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§000 Prologue - Three Years Ago (2015)

On this day, a huge particle accelerator, which had been built by the US government as a prestige project, went into operation at Groom Lake Nevada. The accelerator, which had a length of 120 km, extending between Groom Lake and Bald Mountain, and had been constructed 150 m below the ground, was being operated in order to confirm the existence of residue dimensions.

Various measuring devices recorded the precise moment when the collision energy exceeded LHC by leaps and bounds, recording all data pertaining to that event on the servers, and displaying it on the host computer's monitors.

"...We confirmed the creation of a micro black hole!"

The cheers which reverberated throughout the room all at once, symbolized the moment a new theory had been verified.

"Professor Tyler, we did it, didn't we!?"

The surrounding scientists quickly approached Theodore Nanase Tyler, the lead researcher, wanting to shake his hand.

"Yowzer! Tedd!"

"Stop it. Talking to me like that makes it seem like I'm a talking stuffed animal."

Tyler grasped his hand while laughing. It was a time of glory.

A young scientist, who had been staring at them with a look full of reverence, suddenly shifted his focus to his monitor, after joining the general excitement for a short while.

Even after the experiment's success, the computer robotically carried out the tasks he had commanded it to do.

The information, which was acquired in femto-second intervals, was adequately processed according to the program code...and now displayed an unbelievable result on the monitor.

"Wha-, Professor Tyler!"

His voice, which was unintentionally close to a scream in volume, was plenty enough to garner the attention of those around him.

"What's wrong?"

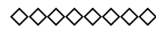
"T-The micro black hole...hasn't disappeared!"

"Impossible!", that's what everyone present thought.

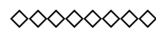
If the theory was correct, it should have vanished in instant, because of the Hawking radiation. The mass, which had been used for its creation, was at most at the level of a particle.

"Several MBHs are moving at high speed within the space! It's as if...as if they have been captured

in some kind of force field..."



At first, it didn't exceed a space distortion at particle level. 'That' perceived the distortions, which had been created within the time of an instant, as a golden opportunity to fulfill its desire. And then, 'that' seized the distortion and carefully added energy to it, continuing to amplify it.



『Some huge mass within the affixed force field is...what the hell is this!?!』

At the same time as a scream reverberated from the speaker, the monitors were wrapped up in a white light, and the video recording cut out.

"That's all?"

A man, who wore a splendid Chester Barrie three-piece suit, and appeared to be neurotic, recrossed his legs.

"Yes, sir! This is all of the video recorded by the ground control of the particle accelerator experiment carried out at Groom Lake Air Force Base."

"In short, you're saying ground control is safe? What about the nuclear power plant built to supply the necessary power for the accelerator?"

The Three Mile Island accident crossed the man's mind. 'Even though we're in the middle of Nevada, spare me from going through that all over again.'

"No major effect has been detected on the surface. We only lost contact with the underground facility, where the accelerator was constructed. The nuclear power plant is fine."

"What about the created MBH?"

"I don't know. But, whatever it might be, I can't believe that it will expand and swallow the earth."

Hearing that, the man nodded, obviously relieved, "How's the progress on the rescue of those underground?"

"At first it was carried out by the troops at base."

"Because the elevators have completely stopped working, they used the emergency staircase at point 3 located on the west side of Bald Mountain to access the underground area, but..."

The speaker indicated a still image on the monitor.

"...What the fuck is this? Are these special effects or something?"

The monitor displayed some kind of terrifying, humanoid-shaped, face, with bluish skin.

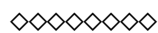
"Its height is above 10 feet. It's the first life form the rescue forces unit encountered after breaking into the underground facility."

If this was a fantasy movie, it would definitely be called a troll, or an ogre.

"Two soldiers died in the battle that started after the troops fired on reflex. The M855A1 bullets in their GAU-5A ASDW rifles had absolutely no effect, as if they were NERF guns."

"Did those guys create a teleportation device between Phobos and Deimos[efn_note]Mars' moons[/efn_note]?"

The dumbfounded man unintentionally blurted out a reference to a game he had played obsessively in his younger days, but he immediately shook his head, and gave several instructions to be carried out right away.



That organism certainly seemed to carry out actions with a certain level of intelligence. Its organs, which constantly transmitted faint, complex, electrical signals, hinted at that in various ways. 'That' trembled in delight, for a time somewhere between an instant and eternity. Then, it released its tremendous resources, for the sake of fulfilling its wish. On this day, the first dungeon, which would be later called The Ring, came into existence 150 m below Nevada's Groom Lake.

A/N:

MBH - Micro Black Hole

GAU-5A ASDW - An Air Force Self-Defense Weapon.

Addition from the LN: The experiment of a teleportation device between Phobos and Deimos is a setting of the game DOOM which took the world by storm in 1993.

§001 Epitaph - Current Nevada 9/XX

A hot, dry wind was blowing through Nevada, September was almost over, but the temperature was still over 25° C.

At a certain governmental research facility, Chief Aaron Ainsworth was shouting loudly, "What did you say!? The dungeon = passage theory has been verified?"

"No, well. I suppose you could call it proof."

The communication official, who had come to deliver the data personally, gave a half-hearted explanation in response to Aaron's overly threatening attitude.

Exactly one month ago, in a dungeon situated between Surgut and Nischnewartowsk, at the basin of Russia's Ob river, a certain, unique skill orb had been discovered.

The name of the skill sealed in that orb was 『Alternate Dimension Language Comprehension』.

They had planned to send the orb to a research institute in Moscow immediately, but unfortunately, the plane couldn't take off because of bad weather, and as the shelf life of the orb was about to expire, it was used by a D-Card holder, who happened to be nearby by coincidence.

"So, has the name of the skill holder been publicized? There's no point in hiding it since it's an academic anyway, isn't it?"

"It was publicized. According to the publication, he's called Ignat Severnyy."

As far as Aaron knew, no dungeon researcher with such a name existed in Russia.

"Over here are the contents of the publication — partial translations of the epitaphs discovered in dungeons all over the world."

Aaron inserted the memory card handed to him by the communication official into the slot of his tablet, entered his own password, and immediately opened the file.

The details written in there were sensational.

According to the documents, the dungeons were passages to different worlds, and they also were tools for terraforming. The dungeons, which pierced a dimension like needles, acted as tools to conveniently transform the connected world. The swarms of monsters pouring out from within were used as means to produce a substance called 『Magic Particles』 which might not exist in the connected world yet. One could truly describe it as terraforming.

And the dungeons exceeding 128 floors apparently became 『Passages』 crossing over to the world connected on the other side.

"If this is the truth, it's quite shocking."

"Yes, indeed."

However, it was still only Ignat Severnyy who was able to read those characters.

Even if he really read the epitaphs for argument's sake, no one could confirm the contents he

claimed to have translated.

At this point in time, only God could prove that he hadn't simply put his own delusions down on paper.

"We have no other option but to have another person obtain the same skill orb and try reading the epitaphs to verify his translation."

"Have we confirmed the existence of monsters dropping that orb in our country, too?"

"The drop monster hasn't been announced officially. However, the dungeon, where the orb was discovered, is called Kiryas Kul'yegan Dungeon. It's a dungeon located at Reka Kul'yegan, a place tied to the Ob River. Given that the monsters within the dungeon's captured areas have been publicized based on the International Dungeon Treaty, how about investigating it by working through all the available data?"

"That's rather roundabout, but I guess it's inevitable."

Aaron gazed outside the window, watching Nevada as the sunshine was gradually growing weaker. Evening in Nevada at the end of September was accompanied by a drastic decline in temperature. His body involuntarily trembling was probably owed to that chill. If not, it might be triggered by the power of the something merely 120 m beneath his feet. And then night fell.

§002 Yoshimura Keigo - New National Stadium - Aoyama Entrance Area 9/27 (Thu)

"Tsk, it's rainin', eh?" I mutter, while watching the rain incessantly hitting the glass windshield, as I sit in the driver's seat of my car, which I had parked at the shoulder of a road.

『So, did it go well?』

A displeased voice is audible at the other end of the hands-free phone call. Its owner is Enoki Yoshitake. For better or worse, he is my boss.

He had sent me, his underling, to go apologize to a client, who he had pissed off with his own management error, once again...There is no question that they are doubting his sincerity by this point.

In the first place, although I am conveniently put to work by various departments, my job is pretty much that of a researcher. This here was a sales job, wasn't it?

"No. ...It looks like they canceled the deal."

『What was that!? Just how did you apologize to them!?!』

It's plain as day that things would turn out this way if you send out your underling to resolve a serious incident. Are you an idiot?

I wanna tell him that. I really wanna.

"I'm sorry."

『You're sorry? In other words, it was your mistake. You're a really useless guy, aren't you? Whatever. Since we lost an important deal, your pay cut is set in stone, and you can expect your bonus to be zero, too.』

Haah? In the first place, I'm completely unrelated to this mistake, aren't I? Isn't it your damn responsibility!?

Just when I am about to object, the connection is cut from the other side.

"...Haa."

Somehow it's all fucked up. Pay cut? No bonus? That makes no sense.

'It's my ability if I succeed, and your mistake if I fail,' why does a guy like that work above me?

"...Ah, I suppose he's successful in life exactly because he's like that."

If you just look at his profile, it's natural, because it's a listing of amazing career steps.

"Haa, I feel like I'm ready to die. I don't wanna return to the company..."

The sound of the rain hitting the roof has become stronger. I start the engine and press the windshield wiper switch. At the same time, the music, which had started to play from the car radio, suddenly pauses.

"Mmh?"

『News flash. It appears that a dungeon of medium depth was finally cleared in the US.』

『Ooh~』

The station makes a ruckus due to that news announcement. Apparently it was passed on as breaking news.

"A dungeon of medium depth, eh? I'm sure they found some amazin' items in there."

Three years have already passed since dungeons appeared in the world. The initial chaos has settled down, and dungeon exploration has fallen to the level of fishing at slightly dangerous spots. Defeating monsters still feels somewhat dangerous, but there isn't much of a difference to hunting or fishing. All of them are probably life-threatening to some degree.

I wonder whether I should also try diving into a dungeon to vent some of my stress with an adventure. I drive my car out of its parking place while thinking about things like that.

Around this area—the outer garden area of the Meiji Shrine—there are many buildings related to the Olympics. Even now, they are about to start on erecting several big buildings.

The rain has increased in strength somewhat, and the sound of the raindrops hitting the car's roof is clearly audible within the car.

『It really feels like, “finally, it’s been three years already since the dungeons appeared”, doesn't it? Today we're welcoming the dungeon researcher, Yoshida Akio. Mr. Yoshida, thank you for coming on.』

Yoshida Akio, eh?

It's a name I hear often these days, but the part about him being a researcher stinks. He hasn't clearly stated his D-Rank either. Is he even an active dungeon challenger?

『I'm looking forward to working with you.』

『I believe it was located in area 36. A dungeon commonly called Evans Dungeon, which had been discovered in the summit lake, located on Mount Evans in Denver Colorado. It apparently had 31 floors. What's your take on this, Mr. Yoshida?』

『Since the number of shallow dungeons with 20 floors or less that have been traversed is limited, you might call this a brilliant achievement.』

『I see. By the way, what's a dungeon with a medium depth actually like?』

『Well, the number of dungeons that have been discovered so far amount to approximately 80 across the whole world, but for convenience purposes, they have been categorized into three degrees of depth: shallow, medium and deep.[efn_note]With this established, I will now call them shallow/medium/deep dungeons when referring to their depth level[/efn_note]』

『I heard that there's also a great depth, but that doesn't seem to be the case.』

『In fact, the term “great depth” as used by the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism wasn't suited as categorization for a dungeon since it's a concept that has been related to underground construction until now. For that reason, a new concept was invented so as to not cause any misunderstandings.』

『Oh, I understand.』

『The categorizations are defined by the number of floors. A shallow dungeon has less than 20 floors, a medium dungeon has less than 80 floors, and a dungeon with more than 80 floors is called deep.』

Yet, there are also rumors that small arms have been proven to be useless, after many nation's sent armies diving into their respective dungeons.

『Then the Evans Dungeon isn't all that deep, even if it might be categorized as medium dungeon, right?』

『No, in the end, it's just a categorization of convenience. Hence, it's nothing you can say for certain. To begin with, a deep dungeon, as it has been defined, still hasn't been confirmed.』

『What do you mean?』

『Let's use Tokyo as an example. The JSDF's countermeasure unit has reached the 21st floor of the

Yoyogi Dungeon. Hence it has been proven that Yoyogi has a depth beyond shallow, however——』

『You're saying we won't know the actual number of floors unless we try going down there?』

『Correct. If there's a 21st floor and beyond, when we actually reach that floor, we will know that it's a medium dungeon, but there aren't that many dungeons that have been captured up to that point in the first place, let alone 80 floors. Because no one has ever reached such a depth, it's not certain whether those floors actually exist in the first place.』

『I see. Going by your words, it could also mean that dungeons only go down to floor 31 in reality?』

『It's a possibility until someone reaches the 32nd floor.』

『However, it has been announced that we have five shallow dungeons, and four going beyond that depth, in Japan. How do we know this?』

『In the end, it's no more than an assumption. By observing the special tremors referred to as dungeon quakes, which are generated when a dungeon is created, it currently allows us to estimate the underground depth — the JDA calls it dungeon depth, and quantifies it in meters — which becomes occupied by the dungeon.』

『That sounds amazing.』

『When the dungeons came into existence, Hi-net and GEONET had already been put in place in Japan, which was already a major earthquake region. By comparing the recordings of those systems, a rough estimation of the depth has been calculated for the already known dungeons.』

『But, as it seems that the dungeon's interior turns into a mysterious space, we don't actually know whether there's a close relationship between the number of floors and the depth it occupies. There's the perception that the number of floors might grow in proportion to the depth of the area it occupies, isn't there?』

『That's how it seems.』

『Accordingly, it means that by comparing the depths of the dungeons we could measure, and the number of floors of the two shallow dungeons that had been traversed within Japan, the assumed number of floors in other dungeons could be estimated just as we talked about moment's ago.』

『You understood it correctly. By the way, I'm told that several skill orbs dropped on the lowest floor of Evans Dungeon. The details unfortunately haven't been publicized, though.』

『Well, it's the dream item that's the easiest to understand among the items obtainable in dungeons.』

"Skill orbs, huh...?"

When the dungeons appeared, the world was thrown into a huge uproar. After all, fantasy-world-like monsters had been wandering around within.

However, if it had been just that, it would have been no more than a slight increase in the number of dangerous places for human society, like tropical and boreal forests where carnivores lurk. What truly shook the world were the three items that could be obtained from there — cards, potions, and skill orbs.

The dungeon card — commonly called D-Card, which had been discovered first, enlivened the science world due to its super technology.

Having said that, it's not like all of that had a big impact on our personal lives.

When someone defeated a monster for the first time, a card, which recorded the name of the human who killed it and various information about him, was dropped. But as a phenomenon, it didn't exceed the level of being simply just that.

These days, the card isn't used for anything except checking one's explorer skill, but back then, it merely seemed like yet another strange item.

The weird characters used for a small 14-character-long string carved on the card's backside became just a small topic among philologists, but they were simply categorized as characters that were impossible to decipher.

When the scientists learned that the characters on the card matched with the characters written on the surfaces of flat slabs discovered in The Ring, that would change what they displayed, it once more became a hot topic across the world.

However, the potions, which were discovered next, were different.

The very first potion dropped on top of a soldier, who was on the verge of dying after having his lower body half cut off, and was merely used by chance, but it created a sensation.

It caused the lower half of his body to reconnect itself, as if sneering at modern medical science, and saved him from "death" itself, which had seemed inevitable.

With that as the only trigger, not only the government and the military, but also famous, international enterprises took the initiative and started to send people into the dungeons.

Due to the various items that were discovered in the process, dungeons were recognized as something similar to mines of unique resources.

During that time, the first skill orb was discovered. To put it simply, it was an item that seemed to have the potential to guide humanity to the next level.

The person who used it, actually became able to use magic. A fantasy world turned reality. That was a skill orb.

There was a serious controversy about whether the skills were hereditary.

People such as soldiers, who were at the forefront, had apparently registered their genetic map before going on explorations. It was for the sake of comparing their DNA before and after they use an orb.

If the first orb user had immediately made a child after using the orb, that child would be due to be born any day now, but such news hasn't been reported.

There were also rumors that such children were being mass produced through artificial insemination in undemocratic countries.

Even if it's at some future date, it's very likely that it will lead to the destruction of the world's order, if such items were to appear on the market and were to be used for crimes.

National governments, who feared that, quickly founded the World Dungeon Association (WDA) to control the dungeonnative items.

However, in the end, they weren't able to control the skill orbs. The skill orbs, which were gathered from countries all over the world, vanished from the vault, despite having been stored there under a firm security protocol, resulting in a huge scandal.

It was suspected that the personnel had sold them through illegal channels, or misappropriated them, but blaming all of that, which intermittently occurred across the globe despite the few numbers of orbs, on the actions of humans was difficult.

And, through careful observation, it could be confirmed that a skill orb would vanish in exactly 23 hours, 56 minutes, and 4 seconds after appearing in this world.

That meant it would be exceedingly complicated to distribute them anywhere but on-site. It also complicated the legal side of skill orb management.

On top of their economic value not being fixed, due to their exceeding rarity, that value suddenly dropped to zero after 24 hours. As a result, opinions differed on whether such skill orbs could be regarded as assets.

Various interpretations were attempted, but in the end, skill orbs were not counted as personal possessions, because of how hard they were to control, and using them on someone else, or giving them away, was not seen as a donation or transfer of ownership, because no one owned them in the first place.

Even if skill orbs were regarded as tangible objects for argument's sake, all skill orbs were natural products, or in other words, ownerless property.

Assuming A obtained one, and didn't claim its ownership, it still remained an ownerless object. Even if A handed it to B, A would only pass on ownerless property. A would be no more than a means to transfer property physically.

It meant, as long as all the middlemen didn't claim ownership - no matter what route was used - the orb would simply be regarded as the possession of the person who used it in the end.

Of course, if there was a trade through those middlemen, a dungeon tax was levied.

As such, the world failed at managing the skill orbs, but in the end the world's order didn't collapse.

The number of skill orbs was far too low, and the number of unregistered orb users was even lower.

Of course it was possible that crimes using the powers of orbs simply weren't made public, as they weren't recognized as crimes, but such crimes existed even before the appearance of orbs, and thus it seemed as if nothing had changed because of their appearance.

Those orbs furthermore couldn't be used by humans that didn't possess a card. If you planned to receive the blessing of an orb, you had to first defeat a monster. As a result of that, it reached the point where tours to defeat weak monsters were frequently carried out.

No matter how low the probability to obtain a skill orb, you might as well prepare in advance, especially if you're only going to get one chance anyway.

There were many people thinking like that. Especially in advanced countries.

At first, when the dungeons were created, all governments were thrown into chaos, and they lagged behind in terms of regulating dungeons, but within one year, laws and a management system were established, and it became somewhat possible for the governments and the WDA to manage all dungeons.

"Although it ain't a pipedream to get rich quickly if you discover an orb, it's not like they fall into the lap of an ordinary person anyway, right?"

Various rumors such as item boxes being discovered, or the existence of teleportation magic, flitted about on the Internet, but information about orb users had a strong inclination towards being concealed, and the credibility of the few available pieces of information was low.

But then again, it's not as if the information concealment is set in stone by law. If the person themselves feels like making the information public, it's their free choice. As a result, it might certainly be a way to garner attention, even if it turns out to be slightly inconvenient.

And then, even a group called Dg48 was born in the world of show business. If you offered them a skill orb as a fan, it was apparently possible to have a sham-date with one of their members for the time before the skill orb was set to vanish.

If you say that this lacks any integrity, I fully agree. They were ridiculed for the handshake coupon business having at last reached such a low, but you might as well call this a shameless way to make

a living.

"I'd like them to follow the examples of others, good god. Uh-oh."

When I get the car going, by pressing the accelerator after the traffic light changes to green, a sensation as if the tires have lifted off the street is transmitted to my waist, and the car moves as if it's bouncing.

"W-What the hell is goin' on!?"

My car, that had been driving across an intersection, bounces back after colliding all over the place.

"F-Fuck!!"

The car is thrust off the road into some kind of construction site after I forcibly turn the steering wheel. Then, in the next moment, the front wheel gets caught in something and the whole car begins to spin.

A deep crack in the ground had opened up, and the tire apparently got caught in there. Now that it has come to this, I have no choice but to cut the engine and wait for it to stop.

I feel like some small shadow has appeared next to the car as it made one beautiful turn, but the car's actions are already out of my hands. The instant I hear a loud bam from the car's frame, I get drenched in cold sweat straight away. And then, the car finally comes to a stop, just before crashing into a huge truck packed with a ton of iron reinforcing bars.

"No way, that just now, wasn't a child, was it...?"

The car had hit it quite dramatically. Assuming that a person was dragged into this, there's no way they would walk away with just a scratch. Adding the shit going on at work, you can really say, it never rains but it pours.

I quickly open the door, jump out into the rain, and search for the object my car hit.

The pouring rain has become even stronger, hindering me from seeing well within the shroud of water, but something black has collapsed next to the truck which is slightly ahead of me.

"Hey, you alright?"

In a hurry, I run up to the figure, and just when I am about to extend my hand, I notice its abnormality.

I have seen it many times in movies, but it's the first time for me to see one for real. No matter how you look at it, it's not human.

"G-Goblin?" In front of me as I mutter that, the goblin-like being is reduced to black particles. And a single card with a dull silver color is left behind there.

Area 12 / Yoshimura Keigo
Rank 99,726,438

A dungeon card — the card that always drops when a human defeats a monster for the first time. It's a card full of incomprehensible stuff, like how it obtains the information it's recording, and the owner's name. At some point it was rumored to be made out of a rare metal, but in the end it was discovered that it uses common materials.

The area represents the place where the card appeared. After using induction, and cross referencing numerous cards, it was believed that west longitude 110° - 120° defines area 1, and that the number of the areas continues to increment every ten degrees of longitude in the direction of Earth's rotation, making a full turn with area 36 as the last.

However, as an Inuit man in Canada's Pond Inlet recently acquired a card with area 0, it was called into question whether the pole sphere was set as area 0.

In any case, it means that Tokyo is at the edge of area 12 with an eastern longitude of 139° .

"Rank 99,726,438, huh?"

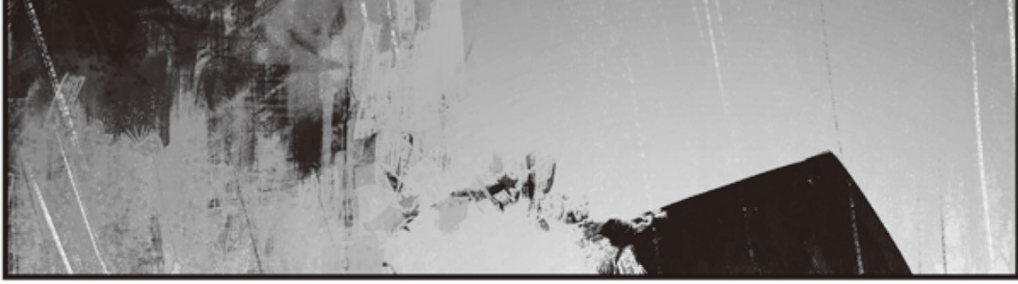
The rank is said to position all of humanity with something — it was referred to as "experience points," conveniently imitating games — that could be obtained from the defeated monsters.

Since I have defeated a goblin for the first time just now, it means that there are more than 99,000,000 people throughout the world that have defeated more than one goblin.

I totally don't get whether that's a lot or little, with $1/70$ of humanity having already come in contact with monsters.

While pondering such things in a carefree manner, I breathe out deeply and mutter, "At any rate, it's good that it wasn't a child."

I lean against the truck behind me, as my strength escapes from my body out of relief, while picking up the card.



Chaotic voices and smoke are rising from the crossing's direction. Apparently it was quite a big earthquake just now.

"I wonder whether my apartment is okay."

After all it's a run-down, two-storied apartment building, said to be around 50 years old. It would be absolutely no surprise if it collapsed because of a large earthquake.

My whole body is already soaking wet. Even if I return to my company, I don't have a change of clothes there, so I decide to return home for the moment an——

The moment I think all that, my body suddenly slips backwards, and my backside falls on the ground.

"Ouch! What's goin' on?"

As I turn around, the fully loaded truck sinking towards the back is reflected in my eyes.

"Eeh!?"

The place it is falling towards is a big, deep, crevice, which had opened up due to the previous earthquake.

It looks like I gave the truck, which barely maintained its balance, the final push.

Fortunately the truck stops sinking after being swallowed around halfway into the crack, but the great quantity of iron bars it had loaded — extremely long and thick ones at that — slide inside the hole just like that.

"No, those had been naturally swallowed by the crack, right? It's got nothing to do with me, okay? Reimbursement or such is a complete no-go——" I watch the spectacle while getting cold sweat.

I'm drenched with rain from head to toe anyway. "Even if I say so myself, getting cold sweat at this point is damn pointless". That's the incomprehensible stuff I am thinking about right now, but no matter how much time passes, I can't hear the sound of the iron bars crashing.

When I turn around and get close to the edge of the crack, wondering whether I made some kind of mistake about the bars falling in, something like an eerie voice resounds from the bottom of the crack, and a violent aftershock hits the area.

"Wha-!?"

And then, the feeling of being pushed up by something from within my body occurs multiple times in succession, and once that feeling settles down, a pretty, rainbow-colored sphere appears in front of me.

Seeing that, I reflexively escape reality by calculating the falling height in my head. Assuming that iron bars with a length of around 10 meters and a diameter of 4 centimeters had fallen freely, and with around 15 seconds having passed just now...the depth was exceeding 1000 meters.

"Even if the iron bars fell vertically, it's still rather unlikely that they reached their terminal velocity, right?"

The sphere is still floating in front of my eyes as I meaninglessly mutter that trivial knowledge.

§003 - Naruse Miharuru JDA Headquarters

"Oh shit...just how am I supposed to report this?" Naruse Miharuru is stumped.

This place, the surveillance section of the JDA's (Japanese Dungeon Association) Dungeon Management Department, is primarily for handling information about the capture and creation of dungeons on Japanese soil.

Even if new dungeons don't appear very frequently, it's said that they come to be at a rate of one per year in every area. Because there are very few countries that have high precision seismographs set up all over the country like Japan does to begin with, it's suspected that there's still a great number of undiscovered dungeons out there.

Even some time ago, there was a response that seemed to hint at the creation of a new dungeon, but——

"You can report it just as it happened."

"M-Mr. Fuurai!"

Once Naruse lifts her head, she finds her boss in front of her. Fuurai Kakeru, 29 years, the chief clerk of the surveillance section. A neurotic-looking man with a receding hairline, despite his young age.

"All the more if it's something that causes you to hesitate. It would lead to confusion if you were to arbitrarily incorporate your own speculations, right?"

"Well."

'Certainly, it's just as he says, but this result——

Naruse is hesitant because of the results in front of her, that would likely make anyone doubt her sanity if she reported them just as they are.

"What is it? Don't put on airs. What the heck happened?"

"No, umm...I shall report the measurements then!"

"That's what I told you to do from the very beginning, didn't I?"

'I don't care anymore. Let's push what happens afterwards onto the boss.' Having decided this, Naruse begins to talk fluently.

"At 14:32 a quake, which seemed to originate from the creation of a dungeon, in the area of the New National Stadium, has been observed."

"Right next to Yoyogi!?"

Three years ago, the Yoyogi Dungeon appeared between NHK's Broadcast Center and the second

gymnasium of Yoyogi Stadium.

"Around one kilometer away from it in a straight line, I'd say?"

"That close? What's the scale?"

"Ah, well...it's a deep one."

"What did you say?"

"If the values are correct, it has a depth of more than 1,400 meters."

"1,400 meters!?"

The depth of Yoyogi Dungeon amounts to 280 meters. It's roughly five times that. It's probably not wrong to say that it's one of the deepest dungeons to date, even on a worldwide scale.

"Wait, then the Oedo Line will be in deep trouble...we have to contact all related parties at once!"

A dungeon that manifests in the city center will destroy its underground infrastructure. At the time when the Yoyogi Dungeon came into existence three years ago, the Chiyoda Line between Yoyogi Park and Harajuku was severed, almost resulting in a major accident.

Right now, it's early afternoon on a normal weekday. If the railway tracks of the subways were to suddenly disappear at such a time, it would likely develop into a great catastrophe. However——

"Ah, no. I think it will very likely be okay, since it's in the vicinity of Aoyama Gate."

It has become clear, through the results of research, that the space, which is actually occupied by a dungeon, has the shape of a cylinder, with a minimum diameter of several meters to, at most, ten or more meters.

Dungeon quakes occur due to the shock caused when these spaces are forced into the ground, like an acupuncture needle, and their extinction quakes happen due to the shock of those needles being removed.

There's still a little less than 200 meters from Aoyama Gate to the route of the Oedo Line. If the measurements are correct, there should be no damage anywhere.

"Having said that, it's still necessary to report it. The entrances must be sealed off as well. I suppose some influence on the stadium that's under construction can't be avoided. Even the Olympic Committee——"

"Please wait."

"What is it?" Her boss asked, without even hiding his irritation at this shitty, hectic situation.

"That is, umm...it's not there anymore."

"What isn't?"

"As I said, the dungeon."

'Boss is pulling a face like a pigeon who's been shot by a peashooter. Well, I made the same expression when I saw the data for the first time,' while thinking that, Naruse puts herself on guard for the storm that's going to come next.

"The deep dungeon that had appeared in the metropolitan area has..." Her boss throws a fleeting glance at his wristwatch. "...disappeared in one hour? You trying to make a joke here?"

As Naruse looks at her boss, who speaks while revealing a weak smile, which clearly says "You won't get off easy if this is a joke," she drops her shoulders, thinking, 'So it has turned out like this after all.'

"That's why I was hesitating to report it. Anyway, the deep dungeon, which appeared around Aoyama Gate of the New National Stadium at 14:32, has already vanished, as of now, at 15:20. An extinction quake that very closely resembled the one in Denver has been recorded, too. Its existence lasted merely a few minutes."

After the last monster had been defeated in Denver, everyone was returned to the surface, and an extinction quake was recorded a short while later. It was reported that only something like the traces of a hole that had collapsed were left behind, a phenomenon similar to shallow dungeons that had been captured.

"You want to tell me that someone captured a deep dungeon within minutes after its appearance?"

"I can't tell. I don't know what happened, but the peace of Tokyo's residents and the schedule for the Olympics have been protected. Isn't that great?"

Naruse adlibs a glib reply to her dumbfounded boss, and bows, as there isn't anything else she could say.

After listening to her report, her boss looks at Naruse with a serious expression, and asks, "So, what do you think I should report to the section chief?"

§004 - Unregistered Skill and Rank 1 Worldwide

I grab the orb, stuff it into my bag, and leave the place at once.

After all, the truck is tipping over, with half of its frame buried in the ground. The hole has disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared, but the crack that swallowed the truck is still there. My whole body is drenched by now, and since I would hate to carry a skill orb all over the place, I immediately tell my company that I am leaving early.

Section Chief Enoki flings insults at me from the other side of the phone, but I mechanically agree with him like a yes-man, and then hang up.

And now, one hour later, I'm sitting in front of the kotatsu, placed next to my bed all year long, in my own room, after taking a shower.

"Now then, how much am I gonna get for this?"

Once I touch the orb, I understand its skill name.

The mysterious numbers — referred to as an orb counter — at its bottom, seem to display the elapsed time since its discovery. I have already learned that the orb will vanish once that number turns into 1436.

"Making/0074, eh? May King, sounds kind of amazing. Is it connected to agriculture?"

[efn_note]The skill name is written as meikingu in katakana. I read it as "making," he reads it as "May King." ;-)[/efn_note]

I boot up my notebook, access JDA's orb purchase list, and try to enter Making. However, it shows me no result.

The orb purchase list is a list recording what various companies, organizations, and individuals would be willing to pay for a specific orb. Using this information, people with orbs they want to sell can contact a buyer and set up a trade, with the JDA as an intermediary.

As there's no way to know when a given orb might be discovered, and they only last roughly 24 hours, it's impossible to set up something like a store, with products lined up on shelves. Of course, there's no time to hold an auction either, so the trade is usually arranged through direct communication between buyer and seller.

"No helping it. I'm just going to check what kind of function it has, and then——" Muttering to myself, I access JDA's skill database, searching for Making.

However, there are still no results.

"Come on, don't tell me this is an unregistered skill?"

The JDA database is naturally connected with the WDA. In short, it means it's a skill that hasn't been discovered yet anywhere in the world.

There's almost no way to sell an unregistered skill with unclear function. I mean, putting a price on it is impossible in the first place. Of course, there's no time to investigate or negotiate either.

"Damn it...I thought this thing was going to make me rich enough to finally leave that terrible

company."

I drop my shoulders in disappointment, imagining the headache waiting for me at work tomorrow. I instinctively shake my head, to banish that mega depressing image, and go to the kitchen to boil some water. While putting the kettle on the gas stove, I take out some kinda decent tea from the cupboard to clear my head.

"Hoshino's high-quality green tea is really the best." [efn_note]Hoshino is an actual tea company, you can check their products here: <https://www.hoshitea.com/> [/efn_note]

After letting the water boil for a bit, I take the kettle off the stove and take another look at the orb on top of the kotatsu, while waiting for the hot water to cool down.

"Guess I got no choice but to use it myself, huh?"

I carefully put the Hachijo green tea into the water, pour it into a cup, take it to the kotatsu, and take my first sip of tea.

"Mmh? Somehow it tastes better than usual...did I change something?"

Well, it's delicious, so who cares? I grab the orb without any further thought.

"This is a contract after all, isn't it?" I mutter, and then use the orb while exclaiming with a slight shout, "I'm going to stop being a human!"

What a strange sensation. As if something is permeating my body, as if my body is being deconstructed and completely reconstructed—it hurts, but at the same time, I feel great.

"Mmh..."

I open my eyes, while clenching and unclenching my hand, paying attention to the sensation. It doesn't really feel as if anything much has changed.
I thought the world might look really different after using the orb, so I'm a bit disappointed.

"Well, it's the same with sex. Once you experience it, it's probably no big deal anymore... So, how do I use the skill anyway?"

At times like this, you go to the internet.

I look up the accounts of guys who have personally experienced using a skill. Of course, I've got no way to tell if they're telling the truth.

"I wonder why. No matter which one I read, they all basically say 『I somehow knew』. Somehow. Somehow, they say..."

I close my eyes, fold my arms and drink the rest of my tea, but the result is——

"...I got no friggin clue."

Did the acquisition fail maybe? That thought reminds me of my D-Card.

If I remember correctly, any acquired skills should be recorded on my D-Card.

"Bah, where did I put that card again? If I'm not mistaken, I put it in the pocket of my pants..."

Once I grab them from the basket in the dressing room, I rummage through the pockets, and take out the dull, silver, card.

"Oh, found it. There it was. Now then, the skill..."

Area 12 / Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1

Making

"Oh, it really was added properly..."

I do a double take at the card, shocked by what I see.

"Huh?"

After massaging the inner corners of my eyes with the thumb and index finger of my right hand, I look at the card one more time, but what's written there hasn't changed.

"R-Rank...o-one?"

The characters "Rank 1" are shining radiantly.

"Wait, wait, wait, wait...just a moment pls. It was around 99,000,000 last time, wasn't it?"

However, no matter how often I check it over, it stays rank 1.

Assuming that the rank is set by the experience points gained from defeating monsters, as according to the hypothesis...

"That eerie voice I heard a little while after the iron bars fell?"

Nothing else comes to mind.

As long as I didn't run over anything with my car on the way back home.

I lift my face as I suddenly realize, "Rank 1 means I'm strong, doesn't it?"

Three years have already passed since the appearance of dungeons in this world.

The folks from the military should have been allowed to dive into them from the very start.

Nowadays normal people are going on explorations too, but I'm pretty sure the upper ranks are mostly occupied by soldiers or police officers.

I have overtaken their three years of experience?

Having said that, the actual feeling still hasn't completely hit me yet.

"But, I really don't feel like I got super strong. It's not like I can easily pinch and crush the doorknob."

I tried to tightly grasp the entrance door's knob with all my might, but nothing happened.

"Magic, then? —Blah, that was a skill, wasn't it? It sure seems unrelated..."

I spend the rest of the day on my PC, pointlessly looking things up forever.

\$005 WDARL (World Dungeon Association Ranking List) Chat with Simultaneous Translation

Rank Area CC Name

1 12 *
2 22 RU Dmitrij
3 1 US Simon
4 14 CN Huang
5 1 US Mason
6 26 GB William
7 1 US Joshua
8 1 US Natalie
9 2 *
10 25 FR Victor
11 24 DE Edgar
12 26 GB Tobias
13 25 FR Thierry
14 24 IT Ettore
15 25 FR Quentin
16 24 DE Heinz
17 11 *
18 13 JP Iori
19 24 DE Gordon

...

US "Did you see the WRL?"

RU "Yeah, Russia's hero, Dmitrij Nernikov became rank 2. It's the first time since the publication of the WRL, isn't it?"

GB "So, who's the guy at the top?"

US "Looks like they are unregistered."

RU "Wut? King Salmon, or the Witch of Campbell are first rank?"

US "Since there's an anonymous ranker from area 2 at rank 9, and another from area 11 at rank 17, it should be someone else."

DE "Well, you know, I tried to compare the rankings from before the leader changed."
GB "GJ."
DE "However, at least until rank 200, there's no one that seems to qualify for this."
GB "Hah?"
FR "I got some news! There's no one qualifying for this within the top three-digits."
US "You jokin'! How did you find out?"
FR "If you exclude Japan, there are no big cities in Russia and Indonesia in area 12. At most, it would be Adele in Australia."
FR "Only Japan has a lot of people in area 12, as it includes a region ranging from Fukuoka to Tokyo, but because it's a country that established a management system at an early stage, almost all of their early explorers have been registered with the JSDF."
FR "That's why there's almost no anonymous explorers in area 12 within the top three-digits. I looked up that number of people and traced them down, but there was no change in ranking for them."
US "Wait, wait, wait. Then, you're saying that this Mr. X here suddenly appeared out of the top four-digits[efn_note]Author uses here the spelling for "Fourth" in katakana. You will need that info for the next line[/efn_note] or below?"
JP "A true awakening of the force, you mean?"
US "Nice one. They might be from the top five-digits or below, no?"
JP "No, I don't think that's likely. That would be..."
FR "For now I will try to trace it back down as far as I have left in my cache."
GB "Good luck."
DE "Was there some kind of huge dungeon capture?"
GB "If it happened recently, then, Denver, right?"
US "That was the work of Simon's team, no?"
GB "Then someone who accompanied them."
US "Don't be silly. You think someone who went with them overtook Simon from the area of five-digits or below? That's too much."
GB "What did this guy do to suddenly end up at rank 1 then?"
US "..."
DE "..."
JP "..."
RU "...Captured a deep dungeon, unknown to anyone, by himself, or something like that?"
GB "Now that the WDA's control has spread all over, something like that is impossible, right? In the first place, unless they got through the dungeon in one day, they would slowly rise through the ranks."
US "I'm sure he comes from planet Krypton."
DE "No, he might be from the M78 Nebula."
GB "He used Blue Water? Or maybe he got a body that can only fight for three minutes?"
JP "It looks like you're quite well-informed about the culture of my country. You're making me cry."

...
... Omitted.
...

FR "Hi. I looked it up all the way until the top six-digits."
US "Thx."

... Omitted.

GB "Thx."

DE "What's the result?"

FR "A person that seems to qualify...was nowhere to be found."

GB "None within 1,000,000 people?"

FR "Since the number of civilians suddenly increases once you get into six digits, there are more unregistered people in area 12 than registered, toward the very bottom of the rankings, so I can't say anything with absolute confidence, but digging any deeper seems impossible."

DE "Mystery?"

US "An anonymous man, who suddenly appeared like a comet after three years have passed; that's kind of cool."

GB "PC!" [efn_note]Abbreviation for Political Correctness[/efn_note]

FR "PC!"

US "Yeah, yeah. Man → Person."

...

... Omitted.

§006 Miyoshi Azusa - Lady's Kisses 9/28 (Fri)

"F-Fuck..."

I frantically run the short distance from the station to my company's building. Since I stayed up late last night, searching the net for information, I ended up oversleeping. Somehow, I get there just barely on time, I stamp my timecard while panting heavily. Just then, somehow calls out to me from behind.

"Yoshimura."

"Oh, Mr. Enoki, good morning."

Cool, gotta stay cool. I'm gonna act as if nothing happened.

"Can you come to the conference room for a moment?"

"Ah, yes."

Figures.

"Senpai, did something happen?" Miyoshi asks me in a worried whisper.

Miyoshi Azusa, 22 years old. She's one of our new hires. As I'm in charge of training the newcomers, she has become quite attached to me.

She's a small, cute, beauty, with a bob haircut that has a natural gradation. She gives you the feeling of a small animal scurrying around you.

She's excellent at mathematics, and especially numerical analysis, making her the Development Department's rising star, but her obsession with wine is a definite flaw in the crystal.

"Mr. Enoki has been on tenterhooks since yesterday, making it difficult for anyone to approach him."

"Yesterday he made me go apologize to a customer for someone else's mistake for some reason. No sooner was the deal called off, than out of nowhere, Enoki starts blaming me."

"Pardon? I don't understand..."

"Don't worry, neither do I."

"...Senpai, are you going to be alright?"

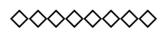
"You tell me and we'll both know."

"Oi, Yoshimura!" I can hear his voice calling me from the conference room. So he's already irritated enough for it to show in his voice.

"Oops, he's calling, I'm off."

"Oh, okay. What to say...please do your best, okay?"

I head to the conference room after being cheered on in a somewhat questionable way.



"Haaah~" I sigh deeply as I sit down in my chair with a thud.

He's been going on and on with his tenacious nagging. He's been chewing me out all morning. It's been going on for so long that I almost asked him whether he had too much time on his hands by reflex.

A few times I almost said something like, "Don't you have any other work to do besides endlessly repeating the same shit?"

I can't stand this any longer. I'm going to quit for real.

"Good work." Miyoshi says.

"No kidding. In the first place, I belong to research / development. Why am I being forced to act like someone from sales anyway?"

"Now, now, senpai. Let's go grab lunch."

"You gotta eat no matter what, huh...? You're right, let's go."

A few minutes later we sit down at an Italian restaurant, a little ways away from the office. This restaurant is slightly expensive, but you almost never run into people from our branch of the company. It's a perfect place to talk about stuff you don't want others to hear.

"Quitting...senpai, aren't you way too impulsive? Couldn't you just go talk to the section chief...?" Miyoshi says while stabbing the Strozzapreti with her fork. It's a goat's ragù sauce resembling white wine.

"Nah, I'm already tired of wiping Enoki's ass. I'm at my limit."

"Can we not talk about things like ass-wiping please?" Miyoshi replies with a frown.

Come to think of it, her sauce kind of looks like....

"Sorry, my bad." I say while coiling the cacio e pepe around my fork.

"However, if you're still going to quit, your unemployment insurance won't be granted for three months, since you would have resigned on your own accord, no?"

"Listen, the savings to get through three months by a 28-years-old working adult are...huh? Was

that so?"

"I don't really know." Miyoshi says as if fed up.

"Rather than that, what are you going to do about the afternoon?"

"Somehow everything has all become so troublesome. It's Friday anyway, and I plan to quit, so I might as well just go home."

"What are you gonna do about your stuff?"

"Oh, Miyoshi, can you gather them and bring them to my place?"

"Eh? I don't know which things are yours!"

"Makes sense. Then, I'll go get my things Monday next week then take a vacation. And then I'll just slap my resignation letter on the table and tie up any loose ends."

"Senpai, are you really going to quit?" Miyoshi puts her fork down and asks me with upturned eyes.

As her short bob gently spills down on one side, my heart races a little.

"Ugh, Miyoshi, where did you learn such tactics?"

"Fu fu fu, it's the experience of a woman, experience. But, if you quit, I really wonder what's going to happen to the current project..."

Outside the window, the roadside trees, their just turning leaves faintly swaying in the wind, signal the silent start of autumn befalling the lands.

"Who knows? Won't Enoki deal with it somehow?"

"Fat chance. Okay, if it gets too bad, I'll just quit too, I guess."

"Whoa, just a second. Quit, you say? Do you have any other job prospects lined up?"

"A senpai I met at college has started a medical instrument company, under Gacco's^[efn_note]Japanese education company^[/efn_note] industry-academic cooperation headquarters. She's invited me over many times."

"...Tell me, why did you come to our company?"

Nowadays, integrated chemical manufacturers are pretty much all on the decline. The profit ratio isn't all that rosy either.

Meanwhile, our entrees arrive. It looks like it's lamb today.

The pink-colored meat looks really delicious. Befitting the current season, it's garnished with trumpet and chanterelle mushrooms.

"This is about you, senpai, not me. What are you going to do after quitting the company?"

"Well, for the time being, I'm planning to dive into a dungeon."

"Huh?"

What's with that silly look? But well, I'm sure she's surprised. Even I'm surprised about it.

"You don't know? Dungeons?"

"No, I know what they are, but...why all of a sudden? Is this something along the lines of going to get the materials directly instead of just researching them? That doesn't sound like you?"

Well, I always did work using computers, so I don't really come off as being an active type of guy, I suppose.

Ah, but I feel like boasting a bit to Miyoshi. She seems to be someone who can keep a secret.

"How rude. Miyoshi, you know about dungeon cards?"

"I have one."

"Hee?"

"I was invited back at college, and went several times to Yoyogi. The first run was just a card acquiring tour, though."

"Why?"

"There's the matter with the orbs. But, well, it's something like fashion, I'd say?"

Going into dungeons for fashion...just what's going on with today's universities?

"What's your rank?"

"No idea. I don't quite remember, but I think it was somewhere in the 90,000,000 range."

"Fufufu, I actually have one, too."

"Well, I guessed as much. Otherwise you wouldn't start talking about going to a dungeon."

The Perceval 9.47 (knife) in Miyoshi's hand sinks into the lamb meat without any resistance. It seems as though it's full of meat juices. Without spilling even a single drop, she carries the pink slice to her mouth.

"Miyoshi, what I'm going to tell you from now on remains a secret between us, okay? Swear that you won't tell anyone."

"Swear on what?"

"Hmm? come to think of it, you're right. Huh? God?"

"Someone like that doesn't exist."

"Well, whatever. Either way, it's a secret."

"I swear on this agneau[efn_note]Lamb in French[/efn_note]. Though it's half-eaten."

"Somehow I feel like it's become quite insignificant all of a sudden."

"Eh? This lunch set will suffice. It's your treat, right senpai?"

"Hey! To sponge off a guy who's about to become unemployed, you're quite the heartless one, aren't you?"

"It's going to be your treat. So, what's the matter?"

"Don't forget your agnello pledge. By the way, we're in an Italian restaurant, so go with the Italian language."

While pouting a bit, Miyoshi says, "Senpai, I think this sort of thing is why you're not popular with women."

"How meddlesome. Tsk. Look at this, and be astonished." Saying so, I place my dungeon card down in front of Miyoshi with a snap.

"Isn't that a D-Card? Just what are you sayi...whaaaat!!!" Miyoshi raises her voice unconsciously, and then looks around us in a hurry.

For an instant, the eyes from several tables turn to us, but the people immediately return to their food, apparently having lost interest.

"W-What's t-this? A fake card?" Miyoshi abruptly leans forward and whispers.

"Don't be stupid, what would be the point of forging something like this?"

"Umm, to surprise your kouhai?"

"How dull."

"I mean, this has Rank 1 written on it, doesn't it?"

"Amazing, right?"

"Sure, it has your name listed, and the card looks somehow realish as well...wait a moment please."

Miyoshi takes out her smartphone and accesses some site.

"It's true. An anonymous person of Area 12 has become rank one in the WDARL..." She shows me the list.

"You thought it was a fake?"

"Well, that's only natural, no? I mean, are you going to tell me that you had the spare time to go to some dungeon with your black-hole-like work schedule?"

"Black hole, you call it...well, it's true that I didn't have time for something like that, though."

"What kind of unfair trick..."

"No, you, what do you take me for?"

"Let alone the high performers of the military, who have been diving into dungeons as part of their work for three years, it's rank one, okay? I think that's definitely impossible for you, unless you pulled some mean trick."

"Well, there's been stuff. Look, you're going to stay silent about this, right?"

"Even if I told anyone, they wouldn't believe me anyway."

"...I guess that's true as well." While I mutter that, dessert is served.

The specialty of this place is the Mont Blanc, no, Monte Bianco, I suppose. Of course, it uses Japanese chestnut.

It's plenty sweet, but not sticky. Sweets do need a certain degree of sweetness in my opinion.

"Moreover, you even got a skill! Okay, I guess that's only natural for rank 1...so, May King? King of May, sounds like potato, somehow. What kind of skill is it?"

"No clue."

"Hah?"

Miyoshi pulls a silly face for the second time today.

"Miyoshi, do you know how to use a skill?"

"No idea, since I don't have one."

"Thought so."

"But, I have seen it on the blog of a person who used one. Umm, if I remember correctly...you touch the skill's name on the card, and then recite that name, I think. It looks like you practice the invocation like this until you get used to it."

"Hee, really? Got it. Let me try."

"Try, you say...you never used it?"

"Mmh? Yeah, well, stay silent about it, okay?"

I had also looked up skills online.

Miyoshi keeps complaining, "And yet rank 1, rank 1...," but whatever.

I touch the skill name on my D-Card, and try to do as she said.

"Touch the skill name, and recite it, okay?"

"May King."

"..."

It's like I'm a chuunibyou or something.[efn_note]chuunibyou means "middle school syndrome" and refers to over the top naming conventions and actions that are associated with things like Power Rangers.[/efn_note] How embarrassing.

"You sound like a chuunibyou, a bit awkward, isn't it?"

"Gah! I don't want to be told that by you!! Be quiet!"

"No, senpai, activating a skill with an unknown effect in such a place; what are you going to do if it's offensive magic?"

Ugh, she's right.

Any researcher would naturally want to experiment right away. No, it might just be me.

"You're right."

"But, senpai muttering 『May King』...pfft."

"S-Shaddup."

You're the one who said to do that in the first place, right?

"In any case, you said you want to dive into dungeons? Well, you'll likely earn an absurd amount as rank 1, though."

"Really?"

"King Samon of Area 2 has been flying all over the world in his private jet."

"Who's that?"

"The sole anonymous explorer in the single digits, until you became rank 1 senpai. Right now, he's rank 9."

"His name is known despite him being anonymous?"

"All high rankers are celebrities. Your identity gets exposed due to the Area information on the

ranking list."

"I see. I suppose in that case, he wasn't able to hide his identity after becoming the top explorer from Area 2."

"Yep."

The most important dungeon-native items that can be trafficked are potions.

However, since most of the potions found by the military are used by the army itself, or stockpiled as national strategic resources, those potions don't appear on the market in general.

In the end, the ones available on the market are mostly provided by civilian explorers. It seems like quite hefty sums of money are paid for them.

Do I have a chance too?

"Senpai, senpai. I just looked at the comments for a bit, but since there's no one in Area 12 who would potentially qualify to be the new rank 1, there's a huge uproar on the net."

"Seriously? Are there no celebrities in Area 12?"

"Because Japan had been quick to put dungeons under the control of the JDA, there are almost no people who raided dungeons of their own accord. That's why the JSDF holds all the top spots. The civilian explorers are far below them. Even the high-ranking ones seem to be around the four digit mark."

"In the range of rank 1000?"

"Yep. At most they occasionally place in the lower triple digits."

"There's Russia and Indonesia, as well as Australia, no?"

"Aside from Japan, the countries in Area 12 aren't overly populated."

"Hahaa..."

"Senpai." Miyoshi suddenly straightens her back.

"What's up?"

"Please hire me if I quit the company."

"Pardon?"

"I mean, you will make a living by diving into dungeons from now on, won't you?"

"Well, probably. I don't have any other prospects after all."

"But, you don't want to become famous, do you?" Miyoshi says while laughing weakly.

This girl has grasped me unexpectedly well, hasn't she?

"...Hmm, yeah."

"So, there are agents, aren't there?"

"Agents?"

"Being known by the JDA will be unavoidable, but you need a JDA trading license to sell items you acquire yourself."

"Hoh."

"And, if you do business with that, your identity will be exposed because of your trade license. That can't be avoided."

"Yeah, there's some law in regards to special business transactions or something like that."

"That's why, if I get a trading license and sell the items you acquire——"

"Any attempt to trace my identity from the license will end with you, is that what you're saying?"

"That's it. A capable manager and an agent. But her true identity is!"

"Is?"

"An Oumi trader brimming with the intention to be senpai's kickback and leech!"

"You know..."

However, it looks like she will keep my secret, and she's quite easy to get along with. It might actually be a good idea.

"Alright. I will think it over."

"Senpai!"

"However, I still don't know how it's going to pan out, okay? Don't resign as long as you can endure it. It's not like I will be able to start dungeon diving right away either. It looks like I have to do some training first."

To freely enter a dungeon, it seems necessary to register as an explorer, and take a training course. At that point, an explorer card will be issued for control purposes. That card is called an explorer license.
Just what's the point of D-Card then?

"...Please wait a sec." Miyoshi pulls a mystified expression while placing a finger on her espresso cup.

"Mmh?"

"Why do you have a D-Card when you don't have an explorer license?"

"...Oh, I defeated a stray goblin or something."

"What do you mean, 'or something'? In the first place, what's a stray goblin? If goblins were able to wander around in back alleys all over the place, it'd be damn scary! How shady..."

"Well, it doesn't matter now, does it? I will tell you at some point. Look, lunch break's over."

"...It's a promise, okay?"

"Aye."

"Then, thanks for the meal!" Miyoshi says, throws the last macaron — no, baci di dama — into her mouth, and drains her espresso.

§007 Making

"Making?" A seedy man, wearing a green, high-necked knitted fabric and leather pants too thin to be called riding gear, says, while pushing his plain glasses up the bridge of his nose, with the middle finger of his right hand.

"Yes."

The control team of JDA's skill database constantly monitors the search terms entered by users. These terms are compared to the JDA's database, allowing them to keep track of potential new skill orbs.

"Just another vague name that someone looked up, no?"

"That's what you'd think, but the user only searched for that one term. Usually, if someone is browsing skill names out of curiosity, they browse several at once, don't they?"

"Well, that's true."

"I've said this before but, wouldn't it be great to implement a membership system, where you have to log in with your explorer ID? Identifying the specifics of an individual with just their IP and timestamps is such a pain."

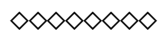
"Whoa, hold it. Don't say such scary stuff. Private data is delicate legally."

"Oops, that's true."

"We're going to put it on the skill list to be checked, just in case. If someone owns it, we will know through a check of the D-Card, right? After all, we have to gather as much information about unknown skills as possible."

"Roger."

And that's how Making was entered into the list of skills to be monitored, which isn't available to the public.



After lunch with Miyoshi, I left work early. I sat down on the bench of a nearby park, and continuously recited the skill name.

"May King."

No, this really looks like chuunibyou...how embarrassing.
Somehow I feel like the people walking past are looking at me and giggling.

"Shit...May King."

Ah, they probably think that I'm some shady dude, right?
If there were children playing around here, I would already look like a splendid, suspicious person, wouldn't I? Fortunately, it's already evening, and there's no one here.

"Ma-May King."

The evenings are already cold at this time of year, so there probably won't be any couples skulking around...is what I want to believe.
Hnnngh, get rid of the noise, ward off the noise...

"May King."

As I repeat the word and shut out the world's noise, the meaning of the word gradually fades, and it completely loses its meaning in the end.

And then, in a state of pure whiteness, I mutter the word as something that feels like no more than a sound, "Making."

At that moment, a semi-transparent tablet expands in front of me.

"Eeh!?"

A woman, walking nearby, starts quickly running away due to me raising my voice and standing up, giving off the aura of a suspicious person no matter how you look at it.

Ugh, how rude...anyway, this is...

I leave the park while it remains deployed, trying to go towards the shopping district.

No really one pays any attention to me. No matter how long I stare through the transparent display, no one else seems to notice. I turn the corner, and a convenience store comes into view, no one looks my way, clearly this can't be seen by other people. I suppose it doesn't exist in physical space. I return to the park once more, and start to closely examine the display. It truly resembles the character creation screen of an old RPG.

Name Yoshimura Keigo
Rank 1 / SP 1200.03

HP 23.80
MP 23.80

STR 9 (+)
VIT 10 (+)
INT 13 (+)
AGI 8 (+)

DEX 11 (+)

LUC 9 (+)

Meikingu, is that possibly Making!? Who was it? The one calling it May King!?

Rather, if you go by the standard of a Japanese Language Council member, May King would be mekingu, wouldn't it!? *pants heavily*

Now let's get back to the main topic.

The UI itself looks like a common game, and doesn't seem all that difficult to understand.

As a test, I try pushing the + of STR once.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1199.03

HP 24.80 [23.80 → 24.80] MP 23.80

STR 10 (+) [9 → 10] VIT 10 (+)

INT 13 (+)

AGI 8 (+)

DEX 11 (+)

LUC 9 (+)

Well yeah, figures.

In short, it means, by allotting SP to a stat, HP or MP go up based on some kind of calculation.

I can probably get SP by killing monsters. The basis for the ranking might be this value.

Since there's no (-) button, I guess you can't take it back once you've assigned the SP.

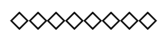
I can see how this system would make someone strong, but what the heck do the people who don't have Making do?

It doesn't seem as though everyone has access to this display. Otherwise the status display itself and information about each parameter should be commonly known.

Well, as I won't reach any conclusions by thinking about it anyway, I will leave that aside for now.

Next is verifying what kind of effect the values have.

It's not like it's an especially dangerous skill, so I guess I will do the rest at home. It's become slightly enjoyable.



I'm the kind of guy who likes to write things down when thinking about something.

I return home, take a shower, and resume the testing, while chewing on the pollack roe onigiri I bought on the way back to my apartment.

And currently, I'm staring at my own notes, while unconsciously drawing Sonic with my mechanical pencil.

Contrary to my excitement when I first figured out how to use the system, it all has a very simple structure.

For each parameter, there's a coefficient to calculate the value to be added to HP and/or MP. That coefficient will simply be multiplied and added to HP and/or MP.

The coefficients I have deduced through experiments are as follows. The HP coefficient is on the left, the MP coefficient on the right.

STR 1.0 0.0

VIT 1.4 0.0

INT 0.0 1.6

AGI 0.1 0.1

DEX 0.0 0.2

LUC 0.0 0.0

Since there were some parts that didn't change, I even pressed some values five times by mistake. After finishing my tests, my parameters now look like this:

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1173.03

HP 36.00

MP 33.00

STR 14 (+)

VIT 15 (+)

INT 18 (+)

AGI 10 (+)

DEX 16 (+)

LUC 14 (+)

"However, this...it's the quantification of a person's abilities, isn't it?"

I wonder if I will get ten times as strong, if my original STR of 9 becomes 90?

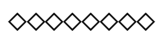
Uwaah, I'm going to raise STR one point at a time, while measuring my punching power! (← Researcher nature)

If I went as far as getting a measurement of my physiology, wouldn't I be able to gauge the parameters that have been strengthened by the dungeon?

However, such measurement devices...wait? Come to think of it, Miyoshi...

『A senpai I met at college has started a medical instrument company, under Gacco's industry-academic cooperation headquarters. She's invited me over once!』

It's convenient that tomorrow is Saturday. It's still before 10 pm. I'm going to call Miyoshi on the spot.



"Hello~"

"Yo, thanks for coming."

Miyoshi knocked on my door at 9 am. She's wearing a cute outfit I haven't seen her wear at the office much.

"Senpai, you sure live in a nice area."

"It's just the area. The building is a run-down apartment building that's more than 50 years old."

"Then it's rather a surprise for such an apartment building to still remain somewhere like this."

This apartment building was built in the former Yoyogi, rather than in the Yoyogi-Hachiman area. Sure, the area itself isn't bad.

"What happened today? Isn't that a cute dress?"

"Eh? I mean, you're going to treat me to a meal at Morille, right?"

"Did I say anything like that!?"

"When I told you that I will come if you're going to treat me to Morille, you said that it doesn't matter and I should come as soon as possible. As it's a restaurant with Michelin stars, I dressed myself suitably."

"Ugh! Something like that...I'm so stupid."

Morille is the neighboring French restaurant. A chef, who came back after training in France, opened it in Hachiman. It's a restaurant that loves mushrooms. Which reminds me, the season where mushroom bouillon becomes delicious is around the corner. The unique flavor of dried mushrooms isn't bad, but fresh ones are far better. But then again, I'm on a low salary right now, so it's not like I can go there frequently.

"Got it..."

Helplessly I write an email to reserve a table for the appointed time, while praying that they'll be booked up today.

"Yahoo. So, you said you solved the riddle of May King?"

"Ah, I guess so. So, about this."

Miyoshi gazes at the gathered notes scattered on top of my kotatsu in the bedroom and settles down among them.

Your skirt will become creased if you sit down on the floor.

"Senpai, are these possibly the abilities of a person, expressed in numbers?"

"Well, I guess you could call it that. It's the values of the parameters strengthened by the dungeons."

"Making is a skill that quantifies parameters!?" Miyoshi presses me for an answer, obviously surprised.

What's so exciting about it?

"W-Well, that's not its primary purpose. It just appeared to be slightly interesting."

"Appears interesting...senpai, isn't this something at the level of state secrets?"

"What's with you, all of a sudden? The calculation formula is very simple, you know? It's at the level of middle school."

Miyoshi breathes unnaturally.

"Senpai, that's because you have a skill allowing you to measure the numerical values, right?"

Sure, it's just as she says. I'm confident that I wouldn't have realized it at all without this skill, even if I researched it intensely.

"Besides, this coefficient-based concept will trigger a revolution in the skill orb world."

"What do you mean?"

"After you called me yesterday, I tried to look up information about orbs." Saying so, Miyoshi takes a laptop out of her bag, and accesses the JDA's database.

Most people use tablets, but laptops are far more efficient for our work. Both of us are fans of laptops.

Miyoshi actively uses a tablet as well, though.

It seems like there's quite a few orbs whose effects aren't totally clear.

Even if you try using them, they don't increase the number of skills you have, or you don't actually feel as though you used them. Those orbs have been called junk orbs.

One group among those junk orbs is called the xHP+ types.

"However, going with this concept, it's clear. For example, this——" Miyoshi points at the search results of the database.

"AGIxHP+1 or AGIxHP+2 means——"

"I guess it will increase the HP multiplication coefficient of AGI."

"I don't know unless I verify it, but assuming it increases your coefficient value of 0.1 with +1..."

"With the AGI of a normal person, they won't actually notice the effects, since the HP only raises by 1 or 2."

"That's how it is. Quantification is amazing, isn't it?"

But won't it result in something totally different if the parameters have grown? Going from 0.1 to 0.2 is double, isn't it?

"You see, the important part is that those junk orbs are cheap."

Once I look at the screen, most of them cost around several 100,000 Yen. That's still plenty expensive, but with the rarity of orbs, it's cheap.

I guess I could monopolize their use, in order to prepare for the future, However, that only works if you've got the money.

"Of course, since you can't store them anyway, it's not like there's a stock of them either. It's just that their value will go up if others become aware of this." Miyoshi says, and logs out of the database. And while pointing at my notes, she whispers, "Besides, if you can measure attributes, it will turn into a huge source of money."

I think so as well.

The governmental bodies of all nations, and civilian corporations for sure, and even freelance explorers...a large number of people will likely buy this information.

"I'd expect nothing less of an Oumi trader. Actually, I called you here for that very reason, Miyoshi."

"I see. Give me the details."

"Yesterday you said something about having an acquaintance among the higher-ups of a medical instrument company that's doing a joint-venture with your former college, didn't you?"

"Yes, she's called Naruse Midori. It's a company created by a senpai of mine who was the golden child of our lab."

"So, about that. My Making can add a value to a stat. That's its true ability."

"Eh? That means it's a character maker?"

"Well, yeah."

"Unbelievable. But, then, a measurement target already exists, albeit it would be your private information in this case, right? So all you have to do is calibrate a sensor to your current attributes and adjust the values in order to create a standardized measurement scale right?"

"I guess so. However, I don't even know what I should measure in the first place. Accordingly——"

"That means, you're going to comprehensively evaluate yourself with the measurement devices over at Midori-senpai's place, and deduce each parameter afterwards, huh?"

"What do you think?"

"Even if you ask me, it seems interesting, but physiological values have quite the range depending on physical condition and individual difference, you know?"

"The correction of that error would be your field of expertise, wouldn't it Miyoshi?"

This girl is an expert on numerical analysis.

"That's true, but...in the end, we will need to gather the numerical values, by scanning you in various ways each time you raise one of your parameters by one, and afterwards we would need to put those measurements together, and try to check what has changed, wouldn't we?"

"Yeah, well, that's correct."

"Assuming that physiological changes will really occur through the parameters, and if you raise STR by one, and supposing that the concentration of your blood content will be altered in some way at a level that can be measured, won't you die after your homeostasis is thrown into chaos if you raise STR by 100?"

It's true that the soldiers at the forefront of dungeon exploration haven't become abnormally muscular.

If their strength has doubled, even though their muscle mass hasn't increased as much, the possibility of some kind of physiological change having taken place is reasonably high. That's why it's definitely possible that a problem like Miyoshi mentioned might occur.

"We will go little by little. The change won't be too intense, and we can take occasional breaks, too."

"Well, in that case, I will contact her, but...senpai, your skill is a secret, right?"

"If possible."

"I wonder what reason I should give for intermittently doing comprehensive examinations."

"Hmm, how about we say we're running tests on a newly developed drug or something?"

"If we suddenly started doing a clinical study, without even having a permit for a clinical trial, we would get arrested."

"How about we say we're examining some special item, and you want to observe its effects on the human body?"

"Since the other party wouldn't stand to gain anything in that scenario, we would need to pay for the examinations, I think. It might be different if things move in the direction of joint development of new measurement instruments, though."

"If you go with that at the current stage, it will become necessary to explain the skill, I think."

Since I don't yet know whether it can be measured in the first place, there's no way we can propose a joint development project.

"Well, that's a long way off. It's possible that nothing measurable will change."

"Yeah, that's possible. I will try to contact Midori-senpai, for the time being." Miyoshi writes an email and sends it. As usual, she works quickly.

"——So, what if it goes smoothly?"

"Pardon?"

"No, I just mean, if it looks like that measuring device thing is working out, it'd be nice if you were to start selling it, Miyoshi. I'm sure it would be possible to earn quite a lot of dough with it if you got a patent on it."

"Yep. When the time comes, we will register the patent together. But look, I believe the test results will be heavily disputed. After all, it won't be possible to publicize the theory it's based on."

"In the eyes of outsiders, it'll seem like nothing more than inductive reasoning being sold as a product."

"Thermometers are like that too. Natural science seems to have been primarily built on inductive observation. I believe, in the end, it will be accepted, though."

"Would sure be nice."

"Forget that, senpai! It's lunch time already, lunch time! Let's go eat out."

"D-Don't be too hard on me, okay? Our reservation at Morille's was confirmed."

At last, the confirmation email has arrived on my device. It's blinking, as if to symbolize the crisis facing my wallet.

§008 Short Training Course 9/30 (Sun)

Morning of the following Sunday:

It's raining, as if the sky is weeping for my poor wallet after last night.

As I open my umbrella, about to leave Ichigaya Station, someone taps my shoulder.

"Senpai!" Miyoshi stands there, while cracking a cheerful smile.

"So, why are you here?"

"I mean, you've said you're going to take the training course today, and so I thought I might as well take it once more."

"Why?"

"Now that I've been officially appointed as your agent, I've got to at least pay you back for yesterday's trumpet, chanterelle, and girolle mushrooms."

"You mean, mushrooms get you going?"

"Uwaaaah, don't be a perv! Ah, ouch! Please don't hit me. I will also do my best for the mehikali[efn_note]local dish of the Ehime prefecture made out of sweet potato powder[/efn_note]. Those were soft, fluffy and delicious, don't you think? I really wonder, why are French cooks all so skilled at cooking fried food?"

"Come to think of it, yeah, why?"

While bantering with each other about casual stuff, we cross the Ichigaya Bridge, and once we turn left, the JDA headquarters becomes visible in the distance.

"No matter how often I see it, it's a weird building, isn't it?" Miyoshi says, bending her head slightly to the side, and looking up at JDA's headquarters through her transparent umbrella.

The JDA has bought up, and is using, Sumitomo's Ichigaya branch office, while planning to link up with the JSDF's Tokyo Branch Cooperation Headquarters located in Ichigaya.

It looks like they renovated it in various ways, but it's weird, err, unique, shape, has remained the same.

I look up at the JSDF building as I walk along Yasukuni street, after exiting Ichigaya station. The building looks like the bridge of a transforming robot/spaceship, built by a mecha designer to finish off some enemy.

"Oh, on that subject, Midori-senpai sent a reply."

"Hee, what did she say?"

"Looks like she can make it work, as they have finished the first stage of development for the medical scan capsule they're working on."

"How much?"

"If you submit the summary of the examination, it will cost around 2,000,000 per examination, she says."

"The hell! If I measure six kinds of parameters five times with an increase of two each time...it's going to cost me 60,000,000!?"

"Even if you shake your piggy bank upside-down, such an amount of money won't fall out."

"The bank...bah, there's no way they'd lend me that much money, is there?"

"You don't want to do a joint development project, correct?"

"Mmh? No, that's not it, but in the current situation, my ability would be simply used for the other party's development, right? I'd like to at least get my hands on the software rights so that it equals out, you see?"

"Well, I guess that makes sense. Haah...I just had a feeling that it'd be profitable."

Sure, I think a quantification of abilities will yield a profit.

I have no doubt that there are plenty of guys who would love to shout "Status Open!"

However, money...money, eh...?

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing, let's put that matter on hold for now."

"I think that's okay." Miyoshi stares at me, puzzled.

"No, I mean, you said it yourself, didn't you? That it might be possible to earn some dough in a dungeon."

"If you can earn 60,000,000 in a short time, I believe it'd be better for you to focus on that and not do anything unnecessary, though."

"That part is...you know, what you'd call the romance of a researcher, okay?"

"Well, I can understand that."

We, who smiled wryly at each other, since romance won't be able to put any food on the table, board the robot, and head to the reception desk right away.

"Excuse me. I've come to apply for a dungeon license."

"Okay. Since the morning section is going to start soon, you can take the training course in the big conference room on the second floor, after filling out this application form."

"The license will be issued with just that?"

"If you are a civilian, there will be an examination based on your official papers, after the short training course, but if there's no problem with that, a WDA license card will be mailed to you on another day."

"Examination means?"

"It's possible that you won't pass the examination if you have a criminal record, seeing as there's the matter with the orbs. Moreover, your age and the existence of chronic diseases will be checked, but it will be fine as long as nothing is wrong in particular."

"I don't have to show a D-Card?"

"No. Most people don't possess a D-Card when they apply for a license."

"I see."

That's quite convenient.

"If you have already acquired a D-Card outside the country, you can have a higher ranked card issued by showing it."

It seems someone in charge has gone ballistic during the process of establishing the WDA license system. Apart from the D-Card, you will be classified to a rank corresponding to the services you have contributed.

Beginners start from G, and there seems to be S above A. It's a sign of the times, these days, people from every strata of society have grown up with video games.

The ranks are used to limit the purchase of weapons and armor, special, restricted, admission to dungeons, and as a criterion for payment in case of an enterprise hiring an explorer.

"Later, you will be able to enter and leave every public dungeon by showing your license card."

"What about the D-Card?"

"It's useful for gauging your strength, but it's not very useful for managing people. After all, it doesn't make their origin and actions clear."

"Then it's not really necessary to show one's D-Card, is it?"

"Indeed. I suppose it's used to prove your skill and rank during party recruitment."

"I got it. Thank you very much."



The training course was an explanation concerning formalities, methods to enter dungeons, and

outlines about equipment etc., that was easy to understand, and based on reality. Afterwards, there was a free question period while we looked at the guide books.

"So there's no need to pay to enter a dungeon." A modern-styled cute-type beauty sitting in front of us says, while browsing her guide book.

"Well, it looks like you've got to pay a 10% JDA administration fee for dungeon-native items instead. Also, a dungeon tax of 10%." Another slender, conservative, beauty, who has slightly boyish features, explains the actual expenses.

It appears they've come here together.

"They are going to keep 20%?"

"What you sayin'? If you consider public gambling, it's a bit of a bargain, no?"

Yeah, well, cycle races and boat races are 25%. If you take horse racing as an average, it's around the same. From the vigorous.

"It's treated like gambling? Hmm, not much difference, either way, I guess."

"Yep. Though, the chip will be our life."

Hearing that, Miyoshi unintentionally burst out into laughter. Hearing that, the two in front reflexively turn around.

"Excuse me. It just matched your cool image too much."

The two look at each other, and then at Miyoshi again.

"Are you making fun of me?"

"Absolutely not. I almost retorted 『Life is a weapon everyone possesses, but you mustn't use it as one if you value it』 on reflex. But, once I held back on that, I burst into laughter."

The boyish woman suddenly relaxes visibly, and asks, "Charles Gordon?"

"Yep. However, I guess in that case everyone will die."

Miyoshi and her smile at each other, but to me and the cutie it's gibberish.

"What's the matter? I totally don't get what you're on about?"

"Yeah, I no comprehendre either."

"It's a line from a movie about the Madhist War. I'm Mitsurugi, you?"

"Whoa, even your name is cool. I'm Miyoshi. And this guy is Yoshimura. Best regards."

"I'm Saito. Coming to a training course together on a Sunday? Isn't going on a date in a dungeon way miserable?" The cutie scans us with keen interest.

"No, we're colleagues at the same company. It's not like we're actually preparing for a dungeon date." I wave my hand in front of my face while thinking that I really wanna ask about those girls' relationship.

"Company, you say. So, vanguards from some major company's dungeon department?" Saito asks.

V-Vanguards?

"No, we're simple researchers." I answer curtly.

"What, so that's it." Saito says, looking bored.

"Don't just dismiss it like that. I'm sure researchers are well-informed about dungeons, you know?" Mitsurugi follows up.

"I see. So please teach us about dungeons next time, okay?" Saito regains some of her spunk.

"Yeah, yeah." Once I answer Saito, who bends her head to the side coquettishly, she freezes with a smile on her face for a short moment.

"..."

"?"

"Haru-chan, was I lacking appeal?" Saito asks Mitsurugi.

So her name is Haru-something.

Mitsurugi covers her forehead with a hand and shakes her head.

"No, I think right now you're facing too tough an opponent." Mitsurugi answers.

It's my fault?

"Umm, what's the story here?"

"Hey you, normal man over there, won't you give me a business card or something?" Saito demands, with her cheeks puffed up.

Eh? Is that how it works? There's a rule like that??

I turn my eyes towards Miyoshi, looking for some help, but only get an ambiguous expression from her. That's clearly a sign telling me, "Don't ask me."

"Now, now, such blockheads exist these days. In the past they've been called KY^[efn_note]I think it was kuuki yomenai, or being unable to read the situation/mood^[/efn_note], my grandpa said."

"Who's a KY, who!? Rather, blockhead sounds quite ancient, too."

"Fads pass right away, and things are seen as terribly old quickly."

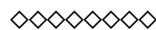
"Haah."

Oh, I think the free question period is about to end.

The lecturer has stood up, and has started on his closing speech.

The two in front of us reseated themselves, turning towards the lecturer, after apologizing with their eyes.

And thus the 'turbulent' short training course comes to an end.



"Senpai, you're going to eat lunch and go home?"

startle Am I in danger?

"That's right. But, you see, we just ate out yesterday, so to immediately..."

"How about something light, like ramen, then?"

"I don't get how ramen is supposed to be light, but salty food, eh? If we're talking about salty food around here, Due Ita^[efn_note] Abbrevation for Due Italian, a ramen chain. Look here: <https://www.dueitalian.jp/> ^[/efn_note]?"

Due Ita is a restaurant that serves Italian food in the shape of ramen. It's a weird store, where the dishes overflow with tomatoes and floating mozzarella cheese.

"No, I was hoping for something more with the feel of Chinese soba."

"Then, Daiyoshi with it's refreshing niboshi^[efn_note]boiled and dried fish^[/efn_note], huh?"

Daiyoshi is a normal Chinese soba shop located in Ichigaya-Tamachi (it's no ramen restaurant). It's the second brand of a popular ramen restaurant, but they've got a simple deliciousness with their straight niboshi in soy sauce.

"You're right. I'm not in the mood for too much chashao. I'm gonna go with Chinese ajitama^[efn_note]soft-boiled egg marinated in soy and mirin^[/efn_note]. Since it's lunch, a serving of wonton and some beer will be nice as well, don't you think!"

"Now listen..."

Afterwards, that glutton really ordered all this shit at Daiyoshi. Moreover, a medium-sized bottle of beer. Are you some middle-aged man? Well, I guess you could say that's why she's so easy to get along with...

"But, those two sure dolled themselves up quite a bit. Since they said something about business card

and such...I wonder whether they work in the sex industry?" I ask, while slurping traditional-Chinese-styled noodles.

"People in that industry have no incentive to dive into a dungeon, do they? Seeing how naive they were, aren't they more likely to be from the entertainment or fashion industry? It looked like they drew glances from the surrounding people, too."

"We're completely estranged from those kinds of people, after all. I wronged them if they are famous people."

"Please don't put me together into one bucket with you, senpai. I'm an ordinary person."

I want to retort, "The actors you know about are all from somewhat old movies, aren't they?", but I firmly endure instead.

Not saying anything unnecessary is the trick to skillfully getting along with others, right?

"But, even people in entertainment or fashion are pretty much unrelated to dungeons, aren't they?"

"You think so? Most recently, look, haven't there been dungeon idols as well?"

"Ah, those. The ones with the rip-off deal of one orb for a one day date."

"Jeez, it makes me want to follow their example."

"Eeh?"

"I mean, the people paying are satisfied with just that, aren't they?"

"Well, probably."

"And the idols ripping them off are all smiles."

"Yeah."

"Both sides are fully satisfied, it's a win-win situation!"

"Hmm, you could phrase it like that."

"Bah, please be careful since you're liable to be drawn in, you know? Senpai, you're extremely weak against advertisements and sophistry."

"Buhuu..."

I unintentionally spit out my noodles. I really can't rebut her though, as I do have a clear idea what she's talking about.

I'm so weak to advertisements that I would end up buying a whiskey due to a single, old poster stating "All gain, no loss" [efn_note]An ad for a Suntory brandy[/efn_note].

No, I mean, it's cool that catchphrase, isn't it?

"What's the point of talking about preferences and dependences on the same level? If you go by that logic, even drug dealing is win-win."

It's like that. But, it makes me want to tell her to stop since that comment raises various points of controversy.

"Anyway, I think we can't talk about moving quickly without optimizing mobility."

"True."

"In other words, going with yesterday's status, I wonder whether raising AGI wouldn't be an optimization of mobility as well."

"That would make sense."

"With DEX, it should widen the mobility range of your body, and raise the precision of your body control."

Naturally, body control is likely to be necessary for all kinds of techniques.

"That's possible."

"Besides, being strengthened by the dungeons means you will be strengthened as human in various ways. Nowadays it's normal for athletes to have training camps in dungeons."

"For real?"

Come to think of it, it might be something like a training camp at high altitudes, but...won't it take way long for them to see visible effects from the amount of experience they would be able to get? Or, are they doing some kind of bootcamp, where they have training courses that involve fighting against high-level monsters?

"That's why I believe that dungeons also have benefits for actors and fashion models."

"Hmm."

"Which reminds me, I've been thinking about trying to dive once at the end of the week. What about you, Miyoshi?"

"You're going to play hooky? Well, taking a vacation would be fine as well, but...if we both take a vacation on the same day, people might get the wrong idea, don't you think?"

The hell? What are you blushing for?

"Oh, I'm going to resign, so it's probably going to be okay."

"But, tomorrow is not possible, right? The license card has to be delivered, no?"

"Ah, true. I feel like she said something about two business days——"

"Then shouldn't you wait till Thursday, just to be sure?"

"Okay. So, what are we going to do about armor and weapons?"

"I took a look at the catalog just in case, but..."

Yep, I totally get her.

Weapons and armor costs a lot of cash. Even the cheapest stuff costs around 100,000 Yen, and items in the hundreds of millions exist in the upper price ranges, too.

"It's expensive, isn't it?"

"Yes! It's so overpriced! Why such prices!? In the first place, putting aside people who do kendo, it's not like we can use a sword!"

"If you meet the requirements for those special guns, that can only be used in dungeons under the supervision of the JDA, it looks like you can use those, more or less. Since they are expensive and not useful at lower floors, they are unexpectedly unpopular, though."

"I wouldn't hit anything with a gun, since I've never used one before."

"What did you do during your time as a student?"

"Rental."

"...There's even something like that, huh?"

"Well, it was something like a tour, after all."

"Actually hammers, hatchets, or axes might be passable."

"Yep. A hammer that's easy to use with one hand would be nice."

"Oh? Do you have some kind of plan? As expected of a beginner purveyor, goblins on the second floor?"

"Actually, there's something I want to test with the slimes on the first floor."

"Huh?"

The main monsters on the first floor of Yoyogi are slimes. However, those monsters are extremely unpopular.

It's difficult to defeat them, they aren't worth a lot of experience points, they don't drop anything...in short, there's nothing good about them.

Moreover, the stairs to the second floor of the unduly wide Yoyogi dungeon are right next to the stairs to the first floor. In the end, most explorers head for the second floor.

By the time I recovered from the shock of hearing about her preferred prey, she had stolen the last wonton out from under me.

§009 First Dungeon 10/4 (Thu)

The first half of the following week was a horror.

Once I handed in my resignation letter to the company, one big-wig after the other showed up, and tried to make me stay, saying things like, "Don't you care about all the projects you're leaving unfinished?"

You stupid?

In the first place, rather than stopping me from considering quitting, you should have just treated me decently from the start.

"I have heard about your recent mistake, we don't have any particular intention to blame you for that." The human resources guy said, but I only felt dumbfounded.

"I have done nothing wrong. The other party simply canceled the deal, after I was forced to apologize to them for troubles that had been caused by sales. Though I think that's only logical, as I would also doubt the company's sincerity if an unrelated underling came to apologize."

"...I haven't heard anything about that."

"Even if you say that, it's your company's problem." [efn_note]Adding the author's note from the end of the chapter here: "御社 (someone else's company in a colloquial way) is intentional. It's sarcasm saying I have already resolved myself to quit anyway."[/efn_note]

In short, I indirectly complained, 『First of all, I don't wanna wipe Enoki's ass anymore』. As a result, my resignation was temporarily put on hold, but my paid vacation until pay day was approved.



And then, Thursday finally arrived.
I was about to brazenly head to Yoyogi Dungeon.

"Oh~, a sparkling, brand-new license. Unchallenged G rank. Somehow this is pointlessly cool, isn't it?"

"Why unchallenged, albeit it's the lowest rank?"

"Because there's no one below it."

"I see..."

In light novels, your card would be made of more expensive material the higher your rank, but the WDA license is a common plastic IC card. However, the rank indicator's design is elaborate and it contains a hologram to prevent counterfeits, making it excessively stylish.

"A country with a culture steeped in manga and anime was guaranteed to make something like a dungeon card a big deal, even if it's just a piece of plastic." Miyoshi flips through the explorer guide book that came with the card, looking totally attached to it.

This book looks like some kind of game manual, it totally gives off a fantasy atmosphere. I expected that it would be a lot more government office-like, a dull and boring document. What's written in there is only common knowledge, though.

"Anyways, let's head out then?"

"Sure."

We leave my apartment early in the morning, heading straight for Yoyogi Dungeon.



Yoyogi is a fairly spacious dungeon, but relatively detailed information is available up until the 21st floor, which has been completely captured. A fine map has been released on the official website, allowing one to even see the interior through Dungeon View. Kind of a dungeon version of street view.

It looks like you will often spot explorers wearing omnidirectional cameras.

"Different from a street, they are walking while moving up and down. The angle of view changes when they evade obstacles as well, doesn't it? They have compiled this through clever tracing, huh?"

"Haven't they been using drones or such?"

"I mean, those would be destroyed by monsters, no?"

It was written on a page of Yoyogi Dungeon's dungeon story.

"How about installing cameras all over the place and monitoring it in realtime at this point?"

"There's some kind of spatial rupture, so the electromagnetic waves won't reach."

"Rupture?" Miyoshi hugs her own body, shivering, seemingly imagining that her body would be scattered into pieces.

"It says that there's no effect on objects that pass through."

"Haah, I realize a dungeon's strangeness all over again. But, in that case, what if it's communication through wire, seeing as objects pass through it."

"They say it'll turn into fodder for monsters."

Especially the damage from slimes seems to be amazing. The cable they brought in at first apparently didn't last a single day.

While chatting about such stuff, we wrap things up at the reception in the entrance area, and go down to the first floor of Yoyogi Dungeon.

Most of the explorers take the shortest route to the stairs towards the second floor. As the first floor hosts slimes and occasionally goblins, it's totally uninteresting to them. Another reason for the unpopularity of the first floor is that the stairway to the second floor is right next to the entrance. While casting a glance at the stream of descending people, we try to head deeper into the first floor.

"For now it's our first run, so I think we should get used to killing monsters."

"Hey, hey, senpai. Let's check the experience points of slimes."

"What for?"

"Because quantification is the trend right now of course. We will sell that information later!"

"What kind of trend are you on about? In the first place, won't we get asked how we measured it?"

"We invented a measuring device with some new technology or such?"

"Ain't that scamming!? Besides, we would be told to sell the measuring device then, wouldn't we?"

"Human trafficking is somewhat problematic."

"The measuring device is me!?"

"You see, there are quite a few businesses using skills in the world, so it absolutely won't be a scam. Of course, we won't be able to publicize the method, but researchers all over the world are going to verify the accuracy of our information."

What a magnificent way to rely on others for your own objective.

However, it's a trait of researchers working in the same field to verify the theories of others by trying to replicate them, isn't it?

"Oh, found one, found one."

Meanwhile, we have stumbled across the first monster, not first villager.^[efn_note]I think it's a reference to RPGs where you run first into a random villager? No clue.^[/efn_note]
It's bouncing and jiggling in a corner of the path, a slime.

"Its movements are slow, and it doesn't look as if it's going to jump at us or spew out something all of a sudden like in fiction, but weapons don't really work against this guy, it seems."

We don't have any magic, so would it have been better to bring a flamethrower to an area mostly filled with slimes? I don't own anything like that, though. Come to think of it, there was a movie where they burned something by igniting the spray of an aerosol can, wasn't there?

"True. Slimes are mostly made out of something similar to water. Cutting or striking them appears

to have little effect." Miyoshi lowers her backpack, and takes out several objects that look like bottles.

"It looks like they die if you destroy the core located somewhere inside their body, but spotting the exact location of an orb with a diameter of around one centimeter is quite the task. Compared to how troublesome they are, they don't seem to drop anything. Even as you kill them on and on, I heard that it doesn't feel like you getting any stronger at all."

"So, you're saying they have no good points?"

"They sure don't. That's why everyone gives up on them and goes elsewhere."

"Err, won't we get discouraged by them midway, as well?"

"That's where my secret weapon experiments come in."

"Hoh."

Miyoshi stands up abruptly, presses her left hand against her waist, and pushes up the bridge of air glasses, saying, "Now listen, okay? Most of the slime's liquid is thought to maintain its shape by causing a minimization of the surface area by destabilizing the interfacial free energy between the inside and the outside of the slime."

"Oh? Playing teacher?"

As she speaks, she points at the slime right ahead of us.

Once the minimization of surface area takes place, it closely resembles a ball. Sure, it's still trembling slightly. Having said that——

"I really don't feel like it's a good idea to apply our science to a fantasy world, though."

In reality, weapons at the level of small arms, including guns, seem to only work up to the 10th floor. Afterwards, they gradually work less, and mostly stop having any effect on the 20th floor, I heard.

That's why it's difficult to capture a medium dungeon. Though, in the case of gunpowder-based weapons, it appears that another reason they aren't used more is that their offensive power doesn't increase at all now matter how much stronger their wielder gets by killing monsters...

"I think modern science can still be applied to physical traits. So, if it relies on those conditions to maintain its shape, it should lose its shape if you lower the interfacial free energy."

Surfactants, huh?

"Are you going to try spraying a slime with soap water?"

"Correct. For starters I prepared the following types: anion, cation, anion + cation, and non-ionized." Miyoshi presses a switch on the camera attached to her helmet.

It looks like she's going to record this.

"If something happens, I'm counting on you for defense."

"Sure. However, with this?"

I audibly swing the 30 cm frying pan she took out.

"Senpai, its level as weapon and armor is high after all. Besides, it's completely made out of titanium, you know? It's tough, light, and resistant to corrosion. Since its thermal conductivity is low, it can deal with a bit of fire, too. As it's a Chinese-style frying pan, you'll be able to deflect attacks with its sloped sides. I think it's far superior to some average shield, okay?"

"I really don't get the idea behind making a frying pain out of titanium that conducts heat badly."

"Probably because it keeps the heat?"

Miyoshi is puzzled, too.

"Well, whatever. I'm ready to go."

I stand ready in front of the slime while holding the frying pan.

"Then, here I go. First the anion type. Sodium Dodecylbenzene Sulfonate, fire!"

"That's no different from a magic chant, is it?"

Miyoshi sprays the surfactant, that seems to be an anion type, out of the bottle in her hand. The slime, which takes a direct hit from the solution, only trembles repeatedly while causing its surface to undulate.

"Doesn't look like it had much of an effect."

"Yeah. Though you seem to work pretty nicely for G, Mama Lemon[efn_note]A detergent with citrus aroma, look pict0re: <https://cdn.yourmystar.jp/relivers/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/mamalemon-018-1-thumbnail-900.jpg> [/efn_note]," she said to the bottle with a frown.

She enters a note on her tablet, while looking disappointed.

"Well then, next up, the cation type!"

"Won't the surface active effect get reduced if you mix it with an anion type?"

"It's fine, it's fine. It's not like I'm going to wash it, and it's an experiment to kill some time anyway."

"Kill some time, you say!?"

However, the effect is dramatic. The moment the cation type surfactant hits the slime, it pops with a

bang.

"Huh? What's this? Is it alien drool or something like that?"

"Its main component is benzethonium chloride."

"Oh, somehow that sounds damn powerful."

"Right? But when it's sold normally, it's called Makiron^[efn_note]Product of antiseptic solution^[/efn_note]."

"Antiseptic solution?"

"Yep."

"You mean, slimes are weak against Makiron?"



"Looks like it."

"Oh, should I buy shares of Daiichi Sankyo[efn_note]The company producing and selling Makiron[/efn_note] then?"

"Even if this becomes widely known, I don't think there'll be a significant demand." While saying so, Miyoshi takes out a somewhat largish locksmith's hammer, and beats the core laying on the floor with it. The core cracks, and dissipates into black particles.

"With this, slimes have stopped being enemies!"

"Though they wouldn't actually be enemies if you ignored them from the get-go."

"I told you, I believe that part of you is the reason why you're not popular with women, senpai."

Miyoshi hands the hammer and the bottle with the fake Makiron to me.

"Senpai, your skill also quantifies experience points, right?"

"Rather than experience points, it quantifies what seems to be the values added to each stat."

"Well, let's just call it experience points for the sake of convenience."

"Righto."

We continue trudging along. Since traps haven't been confirmed in dungeons as of yet, moving around a dungeon is pretty chill, as long as you pay attention to monsters.

"Found the second monster."

"Making." The usual display pops up after I mutter the skill name.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1173.03

HP 36.00

MP 33.00

STR 14 (+)

VIT 15 (+)

INT 18 (+)

AGI 10 (+)

DEX 16 (+)

LUC 14 (+)

"Well then, shall I handle it?"

"Yep."

"Gush forth! Somethingonium chloride!"

"Senpai...is that necessary?"

The fake Makiron jets out with a spraying sound, and the slime explodes.

"Yelling a technique's name is a Japanese tradition."

The rest was simple work, as I only had to hit the core.

Gonn!

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1173.03 → 1173.05

HP 36.00

MP 33.00

STR 14 (+)

VIT 15 (+)

INT 18 (+)

AGI 10 (+)

DEX 16 (+)

LUC 14 (+)

"So?"

"Let me see...an increase of 0.02."

"0.02 you say..." Miyoshi enters the value into a spreadsheet on her tablet.

"Let's go to the next one!"

And that's how we continued beating slimes until the tablet's battery ran low.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

Miyoshi and I return to my apartment as soon as we're done.

Miyoshi immediately transfers the data she brought back to her laptop, and then starts running statistics...not.

"What's wrong?"

"It's not enough to run statistics on it yet. You will know once you look." Miyoshi hands the notebook over to me.

1 0.020
2 0.010
3 0.007
4 0.005
5 0.004
6 0.003
7 0.003
8 0.003
9 0.002
10 0.002
11 0.002
12 0.002
...
...
70 0.002
71 0.001
72 0.002

So we defeated 72 slimes in the end? And the acquired SP totals to...0.182?

"Bleh, even if they're just slimes, only this much after defeating 72 of them!?"

"There's a reason everyone ignores them." Miyoshi answers, while working on something with the 5 liter plastic container she bought the other day and prepared in the kitchen in advance.

"But, at first...oh, hmm? Look, the first 10 are divided by the number of killed slimes, no?"

"Yes. It looks like the amount of experience points you get is divided by higher and higher numbers over time, based on how many you've killed. From the 10th slime on, it seems to always be 1/10th."

"Though it would have been 1.44 SP if it remained 0.02 all the way."

"Mmh? SP, what's that?"

"Ah, I didn't tell you, did I? What we're conveniently calling experience points right now is expressed as SP."

"Hmm, so status point or something like that?"

"Maybe."

"Let's go with SP from now on then."

"Sure. But, it should originally be 1.44 SP and yet it's 0.182. No matter how you put it, that's way too much of a difference."

"Doesn't the experience point efficiency drop if you become stronger in a game?"

"It's just that the necessary experience points for the next level keep growing if you continue leveling. Normally you get the same experience points when you defeat the same monsters, I believe."

"Well, this one is more natural, isn't it? So, at present——"

Miyoshi offers two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: SP decreases if you kill a monster repeatedly in succession.

Hypothesis 2: The real value is the one you get after you have defeated more than 10, and the first 10 are just a bonus.

"We can't verify 1 unless we run into other monsters on the way, can we?"

"Goblins appear on the first floor as well, you know?"

"It appears they only spawn in the area around the stairway leading to the second floor. So, they get hunted down right away."

"Please check it tomorrow, if possible."

"Mmh? What about you?"

"Tomorrow there's a short course for obtaining a trade license I applied to the other day. My aim is Oumi trader! That's why."

"Much thanks, wow. But, what about work?"

"Fu fu fu. I didn't use up all of my paid vacation. Also, Thursday and Friday are consecutive holidays."

"You did well to get it approved."

"Right now, the projects are on hold thanks to you, senpai. So an underling like me can do what she likes."

"No, saying it's thanks to me..."

I'm pretty sure it's thanks to Enoki, though.

Well, that's okay. I don't dislike doing this kind of laborious work. I will travel to Yoyogi for a while...huh?

"Say, isn't the 71st kind of too little?"

"Ah, about that. Look, isn't that the guy I hit with a stone that I kicked by accident?"

"I see. I suppose it became half because both of us attacked it. Quite amazing that it's even."

"Amazing?"

"I mean, the experience points will simply be split by the number of participants, unrelated to their contribution to battle, right? It's all-you-can-hit, so to say."

All you gotta do is throw a random pebble during someone else's battle and pretend it was an accident.

"...Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"Mmh?"

"It will turn into a huge uproar if it's quantified."

I see. Because it's not being quantified right now, no one would think that it's like that. If this fact is publicized...it will likely give birth to brutal hunting grounds, I think.

"Miyoshi~"

"What's up?"

"Since it truly looks like it's better to not announce it, let's discuss before making it available to the public."

"Understood."

Even so, assuming that the explorers of the early beginnings have dived into dungeons almost every day, they will have adventured for around 1100 days by now.

Since it's like this with slimes, they must have already accumulated plenty of points if they gained more than 1 SP per day on average. It's weird that I'm ranked first.

Wait, does that mean 0.182 is normal?

"Umm, what have you been doing there all this time?"

"Well, I'll be at the company for a while. I prepared some alien drool in advance. Since there's five 5 liter bottles, it should last you for some time, right?"

"Oh, that helps."

At that time I wasn't aware that killing 72 monsters, even if they're slimes, in one day, is abnormal. Moreover, I also didn't quite know that it was normal to dive into a dungeon as part of a big party.

§010 A Legend Appears 10/5 (Fri)

"Now then, I guess I'm going to energetically slaughter slimes today as well."

Ignoring the flow of people, I head deeper into the first floor. I don't even notice the odd looks from all the people heading to the second floor, as I march briskly into the depths of the first floor, wearing no armor to speak of and carrying nothing but a rucksack.

As soon as I put some distance between me and the stairs, I find an abundance of slimes, as expected, since there's no one else here.

"Somethingbeam!"

"-onium" has already transformed into a beam, but no one cares anyway.

"Hammer Attack!"

It's not really an original name, but no one cares anyw...huh?

The SP for the slime I just defeated was 0.02. Hmmmm? While considering that strange result, I defeat another slime....and it's 0.01.

Hypothesis 1: SP gains are reset everyday.

Hypothesis 2: They're reset every time you enter a dungeon.

I quickly go outside, in order to immediately check my hypothesis. And then I rush through the process of entering a dungeon again, and head inside once more.

This time I get 0.02 SP for the first slime I defeat. Excited, I continue walking on to the area near the second floor stairs. But I don't spot any monsters besides slimes.

As I get ready to head down to the second floor, feeling like I have no other choice if I want to collect more data, I suddenly notice something.

"That reminds me, I got no armor, and my only weapon is a hammer. The somethingbeam won't work against anything other than slimes, will it...?"

I guess I will focus on drawing up a verifiable model using only slime data for today.

"Phew, it's a battlefield. Losin' your composure means death." While muttering such a line, I feel like the folks descending to the second floor are looking at me, as I start to walk deeper into the first floor again, as if I'm some kind of weirdo, but it's probably just my imagination.

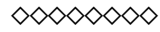
After this, I go in and out of the dungeon 14 more times, but one time among those I only get 0.01. That makes me retrace my steps from inside the dungeon, to just outside the entrance.

I check my hypothesis five times afterwards. I make sure to pause between each run, and keep increasing the distance little by little...

As a result, I confirm that you apparently have to leave the range influenced by the dungeon in order to reset experience gains. It looks like that boundary is at a spot exactly halfway down the path between the dungeon's entrance and the entry reception. Time doesn't appear to be a factor. Satisfied with the testing, I'm about to enter the dungeon once again.

At that moment, I'm called by an unknown voice, "Umm...excuse me for disturbing you."

A small, good-looking, woman wearing a JDA uniform is standing by the entrance.



"What? Suicide?"

"Yes, that's correct."

The woman's name is Naruse. I'm taken to the Yoyogi's Dungeon's YD Cafe (of course it stands for Yoyogi Dungeon Cafe) by her, and there I'm informed about something unexpected.



"There has been a report that a man is repeatedly entering, immediately leaving, and entering the dungeon again, while not wearing any kind of equipment."

"I see."

"It's been suggested that he may be trying to kill himself in the dungeon, attempting it over and over again as he can't make up his mind." She explains while returning my license card.

Sure, it makes sense that people would think something like that, after watching me go in and out of the dungeon in casual clothes like you'd wear downtown.

"That's, how to put it...I'm sorry to have troubled you." I apologize earnestly.

"No, it's alright if that's not the case." Mrs. Naruse smiles, and looks straight at me after taking a sip from her café au lait. "So, Mr. Yoshimura, just what have you been doing then?"

Now that suicide is off the table, it seems like she's interested in what I've been up to.

"Ah, no. I was just running a little test."

"What kind of test?"

"A-Ah, it's nothing I can publicize yet. Sorry."

"You can't publicize it? Are you a part of some enterprise?"

"No. It's true that I'm a researcher, but...do I have some kind of obligation to disclose my intentions?"

"No, you don't. However, since you might be misunderstood by onlookers who don't know what you're up to, it might be better for you to put on some simple equipment. Just in case, inform the reception desk in advance, though."

"Okay, I'll keep that in mind."

It's not like I can just say "equipment is expensive", right?t?

"There are shops offering new and used equipment near the Yoyogi Dungeon, so please make use of those, if you don't mind."

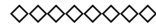
"Ah, okay. Thank you."

"Please excuse me then." Saying so, she stands up, quickly draws near to me, and adds with a smile, "If you reach a point where you can discuss your research, please make sure to tell me aaall about it, okay?" She emphasizes that point, and then leaves the YD Cafe.

"Mrs. Naruse, huh? She ended up having a surprising edge to her."

While I'm here, I open the notebook to sort today's records. Combined with yesterday, I have

apparently killed 99 slimes. When I look at my watch, it's not even 3:00 pm yet. I'm not at a good stopping point yet, so I will dive a bit longer, and then go back home.
Leaving my seat with that intention was the catalyst for the next big development.



"Okay, that's number 100!"

I head to the core of the 100th slime — I will probably acquire 0.02 SP — and swing down the hammer.

As soon as I finish my swing some kind of list is displayed on the Making screen.

"Wut?"

It's telling me to choose a skill since I defeated my 100th slime.

Skills have several inherent functions. Nowadays it's known that you gotta meet some kind of conditions to unlock those functions. The initial function of Making has been the ability to allocate stats, but it looks like a new function has been unlocked by defeating 100 slimes.

However, the function's details are...

"The heck?"

Skill Orb - Physical Resistance	1/ 100,000,000
Skill Orb - Water Demon Art	1/ 600,000,000
Skill Orb - High Recovery	1/ 1,200,000,000
Skill Orb - Storage	1/ 7,000,000,000
Skill Orb - Safe	1/100,000,000,000

That's actually a listing of the abilities apparently owned by slimes. Perhaps it's a list of skill orbs that could drop from a slime?

I frantically write down the contents of the list on a piece of paper.

Very likely the value on the right represents its drop rate. If that's the case, the one that's terribly rare is the last one, the safe, no matter how you look at it. It's literally at a completely different order of magnitude.

If I believe the values, it might drop once from among 100,000,000,000 slimes.

I don't quite get the difference between storage and safe. I also don't know whether you can say that skills are more useful the higher their rarity. I'm pretty sure it means that it's rare for a slime to possess that ability.

"Well, even so, choosing the one with the highest rarity is in the nature of a greedy gamer, isn't it?"
After muttering that, I tap Safe.

An orb appears in front of me. It's the same as when I obtained Making. I hurriedly stuff it into my backpack. I don't think that anyone has seen it, but just for caution's sake. The problem is the condition to trigger this function. I immediately hunt down and defeat my 101st slime, but I only obtain 0.01 SP. There are too many variables to build a hypothesis. I immediately send an email to Miyoshi while retreating.



In the evening, I hear a knocking at my door. Once I get to the entranceway, Miyoshi stands there, out of breath, and the first thing she says after opening her mouth is, "So, did a skill orb really come out?"

"Now, now, calm down first. Anyway, enter."

Miyoshi sits down at the kotatsu as usual, and looks my way with sparkling eyes. I silently take out the orb while smiling wryly.

"Heeh, so this is a skill orb, eh?" Miyoshi pokes it timidly. "Whoa! That's how you can tell that it's an orb! This number is displaying the time since its discovery, eh? It's handy, but it has a somewhat bad undertone, it kind of keeps you on edge in an understated way, doesn't it?"

With a sidelong glance at Miyoshi, who's grumbling something along the lines of "Just write an explanation for us while you're at it anyway, will you?", I make some tea. Miyoshi immediately opens her notebook, apparently accesses the JDA database, and looks up "Safe."

"It's unregistered, as expected."

"The drop rate is one in a hundred billion, you know?"

"One in a hundred billion? What's with that?"

"Look."

Skill Orb - Physical Resistance	1/ 100,000,000
Skill Orb - Water Demon Arts	1/ 600,000,000
Skill Orb - High Recovery	1/ 1,200,000,000
Skill Orb - Storage	1/ 7,000,000,000
Skill Orb - Safe	1/100,000,000,000

I pass the orb list I jotted down yesterday to Miyoshi, and explain the newly unlocked Making function to her.

After listening to me with a dumbfounded look, she sighs and says, "Haaah. Depending on the circumstances, the world could be turned upside down with just this."

"There are too many possibilities. Too much that's unclear. We need to run more tests."

"The skill's unlock conditions could be defeating a certain number of the same type of monster, a certain number of kills in succession, or merely a certain number of subjugated monsters. Even if it's a magic number, the next skill trigger might be after 100 more monsters, after some other number, or maybe it was just a special condition for the 100th kill...you're right, it's completely unknown."

"Just searching for a magic number is much too obscure, making any logical testing useless. For starters, I will try killing 100 more slimes in succession next."

"Makes sense. That means you're going to try hunting 100 goblins in a row afterwards?"

"Well, something like that. If it goes well, we could even raise some funds for the examination, right?"

"From among the slime's orb list, only Water Demon Arts seems to have a price attached to it, the others are all unregistered skills." Miyoshi reports, after swiftly looking up the other orbs.

"Heeh, Physical Resistance is unregistered, that's a bit unexpected."

"Umm, the Water Demon Arts orb costs...around 80,000,000 Yen."

"80,000,000!?"

"That's also just the initial price set by the buyer. I wonder how far it's going to climb, if you give it some time. If the military gets involved, it wouldn't be weird even if it would cost around as much as a cheap fighter jet, don't you think? If you consider cost-effectiveness."

I have no clue what that skill does, but depending on the circumstances, it might be able to neutralize a missile defense net or something like that. I guess it wouldn't be odd for it to cost any sum of money.

"What about the taxes?"

"Trades using a license issued by the WDA take 10%, since it has been consolidated as a dungeon tax."

"Eh? What's with that? Isn't that way low?"

"In addition, you will also be charged a 10% JDA administrative fee. Normally the rate would go up as the amount increases, but the tax rates are fixed as a stimulus measure. And unlike stocks, orb sales don't affect your tax bracket either."

"Tax bracket, you say, but what's being taxed then?"

"Isn't it your life?"

"...There's no friggin' way to tax that, is there?"

Miyoshi has been poking the orb on the kotatsu table throughout the entire conversation.

"Say, senpai."

"Mmh?"

"I've been thinking about it all the time, but this, after all it's..."

Yep. I actually think so as well.

"Yeah, a requirement for any light novel protagonist. An absolute necessity. It's an item box, right? Probably."

Miyoshi sighs and leans back against my bed. "Since there's a skill called Storage on the same list, it's unlikely that it's a mistake to call either of them an item box. But, if this list...were to become open to the public, it would trigger mass slime hunting, wouldn't it?"

It would become common knowledge that the slimes, which have been considered to be trash so far, drop five kinds of orbs, including the legendary item box.

"Having said that, even the one with the highest drop rate, Physical Resistance, still is in the range of one in a hundred million..."

"That's why I said they'll be overhunted, didn't I?"

"B-But, slimes have been left alone because it's a bother to defeat them, no?"

"I wouldn't be surprised if folks started doing things like spraying gasoline all over floors where slimes appear, and setting it on fire."

"I-Indeed..."

As a result of Yoyogi Dungeon's first floor having been continuously neglected for three years, it currently boasts an overwhelming density of slimes.

After all, no one tries to actively hunt them. It doesn't look like they have any natural enemies in particular either. So to speak, a slime paradise. It wouldn't be weird even if there were places where you could hunt several hundred slimes at once if you possessed offensive area-of-effect magic.

"Let's refrain from making it public for a while."

"I agree. We can't explain how we investigated it anyway. What are we going to do about the slime melting fluid?"

"If we were to publicize this information, it might sell like hot cakes, but on the other hand, there's actually no one hunting slimes. I think we should watch the situation here for a while, too."

"Gotcha."

"So, what to do with this?" I point at the skill orb on the table.

"What to do, means?"

"Miyoshi, how about you use it? You're going to be my dedicated merchant in this fantasy world, right?"

"But, if the skill is what we're imagining it to be, I think that you, the one actually entering dungeons, might need it more than I do, senpai."

"Maybe, but...can you acquire several skills? The previous one won't vanish or such?"

"It doesn't seem like there's any reports stating that it's not possible, but since the precedents are few in the first place, saying it with absolute certainty is..."

If there's a limit in the number of skills that can be acquired, it would result in Making being thrown before the swines.

Seeing as I could choose an orb, I'd like to believe that it has an UI function confirming a possible overwriting, though.

"But, if you consider it calmly, I kind of feel like an item box isn't all that necessary in modern Japan, unlike a medieval times world like the ones in light novels."

"True. Luggage you can't carry will usually be transported by someone. Even in regards to disaster control, the JSDF will immediately show up. It seems handy for robbers, or otherwise...smuggling?"

"Hey, somehow I have started to get a really dangerous vibe from this skill now."

"A little while ago it was a hot topic, something about a group freely smuggling consumption tax-free gold around, wasn't there? With a skill like that, you could easily make hundreds of millions just from smuggling..."

Moreover, if people found out that you possess that skill, I bet you'd end up being suspected of all kinds of shady things.

"How about leaving it alone as is, letting it fade into nothingness?"

"That would be a waste, though..."

Even though we haven't ascertained its actual effect, we both continue to groan, with the orb on top of the table between us.

§011 Forum [Too Wide] YoyoDun 1296 [Almost Lost]

431:Unknown Explorer

Did you see that kinda weird old man today, around noon?

432:Unknown Explorer

Yep, yep. The guy who totally looks like he belongs downtown, right? He was quite young, wasn't he? A college student, or around that age?

433:Unknown Explorer

Ah, the one from the suicide scare.

434:Unknown Explorer

Suicide? Did something like that happen?

435:Unknown Explorer

Something about him repeatedly entering the dungeon for a bit and immediately leaving. It looks like he was reported as a dude who can't make up his mind to kill himself, or something like that? A person from the JDA headquarters came.

436:Unknown Explorer

Ah, did Na-tan handle it?

437:Unknown Explorer

Na-tan, the heck? Who's that? lol

438:Unknown Explorer

The popular staff member of the JDA's Dungeon Management department, Naruse Yoshiharu. She won the beauty contest as Miss Keio^[efn_note]Keio is a university^[/efn_note] in her second year, and there were rumors that she became a TV announcer (?), but I didn't expect her to end up with the JDA.

439:Unknown Explorer

Why do you know so much about her? Are you a stalker?

440:Unknown Explorer

She was famous back then. Also, her personal career is written in last year's newbie corner on the JDA's Dungeon Management department's website.

441:Unknown Explorer

That person? They talked in the YD Cafe, they seemed close. Maybe they were acquaintances?

442:Unknown Explorer

Seriously? But, Na-tan is friendly, so she might have given him a kind warning.

443:Unknown Explorer

Tomorrow I will enter and leave the dungeon in casual clothes!

444:Unknown Explorer

Better not, it'll just be a bother lol

445:Unknown Explorer

Come to think of it, someone from Area 12 just shot up to the top of the WDARL power rankings right?

446:Unknown Explorer

I can only tell ya that it's not me.

447:Unknown Explorer

Me neither.

448:Unknown Explorer

Unfortunately, my rank hasn't become 1 either.

449:Unknown Explorer

Who's the top of YoyoDun right now?

450:Unknown Explorer

The guys from Asaka, Ichigaya, or Funabashi, right? [efn_note]All districts/parts of Tokyo[/efn_note]

451:Unknown Explorer

It's bout rank 1, so it's prolly not the JSDF j/k.

452:Unknown Explorer

True dat.

In the first place, the top of the JSDF is Iori-chan.

453:Unknown Explorer

What about the Kagerou[efn_note]A restaurant in Tokyo, near the Ebisu train station[/efn_note] folks? I heard they're loitering round the 19th floor.

454:Unknown Explorer

I heard the Shibu-chi[efn_note]Some local Tokyo slang about people from Shibuya, I think. Kagerou is in Shibuya, so it refers to the same group[/efn_note] went to the 20th floor, though.

455:Unknown Explorer

Sry to say, they don't feel like rank 1 at all.

456:Unknown Explorer

Russia and Australia have no famous players in Area 12, right?

457:Unknown Explorer

If you look at the comments over at the WDARL, some French dude said that there's no one who would qualify within the top six digits of known explorers

458:Unknown Explorer

Sry to say, but there's no one in Japan either.

459:Unknown Explorer

In other words, he suddenly popped up. A guy who's suddenly close with the JDA staff, although no one knows him. It's pretty fishy, aight?

460:Unknown Explorer

To sum it up, he's a suicide bastard!

461:Unknown Explorer

Yaaaah!

462:Unknown Explorer

I mean, the rank 1 explorer in the world would be able to enter dungeons safely even in casual clothes, no?

463:Unknown Explorer

No, you guys, stop it, since newbies will believe what you say if they see this. Keep your comments appropriate, okay?

464:Unknown Explorer

Aye-aye.

§012 Reunion 10/6 (Sat)

Day in, day out, the first floor of Yoyogi Dungeon. As always, no one's here. Yoyogi Dungeon is the the dungeon with the most entrants in Japan, but the first floor is truly underpopulated.

Of course, for me right now that's more than welcome. Finding a cute fellow bouncing around, I spray with a psshh and beat with a bang. Today's work is a repetition of that.

"Bounce♪ Psshh♪ Bang♪"

The melody is the same as that old shampoo CM of Hiroko Yakushimaru I saw the other day on YouTube because it's a simple, nice tune. As for why I know about such an old idol, well, we had an old CD (!) of hers at home as Dad was apparently a fan of Hiroko Yakushimaru. I feel like he said something I didn't quite get, about it being a gently flowing melody line that becomes addictive or such while watching the composer writhing in agony due to her strange voice quality and the narrowness of her singing range.

While humming that song which might very well cause a Gestaltzerfall, I only record the number I defeated with a feeling of pointlessly piling up stones. I'm not noting down the SP checks because it's just as suspected on the first day.

"Haah, it's the 57th with this."

I stretch my back while writing the tally mark on the memo pad.

Sometimes slime are crawling along the ceiling. If game passes below, they prey upon it by falling down. A true slime bomb. Once they stick to you, they won't come off easily. Even if you hit or cut them, the effect is small. There's somewhat of an effect if you scorch it with fire, but even the person it's sticking to will get considerably burned. I hear, such accidents happen from time to time.

After hearing about it, I have made sure to avoid places with such a high ceiling that my light won't reach as far as possible.

"Well, even if I get attacked, I think I will get it off with one shot of the somethingbeam, but..."

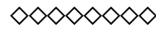
I'd really like to pardon myself from experimenting with my own body.

Moreover, we still haven't publicized the discovery about the fake Makiron. As for the matter with the orb list, it's because it'll likely lead to an overhunting.

At that moment I feel like I heard a faint scream ahead of the passage.

"What's going on?"

As I strain my ears, I can definitely hear a voice as if someone's screaming deep down the passage. I start running towards that voice.



"H-Hurry, hurry up and get it off! No way, what's this!?!"

"I'm on it! I'm doing it already! Why doesn't it come off!?"

A party of two people wearing a beginner's armor set have been entwined by a slime that fell on them from above in a small square-like room located slightly ahead. It's not like the slimes of Yoyogi's first floor will melt you with an obvious speed just because they captured you, as long as you don't allow them to suffocate you by fully covering your head. However, it's dangerous if they stick to you for an extended period of time.

The smaller girl has one glued to her from around the nape to her chest, and the taller girl is grabbing, trying to get it off, but it doesn't seem to go smoothly as her hands sink into the slime. Moreover, unfortunately they will never melt only the clothes.

"You okay!?" I yell while running up to them.

"Ah, help! Please help us!" The taller girl is frantically looking my way as she screams so.

I pull out a bottle from my waist belt and spray its content at the slime clinging to the smaller girl. While shouting the technique's name, "Eat this! Chloride-something-onium!"

I did promise to do so, yep.

The effect is dramatic. The slime pops in an instant, probably looking as if it has vanished after being sprayed with the fake Makiron.

"Eh!?" The girl, who had struggled to get the slime off, freezes out of surprise over the too sudden happening.

"Hey, you okay?" Saying so, I take out an unused, clean towel from my backpack and hand it to the smaller girl who's sobbing.

"S-Shank y-yoo."

She takes it from me and while wiping her face and the places where the slime clung to, she keeps looking my way.

"H-Huh? The research person?"

"Hah?"

Now that I look closely, I remember that face.

"Umm...Mrs. Saito? Am I right? What a coincidence."

Once I answer like that, the taller girl with the cool surname, whatever it was, looks at my face and says visibly surprised, "You're right! The one who was sticking to Mrs. Miyoshi, umm, what were you called again?"

"It's Yoshimura. ...You were called Mrs. Mitsurugi, weren't you?"

"Yes. Thank you very much for saving us. But, is it okay to apply that liquid on a person?"

Well, since it burst open the slime she couldn't get off no matter what she did, she's likely thinking that it won't be weird for that liquid to have an effect on the human body, too.

"It'll be fine as long as you don't drink it or get it into your eyes. It's something similar to an antiseptic solution. How about washing it off with water if you're worried?" I take a 2 liter PET bottle out of my backpack.

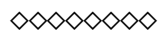
"Thank you. Please let me wipe it off with this, just in case." Mitsurugi says, wets the towel with the water, and presses it against Saito's nape.

"Umm, could I have you turn around for a bit...?" Saito asks while looking embarrassed.

"Ah, sorry. That was rude of me." I hurried face about in the direction of the square, and look out for slimes, for caution's sake.

Behind me I can hear the rustling of clothes, and quiet voices, saying "It has just turned a bit red, it's okay" and "It's cooold."

Guuuh, this sure has an unexpectedly destructive force.



The duo, who took the short training course together with Miyoshi and me, introduced themselves as Mitsurugi Haruka, the boyish, tall, conservative beauty, and Saito Ryoko, the cute type that seems like she'd be popular.

"It's ko, you know!? Ko in these times! Jeez, it won't change even when I marry, okay!?" She belw up over a weird part, though. [efn_note]Her first name is 涼子 (Ryoko), the kanji mean something like cool breeze child. It's a female name meaning "beloved child that's cool/refreshing/calming." The ko here refers to child. It should also be noted that using "ko" at the end of female names is a bit outdated, although it's not shunned or anything. In the past it was standard to use "ko" at the end of female names. Saito is likely blowing a fuse over it being an old way to call a girl + it meaning child, which she obviously doesn't want to be seen as.[/efn_note]

Both of them are pretty much a newcomer model and actress, working at the same agency or something like that.

You really shouldn't make light of Miyoshi's profiling.

"But, as you'd expect from a research person, really." Saito, who has fully recovered, says in admiration.

"Even though we couldn't defeat it at all by beating or pulling it, you simply finished it off with a spray of that atomizer. Is that some kind of secret weapon?"

"Well, something along those lines." I answer while smiling wryly.

"Is that being sold that on the market? I didn't find anything like that when I looked up things." Mitsurugi has been talking to me politely ever since I rescued them.

"Nah, it's something we made several days ago, so you won't be able to buy it yet."

"I see." Mitsurugi looks down, disappointed.

Me having my heart strings pulled by such expressions against my will is the very reason why I'm being told that I'm weak against advertisements, but well, nothing I can do about it as it's my nature.

"Umm, if you have some circumstances, I can share some with you, though."

"Really?"

Her face as she quickly lifts it is flushed, very childish, and has a serious look.

"Jeez, aren't you suited for being an actress, Haru-chan? And here I couldn't even get him to give me his business card," pouts Saito.

I see. So Saito was an actress and Mitsurugi a model, eh? But sure, if I had to choose one, I'd favor Mitsurugi. It's not like it's two times a good deal with her being androgynous. I just like conservative beauties. When I told the same to Miyoshi in the past, she laughed scornfully, saying, "There are no preferences or anything when choosing the number of a null set."

"Is it true that you're wrapped up by an aura if you accumulate experience in a dungeon?"

"What?"

Aura? Is she talking about the light when plasma, which descends along the lines of the magnetic force, excites the oxygen and nitrogen atoms? Blah, that's an aurora.

Being asked with such a serious look, I was so taken aback that I gave myself a retort. Her eyes are serious. I have to...have to answer here something.

"Haru-chan, you see, right now we're at the boundary."

"Boundary?"

Saito, who had started to speak about something like that with a serious expression after sitting down on a rock, suddenly looks like the mature one here, instead.

"Yep. Boundaries are nice, you know? They are vague. I like that."

"The boundary between adults and children, the boundary between the Earth and space. A moratorium-like[efn_note]The moratorium here means something else than the usual deferring payment. It's more about adults not wanting to grow up. They live in their own world, not working, or if just fickle doing this or that. Kind of like rejecting reality of normal everyday life. It's not about social recluses. Just a refusal to act like a normal adult[/efn_note] place looks like you have to decide something on a first glance, but until you finish making up your mind, you're tolerated even if you don't decide anything. That's why I think it's cozy."

This girl, that's her true character, eh?

"But, there are also people who aren't like this."

Mitsurugi appears to be a gravure model. It looks like she got even as far as being allowed to appear in boy and young man magazines of Kodansha, who have always put in a lot of effort into photogravure, at some point, but no matter what she did, she has fallen behind in the reader's votes. Her slender, androgynous appearance is unsuitable for gravure, I think.

"Taking your proportions, appearance, and on top of that, your height, aren't you more suited in the direction of fashion catering towards those of the same sex rather than those of the opposite sex, Mrs. Mitsurugi?"

"Yeah, yeah, Mr. Researcher knows what he's talking about. It's cause you're trying to switch towards that, but that's tough all of a sudden, right?"

"Well, it sure isn't easy, I think."

I don't really know, though.

"Since a little while ago, there's even the word of ModGrav woman for it, and so far as it goes, you've got connection in the agency as well."

"If I'm going to do business with that, the composite and the book won't be an issue, but during interviews I'm often dropped at the end, being told that something is still lacking."

"Composite or book, you say?"

"A composite are documents, kind of like a business card. Your work history, your body sizes, and so on. A book is, well, something similar to a photoalbum of yourself."

"Hee."

"So, if you're continuously told 『still lacking』, you'd wonder just what, right?"

"Hmm, I guess so."

"And since Haru-chan is so damn serious, she took the trash talk about something like aura some stupid guy from somewhere told her about serious."

"Aura, isn't that something you feel like having attained when your personality comes through?"

"Right? In the first place, it's not like something like that comes out of your body all of a sudden."

That makes sense. No matter how amazing an actor you might be, it'd be a disaster if something similar to electromagnetic waves imprisoning the hearts of others were to come out of your body. Though I can't deny that there might be skills such as "Charm" or "Charisma" among the skill orbs by some chance.

"Speaking of our position, I wonder whether being able to optimize your movements, for example, might be something related to auras."

"What do you mean?" Mitsurugi, who had merely listened to Saito's and my conversation, suddenly latched onto those words.

"In other words, when you're expressing something through your body——"

"Like poses?"

"Yeah. Also, expressions or line of sight expressing emotions in case of an actresses, or the way of walking to show off the most beautiful clothes silhouette in case of models."

"Uh-huh."

"Well, I think you've been thinking about such things already."

"Yes."

"However, if we speak about whether your body moves according to those intentions, there's no way that you can say so."

"Even if it's just picking up a cup on a table, humans have to control their bodies so as to achieve that goal while feeding back the information gained through the body's sensors."

"Yes."

"Optimizing your movements means, to put it frankly, moving your body according to your thoughts without even the slightest deviation, I think."

"Deviation..."

"Human senses might feel uneasy by the slightest deviations because they can be very sensitive towards the finest details."

"...Optimizing movement."

"The mysterious effect obtained by killing monsters not only increases your strength, but also extends body control ability and your agility."

"In short, as long as I kill monsters, I can gain those abilities?"

"I think even normal training will work for that as well, though."

"There are places you won't reach with that."

Ah, right, this girl was the one mentioning that her own life is the betting chip, wasn't she? Was she serious about that?

"Well, as for that, there's this slightly big audition coming up in less than two months." Saito adds an explanation of the circumstances.

"So she said that's she's going to do special training for that. When I wondered what's it going to be...really, for it to be defeating monsters in a dungeon of all things." Saito says and the mumbles, "If you injure your face, the foundation of your work itself will be gone, not to mention some audition."

Saito, who has gone along with her despite this, might actually be a slightly nice girl, I think. Two months, eh...? A meeting by chance is preordained. I start to feel like wanting to give them some of my help.

"What I'm going to say next might sound like something retarded, but wanna have a try?"

"Yes!"

And then I told them about the place of the dungeon boundary. While thinking, 'Yep, this is a boundary as well, isn't it?'

"First, if you enter the dungeon, you go to a place that seems to have many slimes with no people nearby."

"Okay."

And then, once we enter the dungeon, we ignore the flow of people heading to the second floor, and enter a route with a hall right around the corner, immediately spotting a slime.

"Then, you spray it with a pssh..."

I actually spray the liquid on the slime, and once only the core is left, I quickly and lightly hit it, destroying the slime in the process.

"That's how you destroy the core."

"Okay."

"What's important here is to not use too much strength. Keep in mind to hit it as quickly and precisely as possible."

It's because I had the vague idea that their SP might be preferentially assigned to AGI and DEX by doing that, if stats are build up depending on your actions. Mitsurugi nodded while diligently listening to me.

"And then, at the end, this is the most important part."

Mitsurugi looks at me curiously, wondering what it might be.

"Once you defeat one slime, immediately move one step beyond the previous place, return from there, and then defeat the next slime in the same way. Even if there's slimes nearby, make sure to not kill them in succession."

Both of them look at me with question marks written all over their faces. But yeah, even I'd look like that if I were to be told something like that. However, I don't think they have any other choice if it's for the sake of getting some results in two months.

"I can't think of this as anything but a waste of time, but does that have any meaning?" Saito retorts from the side.

It has! If you kill ten slimes in a row, the SP will become 0.059, but, if you do it like this, it'll be 0.02. It's more than three times as effective!
However, it's not like I can say something like that. In the end I went with——

"D-Don't look down on researchers."

Saito glares at me for a little while, but then suddenly averts her eyes, saying, "Haru-chan, this man is suuuper thickheaded, but he seems excellent as researcher...is what I feel."

"It's fine. I will do as told."

I forbid them to speak about this by warning them, "You mustn't mention this to anyone since it'll be a violation of confidentiality in various ways," and hand them two spare hammers, and two full bottles of something-onium.

"Why two sets?" Saito asks curiously.

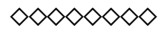
"You're going to keep her company anyway, aren't you Mrs. Saito?"

In response, her cheeks blush a bit while she looks vexed.

"However, it's not good to throw a single fragment of a stone at the slimes you're each going to defeat. Make sure to definitely kill them by yourself."

"Got it."

"And, once your bottles are empty, I can give you new ones if you call me." As I hand my business card to Saito while saying so, she smiles impishly while answering, "I finally got your business card."



Afterwards I accompanied them in killing several slimes.

"Well~ This is easy." Saito happily lifts up the bottle.

"Make absolutely sure to not be seen by others."

"I know, I know. But, this moving is troublesome."

Each time we defeat a slime, we leave through the exist, and move to the dungeon's boundary. Although it's a short trip, it sure is troublesome, I suppose. However, this is important.

"Don't cut corners and make sure to return to the previous place."

"I got it. But, if there's no effect after doing all this, you're going to hear a full array of complaints from me later."

"Uhah!"

That sounds quite terrifying.

"I-It'll be alright. The rest is repetition then."

"Thank you a lot." Mitsurugi bows politely.

Basically, this girl does have a beautiful conduct.

"Lastly, can I have you take notes about the number of slimes you defeated?"

"Mmh? Sure, no problem."

"Well, I guess that's all," saying so, I leave while wishing them good luck.

Because I handed them even my spare hammers, I ran out of equipment.

§013 Orb once more 10/7 (Sun)

Day in, day out, I go in and out of the first floor of Yoyogi Dungeon. And as always, no one's here. Even on the weekend, Miyoshi has her short training course to get her trade license. I really wanna thank her for her efforts.

As for myself, I have moved much further into the floor than usual. I want to leave the entrance area for those two. I hope they do their best today.

"It's wrong to disturb them. Bounce♪ Pssh♪ Bam♪. And that's the 31st."

With the 41st slime of the day I'm going to hit exactly 200 total. Accordingly I'm looking forward, thinking that it'd sure be nice if something were to happen.

While I sing Bounce♪ Pssh♪ Bam♪ I kill the next slime, "But, the Yoyogi Dungeon is sure big," I ponder about the dungeon's size.

If I remember correctly, it had a spherical shape with a diameter of five kilometers when the early investigation of the JSDF drew up a rough map. Five kilometers, I guess that means in front of Baba[efn_note]I think it's an abbreviation for Shinjuku Babashita, an area in Shinjuku[/efn_note] in the north, and Musashi-Koyama Station in the south. In the west it should be the area around Eifukuchou Station, and in the east...hmm, around Yamanote, no, that'll be slightly short of five kilometers. I think it reaches up to Shinbashi.

If this thing actually took possession of Tokyo's underground, a collapse of the subway system would be the least of our problems.

As I think about all this stuff, while dumbly repeating Bounce♪ Pssh♪ Bam♪, a menu suddenly opens, just like the other day.

Looking at the tally marks in my hand, I notice that I've reached 41.

"Here it is!"

Skill Orb - Physical Resistance	1 / 100,000,000
Skill Orb - Water Demon Art	1 / 600,000,000
Skill Orb - High Recovery	1 / 1,200,000,000
Skill Orb - Storage	1 / 7,000,000,000
Skill Orb - Safe	1 / 100,000,000,000 85,998,741

The content displayed in the menu is mostly the same as yesterday, but Safe is grayed out. New numbers are written on the right side. Even now that number is counting down.

I jot down those numbers. Just what's this about?

Seeing as I can't choose Safe, you either can't choose an orb you've already acquired, or

otherwise——

"A cooldown...eh?"

A cooldown describes the time until you can use something again after having used it once. It's a feature you often encounter in games that are played in real time.

Well, I'll think about this later. Right now it's time for the experiment I discussed with Miyoshi the other day.

I tap 「Water Demon Art」, then I put away the orb, which popped up in front of me as usual, into 「Safe」.

In the end I used Safe despite the risk of it replacing Making. The clincher was Miyoshi's comment, "Assuming that it's such an outrageous skill that time stands still in there, like the one you mentioned appearing in light novels, won't it be possible to store away skill orbs as well, senpai?" The reason orbs aren't sold in most markets is the big hurdle of 23 hours 56 minutes 43 seconds, even more so than their rarity. There should be many explorers saying "I want to change my once-in-a-lifetime-luck into cash." However, I have no doubt that many must have cried bloody tears while being unable to successfully find a buyer, being hampered by that absolute deadline.

"Well, I guess it's pointless to think about it now."

Very likely this skill activates every hundred kills. In that case, I should amass as many orbs as possible while I still can. Mass slime hunting might eventually catch on, after all.

"As a matter of fact, the slime overhunting team has grown to three people since the other day."

However, two months later, eh?

It looks like the initial stats for humans are all somewhere around 10 for an adult. I'm the sample here.

Even if slimes give 0.02 SP, that's enough SP to rank up a stat in five days, if you defeat ten slimes per day, right? If you do that for two months, it'll go up by ten. Assuming these points are all assigned to one stat, it'd be a human's experience equal to one normal person.[efn_note]The author phrased it really confusingly...above he mentioned 10 SP per stat when becoming an adult (20 years), so he said that if you have 10 SP for one stat, that's 20 years in human life years...we changed it to something easier relatable. ;-)[/efn_note]

...Huh? One normal person?

Moreover, I feel like it's not impossible to do 100 slimes a day with 「Bounce♪ Pssh♪ Bam♪」, in Yoyogi, which is infested by slimes, on top of there being no one here.

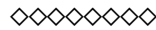
2 SP will be added per day? Then, it'll be 100 in 50 days, no?

If those points were to be allotted to a single stat...basically you could be as strong as 10 normal people?

Wait a moment, that could cause problems if it became widely known, couldn't it? Eh? Did I possibly teach them something bad...?

"No, no, no, no. That won't work unless you keep entering and leaving. No matter how diligent they might be, there's no way they would do something like that, right!?"

Fooling myself, I repeated 「Bounce♪ Pssh♪ Bam♪」, free from obstructive thoughts, until my brain blanked out.



"Miyoshi, you gotta work tomorrow, right? Should you really be here right now?"

Sitting at my kotatsu, Miyoshi gazes at today's notes while twining pasta around her fork. At 7 pm she suddenly showed up here, saying that she's hungry. As a last resort I boiled some pasta and served that to her, but the clock is already approaching 8 pm.

"Senpai, it was around 3 pm when you got Safe, wasn't it?"

"Hmm? I think so. If I remember correctly, it was a bit before 3 when I finished talking with Ms. Naruse, so it should've been around then."

"I see."

Miyoshi has been staring fixedly at my notes. I don't really get what's going on inside her head, but she's definitely a genius when it comes to the field of calculations and the detection of patterns. She keeps discovering meaningful patterns in the data, even though it looks like a meaningless list of numbers to me.

"Was it around the same time when you got Water Demon Art today?"

"If I'm not wrong, it should have been around that time, or slightly before."

"Assuming this is a cooldown timer as you've said, it looks like the number of days is the inverse of the drop probability divided by a hundred million. Moreover, expressed in seconds."

"Meaning?"

"It means, you can obtain the next Safe orb in 1000 days — no, right now it's 998 days, I suppose."

A skill that can be obtained only once in three years, huh?

But then again, if you were to look for it the normal way, even with a hundred million people killing ten slimes a day, around one person in three years would find one. Thinking about it like that, I feel like it might work rather well, but I can't believe that there are so many slimes around.

"Then, Water Demon Art will take——"

"Six days, I expect."

"If the orb hasn't vanished from within my Safe even after 3 pm has passed tomorrow, it'll be one huge distribution revolution."

"The one standing to waste 80,000,000 Yen if things don't work out with the test is you though Senpai."

"While being unemployed."

"No kidding."

She puts the last of the pasta into her mouth, then mixes half a bottle of Sangaria's Strong (extra carbonated) Sparkling water with half a bottle of fresh spring water, and drains the entire glass of freshly mixed Something-strong Mineral water.

"Thanks for the meal. You're not half bad at cooking, senpai."

"Well, I've lived alone for a while now."

"Haah, how lonesome..."

"It's none of your business!"

"But, if this experiment succeeds, allowing us to publicize the Safe, you'll be approached by governments and companies all over the world, won't you senpai?"

Now listen, you. What are ya talkin' about it without a care as if it's some Hollywood movie!?

"And I'll be super rich...Oh, that means I'll be able to eat all the delicious meals I want."

"Miyoshi, Miyoshi, your eyes have turned into \$ signs."

"Jeez, I wanna resign from the company too! What's with that project? Without you there, it doesn't get anywhere, senpai!?"

"What about Enoki?"

"Someone like that, it would be better if he wasn't there. Bah, just thinking about him pisses me off."

"G-Got it, my bad. But, right now, I got no way to pay you a salary, you know?"

"Tomorrow, if that orb hasn't vanished, can I just quit then?"

Yeah well, even if the result of the magic number experiment is wrong, I guess I'll have enough money for the time being...renting the examination equipment would still be too expensive, though.

"You want to quit that much?"

"It's just that this stuff looks a lot more interesting."

"Okay, if it hasn't vanished that is."

"I look forward to working with you."

In the experiment I did the other day, the Haagen Dazs Vanilla ice I had bought remained frozen stiff even after an hour had passed. That's why there's a bit of hope here. While watching Miyoshi

eat the ice cream, I wondered if it wouldn't have been better to just put a smartphone or a clock in there.

Yet, we won't actually know whether that rule applies to the mysterious, native Dungeon items unless we try it out.

At that moment, my smartphone vibrates.

"Hmm? A call? I wonder who it is."

It seems to be a call from a private number, as the phone number isn't displayed. While feeling mystified, I pick up the vibrating smartphone and take the call.

"Yes."

"Good evening, Mitsurugi here. Is it you, Mr. Yoshimura?"

"Indeed. I wondered who it was, since the number was hidden."

"Huh? Did I do that? Sorry. From now on I will call with 186."

"No, no problem at all. So, what's wrong?"

"Umm, since the bottle seems to be about to run out, I was wondering if you could give us a new one."

Eh? They used it up already?

"Sure. When would work for you?"

"Is tomorrow okay for you?"

"I don't mind. At Yoyogi? What about the time?"

"Yes, that'd be great. If possible, I'd appreciate it if we could meet in front of the entrance in the morning..."

"Okay. I will wait for you in Yoyogi's YD Cafe at 10 am."

"Thank you very much. So, about the fee..."

"Please wait a little moment."

Come to think, how many of those bottles have been made?

"Hey, Miyoshi."

"What's up?"

"How much does that something-beam bottle cost?"

"Ah, that? I'd say probably around 3,000 Yen?"

"3000 Yen? Didn't one bottle of Makiron cost around 500 Yen? And if only around one liter goes into that bottle..."

"Wako Pure Chemical Industries' First Grade solution costs less than 20,000 Yen for 500g."

"I don't quite get it, but anyway, as long as you don't take a loss, it's fine."

"Thank you for waiting. I am told one bottle costs 3,000 Yen."

"Understood. If possible, it would be a big help if I could get several bottles."

"Okay. See you."

"Sure, good night."

"Senpai, did you sell that to someone?"

"It was the flow of events, I guess. You remember the two people who sat in front of us during the training course?"

"Yeah, that 『Beauty』 duo."

"Somehow I feel like your words are a bit thorny, but yeah, them. As a matter of fact, they——"

I tell the details about what happened the other day to Miyoshi.

Miyoshi sighs, "You're as naive as ever, aren't you senpai?"

"Really? I properly forbade them to talk about it. Ain't that somewhat praiseworthy? But you know, I'm also regretting it a bit."

"Why?"

"Well, I was just wonderin' whether I haven't done something terrible while beating slimes."

And then I try to explain to Miyoshi my thoughts about what will happen after two months of 「Bounce♪ Pssh♪ Bam♪」.

"Just what is this guy saying?" Miyoshi rolls her eyes at me. "But...it'll probably be okay, won't it?"

"Why?"

"Unlike you, they can't objectively look at the numbers."

"No, look, if we're unlucky, they might end up in the upper rankings, okay?"

"No matter how much they go up, reaching the top 1,000 in two months is unlikely, right? If they

reach the top four-digits, there's a reasonable number of anonymous explorers in Area 12, so I don't think that they would stand out so much."

"I see...you might be right there!"

At that time we didn't quite understand just how much attention becoming rank 1000 in all humanity would draw. Moreover, we hadn't really realized how much attention high-ranking anonymous explorers in Area 12, which is an area centered around Japan, which has been managed from the early stages, would garner in the country.

§014 Forum [Too Wide] YoyoDun 1299 [Almost Lost]

251:Unknown Explorer

Hey, hey, have you noticed the duo of women repeatedly going in and out through the entrance most recently?

252:Unknown Explorer

Ah, definitely. The ones in beginner gear, right? Face guard and ski mask.

253:Unknown Explorer

Exactly, those two.

You see, at first they didn't wear any face guards, and just went with something like regular ski helmets, but one of them looked just like Haruka, I think.

254:Unknown Explorer

Who's that?

255:Unknown Explorer

Haruka, the gravure idol? The one that appeared in a magazine the other day?

256:Unknown Explorer

For real? You're not making a mistake?

257:Unknown Explorer

No, as expected, it must be someone else, don't you think? I mean, what's the point in someone with such a job diving into a dungeon?

If she gets injured and a scar remains, her jobs will go poof.

258:Unknown Explorer

Hmm, that makes sense, but you know, since they looked rather cute, I had a lil peek what they're up to.

259:Unknown Explorer

Uwah, a stalker?

260:Unknown Explorer

A dangerous dude has shown up!

261:Unknown Explorer

Stop doing such stuff inside a dungeon.

262:Unknown Explorer

That ain't it!

There are times when people hesitate on whether to go in or not, or you want to help them if they are troubled by something, no?

I'm telling you, I haven't had the slightest ulterior motive!

263:Unknown Explorer

You did, didn't you? Ulterior motive.

264:Unknown Explorer

He's a lost case.

265:Unknown Explorer

If it's just a bit, stuff like that is fine as well, right!? Anyway, I chased after them.

266:Unknown Explorer

And then pushed them down?

267:Unknown Explorer

It's because they kept running in a totally different direction from the route to the second floor.

268:Unknown Explorer

Well, isn't that owed to them running away after having found out about you chasing them?

269:Unknown Explorer

I mean, if they thought they were stalked, they would run away, wouldn't they?

The interior of a dungeon isn't really all that different from a dark street at night.

270:Unknown Explorer

You guys sure don't go easy on him.

271:Unknown Explorer

Now, now. Did you lose sight of them?

272:Unknown Explorer

Well, they paid attention by glancing back from time to time. After all, I would be treated as a criminal if they saw me chasing them.

273:Unknown Explorer

Uwah, how spineless!

274:Unknown Explorer

I don't have any use for such a spine!

275:Unknown Explorer

Speaking of not heading towards the second floor, wasn't there also that gearless guy who caused an uproar because of a possible suicide!? Is that a recent fad or something?

276:Unknown Explorer

Ah, yeah, him. Even now I catch sight of him every once in a while. Since he's only wearing normal clothes and a backpack, he totally stands out as being out of place whenever he's around the reception.

277:Unknown Explorer

I haven't heard anything about such a fad.

278:Unknown Explorer

But, I never saw them around the second floor, you know? If it's a beginner, they will be most of the time seen around there at first, no?

279:Unknown Explorer

No, wait.

280:Unknown Explorer

What is it?

281:Unknown Explorer

Is that maybe something along the lines of a secret date?

282:Unknown Explorer

Wut?

283:Unknown Explorer

A genius has appeared.

284:Unknown Explorer

No, just think about it. The first floor of the Yoyogi dungeon, which is relatively harmless and outside public gazes, might actually be great for a clandestine rendezvous.

Also, hidden cameras are dealt with by the slimes, you know?

285:Unknown Explorer

A pin-up girl has a date with her lover inside a dungeon?

Blah, what kind of story is that supposed to be? lol

286:Unknown Explorer

In the first place, there were two women, right?

287:Unknown Explorer

The other one is an escort or something?

288:Unknown Explorer

Her manager?

289:Unknown Explorer

3P?

290:Unknown Explorer

Stop it rofl

291:Unknown Explorer

Moreover, they are constantly going in and out. Just how fast are they? roflmao

292:Unknown Explorer

Jeez, you are way too dirty.

Either way, it sure is true that it'd be a weird date.

293:Unknown Explorer

I guess, a date is the winner here then lmao

§015 Party Formation 10/26 (Fri)

One month has passed since I suddenly became rank 1.

As a result of continuously and single-mindedly hunting slimes deeper inside the first floor ever since, a reasonable number of skill orbs has piled up inside my Safe.

Storage x 1

High Recovery x 2

Water Demon Arts x 4

Physical Resistance x 5

Thanks to that, I could officially resign, and Miyoshi has apparently submitted her resignation notice as well.

The company's efforts to detain her were so insistent that it couldn't be compared with my case. She said she was really scared when she was invited to a stress interview in a small room.

For the time being Miyoshi and I will probably manage somehow with the profit from selling Water Demon Arts.

After Miyoshi got her trader's license, she apparently used the opportunity to explore the possibility of founding a company.

"It's pretty much a fact that it'll be extremely difficult to do trades while hiding your name in the current Japan, senpai."

The profit sharing seems to be the difficult part.

Generally speaking, if you move profit, it'll lead to taxes, no matter what you do. That means your name will be revealed or you will have to pay absurdly high taxes.

If you make a corporation, create a shareholder register in an unlisted company, and share the profits, only the creditors and shareholders will be able to access the register. The tax rate will also be 20% and a bit...just when I thought that, it was a huge mistake.

In case of a large, unlisted company, it'll be treated as tax on aggregate income, and the dividend becomes municipal tax + a very progressive income tax. In short, 55%.

"Now I fully understand the feelings of people wanting to use tax havens!"

Miyoshi had apparently also considered the option of founding a company in another country and doing business through mail order over there, but as might be expected of the coward Miyoshi, she apparently stopped it with the reason, "You know, somehow I'd feel guilty."

"And that's why I decided to use the party system."

The party system is for the sake of sharing the earnings with the party when having explored a dungeon with a group.

The original assumption is that this system will be used for the party to buy expensive weapons and armors, and distribute those amongst each other. I have no real clue about the details, but the entire party seems to have a legal status similar to a single dungeon person.

The party member's list is managed by the party's creator, and it appears to be treated similar to a shareholder register, so to speak.

"I tell you, it was a real pain. Even after listening to the tax counselor, I don't quite understand." Miyoshi says, obviously fed up.

"A tax system, where you have to wrack your brain just to save as much on the taxes as possible, feels somehow wrong, right? Isn't that like the government is saying that they believe it to be fine to steal money from idiots?"

"Hmm, isn't that a matter of historic circumstances or consistency issues at those points in times?"

"Rather, at times I'd like to be supported by the tax system when there's something I want to do, but it's full of structures where they thought up some consistency measures after making the exact opposite demand before."

"Well the logic thought up by liberal arts people does have the image that it allows inconsistent and illegal structures as long as it guarantees for the whole to be integer. I always thought that taxes are no good if the structures aren't simple enough that anyone can calculate them."

"In such a case the tax counselors would be troubled, though."

"Even at a fast-food restaurant, it's put together into one set despite you ordering whatever you please. In the first place, aren't they getting paid little in the current situation anyway? I can't think of it as anything but the tax office lacking any kind of motivation, or the tax system being fully intent on ripping you off."

"Well, the state's finances sure are deep in the reds."

As the party formation seemed to unexpectedly cost money, my savings on the bank were facing a dire crisis.

Since it was inevitable, each of us contributed 300,000 Yen to be allocated for the legal expenses and the costs for making an officially registered seal and such.

Since my savings were rapidly diminishing, Miyoshi apparently launched an orb sales website right away.

"It's a safe bet that we will be able to sell them. Even if we have to pay with our own money for now, it looks like we will barely pull through somehow."

Or so Miyoshi eloquently said. Well, I'm sorry for inconveniencing you.

The party's address was Miyoshi's mansion for the moment, but the actual work kept my place's dining room occupied. I said that I would move once we made some profit, but currently I had been thinking that it might be fine to stay here since it was no problem in particular.

The party name was Dungeon Powers.

It's kind of difficult to say, but what decided this very corny and half-assed name was Miyoshi who officially submitted it by pressing the Return key close to dawn while drunk by wine on my veranda.

It looks like she herself liked it quite a lot, though.

Well, with this and that, we got started for real with a setup of: the leader is Miyoshi, I am a member, and that's all (*sob*).

§016 Crazy Auction 11/1 (Thu)

"Yes. Yes, I understand. Thank you very much for contacting us. We will investigate it." The man ends the call with a Tokyo citizen at the Dungeon Agency and sighs.

The Dungeon Agency is the government office running the dungeon administration. Having said that, since the WDA is expected to control the matters going on inside the dungeons, it's an organization heavily leaning towards acting as liaison between the JDA and the different ministries and government offices.

As the WDA had been established a short while after the dungeons came into existence, it gave need to a department governing over the dungeon administration. Precisely because it was directly related to the dungeon rights, every ministry and government office reacted sensitively.

The Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry tried to put the dungeon management under its jurisdiction under the claim of resources, the Ministry of Culture, Education, Science, Sport and Technology tried to establish a Dungeon Investigation & Research & Implementation Office, just like the Earthquake Investigation & Research & Implementation Office under the claim of research.

Then, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication intended to establish a Dungeon Management Department within the Fire and Disaster Management Agency on the assumption of possible rescue missions within dungeons. At present the right to command and control public institutions during times of extraordinary disasters hasn't been granted to the Fire and Disaster Management Agency. Instead the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary for Crisis Management or the disaster countermeasure office would take command, but the ministry obviously planned a legal reform in order to gain the centralized right to command during times of extraordinary disasters on this occasion. It was an action where it was totally unclear what would follow next.

On top of that, even the Ministry of Justice apparently attempted to create a Dungeon Management Department in the Immigration Services Agency for the reason of controlling immigration in dungeons.

In the end, going by the fact that the tallying of the interests between the different offices would be difficult, and the need to extensively coordinate the interests of the various offices, a Dungeon Agency Establishment Law was passed, resulting in the start of an independent agency.

"Haah~"

"What? That's a really gloomy face you're pulling there."

"If you'd take so many phone calls for the same reason, you'd pull such a face as well, I'm sure. We're a humble liaison agency, so it's troublesome if they're getting in contact with us."

"It's about that, isn't it? That auction."

"Exactly. 『That's no scam, is it?』, as if I'd know anything about something like that. I'm telling you, they should just contact the Cyber Crime Control Office of the Metropolitan Police Department."

"The JDA trade license ID has been properly publicized, no...? Should we get public safety on it, just in case?"

The man, who had been receiving the calls, pondered for a bit, and nodded at that as there was nothing better than outsourcing problems to other people.

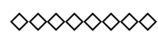
"You're right. Seeing as it's a public safety matter, please inform the National Public Safety Commission and also tell them about the number of inquiries. Moreover, ask the JDA's Dungeon Management Department for help as well."

"The duties of that place certainly cover a wide field, don't they?"

"It can't be helped since the incidents occurring in dungeons are diverse and many, right? They do have my sympathies, though."

'Being compelled to establish a 『Do-it-right-away section』 at a single counter until the system is subdivided and stabilized cannot be avoided, but in a state where we don't have a unified right to take command, but I have absolutely no interest in being the only one doing it', the man sighed.

Thus, the information about that troublesome auction was forwarded to the National Public Safety Commission by the Dungeon Agency.



The consulting service of the Metropolitan Police Department' Cyber Crime Control Office continuously receives requests for cyber crime-related consultations. Especially today, for some reason, there are excessively many inquiries asking whether a certain auction is a scam.

"No, I don't know anything about that, but it's no criminal offense to just say that you're selling something illegal. What? A scam? There are no victims, right? Yes. Oof!"

Apparently the person on the other side of the line hung up after hurling some insults as the consultation didn't go as they had expected.

"What's up? Again that auction?"

"Well, yeah."

The man, who took the call, smashes the receiver into the cradle while replying.

"But, why just call the consultation service of the Cyber Crime Control Office? I can only think of it as stress increase by having the time of the personnel pointlessly reduced...such things can be handled fine by email, no?"

"Because they know that the reception is only manned during weekdays from 8:30 am to 5:15 pm?"

The man, who had asked in such a blunt manner, only shrugs his shoulders. "I mean, we are a section taking care of cyber 『crimes』 such as hacking, fraud, defamation, threats, blackmails, obscenity, child pornography, and vicious businesses. Getting us involved at a stage where there's no crime is just a pain."

The other man scratched his head, "They are telling us to investigate it since it might be a crime, right?"

"If you draw the conclusion here that it's necessary to investigate this, wouldn't you need to investigate all net auctions then? Asking, what you're selling is the real deal, not a scam, right? would be out of some dystopia."

"However, it's not that I don't understand them harboring doubts, exactly because it is what it is....but, it's not really a crime to plot a scam."

Plotting a crime as in the preliminary step before realizing it. In case this leads to an actual crime, the plotting itself will become one as well, but usually the danger towards an infringement of legal benefits in the plotting of a crime doesn't lead to an attempt in doing so, and thus doesn't count as a crime.

"They are just saying that they're going to put something that's impossible to be sold on sale. There's no reason to accuse them of a crime as long as what they are selling isn't illegal, is there?"

"Just in case, we should file a report and send an inquiry to the JDA. Since the trade license's ID has been specified, I think they will know the person behind it right away."

As he said so, the phone rings loudly once again, threatening him to answer it quickly. With a feeling of offering a prayer that it's something else than the auction this time, the man picks up the receiver. While sensing that his hope might be futile.



I have gone over to Yoyogi to hunt slimes today, just like every day. Since the formation of D-Powers, we nicely acquired one additional <Water Demon Arts> and two additional <Physical Resistance>. As I get all fired up by myself since it looks like I will be able to get another <Water Demon Arts> today, I'm suddenly addressed by someone in front of the reception desk.

"Mr. Yoshimura!"

"Oh, Ms. Naruse. Hello."

Since getting acquainted with Ms. Naruse during the suicide uproar and being accommodated by her in various matters during the party formation, we've become friends. Of course it's nothing I would directly tell her, but she's a pretty, intelligent, and fantastic person. Except for the management staff, it's probably just Ms. Naruse who knows about me being a member of 「D-Powers」, which has Miyoshi as the public face.

"Hello. Do you have a moment?"

"Eh? Yeah, sure."

I'm taken along to the usual cafe by Ms. Naruse as if being dragged, and as soon as I sit down with a cup in my hand, she immediately broaches the main topic without a preface.

"Yesterday a sales site was published by D-Powers."

Oh, so Miyoshi has finally gone public?

"I heard that it would be soon, but yesterday, huh? The formalities should have been in order, so I don't suppose that there's any problem, but did something happen?"

"That hasn't been publicized as next year's April's fool site by some mistake, has it?"

Yep. I totally get her. I would probably think the same.

"No, it's a genuine sales site. I told you that some of it would take the shape of an auction, though."

"I see. So, about the goods..."

"Yes?"

"As a matter of fact, the JDA has been flooded with inquiries asking whether it's a scam."

"Far from it!"

"You do know that an orb disappears one day after its discovery, don't you?"

"Of course."

"Then you're saying that you've created that site not as a joke or scam, based on that knowledge."

"Yes."

I haven't checked it yet, but currently nothing but skill orbs should be sold on that site. Probably it'll be something like three <Water Demon Arts> at first, and then one <Physical

Resistance>.

<Physical Resistance> is an unknown skill as of yet, after all.

Even if its effect should be obvious from its name, the details might be unclear.

I'm pretty sure an organization related to the WDA is going to win the bid, and test it out first.

<High Recovery> and <Storage> aren't supposed to be sold yet.

"Umm...it's just a blind guess, but..."

"Go on."

"Did you find a method to preserve orbs?"

A smile formed on my lips unintentionally due to Ms. Naruse's far too straight question.

"That's difficult for me to answer."

If I were to confirm the existence of such a method, it wouldn't end with just a huge uproar. Not only the JDA, but even the Japanese government would probably demand a release of the information.

It's obvious that the majority of the Japanese wouldn't want it to be announced publicly if they had won a big amount of money in a lottery. That also applies to explorers.

Naturally Ms. Naruse, who comes into contact with us on-site, understands as much.

"Let's temporarily assume that such a method exists, okay?"

"Sure."

"The possibility of that being sold or applied for as a patent is..."

"It's just a hypothetical talk, right?"

"Yes."

"I think it's probably non-existent. Because of Miyoshi."

Ms. Naruse limply leans back in her chair with an expression showing that she had expected as much.

"Umm, I think there will probably be places that will offer as much as 100,000,000,000 Yen..."
(T/N: 956,343,000\$)

"That amazing amount of money would make my legs tremble, but a party of merely two people can't hold onto such an amount of money."

Even I don't really believe in what I'm saying there while revealing a shady smile, but well whatever.

Sure, 100 billion Yen are lucrative, but the preservation device is me. Hence freedom + a reasonable amount of money is far better.

However, if this were to spread, countless applications to join our party would come in from all

kinds of places. Mostly with the intention to spy. I wonder what Miyoshi is planning to do about new members and such.

"Umm, it's just figuratively."

"Go ahead."

"Would you be able to accept the preservation of orbs if the JDA requested it?"

I ponder about it for a bit.

If I confirm here, it will prove that I possess a means to preserve orbs. However, if I decline, it might become troublesome as we will be investigated in various ways.

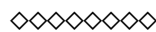
"Assuming I had such a technique, only under several conditions."

"Understood. My boss might intrude upon you in near time, but——"

"If possible, it'd be a big help if you, who has already helped us out in the past, could continue serving as contact person. You can also add this to the conditions, if you want."

"Thank you very much. Please allow me to think it over."

And then Ms. Naruse returned to the JDA. I suspended the dungeon run and headed back home in order to deal with any situation that might crop up as soon as possible.



In a stately, windowless room located in Central Government Building 2 standing along the Sakurada Street, which was painted with the beautiful autumn colors of the Japanese horse chestnuts' leaves that had started to turn crimson, a nervous-looking man received a report from a featureless, ordinary man with a medium build.

"So, are there any important factors in regards to the matter in question?"

The man's report was about the same issue that had been brought up by the JDA, the Cyber Crime Control Office, and the Dungeon Agency.

"Isn't it just saying that yet another simple scamming site has been set up?"

"No, the core of this issue pertains to the case if this site isn't a scam."

"The case if it isn't a scam?"

"The trader's license of the one in charge of the auction belongs to a woman called Miyoshi Azusa, but if this auction were to be genuine, her value would become unfathomable."

"Hmm."

The neurotic man considers the matter, and asks the reporting man, "So what are you of the CIRO (Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office) telling us to do about it?"

"The technology, which the founder of this site might possess, will be considered a treasure and a threat, if this proves to be no scam."

"I have also heard about the matter with <Different World Language Comprehension>. You're saying, those folks might become the key here?"

"That possibility exists."

"I guess for the time being we're going to recommend a travel ban. Of course, only if it's the real deal, that is."

The man affirms that line by merely bowing his head.

"Very well. We will handle the necessary arrangements with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the director of the Dungeon Agency from our side."

"Thank you very much."

"Please handle matters properly on your end as well."

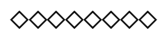
"Of course. The duty of this place is to maintain public safety and order after all."

"Whoa, just a minute there. Don't forget about the part after that."

The featureless man smiles faintly, bows, and leaves the room.



This organization's duty has been defined in paragraph 5 of the police law. It says, 『It is their duty to maintain the public safety and order, and protect the freedom and rights of the individual.』



"Huh? Aren't you kind of early?"

Once I open the door, Miyoshi, who totally behaves as if this is her home, turns around with a puzzled look in front of the dripper.

The dining area of my apartment has already been magically remodeled into something like a small office by Miyoshi. My private area has decreased to no more than the bedroom further back in, but even there, the kotatsu sometimes seems to be occupied by her. It's the sorrow of a 1DK.

A characteristic, nice aroma is filling the room. It should be the beans Miyoshi has recently taken a liking to. What were they called again? Beans with a name sounding as if they are wearing ornamental hairpins — the Geisha blend, was it? — originating from a plantation with some name that's similar to some old shooting game in Panama[efn_note]Call of Duty: Black Ops 2[/efn_note], or a plantation with some name similar to the female pirate searching for Tochiro[efn_note]This refers to Emeraldas of Captain Harlock who seems to be looking for her husband Tochiro Oyama[/efn_note], was it? [efn_note]Author's notes are here: first is the Donpachi Plantation, second the Esmeralda Plantation. The dry roasting of a Geisha blend needs to be accurate on the second. Especially the flushing specifications are harsh[/efn_note]

This blend seems to be extremely difficult in regards to controlling its roasting time. She said that she had a skilled artisan roast the green coffee beans. This girl's obsession with food is at a level that makes me draw back a bit. However, the end result is definitely delicious.

"Give me one cup, too."

"Okeey."

At once, Miyoshi starts preparing a new dripper.

"I hear you have finally put them up for sale?"

"Where did you hear it from? They sure have sharp ears."

"Ms. Naruse got hold of me at the dungeon's reception."

"Haah. I wonder, is she not coming directly to me because she wants to meet with you, as expected?"

What's this girl saying?

"You didn't come with me to the registration, now did you? Leaving that aside, she's saying that inquiries about the authenticity of the site are flooding the JDA."

"Hahaha."

It's only natural. I'm sure I'd think the same if I didn't know anything.

"Well, I have given her a rough explanation, but..."

"What happened?"

"I had no choice with how things were going, okay? I think she got me since she suddenly tossed a strong fast ball, without any acting or shit like that." Saying so, I explain my previous conversation with Ms. Naruse to Miyoshi.

"But, senpai. If you start such a business, everyone will sooner or later reach this conclusion. There's no other option, if it's no scam."

"What about creating an amazing explorer network and getting the targeted orbs, or something along those lines?"

"That's way too unreasonable."

"Thought so."

"So, what do you plan to do about the caretaking conditions?"

"Let's see. First, Ms. Naruse will be the contact person."

"So you guys had that kind of relationship, after all. She seems to be a former Miss Keiyo, you know?"

"No, no, no, no, wait. You'd also hate it if it was someone annoying who's playing psychological games, right? Like Enoki."

"Ah, how nostalgic, that name. What happened to that company?"

"No clue. Next would be the remaining time, I suppose. I'd like the orbs to have at least four hours left."

"That means, less than 1200 on the orb counter, doesn't it?"

"Correct. Then, a commission, I'd say?"

"A truckload of that, boss."

"Nothing less of an Oumi trader."

"Mmh. How about 20% of the sales price? Tell them, 10% for the actual expenses, and 10% as handling charge, or such?"

"20%? That'll mean the storage fee will be ten million if the orb costs fifty million, no? Isn't that like ripping them off?"

"Isn't that normal? I mean, around 20% as consumption tax and service charge will easily be taken off you if you go to a slightly better restaurant. Even the taxes you pay for the sales profit of stocks, and the handling charge as well tax taken for a trader's license are both 20%, no?"

"Somehow I feel as if you're bearing a grudge."

"It's just-yo-ur-i-ma-gi-na-tion. Or is it better to structure the rates in correspondence with the safekeeping period?"

"Well yeah. It won't be limited to storing the orbs for the sake of selling, and we'd draw morons feeling inclined to get the better of us by reselling orbs for a big sum after selling the one handed out by us for 100,000 and thus only having paid a storage fee of 20,000."

"Such trade partners will be banned, banned I tell you. After all it will be a service only we can provide in this world. We're going to go ahead with confidence!"

"Anyway, so I will ask for the custody time and the orb's value. Keeping the rest negotiable will be a safe approach, I'd say?"

"That's right. How are we going to calculate the storage fee then?"

"One million per day, or something like that?"

"How dull."

"Well, isn't it fine to meet with the other party and ask about their wishes? That will allow us to gradually get an idea of an estimate, no?"

"Sure thing."

Immediately after a hollow bubbling sound, Miyoshi passes me the coffee that finished dripping.

"Here you go."

"Thanks."

While sniffing the characteristic aroma, I take a sip and hold it in my mouth.

An acidity that has a feeling of translucence spreads, and then a mild coffee body seems to surge forward on my tongue. It's definitely delicious.

That means fussing over coffee makes a difference, huh?

"So, did you sell any orbs?"

"For the time being it looks like I got some prices. For the first two days I'm making them show their ID to prove their authenticity while pretending to have forgotten."

"How evil."

"Their ID will be hidden on the last day. I think there's only a few successful bidders who would rejoice over being singled out."

"In the end, you're going to use an auction format then?"

"Well, there's not much merchandise. Besides, at present it's just us across the whole world who can deal with these! Even Southerbee's or Christy's can't put up such auctions!"

Makes sense. Orbs do vanish if their time runs out.

"For starters, the prince for the three <Water Demon Arts> has started with 60,000,000 JPY (Japanese Yen) each. I set it up to have a 10 minutes time extension, once they are bid on. When I checked just now, they were at 108,000,000."

"What? Didn't you mention something about 80,000,000 before?"

"That's the price assigned by a single buyer in the current system. I think this much is only natural, if there's competition."

Hmm, I don't know what kind of skill <Water Demon Arts> is, but if it allows you to use some awesome offensive magic, even a big amount of money might balance out more for the military than a fighter plane...

"What's the deadline?"

"So far as it goes, three days."

"That's amazing. The time for winning a bid on an orb that doesn't last more than a day is three days."

"It'll shake the world."

Will it really...? It actually might.

"So, what are you going to do after someone won the bid?"

"Personal delivery. Of course home delivery will be impossible. I will send a password to the successful bidder. The encryption of the password will be a public key known to both sides. Then I will get the successful bidder to come to a rented conference room of the JDA, and there I will receive their encrypted data. Once I manage to decrypt it with our private key, I will confirm that the payment has been made via bank deposit transfer, and hand over the orb."

"It ain't as if we can guarantee the orb's timer for any delivery type except personally after it left our hands."

It looks like Miyoshi has written the lowest guaranteed time in the product description.

"I'm really thrilled about the final price."

Miyoshi drained her coffee while broadly grinning as she imagined the winning bid. This might be enough for an Oumi trader, but I worry about what will happen after the sale. I think we might as well go into exile for a while until things cool down a bit.

"You bet. How about going on a vacation this winter, even if it's a foreign country, once we are done with this? Kind of like a company outing."

"That's a great idea! I'd like to visit Machu Picchu or Angkor Wat."

"What remote cultures. Isn't there France, Italy, or if it's now, Spain, for food?"

"Oh, those might be nice too..."

"Well, let's do our best so that we haven't counted our chickens before they hatched."

"Okaaay."

However, no one had probably imagined that a vacation abroad would become a dream within a dream from now on. Of course we, who aren't gods, couldn't even begin to imagine it.

§017 Forum 【What's this?】 D-Powers 1 【Scam?】

1: Unknown Explorer ID:P12xx-xxxx-xxxx-2932

The party with that messed up name of D-Powers, which suddenly popped out, seems to have already started the orb auction.

Are they crooks? Or saviors of the world?

Next thread at 930 posts.

2: Unknown Explorer

Is that for real?

3: Unknown Explorer

Obviously a scam, no? They say it'll last three days, so how are they going to maintain the orbs?

4: Unknown Explorer

They go and get them after three days, or something like that?

5: Unknown Explorer

That in itself is impossible. Of course it'd be something else if there's a place or monsters that reliably drop orbs

6: Unknown Explorer

Not a chance, but quite a few organizations have placed a bid.

7: Unknown Explorer

How do you know? >>6

8: Unknown Explorer

What you're using when bidding over there is the WDA license ID. Just google it.

9: Unknown Explorer

Geeh, the Ministry of Defense and the National Police Agency are in there!

10: Unknown Explorer

Huh? Isn't that just a forgery?

11: Unknown Explorer

That's impossible. An authentication with the WDA is carried out upon entering your data.

12: Unknown Explorer

Seriously? That means, you tried?

13: Unknown Explorer

Actually I did.

14: Unknown Explorer

You've got 60,000,000 JPY!?

15: Unknown Explorer

Well, if you're a client with a trader's license, having 60,000,000 is no big deal.

16: Unknown Explorer

Makes sense.

17: Unknown Explorer

Doesn't that mean any organization will give it a try since they got nothing to lose anyway?

18: Unknown Explorer

Well, you could say that. Since it has become such a hot topic, I think the JDA investigated directly, too.

And yet they weren't banned, meaning...

19: Unknown Explorer

I think it's very likely genuine. But you know, if this is the real deal, where did they get the goods then?

20: Unknown Explorer

The mysteries of D-Powers:

1.) Where did they procure the rare orbs?

2.) What about the obstacle called 23 h 56 m 4 s?

21: Unknown Explorer

>>20 Leaving aside 1.)...doesn't 2.) point to them having developed some kind of method to preserve orbs? Or rather, I can't think of any other option besides that.

22: Unknown Explorer

Something like that is possible?

23: Unknown Explorer

If you limit it to looking at the license ID of the person in charge mentioned on the site, the ID's acquisition lies quite a good while back, huh?

24: Unknown Explorer

But, they are a total unknown, right?

25: Unknown Explorer

Even googling the ID won't give you anything but their connection with D-Powers

26: Unknown Explorer

What about the company's address or contact?

27: Unknown Explorer

It's not written there.

28: Unknown Explorer

Eh? Isn't that a violation of the Specified Commercial Transactions Law?

29: Unknown Explorer

Trade licenses related to dungeons don't need to give a description as long as it's been specified in the license.

30: Unknown Explorer

Well, it's just that it's very likely for them to get attacked by robbers since the trade items are way too rare and expensive.

31: Unknown Explorer

I see. I suppose that's how it works

32: Unknown Explorer

Anyway, I'm kind of looking forward to three days later.

If there's winning bids, the successful bidder will announce something, right?

33: Unknown Explorer

No, I don't think the successful bidders will announce anything as they likely don't want to be identified as such.

.....

§018 Simon Gershwin 11/2 (Fri)

"Simon? What're you up to?"

A slender, tall man with ash blond hair comes down to the living room from the second floor of the house that had become the base of their team, while scratching his belly after having woken up.

"Ah, Joshua? How early. Well, Mason was blown away back then at Evans, wasn't he?"

"Yeah. At the thought that we're going to dilly-dally around like this from now on, I got totally fed up. With our guard Mason in such a sorry state, we'll be stuck doing nothing, aight?"

"Well yeah. So, I have been investigating various stuff, wondering whether anything can be done about this, but..."

Feeling that something was odd, Joshua asks Simon, who's staring at the screen of his PC, "What's wrong?"

"Hey, what do you think of this?"

What Simon shows him is the English site of D-Powers.

"The hell? ...A skill orb auction, you say? Moreover, the bidding deadline is three days? Is it a site created by some random idiot? Way too lame for a scam."

Joshua's opinion is very understandable. Everyone knows that a skill orb vanishes in one day. And there's also the rarity. Moreover, it's common knowledge that it's impossible to collect orbs while aiming for specific ones.

"One day since its creation has passed, but it hasn't been shut down so far. Besides, the folks, who have added their names to bid, are Japan's Ministry of Defense and the National Police Agency, and several enterprises that have been investing quite some effort into capturing dungeons."

If this were to be a scam, the JDA should have taken it down right away. Furthermore, such big players are all bidding?

"...Did those guys possibly discover a method to preserve skill orbs?"

It's certainly unbelievable.

Having said that, humanity is evolving. That possibility always exists. But, it looks like this site is run by a single civilian.

"If they really found such a method, it means it's this guy's private technology at the current stage, doesn't it?"

"Oi, if that's true, we gotta headhunt them right away! They have way more value than an aircraft

carrier, you know?"

"All the folks across the whole world, who saw this site, probably think the same. Even Japan isn't dumb. As if they'd let us headhunt them so easily."

About this time there's likely a huge pandemonium going on between the people related to dungeons on the whole world.

However, right now no one knows whether this is genuine. The only other party that knows the details of the person in question is the registrar of the WDA license ID.

For the time being everyone should think so and wait to see how things pan out.

"Well, that's fine. The problem is this." Saying so, Simon points at the letters stating <Physical Resistance>.

"<Physical Resistance>? There was such a skill?"

"I tried to look it up. Just as you suspect, the answer is no."

"An unknown skill!?"

Simon powerfully nods and says, "Don't you feel like Mason is going to need this from now on?"

Simon repeatedly taps the LCD with the tip of his index finger.

"An unknown skill and an orb auction with a deadline of three days? That's crazy. Does the guy who got this party started understand the meaning of what he's doing?"

"Who knows. Anyway, I will try to bid on this. Please get permission from the other guys on the team to use the party account since it looks like I won't have enough money."

"What, you think that it'll take such a huge amount of money?"

"Well, looking at the other bidders, yep."

And then he shows the currently highest bidder. Just like Simon's, it's a very well known ID.

"Huang Zun Xi!?" [efn_note] The name is written as 黄俊熙. I think it reads as Huang Zun Xi in Chinese. The katakana is ファンチュインシー.[/efn_note]

Huang is ranked fourth in the WDARL, and the top explorer of China.

"If I'm going to win the bid, we'll go to Yoyogi for a while. I can't believe that all of this is unrelated to the sudden appearance of a new world rank 1."

"I don't think Mason is ready yet."

"A holiday in Japan is nice from time to time as well, right?"

"Holiday? At such a time?"

Thanks to those annoying orbs, the US explorers related to the government have all been worked to the bones. However, Simon returns a smile to those words.

"Haah...I guess I'm wasting my breath. Got it. I will get in contact with everyone."

"Please do." With those words, Simon returns his eyes to the PC screen.

§019 What's with this Winning Bid!? 11/4 (Sun)

Just when I left the bathroom after waking up by taking a shower, the entrance door to my apartment was suddenly thrown open, and Miyoshi rushed in. I covered my body with a towel in a hurry.

"You know, even though we decided to use this place as something like an office, this is still kind of my home...even if it was inevitable to give you a duplicate key, knock at least."

"Se-Se-Se-Senpai! It's not the time for this!"

"Not the time, she says..."

"Look, here, here, this."

Once I look at the smartphone she held out towards me, I see D-Powers' sales site. Come to think of it, today at twelve o'clock (Japan Time) was the deadline, wasn't it? The display shows the final winning bids. Let's have a look...

"200,000,000!? Wow! Isn't that three times what we expected?"

"Senpai, digits. You're making a mistake with the digits!"

"Hmm? ...one, ten, hundred, thousand... Wut? Two billion four hundred eighty two million?"

2,482,000,000 JPY

2,643,000,000 JPY

2,562,000,000 JPY

The prices attached to Miyoshi's <Water Magic> orbs are all above 2.4 billion Yen.

"Moreover, the winning bidder being the same for all three...an ID related to the government, huh?"

The WDA ID (WDA Identification Number) consists of four parts. The part on the left end uses a format of Classification + Area ID + Country ID.

Beginning with P means it's personal, or in other words an individual's ID. C stands for company, G for government, and D for an organization connected to the WDA.

For example, the code of an individual under the jurisdiction of the JDA in Area 12 becomes "P12JP-".

"It's the Ministry of Defense, isn't it?"

Really now...

Well, since it's an era where a single fighter plane costs ten billion Yen although there's still the maintenance to add on top, it might be possibly cheaper if they can create a soldier matching a fighter plane...

"Rather than that, look at this."

What Miyoshi is pointing at is the winning bid for <Physical Resistance>.

3,547,000,000 JPY

"Three point five billion?"

This price for just the name despite it being an unknown skill. On top, the ID is that of an individual.

From just where did that multi-billionaire pop out...?

"It's an ID famous enough that the filter converts it. Look, it's Simon Gershwin."

"Famous? Is he some multi-billionaire? But yeah, I feel like I heard that name somewhere..."

"What are you talking about? It's this person. Look, this guy."

Miyoshi points at the third rank of the WDARL.

"Isn't that the leader of the Evan Dungeon capture party!? So he was called Gershwin, eh?"

As just about everything is full of unexpected events, I slump down on the chair in the dining room, and breathe out deeply.

"The profit will be 8,987,200,000 Yen after taxes, but what are we going to do?"

"Basically, it means we can stock up on 『Alien's drool』 for a decade. So, even if you ask me what we're going to do, next up is the examination over at your senpai's place, right?"

Once I say that, Miyoshi lets a chuckle slip.

"Senpai...it's quite amazing, isn't it?"

"What is?"

"I mean, you've gone from being penniless to a wealthy person possessing close to 10 billion Yen in one swipe, no? It wouldn't be strange even if your head went blank there, don't you think?"

"What are you saying? That's the party's money, isn't it? I'm still as broke as before."

It's impossible for an employee to freely use company funds. That's common sense.

"The members are just you and me, senpai. Half of this is definitely your money."

"Well, even if you tell me all that. It's not like I'm going to do anything with it in particular...oh, right. I think it would be great if the company's location were to be moved to a proper place."

It's troublesome for it to stay in my room forever. Mainly for me, though.

"We can buy something like that including the entire building."

"Oh, that'd be nice. Somehow like a secret base. How exciting."

"Are you a child...? Ah, now that you mention it, your party card is finished, so I will leave it over here."

It's an IC card that has the Party ID and the Member ID carved into it in small, golden letters on a matte carbon black base.

It's fairly simple and stylish.

"The D-Card, the WDA's license card, and a party card, eh? Can't you combine all of these into one?"

"The D-Card can't be reproduced with human knowledge. Parties do change. Besides, if you combine it with your license card, your identity will be exposed when using it, no?"

The Party ID is a simple, serial number, but if you were to combine it with the license ID, it'd be possible to link it with your WDA ID.

"So you're saying they don't wanna take the time and effort to create a design that can't be deciphered by others?"

While fiddling around with the party card, I suddenly ask something that has been on my mind, "By the way, how much can I spend with this per month?"

"Senpai, you understand that neither of us has a monthly wage, don't you?"

"Whoa."

"This card is something that combines the credit and cash card of a corporate person. Given that it's basically issued by the WDA, the credit card part is similar to Daimex, it'll become available immediately after we receive the money for the orbs. And, there's no upper or lower limit."

"In short?"

"You can withdraw as much money as is on the account. Please use it moderately since there's no credit limit on the card."

"Now listen, that's a bad idea, don't you think?"

"It's after taxes anyway, and there's only us two in the party. Because the credit limit on a Daimex seems to be set individually to begin with, I think they might set it on their own accord despite saying that they haven't."

Is that how it works?

"Well, let's make it a rule to discuss before buying something big. How about saying that up to ten million can be used freely?"

"Well, I'd like to put some money aside, though."

"Me too, but this card is the bank account, and thus something like savings."

"Oh, I see..."

At that point both of us burst into laughter.

"It really feels like we're taking the petty bourgeois mindset to its extreme here."

"We're petty bourgeois, so it's inevitable. I will handle the remaining finer details on my side, so please earn a truckload of money in the dungeon, senpai!"

"Righto~ But man, having an agent sure makes it nice n' easy."

"Right? I'm happy that you regard an Oumi trader latching onto you as parasite as worthwhile."

That causes both of us to laugh at each other once more.

"However, since we got to pay rent and monthly expenses, won't it be troublesome to not have any individual assets?"

"When money is deposited on the party account through the JDA, you can split it to the accounts linked with the WDA card of the members belonging to the party. Hence it's currently set to

automatically split the money and deposit 1% on the bank using that system. Given that it's likely to anger the tax office, if you withdraw the money directly and deposit it on your personal bank account, I'd like you to please refrain from that."

Oh, I guess that means the money after excluding the taxes will be divided between the party and the party members. That sounds logical.
However...

"1%? I'm paying more than 100,000 Yen per month. Is that going to be alright?"

"Senpai. Even if it's just 1%, it's a little less than 90 million Yen from just the payment for the first orbs, you know? Moreover, that's after taxes."

"Eh...my monthly income is 90 million?"

"For this month that's correct," Miyoshi laughs and then warns me, "Please be careful since 10% will be taken away as municipal tax from the rest."

Hearing all that, how to say it, I feel somewhat dizzy. Let's just forget about this matter. Anyway, it looks like there are no problems with the payments. That's the only thing that matters.

"So, have you decided on a delivery schedule?"

"The one with the Ministry of Defense will be tomorrow."

"Fast! Will the preparations and such be in time?"

"Fu fu fu, I prepared cool titanium-made boxes! The inside is stuffed with a high-density silken velvet. Look."

The box, which Miyoshi retrieved from a cardboard box that had been placed in the kitchen and showed to me, has just the right size for an orb to fit in. The inside is blanketed with dark blue, which is pretty close to black, and crimson, with a low chroma, silken velvet. Two questionable magic crests have been engraved on the inner part of the lid and the bottom of the box.

"So that cardboard over there was a box, huh? But, somehow it looks kind of expensive."

"Yes, of course it does. It's custom made. 1 lot is 100 boxes, and a box costs 120,000 Yen."

"The box costs 120,000 Yen!? Wow."

"If the payment wasn't after the orb sale, I would never be able to pay it."

Miyoshi talks about being unable to pay while brimming with confidence.

"So, what's up with those magic crests?"

"It's a bluff, a bluff. I created those so that the various lines would result in a funny mathematical

value. Won't it be bloody hilarious if you imagine some research institute analyzing those magic crests seriously."

"You...do have a nasty taste."

"Awww~ I'd like you to put the orbs into these right before the delivery."

"Sure. What's the location?"

"I have booked a conference room rented by the JDA after 11 am. Ah, come to think of it."

"What's up?"

"The other day I have been contacted by the JDA about wanting to meet with us."

"The matter with the preservation, eh?"

"Most likely."

"Since the time and date for the hand over has been decided, I have decided to meet them at the JDA's headquarter tomorrow afternoon while I'm there anyway. Senpai, you coming as well?"

Let's see. No matter how much I don't want my identity to be exposed, the JDA is likely aware of me being a party member. I suppose, around this much should be alright. In the first place, I'll be worried if it's just Miyoshi alone.

"For the time being I will attend as party member."

"Got it."

"Alright. Guess it's time to go to sleep in preparation for tomorrow."

"It's still morning." Miyoshi says while astounded.

"No helping it. I think I will go to the dungeon for a bit then."

"I will do some office work for the company and then go look at multi-floor buildings and houses at several real estate agents. What location should I target?"

"Hmm, isn't this area okay? It's close to Yoyogi and I'm kind of attached to the location, too."

"Gotcha."



The Dungeon Capture Group (JDAG - Japan Dungeon Attack Group) is a unit that mainly focuses on dungeon capturing and dungeon disaster relief. The Ground Self-Defense Force naturally plays a

central role in the capture of Japan's dungeons because of the topographical requirements. At times, its members are recruited from the whole JSDF and police organizations, but since the unit has been established with the 1st Airborne Brigade, which is a similar special operations force, as parent body, it's naturally situated at the Narashino Garrison.[efn_note]Please look here for further info: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1st_Airborne_Brigade_\(Japan\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1st_Airborne_Brigade_(Japan)). [/efn_note] As a unit subordinate to the Ground Component Command that had been established last year, the unit is currently operating with Narashino Garrison as its headquarters.

On that day First Lieutenant Iori Kimitsu, who finished her independent training at the Narashino Garrison, was on the way to her official residence. It's somewhat lonesome for her to train by herself on a Sunday, but she had nothing else to do once she finished cleaning and doing the laundry. While being on a light jog, she suddenly got all motivated. Besides, she had absolutely no doubt that she would be given a new mission in the near future.

It seems like the focus will lie on searching for something specific rather than capturing this time.

"<Different World Language Comprehension>, eh...?"

It's the name of an orb mentioned in the documents she saw the other day.

"Even though it's already rare for it to drop randomly, I can't believe that we will be able to actually target its acquisition..."

She had personally witnessed the appearance of a dungeon orb only two times since the dungeons came into this world. And, the first dungeon orb she caused to drop became the main reason for her to be dragged down this path.

As Iori absentmindedly ponders about such things, she hears a voice calling out to her from a distance.

"Iori!"

"Master Sergeant? What's wrong?"

Master Sergeant Hagane is an elite veteran and has been assigned a post in Team I equivalent to a warrant officer. As they have a relation of him being primarily responsible for training Iori's unit, she treats him politely outside their missions.

"It's great to meet you here. I received a message from Ichigaya. It says to attend tomorrow at 1400."

"Aye! Attend at Ichigaya, tomorrow at 1400. However, if it's Ichigaya..."

"Major Terasawa...which reminds me, I think he was promoted to lieutenant colonel."

Terasawa and Hagane are close in age. The paths each of them took were completely different, but they got along strangely well during the period when they belonged to the same unit, and have been fostering a private friendship ever since.

"Very likely he will wait for the beginning of the new year and get promoted to lieutenant colonel

during the January promotions. Having said that, Master Sergeant, you can take the SL C, can't you?"

Hagane, who continued being devoted to working in the field, is already 36 years old. He has reached an age allowing him to take the C line. Within the JSDF, those who passed the leadership cadet selection test within their department starting from non-commissioned officer belong to the B line. Those who completed the Second Lieutenant Candidate Curriculum (SL C / Second Lieutenant Course) after passing the selection test at an age from 36 to 49 are referred to as C line.

"Indeed. But well, right now I'm your babysitter."

"That's terrible of you." Iori says while smiling wryly.

Hagane is the kind of man who likes working in the field. Having said that, it's not like he can do so forever. Iori also felt that she wanted him to use his abundant knowledge to give advice to the upper echelons.

"At any rate, it's a direct notification from Major Terasawa."

"Direct? The major? On a Sunday?"

"Correct. If it's an order, it's quite exceptional."

If he knew the schedule in advance, he should have sent the notification on Friday at the latest. Something requiring a quick response must have occurred.

"Is it about the matter with <Different World Language Comprehension>?"

"No, he also told me to bring Kaiba and Sawatari along. It looks like it's no mere rumor that the Ministry of Defense won the bids at that auction."

"That was real!?"

"We won't know that until tomorrow, will we?"

At the beginning of this month, a party with a clown name such as 「D-Powers」 has started an auction site.

That in itself wasn't anything especially unusual for a party possessing a trade license, but the items put on sale there caused a major uproar.

Even at the JDAG a mountain of inquiries asking whether they would be able to do the same arrived from not only the Ministry of Defense, but various related places. The answer is of course:

「Impossible」.

Considering it normally, you couldn't take the site as anything but a joke even before a scam.

All those in a position that would allow them to bid there have known that it's impossible. It would be very unlikely for them to get cheated.

And yet, contrary to the expectations of the majority, even now that three days had passed, the site is still up. That means, the party hasn't been told by the JDA to shut it down. In other words—

"—It's the real deal, isn't it?"

"Hmm? Did you say anything?"

"No. Master Sergeant, you are coming with us tomorrow?"

"Yeah, I guess we will all go by car? It will take around one hour through the Kudan Hill after getting off at Kitanomaru along the C1."

"Won't we get killed by the Major if we end up stuck in a traffic jam?" Iori says while laughing.

"In that case we will gather at the main gate, tomorrow at 1230. We will be sent up to Tsudanuma by car and then switch to the Sobu Line." [efn_note]A train line connecting Tokyo with Chiba. Tsudanuma is a part of Narashino[/efn_note]

"We gather at the main gate, tomorrow at 1230."

"Okay. Now, hurry up, go home and rest. Sundays aren't for doing voluntary training. You could at least find a partner to go on a date with, couldn't you?"

"Master Sergeant, is that sexual harassment?"

The instant Iori revealed a terrifying smile, Hagane performed an exemplary salute

"I shall excuse myself with this for today!"

No sooner than saying that, he flees in a hurry.



Having dived into the dungeon for a bit around noon, I come back home, opening the door. There I discover Miyoshi fallen prostate on my dining table.

"Senpaaaiii."

"What's wrong?"

"I have no clue whether the multi-floor buildings are expensive or cheap."

"The hell?"

Because Miyoshi has decided to go with a place that serves as a domicile and office, she ran around various real estate agents after making a guess by searching the net.

"If you exclude really huge buildings and places around Ginza[efn_note]Shopping area in Tokyo[/efn_note], you can buy one in the range from 200 million to one billion Yen, but almost all have tenants, you know?"

"Well, that makes sense."

Unless it's a new building, there's probably no value in a multi-floor building without any tenants.

"I'm totally busted after looking at various buildings... My last thought was that it might be just fine to buy an entire building and keep making some cash with real estate afterwards. That's really scary, isn't it?"

"That means you thought it'd be fine to go with a floor of an office building that already has a tight security set up."

"Correct. The company's building having a touch of being a secret base sounds cool, but that's all there is to it."

"So, I investigated that next. Once I did, the buildings with proper security were full of floors with 300 square meters or 500 square meters, making me go like 'just how many people are we supposed to employ here.'"

"I really don't know whether to call it cool or saddening to work with just two people right in the middle of a floor with 300 m²."

"Senpai, I will be all alone if you go to a dungeon, you know? I'm sure that'd be impossible for me."

Working alone at one of the two sole desks in the center of a 300 m² office...yep, that'd be harsh. Or rather, there'd really be no point in having 300 m².

"And then, since I was worn out already, I just bought a slightly bigger house located behind this apartment."

"Just bought?"

"Well, I reserved it for the time being. Since the plot has more than 400 m², it's a bit expensive. Originally it's a two-family building with an unusual style. The first floor is shared, and there's two 2LDK^[efn_note]A 2LDK is an apartment with two rooms in addition to a living (L), dining (D) and kitchen (K) area.^[/efn_note] on the second floor. I decided that I will live on one side, and you on the other, senpai."

"No, wait. Decided? The fuck?"

"The first floor will be the office. It's a 1LDK, a 16 tatami^[efn_note]Generally 85 x 170 cm - since they are in Tokyo, it could also be 88 x 176 cm^[/efn_note] Western-styled room + LDK. The living room has a size of more than 30 tatami, so it's perfect as an office. There are three entranceways, properly divided separately."

"Haah."

"It's fine with this. I'm exhausted. I don't want to look at any other places anymore."

Miyoshi flaps her feet while lying on the dining table.

"I-I got it, I got it. Are we going to call movers then?"

"Senpai, is there any furniture you want to take with you by all means out of some sentimental attachment?"

"No, my furniture is basically limited to a worn-out kotatsu, bed, and hanger, so there's nothing like that..."

"We're going to buy everything new then. That's better since it'll be treated as a company owned house anyway."

"Are we going out to buy furniture?"

Lifting her face all of a sudden, Miyoshi starts speaking with a very serious look, "Senpai, I didn't know why people such as coordinators exist on this world, but with what happened this time, I fully grasped it."

"What?"

"Deciding or choosing something, the modern era is cluttered with information and things. It's a really maaaaajor pain!"

"Y-Yeah."

"That's why I will leave it all to someone else! I will outsource everything after telling them what I have in mind, get them to ensemble things, and just complain a bit! What a dreamy world!!"

"Y-Yeah."

"Thus, when I checked the net, I found people with such an occupation. That's quite amazing. After I delegated all of it to a place that seems to have a good track record, please take a look at the draft they will send us and complain away as you like, senpai."

"Y-Yeah."

"Jeez, researcher is a nice job after all, isn't it? Nothing but you and your research target matters. I don't wanna think about anything unnecessary for a while."

An Oumi trader appears to have many hardships as an Oumi trader.

Since it couldn't be helped, I went out shopping in the early afternoon, turning that day into a party in honor of Miyoshi's services.

§020 Trade with the Ministry of Defense 11/5 (Mon)

And then the next day greeted us with stupidly nice weather.

"With the sky being so blue wherever you look, I kind of feel like having become some kind of small bug." Miyoshi, who had gotten drunk on plenty of wine yesterday at the party we held afterwards, says as she narrows her eyes seemingly dazzled by the sunshine.

That's just you having drunk too much.

"A glossy, black bug with a pink head and pink specks?"

"Our office is on the second floor, though."

"In that case it'll be a friend and a good-luck charm of mine I took along down to the flower bed. I will wait for him to get up to the second floor. That's still far closer than the 18th floor."
[efn_note]There's an author's note: "It's a scene from Raymond Chandler's "Farewell, My Lovely." The protagonist gently releases a bug at a flowerbed located outside after discovering it in an office situated on the 18th floor of Los Angeles' Police Department. No matter how often I read it, it always gives me the impression that I don't really get it."[/efn_note]

"There's no flower bed below, though."

Miyoshi is sure a nice girl to casually go along with my Chandler make-believe act.

"Unfortunately, this place has no more than 17 floors either."

"No, senpai, I think you can stop now." Miyoshi, who bluntly shoots me down as I say this while looking up to the strangely shaped multi-floor build of the JDA, quickly enters the lobby and heads for the third floor.



"Please take a look at this then."

A uniformed man with masculine features, who introduced himself as Teresawa and looks to be around 30 years old, holds out a memory card towards us. Miyoshi takes it, inserts it into her notebook's card reader, and swiftly confirms the code.

"I have confirmed it. The goods are over here." Miyoshi opens the lids of the three titanium boxes, showing him the orbs.

"Please verify them." She says to the JDA's witness — it's Ms. Naruse — and lines up the boxes in front of her.

You wouldn't allow the other party to directly verify it at this point. After all it'd be over if they used the orbs by touching them. No matter what protests you'd file, they wouldn't come back either way.

Thus it's the normal procedure to hand the orb after an observer guarantees the content and checking that the money has been paid.

Ms. Naruse touches the three orbs in turns with a meek expression.

"I confirm. The JDA guarantees that all three are the skill orbs <Water Magic>. The orb counter of all three...is less than 60."

The instant she finished saying all that, I could hear a small stir from the other party.

An air of shocked disbelief spreads on the spot.

"Can I confirm as well?"

"Please do so after paying. Even if you can get back the money, the same can't be said for an orb after usage." Miyoshi answers.

In response the man operates a device to transfer money to a bank deposit while laughing and saying that she's a level headed person.

"Please check."

A trade related to dungeons and carried out through a WDA license will always run through the administrative authority — the JDA if it's within Japan. The paid money will have the dungeon tax and the JDA's administrative fee deducted, and transferred to the account linked to the license of the other party. Taxes will always be taken.

"Certainly, I have verified the payment." Miyoshi confirms and lines up the three orbs towards the other party.

"Please use them as you see fit."

At once the man called Teresawa nods and touches the orbs.

"It is as you said."

"The trade is over with this then. Thank you very much everyone." The air inside the room noticeably relaxes upon Ms. Naruse's announcement.

"May I, Ms. Miyoshi?"

"Go ahead."

"How did you bring three of the specified orbs from a dungeon to this place in less than one hour? Unless you used a fighter plane that would be able to transport them within the time frame, only Yoyogi would be an option, but..." The man asks, looking very curious.

"Trade secret," Miyoshi says with a smile.

"Well, I had expected as much." The man folds his arms and pulls a complicated face.

Feeling that it was about to become troublesome, I address Ms. Naruse, "Next we have a meeting with the people of the JDA, right?"

"Ah, yes."

Teresawa cuts into that, saying, "Please wait. Mister, there's still one topic left."

Teresawa passes the conversation to a man in a business suit without any particular traits who has been simply sitting next to him without saying a single word.

"Nice to meet you. You can call me Tanaka."

"Haah."

"I can't reveal my affiliation, but I have been sitting in on this after receiving an order from the relevant authorities."

The heck?

"In short, a big-wig in the government?" Miyoshi asks back before I can.

He doesn't reply to her, presents some documents, and informs us about their shocking contents.

"As of now the two people called Miyoshi Azusa and Yoshimura Keigo are requested to voluntarily refrain from traveling abroad."

"Pardon?"

Once I check the documents handed to us, they are jointly signed by the Dungeon Agency Director, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the National Public Safety Commission Chairman.
Now, just a moment there. No matter how you look at it, those members....are way over the top, aren't they?

"Umm, I don't know what's what, but..."

"After holding a skill orb auction run by D-Powers the other day, the intelligence agencies all over the globe have started to move."

"Okay?"

"In other words, if you two travel, it's possible that it will produce grave issues to the security guarantee of the nation."

"No, that's too exaggerated. Wait, even Europe and America?"

"Of course."

"No...way. They are allies, no?"

"In case it's absolutely necessary to visit those places, please get in contact with us. We will dispatch personnel from the Security Bureau." Saying so, Tanaka hands us a card with just his name and a number.

"Huh? Well, I'm a civilian, though..."

The Security Bureau is a section that usually guards VIPs. However, Tanaka doesn't answer.

"We trust that you will definitely follow our advice. Please excuse me then."

Tanaka, who stood up after one-sidedly stating his demands, silently bows to Teresawa and leaves the room.

"Umm, what was that just now?"

As I have no idea what's going on here, I ask Teresawa who stayed behind, but his answer is curt.

"It's nothing that concerns me. I just allowed him to attend after being asked so by my superior."

"Haah."

"Well then, I will take my leave here as well. It's great that we could make a good deal. I look forward to working with you again if an opportunity presents itself." Teresawa holds out his hand towards Miyoshi.

"The pleasure has been on my side. Thank you very much for your purchase." Miyoshi grasps his hand.

Once they finish their handshake, Mr. Teresawa leaves the room at a quick pace.

"In the end he didn't use them here."

"You're right. But, the Ichigaya headquarters[efn_note]Same building complex according to the map[/efn_note] is right around the corner. He has plenty of time left."

"Mmh okay."

"Rather than that, senpai."

"Hmm?"

"The plan to go eat delicious food in Europe..."

"Want to go there while surrounded by SP?"

"Uuh, goodbye, my Angkor Wat."

While crying crocodile tears, Miyoshi falls prostrate on the table in the conference room.

"Umm, you two?"

"Ah, good work you too, Ms. Naruse."

"Yeah, good work."

"If you just think about it, it's amazing, isn't it?"

"What is?" Ms. Naruse tilts her head to the side with a confused look.

"Ms. Naruse, just now you have earned more than 760 million Yen in 30 minutes, haven't you?"

"Huh?"

"Yep, the commission fee is sure nice stuff..."

"No, wait, it's not like it's my money..."

"Please get some nice, big bonus since you have earned so much money."

"If you say so...by the way, since there's still some time until afternoon, how about going out for lunch?"

Miyoshi suddenly raises her head and energetically says to Ms. Naruse, who changed the topic, "Sure! 『Minamijimatei』?" [efn_note]Probably a pun by the author (he went out of his way to add the kana above the kanji). In Tokyo there's a French restaurant called Kitajimatei (Northern Island Restaurant)...he used Minamijimatei (Southern Island Restaurant). Or maybe it's a branch or it renamed itself, not going to look further into food-related matters. ;p[/efn_note]

"Now listen..."

『Minamijimatei』 is located in Yotsuya[efn_note]A district of Shinjiku[/efn_note]. They serve very manly French food, and are slightly addictive. They also hand out plenty of souvenirs. It's a place that more or less serves lunch as well, but befitting of their manly menu, you can also order a grand menu. It's a very, very dangerous place to visit together with Miyoshi.

"I don't have so much money."

"Eh? You just earned the money, though."

"Ah, true...but, we don't have time."

Miyoshi apparently glances at the clock in her own notebook, and nods while looking bored.

"It'll be fine with 『Suragawa』[efn_note]A small soba restaurant[/efn_note] located opposite of the

JDA, no?"

"Senpai, you do like 『Suragawa』, don't you?"

"I can feel relieved over there since it's a truly safe choice. It's easy on the wallet, and it's also a plus that it's close. Also, the logo and name of the building has that very nice Morohoshi-sensei-like flair." [efn_note]Morohoshi Dajirou is a mangaka. His most known works are Saiyuu Youenden (Journey to the West: Monster monkey's Commentary) and Youkai Hunter (Demon Hunter). You can google him if you want to know more.[/efn_note]

"Huh? What's with that?"

The building's name is the same as the surname of Demon Hunter's protagonist. Moreover, the logo is written in Ming-style typeface using katakana, but it has quite the charm as the letters are slightly crooked. To a very small part of society mostly. I'd like those living nearby go visit it by all means, it's completely unrelated to 『Suragawa』, though.

"Umm..." Ms. Naruse says apologetically, "...if you're fine with it, how about our staff canteen?"

You can't enter the JDA's staff canteen unless you're together with a staff member. It's rumored to have quite the delicious food, but we never ate there. Miyoshi and I look at each other, and nod our heads repeatedly.



"The JDA is sneaky, isn't it?" Miyoshi has been angry while walking through the corridor after finishing lunch.

"A tonkatsu set meal with suuuuch a volume for just 500 Yen? A dirt-cheap-frigging-tasty gyuudon, you say!?" [efn_note]tonkatsu is breaded pork cutlet, gyuudon is a bowl of rice covered with beef and vegetables[/efn_note]

"Relatively tasty, I must say."

"Relatively is the wrong word here! I want them to make it available for regular explorers with a WDA license. I will buy it three times a week!"

"Wait, that'll exceed the train budget, if coming from our place."

Using the Sobu Line and the Atsumi Line from Hachiman to Yotsuya costs 290 Yen. If you use a card, it's 278 Yen. 556 Yen for a roundtrip. With the tonkatsu costing 1000 Yen, it's difficult to call it expensive, but I kinda doubt it deserves to be eaten three times a week.

"Oh, I see."

Ms. Naruse giggles at the statement you wouldn't expect from a woman who became a billionaire

just a little while ago.

"Ms. Naruse, who are we going to meet at the meeting with the JDA?"

"I think it will be the boss of my boss, but...I haven't heard any details either, you know?"

"Hee, what kind of person are they?"

"Saiga is the chief of the Dungeon Management Department. He's a relatively reasonable person."

"In that case it's good, no matter what kind of talk it's going to be."

Once we opened the door to the meeting room, an old man around the age of sixty sat there.

§021 Deal with the JDA, and afterwards, Matsuda 11/5 (Mon)

"Executive Director Mizuho!?" Ms. Naruse says, startled.

Executive Director means a big wig? Right?

The first thing that the Executive Director said after opening his mouth was, "How about a hundred million?"

"Huh?"

Miyoshi and I are dumbfounded, not understanding what he's talking about.

"A hundred million Yen. That's a big amount of money for you guys, right?"

Well, if he asks like that, the answer is pretty much yes, but just what is this old fart actually talking about?

Next to me, Ms. Naruse has become pale.

"Sir, one hundred million Yen all of a sudden is too much. Ten million would be plenty, don't you think?" Sitting next to the director, a neurotic-looking man with a somewhat receded hairline for his age says.

"Really? I suppose we go with ten million then. We will get it ready so that you can get it at accounting right away, so now——"

"U-Umm, Director." Ms. Naruse cut into the conversation with a desperate look.

The director, who has been talking with his underling, looks slightly astonished. Seeing his face, I'm reminded of the balloonfish I pulled in at the breakwater during my childhood. Those expanding ones.

"Is there anything wrong?"

"What happened to Section Chief Saiga? I was told that the chief would be in charge of today's meeting."

"I assigned him to another task earlier. It's about the purchase of the orb preservation method, right? All those troublesome formalities are unnecessary. It will be fine as long as I buy it upon my authority, right?"

Ms. Naruse becomes speechless after hearing that.

"Ah, I don't have much time. So hurry up, and get the form——"

"Excuse me, but it looks like you have some kind of misunderstanding." I interject politely.

"Misunderstanding?"

Executive Director Mizuho looks at me quizzically as if he discovered something on the path he was walking that mustn't exist there.

"Yes. We don't have any technology that we could sell to the JDA. After all, we are ordinary people."

"What was that? I don't care how you did it, but you guys came here to sell the technology to preserve orbs, didn't you?"

"Eh? Why would you say that?"

I pull a surprised face. The director looks at the nervous-looking man next to him.

"Didn't you make a trade with the guys from the Ministry of Defense just now?"

"Why do you know about this? Isn't it kind of unprofessional to leak the details of deals made in rented conference rooms?"

I casually retort at the director's line.

"Ah, no. It's because I caught sight of the Ministry of Defense folks in the lobby. Sorry if I misunderstood."

"Haah."

"However, aren't you guys offering orbs for sale over at your place?"

"That's correct. It was a big relief that we somehow managed to collect the orbs that had been won in the bids."

"Somehow?"

"Yes. If we hadn't collected all of them, we would have been treated as scammers. It was very difficult to acquire and transport the orbs."

"What about the orb preservation then?"

"Such a technology has been developed? Nothing less of the JDA, I guess. When are you going to announce it officially?" I spread both my hands with a surprised look, emphasizing with my eyes that I really wanna to hear all about it.

"...Fuurai, what's this about?"

"Eh? No, according to the section chief...just what is going on here? Naruse!"

"Yes? I wonder what you're talking about? I don't quite understand, but maybe you can explain?"

Having the subject brought up with her by the man called Fuurai, Ms. Naruse while becoming very confused.

"Fuurai! Come to my room after this!" The balloonfish, who tightly clenches his fists and has a bright red face, spits out and stomps out of the conference room.

"D-Director!"

Fuurai or whatever he's called chases after him in a hurry.

"What was that skit just now?"

"Umm, while it's embarrassing, Fuurai is my direct boss...today's meeting should have originally proceeded with Section Chief Saiga present and me being in charge."

I see, I guess that means he's the JDA's Enoki. Finally I got the whole picture.

"Ah, so there's a struggle or something over the next company president — I suppose it's the organisation's president in the case of the JDA — and the executive director's faction went haywire, scheming to strike a big deal here so that they could push their own agenda under better conditions?"

"How do you know that?" Miyoshi asks with a curious look.

"It's because I read Shimako[efn_note]A manga called Kosaku Shima. Highly underrated in the west, but quite popular in Japan. It's been running since 1983, and has 80 volumes released. You can read up about it here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kosaku_Shima . Shimako is an abbreviation of it[/efn_note]

"A manga!?" Miyoshi says and chops the back of my head.

Ms. Naruse glances at her watch. It's slightly past the meeting's starting time.

"U-Umm, I will go look for the chief for a bit. Can I have you wait a little moment?"

"Sure. Our plans for today will be wrapped up with the end of this, anyway."

Once I reply to her, she quickly bows her head, and leaves the room in a jog.

"Senpai, you're kind to Ms. Naruse, aren't you?"

"I'm kind to you as well, no? Who was it that nonchalantly bought the Bâtard-Montrachet with my card yesterday when we went out shopping for the party?"

Miyoshi ducks her head with a start, and then turns my way with a sound similar to the jarring of a rusty door.

"What was the deal with that price? I toppled over after seeing the bill for that bottle, you know?"

"A-Ahahaha. It was a wine from the year when Henri Clerc retired and sold his fields off to Giradin[efn_note]Not going to go all history on wineries and stuff. Basically Miyoshi is talking about 2002 here when Henri sold his fields to Vincent Giradin. If you want to know more, you got the names, look it up yourself[/efn_note], you know? Since it's a year where it's unclear whether the winery had any motivation, I just had that urge to try it out, you understand? For a Bâtard it was absurdly cheap, a super bargain, okay?"

"Hoh."

"I mean, you see, I really wanted to drink it, but I didn't have any cash with me. And senpai, you said it was a party in honor of my services."

"At such times, an adult would choose to throw in the towel."

"Senpai, the world is overflowing with once-in-a-lifetime encounters, okay?" Seemingly believing that she said something nice, Miyoshi is getting somewhat cocky.

I answer while sighing, "It'd be nice if we were in a position allowing us to get all once-in-a-lifetime encounters from now on."

"In that case, how to put it best...it'll be dull if there's no worried anticipation...or rather, isn't all that money completely your earnings, senpai?"

"No, turning it into money is impossible for me. It's the same with the 『Alien's Drool』. That part is thanks to you, Miyoshi."

"...Senpai." Miyoshi looks my way with teary eyes just like some deeply moved small animal.

"Senpai, if you were always like this, I'm pretty sure that you'd be popular."

"Man, as always it's one comment too much with you!"

The instant I deliver a chop at Miyoshi's head, the room's door opens, and Ms. Naruse enters.

"E-Excuse us for having made you wa...it?"

Seeing Miyoshi crouching while holding her head, Ms. Naruse reveals an ambiguous smile that indirectly asks what's happening.

"Well, hello. I'm terribly sorry as it looks like our executive director did something unnecessary." The one who appears from behind Ms. Naruse while saying so is a man with a tough body build, but a slightly low height.

My impression of him at a first glance is: Tetragon.

"I'm Saiga. Best regards."

"I'm Yoshimura. The pleasure is on my side. The one crouching over there is Miyoshi. Our leader." I shake his hand with those words, and we sit down.

"It's a bit sudden, but let's talk about the matter with the orb preservation."

It looks like Section Chief Saiga is the kind of guy who quickly gets to the point. Those types are nicely comfortable when doing business.

"Do you know what currently happens with the orbs obtained from dungeons like Yoyogi for example?"

"No, not in detail. I can only imagine that you have a waiting list, look at that, and if there's a buyer, the finder will get in touch with them and quickly deliver it, or that the finder uses it for themselves."

Saiga nods and adds, "Besides those, there are cases where the JDA directly buys the orb. In such a case it becomes difficult for it to yield a very large sum of money, but even if it were to vanish, it's still an orb, so it will be quite a bit of money. It seems explorers, who do it for the money, consider that to still be okay."

"I see."

"A reasonable number of such orbs drop over a year across the whole JDA. No matter how rare they might be, around four per year will be found even if it's just Yoyogi."

At that point, Saiga pauses, smiles impishly, and supplements, "Of course, assuming that the orbs sold by D-Powers this time originate from Yoyogi, it means that this number of dropped orbs is just the peak of the iceberg."

"A-Ahahaha."

"The problem are future sales of those."

Saiga takes a sip of the coffee Ms. Naruse prepared. Possessing a coffee machine where the coffee comes out once you press a button is pretty neat. For me, someone belonging to the Japanese tea faction, being forced to only drink coffee recently is mostly Miyoshi's fault.

"Because you need to sell it quickly, it produces an advantage for the buyer, no matter what we do. What will happen if an auction is held has been proven by D-Powers this time." Saiga inserts a break there to let it sink, and then continues after deeming that it had the desired effect, "As for what we hope, I'd like to use the orbs at times when it's necessary, or put them up for auctions."

Humph. Is he just telling us demands of what he would like to do?

It looks like Ms. Naruse has put in a good word for us, but this section chief understands quite a bit about us, doesn't he?

I look at Miyoshi, and she nods quietly.

"I have several questions."

"What might those be?"

"First, it's about those orbs. Can you bring them to Yoyogi or this place with an orb count of less than 1200?"

An orb count of less than 1200 means that it's been less than 20 hours passed since the orb's appearance.

"I think that's possible. Even if the trip to the surface takes ten hours, a range of ten hours for its delivery to Tokyo is fairly big."

"In the worst case, we can deal with a count of up to 1260, but anything beyond that will probably be difficult."

"Also, can we have you contact us at least 48 hours before your side needs the orb?"

"I think that's possible as well, but why?"

"What, that's easy. It will allow us to use the orbs we were entrusted with for something before they end up vanishing."

I begin to explain the bullshit I came up with on the spot. Officially, it will allow us to thoroughly feign ignorance.

"Eh?" Saiga raises his voice in surprise.

"And, when you need the orb, we will find it by 『coincidence』, and deliver it to you. The guaranteed orb count on that occasion will be within the count at the time we received it + 60." After drinking from the plastic cup and taking a breath, I continue, "No matter how much we are loved by the gods, at least that much will be necessary to find the orb, right?"

Saiga looks puzzled, wondering that I'm saying, for a moment, but he immediately understands the aim behind my words and agrees with, "Very well."

"Of course, in case we didn't find it by coincidence, we will properly compensate you."

"Well then, next is the fee. As for this matter, since there's no comparable service, it will be something close to your side's asking price." The section chief says while lifting both hands as if giving up. "Even if you add the transportation expenses, it will likely become a much bigger profit for the JDA than it has been so far. If it's within the range of that profit, I think we will accommodate you on anything. After all, the money isn't the only merit here."

Well, that makes sense.

It will make it possible for them to use orbs as negotiation material.

The political and military impact will be unfathomable. The reason why the JSDF hasn't directly come to apply for it is simply because they have a queue of personnel that ought to use the orbs within their own organization.

"The basic fee will be one hundred million per orb, or in case you're going to sell it, it will be 30% of the sales price. Please apply the higher one between those two. Ah, right! Please place a ban on

registering the orb with any auction house other than ours."

I'd like them to spare us from being used as subcontractors of some famous auction house.

"Hmm...understood. I think that will be fine."

He promptly decides despite being overcharged.

If you look at this time's turnover, it's small change, but it's not said that it will continue like that from now on. (T/N: No it'll get worse, obviously). Is he a man who takes risks without batting an eyelid.

I guess I will test him.

"And, there's one important item at the end."

"What is it?"

"It's a technological issue. The objective can't be achieved if Miyoshi and I aren't present at the same time. In case one of us dies, it's possible that all orbs, which are in our custody, will be gone. Please accept that risk."

"I see."

"However, it might be possible for us to resolve this problem in three years."

"In three years?"

"To the bitter end, it's just a possibility. However, since it's impossible to reduce that time no matter how much money we invest into it, I'd like you to please be understanding of our circumstances."

"I don't really understand what you mean, but...I got it. That's fine."

"That's all from our side. The rest is with your side as it's about whether you accept it or not——"

"Of course I believe that I will be able to get them to accept all of this. Given that I will be in charge of drawing up a written contract in the near future, please confirm it at that time."

For real?

Quickly deciding despite there being more than plenty of possibility for the orbs to be lost pointlessly, what the hell is going on here?

I can't believe that a section chief possesses such an authority...

"Thank you very much. Since it's hard to read a contract that's full of overly small letters, I think it would be wonderful if you could prepare a contract that concisely summarizes what we talked about just now." I emphasize, just in case. "It will be a big help if we can have you understand that this venture mostly falls into the personal domain rather than a legal domain."

"...Got it. And, as for the contact person from our side." Saiga adds as if having just remembered, "Naruse."

"Yes?"

"I think an official notification from human resources will follow later, but as of today, you have been appointed as exclusive full-time deputy chief in charge of contact with D-Powers. It looks like it will be a duty where you will have a free hand and the salary of an assistant section chief. I think that makes you the most successful among the employees who joined in the same year as you. Congratulations."

"E-...Eeehh!?"

While looking at the surprised Ms. Naruse, Miyoshi says with a prim look, "That's only natural, seeing as you earned more than seven hundred million Yen in thirty minutes, don't you think?"

"You're holding a grudge, aren't you?"

"Those who exploit large taxes are my enemies."

"Hahaha. Please clear the remaining matters with Naruse who's now in charge of you. I will excuse myself with this." Section Chief Saiga bows and leaves the room.

"He seems to be a capable person, doesn't he?"

"That's for sure. He's square, though."

All of us burst into laughter due to Miyoshi's overly precise assessment.

"By the way, Ms. Naruse, what's a full-time deputy chief?"

"I don't really know, but a person that suits the convenience of D-Powers, I suppose?"

"What are you going to do at your workplace?"

"If it's a work with discretionary powers, there's no need for her to have a dedicated place. Isn't it a job for her to be transferred to D-Powers and spy out its secrets?"

"No, calling it spying..."

"It will be fine for you to come over if it's to our new office, but in our current office you might be pushed down by senpai. After all, you will run right into his bed if you open the sliding door." Miyoshi teases.

Ms. Naruse answers vaguely by sighing, but I won't do something like that!

"Oh, right, we have to go look at the designer's plans! We have an appointment, senpai!"

"Somehow, you seem quite busy."

"Well, to some extent. Come to think of it, Ms. Naruse."

"Yes?"

"We will put up the next orb for sale in a little while, so we look forward to working with you again."

"...Eh? Again?"

"Well, yeah. It will be our secret until the sale, okay?"

Ms. Naruse sighs obviously astonished, and nods as if having given up.

No, listen, if your job is to spy, it's no good to simply agree here, you know?



1400 hours on November the 5th.

Iori's team that visited the Ministry of Defense as ordered shrinks back in awe before the orbs in Terasawa's room.

"But, Major, is it really alright for us to use these?"

Sawatari, who's the most serious one within the team, flinches in front of the orbs he sees for the first time in his life.

After all it's equipment that cost 2,000,000,000 Yen, and moreover it will become his exclusive possession once he uses it. There's even the possibility that he won't be able to quit the JSDF for the rest of his life.

"Certainly there had been talks about having younger guys use it, but..."

Sawatari is currently 32 years old. Although it's a prime time in one's life, it's difficult to call it young. If it comes to Hagane, he's 36 years old.

Thus, he is nervously waiting for the continuation of that line.

"...It has been rejected since those guys will likely be as old as you are once they become useful."

"That's..." Hagane groans while smiling bitterly.

Even if you give psychic abilities to youngsters who haven't fully finished their training, they won't be able to survive on the battlefield.

That's no more than simple truth. The number of troops, who now die in dungeons, is far bigger than the number of people losing their lives in war zones.

Kaiba, who's relatively young among those in their team, used his orb without any hesitation, and has been confirming the changes to his body.

"What, Kaiba, you used it already? How does it feel?"

"I mean, nothing will start even if you put on airs. It's the first time for me to use an orb, so I can't

compare it to others, but...it somehow feels as if making a fresh, new start in life."

While watching Kaiba with a sidelong glance, Iori asks Hagane, "However, I thought that the selection of the users might be more heated."

"An orb's lifetime is short. It's not enough for us to waste time on debating it. In the first place, it's equipment to survive on-site, so I think it's suited for those who worked their way up. Besides..."

"Besides?"

Iori, who senses a problem due to Terasawa hesitating to continue, urges him to go on.

"It's really strange, but if I look at those guys, I somehow end up feeling that they will obtain orbs easily, unlike in the past, and that we can use the orbs without any hesitation."

"Those guys refers to 『D-Powers』?"

"Correct."

"Just how many people form that party called D-Powers?"

"The ones registered with the JDA are two."

"Eh? Two?"

Iori, who had imagined that it must be a big party, has her guess easily fall apart. Just how did they gather this many orbs with a party of merely two people? Even across the entire JDAG, six orbs in three years was the utmost.

"Does it bother you?"

"That's, yeah..."

"The higher ups seem to think the same. A man called Tanaka, who had been instructed to sit in, announced a request for them to desist from traveling abroad after the trade. Furthermore, with a joint signature by the Dungeon Agency Director, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the National Public Safety Commission Chairman."

"Tanaka?"

The name Tanaka, who has been entrusted with such an important job, doesn't ring a bell with Iori.

"I don't know him either. I have been personally asked by the Chief of Staff to not ask anything. I was just told to let him attend."

But then again, you can say that his conduct hasn't left any lasting impression, and that the coordination between the government offices was awfully quick. I'm pretty sure that he has been assigned by the Cabinet Information Research Office, Terasawa thinks. The Cabinet Information Research Office deliberately calls for a travel ban for merely a single party

with the signatures of the Dungeon Agency Director, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and the National Public Safety Commission Chairman? It's better to avoid any land mines.

"D-Powers, that's merely a party, right?" Iori suspiciously asks while furrowing her eyebrows.

After taking a short breath, Terasawa answers, "Indeed. ...However, that's only if you can specify a party, which can bring three <Water Magic> orbs to a meeting room of JDA Ichigaya with all orbs having less than 60 on the orb counter, with the attribute 'merly.'"

"Huh? Does that...mean they can freely produce orbs?"

At the moment when he hears Iori's words, Terasawa feels as if the scales fell off his eyes. All those who have heard this story have hypothesized that they developed a technology to preserve orbs, that they are a network of high-ranking explorers, or that they are the shadows of the world rank 1 explorer.

What if they can produce orbs? If such a thing were to be possible, it would perfectly explain everything they have done.

However, does such a godlike skill truly exist?

"Major? ...Major Terasawa?"

"Sorry, please wait a moment."

Come to think of it, on the list of skills to be monitored that was sent around last month by the JDA...

Terasawa operates his own terminal, and opens last month's list

The list of monitored skills is a table containing notable words among the search strings of the JDA's database.



There were two databases which people, who obtained skill orbs, would likely browse. One is the JDA's Purchase Wish List, commonly known as WL (Wish List), and the other is the JDA's skill database, commonly known as SKDB.

In case of searching either for content, you will search the WL when using orb names known to exist. It's a database you consult when you want to know how much an orb costs. On the other hand, the SKDB is mostly used when looking up fictional orbs. It's because all orb data that has been reported is recorded there. And, if you can't find an orb there, no one would search the WL for it. After all it would be obvious that the orb hasn't been published yet.

Moreover, if a name were to be looked up in the SKDB immediately after being searched on the WL first, it suggests a very high possibility for the searcher to have discovered that skill.

The names that haven't been registered in the SKDB among the terms that had been looked up in such a way would be added to the JDA's list of monitored skills.

Having said that, it's not said that people's actions always follow logic.

It often happens that the search database list has been simply searched in order, starting from the top. In reality, quite a number of names is added every month to that list, but it's very doubtful that all of the skills have been obtained. At any rate, the first of the names, which are listed in the standard syllabary order, is usually 『Item Box』.

Because of that, this list is ultimately only treated as part of statistics, and hasn't that much of importance attached to it.

However, a far too plain name, mixed among the major terms of a commonplace fantasy world such as item box, heal, or so-and-so transfer magic, which had been registered for the first time last month according to First Lieutenant Kimitsu, is shown on the display, possessing a strangely realistic touch.

"Making..."

That's the only name which had been looked up by the same IP address at the same time.

In other words, this searcher hasn't looked up any other names at all. And, that skill name, which was recorded on September the 27th, hasn't been looked up a second time ever since. The probability isn't low.

However, there's just one thing that bothers Terasawa.

"Say, First Lieutenant Kimitsu."

"Yes, sir?"

"If you could freely create orbs, what kind of orb would you make?"

"Let's see. Transfer magic and the so-called item box. Oh, and if there's something like healing magic, it'd be nice. Our training seems to be bad for the skin." Iori readily replies with something that's close to simple chit-chatting.

Right, those are the skills everyone would want badly if fantasizing. Normally, anyone would probably try to create those. In that case, why sell <Water Magic> and <Physical Resistance> that can be called extremely ordinary in comparison to those three?

"If you were to obtain those orbs, you would want to try using them, right?"

"Well, of course."

And, won't one satisfy their selfish desire to be recognized by using those?

"...Is there some kind of restriction?"

"Major Terasawa?" Iori calls out to him quizzically.

"Ah, no...good work today. I want you to strive in diligently studying your new skill while carrying out your professional duties."

Having come to his senses, Terasawa announces the end of the meeting in order to gloss over his pondering.

""""""Yes, Sir!""""""



After the four saluted and left, Terasawa brooded by himself. Tracing the IP...is probably impossible as long as it's not a criminal investigation. Recently the privacy of telecommunications data gathers a lot of attention in society. It will be complicated to do anything unauthorized.

"I guess I will take at least one measure in advance."

Terasawa mutters, opens the previous name on his display, and makes a phone call to the Dungeon Management Department. And then he personally makes an appointment with the section chief over there.



After the meeting with the JDA, we went to the shop in Aoyama we had asked to design our office, and were asked various things by the designer in charge.

Because Miyoshi apparently didn't set a limit to the budget, the designer responsible for the job was full of motivation. Our demands were to the extent of getting nice furniture as beds and chairs. As a special extravagance, Miyoshi asked for a dining room, and several cellars situated next to each other.

Saying that the rest doesn't matter as long as it's easy to use probably makes us rather deflating clients.

This must be what it truly means to have no effect no matter what one suggests or does.

Clients like us, who don't have any particular demands, might possibly be the worst types.

And yet, as might be expected from a professional, he fully managed to compile our two homes and the office space into one neat concept.

It looks like the wallpapers and floor will be done super fast, but since it'll take around five days for

the ordered windows and furniture to arrive, we decide that we'll move in on the 12th November while allowing for some timely margin, and leave the store.

"We're going to replace the windows as well?"

"It's a countermeasure against laser wiretapping."

The hell? What's that supposed to be?

"Just what kind of facility do you intend to build!?"

"The one who called it a base was you, senpai."

Sure, I did say that, but that was a talk when we were going to buy a multi-floor building, right...? Well, I guess it won't do any harm either way.

We walk around, heading for the Omotesandou Station through the vicinity of the Nezu Museum.

"There's the trade with Mr. Simon in ten days, but somehow it feels like we've completed the first stage, doesn't it?"

"Yeah. Let's take it easy while diving into the dungeon every so often until the move."

"Let's get the aforementioned examination done in the meanwhile. I will be out of stuff to do once I finish preparing the computers and setting up the connections."

"What, you're doin' various stuff again, aren't you?"

"Half of it is similar to a hobby."

The sky is on the verge of turning mostly crimson.

Once we stop to wait for the traffic light in front of a watch store on the left side, I can peek at the happy looks of the people toasting their glasses through the window of a well-established brasserie on the opposite side of the street.

"I'll tell you what, senpai."

"Mmh?"

"Some time ago, when I put my card into an ATM, my balance was at 60 million or something like that."

"Hee."

"What's with the 'Hee'? Senpai, it'll be the same with your account as well."

"Ah, the 1% you mentioned previously, huh?"

"That's so. So you see, even if we decide to stop at this point, I think we'll be able to live while playing around for the rest of our lives, but what're we going to do, senpai?"

Ah true, around six billion Yen have been transferred to the party's account, haven't they?

"Miyoshi, you want to do that?"

"Nah, I just wonder what you'd think about it. I mean, until around a month ago, we were whining around at an exploitive workplace, you know?"

Now that she mentions it. I feel like Enoki and such is part of a distant past, but I suppose that's something that was still reality merely one month ago.

Living while playing around isn't a bad idea either, but even if I stay indoor and play netgames all day long, I think I'll get tired of them sooner or later.

"Such a life sounds boring, doesn't it?"

"Right!?"

When the traffic light turns green, and the people start moving all at once, Miyoshi also cheerfully crosses the pedestrian crossing.

"Which reminds me, Miyoshi, what's about your family?"

"It's a normal home of a salaryman and a housewife. I also have an elder brother, so I can do what I want. What about you, senpai?"

"My parents are both already dead. Well, I don't have any siblings either... After leaving senior high, I went independent of my relatives."

"Eh? Senpai, you have the innate characteristics of a loner?"

"How rude. Anyway, you finally got ahead in life, so how about giving your parents some remittance?"

"Well...since everyone will likely turn into lost causes if I were to tell them about the situation truthfully, I will hold back on that for a while. This world isn't just full of people like you, senpai."

Somehow it feels kinda questionable whether she's dissing or praising me. Just like it's unclear whether the building with the Prada Boutique we just passed is stylish or overkill.

"Whatever. I'm slowly getting hungry. Wanna grab something and then go home?"

"Eh? It's your treat, senpai?"

"Now listen, you're pretty much wealthy since yesterday, aren't you?"

"Ah, true. But, the delicious places in Aoyama are almost all in the opposite direction, you know?"

"Really?"

Miyoshi, who thought it over for a bit while walking, makes a suggestion, obviously having recalled a good place, "How about some sushi then?"

"Sure, why not."

"Matsuda is in the neighborhood. It's right nearby if we turn to the left at the Comme des Garçons over there."

"That's totally back alley-like. You say it's in such a place?"

"Senpai, this area is full of pretty popular restaurants."

"Hee. So you're saying that the folks of Aoyama or Omotesandou like hiding place-like restaurants, eh?"

"That's a prejudice. I think all Japanese like those - secret bases."

"No doubt."



Once we called them, we were told that they can prepare a table for us.

According to Miyoshi, it seems unexpected to get a table if you call a restaurant, difficult to get a reservation for, on the very day. Someone must have canceled their reservation or something. While being told, "We were really lucky," by Miyoshi, we arrive at a weird multi-floor building with oddly protruding parts, not losing out to the JDA.

The nicely sour and softly melting sushi we ate in the basement of that building were definitely delicious, but it didn't change that I felt dizzy from looking at the bill several hours later.

That idiot Miyoshi just stuck out her damn tongue at me.

And Matsuda became the restaurant that should be commemorated for me having used my D-Powers card for the first time.

§022 Examination 11/7 (Wed)

"Here?"

"Yep."

I could see a place similar to the former site of a small workshop located near the river zone along the Edo. The vicinity is surrounded by silver grass with the autumn breeze making the ears solitary sway.

"This really feels like the end of Tokyo."

"Well, it's because Ichikawa lies on the other side of the river." [efn_note]Ichikawa is a metropolis located at the eastern border of Tokyo[/efn_note]

Seemingly having been in use until most recently, the workshop-like building is still in good shape. A building had been built in an area that might have been a parking lot before. It has an outward appearance similar to a simple, square warehouse that looks as if it has been connected through big, white containers.

"I hear this is the place where the workshop of Midori's home was."

"Hee. Since you've said that she's in medical measurement, I imagined it to be a more stylish building."

"That's none of your business!"

"Ah, Midori, long time no seeee!"

"Azusa sweetie, it's great of you to visit. Let me give you a squeeze." (editor: Originally the last sentence is about caressing Miyoshi's head, but I can't really put that in words, got an idea or go with the one above?)

Ms. Midori is a bespectacled beauty with clear-cut facial features, an impressive bob cut of uniform length, and her hair off the forehead with the bangs flowing down the sides. These days my fate is linked to women with short hair, isn't it?
Her white robe is somewhat clichéd. But I feel like I've seen her somewhere before...

"So, you said examination, but just what do you actually want to measure?"

"Well about that, we'd like you to measure everything that can be measured, just as I wrote you in the email."

"What a very broad requirement...if it's everything, it will cost a ton of money, you know? I really want to give you a discount, but we are tight on cash, and seem to go bankrupt anytime soon."

"Bankrupt, you say. Senpai, didn't you get a loan?"

Hearing Miyoshi, Ms. Midori scowled at empty air, obviously awfully pissed off.

"Japan's banks won't lend you any money without any securities! And even if you get them to invest, it's not like it's any decent venture capital either!"

If a researcher also works as a manager, they get mentally worn down as they are forced to do various things they aren't familiar with.

Fund raising might be the extreme of that. Japan's banks won't lend any money to people without collateral.

"It sure builds up."

After glancing at me, who blurted those words out unintentionally, she says to Miyoshi, "Azusa, that rude man is?"

"Ah, he's the target of today's scans."

"I'm Yoshimura. Looking forward to work with you."

"Naruse. You didn't make a move on Azusa, did you?"

"Naruse?"

"What?"

A-Aah, I got it! She resembles the JDA's Ms. Naruse.

"Umm, it's just a possibility, but do you possibly have a relative at the JDA——"

"You mean Miharū? She's my older sister."

Hearing that, it's Miyoshi who raises her voice, "Eehh!? Ah, now that you mention it, I do feel like you resemble each other!"

Girl, you didn't realize so far even though you know both of them well, did you!?

"Having said that, after I left school, we only meet each other at home for the end-of-year festivities, so she's more like an acquaintance?"

"Acquaintance or whatever..."

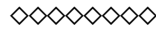
I explain that she's currently the full-time deputy chief of our party, and that we have received many favors from her.

"Hmm. The world sure is small."

"No kidding."

"So, I guess we're going to immediately start the examination after signing the contract inside."

"Please treat us well."



"The scan will be for all data, the number of scans will be——"

"Thirty times for starters."

"Thirty times!? ...Listen, with that much it'll cost roughly 60 million. You okay with that?"

"Will your company's fundraising revive with this as well, senpai?"

"No way. There won't be much left after paying for the reagents and the computer usage fee. But well, if you ask me whether I'm grateful for you to test as much as possible, I certainly am."

It does cost a lot of money to do all that, doesn't it? I try asking her out of curiosity against my better judgement, "However, supposing that you were to implement this, is there any demand for examinations that cost 2 million per run?"

"Now listen, normally no one does all types of scans since it's meaningless. Besides, the reason for the examination expenses to explode is owed to the demand being mostly limited to a small field. Such special examinations are done rarely, right?"

If you split development costs of 10,000 Yen across 10,000 people, it's one Yen per person, but if there's only one user, it means you can't get back the original costs unless you get them to pay the whole 10,000 Yen, so I suppose there's no way around it.

Rather, I'm surprised that there are ways for such examinations to be implemented as well.

"But then again, undoubtedly the biggest reason is——"

"Is?"

"——the existence of insurances."

I spontaneously agree. A big cheer for an expensive medical fee system.

"Anyway, the payment for the examination costs isn't an issue. Right, Miyoshi?"

"Yes, it's no problem."

"Does the company you work at make so much profit, Azusa?"

"No, this isn't from a company..."

"Hmm?"

"Those will be Mr. Yoshimura's and my own expenses."

"Eehh!?"

"Well, it's something like research development costs."

Hearing that, Ms. Midori reflexively turns an envious look at us, and while saying, "Azusa, so it was really the correct choice of you to not have come to us. Haah, I'm jealous," opens the door to the examination room.

It's a small room with orderly grids densely drawn on the walls.

A futuristic pod is placed in its center. I'm made to sit down inside with just my briefs on.

"Because it's a reference device, I will attach the various cables manually so that it'll be easier to make adjustments." Ms. Midori says while pasting various sensors to my body.

It'll very likely become much easier as finished product with a set of fixed functions.

"Blood will be taken on each measurement run. It might sting a bit on you arm, but don't mind it."

"Got it."

"Can I have you tell me about your impressions of being measured later on?"

"I will write a report and hand it in."

"That'll be a big help. It won't reduce the measuring fee, though." Ms. Midori answers while laughing.

"Ah, please allow me to tell you about the timing for the measurements from my side."

"Hmm? Yeah, that's fine."

"How do I signal you?"

"Sound is connected in here."

"Understood."

After she leaves the examination room with me becoming all alone in the pod, I secretly activate Making.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1178.307

HP 36.00

MP 33.00

STR 14 (+)

VIT 15 (+)

INT 18 (+)

AGI 10 (+)

DEX 16 (+)

LUC 14 (+)

"Ah, moreover, please present the results always in the order of the measurements, okay?"

『A timestamp will be attached to the data, so that's no problem.』

"Please start the first run then."

『Okay. I'm beginning.』

I start to hear a mechanical sound similar to the buzzing of a CT scan moving, and immediately feel a prickling pain at my right arm, but as there's no big stimulus or uncomfortable feeling besides that, I lie down sprawled while relaxing. And once several minutes since the measurements' start passed, I revise my stats further.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1178.307 → 1176.307

HP 36.00 → 38.00

MP 33.00

STR 14 (+) → 16

VIT 15 (+)

INT 18 (+)

AGI 10 (+)

DEX 16 (+)

LUC 14 (+)

First I will start from STR. I intend to make it rise in units of 2 for the time being.

"Please start the next run."

『Starting the second measurement run.』

And then, at the time when the 30th run was over, more than two hours had passed.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1178.307 → 1118.307

HP 36.00 → 61

MP 33.00 → 52

STR 14 (+) → 24

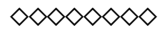
VIT 15 (+) → 25

INT 18 (+) → 28

AGI 10 (+) → 20

DEX 16 (+) → 26

LUC 14 (+) → 24



"Good work."

"So, what's your impression of being measured?"

"I will send you the report later, but probably because the places for the blood to be drawn were close together, it feels like the area will swell a bit, no matter how thin the needle might be."

It kind of feels like being a drug addict.

"That's because blood tests normally won't be run thirty times in a row. Here, those are the examination results." With those words, Ms. Midori hands a memory card to Miyoshi.

Miyoshi immediately plugs the card into her tablet computer, and starts checking the contents.

"Eh? The results are already available?"

"That's one of our selling points, after all." Ms. Midori proudly replies.

Even if it's simple, being able to screen before expressly sending them to a lab and receiving the result might be effective in regards to reducing the workload of labs.

"So, was there any weird data?"

"No, the system automatically detecting problems from the physiological values didn't spike — Nakajima."

"Yes."

A man called Nakajima brings a bundle of papers from the table on the opposite side over. To use paper nowadays, what an unusual guy.

"The physiological values didn't have any extraordinary occurrences during the thirty runs. I don't understand the meaning behind running the scan thirty times in the first place. Is it some kind of measurement accompanied by passage of time?"

"No, well, something like that."

"However, the brain waves are a bit..."

"Brain waves?"

"Yes. As the measurements advanced, the basic rhythm of the brain waves increased in frequency on the whole, albeit faintly."

"Increased frequency? Not slowing down?" Midori confirms with a puzzled look.

[efn_note]Slowing down brain waves happens when you relax, or when you sleep.[/efn_note]

"The frequency went up. The frequency of the brain waves depends on the level of the thalamus neuron's membrane potential, but it feels as though the data input has increased at a level that isn't comparable with the rising level of input through visual information when waking up."

"Moreover, in accordance with the passage of time, the times, where the frequency increased, can be separated into six stages."

Six stages? Well, that means...

"Umm, I don't really get what you're saying."

"This is no place where you will hear medical science opinions. We are no doctors, so we can only talk about facts as they took place. Having said that..."

"Yes?"

"It's at the level where I wonder whether you might have some kind of mental disorder."

"Level, you say..."

"Generally it often happens that the waves go non-REM, or in other words, slow down on their frequency, but you can't unconditionally state that to be true either."

"The waveforms are also different in cases of epilepsy."

"Haah."

"The rest is nothing special worth mentioning... Ah! There's something unrelated to physiological phenomena, though."

"What is it?"

"How to put it...a strange fluctuation of the electromagnetic waves has been observed."

"Electromagnetic waves? When did you observe something like that?"

"Well, since we were told to measure everything that can be measured, we measured it with the minimum grid of the room."

"It's not the influence of using your devices?"

"I believe that we have excluded those for the most part."

"What's that minimum grid?" I ask him.

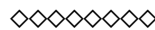
"In this place, it's a generic name for sensors that had been laid out inside the room at intervals of approximately three centimeters."

"So, what kind of fluctuation was it?"

"I don't know how to say it, but it's as if a field of some kind of energy had been generated."

"From where?"

"No idea. Maybe it's what you call aura?" Nakajima laughed while saying those words, but that might have unexpectedly hit the core of the matter.



Miyoshi, who has been gazing at the numbers displayed on her tablet inside the train back home, suddenly lifts her face, and says, "Maybe the strengthening by dungeons is something like an exoskeleton?"

Sure, if only the punch power goes up after you punched with all your strength, the fist should get hurt, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

You can also consider that the cells were strengthened, but it'll be difficult to explain the lack of a change to the physiological values with that. For example, thinking that your body is covered by some kind of field and that this works like an exoskeleton appears to make the explanation of the phenomena simple.

"There's been almost no change to the physiological values. With this, saying that the cells were strengthened is a bit unreasonable."

If an enhancement that seems to double the output is carried out, it's only logical for the energy consumption to double or the utilization efficiency to double, but if something like that happens to the body of a living being, it'd be far too weird for there to be no changes to the physiological values.

"Also, there was a change of brain waves, wasn't there? Six stages, that's definitely the number of stats."

"Right?"

"Meaning, the body strengthening through monster killing is actually something like a mysterious field caused by the brain, kind of like ESP, huh?"

"Well, if we trust the measurements, it looks like you can explain it in such a way." Miyoshi says and dives into the sea of thoughts once more.

§023 Patriot Express (Special Flight) 11/9 (Fri)

"Whoa~, this is Japan?" A man with a balanced body build and a crew-cut of his brown hair gets down from the Patriot Express, and asks while deeply moved. [efn_note]Author's note: Patriot Express - A charter flight operated by the US Airforce. Normally lands at Yokota Air Base on Fridays' morning[/efn_note]

His brown, amiable-looking eyes gives one the impression that he has a character overflowing with humor.

"Isn't the interior of the base still part of the US, Simon?" A tall and slender man with ash blond hair takes a jab at Simon's words.

The man with the slightly sly impression is Joshua Rich, the excellent scout of Simon's team.

"What about Mt. Fuji, geisha, and tempura?" Mason, who has a tall and burly body build, passes through the passenger entrance by stooping down a bit while having his left arm in an arm holder affixed to his neck with a strap.

"Eww, how ancient. Right now, Kobe beef is a must, right? Is Kobe close?" The meat lover Simon asks Natalie, the sole woman of Team Simon.

"You boys... Mt. Fuji is further west. The geisha of Kyoto, and Kobe's beef is in Kansai. Listen, it's faaaaaar to the west, okay? We're in Yokota right now, got it?"

Simon lowers the corners of his mouth looking disappointed while shrugging his shoulders and saying, "That sucks. But, it's more refreshing than Nevada here. Wasn't Japan a humid country?"

"That's only during summer."

"Buuut, Simon." Joshua speaks up, seemingly anxious.

"What's up?"

"Is it really alright for us to do something like this? The higher ups told us to search for that orb. They had a force as if you could boil water on their heads anytime soon, didn't they?"

"As if I'd get on with such a dumb plan. Like hell you're going to find what you're looking for with such a messed up method of doing things."

The US dungeon explorer teams have been ordered to get an orb after one of the monsters inhabiting the Kiryas Kul'yegan Dungeon has been confirmed in the US. It's a highest-priority order.

"It's that <Different World Language Comprehension>, right? Just the specified monsters amount to more than twenty types, no?"

"Even when we did nothing but diving dungeons, the number of orbs we got was at most two to three per year. I don't know the precise numbers of how many dungeon exploration teams are around, but the probability to find that orb with such a method is close to zero."

"No, even so, we'll be told that it'll be definitely zero if we don't dive, right?"

"I'm telling you to not worry. We expressly came to Japan because of this matter as well."

"Come again?"

"You saw it, that site, didn't you?"

"Yeah, that incredible auction, you mean?"

"Aye. Can you gather so many of the same orbs?"

"Definitely not." Joshua immediately replies.

"Of course, I'm not capable of that either. Don't you think there's a means to get the target orb over there?"

"...I see. My eyes were blinded by the possibility of orb preservation, but you mean preservation doesn't matter a damn if there are no orbs, eh?"

"You got it."

"Well, enough of all the complicated stuff. Let's hurry up and go. I'm hungry." Mason, who holds his stomach with his right hand, gestures as if saying to give him something to eat as soon as possible.

Hearing that, Joshua and Simon look at each other and shrug their shoulders.

"We'll set out to the JDA tomorrow, right? What are we going to do today?" Natalie asks.

"We'll go to the hotel for now."

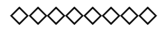
"So we're not lodging at the base. Where's the hotel?"

"Shinjuku. It's pretty much a holiday, so I booked rooms at the Park Hyatt." [efn_note]Hotel chain with five star hotels[/efn_note]

"Wow, how generous of you, leader!"

"It's cheap compared to the orb."

And then the four start to walk towards the control room in order to greet the base's commander.



Lieutenant General Martinez, the base's commander, pulls a face as if having swallowed a bitter pill, and links his arms behind his back while looking out of the window.
It's because he received a report that troublemakers would arrive in Japan with today's Express.

"Certainly, those guys are capable..."

Even without citing Evans Dungeon as an example here, they have reached the deepest floors among humanity, making the US widely known as an authority in dungeon capturing. It's a remarkable achievement that even matches the success of the Apollo Project. But, although that's the case...

"Their human natures are..."

Lt. Gen. Martinez recrosses his arms, and looks up to the ceiling.

The troubles caused by Team Simon are innumerable.

They are the kind of people who would blow a building to smithereens just to protect said building from terrorists. There were apparently some who blamed them for that, but they only commented, "We're just tools," as if it was a problem on the side of those employing them.

The nickname that was attached to them is HESPER.^[efn_note] Author's note: Hesper is the AI introduced in James P. Hogan's book "The Two Faces of Tomorrow." It causes an incident after receiving a maximum-priority, unrestricted order on the moon's surface.^[/efn_note] It means, those guys are quite capable of firing a mass driver in operations they join.

What's worse, dungeon capture units are under the direct control of the president. Many of them are people transferred from the DEA, CIA, the Department of Justice, and the FBI. I don't have the authority to give them direct orders.

At that time, there's a quiet knock at the room's door.

"Enter."

"Excuse us!"

The four, who made you think that they are backpackers from somewhere, enter the commander's office and salute.

"First Lieutenant Simon Gershwin and three others. We've come to extend our greetings after having arrived just now."

"G-Got it, good job. So, what's the objective of your visit in Japan on this occasion?"

"We're on holiday."

"Hoh, holiday, eh?"

I have received a report stating that First Lieutenant Simon won the bid on a skill orb.

It's probably not wrong to assume that they came here to fetch it, but there's no way that things will actually finish with just that.

"How long is that 『Holiday』 of yours?"

"For the meantime we plan to go with one month, but anything beyond that will depend on the situation."

They came here while it depends on the situation, eh?

"I've been told to accommodate you during your stay here. Please get in touch with my secretary if something happens."

"Thank you very much for your consideration! Please excuse us then."

They salute and leave the room.

"If the theory of dungeon = passage proves to be true, they might become the heroes of Earth, but..."

Please, don't cause any trouble while in Japan during my tenure!

The Lieutenant General, who holds the posts of commander of the Fifth Air Force Base and General of the US Forces in Japan, prays to god.

§024 Forum 【Gods?】 D-Powers 57 【Swindlers ?】

1:Unknown Explorer ID:P12xx-xxxx-xxxx-0199

The party with that messed up name of D-Powers, which suddenly popped out, seems to have already started the orb auction.

Are they crooks? Or saviors of the world?

Next thread at 930 posts.

...

11:Unknown Explorer

2 billion Yen orbs, that number makes you think it's a lie, but who won the bids in the end?

12:Unknown Explorer

The IDs were hidden starting with the latter half of the second day, so it's unknown.

13:Unknown Explorer

Why!?

14:Unknown Explorer

Well, normally the winning bidder of an auction won't be publicly announced. It'd be crazy to do so.

15:Unknown Explorer

It's a shitload of money, after all.

16:Unknown Explorer

The IDs being shown at first was a system error?

17:Unknown Explorer

Wasn't that actually intentional while looking like it's an error?

Since big organizations were in there as bidders, we had a feeling like it might be the real deal, but if that hadn't been visible to everyone, it might have ended with the whole thing just being labeled as shady.

18:Unknown Explorer

But you know, until now trading has been relatively complicated because of the orbs' rarity, and even the price placed on the purchase wish list for something like Water Magic was just 80 million, no? That's like proving that you can become a dream-like billionaire as long as you can put an orb up for auction, right?

19:Unknown Explorer

That's for sure, but it's because that "putting up for auction" was the biggest bottleneck.

20:Unknown Explorer

No, as I'm saying, isn't it all cool if you just ask? D-Powers, I mean.

21:Unknown Explorer

You're such a genius. > 20

22:Unknown Explorer

But, how are you going to ask them? Or rather, even before that, can they really preserve orbs?

23:Unknown Explorer

How would they complete such an auction if they can't do that?

24:Unknown Explorer

That's what I don't get?

All of this up until this point might be preparations for a huge fraud to steal orbs, targeting the folks believing in them.

25:Unknown Explorer

You mean their partner won the bids on orbs that don't exist as preparation for a scam? It'd be amazing if that were to be true. I mean, in total it's close to 10 billion, no?

26:Unknown Explorer

So turning it into a movie is set in stone?

But then again, the JDA acts as an intermediary during the hand over, it'd get exposed if there are no goods.

27:Unknown Explorer

Hey! Guys! Simon's team was in Shinjuku?!

28:Unknown Explorer

Huh? Simon? The one who cleared Evans? Didn't you mistake him for someone else?

29:Unknown Explorer

Here, a pic.

30:Unknown Explorer

Yo, that's a peeping shot, right?

31:Unknown Explorer

Nah, I made a photo together with him as a super friendly fan.

32:Unknown Explorer

I saw the photo. It's for real rofl.

33:Unknown Explorer

Seriously? But, why write about it in this thread?

34:Unknown Explorer

Listen, you think such a timely arrival got nothing to do with this topic?

35:Unknown Explorer

Ah!

36:Unknown Explorer

Ah!

37:Unknown Explorer

It's possible, actually.

38:Unknown Explorer

You think he will dive into Yoyogi as well?

39:Unknown Explorer

He apparently said something along the lines that they'll be here for a while, so he might do so.

40:Unknown Explorer

Oooh! I gotta prepare a nice cardboard! [efn_note]Used for autographs, poetry and stuff[/efn_note]

§025 Exchange with Simon 11/10 (Sat)

"Are you two going to be alright with the language?" Ms. Naruse asks us as we walk through the JDA's corridor.

Today the other party is Simon Gershwin. As I'm totally curious about the aura of the world's rank three, I have completely forgotten about him being an American until just now. Well, it'll just be a trade, so it'll like work out one way or another.

"Hmm, if it's written English, somewhat, I guess."

"Mines' average as well. But I'm sure it's totally useless by now."

"It becomes rusty, if you don't use it, doesn't it?"

"No kidding."

"That being said, if there should be any problems with the finer details of the deal, we'll be relying on you, Ms. Naruse."

"I will take care of it."



Once we opened the door to the conference, the dungeon exploration team, which is very likely the best in the world, was sitting there.

"Hi there, I'm Simon Gershwin." (in English)

A man with a crew-cut and a balanced body build, the very definition of a soldier, says while raising his hand towards us.

"Hi. Mr. Simon. It's my pleasure to meet you. I'm Azusa MIYOSHI. Let me confirm the ID of this transaction." (in English)

"You got it." (in English)

Simon holds out the memory card with the encrypted code and the private key.

(Ooh, Miyoshi, not bad.)

(Not holding any pointless chitchat is the trick to gloss over that you can't speak English.)

Miyoshi accepts the card, inserts it into her notebook, and confirms that the code is correct by

unfolding it with the public key.

※A/N: From now on, everything in English will be in 『 』.

『Confirmed. Please check over here then.』

Once Miyoshi shows the orb after opening the lid of the titanium box, she holds it out to the JDA's witness, just like last time.

Ms. Naruse touches the orb with a meek expression, and verifies the content, "I confirm. The JDA guarantees that this is the skill orb <Physical Resistance>. The orb counter is less than 60."

『Less than 60, you say?』 The tall man with the ash blond hair, sitting next to Simon, asks in surprise.

Everyone is surprised about that part, huh?

『There's no mistake.』 Ms. Naruse answers while nodding.

『Please pay via bank deposit transfer.』

Once Miyoshi says so, Simon operates the deposit transfer device at his hand.

『Please confirm.』

『I verify. The money has been transfered.』

What's been actually transfered after the taxes and handling charge is 2,837,600,000 Yen. Miyoshi holds out the previous box in front of Simon.

『Here you go.』

Simon lightly touches it, and says after nodding slightly, 『It is as you say.』

And then Ms. Naruse announces the end of the trade, 『The trade has been completed with this. Thank you very much, everyone.』

I send an eye signal to Miyoshi, and leave my seat, trying to quickly exit the conference room. However, as if to prevent that, a voice comes from behind. Tsk, it's the ploy of "Shit, they went around us and cut in!"

『Please wait a moment.』

『What is it?』

『Well, we'd like to talk with you for a bit.』

『Ah, me, no able, speak, only a bit, English.』

"What's with that half-assed English, senpai?"

"No, I'm just trying to swindle my way out with not being able to talk English."

"Oh my, in that case it's okay. I have grown up in Yokosuka until the age of 12."

Ack!

"I'm Natalie. Best regards."

Despite being a stereotypical caucasoid with her blond hair and blue eyes according to what a Japanese person would think, having grown up in Japan is foul play, no?

"Haaah..."

"Well, it looks like it's better to give up here." Miyoshi says, and draws the conference room's chair back for me once more.

As I reluctantly sit down on it, Ms. Naruse presses the button of the coffee machine. At once a fragrant aroma starts to waft through the conference room.

『So, what kind of business do you have with us?』

『What, you're pretty good at it, aren't you?』

『It's written English, though.』

『It's plenty as long as it's comprehensible. So, how did you guys do this?』

『What do you mean?』

"He asked how you brought this orb here with an count of less than 60."

Natalie properly follows up with Japanese. That means I can't pretend to not understand.

『Ah, it's a coincidence. We were able to obtain it around one hour ago.』

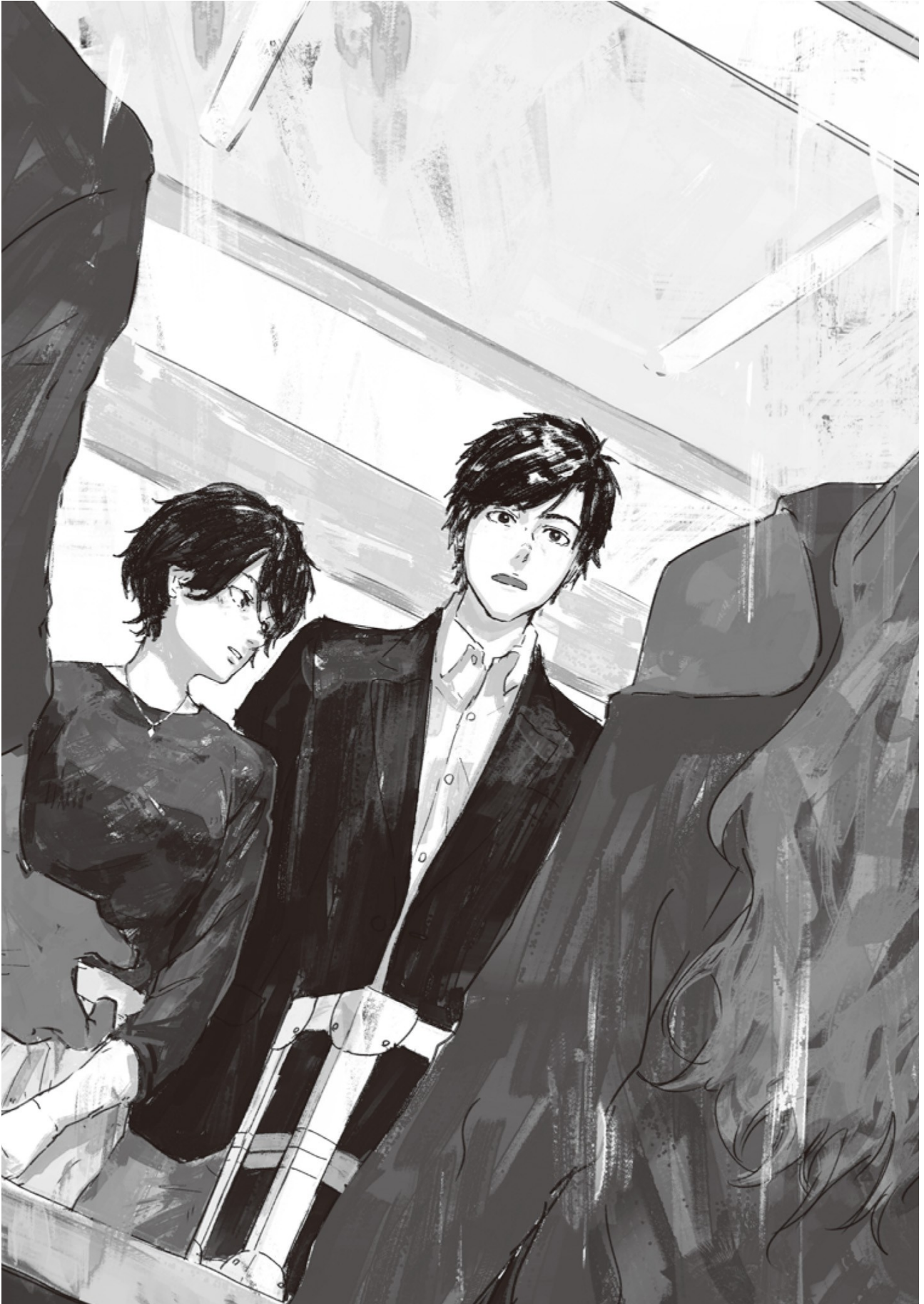
『Coincidence?』

『Indeed, well it's great that it hasn't turned into a fraud.』

『What's going on with this magic crest that looks totally real then? Ah, I'm Joshua. Nice to meet you.』

The tall man with ash blond hair, who introduced himself as Joshua, asks while looking at the underside of the orb box' lid.

『Hmm? That part is a trade secret, but it adds quite the flair, doesn't it?』 I answer while shrugging my shoulders with a look as if it's nothing.



『Flair.』

『Correct. Made in Japan means that we're also fussy about the finer parts.』

Afterwards, they mostly ask various things, while also mixing in idle chat about Yoyogi Dungeon. We're asked whether we can't guide them since they want to try diving into Yoyogi Dungeon as they're going to stay in Tokyo for a while, but we refuse as it's impossible because we never dived further than the first floor.

『Only the first floor?』

『We have gone to the stairs descending to the second floor, though.』

『How long have you been diving?』

『Less than a month.』

『Then, how did...no, I understand. We'll try asking someone else.』

He probably was about to ask how we got the orbs.

Since it looks like there are teams called Kagerou, Shibu-chi or something, if not for the JSDF, it'll likely be fine if they ask them to act as guides. The other party is a much-admired explorer.

Everyone will happily guide them around, I'm sure.

At the moment when the conversation suddenly came to a stop, Miyoshi skilfully cut in.

『We won't run out of topics, but since we have to slowly head to the next appointment, we have to bid you farewell at this point.』

『Sure, we will likely meet again sooner or later. Please take care of us at that time.』

『The same applies to us. It's been an honor to have been able talking with you today.』

At the moment when Miyoshi and I, who shook the hands of everyone in Simon's team with our business smiles at full throttle, were about to leave the room by opening the door, Simon calls out to us once again.

『Sorry, just one more thing.』

Are you an assistant inspector of the LAPD's homicide department? [efn_note]Author's note: It's about Detective Columbo. In Japan, Peter Falk, famous for his "My wife...", played the role. "Just one more thing" is one of his standard catchphrases.[/efn_note]

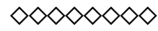
『Most recently an explorer in Area 12 has become rank 1 in the WDARL, but——』

I look back while opening the door, and reply, 『Seems so. What about it?』

『——are they an acquaintance of you guys?』

This old man, his eyes aren't laughing at all.

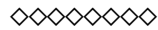
『No way.』 I shrug my shoulders, and close the door after leaving the conference room.



Section Chief Saiga of the JDA's Dungeon Management Department lowers his eyes on the documents at hand while waiting for Naruse who has been exclusively appointed to D-Powers.

"God damn it, for that shitty Ministry of Defense to send over such a ticking bomb."

The JDA is ultimately a dungeon management organization.
He didn't want them to drag the dynamics of international politics into such an organization, but in reality, the existence of a gray zone was unavoidable.



Several days ago, a call about requesting a meeting came in from a man introducing himself as Terasawa of the Ministry of Defense.
Saiga spared him some time since it seemed as if he had some important matter to discuss, but the confidential documents that were handed to him at that time were fully loaded with contents of international politics surrounding a certain skill orb that has appeared in Russia for the first time. What Mr. Terasawa brought over probably has the qualification to be read by him, who's in the JDA's management, but at least he had never seen those documents up until this point.
It's because the translation of epitaphs falls into the sphere of cultural anthropology and language study if anything, and is basically unrelated to the Dungeon Management Department.
However, what does he plan by giving these to D-Powers through me?
Is it merely because he has watched the auction? Or, does it mean that the Ministry of Defense has caught hold of information we don't know?
I don't have any particular interest what kind of information they possess, and how they are trying to use that as it's way too troublesome. However, it wouldn't be amusing if information that concerns dungeons and parties is being exchanged in secret over the head of the Management Department.

"So that's what the local police feels about the FBI, eh?"

Saiga places the documents on the table in front of him while smiling bitterly.
At that moment, there's a knock on the door, and Naruse Miharū enters the room.

§026 Different World Language Comprehension 11/10 (Sat)

"Excuse me."

The next day after she mediated the trade between D-Powers and Simon, Naruse, who had come back because of a message by the JDA office, was summoned to the meeting room by Section Chief Saiga.

"Section Chief, what might be the matter?"

"Hey, no need to become so formal."

Naruse sits down on the chair offered to her while thinking that anyone would wonder what's going on if they are summoned all of a sudden.

"Naruse, do you understand why you have been assigned as an exclusive full-time contact person of D-Powers?"

"I'd like to say that it's because you want to create an obligation of gratitude with a party that hammers out an amazing profit, but I guess it's actually about investigating their unknown technologies, starting with their orb preservation technique."

"Hmm, there's that as well."

"There's still more?"

Saiga switches the places of his crossed legs.

"Do you know of the dungeon = passage theory?"

"Eh? Yes, more or less. It's something I read about in some absurd book."

"The other day, Russia announced evidence for it."

"...Huh?"

"It's not official yet, so don't talk about it."

"Okay..."

"However, because of certain circumstances, the related organizations across the world can't verify it. It does have persuasive power. But, we don't know whether what's said is really true. That seems to be the current situation."

"Haah."

"By the way, in spite of D-Powers having offered so many orbs for sale, we don't know anything about the orbs' origin."

"Going by elimination, I think anything other than Yoyogi would be impossible, but there's no sign of Mr. Yoshimura having gone down to lower floors, and as for Ms. Miyoshi, it looks like doesn't even dive into dungeons. The most likely possibility would be that someone sold or consigned the orbs to them."

"Indeed. In other words, if we only look at the phenomenon, you can't think of anything but them being able to suddenly arrange orbs out of nowhere and deliver them on time, using some kind of method."

"It...might be as you say."

"And that's where the verification I previously mentioned comes into play."

"?"

Even after being told so, it's completely unclear to Naruse what Saiga wants to say.

"A specific skill orb is indispensable for the verification."

"You don't say!"

"Right. It's a talk about whether we can't get them to arrange that orb — <Different World Language Comprehension> for us."

<Different World Language Comprehension>

The orb, which recently dropped in Russia's Kiryas Kul'yegan Dungeon, appears to grant its user the power to understand records written in the dungeon native different world language.

The research institute that got its hands on it immediately translated a part of a known epitaph, and publicized it.

"Was it such sensational content?"

"To the extent of throwing countries all across the globe into a frenzy. However, we can't even confirm those contents through other research institutes in the first place."

They have also tried to decode it by putting the translated content and the epitaph together, but there might be numerous unknown nouns that won't have a corresponding word in human language to begin with.

At present it seems impossible to verify whether the translation by that country was correct or whether some information has been withheld.

"If the published content was to be utter nonsense, they would likely lose any international credibility right after a second orb is found, hence it's likely not all bogus. However, there's plenty of possibility that they are trying to gain an advantage by concealing some important information. Above all, the publicized translation appears to only cover a part of the epitaph."

"Somehow that sounds troublesome."

As soon as the intentions of a nation are involved, the world becomes more complicated than necessary.

"So, what kind of monsters drop that orb?"

"We don't know."

"What?"

"Yet, don't you consider it possible if it's them, who so readily spot an unregistered orb?"

"You're telling me to indirectly induce them in that direction?"

"Well, you're right."

"That's way too unreasonable..."

D-Powers has some kind of secret. That's a fact.

Since I also feel that I have been accepted within limitations, they might trust me to a little extent. However, this order all of a sudden. If they were to take on this task, it'd be something like proving that they have a method to obtain orbs.

"...Is it fine for me to give them the details if they were to ask for the reason?"

"I suppose that's inevitable. However, make sure to tell them that they're forbidden to speak about it."

"Understood. But please don't expect too much, okay?"

"No, I do expect."

Naruse sighs deeply after hearing his reply.

"..So, what are you going to do about the conditions?"

After all it's an orb badly desired by the nations around the world, if the previous story is true. It's difficult to estimate just what price would have been paid for it if it had been put up at the previous auction, but what I can say with certainty is that it would have cost an immense amount of money.

"The conditions...can't you somehow handle it by asking as a friend?"

"Dream on!"

It's a very Japanese-like method, but it's impossible for something like that to work in the business world.

Moreover, where extraordinary big business is involved.

"Thought so... However, it doesn't look like the JDA's annual budget would be enough to cover the costs that might be suitable for achieving this request, don't you think? To get straight to the point, we won't be able to pay."

"I don't think that it'll be tolerable for them, if we say something like, 'Sorry we don't have any money' after ordering a house from someone and having them build it."

"Guess so... Well, I guess I have no other option but to talk it over with the higher ups so that the money will be provided by the country. For the meantime, you can proceed with the idea that we'll buy it at a moderate price + expenses."

"Got it. However, if you can't prepare the moderate price, the JDA's credibility will hit rock bottom."

"In that case I'm pretty sure that they'll be able to at least get the original costs as long as they put it up for auction."

Admittedly, she wondered whether that might not be a life-threatening undertaking if they did something like that, but she kept those words to herself. After all, it's much more likely that they won't find the orb in question.

Saiga stands up, creates a little gap through the blinds with his fingers, and casually says while gazing outside, "Don't you feel like Area 12's world rank 1, who we can't identify at all, is casting his shadow on that place?"

"An unknown third member, you say?"

Letting the blinds return to their original position with a rattling, he turns around in Naruse's direction, "Come to think of it, a message from the USDA (US Dungeon Association) has arrived."

"Okay."

"Starting from tomorrow, it looks like Team Simon is going to dive into Yoyogi for a while."

"Pardon?"

"I got no clue whether it's some kind of competition, but I heard that First Lieutenant Kimitsu's team is going to dive from Narashino^[efn_note]City in the Tokyo Metropolitan Area^[efn_note] as well."

"Kimitsu, you mean Ms. Iori?"

Kimitsu Iori is ranked 18 in the world. She's Japan's ace explorer.

"Correct. Starting with tomorrow, Yoyogi will house a high-end lineup of explorers. The Management Department will become busy as well, I think."

"Should I also help out...?"

"You stick to D-Powers. I'm sure something is going to happen this month. I'm counting on you with the <Different World Language Comprehension> matter." Saiga says and leaves the meeting room.

Left behind, Naruse unintentionally mutters, "Telling me 'I'm counting on you'...jeez."

§027 Moving Office and Search Request 11/12 (Mon)

On that day, the Japanese islands, surrounded by three low-pressure areas, were plagued with bad weather on a nation-wide scale.

In Tokyo, which was greeted by a morning with a sky full of heavy clouds and a slightly chilly temperature, we moved into our new office.

"Holy shit! What the hell is this...?" I mutter reflexively after opening the door to my own room located on the second floor.

"North European style, I'd say." Miyoshi answers after fleetingly peeking inside.

Sure, I told them to keep it simple.

And, just as I asked them, it's a neat and simple design.

"But you know..."

While looking at the bagworm-like light hanging down from the ceiling above the dining table, I flinch back from the excessively stylish atmosphere. I can't settle down at all.

"Well, home is where you make it. I guess I'll get used to it sooner or later." I summarize my current mood into a few words, and begin to put away the few things I own.

If I were to fill the massive bookshelves set up on one wall of the living room with technical books, it'd look very groovy. Unfortunately, I don't possess many of such books in paper form nowadays, though.

As I didn't bring much luggage with me, the sorting finished in less than thirty minutes, and thus I left through the entrance door, and made my way towards the office on the first floor. On another note, even without going through the entrance way, I can descend to the first floor from the corridor between Miyoshi's and my spaces.

"The first floor really kind of looks like your hobby room, Miyoshi."

"Hehehe, nice, isn't it?"

Three Revelations of Eurocave^[efn_note]Wine storage, look here:

<https://www.eurocave.jp/item/revelation.html> ^[/efn_note] are lined up in the dining room. Their

inside is still...huh? It's somewhat full in there, isn't it?

"I thought that you'd place them in the dining room of your own room."

"I don't drink such large quantities in my own room!"

That's like saying that you'll drink large quantities in the office's dining room...not making such a retort is the trick to get along well with others. At least, it should be.

Once I take a peek at the living room's side that already looks office-like, I see three 30" monitors lining up on a huge L-shaped desk further in which is already littered with memo pads.

Given that a piece of furniture that seems to be my desk has been placed there as well, I try to sit down on the chair over there. Yep, feels comfortable.

"Senpai, you've finished putting away your stuff?"

"Yeah, it's been no more than clothes and books anyway."

"Eh? What about tableware or small stuff?"

"At my previous apartment."

"Previous, you say...what are you going to do about the apartment over there?"

"Since it's a bother, I will leave it as is for a while."

"Uwah, you're swimming in money!"

Well, she's not wrong there.

No matter how bothersome I might be, I'd have vacated it as quickly as possible before. Even if it's run down, the rent is pretty high up there. Of course, it's dirt cheap if compared to the neighborhood, though.

"I wonder, is this an act attainable through a flexibility of mind?"

"I think you're just a slacker."

Yes, it's just as you say.

"How about you then, Miyoshi?"

"I finished moving already, you know?"

"Huh? I feel like you didn't do anything, though."

"I asked the relocation service, leaving all of it to them. Even without doing anything it was like oh wow, weird. Things were packed and moved on their own accord, restoring my room to its usual state in like no time. Well, coordinators and relocation services are truly great. There's various magical things in this world."

"Something so convenient...I didn't know."

"The world's sweet to the rich. The scales have completely fallen off my eyes."

"Crap. I guess, I will move my stuff step by step, and once the apartment is empty, I will move out."

"This is the pattern where you will procrastinate forever, isn't it?"

"Shut it."

As we're having such a conversation, the bell at the entrance rings.

Miyoshi checks by glancing on the screen of a PC, and says, "It's Ms. Naruse." It appears that the monitors at each place are connected to the PC.

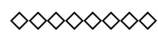
When I open the entrance door, I find Ms. Naruse standing there with a big potted moth orchid in hands.

As it's a fairly big plant with around forty big flowers, it looks quite heavy. It's something you'd usually have delivered...

"Ah, congratulations on your move. This is my gift to you."

"Wow, that's amazing. Thank you!"

I express my thanks while thinking something rude along the lines of, 'But weren't moth orchids kind of difficult to raise?', and accept her gift.



"Umm, as you're at a point where you can take a little break from moving, there's a request I have as your exclusive full-time deputy chief. Is that alright for you?"

After finishing the congratulations for moving in and having eaten some soba - albeit one from a convenience store - and in the middle of chatting with drinks in one hand, Ms. Naruse suddenly fixes her sitting posture, and broaches a new topic in such a way.

"Why so formal? It's fine, as long it's something we can do." Miyoshi answers frankly after seeing how Ms. Naruse seems unnaturally nervous.

"U-Umm...actually we'd like you to search a certain orb."

"Search an orb?"

Miyoshi and I look at each other. Just what's going on?

"What kind of monster drops it?"

"We don't know."

"Eh?"

"Umm, it drops in Yoyogi, doesn't it?"

"That's something we don't know either."

"Eehh..."

"That orb, <Different World Language Comprehension>, dropped only once on the world, at the Kiryas Kul'yegan Dungeon in Russia. However, it hasn't been publicly announced what kind of monster dropped it."

<Different World Language Comprehension>, yet another skill orb with an incredible name.

"So, why do you need that orb?"

Ms. Naruse sighs once, and after forbidding us to speak about it since it's top secret, she begins to explain.



"In short, the orb's effect has been used to translate a dungeon's epitaph, but at the present time you don't know whether that translation is true or false?"

"That's right. All countries around the world are searching for that orb to verify it."

"Senpai, that sounds like it'll become super profitable!"

The Oumi trader jumps up with \$ signs in her eyes.

"Eh? Assuming we got our hands on that one, would it actually be fine to put it up for auction?"

"Ah, I see..."

"For me it would be a tremendous help if we could have you sell it to the JDA..."

"In that respect, a free economy is really terrible as it's difficult to force it, right?" I say while smiling.

"We know the types of monsters in that Kiryas-something dungeon, don't we? Are those present in Yoyogi, too?"

Ms. Naruse nods.

Yoyogi is extremely wide. Even globally, it's one of the leading dungeons in regards to environments and monster diversity.

Floors that have several sections with different environments have also been confirmed. Not just the floor boss, but even the respective floor sections have their own boss-like monsters.

"Almost all of them have been verified." Saying so, she hands us a list of the monsters inhabiting the Kiryas dungeon.

I scan this list together with Miyoshi.

"Language comprehension means that there are some kind of intelligent monsters capable of talking, doesn't it?"

"Something like vampires?"

"Yeah, right, that kind of."

By the way, vampires haven't been spotted so far.
Of course it's possible for them to exist like Miyoshi said, but——

"It's probably this one here."

I point at the name of a monster.

Blood Clan Shaman.

The goatman-like monsters, which have a high sociality, have created clans in specific areas. This one here represents those among the clan which have an occupation allowing them to use magic.

Miyoshi asks while looking curious, "Why do you think so?"

"Don't you consider it to be strange?"

"Strange as in what?"

"Ms. Naruse, who gives monsters their names?"

"Generally the WDA announces the name, which has been suitably added to a monster by its discoverer or the country, as the official name. However, in case the monster dropped a raw material item, its name will be revised since the item's name includes the monster's name in most cases."

"That's the part in question here."

"?"

"It looks like most of the monsters are assigned names from Earth's mythology or game worlds referencing it."

"Yes, mostly."

"The official name added to its item is something specified by the dungeon, so to say. And yet, the orbs that dropped so far usually possess an effect in a range that doesn't make it weird for that monster to have dropped it."

"That's...right."

"I wonder, why do the orbs, which we consider to be proper for a monster to drop, properly drop from said monsters?"

After seeing the orbs possible to drop from slimes, I believed it to be very odd.

That's because it's a lineup as if we had been the one deciding the drop items.

Why is an unknown creature from a different world (?), which we named slime, matching down to its very nature, which shouldn't have been known at the time when it was named, with slimes from Japanese games?

"The guy, who designed this game, understands the culture on Earth quite well. You might even say, he's extremely well-acquainted with it.

Ms. Naruse listens with a dumbfounded expression.

"Accordingly, there are three possibilities I can think of."

I raise three fingers.

"First, it's mere coincidence."

Probability-wise it's impossible, though.

"Second, the existence of an *eidos* as it's called by Platon."

Even if that's the case, what about the matching names?

Well, you might argue that the dungeon card is displayed in the native language, resulting in the monsters' names having been replaced based on our knowledge.

"And the third is the possibility that an Earthling designed the dungeons, I'd say."

"No way..."

"Really? Considering all of it, it's the one possibility fitting the most." I take a sip of coffee while smiling as if I've made a joke.

"Anyway, if you come to such a conclusion, the handling of words and characters in Earth's mythology, and especially around Celtic mythology, is the same as magic."

"That means, the monsters that use magic among the highly social monsters possess a skill related to words and characters?"

Miyoshi stabs into the heart of the matter.

"Correct. As far as I can see on the list, it's only the goatmen who are so social that they establish clans."

Ms. Naruse takes out Yoyogi's monster list.

"Unfortunately, there's no blood clan in Yoyogi, but there's a moon clan."

A goatmen moon clan.

Deep inside Yoyogi's 14th floor, in the opposite direction of the stairs to the 15th floor. A section located in an area that seems very depopulated.

"But senpai, are there so many shamans in the same clan?"

Generally it's one, or at most around a few, I'd guess.

"That's the point, isn't it? But I think another individual might immediately turn into a shaman, if the previous one is gone."

"That's a groundless assumption, no?"

"Well yeah. But something like that happens quite often in nature, doesn't it?"

But then again, I suppose that still doesn't apply to mammals.

"Also, going back and forth down to the 14th floor sounds like it'll take an amazing period of time, don't you think?"

Ms. Naruse provides an answer in regards to that, "By standard, the direct route takes two days."

"How about going with the expedition style of building a base at some place?"

Expedition style is a word originating from mountain climbing terminology.

It's a method that can be used to go on adventures by building a base camp inside the dungeon, constructing camps each time you descend several floors from the base camp, and having several support members transport goods between the camps.

On the other hand, the method of capturing a dungeon with just a small party is called adventurer style.

"No, I think it'll work with the adventurer style."

"Eh? Really?" Ms. Naruse asks in surprise.

I turn around to Ms. Naruse, and irresponsibly dodge the question, "Well, I have understood your request. I will try to look for it a bit."

"Umm...please don't try the impossible, okay?"

"Of course. After all, it's my dream to continue a slacker's life. Well then, since there's a few things that need to be prepared, let's leave it at that for today."

"Understood. I will go back to the JDA for the time being since I need to inform the section chief."

"Please don't tell him about the previous shaman conjectures yet. It'll be a pain if the troublesome

matters increase."

"Okay. For the time being I'm going to only report that you will undertake the request."

"Please tell him to not expect too much out of it, okay?"

"Good work today~"

The two of us exit through the entrance hall, and see off Ms. Naruse as she goes back to the JDA. I feel like it would have been also fine for her to inform him through her cell phone, but there might be some other circumstances.

"Senpai, are you really going? The 14th floor. We still haven't even descended to the second floor, you know?"

"Well, won't it work out one way or another?"

"Ah, come to think of it, you were ranked number one in the world, weren't you? I completely forgot about it since you don't give me such an impression at all."

"You sure are a rude girl. But then again, I don't have that impression of myself either."

We look at each other, and burst into laughter.

"Well, I will immediately scurry home if it looks dangerous. Also——"

I ask Miyoshi to procure a certain item.
Miyoshi pulls a surprised face, but accepts to look for it.

"As for the rest..."

I take out four orbs and place them in front of me. <Storage>, <High Recovery>, <Water Magic>, and <Physical Resistance>.

"Senpai, those..."

"Well, we have to test <Storage> and <High Recovery> anyway, right? Leaving <Storage> aside, I can get another <High Recovery> in the middle of November. Since I have <Safe>, you'll use this one, Miyoshi."

"Understood. The remaining ones are——"

"Excluding these four, two <High Recovery>, three <Water Magic>, and seven <Physical Resistance>."

"If you're careless, you could get a <Physical Resistance> everyday, after all."

"As long as we reserve enough for ourselves, one each for you and me, it's alright to sell all of the extras. The price will likely go down gradually, too."

"Got it. Then let's have a look how things turn out by putting up three <Physical Resistance> and one <High Recovery> for the next auction."

"Four orbs twice a month, huh? Isn't that kind of low?"

"No, senpai. Four orbs have been officially announced to have appeared in Yoyogi Dungeon last year."

Oh, which reminds me, I think that square guy said something about that...

"E-Either way, use these if you're going to come with me to the 14th floor. Also, I look forward to a report about the usage, okay?"

"It has turned into something like a field test to see how many skills you can acquire at maximum, hasn't it?"

While revealing a stiff smile, Miyoshi touches <Storage>.

"There's a rule to shout 『I'm going to stop being a human!』 during the first use of an orb."

"Please tell me something like that a lot earlier!"

The touched orb turns into light, scatters, and is absorbed into Miyoshi's body as if coiling around it, starting with the parts that got into contact with the light.

It's the first time for me to watch an orb usage from the side. So that's how it looks, eh?

"So, how is it?"

"Mmh~, somehow it's a weird sensation, as if my body has been reconstructed."

Yeah, yeah, that's it.

"Senpai, you're going to get ready as well, right?"

"Yes." Confirming, I take out my own <Physical Resistance>, <Water Magic>, and <High Recovery>.

"I hope that my head won't go boom due to acquiring too many skills all at once."

"Scanners[efn_note]A horror/sci-fi movie aired in 1981[/efn_note]!? Please stop. The room will get dirty."

"That's the part you worry about!?"

And then we absorbed the remaining orbs.



Luckily our heads didn't explode.



After having safely acquired several skills, and since it was still early in the day, I went to Yoyogi to test out the skills while at it. Over there, I ran into Simon's group who were just then walking on the opposite side.

"Geh...!"

Why is Simon here at such a time!? Even if you're going to dive, how about doing it a lot earlier...

『Hmm, this is Yoyogi? What a surprisingly neat entrance.』

『Well, it's a dungeon located right in the middle of the city center. The early floors seem to have quite the draw for some amusement.』

Natalie answers Simon, who admires the entrance area, while opening Yoyogi's pamphlet.

"Hey, isn't that Simon's team?"

"Eeh? Wait, the real deal? Not Falcon Industry's Simon model, but the original?"

Because the duo next to me says such things at quite the volume, that friggin' Simon turns his head in this direction. It's what you call the cocktail party effect.

『Oh? Isn't that Yoshimura!?』

That Simon is friendly to an extent you wouldn't expect of a soldier.
Due to him coming over while eagerly waving his right hand, the two next to me pull a surprised face, and turn my way. Stop it! You make me stand out, you know!?

『Y-Yoo, Simon. It's been a while.』

The first thing Simon, who came close, says to me after seeing my get-up is, "『Yoshimura. You're going to dive into the dungeon in such an outfit?』"

『? It's my usual outfit, though?』

『Crazy. You don't care about your life?』

『I do! It'll be fine as long as I don't approach any places that look like I could die!』

『In a dungeon you never know what might happen, do you?』 Simon says, obviously astonished, but I mean, I won't go to any places where I don't know what might happen to begin with.

At that moment, the entrance area becomes noisy. Once Simon and I look back, a woman that seems to be the personification of the word 『dignified』 is walking in our direction.

Kimitsu Iori. First Lieutenant belonging to the dungeon capture unit stationed at the Narashino Garrison, and Japan's ace with an established reputation in dungeon exploration.

Seeing her approach, Simon says in panic, 『Fuck, it's Iori. Come to think of it, it looks like you guys are offering orbs for sale again. I'm quite interested, but for now, I'm off.』

『Why all of a sudden?』

As I look at him, who's getting away in a hurry, with a puzzled expression, he says 『I can't handle Iori』, and leaves while waving his hand and winking. He's quite the playful guy.

"That guy always acts like this whenever he spots me." First Lieutenant Iori, who has walked over, says to no one in particular.

"Is that so?"

Once I give a suitable reply, she looks at me and furrows her eyebrows.

Huh? Did I do something? Sure, I'm acquainted with Simon, but it's not like I'm an American spy or anything.

"You, are you going to dive into the dungeon in such an outfit?"

...So that's what bugs her.

I get slightly irritated at Simon, who looks this way from the other side, does a thumbs up while laughing with a face as if telling me, "Look, I told you," and descends into the dungeon.

"It looks like you two are quite close. Are you an acquaintance of Simon?"

"Yes, well. Having said that, as I just got slightly acquainted with him at an orb trade, it's not like we're that clo——"

"Orb trade?"

§027.5 Iori Kimitsu

"Orb trade?"

That's what a man looking to be the same age as me has said. He's a man that gives me a slightly spindly impression, but if he has done an orb trade with Simon, he shouldn't be underestimated. If it comes to trades that have become public recently...

"Are you someone connected to D-Powers?"

In response, the man looks surprised for a moment, but then immediately smooths it over with a normal expression.

"Yeah, more or less. I'm a humble G rank member."

Iori senses a slight feeling of discomfort towards that reply. Why would he meaninglessly stress the part about him being G rank here? Normally G rank adventurers have a strong tendency to avoid speaking about their rank, excluding a small part who are clearly beginners. The only exception would be times where it's beneficial to emphasize being weak, such as in case of getting protected by someone. However, to Iori, that doesn't seem to apply at the moment. Speaking of possible scenarios, you'd use this approach when wanting to falsify your true strength, but...

"Did you acquire a card most recently?"

"Eh? Yes, well. Last month..."

And yet he has a relationship with Simon allowing him to casually chat him up. Don't tell me, he made the same experience as I did—

Iori recalls the chain of incidents back then when she was rescued by a JSDF rescue team.



It was around the time when the summer of 2015 was about to end.

The dungeons, which appeared at the beginning of summer, monopolized the topics in society, but they only affected Iori's life to the extent of the Chiyoda-Line being severed between Yoyogi Park and Harajuku.

Her livelihood hadn't changed overly much compared to before the dungeon's appearance, and even now she had visited a friend in Okinawa to get a final breather before entering the final stretch of her graduation thesis.



"Miho, are we really at the right place here?"

The two were walking along a very narrow path, almost like a tunnel that had been created by the trees.

The sticky atmosphere and the temperature that would cause the sweat to run even when standing still made her feel as if they were walking through some jungle. The cries of the cicadas searching for the last partner of their lives were only intensified by that unpleasant feeling.

"Hmm, probably. I mean, there's no other path or anything."

Iori, who had become worried due to the lacking foundation of Miho's reply, started a compass and map app suited for orienteering, and tried to check their route.

"H-Huh?"

However, the smartphone's compass pointed towards a cryptic direction each time she moved.

"That's really weird?"

"What if you try to calibrate it?"

Miho drew a lemniscate^[efn_note] Math term ... basically she's drawing ∞ in midair^[efn_note] in front of her eyes while holding the smartphone in her hand. This method of adjustment seems to be a patented technology of Asahi Kasei^[efn_note] Asahi Kasei Microdevices - Company providing electronic parts^[efn_note]. The first time Iori heard about it, she admired them for having come up with such a good idea.

However, even after Miho did the same motion several times, the result didn't change in particular.

"Is the geomagnetism around here messed up?"

"Ooh~!? Isn't that the work of some kind of powerspot!?"

"Yeah, sure."

Miho is an engineer, but she loves the spiritual.

Having said that, since she enjoyed it while being properly aware that most of those things don't have much scientific significance, and mainly have an effect on the mental area, she's not so crazy about it that it would be unpleasant to spend time with her, and if pushed to say, there were many things Iori could enjoy as well.

Usually, a beautiful scenery or something touching exists with a high probability at places that are referred to as powerspots.

"It's fine, it's fine. A fantastic reward is waiting for us at the end of our hardship." Miho said and started to walk again.

But just as before, her sweat was running down, a strong smell of grass assailed her noses, the cicadas enjoying their existence was annoying, and at times even some small winged insects flew at

her. Iori had been taken along to various places by her spiritual-loving friend, but this place ranked first in difficulty.

Moreover, at the time when even Iori started to get fed up after hours had passed, that suddenly appeared.

It was a place that widely opened up, located at the path's dead end.

The sun finding its way through the tree's leaves created rays of light, and the air, which had felt so humid, felt refreshing as if only that place was a part of another world.

"Wow..."

"It's probably here."

There was basically nothing in the D-shaped space that had its undergrowth mowed down neatly. Only a single, white, quadrangular prism stone stood all alone in the middle of the D's straight line.

"That's the Ibi stone?" [efn_note]This is about sacred sites in Okinawa. The hallowed stone here is called Ibi. It's a specific stone placed at many sacred sites which becomes a place to pray. You can google it by using "Okinawa sacred sites" as search term if you want to know more[/efn_note]

"I think so." Miho nodded once Iori asked.

In a manner of speaking, the Ibi stone is a guidepost from the divine domain, a stone for the gods to descend while using it as a landmark.

"Even though it's called a sacred site, there's nothing like a torii[efn_note]Shinto shrine archway[/efn_note] anywhere." Iori said while recalling the fairly big number of torii erected at the place called Sacred Ground of Yaeyama, which they had visited until yesterday.

"Those have been put up after the Meiji era as a result of the institutionalization of Shintoism because of the imperialisation policy. It looks like quite a few of them have been removed most recently."

"Hee."

In that case, the torii have been removed here, or otherwise, it might be a place where they hadn't been erected in the first place.

Iori believed that it was very likely the latter while surveying the vicinity.

At any rate, this place is so empty that it's actually weird.

The heat, grass smell, and the small winged insects clinging to the sweat - all of them as if unwilling to part with summer - which had accompanied them on the path up until now, were completely gone.

Only a strange, empty purity dominated this place.

"Even fish find it difficult to live in the purity of Shirakawa?" [efn_note]This is a part of an old satirical tanka that's even nowadays well known, something along the lines of "Even fish find it difficult to live in the purity of Shirakawa, and yearn for the former impurity of Tanuma." It has a rather deep historical reference. Shirakawa refers to Matsudaira Sadanobu who made the Kansei Reforms as Shirakawa's daimyo, Tanuma here means Tanuma Okitsugu, a politician of the Bakufu government, and the fish refer to the common people. Sadanobu enacted the Kansei Reforms with

the justification that he's aiming for an honest and sincere government after Tanuma was overthrown, but the new government had many aspects that were oppressive towards the common people since the reforms had very strong retrogressive aspects considering the era. During the Tanuma period bribery was rampant, but since it was a time where people could live more freely, they yearned to return to those times. Here it basically means that the place is so pure that Iori asks whether it wouldn't be better for it to actually be less pure.[/efn_note]

Somehow that line just slipped out of my mouth while recalling Matsudaira Sadanobu who forced the Kansei Reforms through.

And that wasn't all, this place was pregnant with an odd silence.

I wonder, why can't I hear a single cicada cry, despite them having been so loud on the way here. If it was just that, it might have been fine to believe that the cicadas have stopped crying, but just what's going on with even the roaring of the ocean lying ahead that could be heard alongside the cicadas being gone as well.

To Iori, the scenery that had been simply refreshing and beautiful until now, started to look like a different world, as if they wandered astray into some spirit world.

"It's a place where you meet the gods, that's why. This is what you'd call a spiritual effect, I think."

Once Iori looked in the direction of Miho while glossing over her uneasiness with a joke, Miho was gradually moving back, trying now to capture a panoramic view of the Ibi stone — all of the D's straight line in the frame of her camera while taking pictures. Iori headed behind her, getting close to warn her so that she wouldn't fall down.

"Hmm, I guess a little bit more to the left..."

Miho, who had retreated all the way to the summit of the D's curve, moved a bit to the left, but there was no ground in that location.

"Wha-!?"

"Watch out!"

Iori, who grabbed Miho's arm at once as she almost fell down while screaming, pulled the arm towards herself with all her strength.

In exchange for pulling up Miho's body, Iori ended up taking a step outside the empty area as a recoil — and slipped off a steep slope just like that.



"Ioriii! Ioriiiiii!"

She could hear a voice frantically calling her name from above. 'Oh, it's Miho.'

"Ouch, it hurts."

Was it a blessing that she wore long sleeves, being afraid of a sunburn? It didn't appear as if she had

suffered any serious injuries.

Even after she carefully tried to move her arms and legs, there were no signs of a sprain or break. She could feel that it was limited to small scratches.

Once she looked up, she could see the sky through a thin crack. Although the slope had been steep, the fall didn't last all that long, and at the end she apparently dropped into a rock crevice-like place.

"Miho!"

"Ah, Iooooorriiii! You okay!?"

"Yeah! I just grazed my skin a bit!"

"That's good to hear. So, does it look like you'll be able to get out yourself?"

Being asked so, Iori surveyed her surroundings for the first time. Although the sunlight was shining in through the crack, she couldn't see well as it was fairly dim.

Her smartphone, which she had kept inside her chest pocket, had been flung off to somewhere, but although she didn't find her smartphone, the small backpack on her back was fortunately okay. She took out a flashlight she had put in there in preparation for the possibility of them going to Gama (Cave)[efn_note]It's one of those sacred spots in Okinawa, full name is Makiminato Terabu of Gama. Look it up if you like[/efn_note], and turned it on, trying to confirm the area ahead of her. Being illuminated by that light, a part of the fallen stones and the wall reflected it in golden colors.

"Gold? As if, who am I kidding."

'It's probably iron ore. I'm sure, there are times when magnetite patches turn golden. The compass going haywire since a while ago might be owed to a small vein of strong magnetism running through this region.

"Ioriii?"

"Ah, sorry. Ummm...climbing out of here looks impossible! There's a cave ahead from here, and it looks like it continues quite far in, so I will have a look for a bit!"

"Eh? Don't do that! It's dangerous! I'm going to call for help right away, so it's better for you to not move from where you are!"

"Okay! But just for a bit—" While answering like that, the flashlight, which was turned into the darkness ahead, made something lacking any sense of reality stand out.

"Kyaaaaaa!!!"

"Iori!? What!? What's wrong!?"

What was illuminated within the flashlight's cone were the bones of a person, no matter how you looked at it. Moreover, it seemed as if all of the bones were in one place.

"A-Ah, sorry. There's something here that surprised me a bit..."

"What is it? Did you find a pirate treasure?"

"Treasure? Yeah, well, academically, in regards to human culture...no, isn't it a tad too new?"

"What are you talkin' 'bout?"

The skeleton had been carefully enshrined as if some kind of ceremony had been performed. Traditionally, Okinawa had used aerial sepulture. Although it had turned into cremation nowadays, urn burials were still carried out on isolated islands, and it's said that cave burial had been practiced up until the 70's in Miyako. The remains were put into Gama, and after many years had passed, the bones were washed before placing them in a bone storage urn for the final rest. Gama was a boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead. And at the same time it was a place where all purity was washed away as it was a holy ground. Once Iori looked closer, many bone-like objects of other people were scattered around the skeleton.

"You know, somehow it looks like this place is a gravesite."

"Gravesite!?"

"Yeah, people that appear to wait for their bone washing are——"

When she was about to explain, something faintly shining appeared from around the corner deeper down the cave.

Seeing that, Iori wondered whether she might not actually be dead already.

"Iori? Iori!? What's wrong!? Did something happen!?"

"Miho, be quiet...!"

What showed up was a fish with a beautiful silver color, floating vertically while elegantly making its dorsal fin wriggle back and forth. Each time it moved its fin, a rainbow-colored light glittered, so beautiful that it captivated Iori's eyes.

The problem was the fact of this being on-shore, meaning that the fish was swimming through the air.

Unless she was watching an illusion due to her head having gone crazy, there was only one possible explanation for this phenomenon.

"Miho, call the police. Tell them that I found a dungeon-like cave, okay?"

"Dungeon!?"

"There's something like that slightly ahead of me."

"Something, you say...are you alright?"

"I don't know, but I will hide so that it won't spot me."

"Got it...damn, why must this place be out of range!? Wait a moment, I'll be right back!"

Saying so, Miho apparently ran off in the direction of the parking area.

"There would be nothing better than not being found by that, but..." Muttering that, Iori retrieved a survival knife from her backpack.

It was a knife that had an engraving of something like Momotaro being born from a peach on the hand grip, a mass product manufactured by a knife maker of Okayama.[efn_note]Momotaro is a famous Japanese folklore. Look here: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Momotar%C5%8D> [/efn_note] Once Iori said that she would go to Okiniwa, her younger brother gave her this knife, saying, "Take this with you as a charm if you go to the primeval forest." Since it looked like it would get in the way, she had even considered leaving it behind, but seeing as it was given to her as charm, she reluctantly stuffed it at the bottom of her bag, bringing it with her.

"Sometimes that guy's quite useful, isn't he?"

As she was looking at the thick, unrefined knife blade, she had the impression that she could feel slightly relieved.

When she took a fleeting peek at the silver fish swimming on the opposite side from the shade of a rock, the number of fish had grown into a flock that continued to quietly swim through the narrow light pouring down from above.

'Assuming they are scabbard fish, they will be actively hunting carnivores. Their sharp blades are similar to razors that can cut you by just touching.' Iori silently prayed from the bottom of her heart that they wouldn't come in her direction.

She didn't know whether her prayers got through, but after a while the flying scabbard fish returned the way they came from.

"Haaaah."

Sitting down in relief, Iori felt like something touched her nape with a clap.

Timidly turning around, she faced a great white shark that seemed to be two meters long being right now in the process of opening its mouth widely to sink its teeth into her.

"—!!!!"

Iori, who screamed soundlessly, brandished the survival knife in her hand as she lost control of herself, stabbing the shark's head with all her might.

The shark, which certainly hadn't expected to receive a counterattack here, made its body roll over, sending Iori flying with the momentum.

"Gahaa!"

Being slapped against the wall on the other side, Iori powerfully hit her back, unable to get back up right away.

The shark, which had been writhing opposite of her, apparently hadn't died, and came swooping down on her with a tremendous speed after turning its black eyes, which were completely emotionless, in her direction.

Watching that with a blank stare, Iori instinctively tried to dodge its body by sliding below it. And then, when its demonic face passed above her while laughing with its mouth gaping open, she felt a strong irritation towards this irrational event, and kicked its belly from below at full power, driven

by an outburst of anger.

Just because it was kicked with all strength by a weak woman, there was no way for the monster to be defeated by that. However, that kick succeeded in slightly shifting the monster's direction of movement and the fate of Iori that should have visited her next.

The shark, which had its movement direction turned slightly downwards, powerfully hit the hilt of the knife still stuck in its head against the wall. The shark convulsed strongly, and then the light vanished from its black eyes.

The survival knife, which had been stuck in the shark, fell down towards Iori's head as she watched the turn of events vacantly. While cutting off a part of her hair, the blade planted itself into the ground.

And then a silver card appeared on her chest as she was laying sprawled, as if being some cursing tool to offer prayers to something.

"Did I possibly survive?"

The rainbow-colored, shining orb that manifested in front of her as she muttered those words might have been god's compensation for having offered a sacrifice. Iori, who had completely lost all sense of reality except for her back pain, touched that orb without a shred of hesitation, releasing its power.

After being engulfed by a sensation of floating, as if having lost gravity, and once the weird feeling similar to her body being rebuilt came to an end, mystically her backache mostly disappeared as well.

She carefully sat up, and made sure that nothing was wrong with her, such as bone fractures at her limbs. Then she silently stood up, wiped off the dirt, and picked up the knife and flashlight.

Next she absentmindedly gazed at the silver card she had obtained just now. Strangely, her own name and rank were written on it.

"This is a D-Card, isn't it?"

She knew about D-Cards, which could be obtained at the time of defeating a dungeon monster with your own efforts for the first time, since it had become a hot topic in the world. And, the card also listed the name of the skill she had acquired.

"<Magnetic Field Manipulation>? ...You're saying those fish floated because of magnetic force?"
Mumbling so, she made the survival knife in her hand float above her palm.

"For real, it floats..."

The stainless steel used in the knife mostly contained martensite, in other words, it was very magnetic.

Iori laughed softly, as she felt that it was a skill suited for an engineering woman. She could relatively easily manipulate the magnetism as long as she imagined the magnetic flux.

Once she used her power on a fallen stone at her feet, she could draw it towards her hand. Pyrrhotite that could also be mined in Okinawa had a dispersed intensity, but it was a magnetic substance.

Thinking that it might be possible, she climbed on a similar stone and tried to make it float as if using it as a platform, but that didn't work out.

"Awful. Isn't this telling me that I'm too heavy?"

There might be another reason for it, but right now she didn't have the spare time to study it. After all she didn't know when dungeon monsters might come attacking her. If one insisted that her newly obtained skill had become a weapon, she would need to master it as quickly as possible. 'Being able to manipulate magnetic fields means something like a railgun is...', she even thought, but then she changed her mind after considering, 'No matter how high the magnetic flux density, the electric charge will be zero, and thus the Lorentz force will be zero as well, I guess.'

"If it concerns something I can manage to get done with just <Magnetic Field Manipulation>, it'd be induction heating or a coilgun."

'If I make the intensity and magnetic field orientation change at high speed, it'll create electricity within a metal placed inside that field through electromagnetic induction. It follows Faraday's electromagnetic induction law.

'The size of the electromotive force at that time is expressed by $d(\Phi)/dt$, with (Φ) as magnetic flux, t in seconds, and d naturally being the Leibnitz notation showing the differential. In plain words, the change in the magnetic flux of one Weber[efn_note]Unit of magnetic flux[/efn_note] per second will generate an electromotive force of one Volt.

'If I can manipulate the direction and strength of a magnetic focus and the magnetic field density with <Magnetic Field Manipulation>, it'll allow me to freely change the magnetic flux, and it should theoretically be possible to increase the electromotive force indefinitely.

'The joule heat created at that time will be $R \times I^2 \times t$. R is the electric resistance of the object in Ohm, I is the streaming electric current in A (Ampere), and t is the elapsed time in seconds. If we use V for the electromotive force, the generated electric current will be $I = V / R$ according to Ohm's law.

In short, because the joule heat will be $V \times I \times t$, it should be possible to increase the generated heat indefinitely if I can increase the electromotive force indefinitely. Electric current must flow in the material, though.[efn_note]The formula is a bit misleading cause the author replaces R in $R \times I^2 \times t$ with $R = V / I$ which is a modulation of $I = V / R$.[/efn_note]

The principle behind a coilgun is much simpler. After all it just makes a magnetic substance fly by pulling it with a strong magnetic field.

You can't obtain a strong magnetic field to allow enough of initial velocity because there's a limit to the electric current in the current world, but it'll be a different story if you can manipulate the magnetic field itself.

"Mmh~..."

Iori tried to create a magnetic field stronger than the one obtainable through a coil around the pyrrhotite-like stone on the palm. At that moment she could observe not only the stone on her palm, but also the surrounding magnetic stones being immediately drawn towards her hand, and thus cancelled the magnetic field in a panic.

"Whoa, dangerous stuff..."

Normally, the strength of the magnetic field created by a pole will be inversely proportional to the square of the distance, according to the inverse square law.

In short, the power will sharply drop the further the distance, and yet a magnetic field powerful enough to move the surrounding magnetic substances has been formed.

"Manipulation...going by extreme logic, it means I can freely set the direction and strength of a

magnetic field, doesn't it?"

At the moment she applied a magnetic flux possessing a powerful magnetic flux density on the magnetic substance on her palm in a direction away from her own body, the stone vanished in front of her eyes, and crashed very loudly against a wall around ten meters ahead of her.

Iori, who felt dumbstruck by the excessive power, came to her senses after seeing a swarm of silver fish turning around the corner after being lured by the sound just now.

For an instant she was reminded of the shark just now and her face turned pale, but resolving herself that it would be better to do something about them before they get close, she picked up several stones at her feet.

Those stones were the surrounding, magnetic objects that had gathered at her feet due to her previous magnetic pull.

"Gooo!!"

Once she added power to a magnetic body with the same trick as moments ago, one fish within the swarm burst open.

"That'll work, won't it? It was a different one from my target, though."

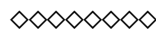
Iori imagined the magnetic flux lines until the target.

If it was a common draw-type of coilgun, the bullet would come back if you didn't turn off the magnetic field as soon as it passed the pole for pulling, but if you could set the magnetic flux freely, it was unnecessary to worry about such things.

The magnetic object that was shot out very likely flew along the lines imagined by Iori in accordance with the generated magnetic field, and directly hit the target.

After all, the bullet moved at such a high speed that it was impossible to follow its flight path with the eyes. Iori had no choice but to guess whether it had flown along the lines, but since it hit, there was likely no mistake in that assumption.

Annihilating the entire swarm of scabbard fish heading for her in such a way, Iori put her hands together in prayer towards the skeleton, and then proceeded further down the cave.



Having received a rescue demand, the police immediately passed it on to the department for dungeon countermeasures. That information was at once transmitted to the Dungeon Capture Unit that had been deployed very closely for training.

The JSDF's structure, which only allowed for a dispatch within the framework of a disaster relief mission, had been drastically simplified as far as dungeons were concerned, and it had become possible to directly request a dispatch by the dungeon countermeasure department that received a report.

In regards to this matter, there were many misleading arguments such as that it would be used for war or that it would change for the worse because of the simplification of the JSDF's dispatch, but the opposing opinions were easily crushed due to the actual danger of monsters swarming out of the dungeons, and an adequate system was set up speedily.

This time the relief order was passed down on the Dungeon Capture Group's first team led by Sergeant First-Class Hagane who were training at Okinawa with its many caves by coincidence. They quickly got their equipment ready, and boarded the HiMan^[efn_note]Author's note: HMTV (High Mobility Vehicle), an automobile used to transport troops of the Ground Self-Defense Forces. T/N: The abbreviation Kouki used in the novel stems from the car being called 高機動車 (High Maneuverability Vehicle) in full. 高機 equals Kouki. I abbreviated it to HiMan since I don't know of any better English counterpart. I could have gone with Humvee, but that's another type of car. [/efn_note].

"Well, nothing less of Okinawa. I didn't know that we would be deployed in a HiMan with an air-conditioner. But, it doesn't really cool the air in here," said the flippy Leading Private Kaiba who energetically got into the car which had maintained a temperature that was still better than the one outside.

Okinawa's sunlight was strong. If you went all day long with your upper body naked, you would suffer from a state similar to having scalded your whole body depending on the circumstances, even if it was cloudy. Compared to such an outside, the inside of the HiMan was heaven-like.

"Alright, now that everyone got into the car, we're off. I will explain the situation while we move." With those words, Hagane distributed the documents to everyone.

"At 00:05, a woman slipped down into a place similar to a cave that's marked on the map."

"A place similar to a cave? However, us being ordered to dispatch means..."

"Correct. It looks like that place was an undiscovered dungeon. Because of that, it's our turn as we're the ones closest to the place."

The team members, who heard that, thought that a single, unarmed woman in a dungeon might have already passed away, but none of them voiced it out.

"The woman's name is Kimitsu Iori, 22 years old. Our objective is to rescue that woman, and to capture the dungeon, if possible. Still the rescue takes precedence."

Leading Private Seruhio, who had been born in Okinawa, silently looked at the documents and muttered with a pale face, "Dat cave's haunted by evil." ^[efn_note]Thick Okinawan accent here, luckily author provided a note, else I wouldn't have understood a thing xD[/efn_note]

"What was that?" Sergeant Sawatari to whom the words next to him sounded like a spell chant turned his head to Seruhio and asked.

The complexion of Seruhio, who looked back at Sawatari, became even worse, and he squeezed out his words with difficulty, "The cave located over there is a mourning ground, so to say. Locally it's simply called tiral."

"Tiral?" Hagane asked back after hearing that story.

According to Seruhio's explanation, tiral seems to be a Ryukyu dialect for cave.^[efn_note]Ryukyu

refers to the southwestern Japanese islands forming the Okinawa prefecture.[/efn_note]
In contrast to gama, which meant natural cave, tiral, or tira is a word deviating from 『Tera (Temple)』, and apparently indicates a cave that's a burial ground.

"Terror, that's yet another very cocky way to call a burial ground, isn't it?"[efn_note]Terror in English here...it's similar to the pronunciation of tiral[/efn_note]

"Captain." Seruhio added a grim expression to his very pale face, and said, "This ain't no joke or anything. That place is dangerous! That place...is where the abandoned gods dwell!"

Due to the excessive words by Seruhio, none of the team members could speak up.

A place where abandoned gods live in the 20th century? All of them wanted to laugh that off, but the strong pressure ruling the car didn't allow them to do so.

"A place where the gods live? You mean, it's a sacred grove?"

Sacred groves were important places in Okinawa's faith, and he had heard that they were similar to funeral halls, in a broader sense.

"Captain, you know of the Ryukyu faith?"

"Hmm? Yeah, there seem to be various taboos, so I took a lecture before coming here, just in case, but to be honest, my knowledge isn't all that deep."

"Sacred groves are the places where the noro[efn_note]Female Mediums in Okinawa[/efn_note] perform the rites, so they are different from tiral. However, if it's in the meaning of being boundaries to the netherworld, both seem to be so."

"The old festivals might be the same anywhere, but here almost all of them are ceremonies of a divine welcoming for the visiting gods."

Seruhio took a short pause of one breath, and then started to explain to no one in particular, "We interact with the visiting gods by holding determined festivals at fixed times."

"For example, Kudaka's Izaiho, which has become famous, is a ceremony to welcome the visiting gods from the next world. And after having them confirm a new divine woman, we send the visiting gods back." [efn_note]Sorry, but this goes quite deeply into Okinawa's religious traditions. Izaiho is an inauguration rite for a new divine woman. niraikanai is the next world in Okinawan folklore. If you want to look it up, google for イザイホー and ニルヤカナヤ.[/efn_note]

"So? What has all of that to do with this case?" Hagane was bewildered by the cultural anthropology lecture that had suddenly started in the middle of his briefing. "But, is it actually possible to choose a god through a human ceremony or such?"

Assuming it was just a ceremony of opening a door, it was a difficult issue whether the gods arriving from the other side would be the ones chosen by the humans. Even if they strictly controlled the procedures and time of performing the ceremony.

"Do you know why the Izaiho is held only once every twelve years?"

"The position of the stars or the calendar? I don't really know, but such things play a role, don't they?"

‘After all, the wall separating this world and the netherworld seems to become thicker and thinner depending on the calendar, no matter which book in which country at what age you check.

"That's also one way of thinking, but as a matter of fact it's because it would take twelve years to amass the power of prayer to choose the visiting gods." [efn_note]Author's note: That's fiction[/efn_note]

"If it takes twelve years to accumulate that power on an island as full of shrine maidens as Kudaka, just how can other regions choose with a power that was amassed within a year then?"

The classification of good gods is something merely decided by humans on their own accord. If we assume that the visiting gods are chosen irresponsibly, it might happen that even annoying, evil gods arrive.

"That means, it's a place that abandoned the gods?"

"Going by the recognition of the people back then, it's a place where the gods were sent back forcibly without being warmly welcomed."

He says the tiral is a boundary to the netherworld. Then it wouldn't be strange even if everyone believed that the gods might go back on their own accord as long as they are locked up in there.

"It's no problem if they go back, right? So, just what is there supposed to be?"

"...Captain. The gods of the Ryukyu are the shrine maiden."

On the Ryukyu the gods borrow the body of shrine maidens to manifest. You might also call that a possession.

The manifested gods are the shrine maidens themselves in the physical world.

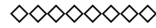
"Don't tell me, they're like people descended from gods..."

"It's like being possessed by something evil and being spirited away. It's terrifying." His Okinawan dialect spread through the car, which should be hot, like a chant, making them feel such a strong shiver that no one would think of it being summer.

"The irrational things called dungeons have appeared in the world, and their interior has been overflowing with creatures that seemed to have slipped out from some fantasy book. Even if we truly found a god or two over there at this point in time, it wouldn't be a surprise anymore." Hagane states as if to smash the frozen atmosphere inside the car. "Got it? No matter whether we will find gods or whatever in there or not, our mission is to rescue the victim from the newly discovered dungeon."

"As expected of you, Captain. How cool!"

The tense atmosphere became loose due to Kaiba's casual banter, and it felt as if the surrounding sounds had returned.



I wonder just how many monsters I defeated since then?

As I walked through the cave while putting the stuff that would occasionally drop and which I couldn't really identify into my backpack, I heard the roar of waves and saw a blue light shining into the cave from ahead.

Once I quickened my pace in the hope that I might get out from here, I ran into an open room. The room at the end was slightly wide, and possessed deeper inside a blue, shining tide pool that seemed to have a diameter of around ten meters.

Stalactites were hanging down from the ceiling, and each time the tide pool swayed, the blue light made the shadows of the stalactites sway, as if being a living creature.

The end of the tide pool is very likely connected to the ocean, seeing how a strong scent of salt is hanging in the air.

As I was unintentionally looking absentmindedly at that fairytale-like scenery, black shadows appeared beneath the water surface, and many huge scabbard fish jumped out into the air from within the water. It looked as if the tide pool was actually a spawn point for the monsters.

Iori defeated the monsters with the same method as before, but the instant she finished off the last fish, she suddenly felt a light dizziness.

"Huh?"

How to describe it? My body feels sluggish. It closely resembles the times when I'm terribly exhausted.

"Have I possibly used this power too much?"

It looks like the monsters are born from this tide pool.

Feeling that it would become bad for her to stay here like that, Iori started to stagger back in the direction she came from. She felt like she could escape outside through the tide pool as long as she held her breath, but she considered that to be a disadvantageous gamble.

At that moment a remarkably big, black shadow rose up, pushing out its dorsal fin through the water's surface.

"C-Come on, this isn't a Spielberg movie, now is it?"

While running as fast as she could with her shaky legs and pulling a cramped face after seeing that, Iori thought about such trivial stuff like Spielberg being not enough as it would be like The Asylum's outrageous movies if a shark were to fly out into the air next.

'If that shark is going to attack me in the same way as the first one, the only help in sight would be to jump into its mouth while holding onto a chainsaw.[efn_note]It's about Sharknado (2013) according to A/N. It's a TV drama about a large amount of sharks being blown up by a tornado, attacking while flying through the air. In the series, there's a scene where someone jumps into a shark's mouth while holding a chainsaw.[/efn_note]

Her wish to somehow not be discovered was in vain. The great white shark that seemed to be around five meters long peeked out through the water's surface, jumped into the air in the next moment, and started to chase after Iori.

She felt like she would faint if she used <Magnetic Field Manipulation> one more time, but struggling to the bitter end was Iori's credo. While fleeing, she tightly grasped the charm knife her brother had forced on her.

"Get down!!"

At that moment, Iori heard such a voice from her front. Iori reflexively laid herself on the ground, following the voice's call, hearing the sound of guns being fired intermittently from the front.

As she was laying down as if clinging to the ground, holding the back of her head, the gunshots stopped soon, and someone called out to her, asking whether she was okay. When she slowly lifted her face, she found a boorish but reliable-looking man kneeling while looking her way in worry.

Iori clung to the man while trembling in fear, and then let out a cry and started to sob.

"Ooh, captain, what a nice side benefit."

"You held out well all by yourself. You must have been anxious."

I see, I was anxious, wasn't I?

At that moment, Iori understood her own feelings for the first time. As she stayed like that for a while, the troops that headed up to the tide pool room came back.

"It looks like there's a dead end on the other side. If it means that the dungeon is limited to just this cave, we should have visited all places with this, but..."

But, it didn't look as if the dungeon had been completely cleared.

"The boss should be somewhere..."

"If it's on the other side of that tide pool, we have to give up for now."

It's probably because none of them has underwater equipment such as scuba. Once Iori accidentally looked to the side, there was someone who was paying undue attention to the

direction she came from with a very unsettled look.

"Captain, we should go back right away. It might be too late already, but still, right now!"

"Calm down, Seruhio. Why are you so panicked?"

"Captain, this guy has been like that all the time since seeing the skeleton at the place we came from. I think he got cold feet?"

"Yeah! I'm terrified! You guys are so calm because you don't know what that was!"

"Just what is it you're saying?" Hagane asked Seruhio.

'Seruhio is an excellent team member. However, his state has been too weird since a while ago.

"Didn't I explain it at the briefing!? It's just as said! Anyway, hurry. Let's quickly get out of here!"

Hagane was puzzled by his strange behavior, but there was certainly no reason to stick around here any longer. After all, the target had been secured.

"No helping it. We will begin retreating."

"Roger!"

"The exit was in the opposite direction, wasn't it? I thought that it might be a dead end since the passage became narrow." While walking together with everyone, Iori asked Hagane who had been walking next to her.

"It's a place one person can barely pass through alone. If you had only known that, you would actually be at the exit around now." Hagane said with a smile. It was a smile that seemed to give others a peace of mind.

Iori finally sensed a feeling that she had been rescued well up in her.

"Look, if we go around this corner, we'll find that, which scared the shit out of Seruhio, won't we?"

A man with a slightly frivolous feel teased the man who was excessively anxious — Seruhio. Seemingly not having even heard that banter, Seruhio restlessly looked around him with frightened eyes.

"Hey, give it a rest, Kaiba." A bespectacled man, who seemed to be the serious type, said to the frivolous man.

"There was an altar-like place, and I think the corpses, which received a cave burial, are in a state of waiting for the washing of their bones, but after all is said and done, they belong to humans. I think it would be best to contact the police, just in case."

"...Those aren't anything—" Seruhio, who was about to finish with "like that," loudly swallowed his breath.

"Leading Private?"

A young man, who had been walking in front, turned back over his shoulder towards Seruhio, obviously worried about him, and then followed his gaze. But the man's action of turning his head back to the front never finished.

"S-Saito?"

Another man was dumbfounded for an instant, seeing the head of the man, who had been walking diagonally in front of him, having disappeared, but in the next moment, he began to shoot his gun as if having gone mad.

"Hey! What's—"

At the time when Hagane tried to ask what had happened, the upper body of Private First-Class Shimabukuro, who had fired the gun, burst open. And then pure terror peeked out from the place where the path took a corner.

"Get down!" Hagane's voice breathed life into everyone that had survived.

What showed up had been moving slowly so far. Its upper body seemed to be the skeleton that had been enshrined on the altar. Right now, a light brown membrane wrapped up the skeleton like a dried-up skin. Its head was unruly covered by white, thin hair, similar to the silken threads spit out by silkworms. Its lower body half had transformed into something like a fish's tail fin. It was as if—

"The mummy of a merman!?"

"Captain, is this guy this dungeon's boss?"

"Probably. However, it's far beyond the level of what should be found in a one-cave-only dungeon like this. Just what the hell is going on here?"

'Shimabukuro had shot his Howa[efn_note]Howa Type 89 Assault Rifle according to author's note[/efn_note] on full auto. No matter how shaken he might have felt, most of the shots should have hit at this short distance. And yet the thing in front of us is moving as if having felt no pain at all.

"That's why I warned you, didn't I...? I told you this is a place inhabited by the abandoned, mourning gods! Now...now it's all too late..." Seruhio said with a shrill voice while tearing up.

"So what? Are you saying that thing over there is a collaboration work between the dungeon and the mourning gods?"

"Mr. Seruhio, tell me, why are you so well-informed about all of this?" Iori faced Seruhio, who had completely lost his fighting will while holding his head.

"Eh? My granma was a yuta who soothed the gods here."

A yuta was a kind of shaman. You could say, if noro were the priestesses governing over religious ceremonies, yuta were unofficial spiritualists. As there apparently was a period where yuta suffered persecution because of their role, the yuta themselves seemed to have a tendency to avoid revealing that they were yuta.

"Granma told me that she had a conversation with something inside a forest in her childhood. After she married and gave birth to my mother, she was on the verge of dying from illness, and that's when she told me that she had become a yuta to console the something she had spoken to in the past."

"Then, that was your grandmother's friend, wasn't it?" Iori asked while shifting her eyes towards the merman mummy that was slowly drawing closer to them.

"I don't know, I really don't! But, what's only clear is the thing's hate towards humans!"

After all it had been abandoned in the tiral while a god dwelt in its body since they didn't like the god inhabiting it.

"I don't know whether it's the grudge of that god or the person who was turned into the god's vessel. But, for our fate either will bring about the same outcome." Seruhio dropped his shoulders in resignation, donning an expression of already having given up on life.

Hagane listened to Sawatari's report while casting a sidelong glance at Seruhio.

"As far as visible from Shimabukuro's case, the Howa doesn't seem to be a match for it."

Sawatari dealing with things calmly even at such a time was reliable, but Hagane had noticed that his hands were shaking faintly.

"If it comes to equipment besides the Howa on this dispatch——"

"Captain Hagane, you have two MK3s[efn_note]Author's note: The MK3 is a hand grenade. It's a very small hand grenade with an effective radius of two meters, the type that kills and wounds through the shockwave of the explosion[/efn_note]. As for 06s[efn_note]22 mm grenade that can be used together with the 89 Howa assault rifle[/efn_note], we have four shots in total with each of us others having one."

"Captain Hagane, I still haven't had my fill of playing with girls, so please come up with some kind of ingenious plan allowing us to return alive! Fuck, I'm so nervous that I'm going to pull the trigger at any time!" Kaiba's hoarse voice skilfully managed to calm down the place with his usual, casual style.

'Defeating that with our current gear is impossible.' Hagane said while resolving himself for the worst, "Alright, we're going to quietly retreat. In case we get attacked, we will retreat while plastering the enemy with a barrage. Once we enter the tide pool room, we will move to a corner next to the entrance. Once that thing enters the room, we will push it back by everyone shooting 06s at it simultaneously, and then we will escape into the passage. Afterwards, we will escape in a beeline."

"What are we going to do if it doesn't get pushed back by the 06s?" Sawatari asked.

Hagane shrugged his shoulders while answering, "Then we won't have any other choice but ram it with all of us."

Hearing that, Sawatari chuckled and replied, "I'm kind of bad at Sumo, though."

Hagane turned his face to Iori, and instructed her with a serious expression, "Listen, if that thing has moved back to the other side of the entrance, you will run towards the entrance without any hesitation."

"Got it."

Saying so, Hagane's group, who took up camp in a corner of the room, adopted a shooting formation.

Once a part of the monster vaguely showed itself from the entrance, "Get ready!"

"Get ready to shoot!"

And when its body fully entered the room, Sergeant Hagane shouted, "Fire!"

Four rifle grenades were shot out alongside his yell. The four grenades fully hit the monster's head and body, and exploded. But——

"Not a single scratch..!?"

The monster moved back a bit, but it didn't look as if it had suffered any significant damage.

Now that it has reached this stage, it couldn't be helped. Hagane's unit decided to focus on at least allowing Iori to get away.

"We will lure this guy to a corner deeper inside the room while we still have its attention. You make sure to escape outside through the entrance during that time."

"Eh? What about you guys then?"

"Our duty is to protect the lives of the citizens."

"No way..."

"Don't worry. We won't be finished off so easily." Hagane said with a friendly smile while tapping Iori's shoulder. "Okay, let's get this started."

The five of them moved in order to lure the monster deeper inside the room while firing their guns in burst mode. And just as planned, Iori arrived at the room's entrance when the monster had left.

Seeing that, Hagane's unit felt relieved despite being in such a situation. They had been able to

accomplish the minimum objective of their mission.

"Well, doesn't it look like the mission will work out one way or another?"

"It kind of sucks if we get annihilated, don't you think?"

"At the end, scatter, and run away while passing on both its sides."

"We coulda jump into that pool over there?" Kaiba said while pointing at the shining, blue water surface.

"I don't mind, but you're confident that you can swim faster than a merman?"

"Ah, I guess it's the fate of a hunk to get chased after all, huh?"

"Who's a hunk here?"

Them trash-talking with each other in front of death was probably because they had accepted their fate, or maybe because their personal experiences related to death were rather shallow.

"Don't look back, even if someone gets done in. Run while only thinking about your own life."

"Roger!"

When they glared at the monster in order to resolve themselves, Hagane and his men were shocked to see Iori stand on the other side.

"What is she doing, that girl!?!"



Standing at the entrance, Iori spoke to the monster she faced while strongly grasping her brother's knife.

"You have probably many things you want to say."

"Hey! What're you doing! Hurry up and run away!"

Iori continued speaking as if not having heard the voice at all.

"But, we have our own circumstances to deal with. Though I certainly believe that you've been treated cruelly while having been left summoned here like this."

Due to the excessively powerful, focused magnetic force that took all her might to control, the surrounding pebbles with magnetic elements had started to fly up.

"C-Captain...t-this is?"

The somewhat large survival knife, which Iori had held, floated next to her while trembling repeatedly.

"Your cherished friends have left this world long ago...you ought to return to your own world now as well."

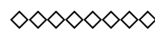
As if responding to that, the monsters turned around in Iori's direction, widely opened its mouth full of fangs, and screamed soundlessly.

"I'm sorry, okay?" The instant she said so, something was fired towards the monster along a loud bang, blowing the monster's upper body into smithereens with a sonic boom.

In front of Hagane's team, who had watched that spectacle in mute amazement, the broken bones continued to drop into the water with splashes, and the merman's lower body turned into black light, melting into the blue light emitted by the water's surface.

The tiral is a boundary connecting this world with the netherworld. I'm sure they will be able to return to their original place if it's through the ocean located deeper inside.

Iori was engulfed by a mysterious feeling of satisfaction while sensing how her own consciousness suddenly melted with darkness.



'If he has experienced something similar to what I have, it wouldn't be strange for him to possess some kind of powerful ability — similar to the one created through a skill orb,' Iori believed.

"You, are you possibly——"

"Lieutenant Kimitsu!"

"Look, everyone from your team is calling you." Yoshimura said to Iori as if grabbing the godsend opportunity to get out of this.

Iori fixedly stared at his face, but then showed a smile all of a sudden, saying, "Then I will have you tell me your story next time," and then ran after her teammates.

"Eeehh?"

Tell her, she says. I wonder just what does she intend to talk about with me. Getting involved with the top explorer of the JSDF is something I kind of...no, definitely don't want, though.

Once Yoshimura reassessed his own appearance, and then went back to his new home without diving into the dungeon before being told something similar by someone else.

§028 Forum 【Just from where?】 D-Powers 69 【Are they procuring them?】 11/13 (Tue)

1: Unknown Explorer ID:P12xx-xxxx-xxxx-0944

That party with the weird name, D-Powers, which suddenly popped up, seems to have already started the orb auction.

Are they crooks? Or saviors of the world?

Next thread at 930 posts.

2:Unknown Explorer

Hi. ID means auction lol[efn_note]This starts a stupid pun on the ID number of poster 1 which ends at 0944, using different ways how to spell numbers in Japanese. Auction is written as オーク (oku) ション (shon), in other words: O-Ku-Shon.[/efn_note]

3:Unknown Explorer

Yo. Come on, not even two weeks have passed since the last time. And yet another one... Just where the hell do they get all those orbs??

Like how!? Except for 09 it doesn't fit, does it? >2[efn_note]Continuation of previous T/N: オーク (o-ku) = 09[/efn_note]

4:Unknown Explorer

Moreover, High Recovery. It's not even listed in JDA's database.

5:Unknown Explorer

Another unknown orb?

6:Unknown Explorer

It's "Fourfour," so Fourtyfour minus ty >3 [efn_note]We start with "auction" second part - ション (shon). The "Fourfour" in Japanese is しーしー (Shishi). Now you can also read 4 (shi) as yon, so it's 4(shi)+4(yon) = Shon + some extra, which is why I went with fourtyfour. ;-)[/efn_note]

7:Unknown Explorer

I mean, it's been 4 orbs per year even in a dungeon of Yoyogi's size, no? 4 orbs every 2 weeks is weird, no matter how you spin it.

We don't know how long they needed to collect the first 4, but another 4 in 2 weeks is bullshit.

8:Unknown Explorer

Well, even if you say so now. They're running the auction already. Maybe the black market or something?

Die rofl >6 [efn_note]Another pun on the number four. 氏ね (shi-ne) can also be read as “Die”. By the way, as final note to this whole numbers pun. In the Web version, the author pulls something similar, using the game Dragonhearts and a character in No. XIV (Shion). Numbers I can understand, game references not, so I went with the LN version.[/efn_note]

9:Unknown Explorer

As if you'd find something like that anywhere.

10:Unknown Explorer

Maybe the JDA got some secret organization? Kind of like 7D∀

11:Unknown Explorer

That one was really cool, Seven D Turn.[efn_note]Looks to be a reference to Turn A Gundam, but I don't know that series...xD[/efn_note]

12:Unknown Explorer

Stocked up, eh? I mean, even for a team like Simon's 4 in 2 weeks is impossible, right? Even 1 in 2 months is a challenge.

Seven D Turn rocks!

13:Unknown Explorer

Maybe they got some skill like copy-and-paste?

14:Unknown Explorer

Dude, this ain't no light novel.

15:Unknown Explorer

How about alchemy?

16:Unknown Explorer

They got 10 teams at Simon's team's level frantically running about or something?

17:Unknown Explorer

We already established that it wouldn't work with those numbers.

>16

18:Unknown Explorer

What's strange about D-Powers is that they haven't been selling any of the dungeon-native items like potions, which should drop a lot more often albeit being rare, despite freely dishing out this many ultra-rare orbs.

19:Unknown Explorer

That's something others would be able to achieve as well. Besides, they won't bring as much cash as orbs, right?

20:Unknown Explorer

After all they are the one and only seller.
Even if we could get our hands on an orb for argument's sake, we still wouldn't be able to imitate them.

21:Unknown Explorer

Right now it's impossible for any organization, all over the globe.

22:Unknown Explorer

Won't the intelligence agencies of America, Russia, China, and Israel show up to investigate their secret anytime soon?

23:Unknown Explorer

You're watching too many movies.

24:Unknown Explorer

You sure? It looks like they're already on the move due to the last time, though.

25:Unknown Explorer

You mean, truth is stranger than fiction.

26:Unknown Explorer

In the first place, since that auction, Yoyogi is filled with superstars, no?

27:Unknown Explorer

You're talking about Simon?

28:Unknown Explorer

Ah, I saw him! The aura of the real person was on a totally different level.

29:Unknown Explorer

Not just him. Looking at the Yoyo thread, it appears that Narashino's Team I was there yesterday.

30:Unknown Explorer

Iori-tan!?

31:Unknown Explorer

Oi, you people are getting way off-topic.

32:Unknown Explorer

Well, let's pray that no corpses of people involved turn up.

33:Unknown Explorer

Don't joke about this...

§029 Skill Testing 11/15 (Thu)

"Huh? Senpai, you're early."

As I open the door of our office on the first floor, Miyoshi is in the middle of eating breakfast. Or rather, I kinda feel that we don't use the dining areas in our rooms much.

"With the change in beds, my sleeping snugness instantly took a nosedive."

"So that's why you woke up early."

"Yes." [efn_note]In English[/efn_note]

"Want some breakfast? However, it's omelet."

"Yeah, thanks."

Miyoshi starts making an omelet while roasting bacon in a set with toast with nimble movements. I sit down at the dining table and blankly watch her. Isn't this kind of like being newly wed? Holy shit, just what am I thinking here. Really. While eating breakfast, I try asking Miyoshi.

"Now then, Miss Miyoshi."

"What's up?"

"Did you try out <Storage>?"

"I did. How to put it? It was a skill similar to a sleight of hand trick."

With those words, Miyoshi makes her coffee cup on the table instantly disappear and reappear again.

"Unlike your <Safe>, it seems to not stop time, senpai, but it has a somewhat neat feature."

Miyoshi snickers, brings two stop watches over from her own desk, and starts them at the same time.

She had apparently bought them at a 100-Yen-Shop for the sake of running experiments.

"So, I'm going to store this one away."

One stop watch vanishes.

"Please wait for one minute."

"It sure looks like you'd be able to bring food on the table with such magic tricks."

"You can just enter and retrieve small items. At most it'd be a magic trick at the level of a magic bar in the outskirts." [efn_note]The bar thing refers to a movie from 2014: "A Bolt from the Blue" where the protagonist works as a miserable magician at some rundown bar before being hit by a bolt of light and time slipping to 40 years ago...lol. Sounds very B-movie-like but it earned a total of 1.18 billion Yen (US\$10.6 million). xD[/efn_note]

The stopwatch, which she takes out after one minute, is 30 seconds behind the one not having been stored away.

"Delaying time by half, huh?"

"Considering it calmly, it's amazing, but going by practical use, I think it's mostly meaningless."

"No, not at all. Don't look down on doubling the expiry date of food, okay?"

"Compared to <Safe> which stops time completely, it's useless. However, controlling it will only turn into a hassle, don't you think?"

"If you judge it with <Safe> as a basis, you're right. Judging it by itself, <Storage> is awesome as well. It can even preserve orbs for two days, no?"

"Oh, I see. If you've got two days, you can transport an orb anywhere on this world in the modern era."

"Yep. However, what I want to actually know is its capacity."

The target's size and weight, as well as what can enter, and whatnot.

"Previously I said that I would test what I can put into <Safe>."

"You did."

"So, I thought that living things might be a no-go, just like the standard item box in fiction, but..."

"Eh? It worked!?"

"Yep. However, it doesn't work with humans. By the way, I tested it on you, Miyoshi."

"Eeh!? You're awful, senpai!"

"You see, I'd be in a pinch about what to do if I were to store myself away, in case humans could be put in there. So I prayed that you wouldn't enter."

If it had been possible, I might have fallen into distress due to an experiment of me entering my own <Safe>. I mean, time's stopped in there. It's very likely that I wouldn't be able to come out ever again. Of course that'd also produce the possibility of being able to see the future in a several thousand years, though.

"So, a dog and cat didn't work, but a cricket went in." I said while Miyoshi was tilting her head in confusion.

"That means, the key here is a certain level of intelligence?"

"Though, it might only exclude mammals. I'm not clear on that part yet. By the way, a fish worked, too."

"If it's intelligence, it might be possible to put me in while I'm asleep?"

"As I got no idea what's going to happen if you wake up inside, I'm too scared to test it out, but it probably won't work either way."

"Well, before that, I don't think I will wake up since time is stopped in there, but...is it related to the complexity of the nervous system or something?"

"I feel like it has to do with something more metaphysical, something like your awareness. However, since I couldn't put in slimes either, there might be some limitations in that area as well."

"It sure is a field that seems interesting to poke my nose into."

"Then again, it doesn't seem to serve any purpose if it's just interesting. Putting that aside, on the side of length, I could put in something fairly long. Since I didn't find any length that wouldn't fit for the time being, it made me wonder whether it's the mass that's restricted."

"Mass is energy, after all."

"So, starting with the conclusion, the storable weight of <Safe> is roughly between ten and twenty tons."

"How did you find out?"

"I tested it by going to the parking lot of the route buses at night."

"The heck?"

"The large route buses used in Japan are mostly models of the Aero Star series of Mitsubishi Fuso. And, those buses weigh approximately ten tons."

"So, you're saying you tried using the assembled armada of route buses as something like measuring weights in the depth of night?"

"Yep. One went in, but a second one didn't."

"Gosh, what'd you've done if you'd been discovered?" Miyoshi says while rolling her eyes, and tosses the last piece of bread into her mouth.

I'm pretty sure the fairly sweet marmalade is hand-made, but I know that it's actually made by the bakery around the corner. Miyoshi likes eating, but she's surprisingly lazy. She doesn't waste any

effort in searching for things she likes, but when it comes to making it herself, she's a total slacker. Moreover, she excuses it away with the argument that the food made by professionals is a lot tastier.

"No one would think that a bus has vanished. So, anyway, to me it feels like <Safe> is time-stop with small capacity, and <Storage> is time-delay with big capacity."

"I will test it out next time. Should I go with the route buses' parking lot as well?"

"They got twenty buses lined up over there, so it should be good for running tests. I will tell you the location later."

"Oki."

"Well, with that out of the way, it means I won't be able to transport it, if the materials for building a base camp will exceed ten tons."

"What's those materials for building a base camp?"

"I thought about building a livable space inside a container in advance, and then put it to use after taking it out of <Safe>."

"That's yet another, amazing idea from you. That of a slacker, though."

"Stop nitpicking. However, if you consider water circulation, the inside of a locked-up container seems to be quite a hassle."

"Senpai, I think it'd be better for you if you were to experience a bit of a life in the wild. So, that's why the order you mentioned the other day?"

Indeed, I asked Miyoshi to buy a camper-van.

"And, did you buy it?"

"So far as it goes, I ordered one with a body that's on stock at a famous builder in Japan, but no matter how much they hurry, it won't be available before the 21st November."

"Well, no helping it, I suppose. That means, the search for the orb in question will have to wait until then. In the meanwhile I will steadily work on my reputation as slime killer."

"I wonder whether you won't soon level up to 『Archenemy of Slimes』 or something."

"Nah, I don't need that title. Or rather, you can level up to titles?"

"I hear it's a second name, but...a title. But then again, even if it was displayed, I don't know whether you can distinguish skill names from titles."

Well, it's because the skill names are simply lined up on the D-Card.

"However, won't you be eaten by a slime or something while asleep?"

"Wire communication doesn't work at YoyoDun because the cables will be severed in the first floor's slime area no matter how you lay it out, right? It looks like there's not that many slimes in the lower floors, and since it's not going to be a cable with a non-existing defense value, I think I'll be fine if it's just overnight."

"In that case, I suppose the problem will be the time when it gets attacked by a monster. The van's body is like paper for them."

"Right? It makes you want to put it into a titanium box."

"For the time being, I told them to reinforce it by affixing metal sheets to it."

"You pulling a Mad Max there!?"

"They told me that it wouldn't pass the vehicle inspection, but it's fine even if it can't be driven normally, right?"

"Well yeah. Next would be water...? How did it go with <Water Magic>?"

"I could create as much water as I wanted. It gushed out like a fountain."

"Did it look drinkable to you?"

"Umm, to make it short, it's pure water. You can drink it, but it won't taste well. Also, I don't know when it becomes unusable."

"Well, it's magic after all...I guess we gotta buy mineral water in a box, just in case."

"I will make an order for around 100 boxes on Amazon."

"That's 1200 kg ++, I'd say. Roger."

"Next is food."

"Isn't it fine to stuff your <Safe> with around a thousand bento sets, senpai?"

"For just how long do you think I'm going to dive!?"

"Won't it be until you find the orb?"

"Not with me. For starters, it'll be seven to ten days, I'd say."

"Isn't it kind of impossible to kill a hundred shamans in that time?"

"About that, I've been wondering whether it won't be okay to kill the shaman as 100th, seeing how all of them will be members of the Moon Clan."

"What if that doesn't work?"

"I'm going to come back home in low spirits."

"You live up to your reputation, senpai."

Miyoshi starts tidying up while laughing.

Bento, bento, eh...? I guess I will go to the basement of the department store^[efn_note]That's where the foodstuff is usually sold^[/efn_note], and buy up all the daily dishes they got. It'd sure be nice if they had freshly-made ones as well.

§030 Impatient Bid Winner 11/16 (Fri)

Today's the day after the second auction. The deadline was midnight Japanese time. Since I'm kinda curious how it turned out, I go down to the office early in the morning, but the lights are already on with Miyoshi apparently doing something.

"Ah, good morning."

"Mornin'. You're up early. Did you pull an all-nighter?"

"Well, yes. I went over the code of the previous status measurement for a bit."

"Oh, oh, I guess I can't laugh at the evilness of our previous workplace anymore."

"The part about it being beneficial for the whole is different, though."

"Well, you're right there."

Miyoshi's hands stop flying across her notebook's keyboard, and she starts to pour herself some coffee.

"So, you're going to raise your status before diving, right senpai?"

Ah, she's right. Now that I think about it, I haven't touched my status ever since the previous examination.

But then again, since status isn't really needed for Bounce♪ Pssh♪ Bam♪, I haven't paid any attention to it.

"You're right, it might actually be better as a safety precaution."

"In that case, how about getting it measured up to 100 in increments of 10?"

How's the measurement going to change if the values become big. I'm sure interested in that part.

"After rounding the stats up to 30, increase them in steps of 10 to 100...that's 43 measurements? Hmm, we won't be able to measure this value range ever again, so wanna have a go?"

"Please, the more basic data, the better it is!"

"43 times, means roughly 90,000,000 Yen, huh? Yep, I sure feel like our money sense has gone haywire since the other day."

"Maybe. Our funds will be alright, though."

"I see. I'm going to play around with slimes for a little bit, and get the skills checked as well while at it."

"Sure."

Miyoshi swiftly sends an email. Probably to Midori-senpai's place.

"Also, senpai."

"Yeah?"

"I want to invest in Midori-senpai's company, but what's your take on it?"

"Invest?"

According to Miyoshi, she has tried to extract the measurement values that seem essential from the last examination data, so she wants them to build a prototype of a measurement device based on that data.

"Just a simple device?"

"Yes. Later, we will measure you using that device, and I will adjust the model so that we can quantify the values."

In my eyes it's a task that appears to be suited for an AI, but I'm the only one who clearly knows the numerical values. That's why measuring a great number of people and feeding the patterns to an AI isn't quite possible.

Because we have no choice but to rely on a heuristic tuning for the time being, we gotta depend on Miyoshi's skill.

"That's fine with me, but if you're going to develop such a device, it will be copied in no time."

"Right? Because of that I want to set up the terminal part to only consist of a simple sensor, a value panel, and a communication option."

"Kind of like the voice recognition of Google or Amazon?"

"Yep. The measured data will be sent to a central database, and the terminal will just receive the

result and display it."

In such a case it won't be possible to analyze the underlying software.

It will likely be possible to deduct it recursively from the result after allotting various values, but we just gotta cut off illegal access then. It will make building something similar quite the hurdle, I think.

"Are you going to rent a cloud somewhere?"

"If I did that, it would make a leak possible. We will use Amazon's SWS for the transceiver part and the preceding calculations, but we're going to use the computers at the office to run the final calculations for the result."

"Is our line going to hold out?"

"It's not like there'll be this much access at first, and bandwidth is unnecessary, too. Won't it be alright if we lay out around 10 lines of 1-GB and 10-GB cables for consumers?"

"That sounds like a test setup, doesn't it?"

"If it goes according to plan and yields profit, we just have to make a contract for a proper private line."

"Okay."

"Besides, with this setup, it'll also work as camouflage."

"Camouflage?"

"Senpai...don't you understand? If this device is going to be sold commonly, you will get measured as well."

Oh, I got it! Moreover, it will be displayed with the highest precision exactly because it's based on a model, right!?

"Guh, I didn't think of that at all... However, will recognition of individuals be possible?"

"The data is based on you, senpai. Putting aside other people, I think that you might be the only one capable of that."

"In that case, I'm looking forward to your work. Still, the device will be in the shape of glasses, huh?"

"What's up with that assumption? You vying for a Scouter?" [efn_note]The one from Dragon Ball, to measure power levels[/efn_note]

"Correct. It's cool, right?"

"You could say so, but that will allow for people to secretly scan others all over the place."

"Won't it be just fine if we lower the accuracy and show something like an integrated value? Kind of like a toy."

"Toy? You know, it'll be a tool that will equally quantify humans...it might be convenient, but it'd be great if it doesn't lead to discrimination."

"...You're right, I'd absolutely hate to be told 『A combat power...of a measly 5, eh? ...You trash...』." [efn_note]A line by Raditz, Son Goku's elder brother[/efn_note]

"Messing around with that'd be definitely popular, don't you think?"

Aye, it'll likely be popular. I would do it as well, for sure.

"...Let's put a stop to a Scouter-shaped toy, after all."

"Yep. Isn't it fine to go with a speed gun type for simple measurements, and a stationary version for precise measurements. The data communication will run over wi-fi with a SIM."

"That's good, I think. Sounds like it'll come cheap."

But, investment, huh?

"You wanting to invest means it won't be a loan, right? An increase of capital will be difficult if we don't know what's going on with the stocks of Ms. Midori's place. Since she mentioned something about VC (Venture Capital), she might feel up to it, though."

"If I remember correctly, there shouldn't have been an increase in capital at all, so I think the face value should be 1,000 stocks for 10,000 Yen."

"It'll be simple if Ms. Midori is the only stockholder, but if an university or a laboratory holds some stocks as well, it's quite possible that there'll be a dispute over the stock rate. Since there's isn't that much of a common ground with their current work, it might be better to form a special joint venture."

"I will try to talk it over a bit with Midori-senpai, including that part as well. How much money can I use?"

"Putting aside the final investment sum, around a billion would be okay for starters. Having said that, I think it should be on the condition that they'll first prioritize the development of a prototype that would incorporate just the sensor related to the quantification."

"Sure thing. I will discuss it later with her."

"I'm leaving it to you. Well then, I guess I will continue frequenting the dungeon to earn the funds... Ah, speaking of funds, how did the auction go?"

Man, I totally forgot, even though that's the reason why I got up early in the first place.

"<Physical Resistance>, which I can only consider as plain, is surprisingly popular."

2,422,000,000 JPY

2,658,000,000 JPY

2,855,000,000 JPY

Not to mention the prices, the three <Physical Resistance> have amazing winning bidders. Simon of the US, Huang of CN (China), and Wiliam of GB (United Kingdom) - in other words ranks three, four and six in the world.

Since ranks five, seven and eight are all members of Team Simon, it'll be a line-up of all stars, except for the rank two Dmitrij, if those guys come to pick up their orbs.

Of course it'll likely be paid out of the respective nation's military budget, but it was truly a contest between single digits.

"All of them are high-ranking. Well, they are experiencing situations that would make them consider that skill necessary, I suppose. By the way, I wonder what'll happen if you use the same skill twice?"

"Want to try it out?"

Hmm, I think it's okay to do so, but I'd hate it if it turns into trouble because we pointlessly tested it...

"Well, let's do so eventually once the need arises."

I believe it should be okay if we try it with a skill that's unlikely to cause much of an issue even if overlapping skills causes problems. Some kind of detection skill or such.

At that point, Miyoshi's smartphone rang.

"It looks like Midori-senpai has woken up..."

Miyoshi informs me after reading the email.

"They don't have enough reagents to do 43 runs, she says. She will place an order and wants to know whether the 19th will be okay."

"Monday? Sure, give her an okay."

"Okidoki. Ah, about <High Recovery>..."

"Something wrong?"

"I wonder who has placed the bid on this?"

Saying so, Miyoshi shows me the winning bid screen of <High Recovery>.

5,543,000,000 JPY

"5.5 billion!? What's the ID?"

"Looking it up normally, I didn't get a hit. The one competing against it were non-personal IDs, but the ID that won enters the personal category. Maybe it's a proxy?"

"In other words, you're saying it's not a famous soldier, nor a dungeon capturing organization or a company?"

"Correct. But then again, we won't know anything if it's a proxy."

"Since we're keeping the IDs private now, there's no point in using a proxy for winning the bids, is there?"

"I've got a slightly bad feeling about this one."

"What kind of?"

"This is called <High Recovery>, right? Moreover, it's an unknown skill with an unclear effect."

"So?"

"I kind of think...that an amazingly rich person with a family member, who got an incurable disease or something like that, has bid on it."

"What if this skill had no effect on the illness?"

"We will earn an unjustified resentment, no? Furthermore, such people have a tendency to hold pointlessly big authority."

Now that she mentions it, I feel that it might be very likely.

"Which reminds me, what kind of function did <High Recovery> have again?"

"I just know the rough outline. But, it keeps up the condition of your body. Even if you pull an all-nighter, you won't feel much of an exhaustion in proportion to how careful you are."

"That sounds like quite the dangerous drug, doesn't it?"

"In addition..."

With those words, Miyoshi retrieves a box cutter from a drawer of her desk, and abruptly cuts her fingertip.

"Hey!"

"Now, now, senpai. Please take a look."

Once she gently wipes the blood off her fingertip with a tissue while casting a sidelong glance at me, who's flustered, the cut, which should be visible there, is nowhere to be found, and there isn't even the faintest scar left.

"Ehhh!?"

"Yesterday I noticed it when I scratched my arm at a nail protruding out of a berm's signboard after dodging a car. I don't know what will happen if it's a big injury, but...I feel like I'm gradually stopping to be a human."

"...An item that seems to take humanity to the next level, huh?"

Unintentionally the description, which is commonly used for skill orbs, escapes my mouth.

"On top of it, that person appears to be in quite a hurry. The day appointed for them to receive it is today."

"Today!? Like from now on?"

That means they came to Tokyo before winning the bid, assuming they don't live here. Their motivation is on a completely different level.

It makes me think that the guy, who's going to use it, might be about to die...

"Yep, we have agreed on 10 o'clock."

"Unbelievable! What did they plan to do if the auction had dragged on? Wait, isn't that less than three hours from now!?"

We hurry our preparations in order to head over to Ichigaya.

§031 Request (First Part) 11/16 (Fri)

"This is Sir Ahmed who won the bid for the orb."

The man introduced by another middle-aged, slender man, who looks like a butler and totally appears to be an Anglo-Saxon, is in his forties and has a handsome beard that covers almost his full face while wearing an expensive-looking suit.

That Ahmed silently bows towards us.

Next to him, a woman, who sits in a wheelchair and wears a mask that makes me vividly remember the Phantom of the Opera, quietly and modestly casts her face down.

Miyoshi's intuition might have been on the spot. Even as I think so, I wrack my brain in puzzlement.

That's because a potion should get the job done if it's merely external wounds, without the need to use an orb that's like taking a gamble.

The formalities for selling the orb finish without problems with Ms. Naruse acting as the JDA's guarantor.

However, taking Ms. Naruse's announcement for the deal to have finished as a signal, the butler-like man suddenly speaks up to us.

"Mr. Ahmed has another request for you people."

"Request?"

I dubiously look at Ms. Naruse.

She shakes her head, indicating that she has no idea, and takes charge of the talk.

"Excuse me, but the orb sale has come to an end. Was there any problem with it?"

The butler-like man starts to quickly talk about something with Ahmed.

(Miyoshi, what language is that?)

(I think that it might be Hindi, but...then again not, maybe?)

"It's Marathi." The woman in the wheelchair, who has been silent until then, explains.

"Eh? That means you understand Japanese?"

"A bit."

After answering, she then adds 『English might suit me better』 in English.

Miyoshi, who had quickly gone on the corridor to google it, tells me, "Marathi is one of the official languages of India and seems to have around 90 million speakers."

English is practically India's official language, so I guess it's only normal for her to be better at it

than Japanese.

I reply in English 『I'm better at Japanese』.

"Makes sense."

"So, what are they arguing about over there?"

"Dungeon. Want take along."

"Huh?"

Seemingly thinking that I didn't grasp the meaning, she restates it in English.

『My father would like you to take me along into a dungeon.』

Wut?

"Miyoshi, I heard her say that she wants us to take her into a dungeon, but..."

"I'm sorry to tell you, but I heard the same."

Take an injured person, who can't move properly, into a dungeon? Isn't it much safer and better to request something like that from the army?

『Why would you request something like that?』

『That's an easy one. I don't owe a Dungeon Card.』

Upon hearing those words, we become speechless.

There's almost no doubt that Ahmed is trying to use that <High Recovery> orb on her.

However, the planned user has no D-Card?

『P-Please wait a moment.』

I drag Miyoshi to a corner of the room. The butler-like man, Ahmed, and Ms. Naruse are still arguing back and forth about various matters.

"Miyoshi, what's your take on this?"



"Being suddenly told to acquire a D-Card within 24 hours for her is impossible, if you go by common sense."

"Right?"

"Now that they've brought this topic up in this place, I wonder whether they don't have some kind of aim."

"About that, how does that butler-styled guy look to you? Isn't he acting somewhat arrogantly?"

"True. I've probably got an idea, but it's just a guess."

"Try saying it."

"Doesn't he smell of being an American or Great Britain agent?"

"Going by his pronunciation, and the fact that he can speak that Marathi or whatever, he's related to Great Britain?"

"It's possible. We haven't revealed anything on the orb preservation technology, have we?"

"We've been insisting on it being coincidence."

"What, so it looks like it's their own problem."

"They have already confirmed the orb count. If we were to accept this request here and handed over the orb after more than 24 hours passed, wouldn't it be like making it obvious that we can preserve orbs?"

Indeed. I don't really know whether they try to be clever or cunning here, but it might be a good method, if it's just about confirming that we can preserve orbs. But then again, all will be over if we don't take up that request.

"You think Mr. Ahmed is involved in that machination?"

"I don't know, but I also sense that he really wants to cure his daughter with all his heart."

Seeing Mr. Ahmed, who's heatedly discussing on the other side, and his daughter, who's quietly sitting in her wheelchair, I feel like agreeing with Miyoshi.

"There's also the option that we might make the other party let this orb vanish, and palm off another one to them..."

"Eh? The orb you used a few days ago was the last one, senpai..."

"The cooldown time is twelve days, so I should be able to get a new one anytime soon."

"Well, I guess that option exists as well then. However, either way it'll mean that it's necessary to have her obtain a D-Card, but can you actually do that?" Miyoshi says while glancing fleetingly at the woman.

The D-Card is something you will obtain when you defeat a monster for the first time.

That's the only rule to acquire the card, but there's a single, strict requirement: You have to defeat the monster with your own effort.

That requirement has been thoroughly verified on the acquisition tours that had been popular for a period of time.

There were many traders who killed monsters from a relatively safe distance by mostly using guns on such tours, but only affixing the gun to something or getting help from others was already enough to fail the acquisition. On the contrary, even having someone else load the bullet was already a no go. Because it won't work if the target monster shifts its aggro to someone else, raising and gathering aggro on yourself is impossible as well.

Also, since traps must be completely handled from the planting to the activation by one person, you will also run into time constraints. Still, it's not necessary to go as far as building the tool you're going to use.

It's a limitation that seems harsh on a first look, but it's not that much of an obstacle to a healthy person. After all there are also weak monsters in dungeons. However, she's...

I go back to her, and directly ask, 『What's the problem with your health?』

For a second she's puzzled by the overly straight question, but then she immediately answers, 『It's primarily my right body half. I'm missing the right hand from the middle of the upper arm, the left hand from the end of the forearm, and the right leg from above the knee. My left leg is fine. I'm lucky that the left side of my face is still left.』

『Accident?』

『Well, yeah.』

『If you can buy this orb, a potion shouldn't be a problem, no?』

『A potion has already stabilized this body, but I'm told it can't restore the missing parts.』

『An accident in the past, huh? It sounds cruel, but if you use a potion once more after removing the arms...』

『It's different when limbs, that had been torn to shreds, are still attached, but a potion that would grow a new limb out of nothing isn't available to civilians, even if it might exist.』

Most things in this world can be bought with money. However, there's no way to buy something that doesn't exist, no matter how much money you throw at it.

Even the first high-level potion use, which was a sensation, was ultimately a restoration type.

Most of the body was present, and it only attached and restored the parts that were severed by a monster's jaw. But it's not like it caused the whole lower body to grow back.

『Come to think of it, what's your name? I'm Yoshimura Keigo.』

『Ayesha. It's sarcastic, isn't it?』

『What is?』

『It means hope.』

After hearing that remark, I decided.

"Say, Miyoshi."

"What's up?"

"I want to take her along into a dungeon."

"Well, that's very like you, isn't it senpai? You have a soft spot for beauties."

Beauties? Now that she mentions it, the left half of her face is pretty.

She has a bit of a resemblance with Katrina Kaif in her early days. Probably because she's biracial. Having heard our conversation, she looks up our way with surprise dyeing her face.

"So, how are you going to get her to kill a monster?"

"It's going to work with boots that have thick iron plates attached at their soles, and a broad, somewhat long plastic straw, won't it?"

"Haah...I guess there's no other way. I will get things ready at once." Miyoshi said and sneaked out of the room to make a call.

『You really intend to accept the request? Even though we were turned town by India's and the Great Britain's military?』

Great Britain's military? Oh, I get it.

But well, it's probably normal for them to turn it down. If things were to go badly, not only her life might be in danger, but even the lives of those around her. After all, it's impossible for others to hold down the target monster. Of course anesthesia and such is out of the question as well.

『Mmh, you can just leave it to us. It'll be slightly better than traps.』

『I see.』

I feel that I have seen her smile for the first time just now.
Now then, the issue here is time.

『However, seeing as we've got almost no time, I'd like you to absolutely follow what I'm going to tell you from now on.』

『Even if you were to tell me to get naked and spread my legs?』

『...Yep. But then again, if I were to make such demand, I'd probably get killed by the people

talking over there, so I can't talk about anything as fun as that. Unfortunately.』

『Got it, I will leave it to you, Kaygo.』

『That'll be a help.』

I walk up to Ms. Naruse, and ask, "So, what's going on?"

"Oh, Mr. Yoshimura. It looks like they want you to take her along to a dungeon by all means. Since that in itself is completely unrelated to the deal, they are completely devoted to requesting it from you, even after I explained that they can't force you into it."

"Okay."

"Shri. Ahmed"

There was a term corresponding to mister in the list Miyoshi had shown me. I don't know about the pronunciation, but 'shiri' should probably be correct.

Mr. Ahmed slightly lifts an eyebrow.

"Mr. Yoshimura, if it's talking, I can—" The slender, butler-like man cuts in, but I casually shoot him down.

"Since the orb trade has finished, your job is over. I will speak about the rest with Mr. Ahmed in person. Thanks for your good work."

"Huh? No, that's not it."

"Ms. Naruse, can we use the neighboring, small conference room?"

"Eh? Sure, right away."

I had previously heard from Ms. Naruse that the JDA's small conference room is completely isolated from any electromagnetic wave and has wiretapping prevention in effect.

There's no way to prevent someone from recording a conversation, but since that's possible even with cellphones, they have given up on that as inevitable. Seeing how it's a room we're going to use all of a sudden, planting something in there in advance might be difficult as well.

『Well then, Mr. Ahmed, let's go.』

With those words I forcibly move the discussion to the next room while pushing Ayesha's wheelchair.

Ms. Naruse stops the interpreter at the door, and closes it behind her, leaving only me, Ahmed, and Ayesha in the room.

『You say that you'd like us to take the lady into a dungeon to acquire a D-Card——』

『That's right.』

Mr. Ahmed addresses me directly for the first time.

『You do understand how difficult a feat that is, right?』

『I haven't considered it as an extension of the deal. It's a new request——』

『I don't know where you picked up that interpreter, you also understand that it's that kind of a problem, correct?』

『...I do.』

At that moment I feel like Mr. Ahmed's face turned from that of a businessman into that of a father.

『I will start with the conclusion. We have decided to help the lady to obtain a D-Card.』

『Really!?!』

『However, we can't guarantee that we'll be able to accomplish that in 24 hours, no, now it's around 22 hours.』

『I can relate.』

『If it doesn't work out, the orb, which you obtained by paying a large amount of money, will come to nothing——』

『Why? Didn't you develop a technology to preserve orbs?』

『Did the interpreter tell you that?』

『Yes.』

『You probably won't find such a convenient technology anywhere.』

『However, the orb count is definitely below 60.』

『That's a coincidence.』

I quietly place my index finger on top of my lips, and add, 『A coincidence.』

『Right, a coincidence. Occasionally God reveals his working, too.』

His daughter says and lifts the corners of her mouth faintly.

『We'll put all our effort in regards to the issue with the time, but even if we aren't in time, I'll immediately let you know about our plans when we acquire another one.』

『What was that?』

『Of course it'll be impossible for us to hand it over to you for free, though.』

『Well, that makes sense. So, how much are you going to take for the request of acquiring the D-Card?』

『Let's see. This is a mission impossible that would be turned down by the military of any country...I think that it might cost you quite a hefty sum of money.』

『I don't care.』

『Then, how about giving me the privilege to take our the lady for dinner, if we manage to have her safely acquire a D-Card? Of course your treat.』

Mr. Ahmed frowned, wondering whether he had misheard.

『...Is that some kind of Japanese joke?』

『Absolutely not. Ah, Hindu people were vegetarians, weren't they?』

『It depends. We are lenient, and don't mind fish. If it comes to meat, harmful animals are fine. Once in a while, that is.』

As expected of Hinduism. It's way too broad-minded. No wonder that it's difficult to sum up what kind of precepts the religion has.

"So be it then," I extend my right hand.

After he hesitates for a little moment, he grasps that hand, and returns a tight squeeze. This settles our contract.



Once I open the door, the interpreter is nowhere to be seen. Miyoshi approaches me at a quick pace, and gives me a report.

"Senpai, I have reserved a meeting space at Yoyogi, and had the change of clothes and equipment moved there. It'll all be ready in around three hours."

"Please prepare one rack with shoulder straps allowing one to carry a person. You know, the ones used during rescue missions."

"Sure thing. Are you going to carry her on your back, senpai?"

"I don't know whether the wheelchair will get stuck on something, do I? Besides, moving through a dungeon in a wheelchair is difficult."

"Somehow it's become like a spy movie. I'm totally hyped."

"Though I gotta bust your hopes that it'll have such flashy scenes..."

"True, that's the furthest thing away from a slacker."[efn_note]A TL note here from me since you'll need it a few lines down below: The way Miyoshi phrases this line is a bit obsolete as simple Japanese since she uses 遠くなりにはけり. This is a famous phrase used by the haiku poet Nakamura Kusatao lamenting over the Meiji era and falling snow having become things of the distant past (降る雪や明治は遠くなりにはけり). It's said that he wrote the poem when he visited his former elementary school as a university student on a day of heavy snowfall. It has a bit of a vibe similar to "back in the old days everything was better" but without the negative, demeaning connotation compared to nowadays, but more a melancholic reminiscence of days past.[/efn_note]

"What's with that line as if you have noticed it only now."

"No, I've been aware of it just fine."

"Isn't it just a poetic lamentation then? If you want to say that it's simply a matter of the past, it'd be 『feels distant』, right?"

"I keep telling you, those things are the reason why you're not popular with women, senpai."

Miyoshi kicks my leg while pouting as if telling me to read the mood.



Three hours later. We're in a rentable meeting room at the Yoyogi Dungeon.

Mr. Ahmed looked as though he wanted to tag along, but I have him wait in another room for VIPs. To the end, he wanted to add bodyguards to our group, but I frankly told him that they'd be in the way, and turned the offer down.

『Okay, Ayesha, please take off your artificial arm and leg, as well as everything else, and change into the clothes prepared over there.』

『Eh? Even my underwear?』

『Everything.』

『That's no different from telling me to spread my leeeegs!!』 she said, turning her bright red face downwards.

"I leave the rest to you, Miyoshi."

"That's fine with me. But, what's this about spreading legs?"

"Ah, no clue. If you're curious, ask her."

"Hoh."

I leave the room, close the door, and add a troublesome request to Ms. Naruse who has been waiting there.

"Okay then, Ms. Naruse. After we go in, please close the entrance so that no one can enter for at least five minutes."

"Huh? You're telling me to lock down the dungeon then?"

"Please cheat your way through this by saying that the entrance checker doesn't feel well, or something like that."

"You know, I feel that'll be quite the severe abuse of authority..."

"It's legal since it's a move to thwart danger. If folks from a foreign country follow us, various troubles might occur, after all."

"Haaah, I guess it can't be helped..."

"Thank you."

"Just in case I have looked it up, but no foreign explorers entered the dungeon in the last three hours here. If it's before that, several groups have gone in, though."

"Roger."

Nothing less of Ms. Naruse, she's quick.

It's three hours ago that we suddenly decided to make a dungeon trip.

No matter how excellent the secret service of Great Britain might be, they will likely find it difficult to make their Japanese collaborators move so quickly.

The door of the meeting room opens with a clank, and Miyoshi's face peeks out.

"We're ready~"

"Alright, let's go!"

At once I place Ayesha on the rescue racket, shoulder it, and descend into Yoyogi Dungeon together with her and Miyoshi.

§032 Request (Conclusion)

『Hee. So that's how it feels to be in a dungeon.』

『Yep. I told you before, but not a word to anyone about what you're going to see in here.』

『I know.』

After a few minutes, we arrive at a place where the end of a straight, long, and narrow pathway curved a bit.

Oh, found one.

At once Miyoshi spreads out a thick, cushioned sheet - carefully so as to not be targeted - in front of a jiggling monster.

『Now then, you will get down over there, draw up the liquid with this plastic straw, and powerfully blow it at the slime.』

『Eh? That's all?』

『Well yeah. Although it'll be fine if it's just a bit, make sure to not drink the contents or get it into your eyes.』

I had also considered her using a spray, but it's possible that the part of preparing it might be regarded equivalent to loading the bullet of a gun.

That's why we have chosen to go with the most primitive and reliable method. It probably won't be a problem even if she gulps it down, as long as it's just a bit.

"Miyoshi, please watch the route from the corner over there."

"Gotcha~"

Ayesha lies down face up on the sheet while wearing goggles, and then slides towards the slime by kicking off with one foot.

I stay close to her to back her up in case something happens.

Ayesha gasps heavily, 『Now, please give me the straw.』

Silently I make her hold the longish straw in her mouth.

Everything from now on must be done by her alone.

She sucks up the liquid with the straw, breathes in deeply through her nose, and powerfully blows into the straw.

The Alien's Drool that got pushed out splendidly hits the slime. Immediately following, the slime bursts and vanishes, and its core rolls on the ground. Ayesha observes that dumbfoundedly.

『What's this?』

『Amazing, right? We're calling it Alien's Drool.』

『What a terrible name.』 Ayesha bursts into laughter.

『All that's left is the core laying over there — the one looking like a round glass orb. You gotta strike it heartily with the sole of the boot you're wearing.』

『Okay.』 Ayesha says, turns her body over with a rustling, and switches to a sitting posture.

Then she aims with her left foot, and swings down her left with full power. The iron plate affixed to the sole of her boot crashes against the core, but it looks like it hasn't been destroyed completely.

"Senpai, someone came around the corner on the other side."

『Once more!』

『Oki!』

Powerfully swinging down her leg once more, she precisely hits the core, causing it to be smashed. Once it resolves into something similar to the usual black light, a dull, silver card is left behind.

『Congratulations.』

I pick up the card, and show it to her.

『T-Thanks. Can I use the orb with this?』

『Yes, you can.』

Once I reply to her, Ayesha puts her arm around my neck and mutters, "Thanks," many times over.

『Hey, you okay over there?』

I hear native English from behind me.

『Is there anything we can help you with?』 Miyoshi answers that.

『No, we just came here to check after noticing that someone was here. If you like, we will escort you?』

A frivolous man, who peeks this way while saying so, says, 『Oh, somehow it looks like you're in the middle of something』.

『No, it's appreciated, but we're already pulling out. Feel free to concentrate on your own adventure.』

I put my arms around Ayesha's waist, make her sit down on the rescue racket, and lift it up with a "Heave-ho."

Miyoshi quickly cleans the sheet and straw away.

『What, so you were injured after all?』

『No. It's none of your business. Bye.』

With those words, Miyoshi and I quickly leave the two foreigners behind.

"It looks like they followed us, doesn't it?"

"Well, I guess so. Right, Miyoshi, give me that."

In response, Miyoshi takes out an orb from her pouch.
It's the <High Recovery> orb her father entrusted us with.

『There's the common saying that using an orb in a dungeon works better. Wanna have a try?』

She considers it for a bit, but nods immediately, and touches the orb held out by Miyoshi with her left arm that lacks anything beyond the wrist.
Then she breathes in deeply, and closes her eyes.
At that moment, the orb turns into light and vanishes. The light begins to coil around her body.

『Ngh...aaah』

The voice reflexively escaping Ayesha's lips sounds so much like moaning that anyone not watching in person would misunderstand.
I panic and quickly run into a side path. There I lower her down, and observe the progress with Miyoshi.

『Ah...aah, aaahh』

My face naturally becomes red as I watch her writhing on the ground.
It happened when I became instinctively teary-eyed after Miyoshi drove her elbow into my right flank.
The places with the missing parts on her body swell up, forming the shapes of hands and legs. The areas of her right body half that aren't covered by clothes radiate faintly.

『Aaah...』

Releasing an especially loud moan, she limply leans against my chest with large droplets of sweat visible on her forehead.

"S-Senpai, this is..."

Ayesha's mask slides off and falls to the ground with a clattering.
Her abundant, black hair spills down, and all that's left there alongside a rough breathing is a beauty that closely resembles Katrina Kaif in her younger days, just as I had thought before.

"Orbs...are amazing, aren't they?"

"No kidding."

As we watch her in a daze, our ears register the footsteps of someone approaching. It must be those two from before.

I signal Miyoshi with my eyes, and we start moving while I hold up Ayesha in my arms.

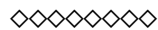
"Ah, we forgot the racket."

"It's okay since nothing's remaining on it. Rather, won't it buy us some time if they investigate it?"

In spite of carrying her, my arms feel almost no tiredness.

I think it goes without saying that it's owed to the power of STR which I raised by ten points during the examination the other day.

If I allot all the remaining points, am I really going to stop being a human? is what I worried about a bit.



Ahmed, who saw Ayesha in Yoyogi Dungeon's VIP room, was unable to stand up as he looked dumbstruck. It's because the one who opened the door and came in was a beautiful woman with no blemishes to be found anywhere, who had looks very close to that of his wife when he met her for the first time.

We didn't understand what she told him, but it sounded like "pita." I'm pretty sure it means "papa." Ayesha rushed over to him, who was unable to get up from the sofa, and both started to cry while hugging each other. We exchanged looks, and quietly left the room.

"Good work." Ms. Naruse says. "Five minutes later two men of Great Britain nationality entered the dungeon. Were you alright?"

"Ah, they totally came after us. We met them. Somehow they were kind of frivolous."

"There was no real harm done as they only went as far as tailing us like stalkers."

"But senpai, it's that spacious Yoyogi, you know? Didn't they do well to spot our location after entering with a delay of only five minutes?"

"That's because there's no people in that area. Or do you think that the Englishmen possess some kind of secret weapon to search for people in a dungeon?"

"Ooh, maybe Q[efn_note]James Bond character[/efn_note] exists?"

"Who knows. By the way, there's no Q in the original novel. The Q department makes an appearance, though."

"Gosh, I told you before, that's why you're not popular with women, senpai." The sulky Miyoshi then says something outrageous, apparently as insinuation, "Well, it looks like you were totally popular inside the dungeon, though."

"Eh? Did something happen?"

"Senpai, that lecher, has held Ayesha in a princess carry!"

"Kyaa!"

Come on, you two...

"Putting that aside, Mr. Yoshimura."

"Yes?"

Ms. Naruse switches into her business mode all of a sudden.

"About Ms. Ayesha's body. Is that the effect of <High Recovery>?"

"I don't know about that, but it's certainly true that she became like this immediately after she used the orb."

"Her state when she used it——"

"Oh, is it for the explanation of the orb's effect in the WDA database?"

"Yes."

"...Isn't it smarter to not reveal that to the public? I think you will greatly provoke humanity's desires if you publicize that phenomenon." I say while looking at the door of the room where Ayesha and Ahmed are.

Back when potions were revealed to the public, the world plunged into a state of madness that could very well be called panic.

If this matter here were to be publicized, I have no doubt that the appearance of <High Recovery> would have an even bigger impact.

"Immortality?"

When Ms. Naruse unintentionally mutters something turbulent, Miyoshi tries to gloss it over in a hurry, "It's nothing that exaggerated! It's just at the level of making it difficult to get tired, okay? You'll be fine to pull around one all-nighter."

"Eh?"

"Also, small injuries will be healed right away. It's better to leave the report of its effects at th——"

"Please wait a moment."

"Mmh?"

"Don't tell me, did you possibly use it as well, Ms. Miyoshi!?"

"Ah."

Yo, Miyoshi, you lowered your guard. I hit my forehead with a hand, and look up to the sky.

"...Well yes. It's necessary to experiment with them before putting them up for sale, right?"

Oh, you idiot...

"That means, other unknown skills as well?"

"It's not like I tested...all of them, you know?"

Miyoshi's eyes wander around after receiving that retort. Is this girl an idiot?

"Now now, let's leave that aside for now, okay? I think it's better to not get flustered since we don't understand the effects fully yet."

Ms. Naruse nods while casting a scornful look at me, who forcibly cuts in.

"In the first place, we don't know how long the effect of <High Recovery> lasts. Besides, it's possible that it'll stop working if it pulls off a big heal once."

The recovery means it's being carried out while taking the energy from somewhere. If you consider it normally, it's impossible for that to continue indefinitely. I don't know whether that common sense works on dungeons, though.

"Even a lizard's tail will become unusable for quite some time if it's cut once. I can't believe that it's so simple as a living being to obtain eternal youth and immortality...oh, wait a sec."

"What's wrong?"

"What's written on Ayesha's D-Card right now?" I ask while looking at Miyoshi.

"Ah! Come to think of it, I still have it with me after picking it up. But, is it fine to look at this without the owner's permission?"

"I don't think it's a problem since we know the contents anyway. We can pretend to not know in an emergency."

"Understood. Here."

Area 12 / Ayesha Ahmed Jain
Rank 99,728,765

[High Recovery]

"The skills are displayed in Japanese?"

Once Miyoshi looks at the card and asks this curiously, Ms. Naruse provides an explanation.

"The D-Card's skill text will be seen in the native language of the person looking at it."

"Huh? Why?"

"No idea."

"It's not like we're perceiving it through just light, correct...? Anyway."

"There are brackets added to the skill's name. The color has become faint, hasn't it?"

"Somehow it totally seems as if it's telling us that it can't be used right now."

"It might actually be just that. It might become usable and heal again after a certain time passed, or it might never be usable again. We don't know which it'll be."

"It might be better to let Mr. Ahmed and Ms. Ayesha know about it later on, don't you think?"

"You're right. Otherwise some stupid country might try to check the skill's effect."

"Senpai, you mean..."

"Well, it's just a possibility."

I don't wanna think about stuff like her getting kidnapped, or being cut up as experimental material. If things about Miyoshi spread, that danger might loom over her as well...I have to do something about it as fast as possible.



Haah, I feel like my peaceful life is rapidly becoming more distant...

§033 US·CN·GB and Invitation

When I woke up, Lady Sun had already traveled high into the sky.

As I shower, my stomach grumbles. After roughly making myself presentable, I head down to the office on the first floor.

"Morning."

"You're way late. It's already past 11 o'clock."

"You see, yesterday was quite tiring..."

"No kidding..."

Afterwards Ahmed came out of the room and effusively thanked us. Against our will, he took us to Ginza, and in the end he dragged us on a bar hopping-spree around the 6th district with plenty of champagne flowing, saying that it was in celebration of his daughter's fresh start in life.

"An antiquated salon and crystal glasses. The highlight was the Clos d'Ambonnay[efn_note]Champagne of Krug[/efn_note], senpai. Yep, that was just like a dream."

Miyoshi appears to think back on the variety of drinks yesterday night while being on cloud nine.

"I sure was surprised when the First Release Lot of Guillaume's Au Dessus du Gros Mont entered the fray. You can really find anything in Ginza, can't you?"

"Having said that, I wonder whether that's a bottle you'd open for a celebration," Miyoshi tilts her head in contemplation.

Like I'd know.

When I asked Ahmed whether it's fine for Hindu people to drink alcohol, he answered that there are definitely places where it's forbidden, but that the Hindu people overall drank it relatively normally. No doubt, it's quite the liberal religion.

"Anyway, what's planned for today?"

"Seeing as I've got to deliver the three orbs, I'd like you to cancel your dungeon trip."

"Since I should be able to get another <High Recovery> in a little bit more, I will go dive for a tiny bit if we wrap it up early. How are things going on your side?"

"So far as it goes, the code is starting to take shape."

"Roger. Well, seeing how it's all moon runes to me anyway, I'll leave that part completely to you."

"Moon runes, you say...didn't you do something similar in your previous company?"

"I forgot all about it by now."

"Looks so." [efn_note]Osaka-ben for some reason[/efn_note]

Going across the dining room, I step into the kitchen. I will grab an Evian from the refrigerator...eh? It's become a glass bottle. ...Châteldon?

"Miyoshi~. This Châteldon is water?"

"Yeah, it is. Senpai, you like semi-carbonated, don't you?"

I roughly turn the screw cap open, pour it into a glass, and gulp it down. Whoa, this is...really refreshing and delicious.

"I was thinking of making some omelets. Want some too, Miyoshi?"

"It's soon lunch time anyway. You're not going to eat at Ichigaya?"

"Ah, true. That option also exists. Where?"

"I have thought about kidnapping Ms. Naruse once she shows up here, and go with the staff canteen, but she's kind of not coming."

"Yesterday has turned into a huge mess, hasn't it? Isn't she just buried under written reports?"

"Well, even the issue with immortality popped up while we don't know what's what."

As expected, it might be possible to become immortal through <High Recovery>, but it's only natural that an immortality-or-such skill orb would appear sooner or later. It's anything goes with skill orbs after all.

"Miyoshi, try calling her, and tell her to meet at JDA's canteen if there's no issue."

"Sure thing."

"I'll get ready for going out then."

"Okaaay."

I drain the rest of the water in the glass, stuff it in the dishwasher, put the bottle back into the refrigerator, and return to my room to change my clothes.

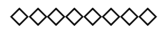


The deals in the afternoon of that day were in the order of Huang, Simon, and William.
The fourth rank in the world, Mr. Huang...how to describe it best...was a taciturn and hasty man.

The instant the trade came to an end, he repeatedly opened and closed his right hand as if checking its condition, just when I thought that he would use the orb himself. And then he suddenly said "Shao Hochien" or something like that, and left.

"A little guardian, was it?"

"There's no way for me to understand Chinese, you know?"



The next party was Simon. Thank you very much for buying at our place for a second time. It looks like he's been warming up in Yoyogi all the time since the last time I met him a few days ago.

Once I asked him how deep he dived, he said something along the lines of going down to the 17th floor in one day, and then coming back up in a day. Nothing less of a top party. Even their adventuring style is leagues apart from other parties.

Warming up, he says. Isn't that more like, something else?

『It appears yesterday things escalated for some reason, doesn't it?』

『You do have sharp ears.』

『What are you playing dumb for? At present, Yoyogi has become the front line of an intelligence war, right? Haven't even GB and CN shown up here?』

『Though, we're unrelated to that kind of world.』

『No...I think that's impossible at this point』, he said, pulling a face as if he's astounded.

『However, Yoyogi has a truly broad and interesting ecosystem. It's the most convenient dungeon in this world if you're looking for specific resources. Besides, it's nice that it's a public place anyone can enter. I suppose that's characteristic of Japan.』

『Being off-guard, that's characteristic of Japan, you mean?』

In response to my words, Simon smiles bitterly, stands up, and says, 『Still, if you consider all of mankind, this is the correct approach』, before leaving the meeting room.

"So his thoughts are heading in that kind of direction, as expected."

"He might basically act for the benefit of his own country, but if Earth perishes, his country isn't worth shit either. If the passage theory proves to be the real deal, considering it like that applies all the more, right?"

Is it going to lead to a different world if you descend to the lowest floor of a dungeon?
It was a retarded theory at the level of saying that the Earth is hollow...at least it should have been.

"Indeed."

"Well, we'll do what we can do."

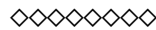
"I'll take on the world as an Oumi trader!"

"Go for it. So, what about the last one?"

"Our special friends, someone from Great Britain."

"You think that butler guy will show up?"

"No, that's kind of unrealistic, I believe."



Contrary to our prediction, it was surprisingly the butler guy who opened the door and came in.

『I don't think we actually need an interpreter for English, you know?』

He returns a bitter smile, and replies, 『Japanese foxes are good at hiding their tails.』

『We just pay attention to not get on a ship made out of sand.』

As I return in my mind that the proverb he used should actually be about racoons as far as I know, a very soldier-like man shows up from behind him. A man that doesn't let me feel a looseness like Simon.

The United Kingdom had formed a dungeon capture unit, referred to as DCU, beneath the SAS (Special Air Service). Because of that, all their members are elites of Great Britain's army. It seems he's William.

The trade itself smoothly passed off.

The butler guy frowned slightly at the orb's count being below 60, but after the trade ended, they uneventfully shook our hands, and left. That was actually ominous instead.

"Phew, that was nerve-wracking, wasn't it senpai?"

"Amen to that. I certainly didn't expect him to bluntly show up as if nothing happened."

"I wonder what's the idea behind that?"

"No clue? Declaration of war?"

"Please stop it."

Hearing that, Ms. Naruse grimaces, "She's totally right. Mr. Yoshimura, sometimes I don't really know whether you're peaceful or belligerent."

"What a thing to say! I'm the very definition of a lazy pacifist."

"There's no doubt about you being lazy. Still, as of late, you're diligently doing your job. Like yesterday."

"Am I working a bit too much?"

"I wonder about that?"

At that moment there's a knock at the door.

"Come in."

It's Ayesha who enters through the door.

"Kaygo!"

Being suddenly hugged, I get really flustered. I'm super happy about it, but I'm not used to this.

『Ayesha, what's up?』

"Came to fulfill, promise."

"Promise?"

Miyoshi and I look at each other.

『You're terrible. Are you telling me you forgot?』

With those words, Ayesha speaks about the reward I suggested when we talked about acquiring her D-Card.

"Senpai, what a show-off."

Hearing about it for the first time, Miyoshi rolls her eyes, and retorts at me, "Aren't you adopting to modern Japan's culture way too much?"

Huh? Didn't I tell her about this?

"No, back then I intended to lighten the mood a bit..."

"It was a joke!?"

"Ah, no. That's not it, I think."

Ayesha grabs my hand and pushes something like a written invitation into it.

『It's an invitation. Given the location, it looks that it will be alright for you to invite up to six people.』

『Got it. I'm looking forward to it.』

『Yes! See you tomorrow then!』 Ayesha says and leaves the meeting room.

"She sure seems to be in a hurry."

"It looks like there will be something like some kind of hearing at the JDA after this."

"Hearing?"

It must be about the matter with <High Recovery>. I'm slightly worried. But then again, as long as that papa is around, I doubt he'll let them do anything unreasonable to her.

"By the way, senpai, can I please have a look at that invitation?"

"Hmm? Here."

"I can open it?"

"Go ahead."

Once Miyoshi takes out the letter and scans through it, her eyes immediately widen.

"S-Senpai, this...the place is... 『Saito』, you know?"

"Saito?"

"It's the ARK Hills South Tower's sushi restaurant."

"Ah, it's because she's a Hindu. It looks like fish is okay for her family."

"No, that's not the problem here...let me put it so that it's easy for you to understand, senpai. It's one of the only three sushi restaurants with three Michelin in all of Tokyo."

"...I don't quite get it, but is such a restaurant a place where you can get a reservation on short call?"

"That's what I'm trying to tell you. You'd wonder what happened to the previous bookings, right? Don't tell me, they got canceled...18th!?"

"What is it?"

"The 18th...that's tomorrow!"

"So?"

"『Saito』 has its day off on Sundays."

"Ah, so that's how he was able to make a reservation."

"No, wait a sec there. Bursting in unannounced and making the restaurant work on its day off? Just who the hell is Mr. Ahmed, senpai?"

"No idea?"

"Ms. Naruse?"

"The privacy of our customers falls into the category of duty of confidentiality." Ms. Naruse answers with a straight face.

"Well, leaving that aside, it means all-you-can-eat of delicious sushi on the wallet of someone else, no? You must be hyped, Miyoshi."

"Of course! Ah, Ms. Naruse, you're coming as well, aren't you?"

"Eh? Me? That's okay?"

"Wasn't it you who held back the party of Great Britain while massively abusing your authority?"

"T-That was— You're right. Sunday, it is. Please allow me to take you up on that offer."

"It's three people then, huh...? Well, whatever. Miyoshi, is there anyone you want to invite?"

"On the spot, no one besides Midori-senpai...ah, right, Ms. Naruse, you were Midori-senpai's big sister?"

"You mean the Midori that started a company for medical treatment devices?"

"Yes, that's the one!"

"Does she have anything to do with you, Ms. Miyoshi?"

"Right now we're trying to develop something special together! Please look forward to it!"

"Hey, Miyoshi! Don't blab. We haven't directly talked it over with Ms. Midori yet."

"Eh? I want to hear about it! Isn't that the kind of stuff that falls into the duty of a full-time spy?"

"No, spy, you say...anyway, please wait a bit longer."

"Eeehh?"

"Miyoshi, forbid Ms. Midori to speak about it. Tell her that her big sis is going to come investigating."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Eeeeehhh??"

In the end the sun went down with the women chit chatting.

§034 Mitsurugi Haruka's Growth 11/18 (Sun)

The next day is an ordinary, slightly cloudy day.

The invitation is scheduled for the evening, so I have turned up at Yoyogi Dungeon to get <High Recovery> as I failed to do so yesterday.

"Mr. Yoshimura!"

When I turn around upon being suddenly called out at the entrance hall, I'm hugged out of the blue just when I wonder about the long and slender woman with a ski mask rushing towards me. Our surroundings become slightly noisy.

Huh? Hah? What's going on?? Eh? ...Is that possibly...

"M-...Miss Mitsurugi?"

"Yes, I passed!"

Passed? She means the competition or whatever she mentioned previously, doesn't she?

Anyway, this isn't the shooting of a TV drama. It's inevitable for such a scene to draw attention in this place.

In a hurry I leave the entrance hall while taking her along, heading to an inconspicuous table of the YD Cafe where Ms. Naruse always takes me to.

"Well, please drink this first, and calm down." With those words, I place a cup of café au lait in front of her.

"Thank you." She says and takes off the ski mask.

In response her short-cut hair, which had the translucent bangs flow down at the sides, smoothly spills down.

Her appearance as she occasionally tucks back her bangs had become even more refined than before, drawing my attention to it.

"Pheew, a ski mask is handy, but since I get sweaty beneath it, I can't put on any makeup."

"If you say so. I wouldn't know, but Ms. Mitsurugi, you're a celebrity, aren't you? Is it okay for you to show your face in such a place?"

"Nah, I'm a novice at best, so no one will pay attention to me. Also, I won't be noticed anyway since I don't have any makeup on." Even her gestures as she cackles look elegant.

This isn't because she's totally overdone it with the status increase, is it...?

"If you say passed, you mean the model auction you talked about before?"

"Yes. It's thanks to you, Mr. Yoshimura!"

"No, it's been you who did your best, right? It looks like you've been diving quite a bit since then."

"About that..." She begins and takes out her D-Card.

It's normal to show one's license card. You only show your D-Card if you trust the other party. It's different when it's right after getting the card, but if it's between man and woman, it wouldn't be strange for them to be even considered lovers.

At that moment I have a feeling as if I heard a stirring around us.

However, I only cared about the vicinity until I saw her D-Card.

—Rank 986.

"In merely six weeks. Moreover, I have only gone to the first floor." Ms. Mitsurugi whispers after bringing her face close. "Mr. Yoshimura, you did something, didn't you?"

What she shows me next is a record of the slimes she killed as I had requested from her before.

It's 118 slimes per day in average.

Wow. That's by far more than my leisurely dungeon hunting yielded.

Assuming one slime takes five minutes, it'll be twelve slimes per hour. I guess that means she had been diving close to ten hours per day.

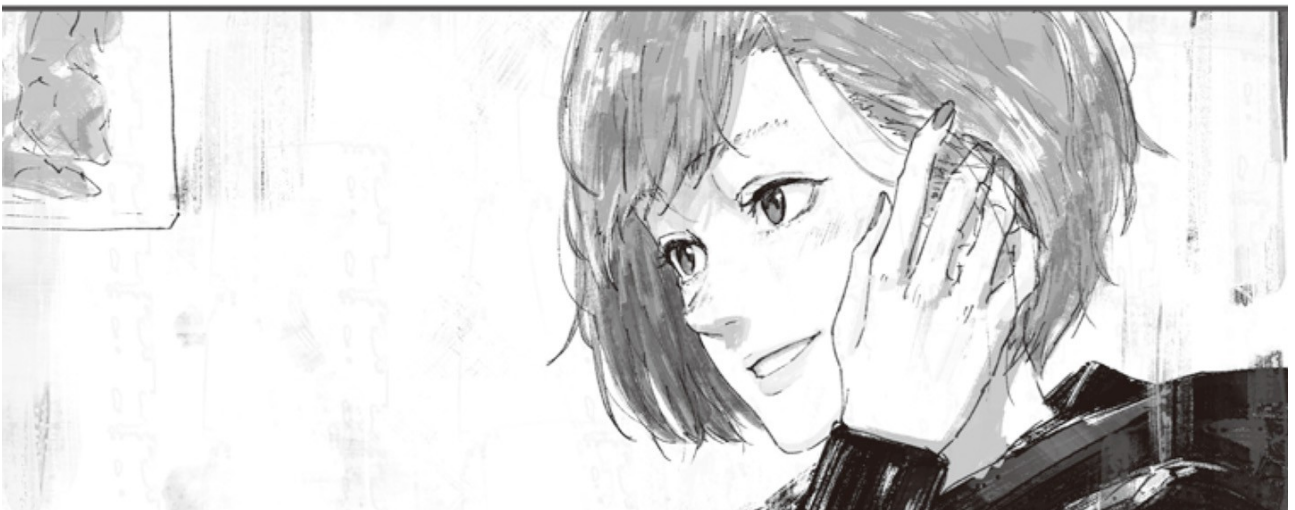
She did this for a total of 42 days. It's been almost every day since we last met...

"Was it okay with your job for you to dive so much?"

"I said that it was a daily special training until the compe, and had my agency turn down any offers except for those that were unavoidable."

"Hee."

The SP she has acquired per day in average is 2.36. This value times 42 days. 99.12, huh?



In short, since it's around 100 points, she's become a three-digit?

Considering it now, the points I obtained after killing close to 2,000 slimes is a mere 5 points. I suppose it might be owed to me having killed them one after the other.

However, assuming that most of those points have been allotted to AGI and DEX, she's already in the region of superwoman. She can likely control her body down to a millimeter by now. Now that it's like this, all that's left is her imagination.

"Hmm, I might have taught you the trick, yes, but for results to show so quickly is thanks to your own efforts, Ms. Mitsurugi."

"As promised, I haven't spoken about it to anyone besides Ryoko."

"I know. ...Grats."

Once I congratulate her, she tears up a bit, apparently moved to tears, and grasps my hand atop the table.

"So, what about Ms. Saito?"

Getting flustered by her sudden action, I reflexively change the topic.

"Somehow it looks like her acting has improved like mad. She's become totally popular recently, and nowadays I can't get her to hang out with me much."

"Eh? Then you've been diving by yourself? That's dangerous."

"Can I have you come along then, Mr. Yoshimura?"

"Eh? Me? Umm, if I find some time, I guess."

"It's a promise, okay?"

"Y-Yeah."

Ms. Saito has apparently dived with the same number of killed slimes per day for around 30 days. I guess, in that case she got roughly 71 points. If those have been assigned with a focus on DEX, I'm pretty sure that she's stopped being a normal human as well.

"It's the same for Ms. Saito, but Ms. Mitsurugi, you better don't show this card to anyone."

"I know. Showing each other's D-Cards is for people very close to each other like lovers," she laughs.

"No, I mean it's better if you don't show it to such people either."

"Eh? Okay."

She corrects her seating posture because of my serious look.

"And so, umm, it's just somehow, but..."

"?"

"...The current rank one, who appeared all of a sudden, seems to be a civilian from Area 12."

"So I hear."

"About that, is it possibly..."

We stare at each other silently. The hustle and bustle in the cafe sounds like far and distant ocean waves.

"I plan to go to Yoyogi as much as possible, even after beginning this new job."

"Okay."

"Say, can we exchange email addresses?"

"Sure, but didn't I give you my business card before?"

"If Ryoko were to be here, she would definitely pout and go like 『Exchanging email addresses means that I'd like you to contact me』." Ms. Mitsurugi says with a wry smile.

While feeling embarrassed due to her words, I exchange email addresses with her.

"I will email you, okay? See ya."

As she says so and tries to leave her seat, I spontaneously grasp her hand and hold her back.

"Ah, Ms. Mitsurugi. As a matter of fact, there'll be a small party related to our office later today. Want to go together with me?"

"Eh?"

"According to Miyoshi, it seems to be a restaurant in the ARK Hills called 『Saito』. You fine with sushi?"

"Yes, it's healthy after all. But, is it okay for me to come as well?"

"At this point you're fully involved with us. If you like, you can bring Ms. Saito along, too."

"Got it. But Ryoko said that she'd have a TV-drama shooting until late in the evening. If she hears about it afterwards, I'm pretty sure that she'll be vexed." Ms. Mitsurugi smiles impishly.

"It starts at 5 p.m. Want me to pick you up somewhere?"

"Hmm, the Toguri Museum is close to my place...you know of it?"

"Oh, the one in Shibuya?"

"Yep."

"Isn't that Shoto!?"[efn_note]Shoto is an upper-middle class residential district in Shibuya[/efn_note]

"Ah, no. It's a cheap rented mansion."

"The street with the Chez Matsuo Shoto Restaurant, right?"

"Yeah, you seem to know the area."

"Miyoshi is a glutton, so I'm learning all kinds of information, limited to restaurants." I say with a laughter. "Then we'll go with 4 p.m. in front of the Toguri Museum, right?"

"You can't stop your car over there..."

"Okay, I will contact you when I leave my place. Since it's a little less than a kilometer, I think it'll take five minutes by car."

"Considering that, it's right around the corner."

"True."

"Okay. Let's do it like this. See you later then." She wraps it up and leaves her place.

Email, huh...? That's a rather unusual way to get in touch with someone nowadays. Those are my thoughts as I follow her back with my eyes.



Afterwards, I kill just twelve slimes in a hurry, and then head back to the office after obtaining <High Recovery>.

And since the time is tight, I try to rent a hired car on the spot. It looks like it'll be okay to rent it even on the same day. I look it up immediately. Viva, Internet! Once I ask Miyoshi whether she wants to drive with me, she answers that she'll meet with Midori-senpai since she had invited her.

"Inviting a girl, and meeting her in a hired car...not bad, senpai."

"Well, it just sort of happened."

"But, those two have kind of rushed ahead quite a bit, don't you think?"

"No kidding. It's also because the two are diligent, but the effect of a dungeon boot camp is fearsome."

"It'll be difficult to determine how and where we'll publicize the rules for getting experience."

"Very true. It's all getting more complicated."

"By the way, what're you going to do about clothes?"

"It's fine with a winning smart casual, no? Japanese restaurants won't have any issues with all smart casual."

"Men have it nice. As long as you put on slacks, and wear a collared shirt plus jacket, it'll pass off most of the time. In that respect, there are times when a woman will feel out of place with smart elegant. I'll be troubled if I gotta go with at least semi-formal."

"Today will be sushi, and the venue is small. I think it'll be a friendly atmosphere, so casual should be okay, don't you think?"

"They're people who will unannounced book 『Saito』 on its day off, you know? I think our common senses don't apply here. I'll get ready just in case..."

"Commoners have it difficult in various ways, don't they?"

"From your lips to God's ears. I'm just worried that Midori-senpai might show up in a white robe."

"...That's a realistic possibility. But, I feel like that old man would be delighted over it."

Miyoshi takes out some kind of case, and wraps it up.

"What's that?"

"Congratulatory gift for becoming healthy."

"Oh, I see. I wonder whether we should get a gift for Ms. Mitsurugi and Ms. Saito as well?"

"Well, that side depends on you, senpai."

"?"

"Senpai, Mr. Ahmed has paid 5.5 billion for the orb sold by us, understand?"

"...Now that you mention it. So, what's in there?"

"From a company catering to rich ladies, the ageless, yearned Sunflower of Harry Winston, earrings with a ruby in the center. The price is an astounding 2 million Yen."

"Whoa, incredible..."

But, earrings?

"Say, Miyoshi, can you open earring holes with <High Recovery>?"

"Right, there's that. However, it's just the right moment as it feels somewhat inactive. If it's now... That's the other intent behind it."

"Ah, so you're urging her it as it might not be possible to make a piercing in the future once the skill activates, huh? But, won't the piercing close up once the skill activates?"

"That should be alright."

"Why?"

"My earring piercings are still there."

Seriously? I expected that it might reproduce based on the genetic information, but that's not how it works?

"Okay, that's a riddle."

"Senpai, I told you, didn't I?"

"Hmm?"

"That I feel it's related to something like a metaphysical consciousness."

"Oh, the matter with <Safe>, right?"

"Yep. I believe that this might be unexpectedly accurate."

"So that's why earring piercings as well, huh?"

"Yes."

At that moment something very shameless crosses my mind.

However, as someone fond of science, it's a question that must be answered. Without the part about dying a lonely death without the corpse being picked up.[efn_note]This needs a bit of explanation. First off the line above starts with a dirty joke. Seeing as High Recovery regenerates body parts based on a metaphysical consciousness according to Miyoshi's theory, it's possible for a hymen to be regenerated as well, right? The part about the death refers to a famous phrase from a long Historic TV Drama series called Oedo Dragnet. It's basically a story revolving around ninja acting as secret police. So that phrase comes up when they go to investigate something by sneaking around and expect to die in the line of their duty. 死して屍拾う者なし is a fairly often used catchphrase in that series[/efn_note]

"Hey, Miyoshi."

"What's up?"

"There's something that interests me very much, on a private level."

"Somehow I get a terrible feeling from this, but go ahead for the time being."

"Virgi-...gufuuh!?"

At that moment, the tablet computer that came flying out of Miyoshi's hand directly hits my forehead.

"Senpai, I think it'd be a good idea for you to learn some delicacy."

Yash, A'm showwy.

"Anyway, she had an accident during her puberty, and since then she was always a Phantom of the Opera."

"True."

"She shouldn't have had the leeway to enjoy getting dolled up."

"Yep."

"That's why we'll give her this with the intention of telling her that she can freely dress up as she likes from now on. The price was reasonable for this kind of gift and good as it won't make her fuss over the gift unnecessarily. It means she can get her boyfriend to buy her something a lot better."

Earrings for 2 million Yen are reasonable!? Just what's going on with you people's common sense!? That's exactly why celebrities are! Celebrities are...! Well, whatever...we got 5.5 billion as well.

"But, it's definitely not like we can pierce her ears, right?"

"If it's that papa of hers, I think he'll be able to get her pierced at a proper medical institute. However, not being able to put on the present right away is saddening! But! Don't fret! I have made no oversight. There's also a mini pendant of the same design!"

"Pendant?"

"I'm pretty sure that she'll wear a dress with an open décolleté today. But, she won't have any accessories at her neck."

"Why?"

"It's a backlash of her having had a need to hide it until now. Since she's such a beauty, there's no doubt about it."

It's a prediction based on the idea that she probably won't wear any accessories since it's unnecessary. This girl's intuition is amazing in a certain way. It's often correct, too.

"That's why, senpai, please make sure to put it on her, okay?"

"Me!?"

"Getting her papa to put it on is age-wise a bit...having said that, the rest of the attendees are all women."

Come to think of it, she's right. Oooh, thinking of it now, isn't that kind of like a harem?

"Well, if I can get them to owe me in various ways with this..." Miyoshi slurps back her saliva.

"Hey, stop it, Oumi trader."

"No, I mean, don't you think that they might reserve 『L'Osier』 for us next time?"

『L'Osier』 is a cosmetics producer who runs a restaurant in Ginza.

After it's renovation and reopening, it's become a slightly hectic floor design as it's said that the service moves around the outer circumference of the round floor, but it's no mistake to still label it as a French restaurant representing Japan.

Reservation? Well, for us that's completely out of reach. I know as much as well.

"Ah, senpai, I know it's a totally different topic, but..."

"What is it?"

"It's about <Storage>. The twenty buses in that parking lot...all went in."

Wut? All?

"A-Awesome. I guess that means 200 tons are no problem...it doesn't seem to have a limit, does it?"

"At the time when I took them back out, I could do so following my own imagination to a certain degree, even if it was slightly further way. That was quite fun."

"...You haven't started playing Lego with buses or something, right?"

"Eh? Eeeh? I-I haven't!"

Miyoshi's eyes are restlessly wandering about, but as it'll only increase the number of criminals even if I make a retort here, I'll drop it.

Pretend to not have seen anything, pretend to not have seen anything.

"Next would be trains or tankers, huh...? If those things fit in as well, smuggling will be our least problem. For now, we should just gather the orbs and hold back on selling them until we find some countermeasure."

"That might be a good idea."

We've talked about everything needing our attention, and somehow I feel like there's still plenty of time left.

It's a little less than four hours until the hired car gets here.

"Alright."

"What's up."

"It's still noon, so I'm going to step out for a bit."

"To get something for Ms. Mitsurugi?"

"Why do you know that? Are you an Esper?"

"Well, it just follows the flow of our conversation. You're a simple guy after all, senpai."

"Ugh...anyway, what do you think would work?"

I don't want to brag, but I'm fully aware that I lack taste.

It's impossible for me to know what present to get for a model. Tehe.

"That's where you learn from others, I'd say. It's going to be an exclusive congratulatory jewelry, right? In case of an orthodox beauty with a shortcut who works as a fashion model, clothes are her main focus, so isn't it fine to go with simple earrings using a single pearl? A big pearl also has impact, and it's quite noble."

"I see. Where do you buy pearls?"

"Senpai...if you're buying for the first time, Mikimoto would be the safe choice. Their main store is in Ginza's fourth district."

"Okay, simple, big pearl, Mikimoto, correct? Nothing less of an agent."

"Haaah...please do your best to not fail."

And then I ventured out into an unfamiliar world. Of course, it would be impossible for me to become a hero, though.

§035 Saito 11/18 (Sun)

We enter the ARK Hills Tower, go to the first floor, and meet up with Miyoshi's group who is just then coming up from below at the "Chun Shui Tang" corner.^[efn_note]Here's a floor map of the ARK Hills Tower of the first floor, red the Chun Shui Tang restaurant:
https://www.chunshuitang.jp/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/roppongi_pc2.png ^[/efn_note]

"Aahh! Ms. Midori isn't wearing a white robe!?"

"Got you surprised, right?" Miyoshi agrees with me while clenching her fist.

"What, you were into science women with glasses and white robes?"

"No, you are wrong, Ms. Midori."

"Don't suddenly act all formal there!"

While Ms. Midori and I have such a silly conversation, Miyoshi congratulates Ms. Mitsurugi who's next to me.

"Oh, hello Ms. Mitsurugi~ Congratulation for passing the audition."

"Thank you very much. Sorry for shamelessly tagging along today."

"You were invited by senpai, right? For him to pull off such a playboy move is totally out of character."

"Hey, stop it! It's because she's a member of the anti-slime team, okay!?"

"Come, let's go."

Ugh, I got totally ignored.

Once we proceed to a spot that looks like a dead end, there's actually a corridor towards the left right before the wall. Passing through an automatic door, we immediately arrive at the meeting place.

However, I gotta say, it sure is at a location where no one unrelated will ever pass by.

^[efn_note]Author's note: "Since the toilets are actually around here, that statement is not quite correct^[/efn_note]

『Oh, Yoshimura, Miyoshi! You're here. You guys are our family's benefactors!』

When we move up to the corner, Mr. Ahmed, who waited in front of the restaurant, notices and comes hugging us.

This old man got quite a bit of strength in his arms. His hug is painful.

『It's not just our credit. We were supported in the shadows and spotlight by Ms. Naruse of the

JDA.』

『It goes without saying that we're thankful for her smooth assistance as well. So, the young, beautiful ladies over there are?』

『Over here we have Ms. Midori, Ms. Naruse's younger sister. She's running a company developing medical care devices. Right now she's sometimes working with us.』

『Oh, the owner of a venture company?』

『Correct.』

『It is nice to meet you, I am called Naruse Midori. I am grateful for you allowing me to join today despite not having been invited directly.』

『Don't mind it. We're very indebted to your sister. Please enjoy yourself.』

『Thank you very much.』

Seeing her like this, Ms. Midori completely gives one the impression of a capable woman. Her appearance of wearing a suit is quite stylish, too.

"Midori-senpai, I must say, you'd be pretty cool if you were always like that."

"Hey, Miyoshi, isn't that way too blunt? I agree with you, though."

『And this is Ms. Mitsurugi Haruka. She's an up-and-coming model who will become the exclusive model of the fiversity brand, starting next year.』

『Nice to meet you. My English still not good. Sorry.』

『Congratulations to that. I fully understand what you're saying, so your English is fine. Are you Yoshimura's girlfriend?』

『That'd be too nice to be true. I'm sorry to say, but she's just someone related to our company.』

At that time I feel like Ms. Mitsurugi's cheeks became slightly red.

『Hoh, you mean, she's diving into dungeons?』

『Yes, a bit.』

『Does that help with your job?』

『Very much.』

『I see, so similar to company staff.』

Mr. Ahmed laughs and enters the restaurant through the entrance door.

The inside is rather cramped with just an L-shaped counter. It looks like there's a separate room as well, but of course it won't be in use today.

『Kaygo!』

『Ayesha, thanks for your invitation today.』

"Here senpai, take this."

"Oh, sure."

I hold out the jewelry box I got from Miyoshi to Ayesha.
Ayesha's outfit is just as Miyoshi had predicted. No surprise there.

『Ayesha, this is a congratulatory gift from us for your complete recovery.』

『Eh? Thanks! Can I open it?』

『Go ahead.』

『Wow! What lovely earrings! It's quite regrettable that I can't put them on right away.』

『It'll be fine for you to make the piercing at a proper place. For today, we'd like you to endure with the pendant over here.』

『Oh my, can I have you put it on for me?』

『Your wish is my command.』

(Senpai, since when were you capable of such phrases in English?)

(Yesterday I looked it up on the net. I didn't say anything strange, did I?)

(It's okay since it's a set phrase.)

When Ayesha turns the other way and lightly holds up her hair, I put the pendant's chain around her neck and connect the hook with clumsy hand movements.
The small ruby surrounded by diamonds beautifully sparkles on her chest once she turns around and lowers her hair.

『Yep, it suits you perfectly.』

『Thanks, I will cherish it!』

And then we were led to our seats, and enjoyed a hearty meal.
While Ms. Midori orders a second serving with the words, "Whoa! The monkfish liver is awesome! Delicious!", I'm impressed how she can drain down so much sake. Another drinker, huh?

"The monkfish' liver becomes fat starting with December, but as of late, it often happens that they

will be caught earlier than that. This is the first catch of the year with the monkfish having reached its proper taste," explains the owner.

Ms. Midori completely pretends to not see that while chatting with Miyoshi and Mr. Ahmed. I'm sitting between Ayesha and Ms. Mitsurugi, having a great time.

The conversation with those two had the queer situation of a foreigner using Japanese and a Japanese using English.

Having said that, it's unexpectedly working out one way or the other.



"Kaygo, this, tasty. Here."

『Ayesha, the "Aahn~" pose, mean, intimate.』

"Intimate? So good! Do I have to say 'earn'?"[efn_note]This "So good! Do I have to say 'earn'?" is in English in the raw. I think the "earn" relates to "Aahn~"[/efn_note]

『I, show you. Copy.』

"Okay, Mr. Yoshimura, say aahn."

"Wai-, wha-!"

"S-Senpai is being pampered."

"It feels like he's being treated like a toy, though."

Saying that the alcohol also plays a role in the nice atmosphere, Ms. Naruse audibly drains down her sake cup.

In other words, the older sister can hold her drink as well.

"Still, on one side a beauty that might very well be called a Bollywood actress, and on the other side a young and energetic fashion model who was selected from among many others by a fashion brand!"

"If you put it like this, it definitely sounds amazing."

"A scoop that will make good copy!"

Miyoshi says something disturbing.

The scary part about this girl is that you never know until when she's serious and where she starts to joke around.



『It was a wonderful meal today.』

『Kaygo.』

『Ayesha, you sure are lively as well.』

Once I say so, Ayesha approaches me and pulls me into a hug.

Umm, Indians were the kind of people who are touchy?? As I'm panicking about that, she suddenly lets go of me, and says, 『See you again someday, okay?』

『Sure, see you』, I bid farewell from her like a friend who's going to meet her soon again.

『Nowadays the world is small enough that we can meet whenever we want to.』

The smile of Mr. Ahmed as he says that is a bit scary. I guess that's a doting parent for you.

『Please contact me should you be in some kind of trouble. I'll definitely be of help.』

『Thank you very much.』

After passing me his excessively extravagant business card and exchanging a deliberately powerful handshake (painful) with me, we bid farewell from Mr. Ahmed and her daughter while waving our hands.

Since it looks like Ms. Midori is going to crash at Miyoshi's place, she gets into the hired car together with us.

When we drop off Ms. Mitsurugi on the way, I give her the present I had prepared for her.

Once I asked for earrings with somewhat larger pearls, the shop clerk chose something with a slightly modern design in the shape of an M.

Being deeply moved, which could also be contributed to her being a bit drunk, Ms. Mitsurugi kissed me before getting out of the car. Of course, on the cheek.

"Oh, oh, a scoop before the debut?" Miyoshi mocks me in the car after we left Ms. Mitsurugi behind.

I pretend to be calm by answering, "I doubt the paparazzi got so much time to stalk anonymous people," but in reality I'm in a bit of high spirits.

§036 Another Examination 11/19 (Mon)

And then, on the next day, we have once again arrived at Naruse's Secret Research Institute.

"Who got a secret research institute!? Mad researchers are——"

"Oh, you've already come."

A man pulling a bundle of papers out of the printer while saying so shows up. If I'm not wrong, he was called Nakajima, wasn't he?

"I couldn't sleep well since I was quite excited that we might be able to get closer to the secret behind the aura today!"

"——not to be found here, probably." Chief Naruse says while curbing her eyebrows. "So, are today's measurements going to be the same as last time?"

"Yes, please do the measures with all sensors."

"Which reminds me, the previous report was written very well. Thanks. However, this time it's going to be 43 times, right? You guys are truly eccentric, you know?"

"It'll be around 100 million Yen for the examinations." Mr. Nakajima says deeply moved while shaking his head.

"We could use such an abundant budget as well."

"C-Come on, let's start at once. Time is precious!"

Once I stop speaking with Mr. Nakajima while avoiding to meet Chief Naruse's eyes, I'm crammed into the previous measuring device.

I immediately invoke Making.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1118.856

HP 61.00

MP 52.00

STR 24 (+)

VIT 25 (+)

INT 28 (+)

AGI 20 (+)

DEX 26 (+)

LUC 24 (+)

For starters I'm going to round up the stats.

The number of slimes I defeated in Yoyogi has exceeded two thousand, but since I defeated them without break, the points I obtained in a month are a mere five points.

At this rate, it'd be around sixty points in a year, huh? And 180 points in three years.

Assuming that the stats of the high-end explorers are allotted uniformly, each of their stats would be around thirty points. Even if the points are assigned unevenly, their highest stat should be at most around sixty points. I have no proof to validate this, though.

Given that the experience points obtainable from monsters might increase the deeper in a dungeon you go, it'd be sixty points in average and around 120 points at maximum, even if the experience points would double.

As a result of consulting with Miyoshi, we have decided to measure while raising all the stats equally rather than focusing on one stat.

I think it's probably because there should be almost no people who raise only one stat all the time.

Well, the plan is to go up to a hundred points, but even if I raise all stats equally to such a level, it won't be any problem.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 1085.856

HP 75.00

MP 57.00

STR 30 (+)

VIT 30 (+)

INT 30 (+)

AGI 30 (+)

DEX 30 (+)

LUC 30 (+)

"Please start."

"Okay, we're measuring for the first time."

I feel a stinging pain in my right arm, and just like last time, a sound similar to a CT scan moving around can be heard.

A few minutes later, I'm informed that the measurement has finished.

Even if one measurement takes five minutes, it'll still be a long stretch lasting four hours. I dispassionately proceed with the mechanical work of raising the stats in order.

And then, when I increased STR to 100, it happened.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 715.856

HP 235.00

MP 171.00

STR (-) 100 (+)

VIT 90 (+)

INT 90 (+)

AGI 90 (+)

DEX 90 (+)

LUC 90 (+)

"Wut?"

A (-) symbol has been added to STR after it exceeded hundred points.

"Is something wrong?"

Chief Naruse reacts to my voice which unintentionally escaped my lips.

"Ah, it's nothing. Please wait a moment."

However, this means...I can possibly get my points back? If that's the case, it'd mean that I can play around by putting a lot of points into one stat, but...

Most games have a penalty system in place where you can get back one point by using two points, don't they?

I timidly press (-).

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 715.856

HP 234.00

MP 171.00

STR (-) 99 (+) [1]

VIT 90 (+)

INT 90 (+)

AGI 90 (+)

DEX 90 (+)

LUC 90 (+)

Starting with the conclusion, I didn't get my SP back.

It looks like a function allowing to decide the points that will be used for the respective stat.

At the moment I don't really get the purpose behind this, but it might be a feature to go easy on someone when the stats have grown exceedingly, giving you inhuman powers.

Also, for disguising your stats or something, maybe? Since such a function would have no use as

there's no one who can see your stats, it probably means that there are skills allowing you to take a peek? If it results in the same state as before having assigned the points as a result of disguising the stats like this, it'll be very convenient for Miyoshi's tests, but...well, I think it's better to not do anything unnecessary right now.

I add the point back, and ask for the next examination.



And then, five hours later my stats have become like this:

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 665.856

HP 250.00

MP 190.00

STR (-) 100 (+)

VIT (-) 100 (+)

INT (-) 100 (+)

AGI (-) 100 (+)

DEX (-) 100 (+)

LUC (-) 100 (+)

"Senpai, good work."

"As I thought, 43 times was really tough." I say after exiting the capsule and stretching myself.

"Good job. Since it's going to take a bit of time for the results to be put together, please have a drink while waiting." With those words, Chief Naruse hands me a coffee in a somewhat bigger mug.

"Thank you." I receive the mug, and in the instant I grip the handle tightly, it's pulverized.

"Huh?"

It's not that it broke, but instead was crushed into pieces.
Naturally, the contents of the mug spill out, dropping on the floor.

"Ugh, s-sorry!"

"Whoa, you okay? You didn't get burned or something? If it looks like some of it spilled on you, the bathroom is over there."

"T-Thank you."

I leave the cleaning to Miyoshi, and rush towards the bathroom. Of course I grasp the doorknob while being very careful.

While cleaning myself with water in the bathroom, I timidly take out a 10 Yen coin from my pocket, hold it between my thumb and index finger, and slowly apply some pressure on it. In response, the coin easily folds in the middle without any kind of resistance, as if being made out of rubber.

"You gotta be kidding...I don't know how to adjust it at all."

If the effect of STR becomes apparent with just this much, an intended little jog would look like teleportation, and an intended light caressing would be capable of blowing off a dog's head. (T/N: lol, great comparison)

Since the top explorers raise their physical abilities gradually over a long period of time, their bodies get used to it, and they become able to control it.

"I finally got the idea behind (-)." Muttering that, I lower the parameters to a level of a slight increase.

Name Yoshimura Keigo

Rank 1 / SP 665.856

HP 75.00

MP 57.00

STR (-) 30 (+) [70]

VIT (-) 30 (+) [70]

INT (-) 30 (+) [70]

AGI (-) 30 (+) [70]

DEX (-) 30 (+) [70]

LUC (-) 100 (+)

I thought that LUC and INT might have no influence, but since INT looks like it would affect <Water Magic>, I lower it as precaution as well. LUC should be fine as it is, though. Just when I'm pondering about these things, my cell phone starts to vibrate. When I take it out in a hurry, it's Ms. Mitsurugi who's calling me.

"Ms. Mitsurugi?"

For the time being I press the button, taking the call, "Yes, Yoshimura here."

"Ah, Mr. Yoshimura? It's Mitsurugi."

"Thanks for last night. What's up?"

"U-Umm, you know, that is..."

According to her, she truly just wanted to thank me for yesterday, but because of what happened at the end, she became somewhat embarrassed, and found it apparently difficult to get in touch with me.

However, it looks like she now felt an urge to make the call no matter what, despite not really knowing why.

Is that possibly an effect of LUC?

"So, I think it's my special training in the dungeon showing an effect, but just now I was told by my coach, who has been teaching me the technique parts, that I'm like a top model who lost her memories."

Ah, since her body, which only hasn't learned the techniques, is moving perfectly as instructed, it's very likely for such an impression to come up.

"And because my lessons are proceeding much faster than expected, the planned schedule of five times a week until the end of the year, has turned into three times a week."

"Then you can start on your job?"

"No, the actual job will start next year. Since plenty of time has opened up for me, I was wondering whether you'd like to go into the dungeon together with me as we had agreed upon before..."

Eh? Is this an invitation for a date?

Well, as it's inside a dungeon, it'll totally lack any romantic atmosphere, though.

"Sure, why not. I'll be absent for a few days starting with the 22nd, but except for those days, I don't have anything planned for December yet. If you tell me the days you're free, I will adjust my schedule and contact you."

"Thanks! I will send you an email about my free days later then, okay? I'm sorry for interrupting you while you're busy."

"No problem. Talk to you later."

I hung up with those parting words, but the man reflected in the bathroom's mirror has a face like a child who just got a surprise present.

Of course, it resulted in me earning a barrage of retorts by Miyoshi from behind, though.



Speaking of Miyoshi, she has apparently talked with Ms. Midori about the something-or-other device development.

You might say that the merits and demerits of quantifying human abilities are two sides of the same coin. I don't know how society will take this. In any case, researchers simply do what they can do. The rest should be considered by those who're going to use it.

§037 A Sequel / At a Certain Social Party

"Who's that beauty? I don't remember having seen her before."

That woman, who's walking through the venue while wearing a light lime-green dress, has been keeping a risque, unbalanced charm swinging back and forth between a neat primness and a mature allure. Bolstering that, the supple dress lines appear to splendidly express the transient beauty of a girl changing into a woman. Her earrings and pendant, which are adorned with rubies, accentuated her gorgeous smile.

"Oh, that's Mr. Ahmed's daughter."

"Ahmed? You mean, the one from Mumbai? Speaking of the daughter of that place was...how to call it...taboo, wasn't it? I didn't know that she had an elder sister."

"No, the one over there seems to be that very daughter."

"What was that?"

"The other day, they went to Japan, and when they came back, she had become like this, I heard. It's a hot topic as a rumored miracle in high society over here."

"I had no idea. Did she go to a skilled plastic surgeon?"

"If there exists a surgeon who can recreate missing limbs, that guy must have tied a pact with the devil."

"Transplantation...or such?"

"I can't even begin to think just how difficult it'd be to find a matching set of such beautiful limbs, not to mention that the face would be close to impossible. If something like that had been possible, they would have put it in practice long ago. And even assuming otherwise, the recovery is too fast. It would require a year of rehabilitation, wouldn't it?"

"What about potions then?"

"They tried it before to no avail, it appears."

"So what does that actually mean?"

"That she met a magician in Japan."

A man with an elegant moustache barges into the conversation of the two.
Ahmed Rahul Jain, a prominent Indian multi-millionaire.[efn_note]Previously I called him a billionaire because we were in Japan at that time, so he was a Yen billionaire. Now we are elsewhere and the currency is Dollars, so it's millionaire[/efn_note]

"Mr. Ahmed!? I apologize for the rudeness."

"Don't worry. No matter where I go nowadays, I'm asked the same everywhere." Ahmed laughs in amusement, apparently really not minding it.

"Still, a magician, you say? Is that some kind of metaphor?"

"No, I just lack the words to describe him in any other way. It was a very outlandish day."

"Day? You mean to say your daughter was healed in one day?"

"Her body, yes."

"Unbelievable."

"No kidding. As for her emotional side, it took merely two days...well, I suppose it's thanks to those earrings and the pendant."

The accessories, which are occasionally reflecting the illumination, are certainly nice, but they are items of a normal collection design, and not high jewelry.

"Harry Winston, is it...? No doubt about them being excellent pieces of jewelry, but Mr. Ahmed, you could easily arrange for a one of a kind high jewelry, couldn't you?"

"Sure. However, I wouldn't be able to imitate the other value that had been applied on that accessory through magic." He says so with a laughter, and walks away to the next guests while waving his hand.

"What do you think?"

"If you encounter a magician while staying in Japan, you can recover your missing limbs and beautiful face. While at it, the emotional care through jewelry that had cast magic on it will be flawless. Something like that?"

"Isn't that a repeat of his words?"

"It's magic, so you can't explain it otherwise, right? That's why."

"If something like that is possible, the former leading folks, who injured their bodies or good looks, will very likely flood into Japan in force, no? Athletes, models, actresses, and also soldiers will do so as well, I'd say."

A small man, who had been silently listening to their conversation at the side, interrupts, "As a matter of fact, there's an interesting rumor going around."

"What is it?"

"Before Mr. Ahmed visited Japan, a strange auction was held in Japan."

"Auction? Christy's, you mean?"

"No. it wasn't a major auction house, so almost no one except for people of a special business circle was aware of it."

"Somehow that sounds quite elitist, doesn't it?"

"The number of auctions held amounts to a measly two so far, and the traded items were just four on either occasion——"

"But?"

"The turnover was roughly two hundred million Dollars."

"Just wait a moment there. Goods where a single one costs 25 million Dollars were traded at an unknown auction house? They did well to get anyone to bid on those."

"Their items were goods that would make all the auction houses across the globe drool. However, none of them would be capable of putting them up for auction."

"Why?"

"It's because the items would immediately vanish in 23 hours 56 minutes and 4 seconds after appearing on this world."

"Don't tell me..."

"But I do. That auction house — or rather something similar to a private sales site — deals with skill orbs. Moreover, the bidding lasted three days."

"No way..."

"Of course everyone thought that they were a scam. However, that site still hasn't been shut down while being run by someone with a WDA license."

"In other words, you mean they are running a legal business?"

"If you trust the WDA, that is."

"You said that the information about those auctions isn't wide-spread, but if it's the truth, wouldn't great numbers of the rich across the world, who can buy orbs, rush for this?"

"Well, yeah. Most of them are probably waiting and watching the situation with most of the bidders being people related to the military for now."

"It's very unbelievable."

"You bet."

"The story is going to get interesting from here on out."

"Come again? I've already had my fill, though."

"Now, now. At the second auction that was held a little while ago, an unknown skill was sold."

"And?"

"Its name was <High Recovery>. The bid was won two days after Mr. Ahmed visited Japan. What's your take on this?"

The two men, who had chatted at first, look at each other.

Afterwards, the taller of them faces the small man, who had barged into their conversation, and says, "It's very interesting as a story. However, Mr. Ahmed's daughter had her accident before the dungeons appeared, right?"

"That's correct."

"What about a D-Card for her? You think she could have defeated a monster on her own in her previous state?"

"That's it. That part is the flaw in this story."

The small man says while looking mortified.

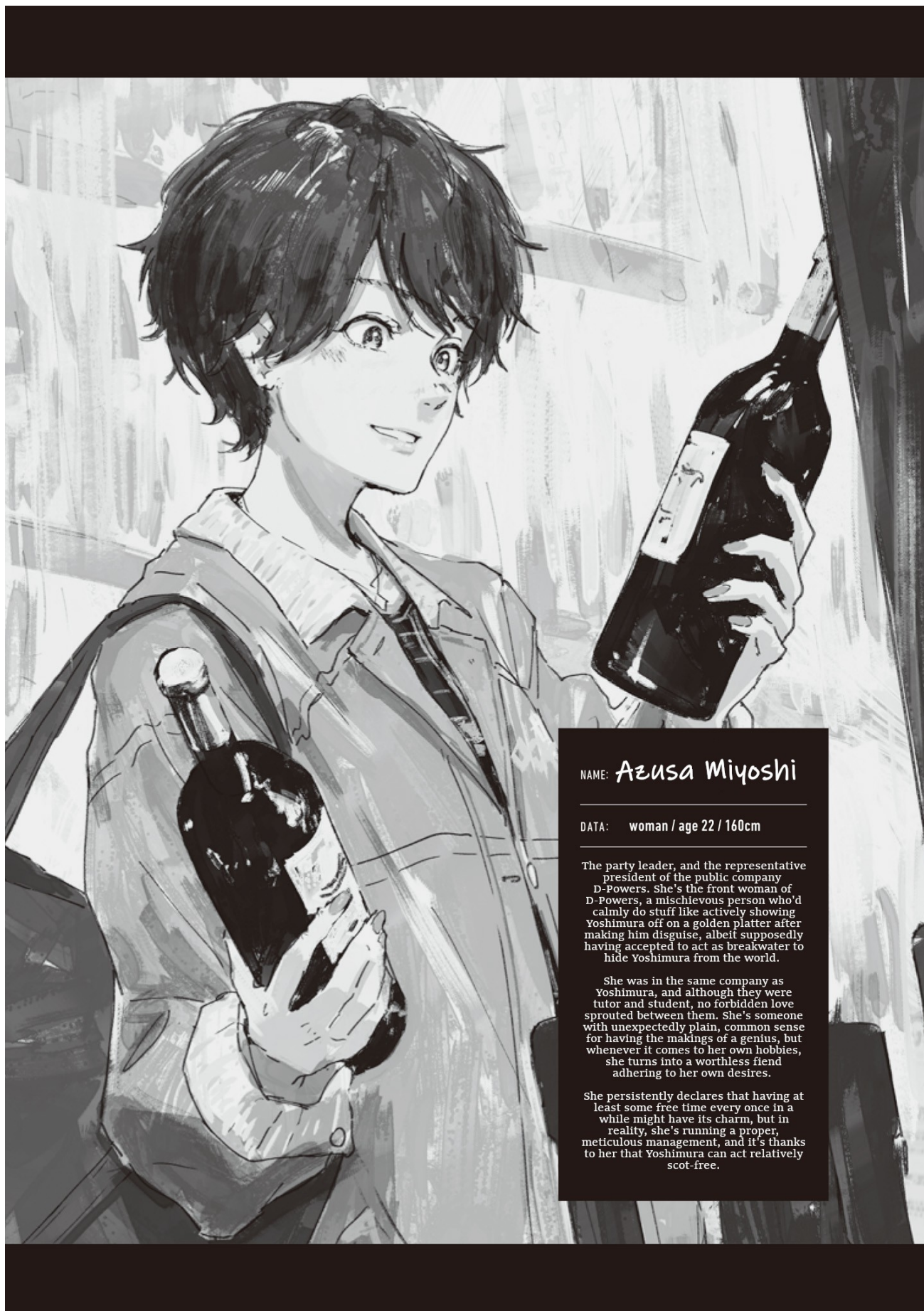
A person, who spent many years in a wheelchair while lacking both arms and one leg, entering a dungeon and killing a monster by herself?

Being told that she crossed over to Dover by swimming would still be more realistic. After all, a human's body will float in ocean water.

"I'm pretty sure that a team of Japanese magicians must have done something."

"That was a story filled with wonderful dreams. Come to think of it——"

And then the topic shifts to the troubles over Brexit.



NAME: **Azusa Miyoshi**

DATA: woman / age 22 / 160cm

The party leader, and the representative president of the public company D-Powers. She's the front woman of D-Powers, a mischievous person who'd calmly do stuff like actively showing Yoshimura off on a golden platter after making him disguise, albeit supposedly having accepted to act as breakwater to hide Yoshimura from the world.

She was in the same company as Yoshimura, and although they were tutor and student, no forbidden love sprouted between them. She's someone with unexpectedly plain, common sense for having the makings of a genius, but whenever it comes to her own hobbies, she turns into a worthless fiend adhering to her own desires.

She persistently declares that having at least some free time every once in a while might have its charm, but in reality, she's running a proper, meticulous management, and it's thanks to her that Yoshimura can act relatively scot-free.



NAME: Yoshimura Keigo

DATA: man / age 28 / 176cm

The protagonist of this book. Thanks to being a former company slave, he has a tendency to have a somewhat slanted view on the world. Even though he was given an ability allowing him to do almost anything, he longs for slackerism. But, although he's trying with all his might to laze around, he's a pitiable guy who doesn't seem to be able to get to that point. The things necessary for being a slacker aren't just money, time, and an environment allowing for it, but also the talent to carry it out. As someone belonging to the group of people writing their thoughts down, his pen spinning, which he does while smiling unconsciously, has reached mastery levels. Of course that skill serves no purpose at all, though.



NAME: Mitsurugi Haruka

DATA: woman / age 20 / 171cm

A girl who ended up harboring good will towards Yoshimura because he supported her when she had started to stumble so much that she didn't know what to do except for trying her best on and on while already stretching herself to the limit. Seeing how it directly connected to an improvement of her life, it might be somewhat inevitable, but whether its love or not, that's something even the author doesn't really know.

She was chosen in an audition as exclusive of the 2019iversity brand, but she's a model who's continuously changing while being featured at Fashion Week Donadona before doing her exclusive modeling job.



NAME: **Naruse Miharu**

DATA: woman / age 25 / 168cm

It's normal for serious people to get the short end of the stick. As former Miss Keio, it was rumored that she might go into the media in the future, but betraying those expectations, she chose the JDA. Her strong sense of responsibility to work for three years at the front desk of the Dungeon Management Department, which has a horribly low rate of women making careers, was her ruin.

After being assigned as D-Powers' exclusive deputy chief (with the salary of an Assistant Section Chief), she's being tossed about by the crazy events going on around them. Probably as result of that, her outward persona was thrown into disarray, and the times for her true character to shine through increased in number. There are also rumors about her being in a relationship with her section chief because of her friendly behavior. She's a worrisome 25-years-old who's most recently drawing a bit of pleasure out of her bad luck.

