
THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE ISEKAI
DON'T PANIC!
"DRY"
★Authors:
Carlo Zen
Natsuya Semikawa
Hoko Tsuda
Tappei Nagatsuki
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The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Isekai [Complete]

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Foreword

Let’s begin this story.

Or should I say *begin telling it*...? Well, I can put on old wise man airs like that all I want, but I can already see myself failing my rolls for intelligence and authority, so maybe I should just be good and write this greeting.

Hello, I’m Carlo Zen from Sakka Keihan, the writers’ circle.

This time we bring you the records of what happened when a bunch of those ridiculous people known as authors got hurled into the unknown frontier of “another world”—an *isekai*.

I suppose you could say it’s like a “let’s play” or something.

Of course, there’s a thought behind this idea. As ancient wisdom says, if you’re telling someone to jump, you should be the first to take the plunge.

We authors hardly know what we’re about, but we need to set the example. If a bunch of guys like us head into another world just flying by the seat of our pants, why wouldn’t our protagonists? How can they not?

That’s the sort of long game we’ve boldly decided to play.

So with this modest volume, we take a great step forward.

This could very well change everything.

It’s neither a prediction nor a prophecy.

We’re merely saying what will come to pass in the near future.

I mean, it’s a survey so large the likes of it are rarely seen these days (N = 6) where authors will be flung into an isekai and simply report back on exactly what happens to them there!

It’s sure to be an isekai record prepared with the utmost thoughtfulness!

The participants are known far and wide for their integrity and fairness.

We will only speak absolute truths such as my love for oysters, Semikawa-sensei’s passion for Tokyo takoyaki, and Tsuda-sensei’s hatred of pro wrestling.

Surely someday this will be part of the school curriculum. The day our faces grace the cover of a sociology textbook is near.

The Nobel Prize in Isekai will be established, and when we're tapped to give the presentation speech for that historic first award, I sincerely hope you'll remember that it all started with this book and have it close at hand.

Carlo Zen

Case 01

Carlo Zen

Many authors who write isekai stories have visited the isekai.

That's a hard fact.

But that process hasn't received much attention until now, and it's rare that isekai writers speak of it publicly. So this is probably the first guide being put out regarding visiting other worlds. It is also an agonized gripe-fest devoid of dreams and hope.

Still, it's undeniable that this accumulation of facts is a critical foundation for the recent isekai novel boom. If it can be of any help to aspiring isekai writers who hope to make a visit, nothing could make me happier. When your luck runs out, and you find yourself facing difficulties in another world, I'd like you to remember what is written here, if possible. You can expect a harsh environment, one where towels don't even exist.

You may find these records of other worlds intense, devoid of dreams and hope, and more like administrative procedures than adventures. But it's this tastelessness, this dryness, that will keep you safe even when faced with the gravest threats. I do believe they could help you, depending on the circumstances, in a time of need. Or perhaps it's more like a warning from the dolphins. I should add that you can't expect a towel to do much for you.

All the same, all the same, I can only tell you what I've experienced.

Are you familiar, I wonder, with the cold, jiggly, moist, transparent blue slime?

Yes, that slime which must not be named!

That vexing bugger!

Do you know the discomfort of having it—that thing—shoved up your ass?!

If you were eating, I ask that you forgive me because, well, these things happen. But if you're a fellow author who, like me...has suffered this trauma,

then you have my sincerest apologies.

Initial Preparations: Fund-Raising

I recommend gold Vienna Philharmonics.

The first step in visiting an isekai is getting funds together. Please remember this.

A research trip is not an adventure.

Just because you kill a slime doesn't necessarily mean it'll drop a coin (honestly, worlds like that are rare).

I'll be frank with you. An isekai is just another world.

This is not fun and games! Consider it reality. Your gamer smarts won't come in handy in every other world.

A research trip is about going and coming back safely. Having your priorities straight is of utmost importance. You mustn't mistake recklessness for bravery.

Which is why, the first time you travel to an isekai, you should just go prepared with gold (bullion) coins.

Yes, gold pieces. Because you're going to another world.

The bills we use are merely Japanese banknotes, the legal currency of Japan. You don't have to think too hard to guess that in another world they'd be trusted no more than scraps of paper. In other words, you need to spec out your wallet for an isekai.

For better or worse, we've confirmed from experience that luckily, the majority of isekai have implemented the gold or silver standard. (In extremely rare cases, credit economies have developed, but there are almost no reports of that causing the value of gold and silver to drop.) That means it's best for you to assume all of your research expenses in the other world will need to be paid for in gold or silver coins.

I'll get into this more later, but considering that quarantine measures make it

difficult to bring silver over, making arrangements for gold would be ideal.

Incidentally, I highly recommend taking gold bullion coins. As a pro, from the perspective of cost-efficiency, I can't recommend old or collectible coins.

Some caution is also required regarding the design. Gold coins with people's faces engraved in them, especially, are liable to be rejected if the faces don't agree with the local ruling class.

You might think you can just melt the coins down, but...depending on the region, that may be a serious crime.

Therefore, it's common knowledge that pros prefer the Vienna Philharmonic gold coins for their high quality and superior design (featuring only instruments and a stage).

Pre-Voyage Checkup

Cost complaints and compassionate care

Before any trip to foreign lands, long or short, you should check your health. You won't be able to get ahold of your usual medicines, and there's no way to know if you'll even be able to communicate with a doctor. And let's be clear, people with a license to practice medicine are no exception to this rule. (There are reports that some doctors are over-hunting dragons. Now we just need them to learn some ethics.)

An isekai is a whole different environment from Earth. Your health affects your ability to stay alive, but you could also say it's your humanitarian duty toward the people who inhabit the other world to get a pre-voyage checkup. Because when you make first contact with a new group of people, the difference in immunities could easily result in an illness that had been conquered on Earth starting a pandemic in another world.

Usually, trained isekai authors will consult with two clinics. (The value of double checking should be obvious.)

Naturally, that's expensive. This is not a cheap investment. And when you're

already scraping the bottom of the barrel after buying gold coins, wanting to skimp on expenses may just be human nature.

But what if we look at it from a different perspective? Not a single person in the isekai will have immunity to the germs you bring.

Perhaps a demon is whispering to you in your mind, *"Surely I'm not carrying any lethal diseases!"* But I urge you to remember something. It's historical fact that even influenza was a pandemic at one point, under the name "Spanish Flu."

Of course, the isekai side will have its own precautions, but there's a higher chance of preventing a catastrophe if the voyager simply gets checked out before they go.

Are you prepared to destroy an entire world with a single mistake?

I wouldn't steer you wrong. This is for your health and, above all, your peace of mind. Getting every nook and cranny of your body examined by a doctor is like paying for insurance.

And if you're going to get a slimed shoved up you in the isekai, anyhow, then you might as well smile and swallow the doctor's camera.

Preparing Documents

All the procedures for authorized entry

As long as intelligent life exists in isekai, we should assume there will be bureaucratic procedures there, too.

Red tape is forever. It can never be destroyed.

At least, as long as there is paperwork, bureaucracy will never die.

And above all, if you're going between an isekai and Japan, you won't be permitted to ignore the Japanese systems—specifically, customs declarations and the like.

Perhaps this surprises you and you wonder what in the world you would

declare, but please recall that you're bringing along all those gold coins to settle your bills in the other world. Whether they are counted as gold bullion or foreign currency will make a big difference, but generally speaking, if you're carrying more than a million yen's worth you need to report that with a Declaration of Carrying of Monetary Instruments, *Etc.* (Note: Please contact customs personnel directly for details of customs rules related to isekai voyages. This zine isn't meant as expert legal advice, and the current laws could be different than mentioned here. Of course, the laws in effect should be prioritized, and this zine refuses to accept any liability for your actions.)

Naturally, it's not only customs you need to worry about.

You should bring your passport.

Experts debate the usefulness of passports in isekai, but having one is probably better than being a suspicious guy with no ID. However, it often happens that people have a hell of a time when they return because their passport was incinerated during their voyage, so don't forget to consult with an immigration officer before leaving the country.

Regarding papers to be submitted upon arrival in the isekai, I'll address this in detail later, but you should take precautions with both the text and format of your papers so you won't run into trouble when they're incinerated.

The ideal would be to have someone from Earth of equivalent standing to someone with a degree of social power in the isekai write you a letter of recommendation, in addition to communicating in writing with the people on the ground there on your own before your voyage, and get all your ducks in a row.

If possible, now is also a good time to make any necessary appointments. After all, your time in the isekai is limited, and there are lots of things you'll want to research.

Fasting

Pray at a Zen Temple

Visiting an isekai is an intense research trip completely unlike a sightseeing vacation. Those of us in the industry who specialize in isekai know this, but those who don't sometimes misunderstand. Research in an isekai is no walk in the park. In order to avoid panicking when faced with the many obstacles you'll encounter, it's well known that some mental training is in order.

One common way to strengthen one's mind is to practice Zen meditation at a temple.

(Note: This is optional, and it's not as if every isekai researcher trains at a Zen temple. There are many examples of people training with their own sects or denominations due to religious beliefs, and I respect the freedom of those individuals who would declare they are perfect and therefore have no need to train.)

Now then, why meditate? There are two reasons: The first is to endure simple meals and severe conditions. The second is to train your mind to avoid panic.

You don't need to go as far as a fire ritual, but before heading into such a harsh environment, you should prepare yourself mentally and take the opportunity to purify your body and mind if you can. This is also so you don't get overwhelmed by worldly desires while in the other world.

Isekai are often said to tickle one's passion for adventure, but as an author on a research trip, you're only there to write your manuscript. If you forget that, you risk assimilating and never returning to this world.

The knowledge should be spread far and wide that one of the major triggers of isekai escapism is the pressure of deadlines. I believe that in order to ensure that authors researching in other words are able to return, editorial departments should pay a bit more attention to this issue.

Now then, did you practice Zen meditation, hone your mind, and set your intentions? Are you emotionally prepared to accept the isekai as an isekai without panicking or falling prey to your desires, even when things get tough?

If you've come this far, all that's left is pre-departure prep.

The Sterilization Room

Endure, my heart.

There is a ritual we perform before voyaging to an isekai.

To be blunt, it's everybody's favorite, the disinfection process.

Honestly, calling it "disinfection" is a lie. No matter how much bacteria we remove—no matter how much—humans can't be perfectly sterilized. That's just the plain truth, so a heartfelt curse on the mass media for going on about "sterile pigs" or "SPF porkers."

True sterilization is incredibly hard to achieve. You can't raise germ-free pigs without a special facility. But I guess we have to admit that humans are able to get *some* control over bacteria.

Thus, there are internal and external measures against infectious diseases.

Before voyaging to the isekai, we authors must take them.

In the sterilization room.

Paid out of pocket. Yes, out of pocket. The sterilization room, which costs thousands of yen even with insurance, has to be paid out of pocket!

And by the way, while you're there, you're forced to live a life of extreme austerity. Time to use what you learned at the temple. For that reason, it's an open secret that many of those with experience call the sterilization room "training."

After all, the whole point is to be as "clean" as possible so that you don't take any germs to the isekai.

Medically I don't know the details, but even just the meals are terrible. Or perhaps I should say, "horrifying."

The food is so bad you'll find sterile meals merely boring.

This stuff is truly just human feed.

(Incidentally, the past few years have seen rapid advancement in medicine...and you're now able to finish your quarantine period more quickly with slime-compatible food.)

Whatever you do, don’t expect anything to be tasty. Not even the British could endure this flavor.

By the way, no small number of people lose their will to make the voyage after their experience with the sterilization room. The reason is that you need to be off cigarettes and alcohol before you can make the trip. You may find this hard to believe, but due to potential cultural differences, even caffeinated items are replaced with decaf versions.

And the food is just so, so bad!

Sadly, even after collecting gold coins, preparing documentation, and training at a temple...human spirits still aren’t made of steel.

Entry Procedures

Confirm your intentions and be on your way.

By this point, you must have been guided from the sterilization room directly to the gate to the isekai. Once you’ve passed through the summoning gate, what awaits on the other side of the looking glass is the isekai to which you’ve devoted so many sacrifices, so much perseverance, and such determination.

Do you have your gold coins? Are you papers in order? Then let’s get changed into disposable pajamas. Whatever you do, don’t wear your favorite and most stylish outfit.

I know, you’ll feel a bit awkward hanging around the border to the isekai in baggy single-use garments. But you’ll just have to get over it—because all of your personal items will be disinfected through incineration. (Note: In most cases, obtaining a notarized copy of your paperwork is possible, but check with the authorities. Your passport you should be prepared to get reissued.)

If by some chance, you have items aside from bullion that would be of some value even if melted, you should brace yourself to hear that they have been completely burned up.

For this reason, preparing for your departure after the sterilization room

means heading to the gate with only your gold coins (in a bag for easy handling is okay) and the paperwork that you can expect will be reissued.

Furthermore, it's a bit late at this point to say this, but make sure you haven't neglected to arrange your will and inheritance.

An isekai is a dangerous world. No one knows what kinds of perils await.

Well, no, some perils are easy to tell at a glance. It may look like a peaceful storybook world where you're the main character, blessed with cheat powers, but make no mistake.

We're going on a research trip. You mustn't conflate research and adventuring. It isn't enough to simply want to go see an isekai because you want to write isekai novels.

If those pure sentiments, your yearning for an isekai, turn into a saga of your own exploits, there's no going back. Don't forget the intentions you set when you decided to go. If you do, you might have so much success in the isekai that you won't be able to come back to Earth.

I know all too many people who went to another world as an isekai author on a research trip and took a wrong turn.

That said, any more on this topic, and I'd be repeating myself.

Now then, to the isekai!

When you arrive...

Quarantine

Slime

Upon your departure, your heart may have been aflutter with excitement about the unknown isekai. But now you have no choice but to cast aside dreams and hope and look reality in the face. "Welcome to the isekai," say the elite mages who meet you...and the terrible sanitation slimes.

Right away, you'll be ordered to go to a changing room, take off all your

clothes, and get into a slime bath.

As you know, any organism in quarantine that refuses to follow orders will be promptly executed without further ado, which could include being sealed up, frozen, incinerated and/or being banished to another dimension, so you have no choice but to get into the slime bath.

In the notorious slime bath, you'll be enveloped in its slippery form, and it'll try to enter every single hole in your body, invading every last part you can think of.

It's all for antibacterial purposes, so you'll just have to deal.

The moment will seem to last forever, but it will end. The relief you'll feel when you put on a pair of underwear handed to you by an elite mage with a sympathetic look in their eyes is indescribable.

Alas, the voyager is responsible for the cost of this slime bath. That's right, we have to pay for it. (Note: But the underwear is generally included in the price.) The going rate is generally one gold coin.

Now, don't go thinking, *It's only one gold coin*. Depending on the size of the slime, you should be prepared to offer 1-2 ounces of gold coinage. Depending on the market, that's 80 or 90 thousand yen.

Then the slime that you just paid 80 or 90 thousand yen for will be incinerated and disposed of on the spot by the elite mage, after which they'll cast immunity magic on you as a precaution against germs. If you resist, you'll be shot. (Note: The immunity magic and slime disposal usually costs 1-2 ounces of gold coinage.)

Essentially, for just this one-way trip to another world, we're already talking a loss of upwards of 160 thousand yen.

You could travel overseas for that amount.

It may sound harsh, but considering our completely different immune systems and the circumstances of the people in the other world, these thorough quarantine measures are the minimum necessary.

By the way, the probability that you'll get a gold coin from the incinerated

slime is zero. What a garbage drop rate.

The Research Mindset

A world where you could use an etiquette instructor

Anyone who journeys to an isekai must constantly remind themselves that this world is different from their home and their home dimension. Frankly, you need to learn the local manners if you want to stay alive.

Taking your first step into an isekai means entering a world with a different public order, different values, and different morals. If you're taking things lightly, take a good look at that slime that was incinerated for quarantine purposes. Before you pity the creature, remember that if you make one wrong move, you'll end up just like it.

The isekai is just waiting for you to screw up.

It's simple, really. In most other worlds, the people view voyagers as a high-risk group they're forced to accommodate. To be blunt, voyagers are guests they have no choice but to accept.

That's us.

The reason most worlds accept us, if passively and through the proper procedures, is because they want to prevent the chaos of unregulated comings and goings, not because they want people to visit. That's just the way things are.

We must never interact with the locals with the intention of benevolently "enlightening" them. Doing so would be seen as a revolt against the world's public order and result in immediate death in a fire.

That is, heresy is punishable by incineration and disposal.

Even if your domestic affairs finagling comes from a place of good will, that's the role of a "protagonist" who will put down roots here. A temporary visitor should refrain from shooting off their mouth.

Your effect on social change could be huge, and there's no guarantee that you

won’t cause anyone misfortune. In this sense, it’s no exaggeration to say that this requires a higher standard of ethics than developmental aid. As a visitor, you mustn’t forget to respect the local culture, customs, and values.

The cost for getting arrogant and forgetting your manners is steep. You could be judged or even punished under local rules.

When in Rome...

So when on Earth, do it Earth’s way. When in an isekai, do it the isekai’s way.

Who knew that such an old saying still held so much wisdom?

Issues When Conducting Research on the Ground

Regarding expenses and scheduling

In the isekai, a minimum of three or four elite mages will accompany you as interpreter-guide-bodyguards. They should each be paid at least 1-4 ounces of gold coinage per day. That alone will add up to quite a few ounces...but don’t forget you’re also responsible for their food, accommodations, travel fees, and other expenses.

Even if you really hack your budget, it’d be wise to expect two ounces for personnel, plus a bit more. (In the current market that works out to something like 320-350 thousand yen.)

If you want to take your time and research for ten days, you’re looking at nearly 4 million yen. To make that back you need to get at least 10 percent royalties, set the price of your book at 1,000 yen, and, not even worrying about various taxes and whatever at this point, do a first print run of 40,000 copies.

Naturally, we can’t ignore the issues of time and budget restraints, so many people bend over backwards trying to see as much as they can on what little budget they have.

No matter how you’ve trained, steeled your mind, and prepared, the process of observation and study takes time.If you rush, you’re sure to miss things. This is where the misunderstanding that isekai authors don’t do their homework

comes from.

Crying about your lack of funding won't help. It's an issue that torments all authors who are endeavoring to research isekai during this slump in the contemporary publication industry.

Above all, it's harder to see an isekai in a limited amount of time than it is to imagine it from Japan. If a Japanese person wants to circumnavigate the Earth, they need only hop on a jet. But in an isekai, you don't know if there will be airplanes, and even if there are passenger dragon flights or something like that, there's no guarantee you'll be able to travel in comfort.

And more than anything, the challenges you'll face will only grow stiffer the further you penetrate into regions where the people aren't used to accepting other-worlders.

That's the difficult reality of conducting research in isekai.

Your First Meal

No more rice porridge

We're used to having milling technology on Earth, so the hardest bread we can conceive of is one with the vague notion of a "hearty flavor." Some people may have tender notions, believing things like, *I like German bread, so I actually prefer hard bread.*

But despite some exceptions, most isekai hard breads are...tough as bricks.

It really does feel like biting into a brick.

After all, they were baked nice and sturdy by wizards so that they could be used as military rations. The only thing you can say about the quality is that it's superb—because even if they're ten years old, you can eat them because they're sanitary!

Of course, soft breads also exist. You can find them as a standard foodstuff in most isekai. But the reality is that I can't recommend them to a freshly arrived voyager.

The reason for that is simple. Soft isekai breads are almost certainly not regulated by the equally insubstantial isekai sanitation standards.

Just because you have immunity magic doesn't mean you can lower your guard when it comes to your diet in another world, where antibiotics may be hard to come by.

Let me be clear. There are essentially no lifeforms that accurately understand the effects isekai medication will have on your body.

After all, no one has studied the physiology of other-worlders.

For safety and sanitation purposes, everyone, unless they have the unusual ambition of donating their body to science (I'm mainly imagining scientists of the mad variety here), should down that awful-tasting hardtack-like brick bread soaked in salt soup along with their tears.

By the way, salt soup is a healthy soup of a salty broth created by wizards using alchemy out of pure water plus a variety of fully cooked vegetables. Once you've gulped down the pseudo—rice porridge of mushy hardtack in salt soup, it's only a matter of time 'til you're an isekai author like the rest of us. The reason for that is also simple! If you're willing to endure such hardship for your research, you're sure to finish your book.

Meanwhile, your guides are likely to be licking their chops over the inn's dinner special. That's in their contract, so be ready to put up with it.

If you fail to withstand this and get deported, you won't be able to cry enough!

Paperwork at the Inn

Review your penmanship skills.

(Note: If you have the rare connections necessary to get arrangements made before your voyage, you can skip this section.)

You've arrived in the isekai and filled your gut with a horrible meal of brick bread, but before you close your eyes for a night of suffering on a hard bed and

pillow, there are some steps you can’t forget to take.

You can’t escape making appointments and writing thank-yous.

The usual way to do this is to have your guide-interpreters take dictation. But while the dictation is part of their guide duties, the parchment and so on will cost quite a bit extra.

There are more than a few worlds where the type of paper you use will depend on where you are sending it and your relationship to the receiver. Even if you feel like it’s a waste, it’s best to put a lot of thought into these subtleties —don’t be stingy.

Now then, making appointments and writing thank-yous is your highest priority, but...if your inn is in a town with a lord or lady, then you need to make an appointment straight away.

If they accept, thank them in person.

This absolutely must be done.

In reality, there are some domain holders who don’t feel it desirable or necessary to meet other-worlders. But as a visitor from another world, you mustn’t neglect to show the proper respect to those with influence in the region.

You can try to say that your stay was so short you “ran out of time”...and thus it was out of your control, but you’ll never be able to visit that realm again. Staying just long enough to “squeeze them in” is rude, and even worse. (Note: In many cases you should expect reprisal.)

You mustn’t take appearances lightly. Even if you can’t enjoy all of the ritualistic elements of isekai, you have no choice but to change your point of view and decide it’s all part of your research.

Incidentally, even if you write by dictation, make sure you can at least sign your own name. Practice writing with a quill and ink. If you don’t at least get to the point where you can produce your own signature, you’ll have plenty of opportunities to be soundly embarrassed.

I hate writing my signature, so there were lots of tears shed over this.

Some people will point out even the slightest misstroke. Once I got interrogated by an important noble. “Your signature was different last time!” he said. “Have you been deceiving me?!”

Maybe if you learn penmanship ahead of time, you’ll have less trouble.

Now, let’s do that research!
Etiquette, preparation, intention.

You may be sick of the whole thing after that parade of societally necessary errands devoid of dreams and hope, but now nothing can stand in your way.

Yes, it’s time to research. One’s first step into a new world is always a thrill. Diverse encounters, all sorts of surprises—your perfect chance to study a world you’ve never seen or heard of before is finally here!

Riding a horse so long your butt hurts is a rare experience—although once is enough for that kind of pain.

Or booking a dragon flight and discovering the dragon feed surcharge on the obscenely pricey bill. (Note: Every world has its energy issues.)

All of these experiences are the pleasures of researching in another world.

The joy of learning magic from a mage and being able to sense mana is intensity incarnate. Or it might be a good experience to steel your resolve and study at a school in the other world. (Note: Just know that you’ll be spending 80-90 percent of your trip learning the writing system.)

Taking in a different culture’s performing arts or learning a traditional craft can also be very satisfying. Even I was moved that time I was sitting in a large bath warmed by salamanders, chatting with goblins and orcs, interviewing them about the discrimination they faced and their court battles.

Goblin generations change fast, but they were able to win because the tribes engaged in the trials banded together to form the Goblin Bar Association. That’s a feat that will go down in legal history even if the bards never sing of it!

Ahh, those goblin tribes sure had some eloquent speakers!

My only regret is that unfortunately, I wasn’t able to remember everything.

After all—oh, I should mention this—before you leave the isekai, every record

taken during your research is incinerated and disposed of for quarantine reasons.

All right, remember all of this and be on your way now.

(Note: Some isekai have magical ways of boosting memorization skills, but buffs are generally canceled when moving between Earth and other worlds. We've seen many cases of people losing everything they thought they had remembered. Please do NOT direct complaints to the local mage guild.)

Case 02: The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Isekai (Nagatsuki Version)

——Get hit by a truck, and you’ll be reborn in another world with a shot at a new life.

Stories like that are all around us these days, but do you believe in them?

My name is Tappei Nagatsuki. I make my living as a writer—some of you may have heard of me. Knowledgeable readers will be all-too-familiar with the flood of “isekai” stories out there, and I’m afraid the series I write is one of them.

Because I’m an isekai writer, I was invited by SAKKA KEIHAN to contribute my own small scribblings. Whether they show up as scribblings or not is up to whoever sets the type in the book, but that’s the phrase that most accurately depicts my present state of mind.

Be that as it may...

Isekai—how easily we lump an entire genre together using a single word, yet that word refers to all manner and make of worlds. Readers well versed in the bounty of the website Shosetsuka ni Narou will be all too aware of this.

Lately the naysayers have become fond of saying, “All isekai stories are the same!” but this could not be further from the truth. Each isekai is literally “another world”—each different from the last. As the writer weaves a web of words or gives it shape within their mind’s eye, their created world takes on a unique form—only one of the countless potential fantasies that lie waiting to emerge from the pen of every writer.

Declaring these to be “all the same” is preposterous, presumptuous, and foolhardy. Seeing the smug looks on these isekai appraisers’ faces as they pick through the isekai offerings (as if examining newborn chicks to identify their genders) makes me want to smack them upside the head with an ultimate attack from another world.

Personal grudges aside, having been asked to join this project, I must do my

duty.

SAKKA KEIHAN's topic du jour is *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Isekai*. The concept is clearly based on the absurd notion that anyone who writes about isekai must know a lot about them—but that is some caveman logic at work.

A common delusion about the creative process is that one's own experiences form the backbone of your work. Assuming this is remotely true, how can you write a story where the entire premise is that you "get isekai'd," that you go to another world??

Getting isekai'd yourself would seem to be the best approach.

Venturing into another world is not so easily accomplished, though. We have a plethora of isekai stories these days, but the protagonists generally have to meet meet grisly fates in order to get from their homes to the new worlds the stories take place in. Usually with fatal consequences; in other words—they die.

It may begin with a truck, like I said above. Perhaps they work themselves to death, or get shoved onto train tracks by someone with a grudge against them, or they die of shock after being nearly run over by a tractor during a laughably unnecessary attempt at heroism. Or perhaps they might simply find themselves in another world on the way home from a convenience store—well, that last one was an exception, but generally speaking, their death is involved.

It was at this point in my thought process that I realized what had appeared to be an invitation to contribute to SAKKA KEIHAN's latest product was, in fact, a roundabout way of bumping me off.

One cannot write for *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Isekai* without substantial knowledge of other worlds. Anyone going into an isekai armed with a half-assed guide would almost certainly meet a swift and terrible end. And I'd be held liable by the coordinators of said isekai, put on trial, subjected to testimony by demi-humans speaking a language I can't even understand, magically framed for crimes I never committed, transferred from an isekai holding cell to an isekai jail to an isekai prison and forced into an isekai prison break. Which sounds like a lot of fun, really.

But idle speculation will not help me here. I've already accepted the job.

It may have been something I did lightly, but backing out of a job once accepted would swiftly become public knowledge. “He ditched a job he’d signed onto!” Once word of that gets around, it’s unlikely new jobs would ever come my way again. The members of SAKKA KEIHAN have the power to make that happen. I have underestimated my opponents.

And so, I, Tappei Nagatsuki, am faced with a critical choice—either to lay down my pen, or to forge ahead despite the consequences.

——I find myself by the side of an expressway.

Cars whiz past me at tremendous speeds. All I can hear is the roar of the wind. It’s terrifying.

But no author can bear to lay down their pen once they’ve picked it up. I would rather face the perils of an isekai than face those consequences.

To write for *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Isekai* I must venture forth and discover the true nature of isekai for myself. Like a detective examining the scene of a crime, attempting to solve all the mysteries within, I am headed to another world.

If I never return, this message will likely be destroyed by the members of SAKKA KEIHAN. These writings may never see the light of day. Yet I write them anyway—because I am a writer.

Damn you, Hoko Tsuda! You got me this time!

△▼△▼△▼△

“Are you for real? It wasn’t, like, to save a child or anything heroic? It was just so you could write something ‘authentic’ about other worlds? You seriously just dove in front of a truck without a second thought, like a total idiot? There are way too many people like you out there these days.”

“Uh, basically, yeah,” I admitted. “You get this a lot? Sorry...”

“It’s getting to be a real problem in my line of work. Didn’t used to be, but there’s just so many these days. Whatever your motivations were, you’re

technically all classified as suicides so it's a mess to clean up."

The lecture went on like this for the better part of an hour.

Having flung myself in front of a truck with a curse on my breath, this seemed like a dream come true. I'd never seriously thought that a truck would actually send you to an isekai. But just as I was coming to terms with this new lease on life, the woman across from me pursed her divine lips.

"Don't get ahead of yourself!" she said. "You haven't been giving permission to enter an isekai yet."

Her role in this was clear enough. But I had to ask.

"Um, you're...a goddess, right?"

"That's right. Don't I look like one?"

"No, you definitely look the part."

The woman in front of me had skin like polished ivory and hair as blue as the sky. She wore the kind of dress you never see outside of JRPGs, and was carrying a bizarre staff like the boss in a final dungeon. She looked to be maybe twenty. I couldn't imagine what else someone like her could possibly be, but...

"I feel like standards of goddess quality are slipping."

"Ohh?" she growled, a vein throbbing on her forehead. Like a total hoodlum.

Describing her appearance was a difficult task. She wasn't ugly, but neither was she so beautiful you were automatically like, "She must be a goddess!" She was just sort of...in-between. And her vibe made it totally clear she wasn't open to any comments about her appearance, but I'd done it anyway.

"I could take it or leave it."

"I can be a goddess or a devil to you, depending on how much respect you show me."

A threat! She was threatening me!

"Lemme be clear, the only reason I'm even here with you is because you wannabe isekai-ers are making a mess out of our whole system."

"What kind of mess?"

“Because there’s so many of you outers trying to get to another world, the gods and goddesses can’t handle the workload. So they had to bring in second-rate goddesses like myself to help process you all.”

Second-rate. The fact that goddesses were rated at all was just depressing.

“Oh, so this whole low-quality vibe going on here is because you’re second-rate?”

That would mean the rankings were decided by their faces. That made *some* sense, but I’d rather not have known.

“Yes, yes, fine, I admit it. When we go up a rank, we automatically become more beautiful. It’s like pay-to-win mechanics. The more money you put in, the better your equipment and customization options.”

“I dunno about calling the way you look ‘equipment.’ But calling plastic surgery ‘pay-to-win’ is certainly a novel phrasing.”

The way she put it definitely made it sound like goddesses had to whale to get hot.

“You’re all having work done?”

“We prefer to call it elevating ourselves to the ideals our rank demands. If I go up a rank, I’ll obtain a pretty face with double eyelids and duck lips.”

“Oh, like character creation in a Western game.” Those games often let you muck around with your appearance at the barbershop, instead of only at the start of the game.

“Anyway, because bozos like you keep hurling yourselves in front of trucks, we’re swamped. It’s a real nightmare.”

“But the harder you work, the closer you get to being a first-rate goddess, right?”

“Peeling human pancakes off the asphalt and flipping them into other worlds? You think people with any real status do this job? Gods of creation are all busy looking after entire worlds themselves. Processing each individual soul totally gets farmed out to the deadbeats.”

That made a lot of sense. It’s like the people who go around cleaning up dead

dogs and cats off the side of the road. It's necessary work, and we should be grateful that somebody's doing it, but it's not really gonna be handled personally by members of Parliament.

"Also, in my line of work we call the truck-divers 'outers,' which stems from the word 'drop-out,' meaning people who have given up on life."

"Are you trying to start a fight?"

"I dunno. Not like I'd lose. I only start fights I know I can win!"

Without dropping her staff, the goddess started shadow boxing. Those punches looked pretty snappy. Like a single one of them would turn me to dust.

"But that's enough jibber-jabber! I'm the goddess Loqua, and I'm here to bring blessings to you pitiful outers."

"Loqua?"

Even her name was cursed with *lo*w *qua*lity. With a name like that and a second-rate status, my hopes for the kinds of blessings I'd get from her weren't very high.

"I can see by the look on your face you doubt my blessing quality. Would you rather just get started with no blessings from me at all, then? If you know anything about isekais, you know what a risky move *that* is."

"Urp."

Yeah, she had a point there.

I need hardly explain the tragic fate of anyone sent to another world with no special qualities. Going to another world without any powers is like going back to school in the fall without doing your summer homework. People roll in sometimes with a "It just seemed pointless" attitude, but pointless or not, it's homework, you gotta do it, don't start fights with the very concept, you only have yourself to blame if you don't do it.

"You seem to be working through some issues there. Do you want a blessing or not? Or would you like to just get turned to dust right now?"

"You sound like you're offering to microwave my lunch..."

But even a blessing offered in that tone was probably worth it. My attitude was to take anything people had to give me (except for germs). So I was in.

“So what’s this blessing you’re about to bestow on me do?”

“Hold on, lemme check the manual.”

She had a manual? While I gaped at her, the goddess pulled a tablet out of her pocket and opened up an eManual.

“Man, the swipe detection on this thing has really gone to hell,” she grumbled.

“Could be because your fingers have dried out from old age.”

As people get older, lack of oil on their fingers makes it harder to turn pages, so the elderly often have to lick their fingers every time they flip a page. Isn’t that educational?

But the goddess just glared at me.

“Basically you can pick from the second-rate goddess lineup, and some stuff related to your conditions at the moment of death. Hey, wanna watch a replay?”

“A replay of my death? Hell no.”

“You’re sure? It’s a doozy. You flew to pieces. It totally traumatized the hell out of a group of passing schoolgirls. They’re gonna have that imagery burned into their minds the rest of their lives.”

“Stop! It’s not my fault, it’s Tsuda’s!”

“Eek, you’re scaring me! Why are you so upset all of a sudden? I don’t get men sometimes...”

“Urghhh... Even from a low-quality girl, that hurts...”

She was cowering, shaking like a leaf. This hit me right in the heart. My outburst hadn’t come out of nowhere, but trying to explain why I’d gotten so angry didn’t seem like it would help. I was already on edge enough here.

“So you said something ominous about a ‘second-rate goddess lineup,’ so...I guess your rank determines how I’m gonna end up?”

“Yeah, basically just goddess gacha. Second-rate goddesses are pretty average all around...but hey, it’s better than getting a third-rate goddess or a dark god! Way better.”

“Don’t put dark gods in the gacha then, damn.” Weren’t they basically the opposite of a goddess?

“Demon Lords and dark gods are as swamped as gods and goddesses these days...”

“I feel like a second-rate dark god would be way weaker than a second-rate goddess, somehow.”

“Anyway, you do get bonuses based on how you died. Like, if you saved a child or sacrificed yourself to save the world, then you’d get way better blessings. Just...in your case, all you did was traumatize some innocent high school girls and cause a temporary traffic jam, and the economic impact of *that* was...”

“Hngg, I really wasn’t paying attention to my surroundings.”

Having a goddess talk sense into me now seems a little after-the-fact, but either way it was pretty clear that I hadn’t died well. They talk about ruining one’s reputation, and this was certainly that. You could also say I’d shit the bed. However desperate I’d been, there was no excuse.

“If only the truck that had hit you had been a rare one...but there’s just nothing interesting about it. If it had been one of those decorated trucks, or at even a semi, you might have gotten something from it... There’s also an artistic score based on the splatter pattern, but in your case...”

“Are you sure you’re a second-rate goddess? Not a dark one?”

“Ew, no. I’m goddess. A proper goddess,” she insisted. Her voice dropped to a low mutter. “These days.”

“What was that last bit?”

She looked away, whistling. She was weirdly good at it.

“So if you’re going that far down the list, the bonuses I get once I’m reincarnated have gotta be pretty lousy, huh?”

“Not to be a stickler, but ‘reincarnated’ is so old-fashioned. We just transfer you these days. I mean, frankly, making a whole baby to stick your soul in isn’t cost-effective. Like, rather than waste a baby regrowing a mediocre soul, it’s much better if the baby just grows up as a baby? It’ll have faw mow optiony-woptionies.” She lapsed into baby talk towards the end.

“Having a goddess explain the distinction between isekai methods is weirdly insulting...”

“So rather than making your soul hijack some poor baby, we just flush your mince-meat body directly over to the other world, saving us resources and time. Two birds, one stone. Totally green. That’s all the rage, right? Ecology! The green new deal! LOHAS! LOHAS!” She chanted this last bit like a mad woman, pounding her staff on the floor, hair whipping all around. It was horrifying.

“Recycling is cool and all but...you are gonna put me back together, right? I don’t wanna pop into a new world looking like a pile of hamburger and instantly die. That’s like a buggy game.”

“Yeah, games like that suck! Like, did anyone playtest this shit? Pfft.”

“It’s not funny!”

“Why you all mad? Not getting enough calcium? LOHAS! LOHAS!”

Words were a product of human evolution, a communication tool that allowed us to accept each other without the need for violence. But now they’d become a miscommunication tool that incited stone-age savagery. If she didn’t stop chanting, our rational discourse would give way to irrational violence. When the rational and the irrational merge, shit gets wild.

Battling the temptation to release the wild thing within, I matched the goddess’s fishy smile with a phony grin of my own.

“Can’t wait to see this new world! I wanna enjoy my blessings to the fullest!”

“I know, right? I knew a simple-minded nincompoop like you would totally fall for a lazy surface-level sales pitch. Now here you are, dancing around naked with joy like a total putz!”

“I’m not going that far!”

“I can’t believe anyone would actually dance naked in front of a goddess! The nerve! The audacity! The *cojones*!” She turned red, covering her face with one hand while peeking expectantly at me through her fingers. It was obnoxious.

“You may be a second-rate goddess, but you’re still a goddess! You have to maintain at least a basic level of self-control. Did you leave that behind in your mother’s womb?”

“That lady? I ain’t seen her since I tore my way outta that belleh.”

“That’s how orcs are born, not goddesses!”

Never mind her ranking, this goddess had no divinity in her at all. Admittedly, this did jibe with *some* myths I’d heard...

“Ugh, you’re wearing me out,” she groaned. “How about we get down to brass tacks? Which blessing plan do you want?”

“Do I get a choice? What plans are available to a pile of trauma-inducing meat chunks run over by a boring truck?”

“Hmm, what about this? You get massive boosts to all your stats...but you’re a fly.”

“That just sounds like someone really screwed up during character creation...”

But these gimmick builds could be really effective sometimes. It might be kinda fun.

The goddess had me sit next to her so we could both look at the tablet screen. Damn. She actually smelled good. How irritating.

“Don’t even think about falling for me.”

“Rah!”

I snapped and punched her in the face.

The goddess gaped at me in disbelief.

“S-Sorry, my hand slipped.”

“While yelling, ‘Rah!?’”

She wasn't buying that excuse. A moment later, the list of transfer bonuses on the tablet screen refreshed. My rash action here had incurred a penalty on my score, giving me a much worse set of options. In fact, now there was only one item where there had previously been a list. It said:

"Throw a dart, get isekai'd!"

"Noooooooooo!"

The goddess pinched her bleeding nose and shot me a malicious grin, then she tossed the tablet over her shoulder. It hung in the air behind her and grew in size, changing shape to become a giant roulette wheel. A vast swath of options was on it—and suddenly a dart was in my hand. The message was clear.

"I-I have to pick my future by throwing a dart!? This isn't Kaiji!"

"The fact that you get any options at all here is way more humane than anything in that series! Especially considering you punched a goddess!"

"Wait, wait! That was the first time in my life I've ever done anything like that! I swear!"

"You're already dead, so this isn't part of your life! Let's get this wheel spinning!"

"Stop, stop, stop!"

As she spoke, iron shackles snapped closed around my feet. I was trapped in place, turned into a dart-throwing machine.

The roulette wheel began to spin. I didn't get a clear look at all the options, but—

"I'm a bug in most of these!?"

"Were you aware there are millions of species of insects in your world alone?"

"Are you *trying* to make me panic!?" I howled.

Her only response was a triumphant smirk.

My destiny lay somewhere on that spinning wheel. A chill ran down my spine.

Objectively speaking, my fate had been sealed the moment I'd jumped in

front of a truck. Everything after that was just a bonus round, with a chance at a new life.

Okay, so I was already dead. What's the worst they could do to me? Kill me again?

I shouted my war cry.

"Damn you, Hoko Tsuda!"

With the very fiber of my being behind it, the dart flew straight and true...and stuck in the wheel. The goddess made a very impressed noise, but only because she knew the results were bound to be horrible.

If I had to be a bug, at least let me be a female praying mantis. I didn't wanna have sex once in my life and then get eaten, so definitely not a male one, please not a male mantis...

"Lessee here, the punishment for punching a goddess in the face is... Gah!" The goddess's face looked exactly like a certain meme that used a panel from Mitsuteru Yokoyama's Romance of the Three Kingdoms, depicting a horrified reaction to Guan Yu's arrival.

"What, is Guan Yu here?"

The shackles on my feet came off, and I dashed over to the wheel and saw...

"'The Lucky Bastard Bonanza! Anything you want, as much as you want!'"

"I can't believe you hit that, at those odds! That's like you writing a top 100 seller in a world already overflowing with isekai series!"

"Aw, shucks, thanks!" Luck is important, but luck alone won't get you there. Writing light novels isn't like playing roulette.

Anyway...

"As many bonuses as I like? You mean that?"

"Wh-What are you gonna make me do? You're not gonna turn this into some sort of porn doujin, are you? I don't wanna be in porn!"

"Oh, shut up! Wipe the blood from your nose off your face, at least." A bloody nose was definitely not a turn-on for me. Besides, I was busy jumping on this

stroke of luck. “Aw, yeah! I’m going to ask for so much stuff!”

“Quit drooling, you uncultured swine. Whatever, ask away.”

“Can I assume the world I’m heading to is a sword-and-sorcery fantasy world? I don’t wanna stock up on super magic and skills that let me master any weapon, get ready to cheat my way through every fight, and then discover I’m in a kingdom-building economic sim. I’m also concerned about language barriers and religious conflicts...”

“Ugh, isekai authors...”

Oh, please. Anyone who writes this stuff has to think up all kinds of hooks, so if we ever end up going to another world ourselves, of course we’re going to want some proper safety margins. Anyone would!

“Are there any limits to the cheat powers I can ask for?”

“Like the wheel said, anything you want. We’re coughing up anything and everything your limited imagination can conjure up.” This made it sound like I could ask for a way to eliminate her and still get it, but I decided to sacrifice this desire for the sake of my own future. No matter how tempting, it wasn’t worth the risk of blowing this by pissing her off again. Steel thy heart. Control your base urges.

“And I can be as specific as I like with the terms of the cheats?”

“Yes, fine. See, I’m a goddess, and we can basically do whatever we like, so... I mean, we don’t really understand what it feels like to have limits? Like, cheat skills? How is that different from breathing?”

“Wow, now I want to destroy all goddesses...” Of course I didn’t say that out loud, but I was really thinking it. Despite her stratospheric levels of arrogance, I fought off the urge to ask for that once more and listed out the cheat skills I had in mind.

Namely...

“Super regenerative powers, supersonic speeds, and flesh *capable of withstanding* those speeds! The power to tear apart steel, drink lava, and shoot lightning bolts! I wanna fly, be able to turn into a dragon, and use any and all

magic! And um, um, mastery of any and all types of weapons...”

As I rattled off the list. the goddess’ expression went:

expectant→annoyed→bored→asleep

Her ears remained functional even in her sleep, because her hands kept moving, like supersonic automatic writing, writing a list of my wishes on the floor with the base of her staff.

When I was done with my order she said, “Oh, are you done? Uh... Wow, you’re greedy. I guess if you’d never had anything good happen your whole life you *would* get carried away.”

“Oh, be quiet! And don’t even think about just randomly assigning one single power from this list or anything like that, either.”

“Tch.”

“I heard that!”

Close one.

I could imagine nightmare scenarios, like getting regenerative powers and superspeed but not getting a body that could withstand them, so every time I moved the sonic boom would destroy my body and I’d have to fully regenerate it.

“At least me specify required combos... Even a second-rate goddess can handle that, right?”

“Huh? What are you talking about it? I can grant you whole the whole damn list, no prob. Who do you think I am? I should punch *you*.”

“For the first time ever, I actually respect you! Seriously, you’re gonna give me all of these? Jesus!”

“Ha, damn straight. As greedy as you were, your ideas are still woefully confined to the territory of mere mortals, shackled by the tedious chains of common sense, but to you I offer the blessings and salvation of the goddess!”

She raised her staff, and its tip began to glow. I closed my eyes, but I could feel a warmth settling over me. I opened and closed my palms, savoring the

sensation.

“Is...that it?”

“Yep, all done. You’ve been granted that whole list of party tricks. You’re the perfect human!”

“They aren’t party tricks!”

But I could feel the power surging through me. I’d clearly ascended to a whole new plane of life. I was now almighty, a pan-dimensional being!

“It’s lonely at the top...”

“Woah, woah, woah, angsting already? Probably a good sign, really. Ready to head to your new world?”

The goddess took her staff and struck the floor at my superpowered feet. A dark glow appeared around me—I instantly knew it was a warp hole.

“This is my new world?”

“Yes! Dive on in. With your current powers, you should have no trouble handling it.”

“...I know we’ve had our problems, but... I’m sorry,” I said, scratching my cheek. I’d felt nothing but rage and loathing for her, but she’d done right by me in the end. I was grateful for that.

She just shrugged. “No problem. This is my job.”

“Oh. Well, here I go!”

I couldn’t hang around all day. She had more outers to process. Hopefully the next one would be equally blessed.

“Then have a great life in your isekai!” she said, and saw me off with a smile.

I stepped into the warp hole, ready for my great adventure. But the smile on her face was a bit too beautiful for a second-rate goddess...

△▼△▼△▼△

Then...

“Are you fucking with me, second-rate goddess? ‘Great adventures in a new world,’ my ass!”

I made a warp hole back to the loathsome goddess, and started unleashing hit and run tactics at lightning speeds. I floated like a butterfly, stung like a bee. But even at lightning speed—the goddess batted away my attacks with a wave of her hand. Damn you, goddess! Damn you, Hoko Tsuda!

“I granted all your wishes, so what’s the problem? Goddesses have feelings, too, you know!”

“Shut it, lady! Even loaded up on cheat skills, that world is insane! I tried to save a girl from a group of thugs and they hit me at light speed! I can’t keep up! I’m faster than the speed of sound but still slower than them! What the hell!?”

“Huh? You didn’t ask about the world you were going to? If you only think about yourself, you’ll get the rug pulled out from under you! Well? Wooooeeeelll?”

“Stick to Japanese!”

She’d lapsed into the language of the people of the lightspeed planet. I tried to hit her with an energy beam, but she blocked it with a barrier of darkness. I knew she’d started out as a dark god!

“This was all your way of getting back at me for getting lucky with that dart throw, wasn’t it? That’s so petty! Some ‘goddess’ you are! Is that short for ‘Gods Only Do the Dumbest, Evilest, Sneakest Shit!?’”

“Shut up shut up shut up!” she squealed, like a teenage tsundere. She fired beams of destructive light in all directions. I avoided these by phasing into another dimension, nearing the limits of quantum physics principles that may or may not exist to unleash an attack that could destroy her very existence.

“What the hell kind of world has street thugs even a goddess couldn’t hope to beat? They broke my nose!”

“I watched them do it, and I laughed my ass off! It was the best laugh I’ve had in the centuries since I got sealed away!”

“You were sealed away!?”

Damn you, goddess. Damn you, SAKKA KEIHAN! *The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Isekai*, my ass! All I can really say is to make sure you’re well-prepared before you ever try and head off to some other world. Don’t be satisfied with a pile of cheat skills. Make sure your new superpowers will be enough to live in the world you’re headed to!

...And try to get a first-rate goddess, not a second-rate one.

Pick a good truck, and make sure you rescue someone as you die. In this world or the next, careful planning makes all the difference.

But, kids, our world is overflowing with isekai stories, so you’d be better off reading those instead of trying to have one yourself.

Get thee to a bookstore! Take a book in hand! There you will find infinite isekais, so many tales I doubt you could read them all if you devoted your life to it! I’m sure you’ll discover at least one that’s perfect for you! And if you find no isekai story that fulfill your desires, just create one yourself. The world you personally design will become your own private isekai.

You’ll have to excuse me now. After my fight with the goddess/dark god, I’m going to rewind events to the moment just before I dove onto the expressway and peace the hell out of there. Don’t call it the coward’s way out—call it getting out while the getting’s good.

Thank you for following me this far.

Finally, I’d like to ask all readers to join me in saying the only words that can possibly bring this essay to a close.

Damn you, SAKKA KEIHAN!

Damn you, Hoko Tsuda!

Case 03: The Case of Natsuya Semikawa

Introduction

It is now a mere historical footnote, but when the isolated archipelago on the eastern edge of the Eurasian Continent was governed by the absolute theocratic state known as the Empire of Japan, railways served as the primary means of transporting mail between the major metropolitan areas.

The Osaka Central Post Office, on the order of the Building and Maintenance Office of the Ministry of Communications, was connected to the Osaka Station of the National Railway (now-JR West Japan) north of the office via subterranean tunnel, the construction of which being contracted to the Shimizu Construction Company.

This was the origin of the famous “Umeda Dungeon.”

When a connection to an Isekai was made during the tunnel-boring process, the area affected by this connection to another world began expanding rapidly. At the time, it appeared that it would grow to include the entirety of the Osaka metropolitan area, however, the Kamiori Agency managed to contain this expansion and quickly reduced the size of the connection to an area of similar size to its modern extent, limited roughly to the Umeda neighborhood of Osaka’s Chuo Ward.

(It was once thought that the origin of the neighborhood’s name of “Umeda” stems from the fact that the Regent Toyotomi Hideyoshi discovered the connection when building Osaka Castle in the late 16th history, forcing him to bury the area. However, modern historians consider this to be an apocryphal account.)

Osaka’s Umeda Dungeon is the largest isekai portal in the Far East, serving as a rail hub for journeys into numerous Isekais.

Every day, countless people ranging from vacationing families to office ladies going on shopping trips to light novel authors avoiding looming deadlines come to the station to travel to an Isekai.

This case is a simple report detailing an example of one such journey.

It is a fact universally acknowledged, that a light novel author threatened by deadlines, feels the compulsion to travel. Still, ordinarily, “travel” in my case means a day trip to a local sauna or super sento bathhouse to enjoy a little escape from my everyday routine.

Why? Poverty.

The reasons for Natsuya Semikawa’s poverty have been extensively elaborated upon in other media, and the details would fill the space available here many times over. Yet if all my journeys involve a trip to a bathhouse, I’m afraid I’ll end up better known as a sodden middle-aged man than a light novel author. Hence my decision to travel to an isekai this time around. It’s certainly not motivated by the fact that however tenacious my editor may be, she would hardly believe I would head to an isekai.

No, this is a trip driven by professional curiosity.

Only a half-wit needs to commit actual murder to write a murder mystery, but there’s no reason an isekai light novelist can’t visit the subject of his writing. Surely if a novelist can write about isekai they’ve never seen, they’d write even better after having visited the real thing.

That’s why I’ve committed to this isekai jaunt.

Umeda is the starting point for the H-shin Iandborough Line. One could also say it’s the end point of the line; however, that is a matter of perspective. It’s a three-day rail journey each way from start to end on the Osaka Umeda — Iandborough Line.

This, of course, means sleeping inside the train. However, only the first-class private cabins come equipped with sleeping berths. The other two types of passenger car classes, the soft-and hard-seat cars, are only equipped with rows of upright seating and have no sleeping berths for the passengers.

However, it’s worth noting that only an amateur traveler would choose a first-class cabin.

To truly enjoy a rail journey in safety and comfort, the train of choice is to travel by express trains. Such trains come equipped with security attendants

and their tickets include travel insurance.

The reason first-class cabins are a poor choice in ordinary local trains is because those cabins are enclosed spaces. The least of your concerns among such cabins is having an illegal speakeasy or gambling den next door. Worse are the more unsavory sorts of illegal activity that such cabins play host to.

There are some thrill-seekers who deliberately book first-class cabins on ordinary local trains for this very reason, but my recommendation is to travel in the hard-seat cars.

Opening the door to the hard-seat car, I find most of the seats occupied despite the fact that there's time to spare before departure.

There is, of course, no reserved seating in these cars. The ticket only provides the bearer with the right to ride in the hard-seat car. It goes without saying that no one bothers counting the number of tickets sold versus the available seating on the train.

Once the benches fill up, people spill onto the floor.

Once the floor is full, then people begin slinging hammocks across the aisles. That's right, hammocks. There are hammocks hung up in the hard-seat cars.

Now, these hammocks are not provided by the rail company, of course. The passengers put them up on their own.

Some time ago, when passengers first began hanging hammocks without proper anchors, there were several incidents where the hammocks came loose, resulting in injuries among the passengers. To prevent a repeat, the rail company began equipping the cars with hammock hooks. The rail company doesn't officially describe these hooks as hammock hooks. Their official literature simply describes them as "unknown hooks" without a stated purpose. The hooks just happen to be perfectly designed and positioned for hanging hammocks.

Fortunately, I find a spot that looks comfortable and claim a spot for myself on the middle hammock.

If you have the misfortune to travel during Iandboroughan holidays, passengers in the hard-seat cars are crammed in, standing like sardines with some even spilling out onto the roof of the car.

After a spate of lawsuits from passengers against the rail company regarding train availability, the Iandborough Superior Court ruled that a passenger in possession of a hard-seat ticket need only be located somewhere between the floor of the railcar and the stratosphere. As for the Constitutional Court's ruling on the matter, I'm afraid I must profess ignorance and say I simply don't know.

Laying down in my hammock, I open a paperback purchased at Kinokuniya Bookstore. It's a book a recently fashionable light novelist has published under a famous old sci-fi publisher. As I flip the pages while skimming through the book, an impatient mecasoli dealer peers into my hammock and speaks out to me in faintly accented Japanese:

"Got some mecasoli, cheap."

They try to pass me some short lengths of rolled-up paper. Mecasoli is a drug similar to marijuana. It's completely different in chemical composition from the various alkaloids and cannboids widely used on Earth, but it functions in a similar way. It's a luxury item as popular in the isekais as cigarettes were in 1970s Japan, and it's highly addictive.

It is, of course, banned in Japan.

"Gae," I answer, and return my attention to the world within the pages of my paperback.

"Gae" means "no," and is the isekai word I use most.

A poor isekai light novelist repeating the word "winne" ("yes") during an isekai vacation is virtually guaranteed to be penniless within a short span of time.

When I'm about a third of the way through my book, I start hearing announcements ring through the car. The car starts filling with activity and I begin getting jostled about in my hammock.

This isn't because someone is trying to shake me out of my hammock, it's simply because many of the passengers have waited until the last minute to

board and are rushing to secure a place. In fact, many of these passengers haven't even purchased a ticket.

Or perhaps it's more accurate to say they haven't "yet" purchased a ticket.

These people are vendors of one sort or another.

It's not that they've been granted permission by the rail company to sell their wares inside the train, they've just come aboard carrying goods for sale. Their goals are to use the three-day journey to sell various things, like food and consumable luxury goods (both legal and illegal), to make enough money to pay the hard-seat car ticket fare by the time they have to get off at the other end of the line.

When a young man comes around to sell a makliya (a sour little fruit similar to a melon), I ask in my halting isekian: "Howdy. What doth ya plan ta do if ya ain't got thy ticket fare by the time we go ta Iandborough?"

The boy, about fifteen years old by Earth reckoning, stares at me for a moment before answering, as though my question was one of the dumbest things he's ever heard. "Then I just stay on for the trip back to Umeda."

Oh, I see. I suppose that was obvious.

As a token of appreciation for answering my question, I buy a makliya from him for 32 nahs.

The regions around Iandborough, in a bothersome twist for Earth natives, have only recently converted from a base-8 counting system to a base-10 system. This means most of the paper notes and coins are still in multiples of 8.

Furthermore, they have a habit of producing limited edition coins for various anniversaries and celebrations. In the past I've emptied my wallet and counted 17 different types of 8-nahs coins, 5 types of 16-nahs coins, and 3 separate types of 16-and-a-half nahs coins. I could only shake my head in quiet bemusement.

Because of this situation, there aren't any useful objects like vending machines in the areas surrounding Iandborough. When you're thirsty, your only option is to buy luke-warm juice or alcohol from a random old man on a bike, where the drinks are kept a little below the ambient temperature in a water-

filled bucket.

Which brings me to another word of warning: first time travelers to Iandborough should never, *ever* make the mistake of ordering Iandborough beer. It may be called “beer,” and it may contain some alcohol, but the mysterious liquid sold as beer tastes primarily of bitterness, astringency, and bitterness, with a touch of nihilism mixed in for effect.

If I had to describe it, it tastes as though you boiled a muscle-relaxing medical pad in the extract of whole bitter gourd and water pepper.

(However, if you do end up drinking Iandborough beer, you’ll likely end up developing the occasional craving to drink it. I suspect there’s some sort of unknown addictiveness to the stuff, but since my doctor has forbidden me from imbibing any more of it, I haven’t been able to confirm this theory.)

Once clear of the familiar underground tunnel, the landscape becomes significantly more beautiful. Iandborough and the surrounding lands of Larks Province are Gomanleigh’s temperate-to-subtropical regions with a lush landscape.

The railroad that stitches the countryside between the lush great evergreen woods and the coastline has a great view of the landscape, and the green of the great woods is a particularly impressive sight that one never grows tired of watching. The bright colors of the flowers growing among the trees are something you can never find in Japan.

It’s not particularly crowded in the car, so the sea breeze blowing in from the opposite side’s windows is rather refreshing.

After a short run through the country, we stop for a while at the first station, where they also handle immigration procedures. The gendarmes check each car while chewing on a gum-like sap called icha.

“Winne.”

As I produce my passport and hand it over, the pair of gendarmes snap their fingers. It’s body language similar to a shrug on Earth.

“Thy book is a restricted volume,” The younger of the two gendarmes says in faintly accented but easily understandable Japanese.

I’m briefly puzzled, but quickly understand what he’s getting at.

“My apologies. I was a bit careless.”

With that, I quietly pass two 8-nahs pieces into his palm.

The younger gendarme looks into his hand to confirm its contents, then looks to his older partner.

That’s some second-rate acting. Who the hell confirms the bribe amount with their partner?

The older gendarme replies with a simple “Gae.”

I’m forced to add another 8-nahs piece for each of them.

One of the coins among them is a Crown Prince Leonpat’s Third Accession Anniversary coin, but I’m not particularly bothered by that.

The gendarmes, pleased with their haul, turn their backs on me. I turn my gaze to outside my window.

I take the time to think about what I want to do after this three-day journey is over. I may not have money, but I have plenty of time.

One thing I can’t leave off my list of activities is to eat some coal-roasted hyoleger. It’s no exaggeration to say that I chose to head to Iandborough in this season just to have a taste of hyoleger. Hyolegers are a bivalve native to Iandborough, and they’re currently at the peak of their season. When roasted over coals, they open with perfect timing, releasing an indescribably delicious aroma.

As you drip just a touch of a condiment similar to soy sauce atop it and slide the meat onto your tongue, sensations of pure bliss travel from your mouth to your throat to your esophagus to rest in your stomach.

Hyolegers are also known as the Winne Winne Clam, because when asked “Another round?” the only answer that comes to mind is to say “Winne winne.”

And, even better, unlike oysters there’s no fear of food poisoning, which means you can eat as many as you can handle.

They’re also wonderful fried or sauteed in oil.

I’m drooling just thinking about it.

I really hope I’m off saying “winne winne” soon.

As I stare at the station building, visions of hyolegers dancing in my head, I notice something odd.

It’s a human.

Well, there’s humans everywhere, of course. In Iandborough, there are Japanese, Americans, Chinese, Puerto Ricans, and even Karakalpaks and Transnistrians.

However...I know this face.

“Mr. Semikawa?”

The familiar face sticks her head in through the open window and smiles serenely at me.

“Wh-What a coincidence, Ms. Editor!”

“Yes, quite a coincidence. And right before your deadline, too.”

She places a faint but noticeable emphasis on the word “deadline.”

“And just what brings you here today?”

“Uh, um, well, I was taking a little vacation...”

“And is that something you should be doing right now...?”

“Ah…ahm…gae.”

Sadly, it is here that Semikawa’s adventure comes to a premature end.

Case 04: The Restaurant at the End of the Isekai

Exposition: Editor O

Pat, pat, pat.

A piglet's day begins with her makeup.

A quick glance in the mirror to be sure I still had those adorable little stripes, then three lines on each cheek to match. Eyedrops to make them glisten even more. Of course, I can't forget my colored contacts, either. A pass with the eyelash curler, then mascara to make the curls stand out. Last but not least, I filed and buffed my hooves.

Then I made my best pose in front of the mirror.

Perfection!

You might ask why a young *Sus scrofa*, someone you might call a "piglet," is so concerned with her looks. Well, I have my reasons. Let me tell you why.

It all began half a year ago. I was at Gokokuji Station, on the Yurakucho subway line. For someone from the rattier part of the sticks like me, it was a big change to finally be in 'the City.' And for work, no less.

"I'll meet you at the station at 2 PM, then."

I double-checked the text. It was five before two, and I was standing outside the station waiting to be picked up. By who? Well.

Gokokuji Station is in Bunkyo Ward, and Bunkyo Ward is packed with publishers. A clever reader should be able to deduce what sort of meeting this was.

I was waiting for an editor—let's call him "Mr. O." For a bit of background, you might want to search for 'Mr. O sucks'. But he was a famous editor, and I was an innocent little piglet, so I made sure to arrive a few minutes ahead of

time just like I would for any other editor.

However—

“Give me a call when you get to the station.”

That was definitely what he’d texted me. Keeping it professional, I waited until the clock struck two and then dialed.

After a few rings, a sleepy voice came over the line.

“Wait, was that today? I’m at home right now.”

He must live near the station, I guess.

“I was napping.”

Well, fine, but why admit it?

Way to start things off on the right foot. I guess the rumors about O (let’s dispense with the formalities until he earns them) were true.

“Anyway, I’ll have someone right over. Can you wait on the manhole cover outside the station? Should only take me about five minutes.”

On a manhole cover? Which one?

My eyes scanned the pavement around me, and I found a likely candidate. To be fair, it made sense as a landmark. If he was going to send an assistant out to find people, it’d be easier if he made sure the people were in the same place every time.

But I should have thought a little harder about it.

If I’d only remembered the urban legend about manholes being portals to another world—

Five minutes later, I found myself launched through dimensions.

Rise: The Mysterious Masked Man

I’d somehow survived half a year. It was hard, at first. I thought I was going to die here. More than one time, I almost ended up on a spit with an apple in my mouth.

No, really! Listen! I didn't have a thing on me. You'd think at least my cell phone would have counted as a key item.

And isn't being spirited away to another world supposed to come with cheat codes? One of the gods of this place could have at least taken pity on me and given me some cheats. But I survived, and dammit, I deserve credit for that.

More than anything, though, I survived thanks to these things I've got right here in my trotters.

Binoculars—no, more like opera glasses. Magical opera glasses.

Not even ten days after I arrived, I was collapsed in a gutter when a masked man came upon me. I know this whole ordeal sounds absurd, but I'm not gonna lie just to make it more plausible. If he hadn't been wearing a mask his long white coat would've just taken over as the craziest thing about him anyway.

At first, I was pretty sure he was going to make me into curry, as he tied me up and started a pot of water boiling.

I'll probably never forget how he happily hummed to himself about 'orc curry' as he sharpened his cooking knife—no, it was less a knife and more a sword. C'mon, get it right. Pork. Not orc. Pork! (Or, if you really wanted to be specific, boar curry.)

Unfortunately, though, no matter how hard I protested to the inhabitants of this world that I was a sentient being too, all they could hear was "Oink! Oink!" Why was that? I could understand them perfectly. If the cheat I'd ended up with was a universal translator but it was broken in one direction, I was gonna have to start doing the RPG thing and killing gods.

"Hey, you! In the mask! I bet you wanna have me with a nice hot bowl of Cuppa Noodles, but you're gonna open up that bag and find nothing but a smashed-up bag of Apex Ramen!"

I, uh.... I don't have very much trash talk game at all. (Personally, I like putting Apex Ramen flavor packets in my Cuppa Noodles bowls.))

I can only guess because of the mask, but I'm still pretty sure he had a look of shock on his face as he turned to me.

“Wait, you came here from another world?”

His voice was entirely too mellifluous for somebody in an outfit as goofy as his. But that wasn’t important right then. If he knew people could be sent here, then—

“Wait, did you, too?”

“Yes! So you’re not ayoung orc? You came here from Earth?” What was I going to do? This guy looked like the type to settle his fights outside the ring with a folding chair. He looked like, uhh, that fourth-row class from that phone game about airships. But somehow... Somehow, he looked like someone I could rely on. And the blade in his hand looked like a katana. Maybe he was Japanese. Maybe he was trapped here too.

And maybe he just looked like that because of however he ended up here.

“Nah, it’s just my look.”

Your look, huh. Okay, sorry for thinking you weren’t a weirdo. And hey, wait, I didn’t even say that out loud, so why are you responding to me?

“Didn’t Entity X give you some sort of power when you ended up here? Even they usually start someone off with healing items and auto-translation.”

Who’s Entity X supposed to be, anyway? Is that O’s username here or something?

“Oh. So *that’s* how you came in.”

He was nice enough to untie me then, and even offered up some of the curry he was making.

Are there, like, established methods? Can I get something like a bus or a train back home? Where do I get my return ticket from, then?

“Well, you can’t really get back the same way I’m trying to.”

Oh, sure, this “Entity X” makes it nice and clear for you. Why couldn’t you be that nice, O? Who the hell runs a one-way route?

“Anyway, I’m sorry. I’d love nothing more than to help a lost compatriot who enjoys the taste of Cuppa Noodle, but I’m on a mission. I need the Tears of the

Fae Queen before the Moon of the Silver Unicorn.”

Okay, so this world was all-in on the “high fantasy” motif.

“Once I get them, I’ll be able to change the color of my mask.”

Really? You’re gonna make a Fae Queen cry for a chroma?

“It’s kinda my thing.”

You monster! I can’t believe you!

I was at a loss for words, and papered it over by raising a spoon of curry to my mouth.

“Too bad I didn’t have any fresh meat for this. It’s so much better that way.”

Personally, I was fine with the dried meat from the packet. It was delicious. Just stop giving me those hungry glances, already.

Hmm, this meat’s pretty chewy. I wonder—no, I don’t want to know what it is.

“Orc curry in the morning, orc curry in the evening~”

Especially don’t sing anything like that to yourself!

Anyway, when we parted, the masked man gave me these magical opera glasses, along with a few flashcards of the local language. I wish I’d been able to pronounce it better, but apparently the sounds just aren’t compatible with a piglet’s vocal cords. That must have been why the translator didn’t work.

In any case, now that I hadw= those opera glasses, the amount of danger I was in fell dramatically.

After touching up my makeup, I stepped out of my room. At that point, I was living in a fairy’s house. From the outside it looked just like a tree stump, but when I pressed a magic key into a crack in the wood, it instantly transformed into a house. The problem was, when I left, I was randomly warped somewhere else in the world. Sounds convenient, right? No. Not very convenient at all.

And as to how I got the key—

The fairy whose house it was was telepathic.

And this poor little piggy had some valuable information.

What, exactly? Elementary, my dear Watson.

I knew what the masked man was after. A creepy guy in a mask was after the Fae Queen. (Motives aside... Seriously, that mask!)

Knowledge is power.

Once she learned this, the fairy had no choice but to rush to the aid of their liege. As thanks, they gave me use of their house. It was inconvenient not knowing where I was going end up when I stepped out the front door, but it was still nice to have somewhere where I could be safe.

And what did I spend the next few months doing?

Scouting with the opera glasses. I could see for miles and miles. And they didn't just magnify—I could see through anything I wanted to in the way, too. It's a good thing my mother raised me to be a good piglet; if a pervert got his hands on these, he'd be spending all day peeping on baths. I'm sure the masked man was a perfect gentleman, though. Too bad about the obsession with his mask color.

I saw so many things through the glasses. Dragons soaring in the far-off skies, farmers with their eternal cycle of rituals and festivals honoring the heavens.

Merchant caravans and the bandits who raided them. A little bit further, there was a motley crew of sword-wielding boys and girls in school uniforms. Hero cadets, probably.

Dragons... No good. They'd see me as nothing but a delicious meal.

Farmers... No good. They'd see me as a beastman come to ravage their fields. I only took a few potatoes, guys, it's not that big of a deal.

Merchants and bandits... No good, either. The caravan guards would find me delicious. The bandits probably would too.

And worst of all were the kids in school uniforms. They weren't even hungry, they were just slaughtering the local wildlife under the excuse of "grinding for experience."

I'd encountered them a few days before when I left my stump house, and it

didn’t go well. These self-described “heroes” were splattering jelly from the poor harmless Slimies all over.

“MEAT.”

I’ll never forget the one word that came from their lips as they looked at me. C’mon, guys, you have all that jelly right there.

No matter what I said to them, they’d just hear it as “Oink! Oink!” It was futile. They’d never understand me.I felt like that yellow rat detective in the funny hat from the video game.

But my luck hadn’t run out yet.

“Stop! It’s just a baby!”

Even though I might call myself a piglet, I was all grown up. But this wasn’t the best time to disagree.

The person who’d spoken up was a high school girl who’d set herself up as the lead romantic interest. The type who tended to end up in that role by default if characters are transformed at all, but end up splitting up with the MC if they’re just dragged into their story as-is.

What?I mean, it’s all opinion, but that’s how I see it.

“What are you talking about? It’s a monster. It’s probably going to get big and go around devouring everything it sees. We need to deal with it before it grows up and turns into a boss monster or something.”

Pot calling the kettle black, right there.

“Look at the poor little thing! We can’t eat it, that would be mean!”

Good girl. I appreciate the concern for animal welfare.

The MC (we’ll call him that) had a hard time arguing against the romantic interest (we’ll call her that) even when he was convinced he was right.

So I took the opportunity to run away. It didn’t take long to get back to the tree stump, where I jammed the key in as fast as I could. I was safe inside. Safe from being meat.

And there I prayed. Prayed for the liberation of all porcine-kind.

No more would we be mere meat!

No more would 30-50 of us be a starting area miniboss encounter!

That was when experience truly taught me I was a piglet. There were humans who would let an adorable little piglet go.

Cuteness is justice. Makeup is essential.

Climax: The Coffee Farm

I survived against the odds for another half-year. And then, a rumor came to my ears.

“Somewhere out there, there’s a restaurant serving food like no one’s ever seen.”

I heard it from a passing merchant who kept repeating the same line to anyone who walked by, like some kind of NPC. I’d taken to wrapping myself in a thick cloak when I went out, so no one could tell I was a piglet. If I was just shopping, I could communicate by showing the cards the masked man had given me. Another gift from him was coming in handy.

Thanks. And, uh, sorry for blowing your cover.

The items in the fairy’s house had fetched a pretty penny. Enough to pay for some serious cosmetics. I wasn’t quite sure how they had colored contacts in this world, but apparently magic could work wonders.

The problem was, I looked suspicious enough with my hood pulled up that the shopkeepers tended to drive a hard bargain. Some of them were kind, of course, but all in all, it wasn’t a kind world for a little piglet.

Even if it only worked one way, the translator was coming in handy. It didn’t just let me hear what the merchants were saying, it let me hear what they *meant*.

If they were trying to rip me off, I just got up and left. Some of the more aggressive ones chased after me, but I always escaped. Sometimes by the skin of my teeth, but hey, I’m still here. This little piggy went to market, and the same little piggy went “wee, wee, wee” all the way home. Anyway, back to

the story.

“There’s a restaurant that makes food I’ve never heard of.”

Its name was...

“Beer Me.”

That wasn’t just the translation of what he was saying, either. That was its name, in Japanese, as clear as day. Exactly the thing every middle-aged man probably says as he settles down at the bar. (I would’ve taken “I’m Driving, So Just A Soda For Me” as a second answer.)

The owner must have been someone from Earth. Even better, another Japanese person.

My sixth sense was telling me that this could be a way back home.

But there was still a problem. I was still using the fairy’s house as a safehouse. It was nice always having somewhere to come back to, but whenever I left, I was in a random place.

And “Beer Me” was in an ancient, far-off city. I guess you could kind of compare it to Kyoto that way. I looked at my maps and started making my plans.

If I stepped out of the fairy’s house and found myself close by, I could easily cover the remaining distance by land. This had its risks, but it seemed like my best option. I began to save up money, produce extra flashcards, and store food.

Being able to stop in restaurants on the way would have made life easier, but I couldn’t risk being revealed as a piglet. If I could eat in a secluded place, it would be fine, but too many of the restaurants were strictly dine-in only. So I was kind of stuck taking my own food with me.

Now, you might say, maybe the problem was just with *human* restaurants?

Point. It’s because I look too much like a young orc. But traveling through orc country was out, too. I’d be mistaken for a runaway teen and caught.

That would be even worse.

Plus, I... I did kind of eat that curry.

That would be a source of a lot of big oof energy if I actually was an orc and I just thought I was a piglet. For the sake of my own mental health, I decided to remain firmly convinced that I was a piglet and not an orc.

”But you eat pork”? Well, I mean, c’mon. Haven’t you had tonkotsu ramen? How can anyone pass that up?

Anyway. Whenever I stepped out of the fairy’s house, I had two missions.

First, determine where I was.

Second, gather food.

A piglet can’t march on an empty stomach. It would have been nice if I ended up near villages, but things didn’t work out that conveniently, and I was beginning to run low on cash. So I had to resort to an extremely paleo diet.

Meaning, for a piglet, foraging for mushrooms from the forest. This had its own dangers.

Of the diarrheal variety.

I honestly thought I’d die of dehydration. But somehow, between the salt content of the dried meat and copious amounts of river water, I survived. It was really unfortunate that this world hadn’t invented sports drinks.

Anyway, though. In the end, I had no options left other than raiding fields. And I’m not sure whether I should consider this lucky or not, but I usually ended up in farm country.

The reason for that should be obvious. For there to be a stump, a tree has to be cut down. People don’t cut trees down unless they’re building nearby. And if they’re building something and had to cut down a tree to do it, that means it must be a settlement and not in a city. And where there’s settlements, there are farms.

Whatever fairy homes once were, now, they’re connections between human settlements.

And since they’re just settlements, that means no big cities, either. Just farming villages. Today, I focused on gathering food. It was too dangerous to go

into town and try to see where I was. The fewer people there were in a town, the better they knew each other—and the keener the stares they'd turn on a stranger.

So I turned my eyes to the fields, where I saw a copse of trees adorned with a fruit I didn't recognize.

It must have been some kind of orchard. Dots of red, yellow, and green dangled from the branches like cherries or grapes. If this was a human farm, surely they weren't poisonous.

I reached out and plucked the reddest, ripest-looking one.

It wasn't bad, just a little sour—

Ptoo! I looked down at the seed I'd spit out. A little sour, and almost entirely inedible. The flesh was barely more than a skin over the hard seed. At first I thought I couldn't feed myself on these, but no, there were plenty.

But why would anyone grow such... Fruitless fruit? And why such a large orchard for it?

I took a closer look at the seed, and its shape began to ring a bell. A round pod with a single split down one side. If you dried it and roasted it, you'd have...

You'd have a coffee bean.

Now, I'm no huge fan of coffee. No problem with people who are, it's just not my thing. I'm more of a hot chocolate type.

But in my current situation, my best option was to eat while I could while I searched for something better. So there I was, an adorable little piglet trotting through the coffee fields. An adorable little piglet who should've been spending less time looking around and more time looking at where I was going.

"Whoa!"

I didn't even notice the uneven ground before I went tumbling down. I rubbed my butt and stood up again. The earth around me was littered with strange white lumps. Unthinkingly, I made the mistake of picking one up for a closer look.

I shrieked.

It was a skull. Bones. Bones were strewn all around me. Not just one or two. More than I could count.

I broke out in a cold sweat. Well, piglets don't sweat, but you know what I mean.

Just where was I? A sea of bones. Human bones. Nervously, I hunkered down in the hole in the ground I'd fallen into. I held my breath and ran to the other side of the hole I was in, but the hole stretched around the border of the field. No. This wasn't a hole. It was a trench. A long, narrow alley. Like there'd been fierce fighting here.

I was dripping with sweat. Well, the boar equivalent.

Nervously, I backpedaled, only for a trotter to clunk into something. It seemed like it was some sort of sign.

"I'm growing coffee here. No stealing. (^_^)

If you do, I'll have to punish you. \(o_o)/

— the Coffee Farmer"

The writing was friendly enough, but the bloodstains splashed below it were anything but. The trench around me was filled with corpses. And seriously, emoji? On something like that? I had a really bad feeling about this.

Beads of cold sweat (again, metaphorical sweat) were dripping down my back,

I felt a piercing gaze from afar and spun around to meet it. I spotted something floating in the sky,

I pulled out the opera glasses for a closer look. A child with a stern air beyond his years was pointing a gun at me. He looked unhappy, like he was being forced to do something he didn't want to. But the little jerk still went ahead and did it.

This is a world of fantasy! What are guns doing here!? I saw a burst of light form at its muzzle. It was a magic circle, surely forming something to launch at me.

But I'm a piglet. What we lack in combat power, we make up for in evasion. I

took off running. Even though I wasn't sure how much good it would do me, with presumably a trained sniper firing some sort of magical burst at me.

Run, run, run!

Find a stump!

I don't want to die!

I still have a couple dozen books I need to finish! Wait until I get back to Japan and polish them off! And I want one last trip up to Hokkaido! One last meal of ikura!

When their life is flashing before their eyes, humans—er, boars—get one last burst of strength they never knew they had.

A shell launched forth from the magical circle. All told, I probably had less than a second to react. But that was enough for me to fish my key out of my pocket.

Stump! Gimme a stump!

These glistening eyes of mine (with colored contacts in) didn't lead me astray. I made a sliding dive for the burnt remains of a tree.

Light flashed around me even before I heard the explosion. I slammed the door of my safehouse shut behind me, but even that wasn't enough to protect me from the shock. As I huddled on the floor, the blast washed over me. I covered my ears and clamped my eyelids shut. Rubble fell on my head, but I knew I was safer suffering the scrapes and scratches than standing back up. All I could do was wait for it to be over.

My (borrowed) home for the past several months was blown away. The fairy's items I'd been selling for money, the food I'd stored, all of it was gone.

I stood up, sniffling.

I knew, deep in my heart, that this was my punishment for robbing that orchard. It was my fault for grazing through its fruits. They say to float like a butterfly, sting like a bee; these were hard things for a piglet to do, but I could at least be a bit more cautious.

And I should never forget that farmers were my natural enemy.

I'm not quite sure that one farmer had the right idea, though. He probably blew his whole orchard up.

I almost wanted to poke my head out and check, but I couldn't. One step out the door was like taking a warp zone. Surprisingly, while the walls were cracked, the door itself was intact. But unfortunately, the key'd been bent.

The second I stepped out of these ruins, I'd probably never see them again. Sorry, fairy. I hope you don't hold grudges.

I searched through the crumbled brick, looking for anything I could still use. A few smashed potatoes, a pouch filled with matcha powder. And, surprisingly, a bag of buckwheat flour. I'd grabbed it in a previous farm raid, even though I don't know how to make noodles. I'd rationalized to myself that I could at least boil dumplings from the dough, then wrapped flour into a sheet of cloth and slung it over my back. Sadly, no one in this world had invented backpacks.

All my paper money was shredded and burnt, but I picked up what coins I could find. And that was the end of that chapter in my life.

Goodbye, fairy's house.

I opened the door.

Denouement: Beer Me

With nowhere safe to stay, I searched for a town. The very least I could do was determine where I was. Thus began a few days of worry about what would happen when my food and money ran out.

Eventually, I fell ill. My food was gone. I had no water. A boar cannot live on smashed potatoes and buckwheat flour alone.

And it was terribly cold. Shivering, I curled up under the eaves of a building. Was I far north, or was this simply winter coming on?

The village around me was a small cluster of inns and farmhouses. The fields were fallow, their bare dark soil exposed. Swathes of pines—no hopes of fruit there—dotted the landscape. It reminded me of when we learned about the

Black Forest in social studies class.

Maybe I should look for a barn, or even a chicken coop to sleep in? No. I shook my head. I was a piglet, not a chicken. I couldn't follow in their footsteps.

But I was at my limit. The chill, dry air of winter took any hope of rain, of water, away. If I found a roof to shelter under, there would surely be humans there already.

And I'd lost all my flashcards. I couldn't even beg for water.

There was no hope left. I couldn't hold out any longer without food or water.

But just as I was about to give up and drift away, a sweet scent filled my nostrils.

"You must have used good grapes."

"Yeah. I'm proud of how it came out."

Grape juice glugged merrily from a bottle. Bottles and casks had been moved from some kind of storehouse into a wagon.

Grape... Juice...

I snuck onto the wagon, making sure to remain unseen. As I lay low in the wagon's bed to avoid being spotted, I wrapped a trotter around a single bottle. I popped out the cork and lifted it to my lips.

And as I filled my mouth with the sweet juice within—

My memories of that night stop there.

It wasn't juice, it was wine.

I'm a piglet. Boars don't have acetaldehyde dehydrogenase. We can't metabolize alcohol.

"Just look at this mess."

The words echoed in my ears as I rubbed my bleary eyes, realizing I'd been booted out of the wagon.

I landed on cold cobblestones, and my bindle was unceremoniously pitched

out after me.

“Gah, there’s wine all over. What the hell happened here?”

I’d been mistaken for a pile of rags. Which was good luck for once; my eyes were doing anything but glistening adorably (especially since I’d lost those colored contacts.) My hair was getting long and shaggy, to the point where you could barely make out my stripes.

But even with my head pounding from the hangover, I knew I had to make myself scarce before the old porter realized I was there. I crept away along the cobblestones, and soon found myself in the middle of a side alley. Small shops lined its narrow path.

Actually...

Where was I?

Cobblestone pavement meant that this must have been a major city. But the stones were time-worn with the wheels of many a carriage.

Was this the “ancient city” I was looking for?

I glanced up at a sign, but the translator told me nothing. Maybe, just maybe, this was the same city Beer Me was in.

Swaying and stumbling from the effects of the wine, I made my way down the alley, attracting stares as I went. Even though I had my hood pulled down to my eyes, I wasn’t even half the height of the people around me. If I was lucky, I’d be mistaken for a child; I certainly wouldn’t be mistaken for an adult.

I needed to find it before anyone tried to “save” me from my “plight.”.

Or worse.

As I walked along, my spirits sinking, I suddenly smelled something familiar. My nose immediately perked up as my instincts took over, leading me to a small business with a slitted curtain over the doorway and a single large sign facing the street.

It read “Izakaya SEMI.” It was in Japanese! I could read it! I guess “Beer Me” wasn’t the real name of the restaurant after all.

Tears welled up in my eyes. Sniffling, I pushed the curtain aside. The sign hanging on the door said “Open,” but would they let a beat-up mess of a boar in as a customer?

As hope and fear swirled within me, I looked around the room, and saw—

A cicada.

I’m probably not being as clear as I could. But a cicada. The things that go “bzz-bzz, hmm-hmm” in the summer.

Even as someone who’d been repeatedly mistaken for a young orc, I found it kind of weird, but I guess it made sense. The masked man who helped me was pretty weird, even though he looked human. And I wondered, how was the Fae Queen doing?

But a cicada? Really, a cicada? At least I’m a mammal. Hell, at least I’m a vertebrate.

But that...that was an arthropod. How were the other customers completely fine with this? Everyone seemed so perfectly at ease, I didn’t even feel right bringing it up.

As for the other customers, there were a few scattered around the pub, lifting frothy mugs of what looked like beer to their lips. The pub food on offer was edamame, fried tofu, and oddly enough, spaghetti, with which one older customer had given himself ruby-red lips as he ate.

It was exactly the kind of traditional-but-trendy place you’d expect to walk into in modern Japan, down to the split bar and table seating. The walls were dotted with placards listing the menu and a small Shinto altar. If I prayed to its gods, perhaps they’d carry me home?

“Bzzzzz? Bzz.”

”What’ll it be?”, I could tell he was asking.

“Oink oink.”

I asked for a drink. Was there any oolong tea?

“Bzz.”

”Sure thing!”, apparently. I wasn’t quite sure how, but it seemed like we could understand each other.

I took a seat at the bar, but then I realized I had no way to pay. What should I do?

Raiding farms and fields was one thing, but there was no way I was going to dine-and-dash. A boar has more pride than that. Besides, farmers are already hunting boars that steal from them; we didn’t need restaurants getting in on the act.

Looking for something to trade, I spread out my bindle and found around three kilos of buckwheat flour. I’d eaten the rest.

“Oink oink?”

“Bzzz!”

We struck a deal. I could pay with the flour. Apparently it was rare here. I handed the bag to the cicada, who passed it on to a young girl. It made sense. I couldn’t imagine trying to roll out noodles with those sticklike bug arms.

In return, he placed a bowl of oden in front of me. The potatoes were fluffy, the stewed tendons were tender, and the daikon slices were golden with flavor from the broth.

I gripped the chopsticks in my trotter (oh, yeah, I made sure to max out my DEX), I picked up a piece of daikon. I could smell the aroma of kombu dashi and soy sauce rising off it. It made me tear up a little bit, after having gone days without food.

As I did, he wordlessly passed me a napkin. Thanks, Mr. Cicada. When I looked up again, though, he was on the floor, twitching. Was this his eighth day? I’d heard cicadas only lived a week after they hatch.

The girl who’d been making the noodles spread him out on the floor of the kitchen, before returning to me with a plate of fried tofu. I guess it was on the house, to apologize for the inconvenience. Anyway, it was delicious.

They definitely knew their Japanese soul food.

By the time I finished my oden and tofu, the cicada had recovered and started

boiling up the soba noodles made from my flour. At the same time, he dashed together a simple broth of dashi, soy sauce, and mirin.

Ah, this must be—

After filling a bowl with the broth, he added the noodles. Sweet-and-salty stewed tofu skin, tenkasu, and a few scattered bits of scallion. Tanuki-style and kitsune-style all in one bowl.

My mouth watered.

“Bzzzzzz.”

The cicada placed the bowl on the bar in front of me. Lifting it in one trotter, I slurped up the noodles using my chopsticks. They were perfectly al dente. He must have mixed the buckwheat flour with wheat flour and a bit of mountain yam. The oden-style broth carried my mind away to home. The tenkasu, softened in its sweetness, were delicious. I wanted to get to the fried tofu skin too, but no. That was my favorite. I’d save it for last.

As I slurped up the noodles, the other customers began to stare at me. I’m sure they were wondering who the absolute wreck gulping down their noodles was. Well, sorry. Sometimes you just want to slurp.

“Hey, chef! Make me some too!”

“Me too! Me too!”

“Bzzzzzzzzz.”

“Oh, sure, I don’t mind waiting on the noodles.”

Ehhhh? They could understand him?

How come I was the only one who couldn’t be understood?

Or maybe I could, in here. “Oink oink oink.”

“Oh, are you a foreigner too? What’s she saying, chef?”

Nope.

“BzzzZzz.”

“Ohh? Someone from your hometown?”

Why did it work for him? Feeling glum, I looked down at the fried tofu skin left in my bowl. I'd been so worried about the noodles and fried tofu and oden that I'd forgotten all about it.

"Oink oink!"

Mr. Cicada! You're a Japanese cicada, aren't you! How'd you get here? Do you know how to get home!?

As I stood up in excitement, the skin from my fried tofu disappeared from my bowl. Dammit! I was saving that for last!

It was only then that I noticed a fox in a red scarf next to me, gripping the fried tofu skin in its mouth.

Give it back! That's mine!

I stabbed at it with my chopsticks, but came up empty. With a powerful leap, the fox soared over my head.

The other customers must have been drunk, because they didn't even notice it. C'mon! Foxes aren't allowed in restaurants! You're going to give us all tapeworm!

Now, I know there's a tradition about leaving the tofu skins out for foxes, but you have to understand. After half a year scraping out a bare living in another world, I was in no mood for propriety. Pinching with my chopsticks, I chased after it as it turned nimbly toward the back door. Give it back! That was my tofu skin! Give it back!

I gave chase toward the door. There was no way a fox could open a door with its paws. ...But the fox proved me wrong by opening the door with its paws. Was this a fox, or a housecat with ambitions of grandeur?

Stop right there! I'll chase you to the ends of the world if you don't!

Give me my tofu back!

I sped through the door after it.

And then.

The world flashed bright white around me. Reflexively, I closed my eyes.

I could hear the hiss of train breaks. The blaring of horns. Train sounds. A more vivid world of sound than I'd heard in months. Everything that I'd thought annoying before made me feel at home.

I slowly opened my eyes. A sign reading Gokokuji Station. Buildings towered around me, some bearing signs for major publishers.

My feet were finally back on solid concrete. Well, soon were. I lost no time getting off the manhole cover I found myself on.

My bag was slung over my shoulder. I'd thought it was gone! Or had it always been there? I fished around inside and pulled out my phone.

It was the day I'd been spirited away. Not even five minutes had passed.

It had been nothing but my imagination. Only a daydream.

As I stared up at the sky, out of the corner of my eye I saw someone running towards me.

It was a young man, who stopped in front of me, panting with exertion.

"Sorry. Mr. O sent me out to meet you."

I glanced at my phone. It'd been barely five minutes since I placed the call. He really had rushed right out in five minutes.

"Anyway, allow me to show you inside, Ms. —."

I followed along as if nothing at all had happened.

It wasn't until that evening that I realized there was a pair of chopsticks in my bag for some reason. During the afternoon, while I waited two hours or so for Mr. O to arrive, I just killed time farming Embers, but that's another story.

Case 05: The Warrior-Writer in the Other World

Foreword

I AM KATSUIE SHIBATA!

Yeah, that's the greeting I'll go with. Many famous Youtubers have their unique greetings, and I want one of my own, too.

Though, I'm basically copying Principal Edajima from *Sakigake!! Otokojuku*, so you can't really call it original. In fact, even my pen name, "Katsuie Shibata," is borrowed from an actual military commander from the Sengoku period. It's as far as you can go from the name my parents gave me, so when I say "I AM KATSUIE SHIBATA!" I'm being at least eighty percent fake.

But allow me to bring up the sayings "even a worm will turn" and "even a thief has his reasons." Twenty percent true might not seem like much, but it is some truth nonetheless.

I'm spending a bit too long making excuses about my identity, but I want those unfamiliar with me to understand. First, please imagine Katsuie Shibata the Sengoku commander. That person is me and that's what I look like. If you are unfamiliar with the military commander, please look at this book's cover. The serious commander-looking guy is me. Alternatively, you can Google it. That depiction of the real person you found? That's me.

Now that you know what I look like, let me tell you about how I began writing using this pen name.

It was about ten years ago. I was enrolling into college and had to go through recreation alongside other freshmen I wasn't sure I would get along with. Somehow, we ended up playing UNO, a game I hadn't played in years. I wasn't good at it, it was really stressful, and I ended up playing until it was just one-versus-one.

That was when a certain word came to mind. A name of a place that doubled

as an idiom to describe a decisive battle. Okehazama? No. Sekigahara? No. What was it again? As I wrung my head, I put down a card and said,

“This is a real Shizugatake!”

(It turns out the place in the phrase is actually “Tennozan.”)

Even now I don’t think I was wrong, per se, but my fellow freshmen weren’t familiar with the Battle of Shizugatake, so we just stopped playing UNO and I told them about it. The decisive fight between Katsuie Shibata and Hideyoshi Hashiba. As I relayed the historical details, the somewhat distant freshmen began opening up. We all had a good time and by the time the day ended, I’d been given the nickname Katsuie Shibata.

My college life began with quite a speedy gallop, and the name “Katsuie Shibata” has stuck with me ever since. I’m certain the nickname would’ve been different if I had the face of a noble from the Heian period, but I respected Katsuie so much that I not only defaulted to Shizugatake instead of Tennozan, but also grew my beard to make myself look more like him. My classmates called me “Katsuie” so naturally that they probably even forgot my real name.

And so, as I continued to live as Katsuie Shibata, I decided to submit a story. At first, I didn’t even think I’d go anywhere as an actual author. It was just something I did to make my days as a student more memorable, and since thinking up a new pen name was a pain, I just applied as Katsuie Shibata.

The hand of fate had other plans, however. My story was graciously picked, and I would be making my debut as an author. But during the same phone call that informed me of this, I was told that they didn’t quite approve of going with “Katsuie Shibata” as a pen name.

So I told them to use my real name instead, but when I visited the publisher, the editor-in-chief took one look at me—as in, my appearance—and said “‘Katsuie Shibata’ is just fine, I’d say.”

What a resolution.

With his decision, I returned my pen name to “Katsuie Shibata” and now work as a Sengoku commander-author who’d been reincarnated in the modern era.

I use this name as a fan of Katsuie Shibata who wants it to remain in history,

and because I want to confuse college students millennia in the future by creating an extra Katsuie Shibata for them to find when they research the name.

Thus, I hope that this book will become an important piece of literature that survives for thousands of years. I'm not certain about myself, but when the others who gathered to write this book become big-league authors who represent Japan itself, the texts written here will become historical documents. And as a part of it, I'll be here, too. Yes, I am basically a popularity leech.

Anyway, all you've read so far is nothing but the tip of the iceberg. This is all I can tell you in a foreword. What's left is to tell the story, which I hope you will enjoy.

1

There was an army lined up on the plain.

Several thousand soldiers were waiting for the time to come. Their apparel was varied, but no matter how they were dressed, it was clear that none of them were human. Dark green skin, pronounced muscles, wicked faces and sharp fangs... it was an army of demi-human tribes, comprised of creatures commonly known as orcs, goblins, and trolls.

There was a man in front of them.

He was shorter than the brawnier warriors, but his build was barely different from that of the demi-humans. He also shared their dense beard and stern face. What made him stand out the most was the foreign-looking armor he was wearing.

An iron double cuirass lacquered in black, spaulders covered in platelets, faulds hanging from his waist, a extravagant helmet with metal plates at both sides. Suddenly, an orc raised a flag with a crest depicting two wild geese.

Who in this world would know him?

There was once a man who used such armor and that symbol. In his era, he served the hero known as Nobunaga Oda. Through him, he received the

nickname of “Charging Shibata” and was known as a valiant commander.

The armored man stood and extended his hand forward into the plain, where the battle would take place.

“CHARGE!”

A single order, and the demi-humans let out beastly roars. Kicking up dust, the army ran into the plain, changing shape akin to a living animal. In the center of the horde, the armored man made his expression sterner.

He was the one and only Katsuie Shibata.

2

There was an author called Katsuie Shibata.

Naturally, it was only a pen name given to him based on the commander from the Sengoku Period. He had absolutely no experience with bloody battles, and generally spent his time writing. The only place where a man like him could act like a Sengoku-era commander was the Sengoku Maid Café in Akihabara, and oh, would he enjoy it.

And so it was that on that day he made his way to Akihabara and entered an elevator in a small building.

Before arriving at his destination, he changed his mentality. This elevator was a time machine, and when it opened next, he would be in the Sengoku Period. Of course, it was only a Sengoku-themed maid café, but going through this ritual helped him travel from the mundane to the unusual.

And so, the elevator opened up.

What Katsuie saw made him blink in confusion.

“Did I go to the wrong floor?”

He was looking at a cavern.

It obviously wasn’t the café he wanted to go to, but he just figured that this was a new place using this decor for a theme. As he changed his mentality again, he pressed a button on the elevator’s control panel. However, it did

nothing. Katsuie took a step into the cave, wondering what was going on.

As he did, he was showered by an intense light coming from ahead.

He didn't have time to react. Somehow, the elevator he'd just left vanished, and he was now in what looked like nothing more than a cave.

"Success!"

"We did it!"

Two voices came from beyond the light.

Katsuie strained his eyes and saw two large silhouettes holding torches. They weren't normal humans. They were dark-green, unnaturally muscular, and had menacing faces that mixed features of man and pig, as well as sharp fangs sticking upwards out of their lower jaws.

"Umm... If I may ask...!"

One of the giants called out. He was the shorter of the two, and had a blond mohawk for a haircut.

"Are you Master Katsuie Shibata!?"

"Indeed. I am Katsuie."

The reply made the two giants raise their voices and express joy with high-fives and the like.

"We did it, brother!"

"Yeah! Our tribe can win now!"

Katsuie's name alone made them cry tears of joy. The scene was just about strange enough to shock him back to his usual way of thinking. A maid café this outlandish just couldn't exist. Hell, he'd come here to soothe himself with maids, so how did he end up being greeted by a couple of muscleheads?

He turned around, figuring he would wake up from this weird dream any second now. He had no idea where to go, but he walked as though escaping. The muscley brothers called out to him, but he didn't care. Katsuie just walked through the gloomy cave, hoping that the dream would end soon.

But as he turned a corner, he walked into someone.

“GYAH!?”

It was a completely unappealing scream. He looked and saw the other person, who he had knocked to the cold floor of the cave.

It was a girl. Just like the two gorilla-men behind him, she had dark-green skin, but she was a lot shorter and was wearing a fancy dress. She shook her head in pain, making her chestnut hair flip down over her face. If you ignored her strangely pointy ears, she wasn’t too different from a human girl.

“Princess!”

One of the muscleheads ran past Katsuie and helped the girl get back up.

“Princess, we have good news. Our muscle-summoning was a success.”

The other followed, and then the two put her on a shoulder each to support her like a palanquin.

“You did!? Is this Katsuie Shibata, then?”

Seated on the men’s meaty shoulders, the girl opened her large eyes wide. You could see joy in the gold of her pupils.

“Master Katsuie, please save my tribe!”

Looking down from her fleshy throne, the girl gave him a lovely smile.

It made Katsuie let out a sound—he actually found it a bit cute.

3

Katsuie and the girl looked at each other in a room set up in the cave.

“So I was summoned to another world?”

The girl—the princess—responded to his mutter with a nod.

“Yes. For a long time now, the inhabitants of this world have used magic that summons people from a different world. That’s how you were brought here.”

The princess reached for a wooden cup on the table. It contained a milky liquid.

“So that’s how it is. I understand.”

Katsuie could accept the situation. He was an author, after all. He'd had his share of delusions of being summoned to another world, so he had little trouble adapting to it when it actually happened.

"Anyway, this is an orc settlement. Do you know orcs? We're not one of the three major races, so we're called 'demi-humans,' but we do have a rich history."

She said it without much emphasis, but apparently, demi-humans were low on the societal totem pole here. While humans, elves, and dwarves lived in expansive urban areas, the tribes of the others had to live hiding in caves or dense forests.

"You said you wanted me to save your tribe. What did you mean?"

"Well..."

The princess' expression became gloomy. Her grip around the wooden cup tightened, and she opened and closed her mouth as though it was hard to talk about.

"Allow me to tell you about it."

The table spoke up. Well, it was actually an orc who was on all fours to act as a table, but whatever.

"These lands have a history of being ravaged by wars between the humans, elves, dwarves, as well as demi-humans such as goblins and trolls. They weren't just any wars, though. They had rules, and the victors would receive land."

He explained with a cup still on his back. It didn't seem like he was comfortable.

"What are these rules?"

The one to answer that was the chair the princess was sitting on—the orc with a mohawk.

"The warring sides had to summon heroes from the sacred texts and fight under their command."

"Sacred texts?"

The princess picked up a book she had placed at her side.

“This!”

The book’s cover read “Nobunaga’s Ambition: Daimyos.”

“This... is it?”

“Yes. This book was left behind by a grand hero who was summoned a thousand years ago. It’s written in divine letters, though, so we can’t read most of it...”

Katsuie didn’t know the details, but he assumed that the person summoned back then was either a history nerd or a gamer.

“Hmm? Wait a minute. So you summon heroes from that book?”

“Yes,” the three orcs said simultaneously before one of the two brothers continued.

“And you are Master Katsuie Shibata! The brave champion who served under Lord Nobunaga Oda himself!”

This wasn’t good.

This sad group of orcs had Katsuie Shibata the general and Katsuie Shibata the author completely mixed up. Unfortunately, this Katsuie wasn’t the madman who randomly broke bottles.

“Nhh... Princess... Isn’t it great that? We now have Master Katsuie!”

“Look at him in all his glory! He is exactly as he was in the texts!”

The orcish brothers, still on all fours, were moved to tears. The princess then slowly opened the book—a strategy guide for one of the “Nobunaga’s Ambition” games—and looked at the page with Katsuie Shibata over and over. Indeed, the picture of Katsuie Shibata portrayed there looked a lot like the man before her.

“And you summoned me so you could wage war?”

Katsuie chose to get back to the main topic. He could’ve told them that they had the wrong person, but he didn’t want to let down the emotional orcs.

“Yes! Now that we have you, we can also participate in war. Up until now,

orcs were bad at summoning magic and we couldn’t earn the right to fight, so...”

The princess looked down as if hurt. The orc acting as her chair let out a heavy sigh.

“Our kind couldn’t earn the right to fight for centuries now, and we only continued to lose our lands until this cramped cave was all we had left.”

The table then raised his head.

“We used to have a lot of brethren, but now the three of us are the last survivors.”

“That’s... pretty dire. So, the others...”

“They quit being orcs and moved to the big city.”

“Ah. So quitting is an option.”

The princess’s sad words made the brothers nod. Katsuie believed that the others had just left the tribe and adapted to civilized society, but it was probably a matter of pride rather than reason.

“Let me ask one thing... Were you brothers the ones who cast the summoning magic?”

“Yes. We captured a lady knight and had her show us how it’s done.”

“We paid her, too.”

Two happy brothers and a proud princess. Katsuie didn’t dig too deep, but it was easy to tell that they had been preparing for this day for a long time.

“With that out of the way... Sir Katsuie, we need your help.”

Katsuie folded his arms and closed his eyes in thought.

It was difficult for him to refuse at this point. To them, Katsuie was hope. He probably couldn’t help them as well as the real Katsuie Shibata could, but as one who used the man’s name, he had a certain amount of respect for the hero.

“Understood. I, Katsuie Shibata, will help you orcs. This new world will be ours to take!”

Those words were enough to make the orcs cheer up. The brothers even got up, spilling the milk on the floor and dropping the princess into the puddle. Not minding that at all, the three laughed in excitement and expectation.

“This reminds me, we forgot to introduce ourselves. I am the shorter and older of the orc brothers, Big Menge.”

“And I am the taller and younger, Little Menge. And this is our princess...”

The milk-covered princess put on an energetic smile.

“And I’m Allizzi. You can call me just ‘Izzi!’”

Orcish laughter resounded throughout the cavern.

4

Sometimes, it was easier to actually do something than worry about it. This was one of those times. With Katsuie as a commander, the orcs instantly attacked a nearby goblin settlement and quickly emerged victorious.

“I didn’t expect an attack from the orcs...”

Those words were said by the goblin chieftain. Orcs actually had lots of potential—even though it all came in the form of the Menge Brothers’ brutality—and even other demi-humans were wary of them. The only reason they lost over and over again was merely because they couldn’t participate in warfare, but now that they had summoned a hero conquering the surrounding lands was easy.

“I didn’t even do anything,” Katsuie muttered, standing in the middle of the goblin settlement, in front of tied-up goblin warriors.

“What are you saying!? It’s because you were standing behind us that we were able to work so hard!” Little Menge tried consoling him.

“That so?”

As he agreed to look at it that way, he heard a voice coming from deeper in the settlement. It was Big Menge, who’d been looking around the village.

“Master Katsuie! We captured the hero of this land!”

From beyond the trees, he saw the large silhouette of an orc and a warrior clad in red armor.

“Ack...!”

Katsuie wasn’t pleased to see him.

He’d taken up the role of Katsuie Shibata out of kindness and just to see where all this went, but this reminded him that there were other Sengoku-era heroes here. If he’d ran into someone who knew the real Katsuie Shibata, they would instantly know that he was a fake.

“He says he wants to see Master Katsuie!”

Big Menge graciously led the warrior to him. Apparently, heroes were to be treated with respect, even if they were enemies.

“Well, if it isn’t Master Shibata...” The man sighed in amazement. He was in his forties, but Katsuie recognized his unique helmet adornments and red armor —he’d seen them in Nobunaga’s Ambition.

“Are you the Ii family’s...”

“Indeed. I am Naomasa Ii!” The man then bowed his head. The large, horn-like adornments scratched Katsuie’s cheeks.

“I could not thank you when you were alive. Never would I have thought that I would get to do it in a land so distant.”

It seemed that Katsuie was safe.

Naomasa Ii and Katsuie Shibata were from slightly different eras, so the man couldn’t tell that he wasn’t the real Katsuie.

“Master Ii, you made a name for yourself in the battle against Takeda, did you not? I was far from there, so I only heard the details, and from how you look, I see you continued to gather fame even after I passed away.” Katsuie just went with the flow and said something that seemed appropriate. It was very effective, seeing as Naomasa embraced him by the shoulders, clearly overwhelmed. To him, Katsuie was a senior champion of the Sengoku Period. Recognition from such a man not only made him forget his defeat here, but made him invite Katsuie for a long talk. It was an impressive display of

sportsmanship.

“Goblins! We’re siding with Master Katsuie! We will unite as one and emerge victorious!”

Naomasa didn’t even consider what the goblins thought, but the fact that they’d survived this made them roar in agreement.

“We did it, Master Katsuie! The goblins are with us now!”

Big Menge was clearly excited. His brother was busy freeing the captured goblins, who simply enjoyed the event and began gathering all the settlement’s booze for a feast.

This looked like a gathering of sporty, carefree muscleheads. There was no way it wouldn’t be a good time. They celebrated the first victory and the good start of the alliance between Katsuie and the orcs and Naomasa and the goblins.

“Sir Katsuie! If this continues, it won’t be long until the revival of the orcs!”

Princess Izzi participated, too, of course, and her laughter was very pure.

5

A week had passed since the alliance with goblins.

Katsuie and Naomasa had fun chats about the Sengoku Era, as well as strategic discussions about the coming battles. Behind them, there were Princess Izzi and the Menge Brothers, playing something with the goblins.

“Sir Katsuie! Look, look! I made friends with the goblins!”

She was racing the goblins while sitting on Big Menge, who was on all fours. Her long life in the cave had ended, and she was now able to play out under the wide sky.

“It’s a precious sight indeed, Master Katsuie. However, we cannot drop our guard. According to the scouts we sent out, the trolls are approaching our army.”

“Trolls?”

A moment after Katsuie's question, Big Menge shouted "Trolls!" out loud and stood up, making Princess Izzi fall on the ground. The goblins helped her up.

"You know them, Big Menge?"

"They are another kind of demi-humans. They're close to us orcs, but they have a rough temper and are known to be violent and dangerous."

Katsuie got lost in thought and glared at the map spread out on the stump that the heroes had been looking over.

"Master Naomasa. Where are the trolls supposed to be coming from?"

"They would pass this river here. Though, that's assuming they would go straight for this settlement."

"It's decided, then. We shall wait for them there."

That was the cue that a battle was coming. All that was left was to march and advance, quickly and efficiently. The union between Katsuie and Naomasa, orcs and goblins would leave the settlement as soon as possible.

Thus, Naomasa arrived at the river on the map. It was already evening, and upon leaving the forest, they found themselves standing on a riverbed.

"Master Katsuie, is this well?"

"Mhm. The formation is good."

Following Katsuie's idea, they put the Menge Brothers at the back and placed the goblins at the front.

"They were advancing here because they believed that goblins would be easy to crush. We will take advantage of their carelessness and handle them with the orcs."

Naomasa nodded in understanding.

The trees on the other side shook, making countless birds fly away. According to the scouts, the trolls were close, but you didn't need more than the shaking trees to see that.

Katsuie heard voices. The goblins were yelping, and the things on the other side released scary voices, creating a strange kind of harmony.

“What is that?”

This was Katsuie’s first time seeing trolls. Fearsome creatures appeared from the forest on the other side of the river. They held dangerous weapons such as clubs and spears, but their appearance was extremely roundish. They had blank faces and soft-looking bellies... They looked a bit like hippos, but Katsuie knew of something they resembled even more.

“Moomins...”

As though they heard his words, the trolls on the other side looked at Katsuie’s army and let out an unnerving roar.

“M-Master Katsuie! The trolls are angry!”

“Uhh... Mhm...”

They looked like moomins to him. A horde of raging moomins. They actually looked adorable, so he couldn’t relate to Naomasa’s or the goblins’ fear.

“Oh, well. Watch as I show you my plan.”

Katsuie stood and faced the horde of battle-ready trolls.

“Hey, you weaklings! Can you even move with those fat legs buried in the ground! Bet ya can’t! Hahaha!”

It was just pure incitement. He was provoking the trolls as loudly as he could. It seemed to work, since the moomins started swinging their clubs around.

“Damn you! You’re dead!”

The moomins threatened them with bloodshot eyes. They looked more menacing than you’d expect.

“Don’t you go anywhere! Stay where you are! Ugh! Hey!”

One by one, they charged into the river with their stubby legs. Letting anger take charge, they went to beat Katsuie to a pulp.

Eventually...

“I’ll kill ybhbhbhbh...”

In the middle of the river, one of the trolls started to sink and was picked up

by the current. The others didn't even notice and continued charging, only to meet the same fate. They were quite the berserkers.

"Master Katsuie, this is...!"

"Mhm. The Tedori River battle."

That was the battle where Katsuie Shibata lost against Kenshin Uesugi. They were retreating and had to pass a river. They'd suffered great casualties regardless of whether they tried to fight or retreat, and it had been a well-known major defeat for the Oda family.

"Seeing it myself makes me understand just how absurd fighting in a river is..."

Katsuie raised his hand and called the Menge Brothers, who gave a response from further downstream.

Suddenly, a large net popped up on the river, and the moomins — or trolls — swept by the stream were all caught up in it.

"We captured the trolls!"

The plan was a success. The trolls didn't think things through and were swept away by the river to be caught by the net further downstream. All that was left was to drag them out, which wasn't undoable with all the goblins' help.

The trolls were still raging, but having had their lives saved made it hard for them to resist too much.

"Master Katsuie! What a great battle that was!"

Naomasa was overjoyed. It was a bit underwhelming, but a victory was a victory.

6

A few months passed since then.

"Master Katsuie! You are exactly as the pictures portrayed!"

The Menge Brothers praised him excessively. Katsuie had just equipped a set of armor made by the nearby dwarves who'd recently joined his side. They'd

also renewed their flag and were now looking like a proper army.

“You think so?”

Feeling a bit uncomfortable, Katsuie sat down on a camp stool. He was in an encampment inside a forest, and they were attacking the elves.

The recent achievements of the orcish alliance were striking. They had already conquered all the midsize tribes using the power of the Menge Brothers, the numbers of the goblins, and Naomasa’s strategies. After they got the nearby trolls to join them, they went on to take in the kobolds and dwarves, as well.

In addition to that...

“Master Katsuie!”

Naomasa’s voice rang out from the forest. You could hear armor clattering as a few generals rushed in.

“We’ve successfully invaded the elves!”

Naomasa wasn’t alone. He had Matabei Goto, Muneshige Tachibana, and Soteki Asakura at his side. They were the heroes summoned by the other tribes, and none of them had any strong ties to the Katsuie Shibata of history.

“I would not expect less of you, Master Shibata. You truly are the one who brought the Asakura family to ruin. Though, if I was alive, Oda wouldn’t have come out on top,” said Soteki.

“Ooh, that’s a harsh one, old man Soteki,” Matabei joked, and they all laughed.

Katsuie also cracked a smile. He could stay on the same page as these generals because he was into the Sengoku Period, but he was constantly worried that someone might find out.

“Anyway, Master Katsuie. Most of the local tribes are now yours to command, but...”

Muneshige suddenly made a stern face and looked at Naomasa. He realized something and nodded.

“Master Katsuie, the final enemy is the allied army of the three major races,

seated in the area around a city. We are an elite group, but we are still just a gathering of smaller tribes. Our next enemy will be fearsome.” Naomasa said it calmly, with lots of confidence. The idea that he had such skilled generals from different times at his side was enlivening him.

“Let’s do it, Katsuie!”

Matabei made a fist. Muneshige and Soteki surely felt the same way. The line-up of the heroes made Katsuie slightly sentimental. He threw away the worry, fired himself up and stood up.

“All right! We’re heading for the city containing the allied army. The hero leading the charge there will be one of us, as well!”

The commanders all cheered, and the demi-humans outside joined in.

“M-Master Katsuie!”

Suddenly, there was a voice. Little Menge was breathing raggedly as he returned from his scouting mission, running between the trees.

“It’s important! The allied army is offering a negotiation!”

Little Menge raised the leather scroll he had.

“The enemy hero, Hideyoshi Hashiba, wants to meet Master Katsuie!”

The report made Katsuie’s face turn pale.

7

The advance was reaching its peak.

“Damn it! It had to be Hideyoshi!”

Katsuie rolled on the floor in his room in the cave, cluthing his head in misery. This was the place where he first met the orcs, and now it was a place he rarely visited, but he had privacy here.

“I mean, there’s no way that Hideyoshi doesn’t know the real Katsuie.”

That was the only thing bothering him right now, and it was a big thing indeed. Since it was linked to the other generals’ morale, he couldn’t refuse the

talk with Hideyoshi, and tomorrow, he would be facing him and his allied forces.

“Sir Katsuie? What’s wrong?”

Someone called out to him. Still on the floor, he raised his head and saw Princess Izzi looking at him very curiously.

“Oh, nothing... Never mind that, what are you holding?”

There was a strange animal in the princess’s hands. It was unusually thin and looked like a cross between a goat and a snake.

“Oh, I was about to milk this goatworm. Her milk is an important drink for us orcs.”

The noodly goat let out a “Baa.” The idea that this was the source of the milk Katsuie was given when he first came here made him slightly uncomfortable.

“I see. Well, we have an important talk tomorrow.”

“We do! I’ll make sure you drink some milk, too! I hope it gives you energy!”

Upon seeing her innocent smile, Katsuie broke. He let out a sigh and got up.

“By the way, Princess Izzi. If I may ask something strange... What would you think if I wasn’t the real Katsuie Shibata?”

He dragged the admission out of his soul and let it flop on the floor between them. The truth would come out during the talk with Hideyoshi, so he figured that he should reveal it himself.

However, the princess was just confused.

“But... You are Sir Katsuie, Sir Katsuie.”

“Hmm... That’s not what I mean.”

“No. I know what you mean. Summoning heroes is difficult. The eras they come from and the ages they are can vary a lot. But since I don’t know the real Sir Katsuie, you, the one I’m talking to right now, are the only Sir Katsuie I have.”

The princess beamed, and the strange goat she was holding let out a sound.

“You are our hero now, Sir Katsuie. I’m sure you came here because I wished

you would.”

Her honest feelings made Katsuie happy. He cracked a smile, put his hands on his hips and got up.

Heroes were but mental images of people, drawn by those who came after their time. They were akin to illusions, and there was no “real” of “fake” there. As long as this little princess desired it, Katsuie would be Katsuie Shibata the hero.

“Indeed! I was worried about nothing, it seems. I was summoned by you and yours. All that is for me to do is to lead the orcs to victory and glory.”

Katsuie and Princess Izzi walked out of the gloomy cave. Outside, they saw a starry sky and heard loud voices. The demi-human alliance members were partying in the nearby settlement.

Tomorrow would be the day he would settle the score with Hideyoshi.

8

And so, a second Kiyosu Conference was held in this world. The stage was the great plain close to the city. The demi-human alliance and the allied forces of the three major races were facing each other.

“I am going, then.”

Clad in armor, Katsuie took a step forward. Princess Izzi and the Menge Brothers waved their hands as they and all the other demi-humans and heroes saw him off.

This would be a pre-battle talk. When it ended, the armies would start fighting tooth and nail, and the victorious side would lord over this world.

Katsuie looked ahead. A single soldier was drawing closer from the opposing side. Neither of them had any companions, so they would be standing alone in the middle of the plain.

The two men faced each other.

“Are you Master Hideyoshi?”

Katsuie looked at the man in front of him. The radiant helmet covering his head fit his mental image of Hideyoshi Hashiba perfectly. He was a bit short, but his face was actually very handsome and elegant—definitely not deserving of the “bald rat” nickname he’d been given.

“Master Katsuie...?”

His tone was questioning. Of course it was. This Katsuie wasn’t the Katsuie Shibata that this Hideyoshi knew.

Katsuie gave up and closed his eyes.

However, Hideyoshi suddenly took Katsuie’s hand and gave it a shake.

“Are you actually Master Katsuie!?”

“Y-Yes...”

“No no no, you’re *Master Katsuie*, right!?”

“That’s what I said.”

“That’s not what I mean! You’re Katsuie Shibata, the author!”

Katsuie gasped in surprise. Hideyoshi not only knew he was fake, but also knew who he actually was.

“Ah. Hold on. Right. There’s no way I should be able to know that.” Hideyoshi seemed to understand something, but Katsuie was still thoroughly confused.

“I actually respect your work a lot.” The man took off his helmet and grinned wider. Upon seeing Hideyoshi without his helmet, Katsuie couldn’t hide his surprise. It wasn’t someone he knew — it was because the man had blond hair. There were no Sengoku generals who dyed their hair like that.

That left only one reasonable explanation.

“I’m not actually the Hideyoshi from the Sengoku Period. I’m just a club host who uses the name ‘Hideyoshi Hashiba’ while I’m working.”

“Eh? Seriously?”

“Yeah. I like Sengoku stuff, and read your books because of it. Your pen name made me jealous, so I followed your example. Y’know, just like how the real Hideyoshi used Niwa’s and Shibata’s names for his surname.”

Hideyoshi was acting more laid back than you could ever expect.

“Anyway, I got summoned by mistake, and everyone treated me like a big deal, so I couldn’t back out.”

“Same here.”

“Seriously? We’re in the same situation, then.”

Hideyoshi made a very serious expression. He was probably trying to look like a real general, but yeah, he was definitely more of the “attractive host” type.

“Anyway, I thought I’d be screwed if the real Katsuie came, so I thought I’d just go and tell him myself. But man, I didn’t expect to get the author Katsuie.”

“I know what you mean.”

The two laughed. The truth was more amusing than either of them expected.

“So, Hideyoshi, you gonna retreat?”

“No no no, I can’t. People are expecting a whole lot from of me, y’know.”

“Same here. I guess that means that we gotta do it.”

“Yep. I may not look the type, but I’ve always wanted to get in a real battle.”

They ended their talk with a handshake and a nod before turning around and returning to their armies. Both of them were fakes, but both were heroes. Anyone who bore the expectations of a hero had to fulfill their role regardless of what they were on the inside.

“My friends! My warriors! It is an honor to lead you!”

Katsuie’s shout resounded across the plain. He saw his people ahead of him, and upon seeing his confidence, the Menge Brothers, Princess Izzi, and everyone else watching this scene felt their resolve grow.

“I call out to you all!”

He raised his hand, and the demi-human alliance roared.

“This is our decisive battle!”

Katsuie stood in front of his motley army of demi-humans. The opposing army was also cheering, their blood boiling for the upcoming battle from something

their own commander was shouting to them.

A bird flew high in the sky between the two armies and let out a piercing cry.

“CHARGE!”

Thus the opening curtain rose on this world’s Battle of Shizugatake.

Case 6: Monster Author XXX

By Hoko Tsuda

Disclaimer

This story is a complete work of fiction. The research and medical practices detailed are all fictional, and the characters bear no connection to any existing individuals.

Additionally, this is a derivative work of Being X's *Monster Doctor Tsuda Series* to which the main character bears no relation to. Disregarding the rights surrounding the name, Tsuda acknowledges that he does not possess the copyright to this property.

Prologue

“‘Authors’ Isekai Course’?” I softly repeat over the counter of our usual bar.

As I reflect on the words, I find a wrinkle set in on my brow. Despite this, the one who brought this idea up in the first place flashes a charming, confident smile like he always does.

“Ya got that right, the Authors’ Isekai Course. So far, we’ve gone n’ done the Authors’ Noodle Course n’ the Authors’ Fried Course. S’about high time we moved onta the next stage, yeah? Whacha think about that?”

That’s Koekawa Touya, droning up a storm with that same old dubious accent. He’s a professional writer who also writes doujins alongside me. While there is another regular member of our little club, he’s currently too busy to keep in touch with us, leaving only the two of us to contemplate our next project at the bar.

“Okay, but so far our ‘adventures’ have been about doing research by eating real food at real shops. I don’t know what you expect me to say about eating some imaginary cuisine.”

“Oh, yeah, right, sure, but the three of us’re always writin’ isekai stories anyway. Shouldn’t be too hard ta mix it up a bit and start tacklin’ the kinda food we’d get in the kindsa restaurants we write about in our own books.”

“I don’t know...”

No, of course I understand what he’s trying to say. But the whole point of our little writers’ group has been and always will be eating food. Nothing more, nothing less.

There’s a limit to the amount of times a man gets to eat in his life. Three meals a day... maybe five or six if you really push it. From this very moment to the end of one’s life, there is an unseen hard cap on the amount, type, and quality of items that can be consumed.

Then, wouldn’t you agree that the desire to capture in words that glimmer of beauty from the finite; to grant immortality to that brief moment by binding it

for eternity within a book, is simply a natural facet of the human condition?

As things stood, we'd been writing doujins together for a while now. Naturally, whenever we stopped by a restaurant for the sake of research, we ordered seconds as many times as needed and never left a scrap behind. There were restaurants that we went so far as to flee editors and deadlines to march upon.

Meaning—the gist of what I'm trying to say—even if the subject matter is based in the isekais we write ourselves, this was such a great deviation from our normal get-togethers that no one could fault me for my bewilderment.

"Well, give it some thought, would ya? There's still some time before the next Comiket. Aight, gonna hafta 'scuse myself."

"Ah, wait, I... hah." I sigh, realizing it's already too late. Despite his physique, Koekawa is surprisingly nimble on his feet, and he's gone. I've run into him in so many places at so many times, I have to seriously wonder whether he's an individual or a series of clones running on collective consciousness. Whatever the case, that matter could wait; his identity is not my most pressing concern at the moment.

"Isekai food, huh...?"

A story about food I have no conceivable way of collecting data on. I would be lying if I said I didn't have minor reservations about the concept.

"Whenever possible, I try to only describe food after I've inspected it with my own tongue first. But there's no way I can go to an isekai... I'll settle for some ramen."

I'd already hit up two separate restaurants with Koekawa, but the hours do go by, and it is nearly the right time for my insides to run dry and demand a midnight snack. When you think of midnight snacks, you think of ramen.

I hope to always be honest and upfront when it comes to my stomach. My feet naturally set me on the path towards my usual ramen joint.

"'On holiday'... huh."

So this is what it means to be down on your luck. This ramen bar has up until

now been open late every night, as if it's waiting just for me. Today, of all days, they had to take a day off.

"Nothing I can do about that. Guess I'll have some cup ramen at ho—mmn?"

I turn towards home, but the moment I'm about to set my foot down to make my first step, an unfamiliar sight catches the corner of my eye.

"Was this stand always here?"

A few years had passed since I moved to this area, and this was the first time I'd ever encountered a food stall of any stripe at this street corner. I'm struck by a slight sense of paranoia. At the same time, I can feel my stomach pleading for food. Paranoia and hunger. It's pretty obvious which one I should give more priority to.

"Welcome, come on in. I'm sorry, I haven't finished setting up yet, so all I've got to serve is ramen. Oh, but it's ramen you want, I'll have it right out in a jiffy." The maestro turns to me with an apologetic look as I'm practically sucked into his stall.

Oh I see, I think after a cursory glance around. When the store is ready, it will apparently offer oden and the like as well. But, yes, this is once again something beyond my control. Certainly, oden is a fascinating, devilish food. However, as I am always honest to my stomach, if something is immediately available, I must seek it without hesitation. I believe that is the right way to get through life.

"Very well, my good yeoman, then ramen it is. One ramen, extra firm."

"Coming right up. Here's your isekai ramen."

"'Isekai ramen'?"

I take the expertly prepared bowl, hesitating a moment over the peculiar combination of words. The mastermind behind it gives me a wry smile, clearly accustomed to this reaction. He spares no time in explaining the origin of the name.

"It's the name of our house special. In that moment of ecstasy when you finish your bowl, it's like your soul has climbed to heaven and you've made your way to a whole new world. That's why it's 'Isekai Ramen.' "

“Oh, I see... hm? This taste, it’s...!?”

Exquisite. Far too exquisite. Amazing, simply amazing. My tongue exudes tears of joy as it sends chimes of approval to my brain at such a rate I feel ashamed that I’d only been half-listening to his sales pitch.

My taste buds are working at full throttle in a desperate bid to catch every last particulate of noodle and soup, but to no avail. While gentle at first taste, it’s not long before this dense and deep flavor exceeds the abilities of my nervous system to process. The sensation overwhelms me. What I can truly call the bountiful taste of God jolts through my tongue before running a lap around my body.

“So what do you think of our house special, bud? How is it?”

“It’s the best. There’s no other word for it! Why, I’ve never had ramen... right, I’ve never...”

My words will no longer come from my mouth This sheer bliss keeps me from even thinking straight. My brain has already overheated simply from partaking of these blessings of flavor and my... thoughts won’t... come together. No... wait... my thoughts... really aren’t...

“I’m glad you’re satisfied. But don’t be so quick to judge; the real draw of our ramen is the aftertaste. I hope you enjoy your trip.”

His words don’t fully reach me... I can’t focus on the last part of what he says...

What’s this...? the world is suddenly growing distant...

Chapter 1: Hello Isekai

“Dark-tor, Sir Dark-tor?”

I hear an uneasy voice speaking from right in front of me. My consciousness is slowly coming back when the words reach me.

“Hmm... err, where is this?”

“We are in your office, as I’m sure you know... Is something wrong? Are you feeling ill?”

I can see again. A robust young blond man peers into my face with bewilderment. I’ve never seen this guy in my life.

“Who are you?”

“I’m your loyal subordinate Slapperdash, sir... though my predecessor only just retired the other day, so I understand why you might not remember my name.”

A name I’ve never heard before, talking about events I’ve never heard anything about. More pressingly, where exactly am I? This room clearly isn’t mine. I don’t have “subordinates.” I don’t even have an office.

Confusion. Anxiety. Chaos I’m suddenly buried with these emotions.

Extraordinary circumstances require extraordinary explanations. In short, this is clearly...

“Ow.”

That’s impossible... That isn’t supposed to hurt in a dream. My pinched cheek sends piercing pain to my brain.

...Calm down. I know this is impossible, but there’s something else I know. I of all people should know what to do in this situation. Perhaps everything I’ve done in my daily life has prepared me for this very moment.

I woke up in an unfamiliar place. Which means...

“I’m in another world... aren’t I?” Even as I’m muttering it, I realize how

ridiculous this all is. And yet, the man calling himself Slapperdash affirms my suspicions all too easily.

“Yes, of course you are.”

Don’t get me wrong... I’ve definitely thought about it before. I did want to go to another world to learn what it was like. As a matter of fact, it was only a couple of minutes ago that I was thinking that exact thing as I wondered what I was going to do about the Authors’ Isekai Course.

But, I mean... I never would have thought it would actually happen.

An unknown place, unknown person, unknown me. Unknown me!?

“Wait... don’t tell me... I...” It doesn’t hit me until that moment. The body I’m in isn’t the one I’m familiar with.

In retrospect, that ramen seller did say something to that effect: his Isekai Ramen was so good, it sent my soul off to another world.

“So my soul’s entered a new vessel?”?”

“Umm... Are you quite alright?”

The blonde man gives me a questioning look.

Crap. I’ve been so caught up in the moment that I’ve been acting and talking without thinking. I need to calm down and get in control.

Okay, so this is an isekai. How are they going to treat me if I start saying that some unknown person’s soul has suddenly come along and possessed one of their best men? One look around is enough to tell me that the cultural level here is likely to be around that of the Middle Ages of my own world...in which case, they might haul off to this place’s local version of the Inquisition.

Of course, it’s possible that this kind of thing happens all the time here, and they’re used to people from other worlds. Unfortunately, I don’t have enough information to tell at the moment, so...

“Oh, no, it’s nothing at all. I’m just rather fatigued, because I’ve been suffering from insomnia... But, remind me, what were my plans for today?” It comes out a little forced, but I’ll blame that on lack of sleep and change the subject. I need to get as much information out of this guy before me as I can.

“Today will be like any other day. You are to see to the comfort of someone who has taken the longest voyage.”

“I see, yes, of course. A traveler.”

All right, that’s something. Naturally, there’s still a lot I don’t know, but I have to start using deductive reasoning to figure out my situation before I ask too many questions and people get suspicious. Think. Gotta think.

The blond man claims to be my subordinate. What’s more, I seem to be in a position where I must entertain or guide a guest from far-off lands. Putting it all together... the person whose body I took over must be an individual of considerably high status. Worst-case scenario, he might even be some kind of diplomat.

I don’t know the first thing about the laws or customs of this world. Which means... it would be foolish for me to meet this traveler.

“My apologies, it must be my fatigue, but I’m not feeling up to par today. Might I engage with this traveler at a later date?”

“Well, certainly...but doing so would increase the chances of corruption...” Distress crosses the man’s face. Okay, so If I don’t meet with this “traveler,” there could be room for “corruption...” Meaning I will be opening a window for bribery. I’m starting to see it.

The owner of this body definitely works to maintain some sort of country or organization. What’s more, if he’s preventing corruption, he must clearly be a respectful and upright individual. I can’t possibly deal with this envoy as honestly and sincerely as the person I’m inhabiting would. There’s only one option left to me.

“Corruption is definitely something we should avoid. Very well then, I leave this voyager to you. Please, conduct yourself just as you’ve seen me do.”

“Eh!? Y-You want me to do...it?” he gasps, his face turning pale in shock.

Hmm I took him to be competent, but if it’s that much of a surprise to him, this task must be a difficult one. What sort of traveler would require such virtue and delicacy to interact with...? while this point does intrigue me, I understand that diplomacy is a complicated, mysterious, and stressful field.

It occurs to me that this must be something that all worlds have in common. My respect for the owner of this body increases as I attempt to say something that sounds like what a respectable superior would.

“Yes, I’ll leave it in your capable hands. I’m sure you can get it taken care of without me, but you mustn’t let your guard down. Any unforeseen happenings are best prevented in before they can start. It will surely be best for the both of us.”

Diplomacy consists of using your right hand to greet people while pointing a gun with the left. Both parties need to be able to open their hearts in conversation while making sure that the other side knows they aren’t one to be trifled with. Of course, a basic fact like that can’t be anything terribly novel to the man, but entrusting this task to him with no instructions at all would probably give him a reason to worry about me, and I don’t need that. I have to say something that sounds helpful, but is ultimately meaningless.

“I see, so that’s how it is. I... understand...” says the man called Slapperdash as he leaves the room, teetering back and forth with the same pale complexion still on his face.

Whew I breathe a large sigh the moment I’m alone. I can’t help but think I’ve done something bad to the poor man, but at least I managed to get out of the immediate problem.

Still, is this whole bizarre situation even possible? Here I am, and it’s all completely real to me. I can’t just ignore it. I’m going to have to find out as much as I can about this world I find myself in...

“Mn? What’s this?” I murmur. There’s a small memo pad on the seat where the blond man had been sitting. “Is this his? Normally, I wouldn’t go through other peoples’ personal writings, but...”

Privacy and common decency must be respected over all else, but this is an emergency. If a notepad, a treasure trove of information about this place, is practically dropped in my lap, how should I see this as anything other than a gift from the heavens?

That’s definitely it. All my positive karma is finally working for me. Right, that noisy man who keeps going on about diets every time he opens his mouth

should reflect on himself from time to time...

"'Soodah Observation Record...' What's this?"

* * *

"We're in hot water now."

Minister Slapperdash returned to the auditors' room, frightfully unsteady on his feet. The moment his colleagues noted his white face, they exchanged looks off unrest.

"Wh-What happened, Slapperdash? I was certain that monster's heart would dance with glee at the prospect of desecrating the corpse of the great dragon..."

"If that was the case, we would still have had the slightest salvation." Once he said this, he could no longer contain the great sigh he had been holding back. This reaction prompted one of his coworkers to hesitantly open his mouth.

"I-Is it possible that he's demanding even more!?"

"How could he!? Just how much danger did our kingdom have to go through to simply obtain the great dragon... You're saying that venomous serpent can't even understand that!?"

Bewildered, irritated objections were raised one after another. These men had been met with a choice: either their ethics or their nation. They ultimately opted to follow the whims of that vile fiend who demanded the dismantling, the *desecration* of every life form in the world. The duties put upon them ate away at their sanity and burned holes in their guts. By this point, a large number of their compatriots had already left the facility due to mental scarring; Slapperdash couldn't help but sympathize with them. At the same time, he now envied their fortune in having found an escape from such blasphemous deeds.

The reason being, the vile fiend had now thrust a certain definitive task upon him.

"That monster holds no interest in, and no comprehension of, our hardships.

Not as long as that unfair agreement exists between us. It was our greatest mistake.”

On that day, when His Majesty had collapsed from illness, they had made their decision. No matter what the risks, they would summon someone who could save their lord. In the end, the King had recovered and regained his former vigor.

Yes... and in exchange, a completely one-sided agreement was formed, one that essentially exempted that monster from all forms of law.

“Do you mean to say he plans to use that contract for his evil schemes?”

“In a certain light, yes, but not exactly. I fear this is only conjecture, but...it seems he has noticed.” Slapperdash curtly replied. His response was so lacking in information it immediately elicited a second question.

“Noticed? What could he have noticed?”

“He has realized our true objectives. That we are only pretending to be his subordinates to keep him under our surveillance. With that in mind, he has ordered us to dissect the dragon ourselves... He must be testing our loyalty.”

Minister Slapperdash broke into a self-deriding laugh. He had been told to cut up the great dragon while remaining wary of that evil man’s watchful eyes. This could only mean one thing: he wished to carry on his research while having it on the record that he himself did not participate in the procedure whatsoever. The blasphemous sin of violating the holy remains would go down in the nation’s history, and his name alone would be spared from it. How...How repulsive could he be?

“To ask that of us...”

“He must take perverse glee in watching us cross the ethical line, one by one. Perhaps he’s only kept us alive for this moment.” And once he had said that, Slapperdash was off to the desk where he kept his belongings. He hurriedly began clearing up everything there.

“Mn... Slapperdash, what’s wrong? Why are you packing up?”

“Oh, it’s nothing. I’ve just got a little letter for the King’s Privy Council.”

“N-Not so fast! You’re handing in your resignation? I’m not letting you get out of this, you sneak! Ah, hey, quit running!” While Minister Slapperdash scrambled to vacate with all due haste, his colleagues were quicker, and they were able to seal off his escape. Their numerical advantage forced him to give up on the idea; his shoulders fell and he sighed again.

“If you won’t allow me to quit and run, then what exactly do you people think we should do?”

“Reinforcements... Yes, let’s call for reinforcements.”

“Reinforcements for what? You want to increase the number of hypocritical hands stained in evil?” Slapperdash defiantly rejected the notion.

However, the man standing directly in his path shook his head, looking back at the minister with a resolute gaze. “No, not at all. The fiend already knows everything. At this point, we should be preparing ourselves to do away with him.”

“B-But that would go against the sacred contract!”

The man had entered into a vile contract, one including fearsome clauses such as “diplomatic immunity” along with “complete and utter nonintervention with the execution of professional duties.” Should it be breached, the distortions of causality would shake the boundaries of reality. There was no telling what terrible fate would befall any who attempted to do so.

Not long ago, Sir Carliss of the Ministry of Justice had tried to lay a hand on the defenseless fiend, only for his life to end before he even had a say in the matter. Alas, even knowing such fearsome precedent, Slapperdash’s colleagues remained firm.

“What difference does it make now...? Either we violate a sacred contract and be smote, or follow his lead and let our souls fall from the grace of God.”

“You...have a point. I agree, even if it costs my life...we will rid the world of that Dark-tor! Get in touch with the capital at once!”

Chapter 2: Goodbye Isekai

“I don’t even know what to say about this... What a terrible visitor they’ve had to deal with.” I shut the notepad with a heavy sigh. The notes left behind by that “Slapperdash” guy are an investigation report detailing a malign entity named “Soodah of the Dark-tor clan.” This Soodah is an otherworldly entity who made some kind of terribly unequal contract with the people here shortly after being summoned to this world. It essentially gave him the same legal protections as a foreign diplomat in my world; he was immune from arrest and could act with complete disregard of the laws here, and he was taking advantage of this deal to carry out all sorts of unscrupulous deeds. It’s rather hard to believe that anyone would have allowed it.

“Still, ‘Soodah,’ huh...? It’s pretty funny how similar the name is, but this ‘Dark-tor Soodah’ is so terrible that I can’t laugh about it. He said ‘the longest voyage,’ too. Maybe this traveler I’m supposed to meet with is yet another summoned visitor...”

As I’m saying that, something suddenly occurs to me. The fact that this traveler is coming to *me* for a bribe means that the owner of this body is in a position to observe and properly handle people from other worlds.

“If he lets his guard down for a single moment, another contract like that could be made... I guess it’s only natural that they’d fear corruption,” I mutter to myself. Again, I feel a deep respect to the owner of this body. Whoever he is, he works tirelessly to protect this country from such vile people as Dark-tor Soodah. I’m sure he’s an upright and pious man.

Yes, now that it’s all coming together, it’s only natural that I’d start holding this nameless official in high regard. I’m really rather sorry that I ended up invading his body, of all people. I have to think about what I can do.

“For starters, I’ll have to investigate. I don’t know how much I can do, but the disappearance of this body’s owner will presumably be a tragic loss to the country.”

Of course, I don’t know how well I’ll be able to imitate his character. I have no

confidence in my ability to protect the country from maliciously unfair deals like he had been doing before I came along. Even so, I feel the power of justice beating within my heart, and I want to believe that I won't fall short of the task ahead. Then...

"Let's start with what I can do. What I need most is information. I should start looking through the nearby rooms. It seems this one here's a reference room... Wait, what is this!?"

The door I'd stepped through was indeed labeled a "reference room," but the bizarre hellscape before me stops me in my tracks. Countless... yes, quite literally *countless* bottles of organs suspended in formalin. I've been to a specimen exhibition before to collect material for my writing. But here, there are just an inconceivable number of bottles, each containing some kind of entrails, all of them clearly of different sizes and varieties from anything I'd seen before. The bottles packed every inch of the narrow room.

"Dragon... Orc... Goblin..." The labels on each bottle explain their contents in excruciating detail, specifying exactly what organs come from what lifeforms. What even is all of this? Why is something like *this* right next to the office of someone so honest and pure... I see!

"These items were all confiscated from Dark-tor Soodah!"

According to the notepad, Dark-tor Soodah sought out the bodies and organs of each and every manner of being, almost as if he was demanding blood sacrifices. Presumably, this is all the evidence the authorities had seized from him.

The owner of this body had taken it upon himself to put them into safekeeping. He'd made sure they didn't attract the public eye and put them right next to his own room...

"Even if it was in service to the country, what a sad life he must have lived..."

I'm already tearing up. All thanks to a single monster, his sense of responsibility compelled him to manage and keep guard over everything that had been seized. My chest grows tight as I think of how this task must have whittled away at his spirit.

The man in this body must have been a saint. He possessed at least enough devotion to deserve the title. I'm overcome with overflowing emotion. While it feels as if these thoughts might sweep me away, I can't let myself be taken by a moment of fervor. I have to act in this man's place, if only for a short while. That means, I should look at this room from a different viewpoint, through the eyes of a scientist. Unfortunately...

"If only that guy was here with me."

A face flashes into my thoughts: the third member of my writing group. He's a doctor, with a name similar to that of this vile fiend... If he was here, he might have been able to gather far more information from this room. Unfortunately, he's been busy with his main job lately and I haven't been able to reach him at all for the past few days.

"No, now that my soul's been isekai'd, establishing contact with my old friends is the least of my worries."

I sigh, understanding all too well that there is a limit to what information I'll be able to obtain here, and return right back to the office. I'm greeted there by the blond-haired man who was supposed to have gone off to meet the voyager.

"Oh, I didn't expect you here. Have you already finished entertaining our guest?" I ask the stiff-faced man with a slight tilt of my head.

He nervously shakes his head.

"No, not yet. There is something I must deal with before that, you see."

"And what would that be?" I inquire, unable to follow where this is going.

Suddenly, he thrusts out his finger.

"I have to deal...with you!" The sheer conviction in his voice makes up for the strangeness of the statement. As he speaks, a swarm of men floods into the room.

"Wh-What is all this!?" I'm caught off-guard by the unexpected spectacle. Not that it matters, as he completely disregards me as he continues in a voice growing in confidence.

"We... We no longer fear the breach of our contract. We're finally putting an

end to you, here and now!”

Behind his words, I can hear the room filling with with an eerie chanting in some unknown tongue. My confusion only grows deeper. What exactly are they trying to do?

Hang on, think about what he’d just said. Something about a “breach of contract.” Meaning... Meaning he’s disregarding his employment contract to raise a rebellion against his superior officer!? How could it be? Oh... The true evil... Yes, the true evil was this man Slapperdash all along.

I had, without properly discerning his true nature, provided him with the perfect opportunity. And the result...is this.

“Everyone, fire!”

Taking their signal from this villain, a sudden and violent torrent of light closes in from the hands of the men surrounding me.

I...repent my own carelessness. My eyes tear up. For, in the end, I had caused nothing but trouble to the dear justice-loving owner of this body.

* * *

“Wh-What happened? Did we do it!?”

Several dozen court magicians had cast exorcism spells at once. This, the most forbidden of forbidden arts, wiped away the root of one’s very existence: their soul. The result was clear; Minister Slapperdash could sense the soul leaving this world, converting the man before him into no more than a husk of flesh. He knew it had worked. He knew they had come out victorious.

And yet...

“Oh my, what is everyone doing in here?”

His eyes took in the slight tilt of the man’s head. The man, a target of such powerful magics, who looked around as if nothing had happened at all.

It was impossible... Slapperdash couldn’t believe it. He had thrown in the greatest talent the country had to offer, used an art that was said to be

forbidden, and yet the monster called Soodah stood nonchalantly without so much as a chip on his soul!

The minister fell to his knees, but he wasn't alone. All of them, those who had used the greatest, most taboo of spells, collapsed to their knees in fatigue and despair, and together their heavy sighs of failure mingled into a wail of hopelessness.

Meanwhile, the man who stood in the center of their attention raised a hand to his chin in thought before clapping his hands together at a sudden realization.

"I see! Today is the day we research the great dragon. You were all so eager to get started that you rushed in and are all short of breath! How very reassuring; I applaud your strong desire to rid this country of disease. Very well, chop-chop, there's no time to waste! Let's get right to the operation!"

Epilogue

“This is...the ramen shop…?”

Once again, I’m washed over by a sensation of being lost at sea. I’m in the middle of the road at the moment. Behind me is the ramen shop that we normally visit, but at the moment it’s closed for holidays. In front of me is a telephone pole.

Right... The stall that had made me smack my lips in delight and lose my soul from pure deliciousness is nowhere to be seen.

“Was it...a dream... Huh?”

I feel my phone vibrate in my pocket. A frantic look at the screen heralds a single text.

“Dude’s way 2 busy, Can’t get a single word from him. Authors’ Isekai Course put on hold. We’ll figure out the details next time the 3 of us can get 2gether. — Koekawa Touya”

I have no objection to the contents of the message. Even if it turned out that I hadn’t hallucinated any of what I’d just been through, I’d unfortunately missed out on the opportunity to try any of the food in that other world. So, I didn’t get any inspiration for what I’d have written about anyway.

...What a strange experience, though. It felt like half-dream, half-reality, and if I had to put words to it, the sensation that remained within me put it smack dab in the middle of the two.

“...I might as well write a book about that.”

But if I want to put that experience into a novel, there is one thing I regret: I’d never gotten to see the face of the man whose body I’d entered. That’s my only regret about the whole thing. If there’d only been a mirror somewhere, I’d have been able to base the protagonist for my new story on him.

Well, no point crying over spilled milk. If I don’t know his face and don’t know enough about him, what should I actually do about the protagonist...?

“The name of the monster preying upon the kingdom was...‘Soodah of the Dark-tor clan, wasn’t it?” Whenever I hear that name, I just can’t separate it from that friend of mine. That name “Dark-tor” just sounds too similar to the word “doctor.”

Oh, I know! How about I just make my protagonist a doctor like that guy? Let’s write a story about a doctor summoned to another world. To spice it up a bit, I’ll fuse his character with the monster from that world.

Let’s make it a misunderstanding story where the locals see him as a demon, but he’s actually just using our world’s common sense and a medical doctor’s sensibilities.

Hmm, this is going to be good. Now all that’s left is to decide what to call it...

At the end of my mullings, I finally tack a simple title onto that bizarre, comical and pleasant novel.

Yes, I’ll call it *Monster Doctor Tsuda*.

Why it’s all Ōta’s fault

Afterword

In Japan, we have a saying that goes, “Three people gathered brings transcendent wisdom.”

(Really sorry, we’ve kept you waiting for quite a long time.)

It means that if you get three people, even normal people off the street, and have them start talking, you’ll come out with some wonderful insight. In fact, there are numerous examples I could point to where having comrades work together towards a common goal has led to better results.

(*The Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Isekai* started in a certain shop in the capital, where some authors were throwing ideas around over a meal what would happen if an author was sent to another world. That conversation eventually evolved into this book.)

Naturally, the same can be said in regards to knowledge on isekai.

(However, as we tried to simulate what would happen if *we* were the ones isekai'd, we ran into one major problem.)

Nowadays, it's becoming a trend for webnovels and the like to depict individuals of commonplace professions venturing to other worlds, and rumor has it that "author" is among the most popular jobs to work with. Meaning, depending on your point of view, one might say that authors are actually the greatest professionals at isekai exploration.

(You see, the greater meaning behind these simulations was escapism from our deadlines, but there exists an individual who might completely ignore dimensional boundaries, hunting us down across multiple worlds just to collect our manuscripts. In short, even if we were to go to another world, we suspect we will be unable to escape from his wrath.)

Yes, an author is an isekai pro.

(Meaning: it's all Ōta's fault.)

We gathered not three, but seven people to write this *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Isekai*. In these troubled times, there's no knowing when or where you might be sent to another world, so please make sure to keep this volume around as your trusty ally, and know it front to back should anything like this ever happen to you. I can only ask you to read it, voraciously, and then read it again.

(But we authors of the isekai would never back down. The word "retreat" had been deftly taken out of our dictionaries as we marched forth. Should they press us on deadlines, we would plead with our tears, "we're starving because we can't eat isekai food," writing at every opportunity with the intention of maintaining the same spirit of the Authors' Light Course: the same vibe of scarfing down a dine-and-dash, and savoring every last bite of it.)

Finally, our deepest gratitude to the following:

(Now how about I introduce our accomplices?)

Carrying on from last time, we have Nagatsuki Tappei returning as a guest author, alongside Shibata Katsuie and Hyuga Natsu joining us for the first time.

And let’s not forget Shinotsuki Shinobu, who did the illustrations.

(I’m sure I don’t have to mention our regular members, and this time we dragged along Nezumiro Neko, Mister Shibata, and Uri, the latter two of whom are here for the first time. I’m sorry for asking for something so crazy, Shinotsuki.)

And of course, thanks to everyone who picked up *The Hitchhiker’s Guide*.

(We can only continue the Authors’ Light Course series thanks to your support.)

Let me use this opportunity to once again offer our sincerest gratitude.

(We really are really, really grateful!)

Well then, let’s meet again in the Authors’ Heavy Course—The Meat Chapter—.

(Our Winter Comiket title is still a secret until the official announcement!)

It’s all Ōta’s fault.

(It’s all Ōta’s fault.)

Summer 2019, Hoko Tsuda

(Summer, Year 1 of the Reiwa Era, Monster Doctor Tsuda)