

Done!

Phew. Now, this is paradise.

Ahh, being surrounded by silk makes me feel so much safer. This is the life. Without it, I just can't sleep soundly.

Oh, gotta check the effects of those new skills before bed.

<Instantaneous: Adds to SP (instantaneous) by the number of the skill level> <Persistent: Adds to SP (persistent) by the number of the skill level> Ah, so these are the SP versions of Solidity and Strength.

My SP stats, which were 40 each, have increased to 41. Stamina is important, so that's a sweet deal.

Well then, now that I've checked out my new skills, it's time to sleep off all that hard work!

Since it's been so long since I had a chance to really bed down, I'll take this opportunity to snooze to my heart's content.

And so, good night!

Ahh, what a nice rest. Yep. I sure slept, all right.

But what's this, now?

I planned on sleeping a little more, so why do I suddenly feel so wide awake?

Hmm? It feels like all the hair on my body is standing on end. That can't be

good.

I stick my head out from behind the rock to peer down below.

<Anograch LV 6: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Anograch LV 3: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Anograch LV 8

Status: HP: 165/168 (green) MP: 38/38 (blue)

SP: 127/127 (yellow) : 109/118 (red)

Status Appraisal Failed >

<Anograch LV 5: Status Appraisal Failed> …

A group of monkeys has gathered in battle formation right below me. I'd say there are about fifty of them.

Huh? You're kidding me, right?

These guys are definitely aware that I'm up here.

Why?!

I thought my rock camouflage was perfect. I even looked at it from the ground myself to be sure.

At a glance, it looks like nothing more than a bit of rock that's slightly jutting out from the wall.

So why?!

The only reason I can think of has to do with the monkey of the same species I defeated before.

Did it do something to me? Like leaving a special scent on me or something? I have no idea.

But either way, those monkeys are lying in wait for me.

Some of them are even getting ready to climb up the wall. In fact, they've already started.

Oh, shit!

Climbing a sheer rock wall is apparently difficult even for the monkeys, as their ascent is pretty slow.

At this rate, I should have a few minutes before the first ones get to me. I have to take action while I still have the chance.

The best move here is probably to escape along the ceiling.

There's obviously no way I'm going to beat such a large group of monkey monsters.

All right, time to head for the hills, then.

Huh? The color of the ceiling is different here? No way! Why is it so slippery?!

My thread is barely even sticking to it! Oh no…

The nature of the rock that makes up the ceiling changes drastically just a few feet away from the wall. It's so smooth and slippery that not even my stickiest threads stay attached, never mind my legs.

At this rate, the ceiling won't work as an escape route.

I'll just have to run sideways along the wall, then.

They'll probably try to chase me, but that'll just be a contest of persistence.

Okay, let's— *WHONK!* Huh?! What was that?! A rock?!

Crap, these guys are throwing rocks at me?!

Wait, how're they even able to reach when the ceiling is so high up?!

Whoa, another one?!

I quickly take refuge behind the rock covering my home to escape. Another stone hits the place I was moments ago.

Considering how far they had to come, the rocks don't have too much power behind them by the time they reach where I am.

However, if one of them hits me while I'm clinging to the wall, it'll probably knock me down.

Judging by the fact that the projectiles always land where I just was, those monkeys probably have the Throw skill, the Hit skill, or maybe even both.

A cold chill of dread runs through me.

I can't get away like this. What am I going to do? Really, I only have one option. I have to fight back.

Luckily, even though it's a simple one, I do have a home base here.

My only choice is to strengthen it as much as I can before the first monkey arrives and stave them off from within.

If we all have to cling to the wall during the fight, unlike the time with the bees, my opponents won't have any advantage.

If anything, since I have my web to serve as both a foothold and a fortress, I'm the one with a leg up this time.

I have no choice but to try.

First, I scatter more threads. Then I stick them to the wall with Thread Control.

It's a basic tactic, but it should make it harder for them to climb.

Since I have to keep avoiding the stones hurtling at me, it's hard to get much work done. And in the process, the first wave of monkeys has made it about halfway up the wall.

Shit. They're climbing faster than I expected.

There's no way I can stop all of them with the threads I've just set up.

Now what?

Ah, maybe there's something I can use to attack them first?

I do have Throw and Hit, so if I have anything to throw at them…

Oh! There is one thing. I can't throw it, but I can drop it!

I poke my head out from behind the rock and activate Poison Synthesis.

Obviously, I'm not making Weak Poison. I use the toxin I've been honing throughout my whole life as a spider: my ultra-potent Spider Poison.

A sphere of venom appears before my eyes, and gravity pulls it down.

The monkey climbing the wall can't avoid it.

The poison hits it right in the face, and it shrieks in agony as it falls.

This could work!

Quickly, I confirm my MP consumption. It only used up 1 point. In other words, I can launch up to 40 shots with full MP. With the amount I've already spent on Thread Control, that leaves me about 25 shots.

If they all hit, I could take out around half the monkey forces!

I immediately drop a second shot. Another hit, another monkey down.

Time to move onto the next one. Now this is a strategy I should count on whenever possible.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Synthesis LV 1] has become [Poison Synthesis LV 2].> My skill level just rose, but I can't check on that right now.

Spider Poison is probably stronger than whatever new venom I just got, anyway.

I succeed in knocking down a fair number of the monkeys, but they're starting to react accordingly. They're avoiding the area directly below my nest and climbing up on either side instead.

I shower them with as much poison as I can before they all make it out of my range.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Hit LV 2] has become [Hit LV 3].> Nice, nice. The monkeys are dropping like flies.

But a lot of them have still escaped to the sides. The poison bombs aren't going to work anymore at this rate. I'm worried about how little MP I have left, anyway, so maybe this is for the best.

I extend some silk toward the monkeys that shifted sideways.

This fight is only just getting started.

The monkeys are still climbing the wall.

I'm using Thread Control to lay down sticky threads on the wall directly in their path.

This is bad. I don't have enough MP. I might've used too much for Poison Synthesis.

If it comes down to it, though, I could probably just apply the threads manually without using Thread Control.

Another stone comes flying in my direction, so I quickly take cover behind the rock.

The monkeys still on the ground are chucking stones incessantly. Even if one hits me, it won't be a fatal injury by any means, but it's still super-annoying.

The closest monkeys rush right into my sticky zone.

Of course, they get trapped in place immediately.

That should buy me some time, because if the monkeys in the lead stop moving, it ought to cause a bottleneck for— *Geh?!*

Those assholes are using their own allies as footholds to keep climbing!

There's still more of the sticky buffer zone left, but at this rate, they'll break through way faster than I expected!

Dammit! I have no time to think now.

I aim toward a particularly large group of monkeys and fire a casting net. I leave the hapless victims to seal their own fates.

The more they struggle, the more they'll get tangled, until it's impossible for them to move at all. The resulting lump of monkeys and webbing will create a worthy obstacle in the middle of the path.

As a general rule, once the monkeys are caught, I can afford to put them out of my mind. After all, their stats seem too low for them to escape from my threads.

This time, I'm not using Thread Control.

My basic strategy is to immobilize all the monkeys with only my sticky thread.

After that, I can take my time in finishing them off.

I launch a second casting net. Again, several monkeys are ensnared.

As I'm about to fire off the third net, a rock comes flying at me. I dodge it in a panic.

These guys are way too good at working together.

On top of that, they're getting cautious of my casting nets and moving even farther to the left and right. Now I can only catch one or two with each trap.

These guys are way smarter than any monsters I've fought before!

If they're this smart, why aren't they noticing that I'm not nearly big enough to be worth their while as prey?! What are they hoping to get out of beating a tiny spider like me?!

But these guys are clearly coming at me with the desire to defeat me at all costs.

C'mon, give it a rest. I can't deal with this level of fervor directed toward me, all right? You should devote all that passion to something else. Like _____, for example (fill in the blank yourself).

I keep pumping out thread everywhere while I rant at the attackers pointlessly in my mind.

Since they've scattered so far to the sides, I have to try and spread my webbing far and wide.

I'm trying to be as sparing with Thread Control as possible. If I run out of MP in this situation, this'll get hairy.

Why don't I just stay inside my simple home? Well, because I'm three hundred feet above the ground.

My threads are definitely strong, but they aren't invincible. They're weak to fire, for one thing, and that earth dragon blew them away like nothing.

While my webs boast high defense, they can still be broken by anything with attack power that exceeds it.

I don’t think the monkeys will be able to do that.

If I were on the ground, I obviously would’ve simply chosen to hole up inside. But this isn’t the ground.

If a monkey attacks my little web and gets stuck to it…

…then its weight will obviously be added to it.

And if that happens multiple times, my home may not be able to handle the load…

This simple shelter doesn’t have a foundation anchoring it down. It’s just attached to the wall and ceiling with some sticky thread.

It can bear my weight and that of the rock without much trouble. But I don’t know how much more it can take beyond that.

I consider expanding it and increasing its stability, but instead I decide to try and keep the monkeys from getting any closer. My logic is that even expanding my web would only increase the possible load it can bear by so much.

Still, it would be good enough for the number of monkeys…

Or it would have been, in the beginning.

Why only at that time, you ask? Because the number of monkeys isn’t decreasing at all!

I thought maybe I just failed to finish off the ones I hit with poison, but their corpses are piled up at the bottom of the wall. So it isn’t like they’ve been revived or anything.

No, it’s just that there are more monkeys than there were initially.

They must’ve called for reinforcements. Ha-ha… I don’t know where they’re all coming from, but their numbers are definitely increasing. There were only fifty or so at first, but now there’s easily twice as many. And that number is still rising. Not being able to see an end to this marathon isn’t exactly reassuring.

What am I gonna do? Seriously, what now? Not only is my MP drained, now my red stamina bar is starting to get too low for comfort.

Probably because I’ve been spinning threads this whole time.

If I run out of stamina, it’s all over. I won’t be able to produce any more.

So I have to avoid that, no matter what.

I prepare a Morning Spider.

My target is the monkey that’s closest to me.

I give it a toss, and it hits the mark.

Next, I let the stickiness of the thread do the work and yank it up toward me.

Quickly, I restrain the monkey as it tries to struggle. Then I strike with Poison Fang.

In the process, a rock hits me.

Ouch! But I only lost 5 HP.

As I expected, there isn’t much power in the missiles by the time they reach me. It hurts, but I ignore it with the help of Pain Nullification and Pain Mitigation.

The monkey soon draws its last breath thanks to my venom.

Time to eat!

I make quick work of the meal. I have to finish as soon as possible and return to the battlefront.

The monkeys are still struggling in my sticky threads. Most of them are so ensnared that they’re essentially immobilized, but their bodies are forming a path for the rest of their comrades. Slowly but surely, the other monkeys are drawing closer.

I’ve managed to recover some of my stamina, but it’s probably safe to assume that I won’t have that chance again.

So it’s all the more important that I eat every last bite to serve as fuel for the rest of the battle!

Whew! All gone!

I get the feeling that only increased the monkeys’ murderous rage toward me, but it’s too late for that now!

I am the predator! Nobody’s gonna make prey out of me!

I spray threads all over the place.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Concentration LV 2] has become [Concentration LV 3].> Since I’m focusing as hard as I am, my Concentration skill even levels up.

But I don’t care about that at the moment. If I let down my guard even for a second at this point, I’m screwed.

There are tons of monkeys piled up below me, covered in thread.

And yet their numbers aren’t decreasing. In fact, there are even more of them.

The number of immobilized monkeys is increasing, sure, but their reinforcements have been swelling faster.

It’s as if all the monkeys in the area are gathering right here.

I only have 2 MP left.

I don’t know what negative effects there may be when my MP reaches 0, so I can’t use it anymore, just to be safe. That means I can’t use Thread Control now, either.

But at the moment, that isn’t too big of an issue.

Because the monkey vanguard is right before me now.

They’ve closed the distance between us to the point where Thread Control isn’t even necessary.

I produce another thread. Another monkey gets caught and tangled in it.

And what it does next is utterly ridiculous.

It jumps.

The monkey crashes to the ground with a dull thud. From this height, not even a monster has any hope of surviving the fall.

Given the choice between dying or getting stuck in the path of their comrades and hindering their progress, these freaking monkeys actually choose death.

Unbelievable.

I can't help but shiver at this disturbing thought process.

I had faintly hoped that if I kept countering them, the monkeys would eventually give up, but clearly that's not going to happen. These monkeys won't stop until they get to me. The only two ways this can end are if they kill me or if I kill all of them.

A stone flies at me. But I can't even avoid it anymore. I don't have a second to spare.

The stone hits my body, and my HP decreases. But thanks to Pain Nullification and Pain Mitigation, I'm able to ignore it.

I entrust the HP I've lost to my Auto-Recovery skill.

Even as the stone hits me, I keep streaming out more thread.

It's my only chance of surviving this situation.

Part of me was disdainful of these monkeys before. I mean, they were nothing compared to that earth dragon.

Certainly, most opponents have nothing on that insanely powerful thing.

But that doesn't mean I can look down on them.

What an idiot I've been. Did I forget how weak I am myself? Compared to me, just about anything could be a formidable enemy. What made me think I could take on small-fry so easily? Not to mention that even though I'm weaker than these guys, they're coming at me with such determination that not even death deters them.

Given all that, there's no reason I should've expected to be able to skate through this without any problems.

So now, I have to summon my resolve and face this with everything I have.

Another stone strikes my body.

It's only one short moment. For just a single moment, I'm startled by the impact.

In that moment, a monkey catches one of my legs. More than half of its body

is bound up in thread, yet it reaches out with its free right arm.

My leg emits a not-very-pleasant cracking sound.

Trying to endure the crushing pain, I manage to jab my poison fangs into the hand on my leg.

At around the same time that the monkey's strength expires, half of my leg is torn off.

It hurts. It's incredibly painful, and I can feel it despite my Pain Mitigation.

Since it's only part of my leg, maybe HP Auto-Recovery will fix it? Hopefully it'll recover if I level up, at least.

But I have no time to worry about my lost limb right now.

That attack has stolen too much of my precious time.

Another monkey will arrive any second now.

I make another thread. Now I'm starting to panic. My stamina is running low again.

My thread connects with a monkey, which jumps out into empty space.

Paying no attention to his fate, I launch the next one.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small taratect has increased from LV 4 to LV 5.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Concentration LV 3] has become [Concentration LV 4].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Hit LV 3] has become [Hit LV 4].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Solidity LV 2] has become [Solidity LV 3].> <Skill points acquired.>

The moment I hear that voice, I quickly evacuate into my simplified home.

It's good timing, but there's a disadvantage to it, too.

Molting.

I hurriedly peel off my old skin. My torn leg has recovered without a problem. Tossing the husk aside, I immediately return to the front lines. Even the short

time that molting takes could be fatal in this situation.

Just as I'd expected, a monkey has gotten stuck to my modest web.

They've reached my final line of defense.

When I leveled up, my MP and SP both refilled, but it might be too little, too late.

No, wait. I can still do this.

I extend a leg outside my simple home.

A monkey grabs it immediately, but what does that matter?

I spray out as much thread as I can, forming a huge clump of webbing.

Then I pour everything I have into activating Thread Control. Little by little, my power permeates into the threads.

Since my skill level has gone up, the number of fibers I can control at once has increased considerably.

Of course, I can't control the entirety of this big cluster, but that's fine.

Still, given the huge number I'm trying to manipulate, my recovered MP is disappearing again at an alarming speed.

Then, my captured leg makes another awful sound.

At the same time, my entire body is dragged out of my home.

More monkey arms reach in from outside.

I manage to keep my head free, but now my body's been caught.

The monkeys are merciless, trying to crush me with all their strength.

My HP is rapidly decreasing, and intense pain tears through me.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Life LV 1].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Magic Mass LV 1].> Just as I hear the Divine Voice (temp.), my threads are ready.

I use all the power I have left to manipulate the thread. Following my commands, the webbed lump detaches from the wall and falls. Naturally, the monkeys stuck there fall with it.

With a load roar, the wall of yarn and the entangled monkeys go crashing down toward the remaining invaders below.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small taratect has increased from LV 5 to LV 6.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Thread Control LV 6] has become [Thread Control LV 7].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Overeating LV 3] has become [Overeating LV 4].> <Skill points acquired.>

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small taratect has increased from LV 6 to LV 7.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Pain Mitigation LV 5] has become [Pain Mitigation LV 6].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Stealth LV 5] has become [Stealth LV 6].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Evasion LV 1] has become [Evasion LV 2].> <Skill points acquired.>

I've succeeded in slaughtering a multitude of monkeys all at once.

Thanks to the molting procedure of leveling up, my captured body and leg are freed from the monkeys' grasp.

All they hold now are two layers of my old skin.

My enormous thread bomb took care of most of the monkeys, but the ones that were attached to my simple home are still alive.

Even so, they're already trapped in my web.

I add more thread to immobilize them and then finish them off decisively with my poison.

When the last one stops moving, I breathe a sigh of relief.

It isn't quite over yet, but I made it through the first wave.



My heart wants to relax, but I whip it into shape. No, it isn't over yet. The monkeys haven't all been wiped out. I can't let my guard down until every last one has been annihilated.

I immediately exit my web and survey the situation below.

A dreadful spectacle greets my eyes.

I see the remains of the enemies who'd smashed into the ground, tangled in my threads, and the others who'd been crushed beneath them.

And among this gruesome carnage, I spot the survivors, who still haven't lost their will to fight.

I immediately start laying more threads on the wall.

The monkeys haven't given up yet. The moment they're ready, they'll come after me again.

Before that happens, I have to make preparations of my own.

Reinforcements are still coming. Seriously, how many of them are there…? Give me a break already.

And among those new enemies is something I really didn't want to see.

<Bagragratch LV 3: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Bagragratch LV 4: Status Appraisal Failed>

<Bagragratch LV 6: Status Appraisal Failed>

A mouth like a giant crocodile's. And inside that mouth, a countless number of fiendish, sawlike teeth. A height nearly double that of the monkeys I've fought off so far. A much thicker body, too. Freakish, deformed, giant monkeys.

It's the monster I first saw when I entered this wide-open area.

The monkeys' species name was anogratch. I should've noticed the similar name. That giant monkey is the evolved form of these guys.

And now several of them have shown up as horrible reinforcements for the monkeys.

There are three of them, mingling with the other kinds.

Their levels are lower than the first one I saw, but they're still superior evolved monsters, so I can't let my guard down just because of that. Besides, even the regular monkeys are fierce fighters, so their evolved forms can't possibly be weak. They look horrifying, too, so it's probably safe to assume they're way stronger than the monkeys.

Sure, they probably don't hold a candle to the earth dragon, but they're still stronger than my current opponents, and there are three of them.

The difficulty of this area has jumped up again.

I freeze in fear, but only for a second.

As the surviving monkeys start making their move, my mind is dragged back to reality.

Giving a wide berth to the fallen lump of thread, the monkeys start climbing the walls from the far left and right again.

Judging by their movement, they're clearly being wary of my thread now. These guys are tough customers.

Keeping an eye on the giant monkeys, I continue adding more threads.

The freaky ones haven't moved yet. Maybe they aren't so interested in collaborating with the regular monkeys?

That'd be nice, but I can't afford to be optimistic. I have to keep an eye on them at all times.

The primates have apparently given up on flinging rocks.

It didn't do much anyway, and maybe the collapsed pile of thread is now preventing them from reaching me that way.

So they've abandoned the stone throwing and are now simply concentrating on climbing the walls. That works just fine for me. Those rocks were quite a hindrance. They damaged my HP and hampered my movements, so not having to worry about that anymore is one small mercy.

Then, one of the giant monkeys starts moving.

Slowly, it lifts up a boulder. Wait, a boulder?!

It’s hefting the huge thing without any apparent difficulty, but that’s the big boulder I originally cut up for my little home!

I thought it was firmly attached to the ground, but this thing just lifted it up like it’s nothing! Even the tiny slice I made before was wicked heavy!

Okay, what am I going to do about this? Wait, what is it lifting it like that for? No way!

I hurriedly evacuate from my simplified home.

An instant later, the giant rock shoots up like a cannonball and smashes right into it.

When the dust clears, I see that the rock has utterly devastated my web.

You’ve gotta be kidding me, right?

That’s way too much power. If I take a hit from that, there’ll be nothing left of me but a smear on the wall!

Luckily, there are no more boulders like that near the giant monkey. So there won’t be any more crazy cannonballs flying my way.

However, my last line of defense, my simple home, has been annihilated.

From here on out, I’ll have to fight without it. That isn’t good.

Not being able to rely on it for defense is bad enough, but what’s worse is that I no longer have a good foothold.

The only reason I was able to fight off the monkeys so far was that I could be confident in my footing, which helped me focus on attacking.

With that gone, I could easily slip and fall with a single misstep.

Since I’m connected to the ceiling by a thread, I won’t crash straight to the ground, but I’ll still end up totally defenseless.

If I give the monkeys an opportunity, no way they’ll pass it up.

I make up my mind in a snap.

Even if it’s a rush job, I have to make a new thread foothold.

In the meantime, I won’t be able to work on laying more traps elsewhere, but

once the monkeys get here, I won't have time to build anything.

If I don't make one now, I'll definitely regret it later.

All right! I've made a scaffold big enough for me to stand on!

Now I have a spot to take on the enemy. The second round of this defensive battle is about to begin.

The monkeys are closing in. I continue shooting thread toward them.

For the most part, it's just like the first round. However, there are a few key differences.

The monkeys know how my thread works now.

They've figured out that if they get caught in it, they won't be able to escape.

And so, the monkeys in the lead are spreading out as far as possible and jumping onto the thread. They're trying to cover up as much of the sticky trap as possible with their own bodies to help their allies behind them pass more easily.

As a result, quite a few monkeys are now stuck, spread-eagled on the wall. They're even preparing for another thread-and-monkey bomb by clinging tightly to the rock surface.

Now the next wave proceeds over the path that their comrades have made for them with their bodies.

Like last time, they throw themselves down as soon as my web gets them.

It's an insanely suicidal strategy. They care more about killing me than about preserving their own lives. But it's also very thoroughly planned out. These guys are seriously tough.

However, no matter how many countermeasures they try to take, the sacrifices are still reducing their numbers.

No new reinforcements have appeared since the giant monkeys arrived.

At this rate, the monkeys will be wiped out before they can reach me. As long as the giant ones don't make another move.

I'm still on high alert.

Even as I face off against the regular monkeys, I keep an eye on their evolved brethren at all times.

It's nerve-racking work. Thanks to that, my Concentration skill level has increased.

Finally, there's movement from that direction. It's the lowest-level giant monkey.

The creature does an abrupt about-face and begins marching away.

It would've been great if it kept going and just left, but of course, things are never that easy.

The giant monkey turns back in this direction and begins to run in a straight line.

No way!

My intuition sounds an alarm in my brain: *Yes way*, it tells me. Immediately, I prepare my counterattack.

My prediction is unfortunately correct. The giant lug takes a running start and jumps over the mass of threads and monkeys in a single bound.

Then, those terrifyingly powerful legs launch it right toward me.

Finishing my preparations just in time, I fling a casting net toward the goliath as it closes in.

Unable to dodge in midair, it becomes caught in the web.

Luckily, the impact of the net shifts the creature's trajectory slightly downward.

It sails forward and crashes into the wall right beneath me.

With a loud *thunk*, it sticks to the threads on the wall and falls still. Even so, it quickly regains consciousness and starts struggling furiously to escape.

Adding more gluey strands to hinder it, I activate Poison Synthesis at the same time to create some Spider Poison and drop it toward that enormous mouth.

The giant monkey shrieks in agony as my one-two combo connects.

I’m a little alarmed that a single shot of Spider Poison isn’t enough to kill it, but all the same I go ahead and synthesize a second dose.

The ball of venom lands beautifully right between those horrific jaws.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small taratect has increased from LV 7 to LV 8.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Vision Expansion LV 1] has become [Vision Expansion LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Acid Resistance LV 3] has become [Acid Resistance LV 4].> <Skill points acquired.>

Leveling up is proof that my humongous foe has breathed its last.

I hurriedly peel off my molted skin. There’s no time to be relieved.

As soon as I turn back toward the invading monkeys, I see another one of the giants. Using its partner’s jump as a diversion, this one has been clambering up along the same route as the regular monkeys.

How can it be so fast?!

It was on the ground just a moment ago, but now it’s practically on top of me. The huge monkey mercilessly crushes the smaller ones in its path as it approaches.

With its impressive speed and grip, it’ll complete its journey in the blink of an eye.

I hurriedly launch a thread in its direction.

The giant monkey dodges it effortlessly, despite hanging off a sheer wall.

But it dodges into an area where there’s no path of monkeys to tread on.

The only thing waiting there is a solid field of my webbing.

The giant monkey adheres to it in no time flat.

Immediately, it struggles to tear the thread away, but even its power can’t rip through my silk so easily.

But as it tries to deal with its trap, the wall itself starts to produce disturbing crumbling sounds.

Of course, I can't let that slide. I waste no time in covering the creature's body in thread.

That should hold it for a while. With that handled, I whirl back to search for the third giant monkey.

Since the second one has made its move, I have no doubt that the third one will be quick to follow.

Sure enough, my prediction is correct.

I spot the third one in no time.

It's coming right toward me, its huge mouth already wide open.

?!?!

What was I thinking, assuming that I practically had this in the bag?

I react without thinking, moving purely on instinct.

Namely, I jump out of the way, off my foothold into empty space.

Even then, I can't dodge it completely, and the massive jaws crush all of my right legs as well as part of my abdomen.

My HP plummets.

Overwhelmed with pain, I flicker in and out of consciousness.

But if I pass out now, I'll never wake up again.

I hurriedly launch a thread in midair. It latches on to the wall, stopping my fall.

However, the rebound smashes me against the stone, nearly knocking me out for a moment.

Clenching my fangs, I force myself to stay awake.

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Acquired skill [Faint Resistance LV 1].> Probably with help from my new skill, I manage to hang on to consciousness.

My line of sight swivels upward, toward the web foothold where I had been a

moment ago.

The third giant monkey has totally destroyed the scaffold and is now caught in the remains.

Well, of course it is. I didn't make an ordinary foothold. Just in case, I built it so it could serve as a trap if necessary. Although I didn't expect it to be destroyed in a single blow.

I struggle upward.

Since half of my legs are out of commission, I use Thread Control to help pull myself up.

I ascend past the thrashing giant monkey.

Using Thread Control, I restrain my adversary, holding its large maw open with webbing.

Then I synthesize some Spider Poison and send it right down the thing's gullet.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small taratect has increased from LV 8 to LV 9.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [HP Auto-Recovery LV 2] has become [HP Auto-Recovery LV 3].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Life LV 1] has become [Life LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Instantaneous LV 1] has become [Instantaneous LV 2].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Persistent LV 1] has become [Persistent LV 2].> <Skill points acquired.>

I level up and molt once more.

Whew. I thought I was gonna die. That was a really close call. If I hadn't leveled up with that kill, I might've actually died this time.

But I made it.

The second giant monkey is getting close to escaping its restraints, so I slather it with more thread. The rest of the army hasn't gotten as far as I feared, since

their evolved compatriots trampled the path they went to such great pains to create.

In fact, their cooperation is in shambles and has given way to total chaos.

There's no more rock artillery, and their numbers have decreased considerably.

Huh? Wait, at this point, can't I just escape instead of going out of my way to wipe them all out?

No, it'd be silly to get this far and then just run away. If I do that, then there was no point in leaving my home in the first place. How could I run away now, when I swore never to do it again?

The very last monkey is caught in my silk right before me.

Its outstretched hand falls just short of reaching me.

I wrap more thread around the hand, rendering it totally motionless.

Then I look around.

Nothing but more trapped monkeys, as far as the eye can see. There isn't a single one that can move freely.

Just to be sure, I take a long look around the ground below, but there are no more reinforcements.

Straining my ears, I can't hear anything else coming, either.

Finally, I've immobilized all my attackers.

It's tempting to relax now that I've apparently won, but I can't let my guard down just yet.

They can't move anymore, but I haven't killed them.

Below me, I can see more wrapped-up monkeys than I care to count. Among them are the conspicuously larger shapes of the giant monkeys. The last one of those is still struggling to tear through the threads entrapping it.

In reality, it's probably strong enough to actually break out. Not right away, but if I leave it to its own devices, it'll free itself sooner or later.

Which was why I kept adding more threads to restrain it whenever it came close to doing so.

And so, I intercepted the charging monkeys while keeping the giant one in check.

It was a lot harder than I expected. Good thing I didn't let my guard down after I killed the first two.

Since restraining the last one took more effort than I thought it would, my MP and SP are getting low.

The only reason I'm keeping it alive is that I simply don't have time to go and finish it off.

The other monkeys kept coming at me, so I didn't have the chance.

And to make things even harder, the giant monkey was smack in the middle of its allies' route to me.

If I tried to go and finish it off, I'd walk right into a sea of enemies.

So obviously I wasn't going to do something suicidal.

What I was most afraid of was the regular monkeys assisting the giant one.

If the cooperative efforts of the regular guys came together with the strength of their hulking companion, it was very possible that they could break through my bonds.

But luckily, they make no attempt to do so.

Despite their tendency to prioritize efficiency over their own lives, they chose to not take the strategy with the most obvious advantage: helping the giant monkey escape and attacking me together.

I'm relieved and all, but the behavioral principles of these monkeys is a total mystery to me. Although really, it's not like I understood this crazy attack in the first place. There's no way just eating me would be enough to attack so desperately, so I have no idea what their motive is.

The only explanation I can think of is that they're trying to avenge the first monkey that I killed and ate, but does that reason explain the lengths they went

to? Hmm.

Oh well. There's no point getting hung up on that. I have no way of knowing what some monsters are thinking.

Anyway, I go to finish off the giant monkey.

Naturally, I don't quite have the guts to go up and bite such a dangerous creature directly.

So, like the other two, I use Poison Synthesis to drop some Spider Poison into its mouth from above.

After eating two of my poison attacks (literally), the thing finally stills.

With the biggest threat out of the way, I can go about taking out the other monkeys with my bite, one by one.

Even Poison Fang uses a tiny amount of SP, but I've never had to worry about that before.

The cost is incredibly low, so I haven't been in a situation where it threatened to use up my SP.

But this time, there are just way too many targets. Even Poison Fang will deplete SP eventually.

So I have to stop partway through to eat and restore some stamina.

Rendered immobile by my webbing, the monkeys are still desperate to put up some kind of resistance, so they shriek at me threateningly when I approach. I sense a hint of fear in their cries, too, but what do I care about that?

They're the ones who picked a fight with me, so they should've been prepared to die themselves.

You're not gonna catch me losing any sleep over killing something that tried to kill me first.

So I ignore their struggles and finish them off.

<Condition satisfied. Acquired title [Merciless].>

<Acquired skills [Heretic Magic LV 1] [Heresy Resistance LV 1] as a result of Title [Merciless].> <Skill [Heretic Magic LV 1] has been integrated into

[Heretic Magic LV 2].> Oh hey, I got a title. Another disturbing one, at that.

That's also my second title to come with Heretic Magic. This has to be some attempt at shaming me. I'm not that much of a heretic! Honest!

For now, I decide that checking out my new skills can wait until later.

I leveled up a whole bunch of times during the battle and gained a crapload of skills anyway, so it's probably better to check them out all at once.

<Experience has reached the required level. Individual small taratect has increased from LV 9 to LV 10.> <All basic attributes have increased.>

<Skill proficiency level-up bonus acquired.>

<Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Poison Synthesis LV 2] has become [Poison Synthesis LV 3].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Throw LV 2] has become [Throw LV 3].> <Proficiency has reached the required level. Skill [Magic Mass LV 1] has become [Magic Mass LV 2].> <Skill points acquired.>

<Condition satisfied. Individual small taratect can now evolve.> As I mechanically finish off all the monkeys, my level rises again.

Oh, huh. Level 10 already? That's fast!

I mean, I did level up quite a bit during battle, but I can already evolve again?!

<There are multiple options for evolution. Please choose from the following.

- Taratect
- Small poison taratect

>

Hmm?

I was expecting Taratect sans *small* to be an option, but small poison taratect?

Is that a race that's ultra-specialized in poisons or something?

Well, I should probably put this off for later, too. I don't want to evolve until I can guarantee my safety. At the very least, I have to finish off all the other

monkeys.

<Condition satisfied. Acquired title [Monster Slaughterer].>

<Acquired skills [Herculean Strength LV 1] [Sturdy LV 1] as a result of Title [Monster Slaughterer].> <Skill [Strength LV 3] has been integrated into [Herculean Strength LV 1].> <Skill [Solidity LV 3] has been integrated into [Sturdy LV 1].>

Hmm? More titles?

It's another dicey one, too.

Is this an advanced version of Monster Slayer? And why did Strength and Solidity get integrated into different skills?

I have to remember to check all this later.

In the meantime, I go through the monkey-disposal routine.

Poison Fang, Poison Fang, occasionally pausing for a snack or adding more threads.

Until finally, I'm the only creature left alive in the area.

I won.

Now it's finally over, for real this time.

All the strength drains from my body at once. However, there's one emotion that bubbles up more than simple fatigue.

I survived! Whoo-hoo!

Look at me! I'm alive! I'm aliiive!

When I made my narrow getaway from the earth dragon's onslaught, I was overwhelmed with fear.

But I was a little bit frustrated, too.

I made an oath when I was driven out of my home in the Upper Stratum. I swore to live with pride from that moment on. But I've been breaking that promise over and over ever since.

I had no pride. I just kept running away so that I could survive.

I don’t think that was the wrong decision. If I hadn’t fled those times, I wouldn’t be alive now.

But even if it was the right choice, the fact remains that I threw away my dignity and fled.

Always running, always scared, always frustrated with myself.

But this time, I stood my ground and lived to tell the tale.

Admittedly, that was because I didn’t have the option of escaping.

But still, I stood my ground and won the battle.

This is my first fair-and-square victory since arriving in the Lower Stratum.

I’m pumped.

Right now, I feel like I can take on anything that might come my way.

Ha-ha-ha!

Heroes, demon lords, whoever or whatever, come at me!

Ah, no earth dragons though, please.

Once again, I take a moment to bask in the joy of my victory.

I’m aliiiiiive!



13 The End

“Okay, Goyef, please lead the way.”

“Yes, sir. And may I say it’s a pleasure to work with you, Sir Julius the Hero.”

The labyrinth guide, Goyef, bowed graciously when I greeted him.

As his title implied, his job was to guide people through the Great Elroe Labyrinth.

Goyef was particularly skilled, a veteran labyrinth guide.

Because of my position as the Hero, I’d been given one of the most capable guides around for my venture into the labyrinth.

“Now then, Sir Hero, are you entering the labyrinth this time to dispatch a monster?”

“Indeed I am. Apparently, there’s been a sighting of a unique taratect. I’m here to take it down.”

A group of adventurers had reported seeing a particularly unusual member of the spider-type taratect species.

As the Hero, I was called upon to defeat it.

“All right. Shall we?”

With a gesture toward Goyef and my comrades, I stepped through the entrance into the vast Great Elroe Labyrinth.

AFTERWORD

Hello to old and new readers alike! I am Okina Baba.

So I'm A Spider, So What? was originally posted on the website Become a Novelist!, and now it's been given the honor of being published as a book.

"Wait, what? A book? Have you lost your mind, Mr. Publisher?" That was more or less my reaction.

I mean, it's about a spider!

That's not exactly visually appealing.

And to you, the readers who picked it up: Have you lost your minds?

If you actually read this whole book, you can't be sane.

Either that, or you just really, reeeally like spiders.

With that said, I have a few choice words for you: Thank you very much!

Finally, I'd like to thank a few other people as well.

To Kadokawa for picking up such an unappealing story; my chief editor, Mr. K; the wonderful Tsukasa Kiryu, who took time out of a busy schedule to make these illustrations; and everyone who supported this book: Thank you!

I'm sure I'll end up being in your debt again in the future, so thank you again in advance.

My adventure is only just beginning!