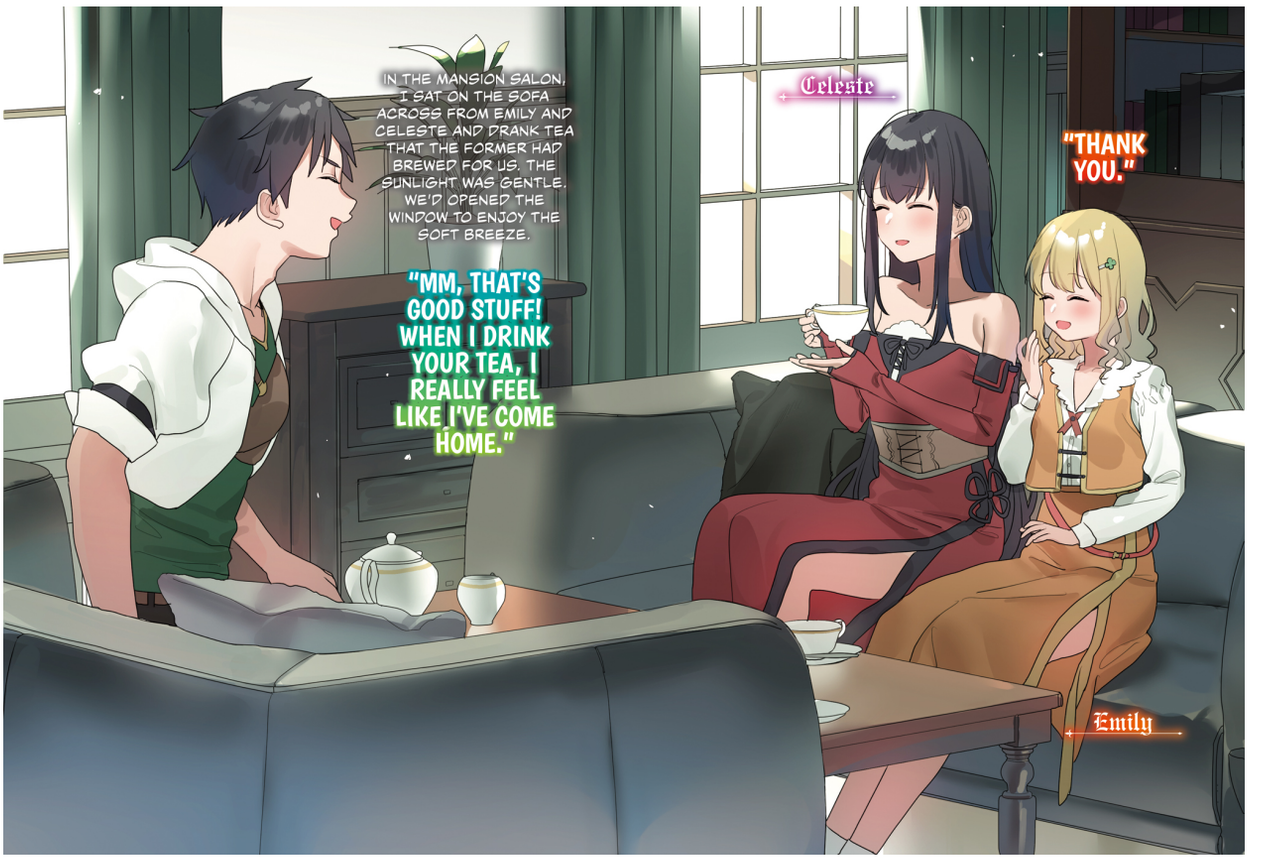
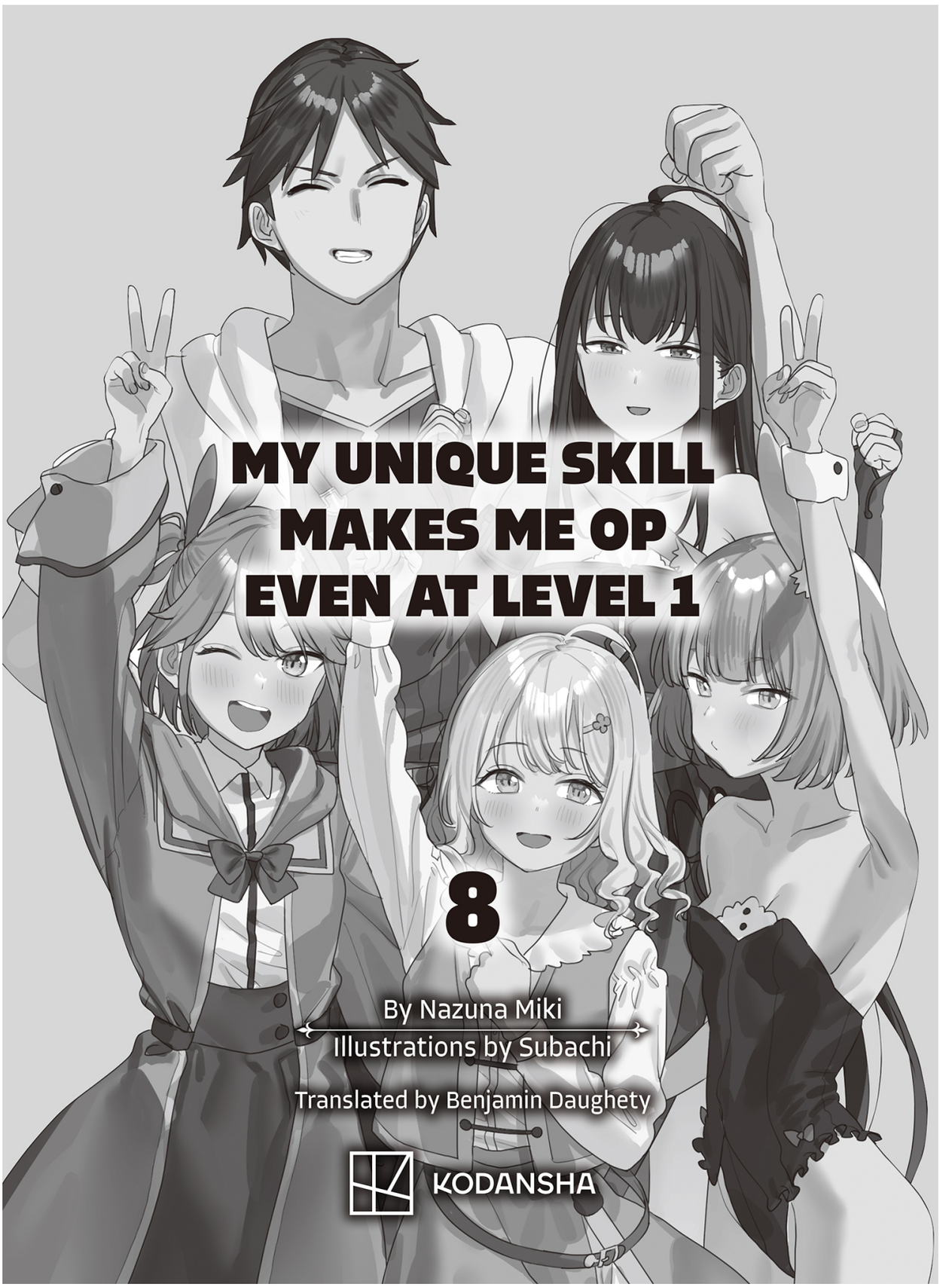

8
Nazuna Miki
Art by Subachi
MY UNIQUE SKILL MAKES ME OP EVEN AT LEVEL 1


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MY UNIQUE SKILL MAKES ME OP EVEN AT LEVEL 1


THIS WAS THE POWER OF NUMBERS, TOO. VOLLEYS OF BULLETS FLEW ONE AFTER ANOTHER, LIKE NOBUNAGA'S THREE-LINE FIRING FORMATION. I LOADED MORE BULLETS AND ONCE AGAIN SHOT THEM DOWN.
"H-HOLY COW..."
THE PREVIOUSLY TERRIFIED ADVENTURER WAS STUNNED.
Ryota


IN THE MANSION SALON, I SAT ON THE SOFA ACROSS FROM EMILY AND CELESTE AND DRANK TEA THAT THE FORMER HAD BREWED FOR US. THE SUNLIGHT WAS GENTLE. WE'D OPENED THE WINDOW TO ENJOY THE SOFT BREEZE.
"MM, THAT'S GOOD STUFF! WHEN I DRINK YOUR TEA, I REALLY FEEL LIKE I'VE COME HOME."
Celeste
"THANK YOU."
Emily


"EVERYONE ELSE LOVES IT, TOO!"
Alice



MY UNIQUE SKILL MAKES ME OP EVEN AT LEVEL 1

8

By Nazuna Miki
Illustrations by Subachi
Translated by Benjamin Daughety

KODANSHA

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1, 8

A VERTICAL Book

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CONTENTS

221. Selective Breeding
222. No S-Rank, Except…
223. Ryota's Vintage Wine
224. Alcohol and Fish
225. The Power of Salmon
226. The S+ Man
227. Three Flames
228. Perpetual Motion
229. Endless Waltz
230. Rerolling
231. Bodley Ryota
232. Best Intentions
233. Five-Minute Cooking
234. A Rule for Ryota
235. Producing Unique Monsters
236. A Village of Unique Monsters
237. A Single Monster
238. From 1 to Cap in Three Minutes
239. Miike Aurum
240. Golden Ryota
241. A Feast
242. The Two Ryotas
243. Bonus Stage
244. The 20,000,000-a-Day Man
245. Raiding Solo
246. What Only Ryota Can Do
247. Phosphorus = Burny
248. No Need for Money
249. Ryota > Alice > Rebecca
250. Holding a Spot…Again
251. A Million People
252. Why I Was Summoned
253. Three-Fold Round
254. Ryota's Gift
255. System Development
256. Ryota Would Never
257. Pity Does a Man No Favors
258. King of the Curveball
259. The Field Trip

Bonus Story:
The First Carrot

221. Selective Breeding

At night, we went to our usual pub, Villa di H, where I partook in the daily rotation of beer. Today's beer came with a strong citrus aroma.

"I wonder what exactly this scent is," I mused.

"It must be grapefruit," answered the girl sitting across from me after she took a sip.

It was incongruent, almost even criminal, to see a 4'3" girl in a pub. Back in my world, people might see the two of us and call the cops on me.

But instead of the cops, a young adventurer ran over.

"Excuse me! I'm your biggest fan, Ms. Emily! May I have your autograph?!"

After insisting that he was one of her admirers, he got her autograph on his morning star weapon, even got a handshake as a bonus, and left with a big, dreamy smile.

"Same old story, huh?" I said. "Do your fans approach you when I'm gone, too?"

"Very often in dungeons," Emily replied, both bashful and troubled over it.

"Uh-huh. Well, Arsenic's monsters are all rocks, so it makes sense that power-favored adventurers gather there. No wonder it's full of people who admire you."

"Everyone puts me on too high a pedestal."

"That's not true at all," I said, glancing around us.

They weren't all about to beg for an autograph, but even in this pub, there were adventurers who looked favorably at her. I thought for a moment…about the day we met.

"Emily, mind standing up for a second?"

"Okay… Is this fine?"

"Now, try standing on one leg… Can you still lift your hammer like that?"

"I can. Why?" While standing on one leg, she easily lifted up the hammer she'd leaned against the table. That hammer was over six feet long. Way taller than Emily herself.

It was adorable how she could lift it like it was nothing. But now that I really thought about it, it was impressive. It was natural that people would be fascinated.

When she did this, eyes gathered on her.

"Why am I doing this, again?" she asked.

"That's one of your charms, Emily. A goddess bursting with power. If I was a raw power kind of guy, I'd die to be like you."

"You would…?"

"Yeah. What do you think is more charming? A macho man, or a little girl who's just as strong? It should be obvious."

"Hmm… I don't know." She cocked her head as she put her hammer back down and sat again. It seemed like she really didn't get it.

To be fair, that was another of her charms.

"Almost nobody has ever approached me for an autograph," I added.

“But of course.” With a smile, Emily picked up her glass with both hands and said, “You’re so incredible that everyone’s too shy to approach.”

“Shy?”

“Yes! Only the brave can talk to someone so impressive. You need to be confident in yourself before you can pull that off.”



“Is that how it works?”

“Remember the kinds of people who have approached you affably, Yoda.”

“Affably, huh…?” I tried to remember. Who approached me affably? Cell, Neptune, Nicholas…? “I get it. Those are all people with confidence.”

“Exactly!”

“All weirdos, too.”

“Every great person can be a little eccentric.”

“…So you’re saying I’m stuck interacting with weirdos from now on?”

“Birds of a feather. No normal person would build a village for outsiders out of their own pocket, after all.”

“Mgh…” I couldn’t argue against that. I had my reasons, but maybe that was all it looked like to others.

“More eccentric folk will gather around you.”

“That’s especially convincing coming from the first one,” I joked.

“Me? I’m normal—”

“No normal person would clean an entire dungeon and make even the monsters happy.”

“Eep!”

Emily was a goddess at housework. Thanks to her, our mansion was warm, bright, and filled with even more comfort than living with your parents.

Her power worked in dungeons, too. She'd once cleaned a dungeon like she did her own home, making the monsters so happy that they ended up napping alongside the poor, exhausted girl. In a way, she was a real dungeon master.

That counts as not normal, in my book.

And so, the two of us drank together and chatted about stuff. It was all trivial small talk, but it was a ton of fun.

"Excuse me," someone addressed us.

"Hmm?" I looked up.

A portly gentleman stood next to our table.

I knew that face.

"If it isn't Eric. C'mon, sit." I scooted over to make space for the gentleman, Eric.

He took off his top hat and sat next to me.

Eric—I met this gourmand not long after I came to this world. He'd heard the rumors that my drops were high quality and requested that I get him bamboo shoots.

Looking back, this was how the Ryota brand had started.

"What a coincidence," I said. "Here for the beer too, I'm guessing?"

"I was actually searching for you, Mr. Sato."

"For me?"

"Yes. I have another favor I'd like to ask of you… Mind hearing me out?"

"Sure, bring it on," I promptly replied.

After the last time, I'd heard a lot about him from various people.

Eric was a genuine gentleman and a gourmand. He'd dedicated nearly his entire life to the pursuit of fine food. His lifestyle was respectable. Unlike most requests, his didn't involve hurting people.

So I was happy to take it on.

"Now, what would you like me to get you?" I asked.

"That isn't quite what I want this time. I'd like help with… selective breeding, you might say."

"Selective breeding?" I hadn't heard that phrase in this world yet.

All production here was done in dungeons. Meat, fish, vegetables, and even air and water were dropped there. While this was my first time hearing the phrase in this context, I could tell that it meant doing something special in a dungeon.

"Have you heard of Lanthanum?" Eric asked me.

"Yeah, it gets name-dropped here a lot. It's a dungeon made for producing alcohol in the city Fylline, right?"

"Quite right. The dungeon drops all sorts of alcoholic drinks, including beer, wine, brandy, and more."

"Okay. What about it?"

"I bought a floor there."

"Huh?" I was amazed by his casual statement. "You bought it? As in, the entire dungeon floor?"

“Is that so surprising? My understanding is that you effectively own Aurum, no?”

“Oh… I guess… Maybe?”

“What do you plan to do with it?” Emily asked him.

“I’d like to have Mr. Sato perform selective breeding for me.”

“What does that involve, specifically?”

“It’s predicted that the next dungeon master appearance has a 99% chance of occurring on the B44.”

“…I see.” It started to make sense. “So that’s a thing you can do?”

Realizing that I’d figured it out, Eric flashed a friendly smile. “It will require some contrivance beforehand, however.”

Meanwhile, Emily struggled to keep up whatsoever. “What does it mean?” she asked.

“Basically, he wants me to keep the dungeon master locked up in one place without defeating it for a period of time,” I explained.

“In one place…?”

“Yeah. Remember, a dungeon master existing in one place for a long time changes the ecosystem of a dungeon.”

“Right… Oh! Will it only change one floor?”

“Seems like it.”

“This is something I can only ask of you, Mr. Sato,” Eric said. “Of someone who has not just the power to maintain a prolonged battle with a dungeon master, but to defeat it at will as well. The

world may be vast, but you are one of a kind.” He was really buttering me up.

“I just have one question. Have you done this before?”

“If you count chance occurrences, then yes.”

“I see. And all I have to do is kill it after the ecosystem changes?”

“Indeed.” The gentleman gourmand nodded firmly, eyes unwavering.

“Got it. Then I accept.”

Selective breeding in itself is typically a good thing, after all, so I decided to take on his request.

222. No S-Rank, Except...

I boarded a carriage that Eric had arranged for me and rode for a full day until reaching Fylline.

Incidentally, I came alone. None of the Family, and no Leia, either. A prolonged battle with a dungeon master sounded dangerous, and I didn't want to put them at risk, so I chose to come by myself.

It had been a long time since my last business trip. It felt like working away from home.

When I entered town, my immediate impression was that it was generally lively. The energy you might find in a tavern filled the entire city, and laughter could be heard from every direction.

As I peeked out of the carriage, I found that my impression was correct. Townspeople all over the place were toasting and drinking together. When you're drinking, you naturally need snacks, and stalls selling light meals were all over Fylline.

The townspeople bought said meals, drank, and laughed together. That was the sort of city it was.

"Is that Mr. Ryota Sato there?" someone asked.

"Hmm?" I turned toward them.

A boy in his mid-teens was looking up at the carriage. His hair was cut short enough to not need maintenance, and his cheeks were dotted with freckles that seemed fitting for his age.

"What's your name?"

“Terr Angos, sir. Mr. Eric told me I should show you ’round, Boss.”

“Okay.” I thought for a second and jumped out of the carriage.

“What’s up, Boss?”

“I’m tired of the carriage. I’d rather see the dungeon; mind showing me the way?”

“Gotcha.” Terr whispered something to the carriage driver, and the empty carriage drove off. “I’ll show ya. Which one, Boss?”

“Which what?”

“Fylline has two dungeons, Lanthanum and Cerium. Which one do ya wanna see, Boss?”

“I see… Lanthanum then, please. That’s the one Eric asked me for, and I’d like to know about the dungeon before the dungeon master is forecasted to appear.”

“Gotcha.” Terr led the way, and I followed behind him.

Our route took us straight through Fylline. All over the city, people were drinking. Not all of them were heavy drinkers; some were just having a single glass after work.

“Everyone sure drinks a lot here, huh?”

“Yeah. It’s Fylline, and stuff. Oh, look over there, Boss.”

“Huh? You mean at the well there?” I looked at the well by the roadside on his urging.

It looked like any other well to me. A middle-aged man slowly approached and drew water from it. Then, he brought it to his mouth, and he drank it all at once.

“Mmm!” he moaned.

“Wait a second. That water was a weird color,” I said.

“That’s beer, Boss.”

“Beer?”

“Fylline’s got enough booze to sell to other places, Boss. The cheap stuff that we can’t sell off, we make it free to drink.”

“What a city.”

I was speechless. Free booze, drinkable from the wells. It reminded me of a prefecture where you could get orange juice out of the tap.

“So it’s like how water is in other cities?” I asked him.

“Yup. Lots of duds, after all.”

“Duds?”

“High drop stats mean ya get higher-quality booze. Lower drop stats end up as cheap booze like that, Boss.”

“I see.”

It was like air or water in other dungeons, or substandard vegetables that weren’t worth trying to sell.

That means I’d get high-quality drinks with my S-rank drops, then, right?

I was a little excited to see what it would be like.

“Oh, if you’re goin’ into the dungeon, you’ll wanna buy one of those.” Terr stopped in front of an item shop and pointed at a rack full of bottles with blank labels.

“What are those?”

“You ever use a pickup box, Boss?”

“Yeah.”

More than that, I’d used the improved Pandora’s boxes. They were convenient items that instantly sucked up your drops. Margaret’s group used those to sell Princess Margaret’s Boxed Air boxes.

“That’s Fylline’s special version of those,” he explained. “Use those, and it’ll put a rating on your beer, right on the spot.”

“How does it rate it?”

“It gives it a rank, like A, B, C, D, E, F…”

“Interesting.” Convinced, I decided to buy five bottles for now.

Terr and I continued through the city and arrived at the dungeon. It was a busy one. People practically thronged in and out.

“Here we are, Boss. Lanthanum.”

“This is the one that only drops brewed drinks?”

“Yep.”

When we went in, I was a little surprised.

I’d been in many different dungeons so far, but this one was clearly different. In fact, its construction made me doubt that it could even be called a dungeon.

B1 of Lanthanum was like a ninja mansion on the inside. In the Japanese building-like interior, adventurers fought monsters.

And as for the monsters…

“They’re ashigaru…”

“Yup. The B1 monsters are flame ashigaru,” Terr confirmed.

I had to suppress a laugh. The monsters looked just like Japanese Sengoku-era light infantrymen.

The sight of the veritable army of monsters fighting adventurers in the Japanese-style mansion was reminiscent of a final battle in a castle keep. What felt off, however, was the fact that the ashigaru monsters were coated in flames. Their spears were burning, too.

“What’s up, Boss?” Terr asked me.

“Oh, nothing. Just surprised; I’ve never seen monsters like those before.”

“I get how ya feel.”

I gathered myself and took two things out: a gun in one hand, and one of the bottles I’d just bought in the other.

As a test, I decided to use the growth round instead of a normal bullet. The growth round had evolved enough that it could be substituted for a normal bullet with no loss of strength.

I aimed carefully…and fired at a gap in the monster’s armor. The approaching footsoldier staggered when it struck.

I fired again. After several shots in the gaps of its armor, I shot one finishing bullet and defeated the monster. It wasn’t very strong. To be fair, it was B1.

After the flame ashigaru disappeared, liquid seemed to be poured into the bottle I was holding. That wasn’t all, either; the blank label now displayed, *Rank: A*.

Yep. Just as I expected.

My S-rank drops gave me the highest rank of beer, even when I killed the monsters normally. That was how it had worked so far, so I wasn't surprised.

However, Terr was speechless.

"What's the matter?" I asked him.

"Sh-Show me that, Boss. Is it really full of A-rank booze?!"

"Yeah? What of it?"

"Don't act like that's nothing. High-rank booze drops come in lower volumes."

"Huh?"

"Even people with A-rank special drops only get around one cup worth…and you filled the whole thing in one go, Boss. That's insane…" He gazed at the bottle and fell silent again.

Whoops… There I go doing it again, without even knowing.

223. Ryota's Vintage Wine

Afterward, we went to Fylline's drop-buying shop, Fluffy Mountain.

I'd brought the beer I'd gotten from Lanthanum. Now I was waiting for it to be appraised.

Perhaps because it was a fellow drop-buying shop, this place was a lot like the Swallow's Returned Favor in Cyclo. The adventurers coming in, and the shopkeepers dealing with them, acted just like the people back at home.

I sat and waited in front of the counter at Fluffy Mountain. Incidentally, Terr sat next to me. He just stared at me with an awestruck look in his eyes.

Curious, I decided to ask him, "Is something wrong?"

"I'm just real surprised. Your drops are no joke, Mr. Ryota, Boss."

"I'm surprised, too. Does that…happen often?" As for "that," I was referring to the bottle breaking…so violently that it was like an explosion.

Defeating the flame ashigaru was an easy enough feat, given it was a B1 monster, but I'd only obtained beer the first time. Every time after that, there was so much that, when I defeated them, the bottles overflowed until they burst.

"Not at all. Those bottles are made so that any adventurer's drops can fit in them with room to spare. That makes it even

more surprising, Boss," Terr explained. He looked less surprised and more reverent or moved.

See… Normally, there's more than enough room.

In that case, I might not be able to make much money here.

Fylline's two dungeons, Lanthanum and Cerium, dropped nothing but alcohol. Alcohol is a liquid, naturally. Unlike solids, if you can't get it into a container the second it drops, it'll spill onto the floor.

There's no use crying over spilled milk—or selling spilled alcohol, at that. It was worthless now.

I could guess why it wouldn't fit in the bottles. Those bottles were made for adventurers with up to A-rank drops, so my S-rank drops went over the intended capacity. My stats were too high to use the mass-produced solution, in other words.

My drops were both high-quality and plentiful…so plentiful that it spoiled them, in fact. A laughable situation to be in.

Not that it mattered; I was just here to carry out Eric's request, and then I'd be on my way back to Cyclo.

After I'd waited a while, the female employee who'd been appraising my sale came back and called out, "Sir!" She looked like she was in a hurry. "It's this man right here," she said to the man behind her.

The man had unkempt hair, stubble, and a bright-red nose with prominent veins, and his clothes reminded me of when people wore kimonos without hakama back in Japan. His half-open eyes only added to his casual, unkempt appearance.

“Did you bring this stuff in here?” He raised the bottle to show it off. It was the bottle with my beer drop in it.

“Yeah. Did I do something wrong?”

“Where did you get the drop from?”

“B1 of Lanthanum,” I replied honestly. “Why…?”

He furrowed his brow. His reaction made me start to feel like I’d really done something wrong.

“B1… Impossible,” he replied. “It can’t be…”

“What can’t be?”

“Let’s talk in the back.” He turned around and went to the back of the store. His employee opened the counter divider and let me through.

I didn’t know what had happened, but there was clearly a reason. Curious, I joined him inside. Terr followed behind me nervously.

We went into the back, where we sat across from the guy in a sort of meeting space.

“This place is incredible.”

I smirked as I looked around the area. It was a drunkard’s room. Bottles were scattered here and there, and the room stunk of alcohol. There was also a small plate on the table with a pile of salt on top.

It might have been built to be a meeting room, but it looked like an alcoholic’s private chamber.

I stared at the salt-filled plate and asked him, “Salt, huh?”

“I was just drinking spirits. Spirits can taste good with just salt.”

“You’re an expert.” I’d heard of people who drank like that, but it was my first time meeting one.

The man introduced himself, “Dio Bax.”

I returned the favor. “Ryota Sato.”

“Hmm? The boss of the famous Ryota Family?” Dio was surprised.

“That’s me,” I confirmed.

“No wonder.” He looked at the bottle I’d brought in and nodded vigorously.

“What’s the problem with it?”

“It’s delicious.”

“Come again?”

“I had a taste of this beer. It is, without exception, the most delicious I’ve had in my entire life. It lacks the bitterness emblematic of beer, yes, but you *feel* the bitterness in your soul when you drink it. You may not understand what I mean here, but…”

“You’re right. I don’t.” He thought it was bitter, but it wasn’t? I didn’t know what that was like, and I certainly didn’t know if it was good or bad.

“Regardless, this is the greatest beer I’ve ever had. Our ranking scheme only goes up to A, but anyone who drank this would agree that it easily surpasses that,” Dio lauded me, straight-faced.

“That’s awesome! I knew you were special, Boss.”

Terr’s eyes sparkled in admiration.

“That’s why I came rushing to find out who’d brought this in after I taste-tested it for my usual appraisal.”

I see. That’s a logical course of action.

“Now, I’d like to ask you something,” Dio continued. “If you could bring in more, on a regular basis—”

“Sorry,” I refused with a wry grin. “I’m just here in Fylline on another request. When it’s over, I need to go back to my home base in Cyclo. I doubt I’ll be able to bring it to you regularly.”

Despite my flat refusal and explanation of the circumstances, Dio did not back down. “In that case, sign a yearly contract with me.”

“A contract?”

How is that any different? I wondered.

“Yeah. I know… Wine would be good. A few floors in Lanthanum drop wine. I just want you to bring me fifty… No, even just ten a year would do.”

“Ten a year? Why?”

“Well, I want to sell it as a vintage.”

“…Oh, I get it.” He was planning to use scarcity as a business tactic.

Dio leaned forward intently, gazing passionately through his half-open eyes.

I thought about it. Ten bottles a year would be similar to the other requests I regularly worked on. I’d be able to use the warp

room when I got back to Cyclo, too. If it wasn't every day, then it wouldn't be a burden.

In that case…

"Name your price!" Dio added while I was in the middle of thinking. He seemed desperate to get me to do it.

"Whoooaaa…" Terr was so amazed that he didn't even remember to call me "Boss" this time.

"…Okay. I'll need time to think about the number, but if you only want a few per year, that's doable."

"Thank you!" Dio jumped to his feet and seized my hand.

Despite my SS vitality, it hurt a little. That pain was proof of his enthusiasm.

224. Alcohol and Fish

B2 of Lanthanum was a ninja mansion, much like B1. There were a lot of adventurers fighting the monsters here, too.

Said monsters were ashigaru infantrymen, like the ones on B1. But their hair color, armor, and spears all seemed aligned with ice instead of fire. Frozen ashigaru. Given the fact that the previous floor had flame ashigaru…

“Seems like they’ll just have elemental variations for the next few floors,” I hypothesized.

I had to guess because I hadn’t sought out information ahead of time. Almost every time I went into a new dungeon, I did it blind for the sake of training my adaptability.

When I encountered a frozen ashigaru, I pulled out my guns. Using the growth round, now stronger than a normal bullet, I fired a bullet right between its eyes.

Splash!

Liquid fell onto the floor. It smelled like wine, so I had to assume the B2 drop was wine.

Without a bottle, I walked around a little more and killed more of them. I encountered one, caught it, and fired a growth round into its cranium from point-blank range.

When the wine it dropped spilled forth, I scooped up some in my hand. It was translucent and kind of yellow, so I realized it must be white wine.

I killed a few more monsters; all of them dropped white wine. Indeed, B2 of Lanthanum was confirmed to drop white wine.

Now that I knew that, I prepared to go down to B3.

Suddenly, screams and angry shouting filled the dungeon.

“Gah!”

“It’s here!”

“Someone, find the thing and kill it!”

The way they referred to it made me think they were referring to the dungeon master, but that wasn’t it. If it was, then the other monsters would’ve disappeared by now.

But that wasn’t true; a frozen ashigaru had just appeared in front of me. Though this one wasn’t the dungeon master, it was holding a different weapon. Where previous ones had wielded spears, this one held a matchlock rifle.

It readied the rifle and fired.

I swiftly evaded. The bullet was fast, but not so fast that I couldn’t dodge it.

“Come on, now,” I chuckled.

The ashigaru had begun reloading. Matchlock rifles can only fire one bullet at a time, and they need to be reloaded each time. The monster’s reload speed was slow, to boot.

Part of me wondered if this wasn’t worse than just using a spear. Meanwhile, I slowly readied my gun and fired the growth round at it.

While its weapon differed, it dropped wine like any other. I kept walking around, curious about what had happened.

“Hm?!” I stepped into a wide space—maybe more accurately described as a room. There was one adventurer standing alone against twenty frozen ashigaru.

They fired their matchlock rifles. One rifle alone was too slow to reload, yes, but their numbers were astounding.

A curtain of lead closed in on the adventurer. He was terrified; he couldn’t react to this.

“Tch!” I fully loaded my guns with normal bullets and rapid-fired them.

In doing so, I managed to shoot all their bullets out of the air. But it didn’t end there; the next volley was about to start.

This was the power of numbers, too. Volleys of bullets flew one after another, like Nobunaga’s three-line firing formation. I loaded more bullets and once again shot them down.

“H-Holy cow…” The previously terrified adventurer was stunned.

I stepped forth while shooting down the barrage. When I did, I saw a different monster beyond the ashigaru horde. It was like them, but it looked just slightly…more important than them.

“What’s that thing?”

“That’s the rare monster, Ashigaru General. Kill it, and they’ll go back to using spears.”

“Makes sense.”

That must've been what the one guy was referring to when he'd said to find and kill something.

While shooting down the three-line firing formation's matchlock rifle bullets with normal rounds, I started firing flame and freeze rounds to make annihilation rounds as well. The situation would only become more difficult to handle if I didn't act fast, so I'd started with the method most likely to deal big damage.

And they were effective; they engulfed its entire upper half and killed it.

The Ashigaru General disappeared and dropped something. At the same time, the surrounding ashigaru lost their matchlock rifles and regained their spears.

"They're back to normal!"

"I don't know who you are, but thank you!"

Everyone in the area thanked me.

While a single matchlock rifle-wielding ashigaru had seemed weaker to me, they were much stronger when they worked as an army. One Ashigaru General's appearance could really ratchet up the difficulty of the dungeon.

With that new knowledge, I picked up the rare monster's drop. It was a pendant—a silver one, with a fish motif.

"What's this?" I asked.

The previously terrified adventurer replied, "That's what the General drops. It's rare, but it's kinda useless."

"Useless?"

“Put it on and kill one of those things.”

“Hmm.” As directed, I wore the pendant and shot a frozen ashigaru. I thought I’d hear that same splash, but it didn’t happen this time.

With that familiar *pop,* out dropped a slice of cheese.

“Cheese?” I raised an eyebrow.

“When you’re wearing that, instead of getting alcoholic drinks, you get snacks you’d eat with them instead. It depends on the floor, of course, but most people here would rather get the drinks.”

“I see. That’s why it’s no good, then.”

“Pretty much.” With that, the adventurer repeated, “Holy cow… Thank you,” and left to resume his farming.

I gazed at the cheese I’d picked up. Then, I put it in my mouth.

Yeah, it’s pretty good. Hmm? White wine and cheese? Does that mean…?

With a theory in mind, I went back to B1. On B1 of Lanthanum, I put on the pendant and killed a flame ashigaru. It dropped edamame beans.

White wine and cheese. Beer and edamame beans.

This pendant was a funny one.

225. The Power of Salmon

On B1 of Lanthanum, I walked around while wearing the pendant I'd gotten from the Ashigaru General. It was a rare monster drop, after all; I had to see what it could do.

Even if it did lead to people basically laughing at me.

"You gotta get rid of that thing!" someone joked along the way.

A flame ashigaru approached me, I dodged its spear thrust, and I went for a point-blank headshot with my growth round—

"Whoa!" I cried out of surprise.

The upgraded growth round's headshot had blown the infantryman's head clean off.

That startled me. I couldn't wait to try it out on Cyclo's zombies, though.

Without its head, the ashigaru fell. Out popped edamame beans.

I encountered another one in short order. This time, I took off the pendant and fired off another growth round headshot.

Splash!

Once again, beer spilled all over the dungeon floor.

After trying it a few more times, I became certain: without exception, they would drop snacks instead of alcoholic drinks when I had the pendant on.

I glanced at the food on the ground. Then, I looked around. Just about all of the adventurers here were producing beer, not

snacks.

Probably not because the snacks wouldn't sell; they were probably just really cheap. They were an exception in a specialized town, and the drops were few at that. I wouldn't be surprised if they were almost literally dirt cheap.

I knew painfully well now why the Ashigaru General's fish pendant drop was treated the way it was. Nobody even bothered picking them up, so the beans turned back into a monster: a flame ashigaru.

Without the pendant, I shot it. This time, beer spilled on the floor.

Beer and edamame beans came from the same root. Both of them would turn into flame ashigaru, and which the ashigaru became depended on whether or not you had the pendant.

"I think that's enough for now."

With simple testing done and nothing noteworthy jumping out at me, I moved to put the pendant away.

In my line of sight, more edamame beans turned back into a flame ashigaru.

I stopped—because I'd just remembered something I had yet to test.

☆

I left the dungeon, and the city of Fylline itself, and went to an empty place outside. There, I left the fish pendant on the ground

and backed off.

I couldn't use Revive without Leia here, so I waited like I used to.

After a while, the outsider Ashigaru General was born. I approached with guns in hand. The General looked around for a moment, then turned…and ran away.

"Wait a second… Does this thing not do anything except buff others?" I wondered aloud as I pursued. The Ashigaru General just ran, never fighting back.

It really just commanded them. After confirming that, I killed it.

It dropped a pendant, but the shape was different.

"Is this…salmon?"

Salmon is a fish, yes, but it was a very familiar fish shape now. With the salmon pendant, I went back to Fylline and into Lanthanum.

B1's ninja mansion was bustling with ashigaru like before.

When I went inside, Terr spotted me and ran over. "Oh, Mr. Ryota! I've been lookin' for you, Boss."

"What's up?"

"The Fylline Dungeon Association chief wants to meet you, so I came looking, Boss."

"Oh, I see."

This was probably related to selective breeding—the plan to use the dungeon master to change the dungeon's ecosystem, that is. Eric had probably settled things with them already, but from

the perspective of the Dungeon Association, they'd probably want to meet the person who was doing the work.

"Okay. But first, I'm almost done checking this out."

"Is it gonna take long, Boss?"

"Nah. Just need to kill one or two ashigaru."

"Gotcha, Boss. I'll be waiting, Boss."

After getting Terr to wait, I put on my shiny, new salmon pendant and shot the nearest flame ashigaru. When I did, it dropped both beer and edamame beans at the same time.

It was as if they'd come in a set.

"Aha. So it drops both at once."

"Huuuuh?! Wh-What's going on, Boss?!" Terr was startled.

I brought him down to B2 and killed a frozen ashigaru there. This time, it dropped a set of white wine and cheese.

"That's awesome!" he exclaimed. "I've never seen someone drop both at the same time, Boss. What'd ya do?"

"Trade secret."

"Whoooaaa…" He gazed at me in admiration.

It seemed this salmon pendant had some use, after all.

226. The S+ Man

As a test, I tried killing a fire ashigaru with the salmon pendant on. Beer and beans both dropped.

This time, I took it off and shot another. Only the beer dropped, spilling unceremoniously onto the floor.

"…"

"Something wrong, Boss?"

"Hey, do you have any of those bottles on hand?"

"You mean this, Boss?" Terr took out a bottle. Those bottles were like pickup boxes; when alcohol dropped from a monster, it would collect and store the drop.

"Yeah. Give me all you've got."

"Gotcha, Boss." He looked a little confused, but he gave me all of his bottles as directed.

He had three. That was probably enough.

With one in hand, I wore the pendant and defeated the next monster. Edamame beans fell on the ground, and beer fell straight into a bottle.

I tried again with another bottle. Once again, beer filled it.

On the third one, I took off the pendant. The bottle burst, unable to fit my full drop.

I knew it.

When I wore the pendant, I'd thought that it might reduce the beer drop slightly to make up for the addition of beans. Indeed, that was how it worked.

With the pendant, my beer drop was just barely enough to fit in a bottle. Without it, there was so much that the bottles burst.

After that, I had Terr go buy me a few more bottles. We were able to prove with certainty that the presence of the pendant had affected the amount of alcohol.

Thanks to the pendant, I'd managed to produce enough vintage wine to satisfy Dio Bax's request in no time.

☆

It took a while because of the pendant, but I'd finished checking out what it could do, so I let Terr bring me to Fylline's Dungeon Association. An association employee took us to the chief's office. When the door opened…

"Eugh," I groaned. The place stunk of alcohol.

Apparently used to it, the man who'd brought us there entered without hesitation and announced, "Chief, Mr. Ryota Sato is here to see you."

"Come in, come in!"

I entered, taken aback by the young-sounding voice. Indeed, there was a little girl inside. A childish face, yet-undeveloped limbs, and pigtails that were almost as long as she was tall… Even an optimistic estimate would put her under ten years old.

"Wait a second," the girl said before opening a bottle and taking a whiff of it. After sniffing a few times, she said to the man, "It isn't very strong. Add 10% more of the B-rank."

“As you wish, Chief.”

“This one has tomato juice mixed into the beer. Discard the entire barrel.”

“I will see to it that the person responsible is punished.”

She opened bottle after bottle, sniffing them and giving appraisals followed by orders. After she’d done this for a while, she finally chased off the employee. Now, it was just her, Terr, and me.

The girl walked over to the couches where we’d been waiting and sat across from me. Seeing how the tiny girl had to clamber onto the couch put a little smile on my face.

“Good to meet you,” she greeted me. “I am Mao Mii, the Fylline Dungeon Association chief.”

“Ryota Sato…” I hesitated for a moment, unsure of how to speak to her. “Uh, nice to meet you, too.”

She looked like a little girl, but she was the chief here. Should I be polite? I was confused for a moment.

“You don’t have to try so hard. I’m the age I look like, so talk to me how you want.” Just as she finished saying that, the door opened, and another employee brought a glass on a tray. The employee poured a wine-red liquid onto a long-stemmed glass and placed it in front of us. “Gulp… Gulp… Gulp…”

“If you’re as young as you look, you shouldn’t be drinking—”

“Aaah… It’s okay. This is just juice.”

“Juice?”

“Ooh. This grape juice is delicious, Boss!” Terr said after taking a sip.

Seriously? Grape juice?

“How misleading…” I groaned.

“Would you prefer barley tea?”

“No. I mean, I like it, but…”

That’s not the problem here…

Probing any further seemed like it’d bring me unnecessary trouble, especially *legal* trouble, so I decided to change the subject.



“What were you doing just now?” I asked the chief, Mao Mii.

“Just now?”

“The sniffing.”

“That’s my job. I do quality control for Fylline’s alcohol.”

“Quality control?”

“The quality of drops varies depending on the adventurer.”

“Well… Yeah.” That wasn’t just true of alcohol; it was true of all this world’s production. The quality of goods depended greatly on the adventurer-slash-producer’s drop stats.

She explained, “Fylline mixes together all of its alcohol, except for the really good stuff and the really bad stuff, and exports the result.”

“Is that why they’re given ranks when they drop? To manage that process?”

“Correct. It’s the Dungeon Association chief’s job to manage the quality of the mixture.”

“I see… Wait, by smelling it?!”

“I’m a child, so I can’t drink,” she replied as if that explained why.

“No no no no no.”

That’s not why I’m… I thought to myself.

Mao cocked her head, as if to ask, *Why are you confused, then?* I wasn’t talking about how children shouldn’t drink this time; I was just amazed that she could discern quality from smell alone.

The girl was puzzled, because she didn't get that. A child, but a Dungeon Association chief. Genuinely incredible.

"By the way, I smelled really good beer from the moment you came in," she said.

"Huh? Oh, this?" I took out a bottle of the beer that I'd gotten while testing things in Lanthanum. When I put it on the table, Mao stared at it. She took it, silently opened the lid, and sniffed. "What about it, uh… Huh?"

Ignoring my surprise, she opened all of the bottles I'd brought and sniffed every single one.

"Is this after mixing?" she demanded.

"Huh? Uh, no?"

"They were sealed, Boss," Terr said next to me.

Indeed, they had been sealed.

I wouldn't have noticed until we came here, but now, I could tell: the mouths of the bottles had a quality control mechanism to prove whether they had been opened, maybe meant to inform how much of which quality should be mixed.

The beer I'd brought *had* been sealed…before she got to it.

"That's odd," Mao mused.

"What do you mean?" I asked her.

"All of these beers have the same scent."

"The same?"

"…Could it be max A-rank?" she mused.

"Max?" Yet another thing I didn't understand.

“Even the same drop stats can have minor differences,” Mao said.

“Oh… True.” I was raising my stats over time with the seeds in Nihonium, though they were combat stats rather than drops. Stats were only graded from A to F, but the actual numbers behind them were invisible. Drops were probably the same.

“Yours is…” Mao looked at the *Rank: A* label on the beer. “…At maximum A-rank, I believe. That’s why they’re all the same quality.”

“So it’s stuck at top quality because it’s so high?”

“You’re amazing. No wonder Grandpappy Eric asked you.” Mao gazed at me with a hint of admiration.

Those innocent eyes, genuinely believing that I was amazing… They made me feel a little uneasy.

After all, she was half right and half wrong. I was at the max, but not at A; I was at S.

“Really, really amazing.”

227. Three Flames

Mao sat next to me in her office. She'd sat across from me before, but eventually, she pushed the table aside just to get to me.

"Umm… Chief?"

"Yes?"

"I mean, uh, why are you next to me?"

"It's nothing that you should worry about."

"Easier said than done." It was a little hard to not be worried in this situation.

She was staring at me with a big smile and stars in her eyes. I assumed that was because she'd found out that I was supposedly "at maximum A-rank." She clearly liked me a lot more than before, and it seemed to be because of that.

That's fine, I guess.

I cleared my throat and changed the subject, "By the way, when will the dungeon master appear?"

"Two days from now. B20 of Lanthanum."

"How certain is that forecast?"

"The alcohol says so."

"Huh? What does that mean?" I cocked my head at her question.

Terr, who was left standing after she took his seat, answered, "The chief can predict when dungeon masters will appear based on the quality of alcohol, Boss. She's a hundred percent accurate, Boss."

“Really?”

“Really!” Mao flashed a peace sign at me. She looked like just a cute little girl, but she had some crazy skills.

“Does quality go up as a dungeon master appearance approaches? Or does it go down?” I asked her.

The dungeon master literally controlled the entire dungeon. Since they only appeared once in a while, I assumed it was one of two things:

1. They spawned once something built up enough in the dungeon.

2. They appeared to replenish something being lost by the dungeon.

It could be anything—mana, spiritual energy, stuff like that.

However, Mao refuted that hypothesis. “Nuh-uh. When the dungeon master’s about to appear, the alcohol gets all ‘graaah,’ and it starts smelling all like, ‘grrr.’”

“I hereby dub thee Rain Man. Well, Rain Girl.”

The words “I am confuse” crossed my mind.

Her job was pure intuition, a prodigy’s work. But if she was 100% accurate, then I appreciated that. That must’ve been how Eric had managed to put together this plan.

While I was busy formulating an itinerary for that day, I noticed Mao staring even more intently at me. Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

“Need something?” I asked her.

“Tomorrow, I’ll know exactly the time it’ll spawn.”

“Wow. You learn more details as it comes closer, then?”

“Yep!” Mao nodded. The expectant look in her eyes intensified.

I thought for a moment.

“Okay. Once you know, would you mind telling me first?”

“Leave it to me!” She was so happy that she jumped around and twirled.

This kid really liked me.

☆

At night, I went to an inn in Fylline.

I’d picked a large room. After placing a beer bottle in a corner, I waited in the diagonally opposite corner. After a while, the beer turned into a flame ashigaru.

“Oh, damn! Repetition!”

I rushed to cast Repetition. The flames engulfing it had burned the walls a little.

“I should’ve grabbed wine instead…”

Regretting my decision, I checked the outsider’s drop. It had dropped a new bullet that I’d never seen before.

“A special bullet, huh… First, let’s mass-produce more.”

I left the inn and wandered around the city—Fylline, city of alcohol. Here, the lowest-quality alcoholic drinks were provided for free all over the place.

I found various kinds in barrels. Beer meant fire ashigaru, and that was bad. Knowing what I was about to do, it could cause a fire. Thus, I found a barrel of wine and hauled it out of the city.

Once I was far enough away, I put it down in an empty place and backed off.

Before long, a frozen ashigaru came out.

“Repetition!” I used magic to kill it instantly. A special bullet dropped into my pouch.

Another frozen ashigaru appeared right after.

The wine in the barrel was like life-giving water to them, causing monsters to appear one after another.

I didn’t use bullets.

This was one reason I’d opted not to use beer. Wine and a gun together probably wouldn’t start a fire, but I’d brought a whole barrel. Given the process of outsiders appearing in quick succession, I wanted to avoid any acts that could start a fire.

Repetition wasn’t a means of skipping labor this time; it was the optimal move.

Every time one appeared, I’d instantly kill it with Repetition and receive a special bullet in my pouch.

With each spawn, the wine in the barrel decreased. Eventually, it emptied as the final frozen ashigaru appeared.

“That’s a good number. Time to test.”

Now that I was out of wine, I drew my gun and loaded the new bullet without hesitation. Then, I fired at the infantryman.

When it struck, the monster burst into flames. This wasn't just a flame round, though; this fire was blue.

"Alcohol, huh?" It made sense.

I remembered the alcohol lamp I'd used in an experiment back in a middle school chemistry class. The fire back then was the same color as this one.

"But this one is even bluer," I noted.

It was a perfect blue, with no red or orange mixed in whatsoever. You could even call it azure.

"All right. Azure flame rounds it is, then."

I fired another. Then, I used a flame round for comparison.

The two flames side by side made for a pretty sight.

"…"

After they both faded, I readied my guns again. I loaded a flame round in one and an azure flame round in another. Then, I fired both at once to fuse them.

"Huh? I don't see anything—yikes, that's hot!"

The instant they fused, I was surprised; it seemed as though nothing had happened. But instantly after, intense heat washed over me.

It was like those flamethrowers at concerts that you can feel all the way from your seat, but worse. Heat nearly a hundred times more intense had struck me.

I quickly crossed my arms in front of me to defend myself, meanwhile jumping far back. As I got away from the heat, I realized something.

There wasn't *nothing* there; the air in that area had distorted from the heat.

A heat haze, like how the road looks on a hot, midsummer day, but much more distorted than that. The fusion of flame and azure flame rounds had created a fire that output incredible heat.

I tried it out on a nearby tree.

"…Okay, whoa, that's way too much."

And the invisible flames had burned it to nothing, leaving not so much as ash, in an instant.

228. Perpetual Motion

I tested out the azure flame rounds and new fusion a bit more, shooting things, burning things. If their firepower was at a 1, then the fused round was close to a 10. It was hard to tell since I couldn't see the fire when they fused, but the firepower was there.

"Hooot!"

I used the Absolute Rock pebble to make myself invincible and stuck a hand into the fire. When I did, I felt stabbing pain, as if I'd put it in a scalding-hot bath.

Incidentally, when I lit a place on fire with regular flame rounds and stepped into it, I didn't feel hot at all.

"It's kinda cool. Like a phoenix rising from the flames," I murmured to myself as I stood, invincible, in the flames.

I really wanted to try using it in combat. It was already obvious that it was strong, but I was curious how its other trait—the fire's invisibility—could be used in a fight.

It was late, but I was ready to hop into a dungeon and try it out. Leaving it until tomorrow would just make me unable to sleep from excitement.

I stepped out of the fire, disabled invincibility mode, and turned to head toward a dungeon.

"Oh?" It was then that I noticed that the flame from the fusion round hadn't gone out. Hard to tell since it was invisible, but the heat haze was still dancing in the air.

When I threw the emptied barrel of wine into it, it burned up without a trace.

Did these last this long?

Leaving an invisible fire would be dangerous, so I decided to wait until it burned out.

In the meantime, I looked around. I'd fired dozens of fusion rounds, so I wanted to make sure there weren't others still burning. There were none; this was the only one that wouldn't stop.

Relieved, I waited for it to stop…but no matter how long I waited, it did not disappear.

Now without a barrel, I tried shooting a normal bullet at it. It was vaporized the second it touched the fire.

Why was it lasting this long?

Curious, I fired another fusion round to the side. As soon as they fused and became fire, the previous one—the one that wouldn't stop—suddenly burned out.

"Is this what I think it is?" I muttered before fusing another pair next to it.

A new invisible flame appeared, and the previous disappeared.

I waited; the new one didn't stop.

I fired again, that one stopped burning, and a new one formed.

I get it. This is the kind of attack that is limited to just one at a time.

This time, I waited patiently. I sat down there and fired a normal bullet every five minutes.

Even after an hour, the invisible flame did not fade.

I remained patient and stopped firing bullets at it.

Another hour later, the fire still burned.

When I fired another fusion round, it immediately stopped. Only one could exist at a time, and when left alone, it didn't disappear.

"…"

With an idea in mind, I tried firing a different kind of fusion round: the flame and freeze fusion, annihilation rounds.

It disappeared, swallowing up a small area with it. After seeing that, I felt around for the invisible fire.

It was gone without a trace.

Bingo.

To sum it up, it was ten times as powerful as a normal flame round. When fired, it would remain there until I used any other kind of fusion round.

"…This might just be useful."

☆

I went back to the sleeping city, picked up a new barrel, and came back to the empty area for more testing.

I once again put down the barrel and backed off to let outsiders spawn. Then, I fused the flame and azure flame rounds

over the barrel.

Space distorted and the invisible flame appeared.

I sat there and waited. After a while, a frozen ashigaru spawned and crawled out of the barrel—and when it touched the invisible flame above, it was instantly vaporized.

I received a new azure flame round in my pouch.

I continued to wait, doing nothing. Every time an outsider spawned, it went right into the fire, and its drop went into my pouch automatically.

Eventually, all of the wine had become ashigaru, and the remaining barrel—trash—turned into a Frankenstein, becoming a homing round.

Some dozens of minutes after I'd set it up, the barrel had become bullets automatically.

This new fusion round was perfect for making perpetual motion machines.

229. Endless Waltz

The next morning, I went to Fylline's Dungeon Association. In the chief's office, I was face to face with Eric and Mao.

"I know what time the dungeon master will appear," Mao announced. "It's tomorrow afternoon."

"Which floor?" Eric asked her.

"B20 Lanthanum, as expected. The one with the dark shinobi."

"The water beer floor. There couldn't be a more perfect location."

"Yep. Zero percent chance of failure."

Mao and Eric were in high spirits. Part of me thought they seemed a little too carefree for people who planned to use a dungeon master to destroy and reform a dungeon's ecosystem.

"Water beer?" I asked. "And what's this about not having a chance of failure?"

"You don't know?"

"Is it just beer that's like water?"

"Exactly right," Eric answered. "It has the taste of beer, but no matter how much you drink, you never get intoxicated. An overwhelmingly sad substitute, indeed."

"Wow."

So it's non-alcoholic beer?

"Water beer doesn't sell, and nobody bothers drinking it even when it's free," Mao added. "We don't know what it'll turn into…

but nothing is worse than water beer.”

“Makes sense. It’s already the worst it can get, huh?”

“To be honest, I came up with this plan when I learned that it would be on B20,” Eric said.

Aha. Rather than failure not being possible, it’s more like they’re turning a worthless floor into a real opportunity.

“We don’t know how long the change will take, so we’ve decided that we will forbid any entry into or exit from the dungeon once the dungeon master appears.”

“Cerium will just have to provide in the meantime,” Mao agreed.

“We will stand by near the entrance. Once the dungeon master’s defeat is confirmed, we will go down to B20.”

“You’re not coming with me?” I asked back.

Eric and Mao looked apologetic.

“We aren’t exactly suited for fighting.”

“We’re both level 1. We would just hold you back.”

“Oh, really?”

I considered using EXP crystals. The ring I’d gotten from a dungeon master turned the wasted EXP from monsters I killed into crystals, which others could use to gain said EXP.

All the adventurers in the world did stable farming, so 99% of them reached their own maximum level without particularly trying. Convenient though the ring was, it was hard to find uses for it.

“You’ll have one shot at this.”

“I can’t wait to find out what drink it’ll be!”

But they weren’t adventurers, and they had no need to fight, so they didn’t mind being level 1. So I didn’t bother offering.

One shot though, huh?

I couldn’t predict the exact timing to kill a monster for the best drop like Rebecca did. Even then, I still only had one chance.

The perfect timing I’d come up with won’t necessarily be the perfect drink, since I just don’t know as much about drinks as Mao does. Still, I have S-rank drops, so it can’t possibly be a letdown. A one-shot fight against a rare dungeon master doesn’t sound so bad once in a while… Hm? A rare dungeon master?

Just then, I remembered the ring I’d been thinking about mere moments ago.

☆

The next day, I went to B20 of Lanthanum.

There were no adventurers left in the ninja mansion-like dungeon, nobody to cull the monsters that still filled the place.

The monster of this floor was the dark shinobi, a ninja clad in shinobi attire that was literally pitch-black. They’d be troublesome monsters if I had to give them a fair fight, but I easily trounced them.

Before long, the time came.

The air changed. I’d experienced this many times now; it was the air of a dungeon whose master was present.

When dungeon masters came out, other monsters disappeared…but this time was different. The dark shinobi didn’t disappear—all of them stopped moving, like mannequins, but they were still there.

There was no time to wonder why; the master had come.

It was a humanoid monster clad in a unique, luxurious suit of armor that set it apart from the ashigaru and Ashigaru General.

Daimyo—that was the name of Lanthanum’s dungeon master. I had to keep it on B20.

The Daimyo walked toward me with heavy steps, drawing the sword hanging at its hip.

I fired the growth round at its shoulder as a simple test. The Daimyo stopped and leaned back from the force.

On closer inspection, its shoulder had been shot through, but it was healing.

A dark shinobi near it fell apart before being absorbed into the Daimyo, healing its wounds.

Once it had fully recovered, the Daimyo resumed walking.

“Hmm.”

This time, I shot a leg with an annihilation round. This dealt much more damage, removing the entire leg. The Daimyo stopped, absorbed a nearby dark shinobi, and healed its wound.

I see. I wondered why there were still monsters here, but they stay as a source of recovery for the dungeon master.

When the Daimyo started moving again, I blew off both an arm and a leg. Two injuries, but still only one dark shinobi was needed to heal it. It seemed it just needed one for any amount of repairs.

Fully recovered, the Daimyo continued its march and swung its sword down. Presuming that its sword length was its effective range, I prepared to jump back—

"Ah…!"

Just then, my spine froze. Instinct screamed that I was in danger. I jumped, not away, but to the side.

The Daimyo's katana had created a fissure in the ground that reached over thirty feet in length.

That was close. If I'd only backed up enough to dodge the sword itself, I would've gotten hurt.

The Daimyo swung again, this time horizontally. Realizing that this was dangerous, too, I squatted to dodge it. After it swung its sword, a horizontal tear over thirty feet long appeared in the mansion's—dungeon's—wall.

Either its slashes were invisible, or the blade itself was. I didn't know which, but I knew that being on the defensive was bad.

Buying time would be difficult.

For now, I put distance between us.

I tried firing the growth round to slow it down, but the dungeon master had learned. Now, it deflected the bullets with its katana and continued its charge. It pressed forth, even tossing

aside its own subordinates in its path. While it did slow down for a moment when it did, there was almost no difference.

I needed to actively, aggressively stop it.

“Hm?!”

Just then, I remembered something. When I saw the Daimyo tossing the dark shinobi aside, I had an idea.

Flame rounds. Azure flame rounds.

I fired them both, fusing them to create the invisible fire.

The instant the Daimyo touched it, half of its body was scorched away. It stopped its charge and regenerated, absorbing a dark shinobi to restore the lost parts.

However, while it regenerated, it had to stop moving. That meant it was regenerating exactly where the invisible fire was. When it regenerated, the exact same area of its body burned away.

It regenerated again and burned away again.

Regenerating and instantly burning, it was forced to stand there and regenerate infinitely.

I lowered my guns. There was no need to do anything anymore; the dungeon master was stuck there. Now, all I had to do was wait.

After a few hundred regenerations and annihilations, there was a change in the dungeon. The dark shinobi around me, its source of recovery, suddenly burst into flames. They also dressed in much more revealing clothes than the stereotypical ninja, with voluptuous features to match.

Flame kunoichi—that was probably their name, based on the pattern so far.

“Wow. So that’s how the monster species changes, huh?”

Despite everything, the Daimyo continued the regeneration loop. While I wondered what to do next, Mao and Eric appeared.

They came over to me and spoke up, impressed.

“Ooh, it did change!”

“I expected no less.”

“Is this fine?” I asked the two of them.

“Yep. Now, just defeat the dungeon master and get the drop from the new monsters.”

“Got it.” I readied my guns and fired a volley of annihilation rounds. They covered the entirety of the Daimyo while it still struggled to regenerate.

The Daimyo disappeared and dropped a ring, which I picked up.

“Let’s taste the new alcohol right now!”

“Would you do the honors, please?”

Mao and Eric looked at me. I nodded back and shot a flame kunoichi right as it tried to lunge at us.

It wasn’t very strong; a single shot from the growth round was enough to kill it. Alcohol poured into the bottle I had, and edamame beans dropped onto the ground.

“My… What’s going on here?” Eric asked me.

“Yeah, that’s my special ability. When I wear this pendant, I get drinks and snacks at the same time.”

“Fascinating,” he replied, seemingly convinced. Snacks dropping was a normal thing here, so it didn’t take much effort to convince him.

The two of them uncorked the bottle and confirmed the new drink.

“This is…banana liqueur,” Eric judged.

“But the flavor…is middling at best,” Mao sighed.

“It’s not good?”

“Unfortunately not. It won’t be worth much, but it is far better than water beer.”

“Then let’s do it again,” I suggested.

“Huh?” they both gasped in surprise.

“Again?” Eric repeated. “How do you mean?”

“Stay over there and watch,” I said, letting them wait.

First things first, to secure their safety I used Repetition to mop up the surrounding flame kunoichi.

Then, in the empty dungeon, I put the ring down in another area and backed off.

They just watched, puzzled.

After a while, the dungeon air changed again, and the Daimyo was reborn. I immediately fused a flame and azure flame round to stop it. After I’d confirmed that it was stuck in the regeneration loop again, I told them, “This is round two.”

“I see. You’ve used the dungeon master’s drop to try again.”

“Wow! That’s so smart!” Mao was overjoyed.

We waited longer, until the flame kunoichi turned into frozen kunoichi. Upon confirming this, I used Repetition to kill the Daimyo again.

It dropped the same ring, and I picked it up. When I turned around, I saw Eric and Mao looking awfully surprised.

“Summoning the dungeon master, defeating it, reviving it… We can reroll until we get something good,” I explained.

“This…is stunning.”

“Amazing! This is even more incredible than I imagined!”

They were surprised and impressed. Alongside them, I repeated this process, changing the ecosystem of this floor over and over to selectively breed for drops.

230. Rerolling

The eternal flame round burned the Daimyo on and on until the monsters around us changed.

“Repetition!” I used Repetition to kill it safely and with certainty. Using up so much MP to defeat a monster made me dizzy, but I was used to it, so I almost unconsciously used my limitless recovery rounds each time.

When I looked around, I saw ashigaru all around. They had shiny gold armor. It was the first time I’d seen them, so Repetition wouldn’t work. I used the growth round to kill one instead.

The drink it dropped went into the bottle, which I handed over to Eric and Mao.

“Goodness, what a glorious display.”

“You’ve got that dungeon master twisted around your little finger!”

“Better than that, he has it down to a science.”

The two of them complimented me and began appraising the new drink.

“This is…seishu sake,” Eric said.

Mao sniffed a couple times. “Fifty-six points.”

“Fifty-six… Not very good, huh?”

“Indeed. It has an odd taste, and it hardly looks appealing.”

“Gotcha,” I replied, repeating the process once more.

I left the drop far away, backed off, and fired a fused eternal flame round above it. Then I waited, clearing up the trash mobs

around us regularly.

The air soon changed again, and the Daimyo returned. Half of it was scorched away by the eternal flame round, forcing it to stay still and regenerate.

We continued to wait. Meanwhile, I shot myself with limitless recovery rounds to bring my SS-rank MP back to full. After confirming that the monsters around us had changed, I used Repetition again.

Then, I handed them the new drink.

“Beer. It tastes rather like coffee.”

“Ninety-three points.”

“It’s not bad, but…” Eric glanced at me.

I smiled back.

“I know what you mean. While we’re doing this, we might as well perfect it.”

In game terms, this was like rerolling. When a random result came from a set process, you could reset and perform that same process over and over until you got the optimal outcome.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

“We’ve come this far.”

“Wow…”

“You never cease to amaze.”

I left the impressed duo and went for another reroll of the Daimyo alcohol gacha.

Putting down the drop, firing the eternal flame round, waiting for it to revive and change the ecosystem, killing it with

Repetition.

Each reroll took around fifteen minutes.

“Forty-two points.”

“No good, I’m afraid.”

“Eighty-eight points.”

“Not bad, but we’ve already given up a ninety-three.”

“One point.”

“Out of the question.”

We continued improving on the product.

Mao was fine since she could just sniff them, but since he was forced to take a sip each time, Eric was getting pale.

The reroll process was not going well. According to Mao, my “max A”—more accurately S-rank—drop stat was not helping the results. I’d tried killing two things in one run to make things easier, but…

“Both seventy points,” she declared.

“So I can get the highest possible rank out of the monsters, but I can’t control the change caused by the dungeon master.”

“After all, you aren’t directly causing the change in ecosystem; you’re only watching over it,” Eric added.

“Yeah, of course.”

In the end, we reached the conclusion that we’d just have to maximize our number of attempts.

“Ninety-three… It’s the same as before,” Mao sighed.

“This is a difficult decision,” Eric agreed.

After twenty attempts, we got 93 again. That was our highest number yet, but I immediately discarded it and proceeded to the next one.

It wasn't bad, but we'd already gotten that before. I'd made up my mind to persevere, and it didn't feel right to not reach higher.

And so, I continued rerolling.

We were getting tired, though, and Mao and Eric offered less and less commentary.

"Fifty-two."

"Beer."

They were only giving the minimum responses.

Yet I continued. I'd come this far, and I wasn't going to back down. Then, long after anyone had finished counting our attempts…

"Unh!"

"Mao? What's wrong?"

"It's delicious!"

"Oh?"

"This is…quite literally sweet nectar," Eric said.

"Yeah! It's a really good drink!" Mao agreed.

The drink was so good that it brought the exhausted duo back to their senses.

"How good?" I asked.

"A hundred twenty points!"

"Unprecedented flavor."

Their appraisal went far beyond my expectation.

231. Bodley Ryota

The next morning, I left the inn I was staying in and wandered around Fylline.

The city was as full of life as ever.

“Wanna go, buddy?”

“I never liked that damn mug of yours!”

“Ooh! Fight, fight!”

“All right, everyone, place your bets! Liquor Monk Goisu versus Drunken Fist Rex, who will win?!”

Maybe some of this liveliness wasn’t for the best, but everyone seemed to be having fun. This city wasn’t bad.

I’d finished Eric’s request, so it was time to think about going back to Cyclo.

Deciding I should bring everyone here for some sightseeing, through the power of the warp room, I headed toward the Dungeon Association to say my goodbyes.

As I approached it, I felt a different kind of enthusiasm in the air.

“Hm?”

Unlike the drunken fervor from before, this was…sober, full of curiosity and wonder. That odd combo seemed to fill the air. When I got even closer, I noticed that an audience had gathered around the association building.

There was something like a stage in front of it. Nobody was on the stage yet, but the audience gathered around it implied that

something was about to happen.

“Good work, Boss.”

“Huh? Oh, Terr. Good timing. What’s going on here?”

“Huh?” Terr opened his eyes wide in surprise. “You don’t know, Boss?”

“Is it odd that I don’t?”

“Yessir, Boss. I mean…”

Before he could explain, his voice was drowned out by the audience’s cheers. Said cheers were directed toward a little girl on the stage—Dungeon Association chief Mao.

“Thank you all for gathering for the new drink announcement celebration!” She threw her hands up excitedly. With her youthful appearance, it was nothing but adorable.

But her words were what really spurred on the cheers.

New drink announcement celebration… Oh, she must mean the new drink on B20 of Lanthanum.

On closer inspection, the audience was almost entirely adventurers.

Makes sense. Everyone’s curious about this new potential revenue stream.

“Today, I’m here to announce a new drink on B20 of Lanthanum. It’s a new wine!”

Half the audience cheered, and half murmured.

“Wine, huh?”

“Wonder what kind.”

“Whatever it is, it’s gotta be better than water beer.”

While everyone was talking, a man who seemed to be an employee brought a bottle of the wine and handed it to Mao. She accepted it and raised it for everyone to see.

“This is our new wine. Its name…is Bodley Ryota!”

“Pffbth!” I practically did a spit-take. I had no idea they’d use my name in the name of the wine.

“Ryota, as in, the boss of the Ryota Family? What’s the Bodley part mean?”

“That means ‘blood of the supreme God’ in old language, doesn’t it?”

“That’s an awesome name. Is it that good?”

People clamored about the name. I could feel their excitement reaching a fever pitch.

Even Terr next to me struggled to string together proper sentences. “Insane… That’s insanely insane, Boss…”

On Mao’s signal, the Dungeon Association employee poured the drink into shot glasses and distributed them to the crowd. People who received them took sips…and a wave of cheers spread from there on.

“Whoa.”

“What is this…? What is this stuff…?”

Like Terr, they were rapidly losing their vocabularies as well.

After the wave had passed, Mao declared, “I give this wine a score of a hundred twenty!”

“Wooo-ooo!”

“A special license will be needed to sell Bodley Ryota. Sales will be allowed one month from now, so I’d like you all to get your licenses by then!”

Even more excited by her words, several adventurers rushed to be the first into the association building.

It was very…very popular.

☆

I sat face to face with Mao in her office. Though we were alone in there, we could still hear the adventurers’ commotion outside.

“I had a bunch of different people make Bodley Ryota as a trial,” Mao said with a smile. “The quality varies, of course, but everyone’s able to make it a hundred points or better. Every other wine has been obsoleted by this one, and it’s all thanks to you.”

“I’m just glad I could help.”

“As thanks, a portion of Bodley Ryota sales revenue will go to you!”

“I appreciate that, but…couldn’t you have picked a different name?”

“Is something wrong with it?” Mao asked, cocking her head in confusion. It was cute, given how small she was, but…

“No. I’m just a little embarrassed seeing my name used like that, I guess…”

“I’d like your cooperation in that regard. We want this wine branded.”

“Branded?”

“Yep! Now’s a good time to be clear on that.” Mao furrowed her brow for some reason. She looked unhappy. “Ryota Bamboo Shoots are too normal. If we’re going to use your name, we want it to be stronger. Grandpappy Eric has no naming sense at all.”

I mean, I don’t think Bodley is that great a name, either. But if it means “blood of the supreme God,” then I guess it does sound strong…

“Please,” she continued. “You’re the one who made it happen, and that’ll make it popular from the start. People won’t need to drink it to know it’s good; they’ll just *know.*”

“It’s hard to refuse when you put it like that…”

I was an office worker for a long time, so I knew painfully well. Even if something was good—really good, even—it could end up dying in obscurity if nobody noticed. The Bodley wine was good wine, without a doubt, but it wasn’t guaranteed that it would become popular by merit alone.

That was why Mao wanted to put the name Ryota on it.

That wasn’t a problem, especially because of how involved I was in it. I just needed to bear the awkwardness of it.

“Okay. Use it how you like.”

“Thank you!” Mao smiled innocently. She looked like she wanted to give me a big hug.

Thus, the Fylline matter ended in great success.

The new wine bearing my name, Bodley Ryota, was strictly managed by the Fylline Dungeon Association. Through their

efforts, the best-quality stuff would only be sold once every three months, popularizing the brand so much that it always sold out instantly on release days.

232. Best Intentions

“I’m back—wargh!”

As soon as I stepped into our lovely mansion back in Cyclo, a massive impact sent me falling onto my backside.

The one that had knocked me down was our dog, Kerberos. “Welcome back, Master!” He was a Cerberus monster, a dog that was even bigger than a lion. The sheer force of his pounce was enough to knock even me down.

The dog licked my face all over. How could I get mad at such a raw, instinctual display of affection?

His tail wagged like mad. While it was a sign of a dog being in a good mood, his size made it problematic. It looked like he was slamming a club into the ground over and over. If that hit me, it’d probably hurt.

With him in this good of a mood, it would probably take a while before I would be free. When I resigned myself to my fate, though, he suddenly floated upward.

He hadn’t just floated; on closer inspection, Emily had arrived after him, seized the dog, and lifted him up.

“Bad doggy!” she scolded him. With her height, she looked like an elementary schooler to the uninformed. It was kind of funny to see someone as tiny as her lifting up a massive dog with just one hand. “Yoda is tired. Don’t force him to play too much, please.”

“Aww… I’m sorry…” Kerberos slumped down upon being scolded by Emily, the shadow ruler of the Ryota Family home. In his sadness, his tail went from flapping wildly to hanging weakly.

I stood up, rubbed my poor butt, and petted Kerberos with my other hand. “We can play another time, okay?”

“Okay!”

☆

In the mansion salon, I sat on the sofa across from Emily and Celeste and drank tea that the former had brewed for us. The sunlight was gentle. We’d opened the window to enjoy the soft breeze.

“Mmm, that’s good stuff! When I drink your tea, I really feel like I’ve come home.”

“Thank you.”

“I know it’s nothing compared to Emily’s tea, but did you not drink any tea in Fylline?” Celeste asked.

“Not at all. That place is all alcohol, all the time. You’d be amazed. It even comes out of the wells. Cheap stuff is available to drink anytime, anywhere.”

“That’s incredible.”

“And Yoda did incredible work even out there. I’m still amazed.”

“Already heard rumors, huh?” I asked. Emily and Celeste both nodded.

Celeste recounted, “You had the dungeon master dancing in the palm of your hand. You defeated it over and over, changing the dungeon to your whims. It’s the talk of the town.”

“They even built a bronze statue on the Dungeon Association grounds!” Emily added.

“Cell again?!”

And a whole bronze statue instead of just a figure this time?

I groaned at Cell’s usual insanity and told them all about what had happened in Fylline. Just simple, idle chit-chat with my good friends.

“Ngh!”

Suddenly, Celeste held her head in pain.

“What’s wrong?”

“A sudden magic storm…”

“I’ll close the window.” Emily stood up, jogged over to the window on her little legs, and closed it. When she did, the wind stopped—and so did Celeste’s headache.

“Thanks, Emily.”

“No problem… That really was sudden.”

“Yeah. Today’s forecast didn’t mention a magic storm at all.”

“It is just a forecast, after all. They’ll be wrong sometimes,” I said. They nodded in response.

It’s like when the forecast says it’ll be a sunny day, so you go out without an umbrella and come home soaked, I mused.

☆

“A dungeon master?”

That night, Cell visited the mansion. He looked unusually grave.

“Indeed. It’s been in Silicon.”

“I see… Wait, it *has been*?”

“Well noticed, Sir Sato.” He grinned wryly.

“Indeed. Silicon’s dungeon master appeared this morning. Of course, I tried to have it killed right away, but several drop-buying shops jointly suggested that we allow it to change the drops.”

“…Is that my fault?”

“You would be the impetus, yes,” Cell confirmed with a nod. “When they heard of your deeds in Fylline and the resulting Bodley Ryota, they proposed the extension of the dungeon master’s life in hopes of creating Cyclo’s own specialty. However…”

“…Then came the unexpected magic storm.”

Cell nodded again. I understood the situation now.

I’d gone into Silicon to help someone before. The monsters there were all immune to physical attacks; only magic would work on them. More precisely, they weren’t quite immune, but even my SS-rank strength would take longer to kill the trash mobs there than it would to fight off a dungeon master.

You’d normally defeat them with magic, but when a magic storm came and made it impossible to use magic, the monsters

there became virtually invincible.

“Is the dungeon master the same?” I asked him.

“Indeed. We were making good progress with magic, but the sudden magic storm halted our efforts. As a result, the dungeon master is effectively invincible and beyond our abilities.”

“It’s been a long time. Silicon’s ecosystem must be a mess now, right?”

“The magic storm rages on. If we leave it, all of Silicon may be destroyed by the dungeon master.”

“Got it.” I stood straight up. “I’ll go deal with it.”

“You have my thanks.”

☆

Unlike the ninja mansion that was Lanthanum, Silicon was like a cave in the ground.

It was almost calming how *dungeon*-like it was.

“Well, maybe not calming.”

The instant I stepped into B1, I felt danger. The air inside the dungeon itself changed when a dungeon master appeared, but this was even worse.

It was as if the air was stagnant—as if the cave itself was on the verge of total collapse.

I hurried. One silver lining was that this situation allowed me to keenly sense the dungeon master’s presence.

I proceeded through the dungeon, as if guided. Beelining toward the stairs, descending multiple floors. When I arrived, there it was.

Silicon was a dungeon full of caterpillars, flies, grasshoppers, and other insects, and its master was no exception.

But it was enormous. It was a giant moth, over thirty feet in length.

“Kinda like Mothra.” While I mused, the enemy noticed me and flew at me.

I reflexively let out a punch. It was a perfect cross-counter, timed exactly for its approach. My fist struck Mothra’s compound eye—

“Argh!” It felt like my arm was about to break off.

That was a serious blunder. In Silicon, physical attacks were ineffective.

My perfect counter dealt no damage whatsoever to the moth; instead, my fist and shoulder took the full impact of its charge.

My shoulder stung. I jumped as hard as I could to put distance between us and used the limitless recovery round to heal.

Of course! Bullets.

Back when I’d saved someone in here from the magic storm, both physical and magical attacks were useless, but special bullets alone worked. I did end up in danger since I’d run out of bullets, but that wouldn’t happen this time.

This time, I centered my fighting strategy on limitless lightning and recovery rounds. But Mothra was not that strong; in fact, it was probably the weakest dungeon master I'd fought yet. It was troublesome due to it being in a dungeon where physical attacks didn't work, yes, but its strength was lacking.

By the time I'd evaded its next attack and loaded it with five limitless lightning rounds, it was already on the ground. I finished it off with a growth round to reap the extra reward.

After Mothra had died and dropped an item, the normal monsters of the dungeon came back.

☆

The next morning, Cell visited my mansion again.

"First, let me offer my thanks," he said in his usual cool and collected tone. As a member of the filthy-rich Stem nobility, he had a naturally pompous way of speaking. That was still true, but…

Why does he look so sour right now?

"Impressive, but by no means a surprise, Sir Sato, that you'd so swiftly defeat a dungeon master under such disadvantageous conditions. The magic storm has finally passed, but if we'd left it for that long, Silicon would certainly be dead by now."

"I'm glad we solved the problem. Why do you look so down about it, though?"

“It’s not your fault at all…but no, it’s strange. Frankly, it’s only because of your swift action that we managed to come out of this as well as we have.”

“What do you mean? What happened?”

“Silicon’s ecosystem has changed.”

“…Hmm.” I recalled yesterday’s events. When I’d entered the dungeon, I felt that the cave was in tatters. Close to collapse. That was a result of the dungeon master’s influence, but that effect remained even after its death. Looking back, I’d noticed on my way out that the monsters had changed. “Come to think of it, this is the first time I’ve seen a dungeon master change the ecosystem of an entire dungeon. I hear about it often, though.”

“…”

“What happened, then?”

“Physical…*and* magic,” he answered.

“…No way.”

Cell just nodded, confirming my suspicions. “Silicon’s monsters are now immune to both physical and magical attacks.”

I felt my brow tighten. Silicon was in a seriously bad state now.

233. Five-Minute Cooking

I went back to B1 of Silicon with Emily and Celeste. It was devoid of other adventurers.

“So many monsters…” Emily said.

“Their appearances…haven’t changed,” the Ryota Family’s walking encyclopedia, Celeste, added as she observed the monsters.

The B1 monsters of Silicon, tissue box-sized caterpillars, were the same as the ones I’d previously seen on B3.

“Seems like it,” I replied. “It looks the same as when I came here to save that person.”

“That was such a hard time…” Emily said.

“Thanks again for saving us, Emily. Now, let’s confirm the situation. Emily?”

“Okay.”

She lifted her hammer and stepped forth. As silly as it looked to see the girl wearing a super-massive hammer nearly double her height…

“She looks more dignified now,” Celeste mused.

“You think so, too?”

“Yep. This is exactly when she *really* puts her head in the game.”

“Oh?” Intrigued by that phrasing, I watched Emily.

The air changed, and so did the look on her face. Our family’s calm, motherly caretaker suddenly took on the aura of an

experienced hero. Her Emily-branded hammer spun, audibly cutting through the air, as she lunged at the caterpillar.

“Yaaaaaah!”

She swung her hammer down, head-on. After an explosive *bonk!,* the ground shook.

The ground beneath the caterpillar’s feet cracked in a spider web pattern, but the caterpillar itself was unhurt.

“Haaaaaah!”

She put more force into it. The cracked ground shattered into smithereens, creating a crater around the monster.

After that, she jumped back away from it. It seemed like she’d given up, but then, she lightly swung her hammer.

Boom!

There was a powerful explosion centered around the crater.

“Did she just use magic?” Celeste asked me.

“No, that was a dust explosion,” I answered. “Amazing how she can just make a crater in the earth like that…” While I admired her work, the explosion gradually settled, and the caterpillar appeared.

Amidst the flames, it crawled this way.

“Aww… It didn’t work at all!” Emily cried.

“Not your fault. Next up, Celeste… Mind doing the honors?”

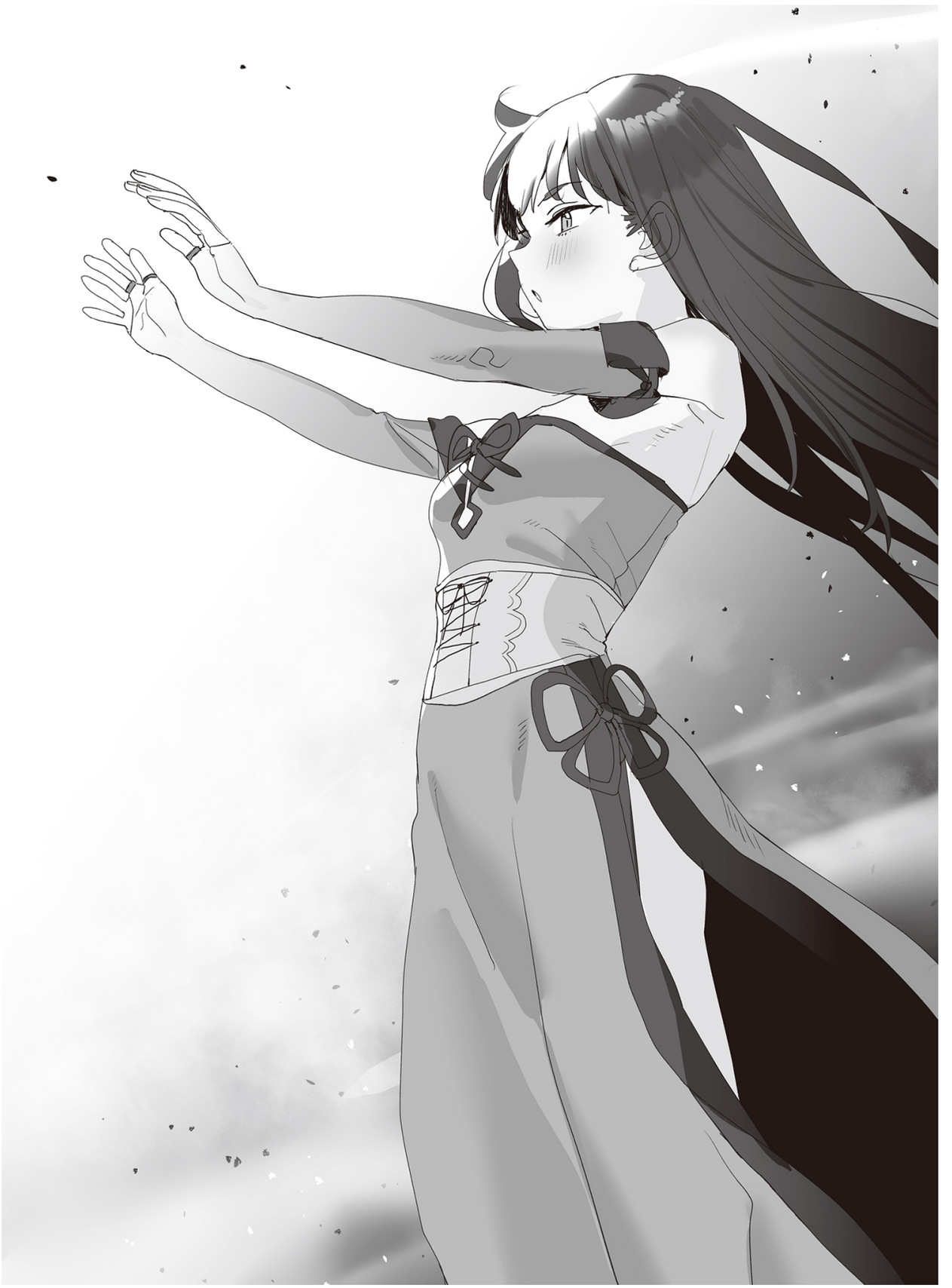
“Sure. I’ll give it a try.” Celeste stepped forth, taking Emily’s place. Unlike her predecessor, she didn’t lunge forward; she just held her hand out and cast the spell, “Inferno.”

Emily and I cocked our heads.

“…Huh? Nothing’s happening.”

“Yeah. She’s casting, but there’s no magic. Is the magic storm still active?”

Meanwhile, Celeste was unmoved by the misfire; she just repeated, “Inferno!” With a more energetic call, vicious flames swirled forth and engulfed the caterpillar.



“It worked that time. And wow! Your magic’s gotten a little stronger than before,” Emily complimented her.

“I see… I think I get it,” I mumbled.

“What do you mean?”

“After the second time she cast it, it was hard to tell, but it generated fire twice. I think she delayed the first one in order to combine them.”

After I offered my impressions, Celeste turned around. Blushing, she said, “Impressive… I can’t believe you figured it out so quickly.”

“Does combining them make them stronger?”

“Yep. It’s not just adding one plus one to make two; it becomes ten times stronger.”

In the roaring flames, the caterpillar was unfazed.

“Magic won’t work either, then.”

“This is a problem…”

Celeste and Emily looked bothered.

Silicon was originally a magic-focused dungeon where physical attacks didn’t work, but yesterday’s problems had led to neither working. I fired an annihilation round at the approaching caterpillar. This worked, killing it easily.

It dropped red cabbage. A leafy vegetable, as usual.

“Good job, Yoda!”

“Yep. Not that this fixes the problem,” Celeste joked.

“Yeah. If only I can defeat the monsters here, then production’s coming to a halt.”

“To turn it back… We’d have to do the same thing again, right?”

“I think so.” I took out the ring that had dropped from Silicon’s dungeon master.

“Is that the dungeon master’s drop?” Emily asked.

“Yeah.”

“You’re going to turn it back into the dungeon master and change the ecosystem again, then,” Celeste hypothesized.

“Right. That’s where I need your help. I want you to keep on burning a caterpillar while I fight the dungeon master. Once things change and magic works again, I’ll kill the dungeon master. Same as I did in Lanthanum.”

“Huh? But monsters disappear when a dungeon master appears, don’t they?”

“Yeah, but…” With the red cabbage in hand, I left the dungeon. I put it down by the entrance, backed off, and let it turn into an outsider. Then, I said, “I think it should be just fine outside the dungeon.”

“I get it!”

“You really thought this through…”

“If it won’t work, then we’ll know as soon as the ecosystem changes. We can just spawn a new one each time.”

“Got it,” Celeste assented.

“You can burn it while I hold it back,” Emily said to her.

“Yeah. Leave it to us.”

I left the caterpillar to the two of them and went back into the dungeon. Then, I spawned the dungeon master in a place where I could watch the entrance.

Here, I used another creative trick.

When the dungeon was stopped, the town's production of the drops within stopped as well. The reason I had them test on the caterpillar at the same time was to get things back to normal ASAP. And I had one more thing to help with that.

"Leia."

"Understood." Leia had remained combined with me and silent until this point. She reached out her arm and cast Revive on the ring.

Instantly after, the Mothra dungeon master was reborn.

I fired an acceleration round into myself. Then, I used another on the boss. Since I hadn't used them in a while, I had a ton of them stocked up. Hopefully this would accelerate the change in the ecosystem.

I fought the revived dungeon master. I'd defeated it once in a head-on battle before. Besides, it was the weakest dungeon master. Thus, I did what I could to buy time, never taking my eyes off the outside.

Emily held the caterpillar back, and Celeste burned it. Keeping an eye on their status, I kept on buying time.

My first pair of acceleration rounds wore off, so I immediately used two more. I did this because I'd realized that they were working.

The cave-like dungeon was changing. The walls and ceiling alike were beginning to collapse due to the dungeon master's power.

But I continued to buy time. After the ninth set of acceleration rounds—after a mere five real minutes had passed…

"There it is!"

The caterpillar began to burn.

Where Celeste's flames hadn't worked before, they began burning the monster fast enough that it was clear to me even while accelerated.

"Repetition!" I used magic to instantly kill the dungeon master, since I'd already beaten it before. It fell, dropped a ring, and changed the air of the dungeon again.

"Yoda!"

"Ryota!"

"Check it out for me, please."

"Okay!"

"Got it."

They used their own styles to defeat a caterpillar that had just appeared. Emily's powerful hammer strikes were ineffective as usual, but Celeste's magic managed to scorch it just like before.

"Phew," I sighed. "Looks like things are back to normal, then?"

"That was incredible, Yoda!"

"Changing a dungeon in just five minutes…"

While I was relieved, my friends complimented and congratulated me for my work.

234. A Rule for Ryota

Celeste entered the Cyclo Dungeon Association chief's office where Cell and I waited, seated face to face. The secretary guided her in, and she sat next to me.

"I took a quick tour through all the floors of Silicon," she announced.

"Thanks. Sorry to make you do that," I apologized. "You're smarter than me, so I figured you were better suited to the task."

Celeste looked a little surprised when I said that. Her cheeks flushed red. "…It's okay. We're friends, so I'm happy that you rely on me at times like this."

"Thanks."

"So, how was it?" Cell urged her to speak. As the chief and person in charge of the dungeons of Cyclo, he was eager to know the state of Silicon.

"Bottom line first: Silicon is just like how it used to be. Every monster is immune to physical attacks and vulnerable to magic."

"I see."

"Drop type changes have been observed in two places, quality in one. Everything else is the same."

"No major changes, then?" Cell confirmed.

Celeste nodded. "It might've been because of luck that we got it back to normal in so few tries. Though that's just a theory."

"At any rate, this means we're safe to continue production as usual."

“Yes. There should be no change to clearing or farming it,” Celeste declared.

Cell looked at me and quietly bowed his head. “All thanks to you, Sir Sato.”

“I’m just glad we got it back to normal.”

“I’ll put out an announcement at once… Also, we’ll need to come up with a means of preventing this from happening again.”

“Are you going to ban selective breeding?”

“…”

He fell silent. I could understand his dilemma.

“It’s not good for things to never change,” I told him.

“I thought you might say that, Sir Sato. And I agree. Just as you always search for new ways to fight, we will not grow as people without change.”

“A moderate level of selective breeding is necessary, then.”

“That is true of the money-minting dungeon that I’m urging the government to allow you to change for me, as well. Change is a necessary thing.”

“…You’re right,” I agreed. I never stopped training in dungeons, so I was able to read between the lines here. “You don’t need a ban; you need a limit. A strict one.”

“Exactly. A limitation that everyone would agree to, at that.”

“Hmm… That sounds difficult. What would everyone agree to?”

Cell and Celeste furrowed their brows in thought.

After a moment, I hit upon something.

“What if it was limited to spirit-blessed?”

“That’s it!” Cell understood instantly. Capable men like him are just built differently, I guess.

“Are you saying only people blessed by spirits should be allowed to do it?” Celeste asked me.

“Spirit-blessed are known for being strong—exceptionally strong—right?” I replied.

“Right… You could make it so that people who don’t fit that condition can’t do it,” she said. “Given what happened, everyone should find that agreeable.”

“There you have it. What do you think?” I put the ball in Cell’s court.

“…”

“Cell?”

He seemed too deep in thought to answer, though.

“What’s wrong? Is it too difficult, you think?” Celeste wondered.

“Who knows…”

After we’d watched him for a while, he suddenly looked up at us and said, “Let’s make it two.”

“Two?”

“Indeed. Two spirit-blessed must be present. Otherwise, a dungeon master cannot be used for selective breeding.”

“You’re really upping the difficulty there.”

“Actually, that would mean…?” Celeste started, but she trailed off mid-sentence.

“Hm? Celeste, what’s up? You’re staring at me.”

“The only family with at least two spirit-blessed is ours.”

“Wait, is that it?!” I gasped.

“Exactly. Spirit-blessed are rare to begin with. Typically, those who gain a spirit’s blessing will divest and become a head of their own family. Frankly, such people are typically strong-willed and refuse to cooperate with others.”

“I see.” That made some sense.

Rebecca Neon, for example. I’d only spoken with her a little, but she did seem a little brave…if not egotistical.

“In other words, under these conditions, Ryota would effectively be the only person who can do it.”

“I wonder how that’d work,” I chuckled.

Cell had a big grin on his face, though. “I won’t say that only Sir Sato can do it. They’ll just need to have two spirit-blessed available,” he said. I could almost swear I heard him say, “I’d like to see them try, though.”

As a rule, it was fine. In fact, it was a sensible act. Changing dungeons was a dangerous thing, so you needed both the consent and support of multiple strong, influential people.

Absolutely reasonable.

“All right. Then I’ll work on a new rule along these lines.”

Thus, with the incident in Silicon, a rule effectively known as the Ryota Bill was drafted.

235. Producing Unique Monsters

I used the warp room to go directly to B20 of Lanthanum. There, I saw a guard exuding an ominous air.

Said guard was watching the stairways leading up and down, as if blocking entrance.

“Hmm?! Who goes there?!” he shouted.

“Umm…” I’d done nothing wrong, but I was unsure how to respond to this. Given I had nothing to hide, I casually stepped in front of him.

“Ah… Pardon my rudeness!” The young man stood at attention and saluted me. “Apologies for my yelling. I didn’t realize it was you, Mr. Sato.”

“Well, it’s fine… Wait, you know who I am?”

“Of course! You’re Mr. Sato, the namesake of Bodley Ryota. Everyone guarding this floor knows you!”

“I see. Why are you guarding it?”

“Production of your drink is being regulated at this time. People without licenses aren’t allowed to sell it, but given the risk of black-market sales, we’ve been asked to manage the production site. Direct orders from the Fylline Dungeon Association.”

“Okay, then.”

They really were regulating production of it. Before long, the seasonal Bodley drop would be a trend in Fylline—maybe even in Cyclo, too. Maintaining a brand was tough.



“All right, guess I’ll have to go out into the city,” I resigned myself. “I’ll talk to Mao and get a license.”

“Ah, the chief left us with a message for you.”

“Hm?”

“She says that Mr. Ryota is free to make all he wants.”

“You sure that’s a good idea?”

“This message wasn’t left to be passed on to you, but she says… ‘It’s naturally okay for him to make it just to drink on his own. And if he can sell it for a high price, then that’s okay, even without a license.’”

How obliging. Still…

“Got it. I think I’ll take her up on that.”

“Of course. Please, feel free.”

After saying goodbye to the guard, I defeated some monsters, got enough wine drops for a few people, and took them back to the mansion.

☆

I went out onto the mansion terrace and felt the night wind. I’d drank a fair bit of wine, so my ears were hot, and my skin was flushed.

“Whatcha doing, Ryota?” Alice came out of the mansion and stood next to me.

“Just cooling down a little. I might’ve had a bit too much to drink.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. It tastes great, after all.”

“It sure does!” She smiled and took a sip of her wine. Though, I had a feeling that her sense for what tasted good differed from mine a little. “Bodley’s so good! You’re as awesome as ever, Ryota.”

“You think so?”

“Yeah! Everyone else loves it, too!” By that, she meant the buddy monsters on her shoulders: the slime Bubbly, skeleton Boney, little demon Boomy, needle lizard Spiky, and Master Dragon Rawry. Her chibified buddy monsters were taking little laps out of her glass, too.

“Can they drink?”

“It’s rare for them to do it, but they really love this one. I think it’s because it’s yours, Ryota!”

“Maybe.” This wine was good enough that Fylline had decided to limit production of it, and on top of that, these were top-quality drinks made with my S-rank drop rate. “So even monsters can get hooked on this stuff, huh?”

“Kerby says it’s delicious, too!”

“Kerberos, too? Well, he does eat like us, I guess.”

Our guard dog, Kerberos the Cerberus outsider, wasn’t quite the same as Alice’s buddy monsters.

“Hey, you should take me with you next time you do selective breeding! I wanna watch you do your stuff!”

“Good idea… But only after you become spirit-blessed, okay?”

“Oh, yeah! I forgot that was a requirement now. Okay! I’ll do my best!”

“Yeah, you do that.”

No doubt our favorite summoner would conquer a dungeon and be blessed by a spirit before long.

I just knew it would happen.

☆

“Nnh…” I groaned and yawned as I woke up the next morning.

I’d slept in the perfect bed imbued with the effects of what could be a skill called Emily’s Home, so I woke up perfectly refreshed and ready for a productive day.

Rustle.

However, something furry was rubbing against my face.

Rustle, flap. Rustle, flap.

I knew that feeling; it was a dog’s tail.

“Did you…get in my bed with me? Uh… Kerberos?”

“Good morning, Master.”

“…”

“What’s wrong, Master?” Kerberos(?) stared at me while I opened my eyes and sat up.

“You…are Kerberos, right?”

“Yep, I’m Kerberos. That’s the name you gave me, Master.” Kerberos(?) cocked his head, as if to inquire why I was asking him that.

I grabbed his face and turned it toward the window. The window, which functioned as a mirror as well, revealed what resembled a giant koppe pan—Kerberos looked like a Shiba Inu now.

☆

At the Dungeon Association chief's office, Cell said firmly, "It's a unique monster."

"Unique…"

"…Monster?"

Kerberos and I exchanged glances and cocked our heads again.

"What's that?" I asked. "Unique…must mean that it's rare, right?"

Cell nodded.

"They are also referred to as mutant species. Through some impetus, individual outsiders have been known to evolve into new appearances."

"Are they like rare monsters?"

"Not quite. Rare monsters are different monsters that live on the same floor as regular ones. For example, slime mutations are not the same as slime bros."

"So what you're saying is, Kerberos is still classified as a Cerberus, but… Hmm." I crossed my arms and cocked my head,

trying to think of the best expression for this. “Like… A Cerberus so rare that only one exists in all the world?”

“That is apt. However…I must say…” Cell gazed at Kerberos, who’d become a giant Shiba Inu. “A unique monster… Amazing. I’m impressed with you, Sir Sato.”

“Hm? Why me?”

“Ninety-nine percent of unique monsters come from outsiders. That’s because they require exposure to human wavelength, magic, and vitality—in other words, energy particular to humans—to transform. That’s exactly why the vast majority must be outsiders.”

“Right… If they were monsters in a dungeon, they’d just be killed.”

Cell nodded. “That said, they don’t simply transform because they have a human owner. Only one in a hundred do, and it can take years to decades. As I recall, you started raising that dog…”

“Not even a year ago now.”

“Simply incredible. Amazing, Sir Sato.”

“But why did he transform so suddenly?”

“Has he taken in a large amount of your energy of late?”

“…Yeah, actually. The wine. We let him drink a lot of the Bodley yesterday.”

“There you have it.”

I looked up at Kerberos, who’d become a Shibu Inu the size of a station wagon. Unique monster Kerberos, a Shiba Inu…

Our beloved guard dog had just evolved.

236. A Village of Unique Monsters

I visited Mao at the Fylline Dungeon Association…and she promptly decided to sit in my lap. We usually sat across from each other, but things had taken an odd turn.

“Umm, Miss Mao?”

“Just Mao is fine.”

“Uh… Okay, fine, I guess… But why are you in my lap?”

“You don’t like me sitting here?”

“It’s not that bad, but…”

Mao Mii was the chief of Fylline’s Dungeon Association. Her title was proof that she was a big deal, but she *looked* even smaller—younger, too—than Emily. When she sat in my lap, it felt like I was babysitting a family member’s kid.

I didn’t *dislike* it. But I was confused, because I didn’t really get why she was doing it.

However, I’d learned from Cell—and others—that questioning things would get me nowhere.

“…Ahem! I’m here with a request,” I said, changing the subject.

“Ask away! I’m happy to do anything.”

“I want to farm a lot of wine from B20 of Lanthanum for personal use.”

“Hmm? Didn’t I say you could use it as much as you want?”

“The guard there told me that, yeah, but I plan to get a large volume of it. I just thought I should ask first.”

“…”

Mao stared right at me. In my lap, she turned and looked up at me over her shoulder.

“What?”

“I’ve fallen for you all over again!”

“Huh?”

She jumped out of my lap and stood in front of me, gazing at me with starry eyes. “Want me to gather people right now? Is five hundred enough?”

“Whoa, that’s not necessary. I can do it myself, okay?”

When I refused her offer to help, she looked awfully sad. “Are you suuure?”

I hated to make such a cute little kid sad, so I ended up offering, “Want to come with me?”

“I do, I do! I wanna see you in action!”

And just like that, her frown turned upside down. She was as excited as a kid the day before a field trip.

☆

I used the warp room to go to Indole, from which I traveled to the monster village Ryota.

“…Wow.”

“Hmm?” I turned around.

Behind me was a cart that I’d procured from Indole, with barrels loaded on it. Mao sat on top of them, wide-eyed and

nearly speechless.

“From Fylline, to Cyclo, and then to Indole in no time…” she said.

“Yeah. That’s one of the features of that mansion,” I answered plainly. I’d shared that information so readily because it had existed in this world already. “It used to be haunted, but after we got rid of the ghost, we were able to use the warp room feature.”

“Wow… That’s amazing!”

“Now, you see that village coming into view?”

“I know about it!” Mao jumped up. She stood on top of the cart, visibly excited. “It’s the outsider village Ryota! All kinds of outsiders live there and even work real jobs!”

“I’m surprised you know.”

“I investigated it myself!” She proudly puffed out her chest. It was adorable.

Investigated it, huh?

I didn’t bother asking why. If I did, I’d just be asking for trouble. Who knows what terrifying things I’d learn? Though really, most of my anxiety about that came from Cell.

“What’s wrong?” Mao tilted her head, noticing my silence.

I just brushed her off with, “Nah, nothing.”

Sometimes, she and Cell felt a little too similar for comfort. Maybe they were the same kind of weirdo. Praying that wasn’t the case, I proceeded toward the village.

When we got there, the clayman greeted me, “Good morning! Your acceleration round is ready again… Oh? What’s with the

cart?”

“I brought you wine.”

“Wine?”

“Stuff I made. Just a little gift for everyone.”

After one more moment of reluctance, the clayman finally, happily agreed, “Thank you so much!” Then, he shouted to the others, “Everyone, Ryota brought us gifts!”

Outsiders began gathering from all over. Despite their shyness, the monsters were all excited when they learned it was alcohol.

They quickly set upon starting a party. The whole carriage of Bodley Ryota was brought in to the village center.

“Deliiicious!”

“Daaaaaamn!”

“I’ve never had stuff like this before!”

It was a big hit.

Not long after, the party was in full swing.

☆

The next morning, after staying a night in the village, I saw that things had changed.

All of the monsters looked different from how they had yesterday. Even the orc, who looked like the kind of guy to kidnap a princess, now looked adorable like one of the three little pigs.

The tiny goblin had grown tall and slender, wearing a biker jacket instead of a loincloth and wielding a nail bat instead of a club.

“Good morniiing!”

A slime flapped its wings, flying at my face height.

“Wait, you’re…”

“Slime-pyon!”

“Oh… Okay, you grew wings,” I realized.

“Yep!”

“I see. Didn’t you have a friend who looked like your twin, too?”

“I’m right here.” A voice came from the opposite direction. When I turned around, I was shocked—a beautiful woman stood there. She was beautiful enough that she could be a leading actress in a movie.

“Umm… And you are?” I asked.

“Slime-nyan. Thanks to you, I’m a unique monster now.”

“It turned you human…?”

From slime to human. I was a little shocked.

Just then, I looked around the village again. All of the excited monsters here had, without exception, turned into unique monsters.

“What a surprise! Everyone who drank Bodley Ryota turned into a unique monster!” Apparently having gone for a look around the village, Mao ran over gleefully. “It’s awesome! Like, seriously awesome!” She was going crazy over the effects of the drink that we’d selectively bred together.

237. A Single Monster

In Fylline's Dungeon Association chief's office, Mao sat in my lap and read out a document. "We had tests done with Bodley Ryota. We couldn't experiment on people's pet outsiders, so we had new ones made for it."

"Okay, fine. But why are you on my lap again?"

"As a result, despite also being A-rank wine, it did not turn outsiders into unique monsters."

"Just gonna ignore me, huh?" I muttered, gave up, and listened to the report.

"But when given *your* A-rank wine, they turned into unique monsters overnight."

"Really?"

"Yep! Without exception, every single one. Yours is A-rank too, but it's different somehow."

I see...

Mao called it A-rank, but that was only because the S-rank concept didn't exist in this world.

I recalled when I'd met Emily and first saw my stats. When she saw my S-rank stats, she thought they were far worse than F-rank. That was correct in pure alphabet order, but I knew that S surpassed A in cases like this.

And I was right. That was surely true this time, too. Mao rated it A-rank based on common sense, but the wine I'd dropped was probably S-rank.

S-rank Bodley Ryota had the effect of turning monsters into unique monsters.

“We tried from B to E just in case, but same deal,” she added.

“Uh-huh.”

“Yours is special. Really special. So, umm…” Mao fidgeted in my lap, seemingly struggling over what she wanted to say next.

“Go on?”

“I’d appreciate it if you didn’t sell it at normal shops.”

“I get it. As someone in charge of the Dungeon Association, you wouldn’t want someone spreading alcohol that has a special effect attached.”

“Yeah…”

“That’s fine. I’ll just take what I want to use for myself. Is that okay?”

“Okay!”

We were talking business, but her smile was as innocent as ever.

☆

I left Fylline and used the warp room to go back to the monster village—rather, *unique* monster village—Ryota.

When I got there, a monster greeted me, “Good morning.” It was a clay doll with a jarringly large head. Kind of cute, yes, but kind of terrifying in how its mouth didn’t move when it talked.

“That voice… Clayman?”

“Yes.”

“Huh. So that’s what you look like now.”

The clayman had started off as a literal man made of mud. Now that he was a unique monster, he looked like a clay doll.

“Your acceleration round is ready.”

“Got it. How’s everyone doing, though?” I asked.

He bowed deeply. “Thanks to you, all of us have become unique monsters.”

“All of you? As in, everyone?”

“Yes.”

“Wow.”

So my Bodley really does make them unique monsters.

“Becoming unique has changed our skills and stats. At first, everyone was confused, and our work output decreased. But…”

“Sounds like efficiency went up in the end?”

“Yes. After we got a grasp of our new skills, we found that our fighting abilities went up across the board. They doubled on average, and in some cases even tripled.”

“Very nice.”

“All because of you, Ryota.” He bowed again. His tone of voice told me that he was grateful, but it was still a little eerie that his expression didn’t change at all.

“I’ll go grab the acceleration round and look around the village. You can get back to work now.”

“Understood.” The clayman left, and I toured the village alone.

Until recently, the village was full of monsters that *looked* like monsters. Some of them had shared the same appearance. But today, they all took on a different appearance. The violent-looking orc had become a fairy tale piglet, one of the slimes had turned into a person… This had added a whole lot of variety.

And of course, their stats had improved as well. I could tell from a single stroll around the village that they were stronger.

This should make life a little easier for them, I thought to myself.

“Oh!” I gasped. A monster had made eye contact with me and then ran off. “That was…mini-sage, right? Huh?” I murmured before realizing that something was off.

The “mini” series of monsters inhabited the dungeon Platinum. They were monsters modeled after what you might call RPG classes, and they were typically about two to three heads tall.

As for their appearance, they looked like late-90’s top-down RPG characters.

That was fine, though. I was used to this world, so that didn’t bother me. The problem was that the mini-sage still *looked* like the mini-sage I knew.

“It’s not a unique monster?” Curious, I ran after mini-sage. It desperately tried to escape me, but I caught up in no time. I circled around its front, and it ran straight into me.

“Punyo!” He let out an odd cry and fell on his backside.

“You okay?” I asked.

“I-I am… Oh!” The mini-sage rubbed his nose. When he saw me extend a hand, he froze up. “G-Great Ryota…”

“You know me? That means you didn’t just end up in this village today, did you?”

“Right…”

“Why didn’t you become a unique monster?” I asked. The mini-sage looked down sadly. “Did you not drink the wine?”

“…Hic.”

“Hic?”

“Waaaaaah!” He burst into tears.

His loud wailing and sobs drew attention from all around. Embarrassed by the scene, I desperately tried to console him.

☆

He sniffled. “I’m sorry, Great Ryota, for troubling you…”

“I mean, it’s really fine,” I assured him. On the village outskirts, the two of us sat side by side on a rock. My feet touched the ground, but the mini-sage’s legs only reached to the middle of the rock, so they dangled freely. “So, do you feel a little better now?”

“Yeah…”

“Good. Sorry if this makes you feel bad, but I wanna know. Did you drink the wine and see no changes?”

“That’s right.”

“The clayman told me that *everyone* turned into unique monsters, though.”

“I was hiding.”

“Hm?”

“I stayed out in the open at first, but everyone transformed except for me, so…I decided to hide.”

“Oh…”

It was too much for him to bear. I knew how he felt; when everyone else around you is doing great except for you, it becomes too difficult just to be around them.

“No matter how much I waited, I never changed. I’m starting to think I shouldn’t be in this village…”

It’d be easy to tell him not to worry about that. That was how I genuinely felt. It wasn’t as if one needed to be a unique monster to live in this village.

But the mini-sage probably felt awkward and hesitant about it. I couldn’t turn a blind eye to the unlucky and unrewarded.

“Wanna drink more?” I offered.

“Huh?”

“That, or you can come live with us.”

“With you…?”

“Yeah, in our mansion. I hear unique monsters are usually those who have an owner and receive their owner’s magic for years and years.” When I explained it, I remembered my initial impression that it was like a tsukumogami spirit. “So come live in

our mansion, if you want. That might help you become a unique monster."

"A-Are you sure it's okay?"

I nodded back.

Personally, it *wasn't* okay in my book; it's never okay to abandon someone in need like the mini-sage.

☆

Everyone was envious of the mini-sage as they sent him off. Almost all of the monsters expressed how they wished they could come live in the mansion.

Thus, I returned to Indole with a new friend in tow. I was ready to go into Aurum and go back home via the warp gate…but then, I remembered something.

"Aww, man. I forgot," I groaned.

The mini-sage was an outsider. A monster.

Monsters could only exist on their own floor.

Outsiders were an exception, allowing them to survive in other floors, dungeons, and outside of dungeons, but going in or out of a dungeon or going between floors would cause them to disappear.

I'd forgotten that, and I ended up bringing him way too close in my attempt to use the warp gate.

"Sorry. This is totally my fault. You can ride Kerberos; let's go back to the village for now." Kerberos came to the village and

back on his daily walks, so he could just pick up our new guest.

Upon my suggestion, though, the mini-sage gazed silently at the entrance to Aurum.

“What’s wrong?” I asked.

“It’s calling me…”

“Huh? Hey, wait—”

Before I could reach out my hand to stop it, the mini-sage took firm steps toward the dungeon. Then, without hesitation, he went inside.

“Wha?!” I ran after it, but when I did, I was warped somewhere else. “Gah, right! It’s a rogue dungeon!”

As a rogue dungeon, Aurum transformed every time someone entered. Another thing I’d forgotten. Now, I was in a random place in the dungeon.

I really am clumsy today. More importantly, the mini-sage… I guess it must be too late.

This world’s logic dictated that it would die the instant it entered the dungeon.

“Ugh…” I sighed, regretted my inability to stop him, and decided to look for the warp gate leading back to the mansion.

“Eruption!” There was a familiar voice in the distance.

“Huh?” After following the voice, I found the mini-sage fighting one of Aurum’s little demons.

It came into the dungeon without dying?

“Could it be…?”

Was he already a unique monster, despite not changing in appearance? Had the S-rank Bodley worked and made him a unique monster with an unprecedented new ability?

That was my theory now.

238. From 1 to Cap in Three Minutes

The mini-sage had just defeated the little demon when I happened upon him.

“Oh, Great Ryota!” Noticing me, he ran over on his little legs. “Look at this, Great Ryota! Look!”

“That’s…gold dust, huh? Did that drop from the one you just killed?”

“Yeah!”

“Also, why did you come running into this dungeon?” I asked.

“It was calling me.”

“Calling you?”

“Yes. It was a girl’s voice… Wait, huh?” Suddenly, the mini-sage’s eyes went wide. “Come to think of it…I came into the dungeon, and I’m still alive. Why…?”

“That’s what I’d like to know.”

“Whaaat…?”

He gazed at his own hands in confusion.

“This is just a guess, but I think you might be a unique monster already.”

“Already?”

“Your appearance hasn’t changed, but your abilities have. That’s a thing that happens.”

“Really?”

“Yeah,” I replied firmly. “Wanna test it out?”

“Test?”

“Let’s go to another dungeon. We can test whether you disappear when you go inside or go up and down floors.”

“I see…”

“Either way, we’re already in one dungeon. Not like we can stay here forever.”

My suggestion was a casual one, as if suggesting the mini-sage take a little walk—because I was almost certain now.

☆

We went back to the mansion through the warp point and then warped to B1 of Tellurium.

After some thought, I’d decided this was the best place to test it. Aurum changed every time someone entered, so we’d be causing people a lot of trouble if we did it there. Nihonium was the polar opposite in that regard; nobody would even notice us. But it didn’t have a status board or any drops.

Thus, I’d decided to bring the mini-sage here.

“I didn’t disappear…” He was surprised again, at a loss for words.

Back in Aurum, he had wandered in on his own, claiming the dungeon was calling him. This was the first time he had gone into a dungeon and between floors while conscious of whether he would disappear, so that reaction was natural.

“Yep. Feel any other changes?”

“Umm… I feel weaker…”

“Weaker? Let’s check at the status board.”

“Okay.”

We nodded to each other and headed to the status board. Status boards, which allowed adventurers to check their stats, were set up in busier dungeons like Tellurium as a free service.

We headed over to one and checked the mini-sage’s stats.



“Huh?” The mini-sage gasped when he saw his own stats.

“Pretty low,” I noted.

“That’s strange… Why am I back at level 1?”

“Were you higher before?”

“Yes. I worked my very hardest every day.”

“Hmm…”

The monsters of the village Ryota received garbage daily from places like Indole and other nearby towns and villages. Then, they worked to dispose of it. It probably built up enough to

turn into Frankenstein outsiders at points, which would lead to them building up EXP.

Knowing that, even I found it strange that he was level 1.

“I wonder if it means you were reborn, or something.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yeah. Okay, wait here a sec.”

“Huh? All right…?”

I left the confused mini-sage there and went back to the mansion for a moment. There, I took a whole bunch of the crystals that had been piled up from disuse.

These crystals dropped thanks to an equipment item I’d gotten from a dungeon master; they stored and materialized extra EXP gained over one’s level cap.

I brought many of them back to B1 of Tellurium, once again through the warp room.

“Huh?” I went back to the status board, but the mini-sage wasn’t there. I searched the dungeon, wondering if something had happened—and I found him going back and forth through the entrance.

He was doing repeated side steps. In, out, in, out, with joy on his face all the while.

Adventurers watched the scene.

“That’s a mini-sage, right? The monster?”

“Looks like one… Why doesn’t it disappear when it crosses a dungeon border, though?”

“Look at that collar there. That’s the Ryota Family’s!”

“So Ryota’s involved in this? It’s crazy… When he’s involved, even outsiders can go in and out of dungeons.”

Leaving the impressed adventurers aside, I quietly approached the frolicking mini-sage.

“Thanks for waiting,” I greeted him.

“Oh! I’m sorry, Great Ryota. I shouldn’t have strayed…”

“Nah, it’s okay. I get how you feel. More importantly, use this.”

“What is it?”

“Experience points,” I said, handing over one of the crystals.

When the mini-sage took it, the crystal disappeared like melting snow in his hands. “Whoa?! Wh-What happened?!”

“Don’t worry. You didn’t break it; that’s how it works.”

“Oh… Really?” Relief washed over the mini-sage’s face.

I handed over crystal after crystal. Despite his confusion, the outsider obediently accepted each one.

Thus, I gave him every EXP crystal I had on hand until they’d all disappeared. It took about three minutes.

“Welp, that’s about all of them.”

“Oh, I see…”

“Now, off to the status board.” I guided the befuddled mini-sage back to the status board from before. “Do it again.”

“Okay… Whaaat?!”



“Yeah, I figured.”

His stats were high on average. Reasonably strong, honestly.

“W-Wow…”

The mini-sage fell speechless at his own stats and gazed at me in admiration.

239. Miike Aurum

Still on B1 of Tellurium, I watched over the mini-sage as it fought monsters. Now that he was at his level cap, he was strong.

He was already capable of close quarters combat with a sword, and he was a jack of all magic trades including offense, support, and healing. Multi-talented and strong, but as a jack of all trades, he was naturally a master of none.

The mini-sage continued to mow down slimes and earn bean sprouts.

“I’m amazed.”

I heard a voice from my side, so I turned and saw that the Dungeon Association chief, Cell, was standing by me and watching the mini-sage.

“Oh… Cell?”

“I came when I heard the rumors. Things are even more impressive than I expected.”

“You think?”

“It’s already unprecedented for a human-owned outsider to return to a dungeon. I’d never imagined I’d see one producing just like a human adventurer. Can it go to lower floors, too?”

“Yeah. Hey, mini-sage,” I called out.

He had just finished a battle, so he came running in no time. “What is it?”

“My name is Cell Stem. I am the chief of Cyclo’s Dungeon Association.”

“Huh? Umm, I’m Miike, a mini-sage. It’s good to meet you.”

“I have some questions for you. Can you travel between floors?”

“Yes…”

He looked at Cell as if to say, *Why do you ask?*

“And enter and exit dungeons?”

“I can…?”

“Mind giving me a demonstration?”

Miike glanced at me, concerned. I didn’t know why Cell would ask for that, but I replied, “Go on and show him.”

“Yes, sir.” Miike began walking toward the dungeon entrance. When he got there, he jumped back and forth between the inside and outside like before.

“…Simply incredible,” Cell said.

“Huh?” I turned to him.

“I’ve never heard of such an outsider. Even a dungeon master cannot exit a dungeon, though they can move between floors.”

“Aha.”

I remembered Aurum. She was an even greater being than a dungeon master, but it was impossible even for her to exit a dungeon on her own. That was why I had to turn her into a gold chunk every day to move her around. When I was busy, I wouldn’t be able to pick her up or drop her off.

I was fulfilling her wish, yes, but not perfectly.

“Miike really is incredible, huh?” I mused.

“More than that. The truly amazing one is you, Sir Sato, for making it happen.”

“Miike, that’s enough.”

“Okay,” Miike replied and came back inside. It was then that a slime jumped at him.

It was a charge from the mini-sage’s blind spot. Taken by surprise, Miike got tangled up with the slime, fell over, and rolled out of the dungeon.

After they’d fallen out of the dungeon together, he kicked the slime away. Then, after casting the offensive magic Eruption, he won with ease.

“Phew… That surprised me,” he sighed.

“You okay, Miike?”

“I’m fine. It just surprised me. It was only a slime, after all.”

“If you say so.” He didn’t look injured at a glance, and he was right; it was just a slime. A simple accident. That was all—

“Why?”

—or so it should’ve been.

Miike and I turned around. Back inside the dungeon, one ghastly Cell awaited us.

“Hm? Why what?” I asked him.

“Why didn’t it disappear?”

“Huh?” I looked at Miike, who happened to be looking up at me. We made eye contact. “I mean, we explained why, right? And you saw it before.”

“No, not the mini-sage. The slime.”

“The slime? Oh!” I gasped in realization.

Right! The slime.

Miike had defeated the slime *outside* the dungeon.

Monsters disappeared when they left dungeons. Aside from unique monsters with the special ability that the mini-sage had, slimes should just disappear.

But that one hadn’t. Miike had kicked it away, and it remained alive until subjected to Eruption. It had been killed normally.

“What does it mean?” I wondered.

“It may be that monster’s special ability,” Cell theorized.

“Mine?” Miike was surprised.

“Let’s test it. Replicate the same circumstances—no.” I realized that I needed to think more fundamentally. “Pick up a slime and try carrying it outside.”

“Okay!”

I switched into my ability-testing mode, came up with a plan, and gave Miike orders. “Yeah, let’s do more than one, in fact. Pick up two, throw one outside, and keep holding the other while you go out.”

“Understood.”

Cell and I went back into the cave and watched.

Miike caught two slimes as instructed. After casting a restraining spell to stop them from moving, he carried them to the dungeon entrance.

Then, he threw one slime—which disappeared. The instant it went through the entrance, the monster disappeared without a trace, as if there was something there destroying it.

Miike looked at me uneasily.

“Don’t worry! Keep going.”

“Okay!” His anxiety soothed, Miike gathered himself and walked out of the dungeon with the slime in its arms. When he did, he gasped, “Wow…”

“Hmm…” Cell grumbled to himself and nodded. The slime in Miike’s arms hadn’t disappeared. “What do you think this means?”

“It seems like monsters that Miike is touching don’t disappear. Just a guess, but I bet going between floors is fine, too.”

“I’ll try it out!” Miike ran like the wind into the dungeon and came back in no time. “Great Ryota!” He brought back a sleep slime, eyes sparkling like a puppy wanting praise.

That was a monster from a different floor, but now, here it was.

“So you can take them between floors,” I observed.

“Yeah!”

“That’s awesome.”

“No, Sir Sato, I still believe *you* are the praiseworthy one,” Cell cut in.

“You sure about that?”

“There have been unique monsters—sudden mutations—until now, yes, but they all still fell within the

category of *monsters.* Monsters cannot escape the laws of this world and its dungeons. But you have finally demolished that boundary, and as such, I believe *you* are the one worthy of the credit."

"That's amazing, Great Ryota!"

Their lauding made me feel a little awkward.

It wasn't bad, but it was embarrassing, so I decided to change the subject. When I quickly looked around for something to bring up, I noticed the sunset. Today was almost over. Now that I was free from corrupt corporations, I didn't work at night. That meant it was about time to go home.

To go home, pick up Aurum, and…

"Hmm…"

"Great Ryota? What is it?" Miike cocked his head and looked up at me.

After gazing at it for a while, I finally turned to Cell and said, "We might just get another spirit-blessed."

"Oh ho?" Unsurprised, Cell asked me, "And who might that be?"

"Miike."

I took Miike to Aurum's chamber.

The mini-sage took her hand and guided her back to the mansion.

Until today, I would have to shoot her and remake her as an outsider. But now, she could just hold hands with Miike.

This made her happier than ever.

As such, the spirit-blessed Miike Aurum had been born.

240. Golden Ryota

On B1 of Silicon…

“Next stop, Arsenic!”

“Okay!”

…one little girl, carrying a monster in her arms, ran up the stairs and made a mad dash out of the dungeon.

The adventurers of Silicon were confused to see this.

“That was…a mini-sage monster, wasn’t it?”

“No shot. Why would a monster be going between floors and out of the dungeon? That cute little girl must’ve been doing ventriloquism with a stuffed animal.”

“You’re wrong. Keep this between us, but that’s the new member of the Ryota Family.”

One adventurer happened to be in the know, so all of them focused on him.

They were all experienced Silicon adventurers, so they were able to listen in while singlehandedly defeating monsters. A strange sight, indeed.

Pleased by the attention, the knowledgeable one proudly explained.

“You know unique monsters, right? That’s one that Ryota made evolve. That monster, and any monster it touches, can travel between floors and even go in and out of dungeons.”

“Whaaat?!”

A cacophony of surprise broke out.

“No way. Outsiders can do that?”

“I know about unique monsters, but they are still just *monsters*, aren’t they?”

“Whew… The Ryota Family’s too awesome.”

“Heheh.”

The knowledgeable adventurer laughed proudly and meaningfully, satisfied by their surprise.

“What’s with that laugh?”

“Remember that girl who was carrying the mini-sage?”

“Yeah… Wait, you don’t mean?!”

“Huh. If it can take monsters it’s touching, too, then is she a monster?”

“Is she a *unique* monster, too?”

“Heheh.” The adventurer acted even more smugly now.

“Okay, we get it! Just tell us everything!” someone shouted. A chorus of yeahs rose from the listeners.

“How impatient. Fine, fine. I hear that girl is Aurum.”

“Aurum… Is it spirit-blessed, then?”

“Come to think of it, Ryota Sato’s controlled the dungeon Aurum for a while now.”

“But wasn’t *he* the spirit-blessed?”

“You’re misunderstanding. That’s *Aurum herself.*”

“…What?”

“The spirit of the dungeon Aurum.”

“Whaaaaaat?!”

Everyone there, save for the knowledgeable one, turned back to look at the entrance to Silicon. Surprise, admiration, and respect dominated their faces.

☆

At night, I got out of the bath and considered going into the kitchen to find a cold drink.

“Ryota!”

“Whoa!”

I was interrupted by a tackle from the side. Despite the suddenness of it, I managed to brace myself and avoid getting knocked down.

“What’s gotten into… Oh, Aurum?”

“Thanks, Ryota! Thank you so much!” Aurum hugged me.

“Hmm? Oh, you mean that?” I saw the mini-sage Miike next to her. “You seem awfully satisfied.”

“Yep! We went to every dungeon in the city!”

“Wow, very nice,” I replied. After I’d taken Aurum out of her dungeon and introduced her to Miike, she’d forgotten all about Emily’s dinner and went out all day with the mini-sage. “Had fun, huh?”

“Yeah! I’ve never seen other dungeons before!”

“That so? Sorry I couldn’t take you to any others until now.”

The reason I’d taken her out of the dungeon to begin with was because she wanted to see the outside world.

Every spirit I'd met so far had different wishes. Arsenic was hungry. Selenium was, well, lusty. Aurum was like a sheltered princess; she wanted to see the world.

So I'd used my S-rank drops and the mansion's warp room to take her out of the dungeon. However, I hadn't taken her to other dungeons. I could've tried to do it in theory, but every time we went in or left, *or* changed floors, I'd have to kill her again and turn her back into an outsider.

That seemed like a lot, so we hadn't done that yet.

"Other dungeons are fascinating!"

"Really?"

"Yeah! There was red snow, and stuff."

"Dungeon snow, huh? Come to think of it, Aurum doesn't have any of that."

She excitedly talked about other dungeons. It reminded me of a kid in a toy store.

"In that case, you might be interested in Lanthanum," I suggested.

"Why's that?"

"Just wait until you get there to find out. Miike, I'm about to take her through the warp room, so tomorrow—"

"I wanna go tonight!" Aurum cut me off. She sure wanted to go.

"Okay, okay. Is that fine with you, Miike? Aren't you tired?"

"I'm fine. Besides, I'm happy to be able to help Lady Aurum. And…"

“And?”

“This is for you, Great Ryota.” Miike rummaged through his things, took something out, and handed it to me.

“Gold, huh? And a whole kilogram at that.”

“Lady Aurum gave it to me, and I want to pass it on to you.”

“Nah,” I refused. “You keep that; you earned it, after all.”

“But…”

“It’s cool. Also, Aurum, it’s okay for Miike to introduce himself as Miike Aurum now, right?”

“Of *course*! We’re BFFs, Mii!”

“O-Okay!” Miike was taken aback by her enthusiasm.

They were going to get along just fine.

I’d been concerned about this for a while now. When I was on business trips, or when I was going somewhere for the first time, I worried about her being left all alone in the dungeon. But Miike had solved that problem for me. I was relieved and genuinely happy for them.

“Great Ryota.”

“Hmm? What’s the matter, Miike? Don’t look so down.”

“I heard some things while I was showing Lady Aurum around. I’m sorry… I know the name Aurum should belong to you.”

“Oh, you *really* don’t have to worry about that.” Names are hardly a big deal.

“What? Does it bother you not having my blessing, Ryota?” Aurum asked me.

“If people start to notice, then that might be a problem. Not that I really care.”

“Then let’s make this easy. This mansion is yours, right, Ryota?”

“Hmm? Well, yeah.”

“In that case…” Aurum held out her hand and snapped her fingers once.

There was utter silence; nothing had happened. But of course, that couldn’t be right. Surely something had happened.

Dungeon spirits were like gods in this world. They had special powers. If Aurum snapped her fingers with the intent to do something, then surely something had happened.

What could it be, though? I wondered.

I heard laughter outside the mansion.

“Ahahaha! What the heck is that? Ahahahaha!”

That was Alice.

I opened the window and peeked outside.

“Alice? What’s going on?”

“I should ask you that, Ryota! What is this? Did Aurum do something, or what?”

“She did, but…” I was getting even more concerned.

Aurum had done something that Alice could recognize at a glance. While I wondered what it was…

“Whoa!” I was so stunned that I yelled. I’d only gotten a glimpse of it, so I leaned even further out the window and turned to see it.

Now it was clear.

I could only see a part of it, but its appearance implied that the whole thing was the same.

The mansion exterior was all gold.

I ducked back inside and asked Aurum, “Did you do this?”

“Yep. I changed a bunch of stuff to gold. Now everyone can tell that *you’re* the one with my blessing.”

“Makes sense…”

“Ahahahaha!”

I heard my other friends’ voices from outside, too.

“This is impressive.”

“Cheeky, for a low level.”

I wondered for a moment if they were that impressed by this imitation of Hideyoshi’s Golden Tea Room—but my train of thought was interrupted by Cell’s appearance on the scene.

“I have arrived. Hmm, I must say, you’ve outdone even me this time,” he said.

Outdone?

I had a bad feeling about that, so I looked out there again.

There, I saw that everyone had gathered in a corner of the courtyard. They were surrounding something: a life-sized golden statue of me.

“Now we’re leveling up from bronze statues?!” I practically wailed.

So this was what Cell had meant when he said he’d been “outdone.” Panicked, I tried to ask Aurum to at least undo the

statue.

“Great Ryota… How cool…” Miike’s tiny figure hung from the windowsill as he gazed with sparkling eyes at the golden statue.

I didn’t want to spoil that childlike innocence, so I stopped myself from making the request.

Thus, the Ryota Family had gained a golden mansion, a golden statue…and a new friend, in a spirit-blessed unique monster.

241. A Feast

“Let’s go see the cherry blossoms!” Aurum said loudly in the dining room once everyone had gathered. She had the mini-sage Miike in her lap, and her eyes were sparkling. All eyes turned to her.

“Come again?”

“Yep! I hear humans go for flower viewings in the spring, and I wanna do that!”

“There are flower viewings here, too?” I muttered and looked over at Emily.

“There are. My mother loved them, too. Every year, she would drink lots and look at all the flowers with her friends.”

“Oh?” Celeste spoke up. “Last time you mentioned your mother, you said she was the kind of person who holed up in dungeons all year. Did she go to flower viewings, too?”

“She’d invite all her friends and hold events in dungeons.”

Eve—who was just gnawing on carrots while we all ate normal food—said emotionlessly, “Is that not just a banquet?”

“It is! Mom loved flower viewings where she could treat everyone to food. Oh, and she chose the floors where dungeon snow fell, too.”

“That’s more of a snow viewing than a flower viewing,” I mused.

After hearing about Emily’s mother, Aurum became more and more interested. “It sounds fun! Come on, let’s go look at

some flowers!” As someone who’d always wanted to know about the outside world, she was probably drawn to annual events like these.

And it wasn’t just her; before I knew it, everyone was waiting for my answer, as if they wanted to do it but believed it was up to me to decide.

How could I say no at a time like this?

“Okay. Let’s do it.” When they cheered, I stopped them. “But work comes before play. That goes for you in particular, Aurum; we need to get you back to your dungeon.”

“Okay! I’ll do my best at work so we can go flower viewing! Let’s go, Mii!”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa!”

With the mini-sage in her arms, she jumped up and ran out of the dining room. She really wanted to see those flowers.

“I’ll make a meal for the event,” Emily said.

As someone who wasn’t an adventurer, Erza offered, “Let me help.”

“Hmm… Do we need to snag a spot for a flower viewing?” I asked the others, since I didn’t know what they were like in this world.

Wise sage of the family Celeste answered, “Good point. We should grab one as soon as we can.”

“I’ll do it!” Alice eagerly volunteered.

“Are you sure, Alice?”

“Yeah! I’m basically immune to boredom, after all.”

The buddy monsters on her shoulder piped up along with her. With her little friends—chibified little monsters that looked like they'd come out of a gachapon machine—perhaps she was the least likely to get bored waiting for us.

"Okay. Job's all yours, then."

"Yeah! Leave it to me!"

"Celeste, Eve, Leia. We'll gather ingredients," I said.

"Understood. Emily, can you make us a list?" Celeste asked.

"Until the list is done, carrots," Eve demanded.

After that, we all got to work preparing for our flower viewing.

☆

Outside of Cyclo, in a place where people normally didn't go, was a place where cherry blossom trees grew en masse. Once a year, in this season alone, it became full of life.

In a corner with a good view of the place, Alice Wonderland sat on a big picnic blanket. Like others around her, she had set up in a spot to keep it for her friends.

She passed the time by playing with her chibified buddy monsters: the slime Bubbly, skeleton Boney, little demon Boomy, needle lizard Spiky, and Master Dragon Rawry. She was chatting and playing with such a diverse group of friends that it looked like she could put on a little puppet show with them.

However, a group of strangers walked near. They seemed to be arguing.

“This is all your fault. You made us leave late, and now all the good spots are taken!”

“My fault? Maybe it’s your fault for sleeping in when you should’ve been saving us a spot!”

“Gotta agree there.”

“Tch, fine. I’ll do something about it, then.”

“Like what?”

“Just you watch.”

One of the rough-looking gang looked around the area for a moment. Then, with a grin on his face, he approached Alice. “Hey, kid.”

“Hmm? Yes?”

“Give us your spot.”

“Uh, no? I’m reserving this spot for me and my friends to see the flowers.”

“Too bad. Give it up, kid.” He raised his foot and stomped heavily onto the ground. *Bang!* This gouged out a portion of the ground and sent dirt flying.

“Oooh.”

An act of intimidation, but Alice didn’t seem intimidated at all.

“While I’m still being nice, *please*.”

“Sorry,” she promptly replied. “I’m reserving this spot for me and my friends to see the flowers.”

“Say what?” He glared at Alice. His voice was getting gruff.

The other men spoke to each other in hushed tones.

“H-Hey… Is this kid who I think she is?”

“No doubt about it. That’s the Dragon Master of the Ryota Family! She’s dangerous.”

“H-Hey, man, maybe leave her—” One of them tried to stop him.

“Guys, just shut up and wait. I’m taking care of it.” Not noticing their protests and tense looks, he turned back to Alice. “I’ll say this one more time. Hand over the spot.”

“Sorry, sir,” Alice refused, perfectly calm.

Immediately after, he grabbed her by the collar of her shirt and lifted her up. “You’d better watch yourself, kid. Don’t act tough just ’cause I’m nice enough to—pghah!”

The man was blown away. A round object had come charging from behind Alice.

“Bubbly! Buddies!” She turned around, and her buddy monsters were there.

They weren’t in their cute, chibified forms anymore; they were normal-sized monsters. All of them were emitting pure malice, too.

Alice had no time to stop them; the skeleton, little demon, and needle lizard all charged in and beat the tar out of the man.

The awful treatment he’d given their master had driven them into a rage.

“Guys, that’s enough! Hey, Rawry, stop!” But even their master could not stop them. Even worse, the now-full-sized Master Dragon was spewing flames from its massive form.

Fire flew at the man. People around screamed.

The Master Dragon’s flames burned even the air. Just as everyone expected the worst, however, a shield of ice had appeared in front of the man.

The many layers of ice managed to fend off the Master Dragon Rawry’s fire attack. However, Rawry had yet to recover from its rage. It swung down with its sharp claws.

Thud!

The blow, so strong that it shook the earth below, was stopped by a man who’d stepped in.

“Ryota!” Alice cried.

His appearance caused a commotion, and relief, to spread through onlookers.

☆

My hands were numb and throbbing. I’d managed to make it in the nick of time, but Rawry’s blow was a powerful one.

That’s a dragon for you—a Master Dragon, said to rival even dungeon masters. I had to use all my strength to stop that attack.

“Grr…” Rawry glared at me with bloodshot eyes and reared up for its next attack.

“That’s enough! You’re making Alice sad!” I yelled. The dragon finally stopped and whipped around to look at Alice.

She was saddened by her buddy monsters’ rampage. Rawry and the other four buddy monsters all looked at her apologetically and returned to their usual small size.

Dejected, they lined up in front of her, where she petted them all.

“You were bad little babies today. But it’s okay. Good babies, good babies…” she consoled them. All of them cheered up and started playing with her.

Knowing that they were fine now, I turned to the man who’d been beaten up. “Sorry for that. You okay?”

“Who the hell are y—mmph!” he tried to yell, but people who seemed to be his friends held him back and covered his mouth.

Just then, my Family showed up—everyone from Emily to Miike.

“Oh? Yoda, what’s going on?”

“It looks like a battlefield out here.”

As for what was going on, that was what I wanted to ask.

The group of men argued amongst themselves about something.

“Mmph!”

“Shut up, idiot. Don’t you know who you’re dealing with?”

“Those people are the Ryota Family. They’ve got three spirit-blessed in their ranks!”

“If they got serious, they could turn you to ash, dumbass!”

Then, they ran off in a tangle.

“What happened?” I asked Alice.

“Umm, well, they told me to give up our spot.”

“Oh…”

Well, that explains things.

A rough-looking group of men, one still-young-looking Alice. I’d figured out what had happened here.

“I’m sorry for what happened.”

“No, it’s okay,” she replied.

“Low level and tiny. People are bound to underestimate you.”

“Yeah. Appearances can be important sometimes…”

Eve and Celeste commented and sat on the picnic sheet Alice had set up for us.

“Maybe they won’t underestimate you if I do this.” Aurum snapped her fingers.

Instantly after, the picnic sheet turned golden. The weights holding it down turned into golden statues, too. Our flower viewing space had turned shiny and sparkly out of nowhere, gathering a ton of attention.

“There’s no way they’ll look down on us now.”

“Maybe they will for different reasons…”

“Forget that. Flower viewing time, flower viewing time!” Aurum excitedly sat on the blanket.

Well, I guess it doesn’t matter, I thought to myself as I saw her play as innocently as a child.

Close friends, beautiful flowers, delicious cooking courtesy of Emily, and one excited Aurum. It was fun in every way possible.

“Look down on us, huh? Maybe if I get blessed, too, they’ll have second thoughts about that.”

While we enjoyed the flower viewing, Alice quietly gathered her resolve.



242. The Two Ryotas

I went to B1 of Tellurium through the warp room, ready to get back to my usual work farming drops for money.

Leia was already attached to me, and her arms had guns at the ready. She was unusually vigorous today, too.

“Someone seems extra pumped today,” I commented.

“Not at all, Master.” She spoke politely, in her usual calm tone, but I could tell she was in rare form today.

Not that it mattered. Being motivated to work is a good thing.

Now, let’s go kill some monsters.

Suddenly, there was some noise in the distance, and a crowd of adventurers ran this way.

“Waaaaaargh!”

“I-I’m not going down, not now!”

It wasn’t just one or two; just about every adventurer on the floor was running.

Some of them were acquaintances. I asked one of them, “What’s going on?”

“Oh, Ryota!” he greeted me.

“Did something happen?”

“It’s an outsider.”

“An outsider?”

“Yesterday, there was an adventurer who bit off more than he could chew. Monsters kicked his butt, so he ran. Apparently, he dropped some of his gear in the dungeon.”

“Oh…” I understood now.

That was another reason not to push yourself too much in this world.

Even adventurers’ gear was ultimately dropped by monsters. If left alone in a place without people nearby, it would naturally spawn an outsider. If a strong adventurer sustained a lethal injury and died where nobody could help them, their gear would become a whole mob of outsiders and cause further disaster.

Because of that risk, adventurers in this world did their best to avoid recklessness.

But humans are human, and we make mistakes. This was just an accident caused by someone dropping their gear without realizing because they were injured and trying to escape. Meanwhile, more adventurers came running. It must’ve been a strong monster.

I couldn’t do my job if I left it alone, so I’d just have to deal with it myself.

I ran in the opposite direction of the adventurer flood. Before long, I found an unfamiliar monster in the familiar dungeon.

It was almost human-like, rare among monsters. However, it was not perfectly human.

It was the size of a young woman, but it had a single butterfly wing on the right side of its back.

Its hairstyle was like a girl’s, too, and it had a single ponytail tied on the same side as the wing.

“Do you speak human language?” I asked.

The monster made an indescribable sound, charged, and attacked.

It's fast!

I jumped to the side as fast as I could.

Though its pursuit was delayed, it caught up at nearly the same speed.

It waved one hand. I raised my arms to guard—and I was blown away.

My guard was broken with ease. My arms tingled, and my whole body throbbed from the impact running through me.

I tried putting distance between us, since my guns would be less useful if it closed in on me, but it was too fast for me to make any progress. Leia put her arms to work, too, but she could hardly even aim, let alone fire.

If I couldn't use my guns, then I'd just have to resort to close-quarters combat.

SS strength, SS speed, SS vitality. With stats that could surely withstand close combat, I prepared to intercept its charge.

I dodged the monster's flexible arm and fired off a gouging hook. The monster guarded against that, so I grabbed its arm, swung it around, and slammed it into the ground.

However, a counterattack came quickly. It used that same arm as an axle to unleash a rotating kick. I barely evaded, but the kick cut some of my hair off.

Fast, and strong. If my stats were all SS, then the monster's were comparable to S.

I wouldn't lose if I took this fight seriously, but it'd take time.

"In that case…!"

At the same time as the attack, I took out a gun and pointed it at myself.

If I'm not attacking, then I can still fire even if it approaches.

And I did just that. I'd fired an acceleration round, the bullet that sped me up—rather, slowed the flow of time around me.

The instant I fired it, everything slowed down except for me. Even a monster with S-rank speed was like a toddler in the accelerated world.

I couldn't use my guns in this state, so I'd have to win via melee combat. I closed in and punched the monster in a flurry reminiscent of the Hundred Crack Fist.

After taking over a hundred punches in the space of a few seconds, the monster was blown into the wall so hard it was embedded there.

In the accelerated world, it slowly faded.

"Phew… That was a strong one."

After the acceleration ended and the monster had disappeared, I wiped sweat from my brow. I didn't know what that monster's name was, but in terms of strength, it might just be equal to a dungeon master.

There were slimes around me, though, so it didn't seem to have the features of a dungeon master.

At any rate, that settled—

"Gaaah!"

“H-Help!”

This time, adventurers came running from B2.

No way!

I ran down to the source of it. There, I found another monster: a rare humanoid reminiscent of a beautiful young woman. It had a butterfly wing and side ponytail just like the other, except…

“Left this time, huh?”

They were on the left side this time, mirroring the previous one. It reminded me of cliché twin characters.

I had a bad feeling about this. A *really* bad feeling.

And at times like this, my predictions tended to hit the mark.

From B1, where I thought I’d defeated the monster, I heard a scream.

“Eeeeeek!”

☆

Outside the entrance to Tellurium…

“That’s a monster called Twins United,” Celeste said, having run to the scene upon hearing the commotion. The Ryota Family’s fount of wisdom didn’t just know about Cyclo’s dungeons; she had knowledge of seemingly every monster in the world.

“Does it regenerate?”

“In a way, yes. From what I hear, they’re one being.”

“One being? Oh, like the slime family.”

“Exactly. It works the same as the slime family; it might look like they’re multiple individuals, but they’re actually one being.”

“In that case, do I have to defeat them through special means?”

“Yes. If you don’t defeat them at the same time, they’ll revive. No matter what.”

“Same time, huh?”

“And it has to be done by the same person.”

“I see. They’d usually be on the same floor together, right?”

Celeste furrowed her brow and nodded. “If they’re on the same floor, then one person can normally handle them alone. But they’re on different floors this time…”

When she said that, the adventurers who’d run from B1 and B2 piped up.

“No way…”

“Defeating two monsters at the same time, when just one of them had Ryota Sato himself on the ropes?”

“Even Ryota Sato can’t clone himself.”

“What do we do…”

I looked at Celeste.

“It’s dangerous, but… It’s gotta be Miike.”

“Yeah. But it *will* be dangerous,” she replied. Miike Aurum. The newest member of the Ryota Family and a unique monster, he had the power to move any monster it was touching to another floor. “Miike can move them between floors, so if it can

gather them together on either floor, you'll be able to defeat them."



Her words elicited cheering because we'd found a clue.

But the problem was the danger involved.

Miike was level 50, and his stats were a mix of Bs and Cs.

Based on our previous fight, the Twins United were strong—too strong for Miike to be safe.

Is there no other way? Maybe if I use an acceleration round and accelerate to the limit…

While I thought about it, Alice appeared. "I heard everything!" With her buddy monsters on her shoulders, she said in her usual bubbly tone of voice, "Leave it to me!"

"To you?"

"Yep. I mean, you remember…"

"…Ooh!" I remembered now.

Indeed, it was worth trying.

☆

I went back into the dungeon with Alice. She went down to B2, while I stayed on the first.

"How should we time it?" she asked.

"We can count based on the acceleration rounds. We'll kill the instant they're about to wear off."

"Okay! Ryochin!" Alice cast her spell, Omnipotence. The instant she used it, a chibified version of me appeared. While it might've looked like a plushie, it was just as strong as me in every way.

“Okay, here goes! Three, two, one…” On my mark, Ryochin and I both fired acceleration rounds into ourselves.

Ryochin and I accelerated, leaving behind even the one who’d summoned him. Then, we sprinted in search of the Twins United on our respective floors.

I found mine quickly; it moved at a sluggish pace from my perspective.

I knew the exact duration of the acceleration round, so I whittled the twin down through melee combat until it ran out. We didn’t use Repetition; after all, I’d only defeated one clone, so it didn’t count as having defeated the monster.

Whittling, ever whittling it down.

The twin was unable to fight back, subjected to a one-sided beatdown thanks to my sheer speed. And then, in the instant the acceleration round was to run out, I dealt a full-power finishing blow.

Time returned to normal, and the twin disappeared. I waited for a moment; it didn’t revive. After waiting long enough that it would’ve revived based on the last encounter, it still remained dead.

“Yoohoo!” Alice ran up the stairs. She gave me a thumbs-up, informing me that hers hadn’t revived either.

“Phew…”

After we’d defeated that troublesome monster, we stepped outside. The adventurers greeted the two of us with cheers.

243. Bonus Stage

“Huh?”

I’d warped to B1 of Tellurium for a day of work, but there wasn’t a single other adventurer around.

In a way, this was a new sight for me. It was teeming with monsters, yet there were no adventurers in sight.

I saw that all the time in Nihonium, but never in other dungeons.

“I wonder what’s going on,” I mumbled.

“I’ll go ask around.” Leia, who’d come to help me farm, ran over to the nearby break room.

These break rooms were one boon granted by the new Cyclo Dungeon Association.

Leia opened the door and went inside. The staff were there. After she’d asked them about it, she came back.

“Master, I’m told that Phosphorus has appeared.”

“Phosphorus? I’ve never heard of that. Is it a monster?”

“No, it’s a dungeon.”

“A dungeon… Oh!”

It’d been so long that it took me a moment to remember. Right, that was the name of a dungeon.

Long ago, I’d look this stuff up. In the same place that I’d learned gold and Aurum were the same thing, I’d learned about Phosphorus.

Tellurium, Silicon, Nihonium—like all of those, the dungeons were named after elements.

“So that appeared, and all of the adventurers from here disappeared… Wait, a new dungeon appeared?!”

Thud!

I heard something heavy hit the ground.

When I looked in that direction, I saw Cell picking up a figure-sized bronze statue. It was me, two guns in hand, doing what looked like my gun-kata technique.

That statue has a whole new composition!

When he realized that he was being watched, Cell cleared his throat. “That is not quite true!”

“Whoa, no, no, no! Don’t act like nothing happened!”

Ignoring my commentary, he explained, “Phosphorus is more of a bonus stage. It’s a mobile dungeon, one that appears at irregular intervals in random cities. One day after its appearance, it will disappear and go elsewhere. It is a special dungeon that belongs to no single city.”

“You’re really just gonna pretend it didn’t happen. Okay, whatever, fine.” I grinned wryly and refocused myself. “I get that it appears for only one day, but why is it a bonus stage? The lack of adventurers here must mean that it’s profitable, I assume?”

“Money.”

“Money?” I repeated flatly. “Money… You mean this?” I took this world’s money out of my pocket.

Paper bills, coins. The denomination here was piros, and its value and the value per bill and coin were equal to Japanese yen.

“Indeed. Phosphorus is a dungeon that directly drops money, and it is almost wholly unaffected by drop stats.”

“In other words, anyone who goes there can expect to make good money?”

“Exactly. A strange dungeon, indeed.”

“…”

Defeating monsters in a dungeon, receiving money directly… It was a strange thought, but as someone used to video games, it wasn’t all that odd to me. I felt a slight sense of surprise because of the perception I’d cultivated in this world.

“Still…everyone going there must cause a resource shortage, right?” I asked.

“That is one reason that my family manages the dungeon.”

“Hmm?” I looked at Cell with confusion written on my face.

“When people can receive money as a direct drop, they turn to that instead of farming resources. It cuts out the middleman, after all.”

“Makes sense.”

“But that makes most goods far more scarce, so the value of goods far surpasses the value of money.”

“…Inflation,” I realized.

Cell nodded.

I looked around the dungeon again. The usual crowd of adventurers was just gone.

At this moment, production had ground to a halt. It didn't take much thought to realize that this was a bad situation.

"For a single day, however, our stockpiles will last us. Primary producers having extra cash on hand will also stimulate the economy; that is a good thing."

"Right."

"Oh! Mr. Sato!" someone called out from a distance away. Just outside the dungeon entrance, I saw Ina's mom.

"Hmm? You're Ina's mother, aren't you?"

She was a greengrocer, not an adventurer, so she wasn't a fighter. Seemingly afraid to enter the dungeon, she watched from outside. Thus, I went to her and exited the dungeon.

"What brings you here?" I asked.

"Umm… Today's watermelons…"

Ina's mother timidly looked at me, as if gauging my reaction. Meanwhile, Cell came out of the empty dungeon.

Oh, I get it. All the adventurers have gone to Phosphorus, so she's worried about stock.

I had a few contracts set up, and my production contract with Ina's family involved watermelons.

"It's okay. I'll make my delivery as usual today."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you so much!"

She bowed over and over again.

Phosphorus was interesting, to be sure, but we had a prior agreement. I planned to prioritize that.

Since everyone was rushing into Phosphorus today, the Ryota Family was thanked by many for delivering our usual drops.

☆

And the next day, for some reason, Phosphorus was still there!

244. The 20,000,000-a-Day Man

Once again, nobody was in Cyclo's dungeons.

Tellurium, Silicon, Arsenic… All of my usual dungeons were just like Nihonium. All monsters, no adventurers.

"This is rough," I muttered, surrounded by Arsenic's rocks.

"Indubitably rough," Cell suddenly said next to me. He'd appeared out of nowhere.

"Whoa!" I gasped. "You were here?"

"I heard you were here, Sir Sato."

"I didn't tell anyone where I was going." And I'd used the warp gate to travel, so it wasn't as if he could've followed me.

"…"

"Don't just fall silent now."

"This is another reason my family manages the production of money. If anyone can generate as much as they like, then they will do that and wreck the economy."

"Yeah…"

It was just the second day, but I could already tell how serious this was. There weren't any adventurers in the usual dungeons. Production of goods had stopped.

If this kept on, then goods would disappear from the city's shops.

"Is there any way I can ask for your aid?"

"…All right," I solemnly agreed to his request.

☆

When working on any project, the first thing you do is understand the situation. As such, I left the mansion, went into town, and traveled to Phosphorus.

The dungeon, still seeing much traffic going in and out of it, wasn't like a cave. A cloud floated about three feet above ground, and on top of it was a door. The double doors never had time to close fully; there was always another adventurer going in.

"Hurry, hurry!"

"Hey, quit pulling! The dungeon's going nowhere!"

"Keep wasting time, and the cloud's gonna carry all of us away!"

An adventurer duo slipped by me and went into the dungeon.

"Wow… Interesting."

Visuals are important; humans are extremely drawn to visual imagery, after all.

The dungeon entrance was on a cloud. It looked ephemeral, ready to leave at any moment, which might be one reason adventurers were in such a rush to get to it.

I went inside, though it was hard to avoid bumping into the other adventurers.

B1 was, in a word, packed. It had so many more adventurers than any other dungeon I'd ever been to.

Despite how many people there were, though, the area had a strange order to it. It was as if the dungeon itself was an amusement park. Adventurers gathered in various locations and formed lines.

When I looked at the front of one line…

“Hey! Get in line,” someone said angrily.

“I’m just watching.” I consoled the adventurer who thought I was cutting and then continued to watch. A monster appeared.

It looked like a jewelry box with eyes.

Instantly after, it was killed by an adventurer. Said adventurer picked up its drop and then lined up at the back again.

This was a familiar sight back in my world, so I decided to line up as well. After lining up at the back, I waited for my turn.

Monsters appeared one after another and were defeated just as fast, clearing up the line.

My turn came in no time. I pointed my gun at the jewelry box with eyes. Where it was open, there were jagged edges like teeth.

One growth round shot made for a clean kill. It dropped 30,000 piros—three 10,000-piro bills. I’d made that much money in an instant.

“No wonder nobody else wants to go back to regular dungeons.” That instant money was worth the same as an entire magic cart’s worth of goods.

When I went down to B2, there were more lines. Unlike the previous floor, though, the monsters were gem bags with arms

and legs.

When a monster appeared, the person at the front of the line instantly killed it. This time, they received 40,000 piros.

I went down another floor. The monsters were motionless safes, each with a mouth and eyes. They were like Arsenic's monsters.

The adventurers lined up in front of the sturdy safes struggled.

When I looked closer, I saw a few of Emily's fans from Arsenic here. It took average adventurers several times as long to defeat them, but it was much safer because they didn't fight back.

I lined up, waited for my turn, and killed it immediately with an all-out annihilation round.

"Oooh!"

"A safe-face in one blow?"

While the people around me were amazed, I picked up my drop: 100,000 piros.

A quick investigation told me one thing: even when you waited in line, you'd still make a lot more money than the average adventurer here. And if there were no lines…

Imagine if Phosphorus appeared and you were among the first to charge in before the news had spread. In my case, I might just be able to make 20,000,000 piros in one day.

The thought of persuading the adventurers to return to their usual dungeons had occurred to me earlier, but that obviously wasn't going to work at this rate.

“Just gonna have to ask Phosphorus to leave, I suppose.”

“I must agree. This is something only you can do, Sir Sato.”

“Please don’t suddenly speak up next to me out of nowhere!”

I hated how I was starting to get used to Cell’s random appearances.

245. Raiding Solo

Even when day three came, Phosphorus remained in Cyclo.

The adventurers focused even more on the bonus stage dungeon. Production of goods was at an all-time low. Goods imported from other cities were still in supply, but vegetables, fruits, and other plant products had totally disappeared from storefronts.

Adventurers weren’t the ones who suffered as a result; regular households did.

Adventurers were making tons of money in Phosphorus. Some even farmed day and night to take advantage of the situation, so it didn’t matter to them if goods disappeared or if prices increased.

The pubs and restaurants they went to weren’t affected much, either. They were dealing with stinking rich adventurers; it didn’t matter if the cost of goods went up, because they could just add that to the price. Humans are strange beings. When we get unexpected windfalls, we tend to get cocky and spend them.

Where the usual price of 100 grams of beef ranged from 100 to 200 piros, a single head of cabbage had skyrocketed to over 1,000 piros.

☆

Knowing I had to do something about this, I went to the bottom floor of Phosphorus: B20.

A very different scene emerged there, however.

The middle was like a lobby, with twelve giant doors all in different directions. Said doors were double doors reminiscent of castle gates. Each one had a countdown timer attached.

Adventurers swarmed around the doors, formed groups, and attacked them.

All kinds of attacks were launched at the door, from melee weapons like swords, spears, and hammers, to magic attacks using fire, ice, and lightning.

“What an odd sight.”

“I’ve never seen such a thing before,” Leia said in her flat tone of voice next to me.

“Yeah, same here. Based on what all those adventurers are doing, those monsters must be doors. But what they’re doing doesn’t look like hunting monsters…”

“Demolition work.”

“I think so.” I grinned wryly as I watched.

Like I’d just said, everywhere I went in this dungeon, it looked less like adventurers were hunting monsters and more like they were doing demolition or wrecking work.

They used all kinds of full-power attacks on the doors.

My eyes were drawn to one such door. The countdown timer was about to end.

10, 9, 8…and on until 0. The timer reached zero, and with an anticlimactic poof, it disappeared. There was a space behind the door, around a hundred and fifty square feet in size.

Nothing was there.

“Damn! Another failure?!”

“We couldn’t charge up enough in time…”

“No drops when you fail… I knew, but it still sucks.”

The adventurer group who’d been attacking it was really disappointed.

I see. So if you don’t break it in time, nothing happens…

Bonk!

“Wh-What the hell?!”

Bonk!

BONK!

BOOM!

There was a tremendous boom from somewhere else on the floor. When I looked over there, I saw another adventurer group attacking a different door.

There were ten of them. The ones who still weren’t attacking were posing as if they were charging up. Then, after doing so, they unleashed attacks on the door.

When the timer went under one minute, all of them unleashed powerful attacks. The door flew open, and a similar space appeared behind it.

Pop!

The door's remains disappeared, and a mountain of bills appeared in the space.

It looked like 20,000,000 piros in total. The adventurers went in and started dividing the money—two million each.

"This place is the best."

"It takes me thirty minutes to charge up, so it's rare for it to ever be useful…"

"Me, too. Whew, this place is great for letting us take our time!"

The adventurers dividing the money were in a great mood.

"I see. Adventurers with super-strong techniques normally can't use them because they take too long to charge," I observed.

"It must be heaven for such people," Leia agreed.

"Yeah."

I had a grasp of the bottom floor now. It was time for me to get to work.

The first group from before left disappointed, opening up a room. I stood in front of it and waited a little.

I had to do something about Phosphorus. We didn't know when it would disappear, so I had to meet the dungeon spirit Phosphorus. That was why I was here.

The simple way to meet a dungeon spirit was to defeat monsters on the bottom floor, so I came here and waited for the door—surely a monster—to respawn.

Just then, I noticed a commotion behind me. Curious, I turned around—

“Whoa.”

A group of adventurers had gathered behind me out of nowhere. Specifically, the adventurers from each of the other eleven doors had all gathered behind me and started watching.

“What’s up?” I asked them.

One of them, a macho man wielding an Emily-brand hammer, replied, “We wanna see how you break this.”

The majority of them nodded along in agreement. I could tell from looking in their eyes that the rest agreed as well.

“You’re popular, Master.”

“Popularity ain’t easy…”

It’s awkward, too.

After a wait, the door came back. I took a deep breath to refocus myself and faced the target.

“Leia.”

“Yes.”

I equipped Leia. As a test, we fired normal bullets from our total of six guns. After firing a full barrage as fast as we could, we waited a moment for the dust to clear. And then…

“It’s unwounded,” she noted.

“Looks like it. Okay, annihilation rounds next.”

“Yes, Master.” Leia loaded different bullets; instead of normal ones, she used freeze rounds this time. Then, she fired them all.

Upon confirming this, I fired flame rounds to match. They caught up to the freeze rounds she’d fired, fused, and became annihilation rounds.

Leia's accuracy wasn't a perfect 100% yet. There was no guarantee that she could fuse them every time. So instead, I had her focus on firing one kind of bullet while I fired the other type and made sure they fused.

"Ooo-oooh?!"

An onlooker might see it as me shooting down all of the bullets Leia had fired. Though they didn't know what we were doing, they still cheered at the feat.

The countless annihilation rounds hit the door. Though they normally swallowed up entire portions of space, they disappeared ineffectually when they struck it.

However, they hadn't been fully nullified.

"Confirmed surface abrasion," Leia told me.

"That thing's tough."

"What should we do?"

"We could run out of bullets at this rate. Let's just use normal bullets from here on."

"Understood." Leia began reloading. Like the first time, she filled every gun with normal bullets and fired rapidly.

I fired along with her, fusing them to make piercing rounds and focusing our attacks at a single point. The string of explosions sounded like road construction.

We were getting into the swing of it, so we raised the pace. The interval between explosions shortened until they were perfectly linked.

It wasn't just a *bang, bang, bang,* anymore. Now it was more like, *baaaaang!*

The adventurers watching cheered amidst the noise.

We gradually whittled the door away. The rapid-fired piercing rounds slowly opened a hole in it.

We fired hundreds of shots in the space of three minutes. At the end of that prolonged volley, the door was pierced through. A hole had been opened.

Instantly after…

Pop!

It disappeared, and the chamber beyond it was filled with a pile of bills.

"Oooh!"

"Daaamn, that was fast!"

"One guy broke it in so little time…"

While they were amazed, I waited a minute.

Their admiration turned to confusion. All of them were wondering why I wouldn't pick up the money. But I still waited—waited for the staircase to Phosphorus to appear.

I gave up and issued an order. "Looks like a no. Leia, Revive."

"Yes, Master." One of her arms stretched forth and cast the spell on the mountain of bills.

Revive instantly turned drops into monsters or outsiders. Right away, it was back to being a door.

"Whaaat?!"

"Why? Why'd he turn it back?"

“Does he not need money?”

While they talked amongst themselves, I reached my hand out and cast Repetition on the door. It turned back into money.

“He defeated it?!”

“That’s his ultimate farming magic!”

“In a single second? Crazy…”

While even greater surprise and admiration came from them, I continued to wait. I waited on and on, but there was no staircase.

We repeated the Revive and Repetition process several times after that, but the stairs never came.

Hmm… What now?

246. What Only Ryota Can Do

We'd tried dozens of times in the end, but the stairs leading to the spirit Phosphorus never came.

Before long, it was evening. Time to go home. Left with no choice, I picked up the 20,000,000 piros and went back to the mansion through the warp gate.

In the warp room of the mansion dyed by sunset, Aurum greeted me, "Welcome back!"

"Whoa!"

"Welcome back." Miike was in her arms, like some kind of doll.

"Thanks. What brings you two here?"

"I wanted to welcome you home!" Aurum was really excited.

"Me?"

"Humans do that stuff, right? You always picked me up and took me home, so I never got to say that to you."

"I see."

Like a couple who live together choosing to meet up somewhere for a date, I guess?

"Heheh! Another new experience thanks to you, Ryota."

"Good for you, Lady Aurum!" Miike said.

"It's thanks to you, too. Here's a present!" Aurum held out her hand. Her palm glowed for a moment, and then, golden accessories appeared on Miike.



Even more golden accessories, that is, I corrected myself.

As a unique monster, Miike had gained the power to go between floors and dungeons, taking any monster it touched in the process. It had become Aurum's partner for when she wanted to leave her dungeon.

She took every opportunity to thank the mini-sage, so its body was just about covered in golden accessories now. With golden rings on all ten fingers, it kind of looked like an obsessive fan of a 2D idol.

Miike and Aurum were clearly getting along well.

"Thanks. I was happy to hear you say that, Aurum."

"That's my line! If it weren't for you, I'd be stuck in that dungeon forever. So thanks."

"Guess so."

We smiled at each other.

Now that I was home, I headed to the salon to relax for a minute. Aurum followed behind me with Miike.

"Hmm…" Aurum grumbled.

"What's up?" I asked.

"You seem kinda down, Ryota."

"Yeah, a little. Just having some trouble clearing a dungeon." I told her about what had happened in Phosphorus.

"Really…"

"I thought I could manage, but maybe that was me being cocky."

"Not at all," Aurum said before stopping.

“Huh?” I also stopped and looked back at her.

She gazed directly at me. Her voice was quiet, far from firm, but I could sense the determination behind it. “I know you can do it, Ryota.”

“Do you think so?”

“Yeah. I mean, nobody but you *can* do it. I’ll vouch for that.” She smiled. “Who else would know better?”

Aurum ruled one of the 118 dungeons in this world. In a world where everything dropped from dungeons, spirits like her were akin to gods—no, they essentially *were* gods.

And she believed that I was capable.

“True… Thanks.”

“Like I said, that’s my line!” She smiled and started walking until she was by my side again.

“Oh! There’s Yoda!”

“Hey, Emily. What’s going on?”

Emily ran over from the other end of the hallway. “You have a guest.”

“A guest?”

“Rebecca’s here.”

“Why…?”

Rebecca Neon, known as the Flawless. She had A-rank in every stat, and she was born in a dungeon. Through these combined factors, she’d fully cleared the dungeon Neon and became spirit-blessed, gaining permission to use the Neon name.

“Oh…” Remembering something, I looked at Aurum and Miike. “I get it.”

“Get what?”

“I remembered what she said the first time we met. She’d called me ‘the Aurum man.’ And that’s you now, isn’t it, Miike?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Maybe she’s here to meet the new spirit-blessed.”

“That’s right. She says she also has something to say to you, Yoda.”

“Bet she’s complaining,” I guessed. “Someone like her is apt to complain that we swapped without her permission.”

Aurum cocked her head and suggested, “Maybe you shouldn’t meet her?”

“That’s an idea… Hmm, what to do…?”

“I could go for you,” Alice called out from behind me.

“Whoa!” I grinned wryly and asked, “You were here, Alice?”

“Yep, I just got back. Rebecca Neon, right? I’m a little interested in her.”

“Interested?”

“We were both born in dungeons, after all.”

“Oh, I…see?”

Wait, both?

“Huh? What’s wrong, Ryota?”

“He froze up.”

“Alice!” I grabbed her shoulders and gazed directly into her eyes from close up.

“Yesh?!” she slurred out of surprise. “Wh-What’s gotten into you?”

“Alice. You have 100% drops, right?”

“Yeah…?”

“But your monsters’ drops are around C-rank, yeah?”

“Yep. I can—hyah!”

I seized her by the hand and ran back the way I’d came. “Come with me!”

“Yoda?”

“Ryota, where are you going?”

“Sorry, I just need to test something! I’ll leave Rebecca to you.” With that, I dragged Alice down the hall.

“What’s gotten into him?” Aurum wondered.

“I don’t know…but he was so vibrant,” Emily replied.

“Sure was.”

☆

I took Alice to B20 of Phosphorus. There were fewer people on this floor than others, probably because of the time investment needed to break the doors.

We stood in front of a vacant door together.

“What do you think?” I asked.

“About the timing, you mean?”

“Yeah. Do you feel any super-rare timings?”

“I do!”

“That was fast! Do you always figure it out that quickly?”

“I’ve been to lots of dungeons, after all.” Alice grinned mischievously at me. “I know a bunch of the patterns. This one… is one of the more annoying ones.”

“What do you mean?”

“There’s always a correct timing, but it’s super short. It’s like a second…like, one in ten thousand?”

“No wonder I couldn’t get it.” Any given kill had a one in ten thousand chance, then. “With timing that short…there’s no way you can tell me and have me kill it in time, right?”

“Hmm… I think it’s fine?”

“Huh?”

“Watch this,” Alice said, stepped forth, and faced the door. I didn’t know what she was going to do, but I let her do her thing. She used her trump card spell, “Ryochin!”

Ryochin, a chibified *me.* He had all of my stats and abilities, but he could only be called once a day—and only for a minute, at that. A true trump card.

“Let’s go, Ryochin!”

Ryochin nodded, pulled out his guns, and started shooting the door. Like I had, he used two handguns to make piercing rounds.

He did it so casually.

I get it. First, you whittle it down, and then you wait for the right time…

“There you go.”

“Bwuh?!” I made a weird sound. The door was pierced normally, disappeared normally…and then, a staircase leading down appeared. “Huh? It was that easy?”

“Ryochin’s connected to me, so it’s super easy to get the timing right.”

“That’s awesome…”

“Don’t be silly,” Alice said, exasperated. “You’re the one who’s awesome. See how I didn’t bring out any of my other summons?”

“Now that you mention it, yeah.”

“This would’ve been impossible without you, Ryota. Ryochin doing it alone had a way higher success rate than bringing out the others.”

Is that how it works? I wondered.

“Anyway, this is the staircase, right?” Alice turned to face the stairs with renewed determination.

I did the same.

The stairway to Phosphorus’s chamber had finally appeared.

247. Phosphorus = Burny

“…Gulp,” I swallowed.

The atmosphere on the stairs was clearly different. It was tense, like a tingling that pierced my skin.

Seemingly sensing the same thing, Alice looked on edge.

“D-Do you think the spirit here is scary?”

“No. There’s one more barrier we have to get through before we reach them.”

“Really?!”

“That’s how it’s worked so far. When we reach the bottom of these stairs, we’ll have to fight a monster in a big chamber. It’s as strong as a dungeon master.”

“Wow…”

She looked at me with respect for my knowledge, but only for a moment. Then, she stared at the staircase with sad eyes.

“What’s bothering you, Alice?”

“Hey, Ryota, umm… I wanna do it.”

“Do what?”

“Defeat the monster. Then I can meet the spirit, right?”

“True, but…”

I could also just defeat it myself and then take her along after. I’d done that before with Selenium and Arsenic, I thought, but I didn’t say that. Because that look in her eyes was serious.

She didn’t just want to; she *needed* this. To do it her own way, whatever her reason might be.

Her determination burned bright in her eyes.

“Okay.” I didn’t know her reasons, but if she wanted to do it, then I couldn’t say no. “At least let me play a support role, then. You already used up Omnipotence for the day, so I’ll raise your stats with Quicksilver—you and all of your buddies. Plus, I can use an acceleration round—”

“Ryota.”

“Huh?”

Alice gazed right at me. I saw that same determination—no, even more.

“I’ll do my best,” she said.

I stayed quiet.

“I will,” she insisted. I still didn’t know why, but she was practically pleading now.

“Yeah…” Insisting that she had to do it, despite knowing the danger. That wasn’t mere selfishness. So I gave up on helping and decided, “All right. It’s all yours.”

“Thanks!” Alice replied, showing her happiness with a big ol’ smile.

After that, she cupped each of her monster buddies in her hands one by one and sent them out, turning them into their original forms. The slime Bubbly, skeleton Boney, little demon Boomy, needle lizard Spiky, and Master Dragon Rawry.

Perhaps sensing their master’s enthusiasm, or perhaps knowing her reasons, their chibified, adorable silhouettes took on an extraordinary aura.

“Let’s go, guys,” Alice said before descending the stairs with her buddies.

After she left, the staircase disappeared as if it had never been there to begin with.

I waited.

I bet… I began to think, but my train of thought was interrupted.

“There you are,” someone called from behind me.

I turned and saw a familiar face. “Rebecca.”

Oh, yeah. She was at the mansion earlier.

“Your friends told me that you would be here.”

“Yeah. Sorry about that.”

“I’m not offended. What are you doing here?”

“Waiting for a friend to get back.”

“Get back? You don’t mean…” Count on Rebecca Neon, the Flawless and a spirit-blessed, to read between the lines in no time.

“Yeah, she’s off to meet the spirit of this dungeon,” I explained. “Phosphorus.”

“I see… You must be worried.”

“No. Not exactly.”

“My, you’re colder than I expected. You were once blessed by a spirit yourself; should you not know the difficulty of reaching the spirit alive?”

Were once blessed.

The weight of that statement stood out a little bit.

I didn’t even have to ask. The reason she’d visited the mansion was to ask about the change in Aurum’s blessing—from me, to Miike. That much was clear in her usage of past tense.

That aside, though, she knew how difficult it was to meet a spirit—which was why she’d questioned me.

“I’m not cold at all,” I said.

“Then what are you?”

My brain went full circle, coming back to where it had been before Rebecca had appeared.

“I bet—no, I know—Alice will return. Once she clears Phosphorus.”

“Then it must be…” After a moment, she stared flatly at me. “Trust, I presume.”

“It’s a little embarrassing when you put it that way.”

Though honestly, she was probably right.

“You act as if she’s a bigshot, but will it go as well as you think?”

“It will,” I answered immediately. She wasn’t a “bigshot” or anything; I just trusted her.

I had faith in Alice.

And, right on cue…

“Ryota, look! It’s Burny!” Alice came back excitedly, holding a fireball burning blue in her hand. It was chibified like her monster buddies.

“Is that Phosphorus?” I asked.

“Yep! Oh, but from today on, its name is Burny!”

“That so?”

Despite being a dungeon spirit, she’d given it a name based on her usual style. I chuckled; I’d expected this much.

As someone who didn’t know Alice, Rebecca was awestruck and speechless.

248. No Need for Money

Alice Wonderland slowly walked down the stairs.

She stopped for a moment and looked back. The exit gradually closed, and Ryota disappeared.

The fleeting sight of him only strengthened her resolve.

“Yeah, I’ll do my best! I’ll become spirit-blessed for Ryota’s sake!”

After clenching her fists to pump herself up, she pressed on. Up ahead was a white chamber with nothing in it.

The buddy monsters on her shoulders stirred. Boney the skeleton clung especially tight to her. Her buddies had varying personalities, and Boney was the most cowardly and spoiled of them all.

“It’s okay. I’m here with you.” After consoling her friend, she looked around. “It’s a weird place. I dunno if it’s spacious or cramped… My eyes would go crazy if I stayed here too long.”

It seemed to stretch on infinitely, but at the same time, she felt as though she’d touch an invisible wall if she reached her hand out.

In this odd space, a monster suddenly appeared. It was a humanoid about twice the size of a normal human.

Despite being humanoid in shape, it had neither skin nor scales. Its whole body was made of treasures like jewels, gold, and silver.

“Whoooaaa… Ack!” Alice jumped to the side.

When the monster raised its hand, said hand came flying as if it had exploded.

Gold, silver, pearls, diamonds—valuables flew at her like shotgun pellets. Though she jumped out of the way, she wasn't able to fully evade one of the jewels. It struck her forehead.

"Owwie…" She touched her brow; something warm ran down her palm. Stemming the flow with her hand, she called out to her buddy monsters, "Let's do this, guys!"

The slime Bubbly, skeleton Boney, little demon Boomy, needle lizard Spiky, and Master Dragon Rawry. All of her monsters charged at once.

Even the terrified Boney mustered her courage and attacked the enemy.

Alice backed off and watched the situation unfold.

The five-on-one battle was an intense one. The enemy didn't just fire off jewels; it also went for close-ranged attacks using stacks of 10,000-piro bills.

Its attacks really oozed a nouveau riche aura, but its power was no façade. In an instant, Boney and Spiky were shattered into pieces and returned to doll size on Alice's shoulders.

"Are you okay?!"

Boney and Spiky nodded, turned back into monster form, and rejoined the battle.

As a monster that protected the path to the spirit, it was quite strong. Outside of Rawry the Master Dragon, the four buddy monsters kept getting trounced and returning to Alice.

Meanwhile, the enemy showed no signs of going down. Even as gold, silver, and other treasures went flying every time it sustained damage, the monster recovered immediately as if nothing had happened.

“Oh, what do I do…” Alice was at a loss.

Ryota might’ve hypothesized along these lines: *inorganic being, self-repairing, must have a core somewhere within.*

Unfortunately, Alice did not have the knowledge or experience to hit upon this. However, there was something that only she could do.

“Is that…it?”

Every time the enemy monster attacked, every time it regenerated, Alice noticed something where its belly button would be. Nothing was glowing there, and it wasn’t as if its magic or life force was spiking. But she could *sense* it.

As a dungeon-born girl, she could sense things that others couldn’t. And now, she sensed something in the enemy’s navel.

“…Okay.”

Thinking about it would just waste time; Alice decided to take action.

She took a slingshot out of her pocket and used it to fling a ball at the enemy monster.

It struck its navel. With a squishy noise, red fluid spread from there. The object itself was just a paintball, with no lethal or magical effects. A mere paintball.

But when her buddy monsters saw this, they focused their attacks on the red area without delay. This was an arrangement between her and her friends: when she marked a spot, they would ignore almost everything else and focus their attacks there.

Boney's bone club, Bubbly's tackles, Boomy's magic attacks, Spiky's spike-launches, and Rawry's bites.

All their attacks focused on the painted spot.

Crack!

With a dry sound, the enemy stopped moving. It twitched for a moment, but then, its treasure-clad body collapsed into a pile of valuables.

"Hooray! Thanks, guys!"

Victory had come at the end of a hard-fought battle. Alice's buddies jumped onto her and were rewarded with physical affection. While she petted each of them and thanked them for their efforts, a staircase leading down appeared out of nowhere.

Alice gulped in anticipation.

"Just below, the spirit…"

She quivered. Was it because of the air leaking in from the newly opened space? Or a mix of excitement and unease?

Or perhaps both?

Whatever the case, she was nervous.

"…"

Boney clung tight to her. Despite being a monster that belonged in a horror world, the skeleton was easily scared. She

held on tight, just as terrified—perhaps even more—than before.

"…It's okay. I'm here."

Paradoxically, seeing someone even more afraid than you tends to be calming. Alice consoled Boney, relaxed a little, and walked down the stairs.

At the end, there seemed to be…a monster?

On the ground below were 10,000-piro bills piled up like some kind of bed. In the middle of said bed was a fiery monster that seemed to be made of burning bills.

The chamber was lit by the fire, making it seem brighter than the pure-white room she'd just been in.

"What's this? Hundreds of years since my last visitor, and now I see a little girl?" The flames spoke in a rather brusque manner.

"Umm, are you Phosphorus? The spirit of this dungeon?" Alice asked politely.

"Yes, I'm the master of this dungeon. I'm Phosphorus."

"Thank goodness… I really got to meet you!"

"What's that? You came here on purpose, and not by coincidence?"

"Yes! I come with a request."

"Uh-huh?" Phosphorus looked at Alice. It had no eyes, but she thought they would've narrowed if it did. After a while, seemingly bored, it said, "Well, you came this far. Guess I can give you a reward."

"You mean it?! Thank you!"

“So, how much—?”

“Be my friend, please!”

“Huh?” Apparently taken by surprise, Phosphorus stopped in their tracks. “What was that?”

“Be my friend! Oh…” Flustered, Alice turned her five buddies back into regular monster size. “Like this! Be my friend, please!”

“What in the…?”

“Umm… Is that a no?”

“Nah. You got that skill from being dungeon-born, right? If you can sock me good, then I can do that… You sure about that, though?”

“Yes!”

“You don’t want money?”

“Right! I don’t need money!” Alice answered promptly. Phosphorus was taken aback by the immediacy of it.

“…”

“Umm… So, is that really a no, then?”

“No, no… I’m just surprised. Never met someone like you.”

“Huh?”

“Everyone here, heck, everyone in this dungeon just wants money. First time that’s been proven wrong.” Phosphorus smiled—or at least, the flames flickered in a way reminiscent of a smile—and asked one last time, “You *really* don’t want money? If I turn into one of those, you’ll never get a single piro outta me or my dungeon.”

“Yes!” Alice answered without a second thought.

Phosphorus laughed jovially, and the chamber boomed and shook. “All right,” it said once the laughter had subsided. “Sock me good, kid.”

“Okay!” Without hesitation, she walked over and punched Phosphorus. She did this with the intent of defeating it, just as she had to defeat her other buddy monsters to recruit them.

Though she was punching fire, it wasn’t hot. Instead, the flames shriveled up, changed shape, and appeared in Alice’s palm.

It was still fire, yes, but like Alice’s other buddy monsters, it had changed into a silly cartoon shape.

Thus, the Phosphorus named Burny had joined Alice’s party.

With a spirit as her new friend, she had finally become spirit-blessed.

249. Ryota > Alice > Rebecca

In the shadows a short distance from Phosphorus…

Adventurers coming out of the exit almost all looked unhappy.

“It just stopped dropping money. What the hell’s going on?”

“Let’s come back tomorrow.”

“We’ve got enough money for now.”

Adventurers retreated from the dungeon now that it no longer dropped money.

There was a reason that it had stopped, of course.

“Looks like a success to me,” I said.

“Yep. Burny’s right here, after all. Just like Aurum,” Alice said happily. Her new friend Burny, the spirit of Phosphorus, was on her shoulder.

“Just like Aurum? So if it went back in there, the drops would return?”

“I dunno… Would they?” Alice asked her friend.

Burny was silent, but the flames grew bigger for a moment in response.

“Burny says they would.” Like her other buddy monsters so far, it couldn’t talk, but it could communicate its thoughts with Alice. After it conveyed something else to her, she said, “Huh? Oh, no! In fact, you shouldn’t go back. Isn’t that right, Ryota?”

“That’s for the best, yep,” I agreed.

“There you go! Oh, but we will be going to other dungeons. All together!” Alice added. The other buddy monsters on her shoulders all piped up excitedly. Watching them in their chibi forms made for a funny and cute sight. “Oh, yeah! Burny, come here! And you too, Boney.”

Apparently struck by inspiration, Alice held her palm out and pointed at it.

Boney climbed on without hesitation. Burny wasn’t used to her yet, so it paused for a moment before joining Boney. The skeleton stood on her palm; meanwhile, Burny floated above it.

Bones and flames together—it was like seeing a will-o’-the-wisp inside a skeleton.

“They go good together, huh?” I said.

“Yeah! They’re cute, right?”

“I didn’t say it was cute, but they look good together. Might just be perfect partners.”

“I think so, too!” Alice beamed.

In response, Boney’s eye holes morphed into a smiling shape while she rattled with joy. Meanwhile, Burny’s flames flickered and wavered… It didn’t seem too unhappy to me, though.

Alice’s party enjoyed themselves with their new friend Burny. Honestly, I could’ve watched them all day…but that wasn’t an option.

“Alice, you’d better go report to Cell.”

“Huh? Me?”

“Burny’s proof that you solved the problem. He’ll understand better if you show him.”

“You’re right! Okay, we’ll go right away,” Alice agreed. Immediately after, Rawry the Monster Dragon literally flew away with her and her other buddies on board.

“I’m simply astounded,” someone said behind me.

Rebecca Neon.

After visiting my home and following me all the way to Phosphorus, she’d stayed quiet since the arrival of Burny and watched from a distance. As soon as Alice was gone, she’d spoken up.

I turned around and asked, “By what?”

“I heard everything. That was the solution to Phosphorus’s unusual stay, no?”

“Yeah.”

“Then the credit is hers now.”

“You act like that’s a bad thing.” I turned around and glanced at Alice, now a dot in the distant sky. “Alice solved the problem; I didn’t do anything. If there’s any credit, it should go to her.”

“Are you really fine with that?”

“Yes,” I answered immediately. I didn’t even need to think about it.

Rebecca stared at me for a moment.

“…Hmph.” After making an unhappy noise, she left.

Come to think of it, she never told me why she came. Is she sure she wants to leave now…?

☆

Alice made a rare visit to the Cyclo Dungeon Association chief's office, unaccompanied by Ryota, and showed Cell the Phosphorus known as Burny.

Cell nodded firmly at her. "I'd expect no less from one of Sir Sato's friends. You can even ally with a spirit!"

"It's not just an ally, it's my friend! Isn't that right, Burny?"

Burny's flame slowly flickered. It was a vague response, neither agreement nor refusal.

It still didn't quite get Alice—because as far as Phosphorus could remember, she was the very first person who'd come into the dungeon for something other than money.

"Well done," Cell complimented her.

"I guess I'm at the same level as her now, huh?"

"As Rebecca Neon, you mean?"

"You knew?"

"I had a feeling."

"Huh… What do you think?" Alice expectantly awaited an answer from Cell.

She didn't want to be looked down on. She wanted to be seen as a proper, capable friend of Ryota's and member of his Family.

To achieve that goal, she aimed to become spirit-blessed like Rebecca, who she shared a lot of similarities with.

Now that she had that, she wanted the opinion of an outsider: Cell.

“Hah. You’re hardly the same level,” he replied.

“Huh? Am I still no good? Is Rebecca that incredible?”

“No, it’s quite the opposite.”

“Hwuh?” She looked at him, stunned, wondering what that could possibly mean.

“You’ve already overcome her. You couldn’t possibly be at the ‘same level.’”

“…Huuuh?! No way!”

“Of course. She’s the kind of woman who monopolizes achievement and dungeon alike. And then she acts jealous and sulky as a result… Heh.” Cell smirked dryly.

As Ryota Sato’s most ardent believer, he knew everything that happened around the man. He was naturally aware of Rebecca’s sudden feeling of inferiority and unhappy departure mere moments ago.

“You’ve become a far greater person than Rebecca Neon,” he declared. “I can guarantee that.”

“Hooray!” Alice rejoiced. All of her buddies save for Burny were happy, too.

“If ever you need anything else, you may rely on me. On my name Cell Stem, I will do everything in my power to aid you.” He was genuinely happy, too, and not just from the position of the Dungeon Association chief seeing a problem resolved.

Cell was a devout believer in Ryota, a man who led even spirit-blessed. In that sense, he welcomed Alice’s newfound blessing from the bottom of his heart—perhaps even more than she herself did.

250. Holding a Spot…Again

On the outskirts of the monster village Ryota was the dungeon Phosphorus. Amidst a flurry of cherry blossoms, the bonus dungeon floated alone.

Two unique monsters, residents of the village, guarded the entrance.

Lined up next to Cell and the clayman—the de facto chief of the village—I gazed upon it.

“And there you have it. I’m leaving management of this dungeon to your village.”

“We’ll take good care of it. We’d go through hell and high water for you, Ryota.”

“It’s not that serious.” I grinned wryly at the clayman. Then, I turned to Cell and asked, “So…is this okay?”

“You’ll hear no complaints from me. This dungeon has lost its master and its drops. Leaving it in the care of a village of monsters who can’t enter it was a brilliant idea, Sir Sato.”

“Leaving it in Cyclo would be fine, but then we might get adventurers wasting their time and trying their luck in there.”

“Indeed. The dungeon is best left in this state,” Cell said and turned to the clayman. “Ensure that nobody but Sir Sato and myself enter.”

“You can leave it to us.”

“I will pay a monthly maintenance fee.”

“Huh? No, that’s not…” the clayman stammered.

I stepped in to persuade him. “Just take it. Guarding is real work. Besides, you know Cell’s position; he needs to ensure Phosphorus is properly managed.”

“Oh… Really?” The clayman looked toward Cell, still uncertain. The chief nodded back. “…Okay. We’ll take it. I’ll bring you your share as tribute later, Ryota.”

I just nodded without a word. Then, I grinned wryly to myself. They really didn’t need to worry, but I knew they wouldn’t listen.

After everyone in the village had become unique monsters thanks to Bodley Ryota, they’d started to respect me more and more. Hell, they’d gone past that; it was outright worship now.

“By the way, Cell, I wanted to discuss something with you… Come with me, please?” the clayman asked.

“Hmm? What could it be?”

The clayman guided Cell a distance away from me. “Basically… Everyone wants…”

“Oh ho… In that case… Gladly…”

They were far enough that I could only hear bits and pieces of the conversation, but it seemed like Cell was on board with his proposal. I didn’t know what they were talking about, but with his backing, this village would do just fine.

No matter what it was, I was grateful that they were in agreement—

Thud! Just then, a miniature bronze statue of me fell out of Cell’s sleeve.

Wait a second… What the hell are you two discussing?

☆

Back in Cyclo, I took a stroll around town.

The quantity of goods in the city had noticeably decreased when Phosphorus was here, but now that the bonus stage was gone, adventurers had started going back to the regular dungeons. Things were starting to go back to normal.

“Oh, it’s Ryota!”

“For real?”

“It really is him!”

Someone called my name, and kids mobbed around me. They were all energetic, impish elementary school age boys.

They pushed me around and said things like, “It’s the real guy!” and “How’d you get so strong?” I felt like a professional baseball player with all this excitement and enthusiasm around me.

While I was confused, they were genuinely happy to see me, so I paid them some of my time. They asked for autographs, so I gave in and scribbled what I could for them.

“Huh? Whatcha doing, Ryota?”

“Now who—oh, Alice?”

Alice came over with all of her buddy monsters, including the new Burny, on her shoulders. She was confused upon seeing me being pushed and jostled around so much.

“This is…”

“Holy crap! It’s Alice!”

“Alice is that new spirit-blessed, isn’t she?”

“Seriously?! Which one? Which one is the spirit?”

The boys all turned their attention to Alice. Just like they’d done to me, they mobbed her like she was an idol throwing the first pitch of the game.

“Ooh. She’s famous, too.”

Once the danger(?) had left me, I watched them calmly, because I knew from experience that she’d be just fine.

Alice was bombarded with a triple threat of questions, handshakes, and autograph requests. After she’d dealt with them, the boys left satisfied.

“Phew…” she sighed.

“Good job. Feeling okay?”

“Oh, Ryota. Yeah, I’m fine… Just surprised. Is that what you’re always going through?”

“Kinda.” I chuckled and shrugged my shoulders.

“Wow… Haha.”

“What’s up? You seem happy.”

“Well, yeah, I mean…”

“Hey, that’s no answer,” I teased. She’d explained nothing.

But she was happy, and that was good enough for me.

Suddenly, the wind blew. It was a warm spring breeze. The flurry of cherry blossoms grew in strength.

“The cherry blossoms are so pretty,” Alice said.

“Yeah. It’s almost over…but right now might be when they’re most beautiful.”

“Hey, Ryota… Let’s try that flower-viewing again!”

“Huh? But we already did that.”

“C’mon! I’ll get us a spot again. I can *really* save a spot this time!”

“You seemed like you were doing just fine last time!”

“C’mon!” Alice gazed at me with sparkly eyes.

I happened to spot Burny floating on her shoulder. “You know, you’re right. Let’s do it again and call it a welcome party for Burny!”

“Yay! I’ll go grab us a spot right now!” In an extremely good mood, Alice ran off like the wind. “Okaaay! Let’s do our best, Burny!”

In the shower of cherry blossoms, she ran off, her voice trailing away as she went.

I didn’t know why she needed to “do her best,” but when I saw how happy she was with Burny, I knew that this was for the best.

251. A Million People

After breakfast, a rare visitor came, so I was a little late to leave for work.

In the salon, I faced the Neptune Family: a trio consisting of Neptune and his entourage of Lil and Ran. He sat in the middle of the sofa while his girls sat really close on either side of him.

“Always a lady on each arm, huh?” I joked.

“You’re one to talk, friend. How many women live in this mansion, exactly?”

“You act as if you know everything about me.”

“But of course. It’s important to know the movements of people as important as you.”

“Sure…”

“But I do think Fylline’s Dungeon Association chief is a liiittle too young—”

I interrupted him, “Say any more, and I’ll sue you for defamation! And I’ll win!”

But Neptune clearly didn’t feel guilty; he just smiled that usual friendly smile. “Scary! I know making you mad can only lead to trouble, so I’ll leave it at that.”

“I mean, that alone won’t make me that mad.”

“I know.”

“Mgh.”

Neptune appeared gleeful, but he looked into my eyes with a rather grave expression on his face. “That’s what I like about

you.”

“Okay, I *will* get mad if you keep that up.”

“No worries, no worries. I’m actually more into the sakazuki ceremony vibe.”

“No more of that, either, please.” I’d gotten used to being called the Ryota Family, but all this talk of sakazuki made it sound a little too much like the yakuza for my liking.

I didn’t know how serious he was, but I decided to change the subject anyway. “So, why are you here?”

“Mm, well, I’m honestly here to say hi to the others instead of you…but you’re fine, too.”

“The others?”

“Umm… What were their names, again?” Neptune asked his two ladies. Ran was cheerful, like a bubbly childhood friend. Lil was more of a seductive big-sister type.

Lil rolled her eyes and answered, “Emily, Alice, Leia, Miike. Those four.”

“Yeah, those four!” Ran piped up.

“…The spirit-blessed, you mean?” I asked him.

Neptune hadn’t really interacted with the four of them until now. Leia and Miike were new members of the Family; I doubted they’d ever even met the man.

But it was clear what they all had in common. They were spirit-blessed, people given permission to name themselves after spirits.

“That’s right. Our families both have multiple spirit-blessed, so I’d love to meet them and more.”

“You have multiple spirit-blessed, too?”

That was the first time I’d heard of that, but I wasn’t surprised.

I’d heard all kinds of things about the Neptune Family ever since I arrived in this world. Neptune and I had participated in contests of strength, too. He was strong without dispute, and his achievements were innumerable.

Having a spirit-blessed, hell, *multiple* of them was no surprise.

“Neptune Oxygen. A pleasure.”

“Oxygen, huh?”

“Ran Hydrogen here!”

“And Lil Hydrogen. Be respectful, please.”

“Oh?” I wasn’t surprised by Neptune’s, but the two following him surprised me.

I knew hydrogen. Based on the dungeon names in this world, I’d expected to hear it sooner rather than later. What surprised me, though, was that they had both used the name.

“Surprised, right? But the spirit said they wouldn’t accept us unless it was both of us.”

“I see. Still…Oxygen and Hydrogen, huh?”

“What about it?” Neptune cocked his head.

I looked at him, then at Lil and Ran on either side of him.

“…H2O,” I murmured to myself.

“Excuse me?”

“No, no, nothing.”

“Really? Okay, then,” Neptune shrugged. “Anyway, I came to meet them, but I realized it didn’t matter after I saw you.”

“Why’s that?”

“Spirit-blessed can exert a huge impact on the lives of many. You know that, of course.”

“…Yeah.”

Rebecca was like that. I’d done similar things, too.

Rebecca Neon had monopolized the entire dungeon of Neon. And I disabled Aurum’s drops at night, though I did it for the sake of the spirit Aurum.

Spirit-blessed could do these things. Neptune was right; any of us could influence the lives of many on our own.

“We may not have official posts, but we have even more power than Dungeon Association chiefs,” he said.

“Guess so.”

“I was worried about a single family having four people with such power, but now that I think about it, it’s *you* leading them. I think things will be just fine.”

“Don’t overestimate me, now.”

“See, that’s what I love about—ow, oww!” Lil and Ran pinched his cheeks to interrupt him. They’d gotten awfully serious out of nowhere. He rubbed his cheeks and continued, as if nothing had happened, “But really, you are incredible.”

“Hmm?”

“When we first met, I thought you were just another adventurer. Now you have four spirit-blessed by your side. You know…” His face turned serious—more serious than I’d seen him at any point today. “You’ve become the kind of man who could affect a million lives.”

252. Why I Was Summoned

“Burny, get on my shoulder with everyone. Okay! We’re ready to go!”

After breakfast one morning, Alice left to go dungeoneering with her whole team of buddies.

The other members of the family had already gone to work, so the only people left in the dining room were me, Leia, and the Miike-Aurum combo.

“Alice is extra energetic this morning.”

“I think she’s excited to show him all kinds of dungeons,” Aurum answered.

By “him,” she meant the Phosphorus that we knew as Burny. He was another dungeon spirit.

“That so?” I asked.

“Yep. He’s enjoying it, too.”

“Good to hear. What about you, Aurum? You can go anywhere you want with Miike, right?”

Miike, a mini-sage turned unique monster, pumped a fist and said, “Leave it to me, sir!”

“Not interested,” Aurum replied dismissively.

“You’re not?”

“Dungeons are all the same anyway, right? We make monsters, and humans kill the monsters for stuff.”

“Yeah. I guess they are all the same in that regard.”

Dungeons were the primary industry in this world, after all. Everything from bean sprouts to gold was dropped in dungeons, so no matter where you went, they would always be production sites.

If you boiled them down to that, then of course you wouldn't be interested.

"Though I'd love to see more of the outside world," she added.

"Well, you do have Miike… Why not take time off once in a while? At this rate, you'll only get to see stuff at night, right?"

"Can I really?!"

Despite her previous lack of interest, she latched on to the idea like never before. She really did want to see the outside world.

"Yeah. Doing it right away might cause trouble for the adventurers farming there, but if you give them, say, a month's advance notice…"

"A month is like no time! Woohoo! Thanks, Ryota!" She was so excited that it kind of scared me. "Okaaay! Time to work like heck! Let's go!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

She picked up Miike and ran out of the dining room.

Miike's special ability allowed Aurum—who had the characteristics of a monster—to go in and out of dungeons. It was her dungeon, and she got to leave and go back almost freely, but

she was basically acting like an employee asking her boss for permission.

“Master,” Leia addressed me.

“Hmm?”

“She thanked you, but does the dungeon not belong to her?”

“It does,” I chuckled.

I couldn’t help but laugh at Aurum requesting my permission to leave her own dungeon.

☆

On B7 of Nihonium…

“It feels like it’s been so long.”

“Approximately three months in fact, Master,” Leia replied like a secretary.

I just looked at her.

“Is there something on my face?”

“Nah. It’s just, you sometimes seem like a tutorial giver from a video game. Like your face would appear in the corner of the screen.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand what you’re saying.”

“Figures.” I grinned wryly. There was no way people in this world would understand talk of TV or video games; after all, those things didn’t exist here. So normally, I didn’t bring these things up. “It’s so easy to share this stuff with you, Leia.”

“I see.” She calmly brushed off my compliment. Leia did this whenever I talked about my old world, so it was easier to tell her about it. “Master.”

“Yeah?”

“Look over there, please.” She pointed at the ground in the distance.

There was a figure-sized woman in a kimono there. My theory so far was that she was Nihonium, the spirit of this dungeon.

“Sorry,” I apologized to her. “I’ve been busy lately.”

The woman smiled back. As usual, she didn’t say anything.

When I saw her smile, I thought to myself: Phosphorus wanted to see other dungeons. Aurum wanted to see the outside, rather than dungeons. Arsenic was satisfied with food, and Selenium just wanted sex—whether it was with men or women.

The spirits all wanted different things.

What did Nihonium want? Curious, I asked her outright, “What do you want?”

She smiled back. That smile never faltered, and her lips never parted to speak.

Then, she disappeared.

“…There’s gotta be something.” I knew that instinctively.

I was almost certain, too. Just like the other spirits, she was effectively locked in the deepest depths of this dungeon, trapped with her unfulfilled hopes and dreams.

When I thought of that, I knew that I couldn't leave her be—because it reminded me of how I once was.

Aurum had shown me that, despite working tirelessly day and night, the majority of spirits were unable to have even their most modest wishes fulfilled.

"I want to do something for her. And for all the spirits whose work goes unrewarded," I murmured aloud.

When I did, I heard clapping next to me. It was Leia, though she was still expressionless.

"What's gotten into you, Leia?"

"I don't know."

"Hmm? You're clapping, and you don't know why?"

"Yes. You seemed so dazzling, Master, that my hands moved on their own."

"Huh."

"Oh. Now I understand."

"Hmm?"

"You're incredible, Master. I applauded because I was moved."

I had to chuckle at Leia's delayed emotion.



253. Three-Fold Round

BANG!

On B8 of Nihonium, I defeated three-headed zombies with normal bullets.

Their three heads represented invincibility, reflection, and weakness. The invincible one never took damage from attacks, and the reflection one dealt the exact amount of damage back to the attacker instead.

You had to attack the weakness head to kill it. If you guessed wrong, the three heads would shuffle, so you'd have to do it again.

Now, that was a 1-in-3 chance, but homing rounds always went for the reflection head. That meant I could reduce it to a 1-in-2 chance if I attacked before they landed. I could attack the weakness and invincibility heads as much as I wanted, so if I failed the 50-50, all I'd have to do was try again.

I followed the homing round and attacked one of the other two heads before it could land.

After defeating a few of them, I'd collected enough luck seeds in my pouch. I used the warp gate to go back to the mansion. There, I went into the basement and met up with Leia.

"If you'd please," I said.

"Understood," she replied calmly.

Careful not to touch them, I took a single seed out of the pouch.

“Revive.” She cast the spell that revived drops into monsters.

We were outside of a dungeon, so the luck seed turned into an outsider. Like in the dungeon, I used a homing round to improve my odds and then struck one of the remaining heads.

I hit the invincibility one. I tried again, and this time, it died.

It dropped a new kind of bullet that I’d never seen before. I picked it up.

Now, what kind of bullet is this?

“Master.”

“Hm? What’s up, Leia?”

“Why do you not use Repetition? It’s much faster.”

“Repetition, huh? You mean like this?” I took out another seed and pointed my chin at Leia.

She nodded and cast the spell on the seed. “Revive.”

Overlapping her words, I cast my own spell. “Repetition.”

The seed instantly became a bullet, nearly skipping the spawn process. Defeating monsters was already production in this world, but this was *real* mass production. Do it enough times, and you can do it with one hand behind your back.

“You’re wondering why I don’t do this, right?”

“Yes, Master.”

“Monsters like this, I appreciate. I have to go faster than a homing round, so it gets me used to high-speed combat, split-second decision making when I choose between two, and recovery from failure. It trains all three of those things at the

same time, so using Repetition to slack off is a waste of a good opportunity."

"I see. You are ever a hard worker, Master."

"Less a hard worker, and more obsessive. I always loved time trials; even in kart-racing games that put an emphasis on items, I preferred to race my own ghost instead of using them."

"I don't understand, but it sounds impressive."

Leia never said anything that wasn't absolutely necessary, making it easy for me to relax and tell her about my old world. I liked how she basically responded that she understood even when she didn't at all, so I told her more and more.

"Now, that aside… This new bullet."

"Shall we test its effects?"

"Yeah. It's probably a special round."

I loaded the new bullet in my gun.

Leia picked up a flower from the pile in the corner of the basement and cast Revive on it. This was a flower from Arsenic, which naturally meant it turned into a monster from Arsenic. Like all other monsters there, it was a sturdy-looking, immobile rock.

"Ready, Master."

"Thanks." I fired the new bullet at this motionless rock.

After it landed…

BANG!

An explosion echoed, and the rock shattered.

"A mere explosion?" she guessed.

“…Let’s do another, Leia.”

“Understood.” With no unnecessary commentary, she prepared a new monster. After it was reborn through Revive, I fired the new bullet at it again.

BANG!

Another explosion, another shattered rock.

“…”

“Your thoughts, Master?”

“One more.”

“Yes, Master.”

She prepared a third monster. Before firing the bullet, though, I used acceleration rounds on myself and Leia.

“Master?”

“Let’s watch it together.”

“Understood,” Leia assented. I fired the special round.

In the accelerated world, it flew sluggishly. Eventually, it struck the rock monster.

BABABANG!

“It exploded thrice.”

“Sure did.” I hadn’t imagined it. At normal speed, I thought I’d heard it three times, but I wasn’t sure. So I used two precious acceleration rounds to confirm. “One more, please. While we’re still accelerated.”

“Understood.” She quickly retrieved a flower and Revived it. However, the outsider spawned at normal speed, so there wasn’t much point in her doing that.

While the world was slowed around us, I fired the round directly into the slowly-spawning rock.

BABABANG!

Another explosion—this was the fourth.

“The sound is different,” I realized.

“Is it?”

“Can you not tell?”

“I cannot, Master.”

“Listen again, and this time, assume that might be right.”

“Yes, Master.”

On the fifth test, after another Revive into insta-kill, I listened in closer. I looked at Leia.

“Yes, the second one alone is slightly different,” she said. “I wonder why?”

“I think the first and third explode from the outside, while the second explodes from the inside.”

“Is that it?”

“I think the way the sound comes out, or rather how it’s muffled, is what’s different.”

“Really? I’m afraid I can’t tell.”

So she said, but I was almost 99% certain. The only question was why.

“Leia, one more time.”

“Yes, Master.”

This was the last one that would fit in the acceleration round’s effect. After Leia set up the rock, I fired multiple bullets.

“Master? Are those not regular bullets?”

“That’s right.”

I designated three routes and fired one, two, three bullets respectively—six bullets altogether.

While still accelerated, on the second and third routes, I lined up the bullets carefully so that they would follow just behind each other without fusing.

One bullet embedded itself in the rock.

When two bullets struck at once, it caused an explosion.

When three struck at once, it caused a similar explosion, but the scattered fragments were blown into pieces.

“I knew it.”

“Knew what, Master?”

“When multiple bullets hit with almost no time between them, the first impact will make the target more brittle, and the following one will become more effective. This special round hits three times, causing three impacts to maximize destructive power.”

“Hmm… I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

“When I first got the acceleration round, I’d come up with a two-fold shot. But this is a three-fold shot, all on its own.”

I dubbed this new round the three-fold round. It had top tier destructive power among my bullets so far.

254. Ryota’s Gift

I’d run out of flame rounds, so I went to B2 of Nihonium to replenish them.

I fired clean headshots through the zombies living there, upgrading my growth round as I went. They became strength seeds, which were sucked into my pouch.

During a break in my work, I muttered to myself, “Hmm… I wish there was an easier way to stock up on special bullets.”

It was easiest to replenish my normal bullets and homing rounds. Normal bullets came from outsiders sourced from bean sprouts and other vegetables, while homing rounds came from trash outsiders.

But special rounds could only be generated from Nihonium’s monsters.

Normal bullets could also be produced by normal adventurers, too, so it was easy and fast to gather large quantities. Compared to that, I had to make special rounds from the ground up. That took time.

No way. I’m the only person who can get drops from here, so there’s just nothing I can do about it.

If nothing else, I could try to build a farming pattern to make it easier.

With that, I defeated zombies one after another.

“Hmm?” I suddenly stopped and stared in a certain direction. I sensed someone there. “Another person? Here in Nihonium?”

I doubted my own senses.

Nihonium didn't produce anything. Normal people would only get air from the monsters, no matter how many they killed.

As a result, just about nobody came here. The only exception would be Margaret's group, since they were making air on purpose. And since she was *just* making air, she had no reason to go beyond B1.

This was B2. Normally, nobody should be here.

I lowered my gun and took a deep breath. After gathering myself, I looked in that direction again.

Yeah. Someone's there.

I wasn't mistaken; it was a human being.

Sensing people in other dungeons didn't matter, so I typically ignored that feeling, but it was different here. Curious why someone else was here, I interrupted my bullet-gathering process and followed that feeling.

After rounding a few corners…

"Don't be rash!"

I spotted a man trying to hang himself using a rope tied to the ceiling.

His neck was just about to be snapped by the rope.

I whipped out a gun and fired at the rope holding up the noose. With the rope cut, he lost his balance and fell to the ground.

I ran over to him and asked, "Are you okay?"

He looked up at me in silence. At first he nodded, but then, he shook his head. “You didn’t have to save me.”

“Don’t say that. Why would you…?”

“Nobody comes to Nihonium. Even if I die here, it won’t bother anyone when my things turn into outsiders.”

“No, I’m not asking why you came here. I’m asking why you just attempted suicide.”

The man looked up at me again and smiled weakly. “I’m no good…”

This is bad. I can’t leave this guy alone.

Knowing that, I used the warp gate to bring him back to the mansion.

☆

“Calmed down yet?”

“…Yeah,” he nodded.

In the mansion salon, he warmed himself up with Emily’s tea. He looked a little better than when I’d first found him.

Emily’s cooking and tea have the effect of calming people. Giving them peace.

I’d pushed him into the salon, used the warp room to find Emily in Arsenic, and brought her home.

“Thank you. I feel better now.”

And my efforts bore fruit—it seemed he’d given up any thoughts of trying that again.

“Mind telling me your name?” I started with harmless small talk.

“…It’s Mattia.”

“Okay. My name’s—”

“I know. Ryota Sato. The most famous guy in the world these days.” Mattia laughed self-derisively. “You use your overwhelming power to solve all kinds of problems, you’ve got four spirit-blessed subordinates, and you’re the boss of the strongest force in Cyclo. You’re not like me,” he muttered, practically huddling up.

“What happened? What drove you to that?”

“There’s…nothing that can be done now.”

“Could you tell me, please? I might be able to help you.”

“…Help me?”

“I’m the guy who solves all kinds of problems, right? Share yours with me.” I looked into Mattia’s eyes.

I couldn’t leave this guy. Because I’d seen so many people like him back in my old world.

After a while, he finally spoke, though haltingly. “Our Family started a new business.”

“A new business?”

“Yeah. About a year ago, we all got drunk together, and we came up with this idea: instead of working all day, what if we figured out the best way to defeat a monster on each floor and sold that method to other adventurers?”

“Oh, like a training team… Well, no, I guess you’re just selling know-how.”

Mattia nodded.

“We were having a great time drinking, but I thought it was all just jokes. But the boss was serious. The next day, he set up a project and ordered me to do it just because I was the closest one at the time.”

“…”

“For a whole year, I worked hard, used all kinds of weapons, even used magic. I optimized routes and stuff…”

“But it just didn’t work out, right?”

Mattia nodded again and looked down sadly.

Figures.

In this world, many adventurers stayed in their dungeons and farmed day and night. Dungeons’ structures and monsters rarely changed. Selective breeding had also recently been limited to groups of two or more spirit-blessed, so that would continue to be true for a long time to come.

As such, adventurers optimized their work in dungeons that they were familiar with. It wasn’t easy to find new and improved ways of doing things.

“And why did that lead to suicide?”

“He said it was my fault that I couldn’t get results after a whole year of trying. Then, he told me that I either had to pay him damages or come up with a method right away…”

“What the hell?”

You want people to pay damages for things you ordered them to do? What kind of idiot…

“And I just didn’t know what to do,” he continued.

“I get it.”

I understood now. While I did have some choice words for his boss, I needed to solve the problem in front of me first.

“About this optimization. Is it okay to do it anywhere?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah… Ah, but not in Nihonium.”

“Of course.”

Optimizing a dungeon that dropped nothing wouldn’t make money. Meanwhile, a way of getting drops that worked for everyone would make tons of cash.

That aside…

“Let’s go.”

“Huh? Where?”

“Just come with me,” I said and began walking.

I glanced back for a moment. Despite a moment’s hesitation, Mattia stood up and followed.

We went down the hallway and to the warp room. There, we used its features to set a destination.

A vortex of light appeared—the gate.

“Let’s go.”

“Huh? Wait a sec—”

I dragged him into the gate almost by force, giving him no option to refuse. We arrived at a dungeon that resembled a Japanese home.

“Wh-Where are we?”

“This is B20 of Lanthanum.”

“Lanthanum?! You mean Lanthanum, the dungeon in Fylline?”

“Yeah.”

“No way… How in the world…?”

“Forget that right now. You know about this floor, don’t you?”

“Huh? Oh, the one with the new wine?”

“Right. I did selective breeding in this dungeon; in other words, the structure just changed. I’m about to farm. Just memorize what I do and go tell your boss about it.”

“Huh? But that’s…”

“This is just a temporary band-aid solution. Besides…” I smirked. “This floor’s newly reborn. Even if this is optimal right now, it’ll be more optimized in the future. So don’t worry about it.”

I gazed at Mattia.

He hesitated for a moment, but then, he bowed deeply to me. “Thank you so much.”

I chuckled and farmed B20 with him at my back.

I always optimized my monster-killing strategies, so I had no problem finding new methods. At first, I’d bungled it by doing things that you could only do with S or SS stats, so I envisioned limiting myself to B-rank stats and devised new methods.

Mattia memorized them and went home with them.

☆

A few days later, on B8 of Nihonium, I continued raising my luck stat with Leia.

“Mr. Sato!”

“Hmm? Oh, Mattia. You look well.”

“All thanks to you.” When he ran over, he looked like a totally different person, refreshed and unbound.

“How’d things go?”

“Oh, I quit that stupid job.”

“You quit?” I was a little surprised. “Why’d you do that?”

“When I taught the boss what you taught me, he took all the credit as if he’d figured it out all by himself.”

“Oh…” I could imagine that.

Pushing your failures onto your subordinates, taking their successes as your own. Very common, indeed…but infuriating enough to make one murderous.

“When he did that, I was totally disillusioned. So, I quit the Family.”

“That so? Well, you might not want to hear it from me, but you’re better off.”

“I agree. So today…” Mattia took a step back and bowed deeply to me. “I came to thank you. So…”

“Yeah?”

Mattia straightened up again. He had a sunny expression, as if he’d become a whole new guy. Though it was a little hard to say

that his problems were solved.

“Thank you so much.”

But when I saw his face, I knew that this was for the best.

255. System Development

I went to B20 of Lanthanum with Mao Mii, the Fylline Dungeon Association chief.

I looked around; there weren't any other adventurers.

"I rented out the floor!" Mao said with a big, innocent smile that matched her tiny figure well.

"Rented out?"

"Yep! Since you asked for it, I chased out all the other adventurers so we'd have it all to ourselves."

"Is it okay that you're doing that?"

"Of course, of course! There could never be anything more important than one of your requests!" She said that insane sentence with that same innocent smile.

Not just "there isn't," but "there could never be." It was incredible that she could say that with such certainty.

☆

Meanwhile, at the Cyclo Dungeon Association, Cell and his subordinates did paperwork in his office.

"Hmm?" Cell suddenly groaned.

"Something the matter, Lord Cell?"

"I've received a revelation."

"Revelation…?"

“A revelation that I must compete against a rival. That I must make my conviction known.”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand, but good luck.”

☆

I gasped.

“What’s wrong? You look scary.”

“Uh, I just felt a weird chill… Hoping it’s just my imagination.” It felt as if something terrible was happening somewhere without my knowledge, but it was so scary that I tried to forget.

“Anyway, what are you doing with that sword?” Mao looked at the sword in my hands curiously.

“I did some research. Apparently, swords are the most common weapons wielded by adventurers.”

“That’s right. It’s orthodox and easy for anyone to use.”

“That’s why I chose the sword.”

“I still don’t get it…but I’m cheering you on!”

“Thanks.”

I gripped the sword anew. This sensation was unfamiliar to me. I’d obtained my gun and special rounds shortly after coming to this world, so I’d never used any fantasy weapons.

But this was necessary now.

The flame kunoichi of this floor had two striking characteristics: flame covering their bodies, and highly revealing

clothing.

A flame kunoichi dashed toward me and went for a slice with her ninja sword, which she held in a reverse grip. I blocked it with my sword. With a metallic sound, sparks flew.

I pushed her back, stepped forth, and went for a counterattack.

Slash!

My sword swing cut straight through it and its flames. The monster disappeared and dropped wine.

I ignored the Bodley Ryota-branded wine and reviewed that battle.

After doing that, I challenged another flame kunoichi. I didn't kill it right away, though; I let it attack a few times and watched closely.

The kunoichi was easy to figure out. Its charge led to two possible attack patterns, determined by which foot was in front. When it started with its left foot, it would slash with its ninja sword. When it started with its right, it would charge and use a shuriken.

Then, it'd circle behind. If you didn't react, it'd turn and slash; if you looked back, it'd throw a shuriken and then swing.

After discerning its attack patterns, I optimized my sword combat. Suppressing my abilities, holding back until my speed and strength were C-rank.

I continued to optimize until they could be beaten with such stats.

☆

“Okay. That’s a time reduction of about twenty percent.”

“Congrats!” Mao applauded me.

“Were you watching the whole time?”

“Yep! You were very cool, and it looked like you were dancing at the end, so I couldn’t take my eyes off you!”

“Dancing, huh? Maybe that’s what it looks like when you have a refined pattern.” I recalled the optimal pattern I’d devised through my testing. Indeed, even I thought it resembled a dance.

I used the paper and pen I’d brought with me to write down my optimized pattern and the flame kunoichi’s attack patterns as a bonus. Then, I handed it to Mao.

“What’s this?”

“The safest and fastest way to beat flame kunoichi with a sword. Distribute this to all adventurers for free, please.”

“That’s a waste, though! That was awesome fighting; even an amateur like me could tell! Making that public is such a waste…”

“It’s only good because it’s free,” I said, insisting she take the paper.

Mao gazed at it intently. Then, she asked, “Did something unreasonable happen somewhere?”

“Sure did. Though they don’t seem to think it’s unreasonable.”

I remembered Mattia’s face. His Family, his boss.

I didn’t know what his boss looked like, but I remembered his despicable actions.

Mattia was happy after he’d quit, but I couldn’t bear the idea of his boss profiting off of something that I’d made for Mattia himself. So I did this, researched the best methods to use with the most common weapon, and devised a pattern that was 20% more efficient than the last.

And the plan was to publicize it for free.

“I don’t know who caused it, but I feel bad for them.”

“Good.”

“But they deserved it.”

“Hmm?”

“Everyone knows they shouldn’t do bad things when you’re around. Whoever did that definitely deserved it.”

“You’re right about that.” I hoped it would work out that way.

Mao accepted the paper from me. “I’ll take responsibility and make sure all the adventurers in Fylline see it.”

“Thanks. I’m counting on you.”

“No problem! Actually, I’m honored. It’s great to be a part of the Ryota System!”

“Okay, I really don’t like that name. Stop that, please.” It was just too embarrassing. That said, she was eager to help, so I left it to her.

After a while, the Lanthanum B20F Ryota System spread throughout Fylline. Mattia’s former Family didn’t just miss out on

profit; people laughed at them for trying to sell such a shoddy method, and rumors about lost trust in them reached even me.

256. Ryota Would Never

Villa di H was a great pub. Every day, they served different kinds of beer. I loved how, no matter when I came, I'd get to experience new flavors.

One night after work, I came with Alice and Rebecca. Their special tonight was black beer, so we started with one for each of us.

"I heard, by the way," Rebecca said unprompted.

"Hmm? About what?" I asked back. She just glared at me.

What? When you don't give me context, what else am I supposed to ask?

"Are you saying such a thing isn't even worth remembering?"

"What 'such a thing'? Help me out here."

"…The Bodley, of course."

"Oh!" I clasped my hands together when it hit me. "You mean the publicized farming method?"

"Yes, that. Goodness, you're a crazy man for doing such a thing twice."

"I did it because I was pissed off."

"Don't try to brush it off with the kind of platitude a criminal would offer," Rebecca pouted.

Clunk!

She slammed her empty mug onto the table. She must've really not liked that answer.

"Okay, but listen…" I scratched my cheek nervously.

Even if all that hadn't happened, in my opinion, strategies were made to be publicized—to be shared. Once you've made your strategy applicable to almost anyone, you put it up on a Wiki. That's how I've always treated them, so publicizing it didn't bother me whatsoever.

But for some reason, Rebecca didn't like that.

"Yes, yes, I understand. You just wanted to teach them a lesson."

"If you understand, then there's no problem, right?"

"I don't like your composure, either!" Her face flushed. She looked really ticked off now.

"O-Oh."

Is she one of those angry drunks?

Alice, who'd been playing with her monsters in silence, spoke up, "I don't think it's composure, or anything."

"What?"

"That's just how Ryota is. He can't sit idly by when someone's in trouble—especially not when someone is causing trouble for others."

"I know that!"

"Sure." Alice smiled kindly, evidently amused. Her reaction only made Rebecca pout more.

"Your composure enrages me, too!"

"Mine?"

"Yes! Walking around with a spirit, showing all the world like it's nothing… Grr!" Rebecca snatched up Burny, who happened to

be in the middle of eating peanuts. A shock, I know.

“Ugh, like this! And this! You do all…this!”

Rebecca petted Burny and kneaded it by putting both hands around it and rolling it up like a ball of clay. Burny’s flames brightened and dimmed. When she finally released it, its eyes were spinning like the @.@ emoticon.

She…sure is drunk.

But her drunken rage was kind of cute, so I didn’t mind too much.

After the kneading of Burny, Rebecca and Alice started talking more.

They chit-chatted wholly without me. I stepped out of the conversation and watched over the kindred spirits.

Both of them had been born in dungeons. Both were spirit-blessed. Their personalities and ways of speaking couldn’t be any more different, but when I watched them now, they seemed awfully similar.

Suddenly, Boney lost her balance. She’d tried lifting a human mug with her whole body to get a drink, but slipped and fell right on her back. Rebecca reached her hand out just in time to break the skeleton’s fall.

“Careful, now. If you’re going to drink, then use a smaller cup.”

Boney nodded its skull back and forth, as if to thank her.

“You’re awfully nice to them,” I mused.

“Monsters are special.”

“Because you were born in a dungeon?”

“Yes, that’s correct,” Rebecca replied frankly.

After she helped Boney, the other monsters started to get closer to her instead of just hanging around Alice. The two of them became good friends through monsters.

While she was feeding Rawry some fries, Rebecca spoke up, “It’s getting rather loud out there.” Her eyes were directed toward the pub entrance. She had returned to her usual sharpness, which fit a top-class adventurer.

“Now that you mention it, you’re right.” I spotted a nearby employee and asked, “Oh, excuse me, is something wrong?”

“I hear outsiders have appeared.”

“Really?”

“Yes, but everyone’s going to deal with them soon, so there’s no need to worry. It’s just that the commotion is being prolonged because they keep appearing one after another.”

“…I see.”

One after another.

That tugged at my mind.

It was already rare for outsiders to appear in the city. Why were there so many now? Was something big happening?

I got out of my seat, headed to the door, and looked outside. It was a few times louder than the average night in Cyclo. The sounds of combat, similar to those in dungeons, could be heard from several directions.

“Hey, did you hear? Ryota’s the one who caused all this!”

“Ryota? You mean Ryota Sato, the Grandmaster?”

“Yeah. Apparently, he’s been scattering monsters all over the place.”

Across the road, in a place where it was hard to see their faces, I heard some passing men.

Me? There’s no way—

I heard simultaneous voices from two different directions.

“No shot.”

“Absolutely impossible.”

One came from one of the two men, and the other came from next to me. Both of them sounded almost derisive.

Rebecca had followed me.

“Rebecca.”

“A ridiculous thought. You would never do such a thing.”

Alice appeared, too, and agreed with her, “Yeah, yeah! Ryota wouldn’t do that! Everyone in town knows that.”

They were right. *Don’t do anything unreasonable in front of Ryota* was practically a slogan here in Cyclo.

Scattering outsiders all over the city? Very few people would believe that.

That said, I couldn’t ignore this. Outsiders were appearing whether I liked it or not, and it was a fact that they could cause damage.

“Sorry, girls. I’ll be right back.”

“Okay! Good luck!”

“Do as you please.”

With their send-off, I ran out of the pub.

☆

After Ryota's departure, Alice and Rebecca were left in the pub. Alice had a big smile, and Rebecca was both bored and sullen.

They watched side by side as he left.

"Ugh. What a man."

"Aww, c'mon. You know he's like that!" Alice covered her mouth and giggled suggestively. "'Doing such a thing twice,' huh? You keep a close eye on him. Or did you investigate him, huh?"

"I have no idea what you're implying!" Having been figured out, Rebecca stomped angrily and went back to her table.

"Ahahaha! Don't be embarrassed!" Alice chased after her, overjoyed by how much they had in common.

257. Pity Does a Man No Favors

I ran around town. Slimes and other weak monsters were here and there.

When I happened upon them, I instantly killed them and moved on.

In dungeons, I would take my time killing things for the sake of training. But this was outside—out in Cyclo. Taking my time would directly increase the danger to the city people, so I wasted no time and immediately killed each one.

I used homing rounds for this; I didn't need to aim, and as long as I fired after I perceived a monster, it would follow them on its own.

Repetition required four syllables of casting. The homing rounds just needed me to pull the trigger. For the weakest trash mobs like slimes, homing rounds were just faster.

Thus, I searched for the culprit, shooting homing rounds as I went.

"Oh. Culprit spotted!"

"Neptune…and…"

When I ran into Neptune, he suddenly accused me of causing this. As usual, he had his lovers Lil and Ran in tow.

The pretty boy flashed a mischievous grin and said to his two companions, "See? I told you. The criminal always returns to the scene of the crime."

"You were right! That's awesome, Nep!"

“Don’t get cocky. *I’m* the one who taught you that.”

“Did you? But you’re mine, Lil, and what’s yours is mine.”

“D-Dummy, what are you talking about?”

“What about me? Nep, what about me?”

Neptune started flirting with his girls out of nowhere. I couldn’t sit here all day, so I ignored them and started walking again.

“Hey, hey, wait!” he called out. “Ignoring me is just plain rude.”

“Just so you know, it wasn’t me.”

“I know that. Everyone in Cyclo does…except for the real culprit, maybe. That’s why they think they can bring you down this way,” Neptune said with a grin, as if he found it funny. “Hey, mind if I give you a piece of advice?”

“What?”

“When you find the culprit, punish them good. Don’t show pity.”

“Why’s that?”

“Pity does a man no favors.”

“…Hmm.”

I half understood and half didn’t.

“Oh, one more thing.”

“Yeah?”

“Your problem is that you keep killing too quickly. The criminal is going around telling people you’re the one who did it, riiight?”

“…Oh!”

It finally hit me. I was too careless.

He was right. That was exactly right.

Someone was out there telling people that these outsiders were my doing. That person was trying to cause damage and pin the blame on me. Just running into monsters and insta-killing them wasn’t enough.

“Thank you. That helps a lot.”

“Heheh. Fame isn’t all it’s cracked up to be, is it?”

“I’ll thank you properly soon.” I said goodbye to Neptune and ran off in pursuit of the criminal again.

After running around Cyclo for a while, I found more monsters. This time, it was two slimes from B1 of Tellurium. Suppressing the urge to instantly kill them, I walked over.

They bounced in my direction and rammed me. I could practically hear the feeble slapping in my head.

We’d come full circle. How long had it been since a slime last attacked me? A year, maybe?

Once I’d gotten strong enough and gained experience, I’d stopped taking damage from them.

Wait, now isn’t the time to stand around.

“Umm… W-Waaah.”

My performance was so embarrassing that I’d die if somebody I knew saw me. With that deadpan “scream,” I fell to the ground.

The slimes mobbed me and attacked. It didn't hurt. In fact, it was much harder to not accidentally counterattack and kill them.

I let the slimes have their fun for a while, occasionally letting out token screams and cries of agony. Despite nobody being here to see it, I was still so embarrassed that I thought my face would catch on fire.

But my efforts would prove worthwhile.

"There are monsters here! Ryota Sato released more outsiders!"

I turned toward the voice. "He's here!"

There, I saw someone leaning out from behind a corner and screaming. I pulled out a gun and, still lying on the ground, fired at him.

A restraining round.

Ropes of light caught him.

"Wh-What the hell is this?!"

"Repetition." I defeated the outsider slimes with magic and then approached the perp. The person bound by the restraining round was a middle-aged man. "Who…are you?" I asked him.

"Who are *you*?!" the man screamed.

Before I could introduce myself and ask why he'd done this, I heard a sigh and an exasperated voice behind me. "Boss…"

"Mattia!" the man screamed.

Huh?

When I turned back around, the man was glaring at Mattia, outraged. They knew each other. More than that, Mattia called

him Boss.

Is this what I think it is?

“Is that the boss of your former Family?” I asked. Mattia nodded with a sour look on his face.

Okay, I see what’s going on.

I quickly understood everything.

“This is revenge, isn’t it?”

“Yes. When I heard, I had a feeling and followed him. I just can’t believe it really was him…” Mattia sighed again. In other words, my publicization of the efficient Lanthanum B20F farming method had worked; it had ruined his profits, and he’d done this to try and get revenge. “I’m sorry it came to this, Mr. Sato.”

“It’s not your fault.”

This man here, his former boss, was the one at fault. He’d started a business on a stupid whim. When it failed, he blamed his subordinates. When it succeeded, he took the credit. And then, when a business rival appeared, he did all this.

The fault rested totally with him.

And yet…

“It’s almost disheartening…” I sighed.

It was such a trivial thing that part of me didn’t even feel right punishing him. In the end, all he’d done was scatter outsiders all over the place and yell my name a bunch. Nobody in Cyclo believed him, and the monsters were all weak anyway.

“Why’d you choose monsters like slimes?” I asked the man.

“Obviously because I’d be in danger too if they were strong! Duh!”

“…”

He put emphasis on the most pathetic part. It really was disheartening.

“What should we do, Mr. Sato?”

“Really? I don’t even care anymore. I’m not interested in doing anything about it.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yeah.”

“Understood. Then I’ll report him to the proper authorities.”

“Go for it.”

Even if I didn’t care, creating outsiders around town was still a crime. Reporting him to the authorities was probably for the best.

“I heard everything,” Cell declared, having appeared out of nowhere. “Allow me to pass judgment.”

“Whoa! C-Cell, when did you get here?” I was startled by his sudden arrival. He was as mysterious as ever.

“As the Dungeon Association chief, I cannot ignore a commotion in the city.”

“Well, that’s fair.”

“Especially when scoundrels are trying to pin blame on you, Sir Sato.”

“You really don’t have to concern—” I laughed, but I was interrupted by something falling out of Cell’s sleeve. The object,

which made a heavy thud when it hit the ground, was a figure of me. “Why do you have one of me getting attacked by slimes?!”

“A-Ahem.” He picked up the figure and put it back in his sleeve. Then, with a stern look, he glared at Mattia’s former boss. “Leader of the Septo Family, I hereby judge you.”

“What?! N-No, you’ve got it all wrong—”

“Septo Family goods are henceforth banned from Cyclo’s purchasing shops. Your dungeon permits are now revoked, as well.”

“Wha—?” the man gasped. Cell’s judgment was perhaps the most severe of all. “W-Wait a second! This is all wrong!”

He desperately claimed that it was wrong. Not sure what he thought was wrong, but he tried anyway.

But Cell left without so much as turning back. To me, he looked furious from behind.

Uh, so, isn’t this just like…

“Tsk, tsk. I told you,” Neptune said next to me. It seemed he’d happened upon the scene at some point, too.

“Neptune.”

“Don’t blame me. I told you; pity does a man no favors,” he said with a smile.

258. King of the Curveball

On B1 of Tellurium, I efficiently farmed monsters.

I'd updated the Lanthanum B20 strategy twice since the thing with Mattia, but it made me realize that my methods for dungeons I was most used to clearing were out of date.

As such, I'd come here.

"Hup!" I seized a slime and threw it at my magic cart nearby.

Leia protected said cart.

The instant it landed above it, it dissolved, disappeared, and became bean sprouts. Said bean sprouts fell straight into the cart.

Grabbing slimes and throwing them, catching their tackles and throwing them, kicking them straight toward the cart at times—I used the perfect response for each situation to launch them.

Above the magic cart was an eternal flame round, the fusion of flame and azure flame rounds. When slimes touched it, they died instantly, and their drops fell straight into the cart.

"How's it going, Leia?"

"Calculating… Efficiency has fallen just slightly compared to your previous method."

"No good, huh?"

"Efficiency is higher until you travel to the monsters yourself. I believe the following wait until your return is the main source of loss."

“Yeah… The eternal flame round is stuck there, so I’m forced to go looking for them. But moving the eternal flame every time…”

“Yes, I agree. That would be even more inefficient.”

“Yeah. The only thing we can do with it is fire it at just the right height and leave the magic cart below it.” That was what caused time loss. That said, using more fusion rounds would only cost more.

“If only I could push the magic cart while we used this method, efficiency would increase,” Leia said.

“Hmm…” I put a hand to my chin in thought.

That did sound efficient. If Leia pushed the magic cart—no, if she combined with me and pulled it with her arm, would that be better? If I threw an enemy over the cart and killed it that way, that could make it even more efficient.

The problem was that the eternal flame round didn’t move…

“Eep!”

A small cry in the distance interrupted my train of thought. A female mage I was acquainted with had been wounded by a slime’s attack.

Without a thought, I fired a limitless recovery round into her.

“Thank you!” She bowed her head. Then, she circled around the slime she was fighting. It was purple.

Her fighting style involved using poison magic and then waiting for it to die from the passive damage over time. That was why she circled around the poisoned slime, never touching it.

After a while, it finally melted and dropped bean sprouts.

I never got used to seeing that fighting style. When monsters died from damage over time, it always looked like they just up and died for no reason.

It wasn't for me, but it was a commonly used method. If you could deal passive damage proportional to the enemy's health, then you could just protect yourself and wait for them to die. That allowed people to regularly defeat enemies that were stronger than themselves.

Adventurers in this world prioritized safety and stability above all else, so a percentage of them used this strategy.

Other adventurers did the same thing she did. Another man nearby used poison magic and focused on defense and evasion. The slime bounced all around and tried to attack him, but since he focused on defense, he didn't take much damage at all.

Eventually, the slime suddenly collapsed and died, dropping bean sprouts.

"Aah!" the man cried. The slime had died exactly when it had bounced up to the ceiling and was just about to bounce back down. Because it died there, nearly half of the bean sprouts it dropped stuck to the ceiling. "I can't get those… What a waste," he grumbled, frustrated, but ultimately gave up.

I stared up at the bean sprouts.

"Master? Do you want those bean sprouts?" Leia asked me.

"No, that's not it," I replied and continued to stare at them.

The slime that looked like it had died out of nowhere. The slime whose drops had stuck to the ceiling. I picked up a pebble on the ground and threw it in a direction where there were no people to hit. It spun as it flew. Then, along the way, it suddenly shot downward.

A vertical curveball.

Yeah. If I manage the amount of force I use…

“Leia. Push the magic cart and follow me.”

“Yes, Master.” She didn’t ask questions; she dutifully obeyed orders and pushed the magic cart toward me.

I found a slime. It immediately lunged at me, so I caught it in my hand and threw it toward Leia. It exploded in midair and dropped bean sprouts—but they lacked momentum, and because it had died before reaching the cart, the bean sprouts didn’t go in there.

“My apologies, Master.”

“No, it’s not your fault. Keep up that same exact pace for me, okay?”

“Understood.” She dutifully obeyed once more.

The magic cart followed at the same speed. This time, I stooped down and snatched up a slime before throwing it with an underhand pitch.

In the instant I threw it, I controlled my force to try and have it die the instant it was above the cart.

My second attempt had too much force and flew past the magic cart, but the third one was perfect. The slime died directly

above it, and the bean sprouts went directly into the cart.

“Well done, Master.”

“We’ll start with the cart at equal intervals. Follow me.”

“Yes, Master,” Leia assented. With her in tow, I got to work throwing slimes.

I’d come up with this method from the poison damage, throwing them so that they died *after* my throw.

At first, they didn’t go into the cart every time. Over time, though, I got the hang of it and learned to get them in almost 100% of the time.

Once I could guarantee it, I threw fifty more. After that, I asked Leia, “Leia, how’s the efficiency?”

“Approximately 1.1 times greater.”

“A ten percent boost. All right, let’s up the pace. I’ll match the timing myself, so you just need to follow me.”

“Understood.”

Leia’s cart-pushing speed was no longer perfectly uniform, so I missed a few times. But now that I had it down, I was able to adjust it on the fly with ease.



Grabbing, throwing, making it so they died just in time to fall in the cart. As a result of moment-to-moment improvisation of speed and timing…

“How about now?!”

“One-point-three times your original efficiency.”

“Nice! Let’s go even faster.”

“Yes, Master.”

And so, I spent a day improving my efficiency in Tellurium.

259. The Field Trip

I took a breather in the break room on Tellurium's B1.

Leia had gone back to the mansion to ask about the numbers we'd gotten during our farming optimization spree.

Orton, the custom cart salesman, had attached a calculation feature to my remodeled magic cart, but it was only rudimentary. I wanted hard numbers, so I had Leia run the errand for me.

Meanwhile, I took a break.

I heard a dispirited voice. "Everyone line up, please. It's dangerous to stray away."

"Hmm?" When I looked, I saw a young woman in her twenties leading a group of elementary to middle school aged kids. "What's going on there?"

"You don't know?" an acquaintance nearby replied to my mumbling.

"Know what?"

"That's an event held by the city's schools. Adventuring is an important job, so sometimes, teachers bring students to the dungeon to let them watch."

"Oh, wow. A field trip, huh?"

Right, those were a thing, I thought to myself, kind of impressed.

"They don't go past B1 because of the danger. And I know I don't need to tell you this, but avoid using any attacks that might hurt the kids when they're around."

“Yeah, of course.”

The adventurer went into the break room.

A field trip to a dungeon, huh?

It was very much like this world.

One of the little girls came over to me and bowed her head.

“Umm… Hello there.”

“Hi there. How are you?” Since I was talking to a kid, I spoke more gently.

“Are you an adventurer, Mr. Old Man?”

“Old… Uh, yes.”

Another little girl came over.

“Excuse me… Can we see how you fight monsters?” She had good manners, too, though she seemed a little more assertive than the first one. This one seemed like someone I’d see working in the dungeons in the distant future.

“Yeah! I can do that.” I ended my break and took out a gun.

“Thank you.”

“Thank you, sir. I spotted a monster over there before.”

“No, it’s okay. Should be almost time.”

“Huh…?”

The girl cocked her head, as if she didn’t understand what that meant.

I pointed my gun into empty space.

When you farm enough, you eventually learn where monsters will respawn and how long it’ll take.

I timed a restraining round perfectly. The bullet flew at the empty space until it struck a slime that had just respawned. It bound the slime in ropes of light.

“Wow! That’s cool.”

“Want a closer look? Or do you wanna try and fight it?”

“Can I?!” The more energetic girl’s eyes lit up, and she went over to the restrained slime.

She punched and kicked it. The other girl followed suit, picking up rocks and hitting the slime with them from a safe distance.

They seemed like good friends. It was heartwarming to see the two of them beating up that slime.

I made sure not to let the restraint run out. After five minutes of a hard-fought battle, the girls took down the slime. It dropped a handful of bean sprouts, which they gleefully brought back.

“Mr. Old Man, we got bean sprouts!”

“Good job!”

They had big smiles on their faces.

“Yay!”

“Thank you.”

Another kid came; this one was a violent-looking little boy.

“Hey, what’re you doing here?”

“Hey, that guy there is really cool!” one of the girls said.

“Look! This old man helped us beat a slime!” the other added.

“Hah! You think that’s cool? You two know nothing.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“Hey, old man!” the boy shouted at me.

“Hmm?”

“What’s your name?”

“Ryota Sato, why?”

“Ryota…Sato… Heh. See, I knew you were wrong about him.”

“What’s that supposed to mean, buddy?”

“Let me tell you something cool. All the best adventurers are called ‘spirit-blessed.’”

“Spirit…blessed?”

“Yeah. Dungeons have spirits, and when those spirits acknowledge you, they let you put the dungeon’s name at the end of your name.”

“Really?” The girls looked at me.

“Yep, that’s right,” I confirmed.

“Ryota and Sato aren’t dungeon names. This guy’s no big deal.”

Okay, he wasn’t violent; he was just a little cheeky. What he’d said wasn’t wrong, but it was badly timed. He’d rained on the poor girls’ parade. While I considered supplementing his explanation a bit…

“Well, well. It’s been a while, Ryota,” someone greeted me.

“That voice is… Hey, Neptune.”

“Aww, you recognize my voice? I think our friendship’s just gotten stronger.”

“You’re just imagining it. Affection isn’t a stat in this world.”

Neptune had come. As usual, Lil and Ran were orbiting him.

“What brings you—Oh. Spending time with the youth, I see?” he asked me.

“Yeah, while I take a break.”

“Sure, sure. Children are our future, after all.”

“That’s right,” I agreed.

“H-Hey…” the cheeky boy from before addressed Neptune. His attitude had totally changed.

“Hmm? What’s up, buddy?”

“Neptune, right? Are you…Mr. Neptune Oxygen?”

“You know your stuff.”

“Wh-Whoa… He’s a spirit-blessed!” The boy was excited now. He was overjoyed to see a spirit-blessed in the flesh. “H-Hey, can I have a handshake?”

“Of course.”

“I’m gonna be an adventurer! I’ll be an incredible adventurer just like you, sir!”

“Aww, that’s great. But you should aim to be like him, not me.” Neptune pointed at me.

“Huh?” The boy was confused. “Why…that old guy?”

“He’s much more amazing. Isn’t that right?”

“I’ll take the compliment, but cut out the winking, please,” I groaned.

“Ahaha! You’re as uptight as ever.”

“Has anyone ever told you that *you’re* too friendly?”

Neptune and I bantered. He was surprisingly easy to be around, since he was so cheerful.

“Anyway, we’d best be going,” he finally said. “Let’s go, Lil and Ran.”

“Okay!” Ran replied, as eager as ever.

“You make us wait too long.” Lil rolled her eyes.

The Neptune Family went downstairs to the next floor.

Once Neptune was gone, the boy scoffed. “H-Hmph!”

“Hmm?”

“Don’t get cocky, buddy.”

“Umm… Okay?”

While I was trying to figure out what he meant, he suddenly got talkative. “Spirit-blessed are the awesome ones. It’s not cool to show off just because you’re friends with one of them!”

“…Oh.”

Okay, that’s what he meant.

I was confused at first, but he was just jealous of me. He’d just seen me having a friendly conversation with Neptune, one of the spirit-blessed he admired.

How cute.

“Master,” a voice called from behind. I didn’t have to turn around to know who it was.

“Oh, Leia. You’re back.”

She circled around in front of me. Her eyes were focused on me, as if she hadn’t even perceived the children. Normally, if you saw kids in a dungeon, your eyes would be drawn to them. It was very much like her to not even care.

“Apologies for taking so long.”

“Did anything go wrong?”

“Selenium called me. When I ignore her, her voice tends to echo endlessly in my mind and disturbs my service, so I went there first.”

“Well, I can’t blame you for that.”

Selenium calling her probably meant that they were doing something sexual, but Leia never said what, and I wasn’t about to ask.

Just then, I caught sight of the boy’s face. He was stunned, looking back and forth between me and Leia.

“What’s up?” I asked him.

“S-Selenium? As in, the dungeon?”

“Yeah.”

“Is this lady blessed by the spirit of Selenium?”

“That’s right,” I confirmed.

The boy’s eyes grew wide along with his growing surprise. “Selenium… A spirit-blessed, but she calls you Master… Huuuh…?”

Guess he’s the kind of guy who can’t help but say what he’s thinking.

He seemed stunned by the fact that the spirit-blessed Leia was my subordinate and called me Master.

“Ryota! Let’s go hooomeee!” someone ambushed me.

“Whoa! Who the heck is just hugging me from behind out of nowhere?”

“It’s meee!”

“Aurum!”

The person who’d run up from behind me and nearly tackled me was Aurum. She managed to hug me while keeping Miike in her arms.

“This is sudden. What’s going on?” I asked.

“I came to pick you up! Just like how you picked me up from my dungeon.”

“Yeah?”

“So? Did it make you happy?”

“Having a spirit come to pick you up seems like a rare experience.”

“Heheh!” Aurum puffed out her chest excitedly. She was so open with her emotions. I was glad that I’d brought her out of her dungeon and paired her with Miike.

Meanwhile…

“Aurum… A spirit…. Is that the Aurum people have been talking about?! Why’s she with this old fart?!” The boy was even more surprised. He started quivering.

It really was adorable how he just spoke his mind all the time.

He glared at me, mouth clenched shut. Then…

“D—”

“Hmm?”

“Don’t think you’ve won, old man!”

With those parting words, he turned and ran. I watched and mentally cheered him on.

Good luck, kid.

Bonus Story:The First Carrot

One afternoon on a day off, the Ryota Family—who prided itself on being a good employer—all enjoyed a well-earned break.

Ryota, Emily, Celeste, and Eve had gathered in the living room.

Ryota and Celeste chatted together at the dining table, and Eve was orbiting Emily—who was cooking, naturally—with sparkles in her eyes.

Emily had just been stirring and taste-testing the food. Finally, she smiled in satisfaction at her work. “That finishes it!”

“It’s done?” Eve demanded.

“Yep. Carrot jam, just for you, Eve.”

“Hoooh! Carrots, carrots, carrots!” Even though she’d been watching the whole process, she went crazy at Emily’s carrot announcement. She was getting a little too excited, drawing Ryota and Celeste’s eyes.

“Food ready?” Ryota asked.

“That’s right.” Emily moved aside so that they could see the stove.

Two burners, two pots. Said pots were exactly the same size.Ryota found that strange.

“I heard carrot jam. Why are there two?”

“This one is carrot-only jam just for Eve. This one over here is carrot and apple jam.”

“Huh…? Hmm? There’s something about that scent…” Ryota cocked his head a little and sniffed in the direction of the “carrot-only” jam that Emily had mentioned.

“Yep. I put in a tiny bit of lemon juice.”

“Wow, lemon juice?”

“It helps bring out the sweetness of the carrots.”

“Oh, okay. Like salt on a watermelon.” Ryota understood this.

However, Eve pouted unhappily at this revelation. “Don’t want lemon. Bunnies only need carrots.”

“Haha. How about you just try it before you grumble? Emily made that decision, and I’m confident she’s got it right.”

Eve gazed at Emily in silence. Even this carrot junkie recognized her cooking talents. “Okay. I’ll try it,” she finally relented. Emily offered her the small spoon she’d used to taste-test.

After accepting it, the bunny took a scoop of the carrot-only jam and licked it. Instantly after…

“Hooooooh!” Her eyes sparkled even more as she danced madly from joy.

But she didn’t stop there; armed with that tiny spoon, she practically shoveled scoop after scoop down her throat. Thus, while moaning about how delicious it was between mouthfuls, she cleared out Emily’s jam at a breakneck pace.

“She eats like she’s in a manga,” Ryota laughed, amused.

Across from him, Celeste spoke up, having just realized something. “By the way, why carrots?”

“Isn’t it normal for rabbits to eat carrots?” Ryota replied.

But Celeste continued, “I hear people like her will eat anything. Even meat!”

“Really?” His eyes widened at that revelation. He found it strange and surprising, but those emotions quickly died down.

When it came to information and wisdom, Celeste was at the top of the Family. If she claimed something was true, then it surely was. Realizing that, he calmed down before her next answer.



“Yes. That’s how most of them are, anyway.”

“Huh… In that case…” Ryota said, turning to look at the bunny who continued to single-mindedly devour the jam. “Maybe the first carrot she ate was just that good.”

Many food preferences are often influenced by the quality of foods eaten during childhood, and they tend to stick for life. Ryota knew of many foods he’d tried as a child, found delicious, and continued to consider favorites for the rest of his life.

So he thought that Eve’s first carrot must have been a delicious one.

☆

In one particular dungeon, there was a secluded dead-end path where no monsters appeared. If any monsters did approach, they would be quickly detected.

In this place, a group of beastman adventurers ate together. Eve Callusleader was among them.

In human years, she was about 10 years old. Standing at around 4’3”, she wore a bunny suit that fit her build. It was revealing, yes, but it wasn’t sexy; if anything, it was just cute.

Eve was the only child among this group of adults.

Because they were an adventuring group, their dinners were often dynamic, but she stood out even among this group. She seized a chunk of cartoonishly large meat and utterly devoured it.

After finishing one on her own, she reached for another piece of meat that had just finished grilling over the campfire.

“Hey! You can’t just eat meat all the time. Vegetables are important!” a middle-aged beastwoman scolded her.

Carrot soup boiled next to her.

Carrots dropped on this floor, so the ones used in the soup were freshly procured. It was a simple soup, with the bare minimum seasoning. Even adults wouldn’t eat it for pleasure, so the child Eve hated it even more.

“I hate veggies. They’re gross.”

“Too bad. Eat them anyway.”

“No!”

The child Eve rebelled strongly against adults’ demands that she eat veggies. When they insisted that she do it, she stood up with her meat in one hand and ran away.

“Hey! Eve, wait!” The woman stood up a little and reached out to grab her, but Eve evaded her grasp and disappeared into the dungeon. “Ugh! That child…”

“Now, now. It’ll be fine,” a middle-aged man who looked to be a warrior said, munching on meat with a small bottle of alcohol in his other hand. He had bunny ears like the others, but one of them drooped due to a sword wound, giving him the aura of a battle-hardened warrior. “Can’t get upset every time a kid wants to be picky.”

“We need to discipline her now *because* she’s a child.”

“Nah, nah. I knew she was special; that’s why I brought her into the party, even at that age.” After quaffing the rest of his drink and rubbing his mouth with the back of his hand, he let out a hearty sigh. “She’s a combat prodigy. Don’t lump geniuses like her in with regular old kids.”

“But she *is* a kid, genius or not. Her life won’t be a long one if she doesn’t keep it in top shape.”

“That’s fair. Try not to make her hate you, though,” he said. Now that he’d said everything he wanted to say, he started chatting with another of the men.

Like him, the other man was chowing down on meat, ears flapping all the while.

The woman put her hands on her hips and heaved a big, exasperated sigh.

“Good grief… This is why I can’t handle men.”

☆

In the dungeon, Eve walked with large bone-in meat in hand, sniffing and breathing heavily.

It was then that a monster appeared. It had a buffalo-like appearance, but when it bared its fangs, it became clear that it was *not* herbivorous.

It glared at Eve with bloodshot eyes. After snorting like a steam engine, it clawed at the ground with its hind legs and used the momentum to charge.

A giant buffalo monster, versus one ten-year-old girl. Normally, this would lead to tragedy—but not this time.

“…Easy.”

Eve kept her cool and jumped. She didn’t bother dodging, however; she simply karate-chopped the buffalo head-on, right between its eyes.

The giant buffalo was blown away. Its neck twisted as it flew away, thrown as if it had just been hit by a car.

The little girl had sent the ferocious behemoth flying. It seemed to utterly defy the laws of physics.

“Huff, huff!” Eve landed, breathing heavily again.

Knowing the circumstances might actually make you sympathize with the monsters.

All of her rage at being told to eat vegetables had been put into that blow. The damage to the monster caused by said rage could only be called calamitous. One could only feel bad for the poor thing.

After being defeated by that one blow, the monster disappeared with a pop and turned into a drop. Eve was used to this sight by now.

“I hate veggies. They’re gross.”

This monster dropped carrots—the very same carrots that the adventurers had created just earlier. As a hater of carrots, the child pouted adorably.

However, in this case, it did *not.* Instead, a child of all things had appeared. It was a boy who looked to be about ten years

old—the same age as Eve.

She had defeated a monster and received a child as a drop. That was the only interpretation that made sense to her.

The apparently dropped boy looked around, utmost confusion evident on his face.

“Huh? Wh-Where am I?”

“…Weird shaped carrot.”

“Whoa, wh-who are you? Why are you dressed like that?”

“Carrots these days are amazing. They can even talk.”

“What are you talking about?”

“…Mlem.”

Eve approached the confused boy and licked his cheek. Startled by this bizarre and sudden event, he jumped back and blushed madly. The boy panicked now.

“Wh-Wh-What are you doing?!”

“…Not a carrot.”

“Obviously not!”

“A rare drop?” Eve cocked her head and looked up at the boy’s face from below.

“What are you saying now? Also, where even are we?” He looked around anxiously. “For a haunted house, this place really doesn’t look like one.”

“Haunted…house?”

“Yeah. I waited in line forever for this haunted house, but this amusement park did a bad job of making it look right.”

“Hm…?” Eve was just confused by his words.

The boy kept on looking all around.

“Whatever. Where’s the exit?”

“Exit?”

“Yeah.”

“You mean the dungeon exit?”

“Dungeon?”

The boy was just as confused as her. He knew the phrase “amusement park,” but it seemed as if the word “dungeon” was not a part of his daily life.

While the two were confused by their incoherent exchange, another monster appeared. It was another buffalo-like monster, far too big and dangerous for a child to deal with. The instant it appeared, its flame-red eyes locked on to the children.

“Wh-What’s that?!” the boy screamed.

“Manganese’s B16 monster. Death buffalo.”

“Manganese?” he repeated, becoming more befuddled by the second. “Like the stuff in batteries?” He was more than a little nervous when faced with the monster—naturally, since he’d grown up in a world where they didn’t exist.

But regardless of his nervousness and Eve’s total lack thereof, the newly appeared death buffalo snorted, clawed its hind legs on the ground, and charged at them.

The suddenness of it left the boy too terrified to do anything but watch. But Eve, the prodigy and seasoned adventurer for her age, reacted quickly. She stepped in front of the boy and hit the

death buffalo with a counter-chop almost exactly like the last time.

Her counter blew the buffalo away.

The sight of a girl who was only 4’3” launching a six-foot monster away was surreal indeed. As for the buffalo itself, it fell onto the ground and spasmed a few times before finally disappearing.

Eve pointed and confirmed, “No carrots… Good.”

The lack of a drop brought a smile to her face.

Meanwhile, the boy ran over to her, excited.

“That was awesome! What was that?! What’d you do to that cow thing?!”

Eve was taken aback. Nobody had ever reacted like this. As someone who worked with adults on the front lines of primary production, this was the first time she’d ever experienced the pure, unfiltered reaction of a child her age.

Unsure of how to respond to this, she just froze up for a moment.

After a while, she timidly asked back, “Aren’t you scared of this bunny?”

“Scared? Why?”

“…”

“Hey! Show me that again, would you?”

“That?”

“The whole, *fwoosh* thing! It was like this Excalibur thing I just read about in my manga!”

“…Okay.”

She decided to respond sincerely to his pure friendliness. Though she’d been on the front lines from a young age, she was still just a little girl. The simple kindness of someone her age had rekindled that dying flame of childhood within.

Eve walked the boy around the dungeon. When death buffalo appeared, she’d kill them and show off to the boy. The kids played in the dungeon as if it was their own backyard.

“Wow! Awesome! Hey, how does that work? Why does the cow thing disappear when you hit it?”

“It’s because my plant drops are low.”

“Plant…drops… Huh, okay.” He rolled Eve’s answer over his tongue, but his deadpan repetition of it seemed to imply that he did not understand. But he remained excited, because he thought Eve was awesome. “Hey, Bunny? Can I make those cow things disappear, too?”

“Do you want to defeat them?”

“Yeah!” the boy replied firmly, an innocent look on his face.

Eve gazed at him for a moment before replying.

“…Okay. Then here.”

She took something out of her bunny suit’s chest and handed it to him. It was a small, cylindrical item akin to a flashlight.

“What’s this?”

“A magical item. Anyone can attack by throwing it.”

“Huh…”

“This bunny will weaken it. On my signal, throw.”

“Okay! Got it!” The boy held the cylinder in both hands and nodded excitedly.

Thus, the two continued their walk. It didn’t take them long to find another death buffalo.

Like she had before, Eve left the boy behind and lunged at it. She karate-chopped again, but this time, she didn’t kill it in one blow. Having declared that she’d weaken it, she circled around and hit it with many chops.

From both his perspective and the perspective of other adventurers in this world, it was odd to see such a little girl running circles around a ferocious beast and holding back against it.

Eve thoroughly weakened the buffalo, as if proving her overwhelming superiority as a combat prodigy.

Eventually, the death buffalo was weak enough that it foamed at the mouth and struggled to keep its balance.

“Throw.”

“Okay!”

On Eve’s signal, the boy threw the small cylinder as planned. It burst in front of the buffalo, causing a small explosion.

It was only the size of a firework, but it was enough of an explosion to defeat the weakened buffalo. Its eyes rolled back into its head, and it swayed until—*thud!*—it had fallen.

Instantly after, it disappeared with a pop, and a carrot appeared in its place.

“Whoa! A carrot came out of it!” the boy said.

“That’s your drop.”

“Mine?”

“Yes. They drop on this floor.”

“Huh…”

The boy seemed to only half understand, but he picked up the carrot and stared at it.

“Throw it away when you’re done.”

“Huh?”

“This bunny hates carrots.”

“That’s no good!” the boy insisted. Sensing Eve’s confusion, he added, “My mom says you shouldn’t be picky and hate carrots.”

“That doesn’t matter. This bunny—”

“I know. What if we eat it together?” He cut Eve off, broke his carrot in two, and offered one half of it to her.

“But this bunny hates—”

“Let’s eat.”

The boy innocently continued to offer her the carrot.

Eve was at a loss. She wanted to say no, but his pure friendliness had taken hold of her. She couldn’t bear to outright refuse now. Another big reason was that this was a present from the first child friend she’d ever made.

Thus, she resigned herself and accepted the broken carrot.

“…Just one bite, and only just this once.”

“Sure.”

She timidly took a bite. And then…

“Hooooooh?!” Her eyes sparkled like never before. She looked back and forth between the bitten carrot and the boy. “This carrot is good. Much better than A-rank.”

“Really? Well, thanks.” He didn’t understand what she was saying, really, but he at least appreciated that she was grateful.

Now captivated by the “better than A-rank” carrot, Eve ate her half in no time.

But that wasn’t enough for her. She gazed at the other half that he was still holding. Drool oozed from her lips.

The boy chuckled when he saw that. “Want this, too?” he offered.

“Want!” She half snatched it out of his hand and devoured it at once.

“I thought you hated carrots?”

“I hate normal carrots, but I like yours.”

“You like my carrots?”

“I want more… Wait a second.” Eve left the boy there and ran off somewhere.

He sat there, dumbfounded. He didn’t know what was going on, but all he could do was wait.

While he waited for Eve, a swirl of light appeared next to him. Beyond the swirling light, he heard a familiar voice.

“Ryota? Where are you, Ryota?”

“Oh, Mom!”

Indeed, the boy’s—Ryota’s—mother was searching for him. When he heard her, he went to the swirling light. But he stopped

for a moment and looked in the direction Eve had gone.

“Ryota? If you’re there, answer me!”

“Ah! Yes, ma’am!”

When she called his name again, he reluctantly jumped into the swirling light. And after he did, it disappeared as if it had never been there to begin with.

Not long after, Eve returned—face smeared with others’ blood—with a large quantity of magical cylinders in her arms.

“Huh?”

She looked around, puzzled. The girl searched all over for Ryota, but she would not find him.

Another adventurer passed by.

“Hm? Isn’t that little Eve over there? What are you doing there?”

The familiar man was carrying a carrot that he’d just received from the monsters of this floor.

Eve stared at it for a while…

“Carrot!”

“Whoa!”

And then, she lunged at the adventurer. She snatched it away and took a bite.

“It’s tasty…but not,” she sulked.

“What the heck has gotten into you?” The adventurer was confused.

Eve had been captivated by that carrot of Ryota’s. It had awakened her to the tastiness of carrots themselves, yes, but she

was unsatisfied that it wasn't as tasty as Ryota's.

Just then, another adventurer walked by. As an adventurer on B16 of Manganese, he naturally had a freshly dropped carrot as well.

Eve's eyes took on the gleam of a girl possessed.

"Carrots… Give me your carrots!" She lunged at him and once again took the carrot by force. Things progressed the same as last time; she took a bite of the carrot, but she was unsatisfied. "Tasty, but not."

Ryota was gone, and so were his carrots—like an illusion.

Thus, the carrot junkie was born. For years to come, she was cursed to search endlessly for that same experience.

☆

Today, in the living room of the Emily home, Eve gulped down the carrot jam like her life depended on it while Ryota, Emily, and Celeste watched.

The pot full of jam disappeared in an instant.

"Thanks for the food."

"It's gone…just like that…"

"She ate our share, too." Ryota grinned wryly.

That was two large pots of food, and in the form of jam at that. And yet, Eve had eaten it all on her own. Now finally satisfied, she lay on the sofa.

With a docile look on her face, showing no trace of the ferocious monster known as the Killing Rabbit, she turned to Ryota and said, “Thanks for the carrots.”

She was the picture of bliss.

Afterword

People write novels. Novels are written by people.

Nice to meet you all. Or perhaps, good to see you again. I'm Nazuna Miki, a Taiwanese light novelist.

Thank you so much for picking up volume 8 of *My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1.*

Have you all seen the anime already?

The series should be halfway through its airing by the time this volume releases. Depending on when this volume reaches your hands, you might just be able to binge the whole thing when it gets there.

I won't divulge the details, since some people reading this may want to avoid spoilers, but I can say with confidence that it's a wonderful adaptation that makes great use of all of this work's best parts.

I'd be so happy if you gave it a watch after reading this volume. Finally, I have many thanks to give.

To Subachi-sama, who continues to draw wonderful illustrations.

To K-sama, who continues to edit my awkward writings.

To K Light Novel Books's editorial department, who made this publication a reality.

To the bookstores who stocked this book, and to those of you who bought it.

I offer my deepest thanks to every single person involved in this work.

Here I'll put down my pen, praying that the next volume will someday reach your waiting hands.

Respectfully yours,

Nazuna Miki
June 2023

Author: Nazuna Miki
Formerly a wannabe voice actor, now a light novelist.
I’m so moved to see how beautiful the anime adaptation is.

Illustrator: Subachi
I’m overjoyed with the quality of the anime!
Thank you for this valuable experience. It’s the first time, and maybe the last, that I’ll have this honor.

My Unique Skill Makes Me OP Even at Level 1 vol 8

KODANSHA COMICS Digital Edition

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