









Content

§038 Preparations 11/21 (Wed)	6
§039 Beginning of Exploration 11/22 (Thu).....	18
§040 Hound of Hecate 11/22 (Thu).....	26
§041 Mishiro Eri 11/22 (Thu).....	35
§042 Item Check 11/22 (Thu).....	40
§043 Exploration Trip Report and Special Training Promise 11/23 (Fri).....	49
§044 Date? (Also Called: Slime Bullying) 11/24 (Sat).....	56
§045 Date? (Also called: Laying Waste to Goblin Dens) 11/25 (Sun).....	59
§046 That wasn't the deal, was it? 11/26 (Mon).....	70
§047 Repercussions 11/27 (Tue).....	79
§048 The Escapists' Exploration 11/27 (Tue).....	84
§049 Walk-in Mansion (Prequel) 11/27 (Tue).....	111
§050 Walk-in Mansion (Conclusion).....	119
§051 Appraisal (Prequel) 11/28 (Wed).....	124
§052 Appraisal (Conclusion) 11/28 (Wed).....	130
§053 Report and Arthur's 11/28 (Wed).....	136
§054 Dragon? 11/28 (Wed).....	145
§055 【Gift to the World】 D-Powers 108 【Different World Language Comprehension】.....	162
§056 The Second Different World Translator 11/30 (Fri).....	169
§057 Visitors in the Early Morning 12/1 (Sat).....	189
§058 Forum 【Too Wide】 YoyoDun 1356 【Almost Lost】.....	199
§059 Party 12/1 (Sat).....	205
§060 The Orb Transport is Life-Threatening? 12/2 (Sun).....	219
§061 Third Different World Translator 12/2 (Sun).....	240
§062 Contents of the Epitaphs 12/5 (Wed).....	251
Epilogue.....	259

§038 Preparations 11/21 (Wed)

David Jean-Pierre Garcia has been looking down at the Marne from the highest floor of a five-story building, which previously used to be a high-class apartment complex, in the city of Maisons-Alfort, located southeast of Paris' suburbs.

"Is it true that the daughter of Mumbai's Ahmed had magic cast on her in Japan?"

The young man, who had come to report, calmly answers towards David's back, "It's a fact that he has returned to India while bringing a beautiful girl along."

"And you say, it was that wheelchair woman?"

Because of Ahmed's grasping at straws, Ayesha had once visited Altum Foraminis. Ahmed is a prominent Indian multi-millionaire, and considering the future of the sect, granting his wish bore a heavy meaning. However, David, who took a glance at her state, decided that it'd be impossible to help her. However, he couldn't simply tell Ahmed the truth. After all, the sect is selling miracles.

Thus, he had been delaying her treatment while lining up one reason after the other.

"Such a story apparently cropped up when he met an acquaintance on the way. Since it sounds like a topic that will go public in high society sooner or later, I think we will get clarity then."

David let his thoughts wander in regards to the influence this would have on the sect.



Mostly unbeknown, Altum Foraminis Sacri Esse (Deep Hole Sect) was generally recognized as Christian cult worshiping the dungeons — the bottom of the earth that was neither Tartarus, the Abyss, Hades, nor Vorago, by those knowing of it.

The name is considered to originate from the healing power obtained in a dungeon by the sect's holy woman, Marianne Thérèse Martin, but compared to many other cults, this one clearly differentiates in one point.

In short, Marianne was the real deal. David met her in Andorra's Encamp two years ago. Back then she was surrounded by kneeling, old locals while sitting on a small bench of the San Marc & Santa Maria Church located in Encamp's public cemetery in shabby clothes.

"Is that some kind of meeting over there?" David asked a man, who seemed to be a staff member, as he considered the group to be strange.

The man fleetingly cast his face in that direction, and answered in a whisper, "Those are people requesting Ma Santa."

"Ma Santa (Holy Hand)?"

The man lightly shook his head at David's repeated questioning, turned his back on him and left as if running away from something he mustn't get involved with.

Having his curiosity greatly piqued, David sat down on a different bench and watched the group's actions from a distance.

A short time later, there was busy movement in the direction of the gate. A limp-looking, older woman was carried by a panicked man - maybe her husband - as he ran up to the bench.

The woman's face was red and inflamed, and terrible burns covered her upper body half, making one think that she probably made a mistake while cooking resulting in her being showered by seething oil.

It should be a matter of life and death if she wasn't taken to a hospital at once. David felt anger towards the ignorant people, wondering why they had brought her to a place like this, but in the next moment, all his emotions except for surprise dispersed.

The girl, who had been sitting on the bench, only held her hand over the woman's face while smiling calmly, seemingly planning to cast some kind of curse.

However, by just that action, the bleary face of the woman, who had been truly on the verge of death just now, transformed into its normal state as if watching a video that was played backwards. The man, who had brought the woman to the girl, lowered his head so deeply that it looked as if he was going to kiss the tip of the girl's foot.

Having unconsciously risen half to his feet, David froze for a while with his mouth gaping open so wide that one would believe his jaw to be dislocated, but before long, time started to flow in his world again, and he flopped down on his bench with a thump, apparently having lost all strength in his body.

He strongly perceived that he was right now standing at an important fork deciding over his future life.

Indeed, he was struck by a divine revelation.

The miracle of healing would likely be possible by using a dungeon potion. But then again, the girl had no reason to use an expensive potion for free, and thus he couldn't believe her to have done that. In any case, for David it didn't really matter whether it was a genuine miracle or some sleight of hand. The crux here was that it looked genuine.

God was one of the best goods created by humans. After all, God's love was a love free of charge. Or in other words, it was always on stock. Everyone was competing and buying a product with an effective cost ratio of 0%.

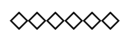
It went without saying that sects were created as a system to sell god's love. Doctrines and ceremonial procedures were productions for the sake of selling it. The facilities and the sects' organizations were figuratively similar to exclusive stores. And, the people believing in those sects, would spend fortunes to buy what you could call a tranquility of their hearts. Something like that could be obtained by just sleeping at the breast of the woman you loved, but David believed that both might be the same in regards to the point of costing money. Just that the latter added the freebie of fleshly satisfaction, making it even more of a bargain.

During that day, David followed Marianne around, and once he identified her home, he offered a business to her father. Her father, for whom the word trash would qualify as compliment, happily sold off his own daughter to a crook on the slightest mention of money.

The more he heard about her, who was the embodiment of miracles, the more perfect she was for his machinations. The prénom[efn_note]First name in French[/efn_note] Marianne was the national personification of the République française. On top of that, her deuxième prénom[efn_note]Second first name in French[/efn_note] was Thérèse, and her surname Martin. Although she had the most common surname in France, her second name vividly reminded one of Thérèse de Lisieux, the

second French patron saint, whether one liked it or not. And, just like her, she was a patron saint of the poor and sick.

At this point it fitted so perfectly as though being the script of some cheap fiction work, but either way, David, who launched a sect with her miracles as pivot, sweet-talked politicians and millionaires with her as a weapon. Those running the state and large enterprises had a far stronger inclination to adore mysticisms and the occult than most people would expect. History has proven that fact, beginning with Rasputin and the Freemasonry. Precisely because of that, he believed that it would give them a chance to pluck off ripened fruits. The girl, who embodied a small miracle, completely changed into a great saint through his production of excessively showing her abilities off while making free use of potions and such. And it worked wonderfully to rip off the world's rich. Alongside Marianne's beauty.



"If that really was Ahmed's daughter, it would mean that a potion beyond rank 8 had been used, wouldn't it?" David looks back over his shoulder, asking the reporting man.

'A potion beyond rank 8 shouldn't have been discovered at present. If something like that exists, we must acquire it at all costs.

"It's possible, but...aside from that, there's a rumor that Ahmed deliberately took his daughter with him to Japan for the sake of a skill trade."

"Skill, you say?"

As a result of him getting an explanation about her ability directly from Marianne, he has been considering it as power of a skill, but he doesn't know what kind of skill it could be. That's because she lost her D-Card. Also, he doesn't clearly understand just how she had obtained one to begin with. After all Marianne doesn't have any memories about that time. But then again, it's also possible that she's only pretending.

"The other day a skill orb auction was held in Japan."

"That wasn't a scam?"

"It's hard to digest, but if you put together the available information, it looks like the trades have been actually carried out."

"You're kidding..."

When David heard about this story, he perceived it as a trick of a prodigious swindler like himself. Moreover, as he couldn't predict how it all would play out in the end, he considered it to truly be a trick entering a domain that could be called god-like as he couldn't figure it out no matter how much he brooded over it. For it to be the real deal is more than a shock for him.

"And then?"

"One of the orbs traded there was called <High Recovery>."

"Has its effect been cleared up?"

"It seems that it immediately heals small injuries and bad conditions triggered by fatigue."

"Who's the exhibitor?"

"It's unknown."

"Which monsters drop it?"

"Unknown."

The explanation of its effect, which is far too meager for its exorbitant price, and the too fishy information are instead giving him the impression that something is being concealed.

"The existence of a person who can cause a miracle upon injuries even the sect can't heal—

David turns his back on the young man, and mutters quietly while looking down at the Marne once more, "There mustn't exist any miracles of healing besides those of Altum Foraminis."



On that day a high-pressure front has been imposingly hanging over the Japanese islands, causing the people living there to greet a rather chilly morning for November.

"Senpai, it looks like the camping van will be delivered today."

"It was about time. So, how did you resolve with the external armoring in the end?"

"I got the manufacturer to affix titanium boards. It doesn't appear that it'll pass a car inspection once those are added."

"That's inevitable, I guess. We won't drive it on public roads anyway, so it's no problem."

"When I told the car manufacturer the same, they asked me whether I was planning to drive into a war with this while pulling weird faces." Miyoshi laughs, apparently recalling the situation back then. "I don't know from where it'll come, but it looks like they'll deliver the car by driving it up to our front door."

"Hmm? Does that mean they can drive it on public roads?"

"For now, at least. The board parts that would make it a no go, such as the front panel, will apparently be affixed later after the delivery. That's why I think it'll be impossible beyond."

Forget a car inspection, if you can't watch the street in front, driving will be out of the question.

Though it's not really an issue as I'm just going to use it as a base.

"For the meantime I'll pull through with this, but still, I'd really like to have a proper dungeon house. You think we can get someone to build one for us, even if it's the camping van manufacturer?"

"It's because a camping van won't last for a long time in the harsh dungeon environment, right? If it needs a perfect hermetic sealing and circulatory system, I'd go in the direction of a space development corporation."

"The requirements aren't that severe, but living in normal tents inside a dungeon sounds kinda unreasonable for us, doesn't it...?"

"You bet. That'd be impossible for us weaklings who are totally used to the conveniences of modern society."

"Wait. It's not because we're weak, okay? It's because there's just two of us. A lookout won't be able to sleep with just two people, y'know?"

Upon my declaration, Miyoshi laughs through her nose, and answers, "Well, let's leave it at that."

Hey, that's the truth here.

"Still, considering it like that, soldiers are really amazing, aren't they?"

No kidding.

Normally the JSDF adopts the explorer style when attempting to clear a deep dungeon within the country. It's the same for foreign organizations. It might also be owed to it being a safer approach for exploring, but above that, it's likely for the sake of avoiding an uncontrollable situation. In contrast to that, Simon's team seems to raid dungeons with a pure adventurer style. He had laughed it off with the reason that they are on holidays right now anyway, but I can easily imagine that they might have various military hi-tec items with them, though it's likely basic beddings for lookouts & explorers.

"So, what are we going to do about weapons and defensive armament? As expected, won't it be stupid to go without those for the floors beyond the first?"

"Well, we'd surely stand out way too much in casual clothes down there...it'd be a bother if the number of kind explorers pointing it out each and every single time would increase."

I'd like to be pardoned from being told that it's dangerous each time we were to pass some explorers. For the side giving that advice with good intentions it'd be a one-time occurrence, but for us, on the receiving end, we'd be told the same many times over.

"Since even expensive armor won't be able to protect you completely anyway, let's go with stuff that emphasizes the easiness of movement while trusting <High Recovery> and VIT (Vitality). Isn't the beginner gear that Ms. Mitsurugi and her friend used at the beginning just fine? It's also cheap."

"Given that our ranks are G, such equipment would be appropriate for us, I suppose."

"Ah, I want a shield to ward off projectile weapons."

"A titanium frying pan is no option, eh?"

"As expected, that's a bit, y'know..."

She's right. That has a fairly high cost performance if you just look at its specs, but it doesn't offer any protection to its wearer, and foremost, it looks way too fishy.

"No wonder, if it's not the shop at a dungeon facility, you can't buy anything like that."

Miyoshi briskly checks her PC, narrowing down on a good shield.

"Oohh, this looks sturdy!"

"Let me have a look." Once I take a peek, a bunker shield is visible on the display. "Now listen...who the hell's capable of walking around while holding a shield weighing 180 kg?"

"Senpai."

Yeah, well, I might be able to carry it. But, come on——

"I'm going to stick out like a sore thumb in a completely different way!"

"Gosh, you're such a whiner. How about this then?"

A Protech Tactical's Personal Ballistic Shield, which is used by US SWAT teams, and LBA's Mini Shield are shown there.

"The Personal Ballistic Shield weighs less than ten kilograms. The Mini Shield is made out of Aramid fibers, and weighs around three kilograms. Its protective range is rather small though."

"For the time being I just want to block instantaneous attacks with it, so the mini shield will do. How about going with two as spares?"

"Sure thing." Miyoshi quickly clicks through the shopping site. "Next are the weapons, but...wanna try to go with a cool holy sword series?" Miyoshi laughs while displaying a Sword of Edrick with gaudy ornaments.

"The hell's that?"

"Those things exist as well, stuff made by game companies cooperating with weapon makers."

"No matter how you look at it, it's a collector item, right? Besides, neither of us can handle a sword."

Attacking with a sword I've never held before is somewhat unreasonable, I think. If it's just beating with all power, it'd be similar to a bat.

"If you don't want monsters to get close, projectile weapons would be the choice, I'd say?"

"Projectile weapons, huh?"

However, be it a slingshot or a bow, it'll be difficult to transmit my stats into power here as it'll cause some kind of recoil. That applies all the more with firearms as there'd be absolutely no place to apply my stats in regards to offensive power. It's different when it comes to a bow that can't be pulled by anybody and everybody, but I doubt that something like that would be up for sale. But even before that, I have a hunch that the arrows wouldn't hit anyway. Isn't there any way to somehow handle it with DEX?

There's also the option to use magic as the main weapon, but seeing as there's also the parameter called MP (Magicpoints), I'd be quite anxious to rely on it exclusively. It's a common trope for monsters, which are immune to magic, to show up as the degree of difficulty increases.

"The area of the Moon Clan on the 14th floor is a valley-like place...so you could throw iron balls?"

Direct throwing, eh!?

"In Hyougo there exists a manufacturer called Funabe. They specialize in producing metal balls."
[efn_note]You can check them out here: <http://www.pluto.dti.ne.jp/~funabe/>[/efn_note]

"Nothing less of Japan, anything goes."

"They can make balls out of various materials in a diametrical range of below one millimeter to around a hundred millimeter for us. Two kilograms for a diameter of eight centimeter, and 850 grams for six centimeters."

"Then, how about ordering a hundred each of the six and eight centimeter versions? Let's test out various things with them."

"I think a normal person will dislocate their shoulder if they throw a two kilogram iron ball at full power, though."

"I'll steamroll through with the power of my stats. Also, if it comes to throwing, axes would be the standard."

"You mean tomahawks?"

"Yeah, yeah, those. Slightly heavier ones would be really nice. Get me around a hundred of Browning's Shock n' Awe Tomahawks."

"Somehow it starts to feel like I'm ordering stuff for an army here."

"Oh noes!"

"I had a feeling you'd say that." While blaming me with a chilly look, Miyoshi wraps up the orders.

"It looks like they got them on stock, so most of it should be delivered by tomorrow."

"Roger. Next would be the route, huh?"

If there're any monsters I wanna check on the orbs they posses on the way, I wanna be able to hunt those as well.

"Speaking of dreamlike skills, it'd be teleport and resurrection, no?"

"Also, body enhancement types are plain and convenient."

"The ones that look like they can be sold for a large sum of money without being usable for crimes are the types that can be put to use in the medical field, though."

"Healing types, eh...?"

Heal, Cure, Discurse. Oops, I guess the last one's different.[efn_note]Sounds like an abbreviation of Dispel Curse[/efn_note]

"It'd be really handy to have a tool allowing us to communicate out of the dungeon."

"I hear there are places researching means of communication using quantum teleportation."

"Does it still work when it's a different dimension?"

"For the time being, they have been preparing experiments to check the quantum entanglement within dungeons."

"Hee, it'd be awesome if they could implement it as fast as possible."

I pretty much just tried saying so, but except for thinking that it sounds amazing, I got absolutely no clue about the finer details.

"I feel like they'll reach a point to somehow handle it with dungeon materials before it comes to this, though."

"What's your basis for that?"

Miyoshi opens Yoyogi Dungeon's floor map and taps on the 9th floor.

"This."

What's displayed there is a monster called Colonial Worm.

"Never heard of it."

"It's a monster that's being left alone since it's way too troublesome."

Some kind of incentive is needed to go hunt monsters living in places too far off the routes to the stairways leading to the next floor. There's basically a trend to ignore monsters which don't have

any such incentive or too little benefit for the sponsors. Like the slimes on the first floor. This one seems to also be a representative of those monsters that are neglected.

"So, what about it?"

"Colonial Worms are organized into small colonies and larger main bodies."

The JSDF unit that came into contact with them first apparently thought that the main bodies were their hives.

"The worms of the colonies actively attack various things and devour them, or rather swallow them, but their thickness or anything doesn't change."

"I guess that means they're not like a Tsuchinoko."^[efn_note]<http://yokai.com/tsuchinoko/>^[/efn_note]

"Yes. And it looks like the JSDF tore open a main body with a blade when they defeated it, but before turning into light particles and vanishing, objects that had apparently been swallowed by the colony spilled out."

Dungeon monsters vanish once defeated. That's probably why a completely satisfying examination can't be carried out, but I suppose that means its contents mysteriously spilled out before the main body's death...

"Things that weren't native to the dungeon were apparently left behind after the main body vanished."

"It totally sounds like a treasure chest."

"That's why I've been wondering whether the colony parts and the main body parts aren't connected within."

"Fantasy all over. So you're saying they are sharing something like a stomach?"

"Correct. In that case, wouldn't it be possible that the main body's stomach and the organs of the colonies' worms share the same space?"

"Possibly. It's possible, but...it's not like you can retrieve items by dissecting a captured monster, right?"

"You're right. Besides..."

The movie playing back in my head due to Miyoshi is exceedingly gross, and to be honest, very scary. A colony of bugs sticking to the walls of a hallway and keeping squirming along them is just like the scene inside the house around the end of the movie Squirm.

"Gueehh..."

"Yep, no one wants to face those things, right?"

"You bet. I don't have any intention to get close to them as long as I don't get my hands on powerful AoE magic."

"I'm totally with you. I don't want to be eaten yet."

It's no laughing matter.

"If it's simple magic skills, there's plenty of candidates, though."

Lesser Salamander on the 11th floor, Kamaitachi on the 17th floor, Great Desman on the 13th to 14th floors...she keeps pointing at one after the other.

"What the hell's a Desman?"

"In a manner of speaking, it's a mole. It appears to resemble a big mole called Russian desman. Its traits are a pointed nose and a thick tail."

Even without counting its tail, it has a length of a meter. It's a monster similar to a rat or mole.

"Such monsters are wandering around there? I feel like tomahawks won't work at all against those."

"It might be better to have physical weapons on hand that possess lengthy blades."

Lengthy blades? So swords, after all?

"Which reminds me, I thought about storing and retrieving a bus, but what's your take?"

"Hmm?"

"When taking out something, isn't it possible to decide the direction and location where you're going to take it out to some extent?"

"Yeah, it is."

"That means, it'd be possible to take out something very heavy and sharp above an enemy, wouldn't it? Of course it wouldn't work against fast moving enemies, though."

"A mass weapon, eh...? I think that got some room for consideration."

"I mean even magic, if you can maintain its position after creating it, won't it be possible to suffocate if you keep overlapping water spheres with the enemy's head as target?"

"Do monsters need oxygen?"

"No clue. It's based on the passage theory, but if deep dungeons are truly connected to other worlds through passages, a difference in the air's gas composition and a change in atmospheric pressure would likely turn into a huge problem, but nothing like that has happened so far, now that three years passed."

"Isn't that owed to each floor being in a different space?"

Electromagnetic waves between the inside and outside of a dungeon won't reach. It's the same for each floor as well. In the first place, dungeons have sizes that are impossible based on the underground they're occupying in reality. Anything but them existing in a different space is unthinkable.

"Even if that might be so, can't you go back and forth between floors without any impediments, as if they are completely connected?"

"In that case, it might also be possible for the air to move between them, you mean? In that case, it'd mean that the air composition and the atmospheric pressure is mostly the same between here and the other side, wouldn't it? Is that why the living creatures breath oxygen?"

"Of course, the spaces themselves are separated. It might be possible to connect them through a teleport-like function, but...don't you consider it weird to begin with, senpai?"

"What exactly?"

"A point of contact with a different dimension where monsters are loitering around? Many people would trespass into such a place, right? Wouldn't there be stuff like unknown pathogens and similar in there? There's no medical inspection, is there? What about preventing epidemics?"

Hmm, yeah, even on Earth, medical inspections are enforced in the exchange between countries. And yet nothing like that is done for dungeons, as far as I know. So far as it goes, it means that no dangerous bacteria or living beings except for monsters were discovered in the time until the dungeons were opened to the public, but...

"It's also possible to think that different world bacteria are annihilated by the oxygen here."

"Anyway, even if we rack our brains over this, we won't reach an conclusion. Well, the idea of using a mass weapon was nice. Are you going to prepare stakes weighing around a ton?"

If it's too heavy, I can't store it into <Safe>.

"If they've got pointed ends, something around one ton might have a good user-friendliness. If a dungeon's height is limitless, the most interesting item available on the market would be rebars with a thickness of around five centimeters, I think. But then again, most of the places where you'll use them won't have a height allowing you to freely handle those," says Miyoshi while smiling wryly.

Rebars, huh...? Come to think of it, the rebars that dropped down back then were the beginning of this weird fate, weren't they? I wonder just what they actually hit there.

"They'd be handy if I can add some acceleration to them."

"Oh, I feel like that should work. I'll try practicing with them later on. However, if it enters the weight range of tons, it'll be a special order after all. I'll try to get an estimate by creating a blueprint in 3D, but it won't be in time for this time's dive."

Is that how it works when you're adding acceleration!?

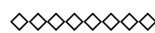
In that case, I guess I'll try practicing with ping pong balls or something. If it's possible, it might be better to raise INT and DEX rather than STR? I'll try to examine that part later as well.

"Yeah, I'm looking forward to it."

At that point, the doorbell rings.

"Oh, it's finally here, isn't it?"

Once I open the gate after checking the screen, I sense how a car enters the front space.



The camping van that had been delivered is quite big.

"Y'know, Miyoshi, it's kinda garish..." I mutter reflexively after going inside and looking at the interior.

A Dorlly Varden 25ft has apparently been used as foundation, but all of the windows have been sealed off so that no light leaks inside. Big monitors, which are displaying the footage of the surveillance cameras around the van, are hanging down at the bed deeper inside and the dinet.

"Since I've heard that the noise in dungeons is bad, the electric power is completely provided by fuel cells. That's ultra expensive!"

For some reason Miyoshi looks happy. I guess she has fun when using new technologies.

"It's a coupling of PEFC and DMCF.^[efn_note] Polymer Electrolyte Fuel Cell and Direct Methanol Fuel Cell, please look them up for further explanations.^[/efn_note]. For caution's sake, I have stockpiled a heap of them, but there's various nice gadgets since the fans would be way too loud otherwise."

Now that she mentions it, I can't hear much in here.

The food will be completely inside my <Safe> anyway. The kitchen area has been kept very simple, probably because there won't be much need for me to normally cook anyway.

Miyoshi gives me explanations about various things, but I think about silly stuff like why a Dorlly Varden and yet an American-styled interior. Well it might be more appropriate to call it something similar to Old American or British style.

In any case, the general preparations are done with this. Once the stuff we ordered is delivered tomorrow, we'll be ready to dive into the dungeon.

I'm somewhat thrilled about an adventure that seems to become my very first real adventure.

§039 Beginning of Exploration 11/22 (Thu)

"Alright, you ready, Miyoshi?"

"I'm good to go. What about you, senpai? You've got our meals with you, right?"

"Aye, I've got plenty in stock. Let's go then."

"Okay."

It's my first decent equipment, albeit a beginner one. Somehow I feel like it's tight. We head down into Yoyogi's underground while teeming with quite a bit of motivation. Since I'd stand out empty-handed, I'm wearing the LBA Mini Shield and have a Browning Tomahawk hanging at my waist for the time being.



Unlike usual, we join the flow of people heading for the stairway to the second floor. The primary goal is the Moon Clan on the 14th floor, but measuring the experience points of the monsters on each floor is important, too.

Miyoshi and I have carefully predicted the environment and areas with few people on each floor. It looks like the action cameras installed on our helmets and the depth sensors are also working normally.

A depth sensor is a device that'll automatically plot a 3D map of the dungeon, I hear. They appear to be the original versions of the dungeon view provided by the JDA. Since we're going to map all the places we're going to visit anyway, we might as well use the opportunity.

Miyoshi has bought a mountain of batteries with the argument that there's an unfathomable value in information. It's a sound argument and all, but it's bullshit if you consider that it's mostly impossible without <Safe> and <Storage>. Well, we don't need to worry on that front.

"You're beginners?"

"Ah, yes."

A party of three men starts a conversation with us. They've probably thought so after seeing our equipment.

If this were a different world or a VRMMO, this would be the moment to suspect them to be robbers, but those kinds of incidents almost never happen in Yoyogi. It might also be owed to the disposition of Japanese, but since the JDA has full grasp on the personal information of the dungeon users, it's difficult to anonymously pull off a crime.

Even if you got something out of attacking beginners here, it's practically not worth it in modern Japan. The risk is far too high for the return.

The man, who introduced himself as Yoshida, tells us about hunting grounds for beginners and various other stuff on the way to the second floor.

"Also, it's better for you to not go further than the fifth floor with that armor."

It sounds like beginner equipment can't handle the swarm charge of monsters called Boa types, who start to appear after the fifth floor.

The fifth floor is split into a fun amateur section and a pro section.

In Yoyogi, it's very probable for monsters down to the fourth floor to not drop any profitable items - commonly called "normal items" - if you defeat them. In other words, to make a living in the Yoyogi Dungeon, you always need to go down to the fifth floor and below.

Turning it around, troubles that would occur due to the difference of attitude towards exploration are being suppressed through the regulated separation in an amateur and pro section.

"I got it. Thank you."

After I express my thanks and bid farewell at the spiral staircase leading down to the second floor, we go down to the second floor for the first time.



"I kinda knew about it, but somehow it's a mysterious view, isn't it...?"

Isn't it pretty neat for there to be a sky in a dungeon? Unintentionally the line of a past artist crosses my mind. But then again, unlike faces, a sky doesn't exist in all of his works. Though, I guess you can create a sky in them if you get rid of the paintings' contents.

This place has forests, hills, plains, and a sky, making it hard for me to believe that I'm in a dungeon. It seems this setup continues all the way down to the 9th floor.

As I look back, the stairway's entrance has been dug into a hillside with a steep wall. Even when peeking inside from here, I can't see the destination of the stairs as they ascend while drawing a gentle curve. Normally you'd think that it'd penetrate the hill's peak, but no spiral staircase piercing the heaven can be found atop the hill.

"You're right, it's definitely mysterious..."

I pull myself together and turn my eyes back in front.

The monsters inhabiting the second floor mainly consist of goblins and kobolds as standard human-shaped monsters, and beast types such as wolves.

"Let's start with the goblins and kobolds here."

We start walking towards a depopulated area while cross-checking with the map we had created in advance.

The lowly frequented areas of the second floor are simply in the opposite direction of the route leading to the third floor. It's not to the extent as with the first floor, but since the stairs to the next lower floor are relatively far away on the second floor too, the lack of people in the opposite direction is rather high.

Of course the number of people drops the deeper you head into the floor.

Once we move to a place with no people around us, I return all my stats to their original values, and

try to run around for a bit.

"W-Whoa!"

"Wai-! Senpai! Where're you going!? Please wait for me!"

My body has become as light as a feather, allowing me to move at a sick speed, but as it looks that my perception has its time delayed as if experiencing everything in slow motion, it's simple to control my body.

"Stats are really awesome."

Traps haven't been confirmed in the well-known areas of Yoyogi Dungeon. Or to be precise, there are no precedents of traps having been spotted in any dungeon. The reason is unclear, but that part is somewhat different to what you'd get to see in fictional fantasy settings.

But then again, I'd consider it an enigma if traps actually existed, and would ask myself just who planted them.

Anyone would consider a trap creator as insane if searching a normal mansion would actually lead to finding a button behind a painting and then being shot by a bullet after the wall to another room opened upon pressing that button.

For that reason it wouldn't turn into that much of a problem even if I were to move at a fairly high speed, although it'd also depend on the structure of the environmental section. It'd be at the level of having a somewhat increased chance of running into a monster after turning around a corner.

But then again, I think it'll be impossible for Miyoshi to keep up with me.

"Senpai, if you're going to move at such a high speed, then do it while letting me ride on your shoulders, please."

No, I don't wanna do something like that as long as it's no emergency. Anyway, I guess I'll walk normally.



Walking onward for several minutes, we stop after finding something like a small human figure deeper down the straight pathway. "Have we discovered our first goblin?"

"Most likely. Let's first check the amount of experience points."

"Roger."

I open up <Making>, and take out an iron ball.

There's a technique to make it accelerate at the same time as taking it out of the item box, but I can't do it.

Since Miyoshi has been using that technique at will, it might have the limitation of working with <Storage> but not with <Safe>. Assuming that the object is accelerated inside the item box at the time of retrieving it, it'd be impossible for <Safe> since time is completely stopped in there.

Of course, it's also possible that there's a difference in talent between Miyoshi and me. If that were

to be the case, I'd start to cry a bit, though.

With that said, I take out a 60 cm iron ball and simply throw it at the person.

The instant the ball left my fingers, the head of the goblin-like being is gone alongside a bang.

"Wut?"

"Oooh~"

For a moment I feel dumbfounded, but this must be the power of all stats being at 100. Come to think of it, my stats are higher than those of the guys who cleared the 30th floor. Probably.

The experience points for the goblin were 0.03, just a little bit more than the exp[efn_note]I doubt you mind me abbreviating it like that seeing as it's a gaming term anyway[/efn_note] for a slime.

Against the next goblin we encountered, I tried a <Water Magic> spell with the name Water Lance.

There are limits to iron balls, and it's a pain to retrieve them in forested areas.

Among magic skill orbs, there exist some with Roman numerals added to them, and others which are unlabeled. The ones with numbers attached to them are called Numbers. You can use spells corresponding to those numbers from the start, but on the other hand, you won't acquire any other spells.

With the unlabeled skill orbs you can discover original spells and spells at the same level as the Numbers depending on your training and experience, but I hear that the difficulty of acquiring those is fairly high.

The orbs dropped by slimes were unlabeled.

We've learned spells like Create Water and Water Lance by referencing to the already known spells of the Numbers.

<Water Magic> consumes 1 MP to create one lance in its initial state. Its effectiveness isn't as high as an iron ball, but the fact that a goblin will be killed with one blow hasn't changed.

"This is nice n' easy."

Hereafter I fully relied on using Water Lances. It's great that it has no potential to damage the forest unlike <Fire Magic>.

In Light Novels it's a template for the effectiveness to rise if you continue using a spell, but if you continue using a spell in a game world, its effectiveness generally stays the same. I'm kinda curious which of both versions is closer to reality.

Since I've fully set my stats at the moment, my current maximum MP amounts to 190. When I confirmed with Making, I found out that MP recovers at INT value per hour. But then again, I don't have a clue whether that's normal or an effect of <High Recovery>. I'll leave thinking about minor details to Miyoshi. (T/N: lol)

I single-mindedly note down the numbers, and just as I had expected, the SP for the second goblin was 0.015.

According to our prior investigation, goblins live in groups. Moreover, exactly because we're in a lowly-frequented area, the frequency of them being thinned out seems to be low as well.

Accordingly I have managed to reach a number close to 100 kills after two hours.

On the way, I've also killed several wolves. They also were instantly killed by a Water Lance. As might be expected of 100 INT.

The exp for the first wolf was 0.03, just like the goblins. Since the exp per goblin has already gone down to 0.003, it likely means that the exp decrease is calculated per race.

And then, when I killed the 91st goblin, it happened.

"Eh?"

"What's wrong?"

Skill Orb DEXxHP+1 1/5,000,000
Skill Orb Premature Birth 1/10,000,000
Skill Orb Premature Development 1/800,000,000
Skill Orb Growth Boost 1/1,200,000,000
Skill Orb Premature Death 1/2,000,000,000

Before diving into the dungeon, the last two figures of the number of defeated monsters should have precisely been 00. By the way, I have defeated nine wolves.

"I suppose it doesn't trigger on a hundred of one monster type, but on the 100th kill of any monster..."

This is a very important piece of information.

After all is said and done, it's doubtlessly good news that I just got to kill the Moon Clan Shaman as the 100th mob.

"Doesn't that mean that you can get as many boss orbs as you want as long as you adjust it cleverly!?" Miyoshi begins to dance Swan Lake while her eyes have turned into \$ signs.

Well, you might be right there, but that'll only work if you kill the boss in the first place, right? Putting that aside, this is somehow an array of friggin' dangerous skills. Or rather, what the fuck is <Premature Death>!? What's going to happen if an old person were to use it!? I tell Miyoshi about the orbs by reading them out loudly.

"<Growth Boost> and <Premature Death> are unregistered skills."

It looks like Miyoshi has downloaded the skill database on her laptop.

Goblins are monsters that can be killed by almost everyone. Given that there's around a hundred million D-Card owners, <Growth Boost> is something likely to be obtained by one person if each of them kills twelve goblins, going by probability, but...

"There's a considerable number of people who have killed goblins just in order to get their hands on a D-Card and then moved on right away, isn't there? After all, goblins don't have any loot that can be sold."

"Makes sense."

I mean, even I'd hate it to eternally hunt goblins. On top of the exp being almost the same as for slimes, there are no reports of drop items either.

"Goblins don't have any loot, and it seems to be the mainstream to aim for the items they gather in their dens."

"Eh? What's with that?"

Up until now there've been quite a few places looking like goblin dens, but we never searched them.

"Well, unlike loot, you won't find those items unless you look for them. They seem to be called GTB."

"Goblin's Treasure Box, or something? I had absolutely no idea. Tell me something like this earlier!"

"Compared to the time it takes to look for them, they don't seem to include anything of value. At most it's a rank 1 potion, I heard. I thought that it'd be better for us to advance quickly."

"Still, it sounds a bit like a treasure hunt, doesn't it?"

"For an amateur, yes."

Searching for a treasure chest during the date might be a nice idea as well.

"I can't recommend a date where you walk around killing goblins. A normal woman would be put off by that."

"How the hell did you know!?"

"Senpai, your nostrils expand when you think about girls."

"Seriously!?"

"I wonder?" Miyoshi dodges my question, but if it's true, it's really bad.

<DEX×HP+1> is what you'd call a miss, but from the feeling I got after talking with Miyoshi before, it's something that'll likely become important in the future. Moreover, its drop rate is 1/5,000,000. A considerable number of those have probably dropped across the world.

"<Premature Birth> is a skill to give birth to a child quickly. Due to its excessive title, I heard it was first used on pigs."

It seems a D-Card will also appear for living beings besides humans, as long as they manage to defeat a monster. But then again, the card will likely be lost in the wild. Moreover, probably because animals don't have names, their names and ranking aren't displayed either. The part about what'll happen if it's used by a named pet piques my curiosity, but even if such a pet had entered the upper ranks, it very likely wouldn't have been clear whether it's a pet or a human.

Animals, who acquired a D-Card, become able to use orbs as if it's only natural. I don't know how they use the orb, but it looks like people made the pigs eat them.

The orb having been used will be obvious from the effect of using an orb, and if the animal has its

card, it's recorded on there, too. It looks like the possibility of animals acquiring D-Cards has been proven like that as well.

Anyway, the pig, which was made to use <Premature Birth>, gave birth merely twelve days after becoming pregnant. And, the ghastliness of this skill lies in all of its children having been normal piglets.

In other words, this is a skill shortening the pregnancy period to approximately a tenth of the usual time.

However, the mother will apparently become quite weak. It's been conjectured that this effect is owed to the mother using ten times the energy compared to normal, in correlation with the shortened time.

At present it's apparently used in experiments to research the heredity of skills used on animals.

"<Premature Development> has been only found two times so far. It seems to boost the growth speed in dungeons to an extreme level, but..."

"Just going by the skill name, it sounds like you'll reach your maximum immediately, right?"

It's what's described as a prodigy at an age of ten, a talented person at an age of fifteen, and a normal person beyond an age of twenty.

"However, this sure is a lineup full of orbs that are difficult to use for humans."

In the end, the only one that seems safe to use is <DEX×HP+1>.

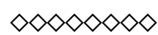
"Well, for starters I'll get them in order of rarity, I think. But you know, <Premature Death>...is that supposed to be some assassination item!?"

I can't think of <Premature Death> — which has a drop rate of 1/2,000,000,000 — as anything but a skill to shorten one's life, no matter how I look at it. Referencing to <Premature Birth>, it'd be by a tenth?

However, if it's like that, it'd be full of demerits, and even for assassinations, it'd take too long, no? It might have some merit — becoming a genius or something like that? — counterbalancing all of it, but I've got no means to test it out. Of course it'd be absurd to test it on myself.

"I guess I'll go with <Growth Boost> here."

And that's how I've obtained <Growth Boost>.



Since there was still a big number of goblins around and as my MP recovered at 100 per hour, we continued to hunt them for another two hours. Even Miyoshi, who has apparently gathered enough data about goblins, has been killing them with compact Water Lances. For her it's one blow with an accelerated iron ball, but unfortunately the iron ball will be gone afterwards.

"Unlike with the iron balls, it kinda lacks that pleasant sensation, though..."

Phrasing it like that, you're becoming a somewhat dangerous girl.
And just then I kill a kobold, which I had discovered in advance, as the 100th mob kill.

Skill Orb AGI×HP+1 1/20,000,000
Skill Orb AGI+1 1/50,000,000
Skill Orb Detect Life 1/1,200,000,000
Skill Orb Exchange Wrought Gold 1/16,000,000,000

"All except for Exchange Wrought Gold are known."

It looks like the other skills are well-known. <Detect Life> is extremely rare in this place, but it seems to drop relatively often from superior wolf species.

"I don't really know whether it's called Wrought Gold because the name of kobold stems from cobalt, but...I wonder what kind of effect it has?"

"It sounds like it'd require some compensation, doesn't it...? Truly fable-like."

1/16,000,000,000 makes it definitely rare, but...

"But, the goblin and kobold orbs are really overflowing with ill will, aren't they?"

"Maybe because of their nature as mischievous fairies?"

It doesn't look like we'll be able to sell them either as they're way too dangerous, and I don't want to test them out either. I suppose we've got no choice but to come here once more after obtaining <Appraisal>.

We meekly chose <Detect Life>.

"We've got an idea on the obtainable orbs now. So, let's move on?"

"You're right. Wolves will appear more frequently on the lower floors, and since the second to fourth floor of Yoyogi Dungeon house mostly the same monster types with just their spawn frequency changing and the opponents becoming stronger little-by-little, we should head for the fifth floor for now."

"Okay, then let's go."

"Senpai, let's first eat something in a place with no one around. I've gotten hungry."

"Well, why not. Then, are you going to take that out?"

"Fu fu fu~! It's time for the debut of the moving base car Dolly!"

Miyoshi took out our base car in a somewhat wide spot. We entered it, and had lunch after I took out the bento and side dishes I bought at the department store.

§040 Hound of Hecate 11/22 (Thu)

After eating our lunch and taking a little rest, we head straight for the fifth floor.

We can always visit the upper floors, and I don't think that there's anything we've got to seriously investigate here right away either. Hence we take the shortest distance while quickly finishing off the enemies with Water Lances in places with no people around, and iron balls in places where it's not really clear whether anyone's watching.

And then, after descending to the fifth floor, we only now notice that we're drawing a lot more attention than we'd expected. Starting with the fifth floor, boars and orcs will begin to appear as well. Because of that, no explorers wearing only beginner equipment can be found here, as might be expected. (T/N: The author used in the WN and LN the katakana Boa, which could either mean boas or boars. Since I can't really differentiate which it is from the context, I will go with boar since further down the line a "wild boa" is mentioned. I never heard of wild boas, but certainly of wild boars.)

"Ugh, senpai, we're unexpectedly sticking out like sore thumbs."

"I guess it'd have been smart to bring cloaks to hide our gear."

It'll be a forest area from the fifth until the eighth floor. It was the same for the second to fourth floor, but the forest here is much denser than it was there. Caves, which seem to serve as dens of human-type monsters, are spread all over the forest.

"Orcs, forest wolves, and wild boars are the new additions here. It looks like night wolves and church grims come out at night as well." Miyoshi explains to me while looking at her tablet computer.

Teams aiming for the deep level seem to often spend the night on the eighth floor. It's a reasonable choice. The tenth floor is full of undead, and the stairway to the 11th floor is far away. The 11th floor has a nasty lava environment, and the distance between the eighth and 12th floor is way too far for normal explorers to travel in one day, assuming they plan to progress deeper down. Furthermore, it's not unlikely to suffer unexpected attacks on the ninth floor, seeing how colonial worms and ogres spawn there.

Hence, going by elimination, the exit area of the eighth floor is the preferred choice as a resting point. Another reason is the temporary base that has been built there as the equipment, which has been brought in by the various expedition-style teams over the last three years, has gathered there.

Anyway, sunset is around the corner. It's a difficult period of time where you've got to decide whether to advance or go back on this floor. Several teams have started to prepare for the night in the vicinity of the stairway.

The objective of the teams waiting for the night on this floor is a dog monster with crimson eyes and black fur which is called church grim and appears only at night on the fifth to ninth floor. This monster, which had at first been mixed up with hellhounds, drops a red liquid, which is treated as adaption medicine and quite similar to potions, with a fairly high probability.

This liquid, which will only show "Potion" if you touch it, had been ridiculed as fake-heal potion at first because it didn't actually heal any injuries after applying it, making its effect unknown.

This very effect was later discovered by coincidence. Yoyogi's tenth floor is an undead area with a huge cemetery. It's extremely troublesome, and the stairs to the 11th floor aren't easy to find at first either. Back then, a certain team panicked and used the fake-heal potion to heal a team member's arm that had been bitten by a zombie. Of course the injury wasn't healed. The team member, who realized the mistake, managed to avoid the wound worsening by using a real heal potion in a hurry, but the effect revealed itself afterwards. Low-level undeads such as zombies and skeletons ignored that team member, treating him like an ally.

Ever since then, the hellhound-look alike monsters were referred to as church grim with the implicated meaning of being charms against the tenth floor's undead. Thanks to this, the tenth floor changed from its previous label as being like hell to a simple roadpoint, resulting in the possibility to travel it unscathed.

But then again, because the effect of the adaption medicine wanes at night, the tenth floor still remains a troublesome floor that's being avoided at night, even by high-level explorers.

Explorers heading for the 11th floor and beyond, generally hunt church grims on the fifth to ninth floor to obtain the adaption medicine. Of course it's the fifth floor's entrance area that's the safest, and the eighth floor's exit area that's the most suited for this hunting. Because of that, most explorers will choose either of those two.

In order to escape the looks of the explorers preparing their camps in the vicinity of the stairs, we quietly leave that area, moving deeper into a direction with few people. After continuing for a while, we run into a shallow streamlet with a width of four meters. I hop across it while carrying Miyoshi.

"Senpai, I had already thought so on the second floor, but the effect of raising the stats is really nothing to scoff at, is it?"

"No kidding. Even someone as heav- gefuuuh..."

Miyoshi, who drove a right hook from behind into my liver, mutters, "The pheasant would not be hit but for its cries."

You, that's not how the saying goes, I think.[efn_note]The proper version would use "shot" instead of "hit"[/efn_note]

Since there's just the perfect, open place ahead of where I'm crouching, Miyoshi takes out our base car after making sure that there's no one around us.



"Ooof, I'm pooped."

Miyoshi, who had turned on the surveillance devices after entering the car, checks the situation outside on the monitors, and then quickly scurries into the shower room. Given that the entire exterior of Dolly has been covered by titanium sheets, you can't look outside normally. That part is being compensated by the surveillance cameras installed all over the car's frame.

As I drink a tea I took out of <Safe>, and stare at a monitor without really registering what I'm looking at, Miyoshi exits the shower room with a clang.

"Senpai, the shower's free now. Oh, please take out something for me to eat before taking a shower!"

"Yessir."

I line up several bento, pastries, and drinks on the table, and then start to walk towards the shower room...just to stop on the way.

"A scream?"

Miyoshi leaps in front of the console, and raises the sensitivity of the outside microphones. I hear the same voice once more at the same time as a small flash shows up in the stream of a surveillance camera.

"You're right. It's a scream and howling. Senpai, what're we going to do?"

"If you see what is right and fail to act on it, you lack courage, was it?"

Miyoshi sighs once, and throws an ear plug my way, indicating that she'll guide me from the van as far as possible.

"Please use that."

"OK." I answer and start to run in the direction Miyoshi tells me.

Once I cross the streamlet and run for a bit, I suddenly encounter a thick fog. It has an unnaturalness as if saying that another world waits beyond.

"Miyoshi, do you see the fog?"

"I do, but to me it looks more like darkness than fog. It's black. The inside is, wait a sec...I'll send in a drone."

There's even a drone stored in that van?

Once I resolve myself and step into the fog, the occasional howling of beasts, threatening yells by someone, and the repeated screaming of a woman gradually become louder.



"What the fuck? These guys aren't church grims, are they!?"

A man holding a pole with a length of 2.5 meters forces back the beasts by widely brandishing his weapon. The pitch black bodies of the wolf-like monsters melt with the darkness as soon as they fall back a bit, with only their crimson eyes and mouths betraying their presence.

"No idea! Usually church grims should hunt alone, but...fuck!"

The one answering, a man with a large build, strikes the sword he holds in both hands at the black monsters attacking while cooperating.

"I've heard that hell...hounds work together in packs, but..."

The woman, who had screamed earlier, says behind those two men after regaining her calm a bit while stopping the bleeding of a small guy who has apparently fainted after suffering a serious injury.

"Those guys start appearing on the eighth floor, no!? However, if those are truly hellhounds...it'd mean a barghest is with them!?"

"N-Now that you mention it, this black fog which has suddenly manifested..."

The men, who had been fighting, look at each other.

"Oi, Mishiro. Leave Shouta behind, and go."

"Huh? Just what are you..." The woman called Mishiro says while looking dumbfounded.

"If there's really a barghest here, there'll be nine hellhounds. Let alone defeating them, it's doubtful whether we'll actually manage to get away."

"That's why, you understand...?"

The hellhounds refrain from attacking, surrounding the humans at a distance, as if enjoying their bickering. The crimson cracks representing their muzzles look as if the darkness is laughing at the humans.

"D-Don't be silly! You're telling me to abandon my little brother and run away!?"

"Have it your way, if you want to be eaten together with him!"

With those words, the men start to run.

"Ah, wait! Wait for us!!"

The woman screams while kneeling, but the men ignore her.

Several low growls are audible from behind her. The woman chews on her lips in mortification, tightly grasps the trigger-less releaser^[efn_note]It's a part of a bow used in archery. I'm no expert, so please have a look at this: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_SFedwg3oPI ^[efn_note] with her right hand, and nocks an arrow on her compound bow. And then, just as she turns around, she releases the arrow, aiming at the eyes of a hellhound assaulting her.

The following whimpering by the hound gives the woman a tiny feeling of satisfaction, but the jaws of the remaining three hounds pouncing on her simultaneously are likely going to reach her body any second now. The woman closes her eyes, obviously having given up.

In the next instant, she can hear squashing sounds, but no matter how long she waits, no pain assails her. As she timidly opens her eyes, she sees the back of a man in beginner gear, standing a short distance away.

"Can you get up and walk?" The man asks without looking at her.



Damn it. Why does trouble pop up one after the other like this? I mean, my LUC should be pretty high up there, right!? It gives me the urge to tell it to get to work, at least a bit.

"Can you get up and walk?"

In response to my question, the woman looks at a man who has fainted after receiving a terrible injury on his arm.

"Hurry, and wake him up. Once you do, run until you cross the streamlet in that direction." I point north.

Barghests can't cross flowing water. It's been designed to adhere to Earth's culture this far, so I'm pretty sure this part won't be any different either.

"What about you?"

"Well, I've got to do something about those guys, don't I?"

"I will hel—"

"You'll get in the way."

The woman looks daunted for a second, but after seeing the headless corpses of hellhounds scattered around her, she immediately nods. She seems to be a fairly smart woman who's capable of making quick decisions. Having said that, why haven't the corpses of these guys disappeared?

Once the woman swiftly makes the unconscious guy sniff something she took out of her pocket, the guy wakes up while groaning. The woman tells the man something, and once he nods, he somehow manages to get up while moaning in pain. It looks like his legs are fine.

"Go."

The two turn in the direction of the streamlet I'm pointing at, and start running while obviously dragging their bodies.

Four hellhounds try to chase after them, but all of them fall prey to my Water Lances with their fangs never reaching those two. While feeling relieved that the spell works against enemies of this level as well, I calmly tell the numbers to Miyoshi.

"Senpai, it sure looks like you've got leeway to spare."

"Well, it's just that my spell is working on them."

"Looking from above, there's something huge further ahead."

"Probably the barghest. I can hear a sound similar to chains being dragged across the ground."

Once the presence of the hellhounds vanishes, the chain sound, which I could hear from in front of me, becomes louder, and an eerie growl reverberates out of the darkness right close by. At the same time, nine magic crests appear, summoning nine hellhounds.

"Oh? Does that possibly mean, I've got lucky?"

"Pardon?"

I'm pretty sure Miyoshi must have been with me when I saw the hellhounds being re-summoned. Considering past precedences, there's no doubt that a monster which can summon these hounds, must be a barghest species, but if you take into account the part of it summoning them several times, it's very likely a special mob.

Because I'm certain that the number of defeated mobs has been at 69 after we acquired <Detect Life>, the seven I've defeated to save the two people earlier have been added to the count, seeing as it's now at 76. In other words, if I defeat that special mob after killing another 23 small fries—

"I guess I'll do my best for a little bit."

While tightly gripping tomahawks in both hands, I face the nine hounds, and shoot Water Lances in succession. I continue blowing up their heads before the hounds can reach a place allowing them to bite me. 14 more left!

When the next nine suffer the same fate, the barghest charges at me with a roar. The location of its crimson eyes floating within the darkness is high up. It looks like it's close to three meters tall.

"Wait, hey! What about the other five!?! Summon them!"

I wonder whether there aren't any night wolves or orcs prowling around somewhere, but as this thick fog seems to be this guy's territory, I can't sense any other monsters nearby.

Its claws, packing a fiendish punch, continue passing next to me. Since I see them in slow motion, it's still okay, but it's quite the thrill nonetheless.

I cut off its right hind leg with the tomahawk in my right, using all my strength. With a loud scream, the barghest takes some distance while limping, and summons its servants once again.

"Alrighty!"

While praying that the count of the 100th will follow the order I killed them, I get rid of five hounds that attack me, dodge the attacks by the remaining four with light step-work, and jump right in front of the barghest. From there I throw a series of the eight centimeter iron balls, aiming for its head. At the moment when I watch the third ball penetrate its head through the jaw, the barghest's huge frame collapses with a loud thump.

"H-Huh?"

No orb selection screen opens up for me.

"D-Don't tell me, it follows the order of aggro!?"

The four hellhounds approach me who has spontaneously gone down on his knees in disappointment. Just when I've become careless, thinking, 'Shit! I don't give a flying fuck anymore!', I hear a groan from the fallen barghest.

"It was still alive!?"

While dodging the hellhounds, I drive several Water Lances into it without delay, and at the fourth, the usual list pops up in front of my eyes. Looking at it, I swallow my breath, completely forgetting about the remaining four hounds for a sec.

Skill Orb Different World Language Comprehension 1/1,000
Skill Orb Darkness Magic (VI) 1/2,000,000



In the moment I hurriedly defeat the four hounds, who came attacking without giving me the time to choose, with Water Lances, the fog instantaneously clears up, and the dead monster bodies vanish just as usual. It looks like the drop item processing is handled once the battle, which seemed to have been something like a boss fight, has completely come to an end.

"Senpai? The fog is gone, but are you okay?"

"Miyoshi, it's about the barghest's orb, you see——"

Just when I try to explain things to Miyoshi, a beautiful, rainbow-colored orb appears in front of me.

"Wut?"

The purchase list of <Making> is still open. In other words, this is a real drop. Once I touch it while surprised, I confirm that the orb floating there has definitely written <Different World Language Comprehension> on it. Sorry, my LUC. You're properly doing your job.

"Senpai? What was that just now?"

"What, so the camera has been running as well? It looks like the barghest dropped an orb."

"Eeeh? What is it? Come on, tell me!"

"Listen and be astounded! It's <Different World Language Comprehension>."

"Haaah!?"

As expected, Miyoshi is surprised as well, huh? According to the list, the probability for <Different World Language Comprehension> to drop is 1/1,000. It's very likely that it's been added to special boss-type monsters with a relatively high drop chance. Isn't that just like humanity being told by the one, who configured it to be like that, to read the epitaphs? I'm sure, a certain number of those will sooner or later drop.

"I think we'll be able to sell it for a hefty sum of money for the moment. I suppose I'll get <Darkness Magic>, huh?"

"Senpai, that means, it's also recorded on the orb list, isn't it? <Different World Language Comprehension>."

"Correct. It says the probability is 1/1,000."

"I don't know what else the list has, but please get it. Definitely."

"Why? We've already got one of them, don't we?"

"Senpai, if only two people possess this skill across the whole world, the arguing over who's right will never stop."

I see. What Miyoshi says is very reasonable. Going by the barghest's abilities, Darkness Magic (VI) must be that fog space and the summoning of hellhounds. Since both are spells used by ordinary barghests, it's very likely that common barghests possess that orb as well.

"Would you strangle me, if I didn't pick that?"

"Eh? What's the deal with that? A flag?"

I select <Different World Language Comprehension> while laughing. With that I got my hands on a second <Different World Language Comprehension> without letting the first one slip out of my hand. On top of that, several items have dropped around me.

It looks like the items will always appear close to you, just like orbs, no matter where the monster might have been defeated. The fact that you'll know the item's name by touching it also concurs with orbs.

Heal Potion (5) x 2
Cure Potion (7)
Fang: Hellhound x 8
Pelt: Hellhound x 3
Tongue: Hellhound
Magic Crystal: Hellhound x 8
Pelt: Hellhound of Hecate
Horn: Hellhound of Hecate x 3
Magic Crystal: Hellhound of Hecate

"Those are the loot items, huh? First time for me to see these. But, for a different world monster to be called 『Hecate』..."

I put those items away into my <Safe> without being able to put my feelings into words.

§041 Mishiro Eri 11/22 (Thu)

"Oh, you were alright!?" A woman calls out to me from the other side of the streamlet with her compound bow at the ready.

"Eh? Ah, yeah, somehow." I wash my hands in the clear water while smiling ambiguously. "So, what about him?"

When I jump over the streamlet and get close to the two, the arm of the man seems to be in a very terrible state as he's laying on the ground while sweating profusely.

"For the time being, I simply stopped the bleeding, but..." She says as she worriedly looks at the man.

Her boyfriend, eh? However, that's a problem. I had intended to bid farewell from them after escorting the two to the fifth floor's entrance area where people are camping, but...on the other hand, I'm not really all that keen to take them to our base camp just like that.

We have a normal first-aid set, which Miyoshi had prepared just in case, but it looks like his right forearm has been completely ripped apart by a hellhound. It's a heavy injury where any doctor would likely opt to immediately amputate the arm at the elbow. I don't really believe that a normal first-aid set will be enough here.

"...No helping it."

"Eh?"

Sorry, Miyoshi.

"You know how to use this?"

I pretend to take out the potion I had obtained just now from my backpack. Touching it, the woman unintentionally cries out in surprise.

"Eh? Eeehh? A heal potion!? Moreover, rank 5!!"

Oh shit, I didn't check the rank of the potion first. Rank 5, is that amazing or something? I can hear Miyoshi's voice yelling, "Rank 5!!", through the ear plug.

"T-This...but..." She's conflicted while looking back and forth between the man and the potion.

"Won't it be stupid to not use it as fast as possible?"

In response, she puts on an expression as if having resolved herself.

"Thank you very much. I will definitely pay for it."

With those words, she rushes over to the man, and makes him drink the potion in little sips.

Oh, so it's something you can also drink. Would it also work to apply it directly to the affected part? As I'm thinking about such things, a big yawn escapes my lips. Even when possessing <High Recovery>, it seems that drowsiness will befall you when you lack tension or concentration. It's probably because it'd turn into insomnia otherwise.

Watching the man and woman, the effect of dungeon items is as extreme as ever. Even if it doesn't go as far as when Ayesha took in <High Recovery>, the view how the inner side of his forearm, which has been damaged down to the bone, let alone the muscles, returns to its former state by bulging out in no time, can only be described as unreal.

At the moment when the man drank up the last drop of the potion, he had completely recovered.

"Eh? Huh? Sis?" The man says while gazing at his arm with a mystified look, as soon as he fully wakes up from his stupor.

What, so they were older sister and younger brother, eh?

"Shouta!" The woman embraces her brother with tears in her eyes.

They sure are on good terms.

"Just what...my arm...it's still there."

"That man has..."

Then she explains to her brother what happened.

"Rank 5!?" Her brother, who had silently listened to his sister's explanation, raises his voice, looking surprised, and then shoots a harsh look in my direction.

Eh? This is not a scene where I get thanked?

"I haven't asked to be saved by you or anything. Neither was it a particularly serious injury."

"S-Shouta?"

Hah? What's this guy saying all of a sudden?

"In the first place, there's no proof that a potion was used."

"Just a sec, Shouta! What are you saying there!?"

Well yeah, that might be true. Strictly speaking, there might actually be proof for it, but I don't give a damn.

"E-Excuse us, my little brother is confused at the moment."

"There's nothing you'd need to apologize for! Sis, you've been deceived!"

Pardon?

"This dirty old geezer has schemed to take your freedom by pointlessly using a high-ranking potion to plunge you deeply into debts, Sis!"



"Shouta!"

Ooh! I hear about this one for the first time. Even Budda would be startled here. Whatever, this has turned into a fucking pain.

While telling me, "So far as it goes, I've recorded all of this," through the ear plug, I can clearly tell that Miyoshi is holding back on her laughter with her shoulders trembling.

"Umm, it's enough. If you head that way, you'll immediately reach the stairs to the fourth floor. Since many teams are camping there, it should be fine for you to go back up after spending the night over there."

"Eh?"

"No, as I said..."

"Leave us alone! He said that it's fine! Let's go, Sis. ...Come to think of it, what about Sakai and Touma?"

Oh, the guys who ran away?

"Won't they be in the same place, seeing how they ran away?"

"Then let's go over there right away!"

They're the guys who escaped while throwing you two to the wolves, though. Knowing about that, the elder sister reveals an expression full of mixed feelings.

"This is my contact address. I will make sure to pay you back...excuse me, but could you tell me your name?"

"It wasn't anything so exaggerated that you'd actually need to know my name. Feel free to forget about it while thinking that he had been bitten by a dog, literally."

"No way..."

The woman, who looks at me with a face on the verge of crying, is probably a good person deep down. I might just have done this out of kindness, but being treated as a perverted old geezer has somewhat pissed me off. Though I fully understand that it's not her doing.

"What're you doing, sis? Hurry up."

"It's okay. I'm sorry for saying something so harsh. Come on, please go now. I'm sure we'll be able to meet somewhere again."

"Sorry. Please contact me if possible, okay?"

With those words she chases after her little brother.

"Mishiro Eri, huh?"

I put her contact address into my <Safe>, and walked in the opposite direction of the siblings, heading back to our base car.

§042 Item Check 11/22 (Thu)

"Senpai, that was totally hilarious!"

As I return to Dolly, I'm greeted by Miyoshi's sparkling eyes. Seen on a monitor, it probably looked like a decent action movie, but I just want to shower, eat, and sleep now...

"Senpai, by the way, do you know the price of a rank 5 heal potion?"

"Nah, no clue."

"Figures," Miyoshi laughs, looking amused, and hands me a cup of cold water. "A rank 1 heal potion costs around one to two million Yen."

"Hee."

It's not cheap, but it doesn't sound like an especially absurd price for a pro explorer. I gulp down a sip of water. It's been cooled nicely. I feel how the coldness penetrates my body. I guess I'm more exhausted than I thought.

According to Miyoshi's explanation, the effects of the potion's ranks are something along the line of:

Rank 1 seems to be able to heal simple bone fractures. It'll completely heal up anything up to what's called a tennis or baseball elbow. It'll apparently also fix a torn muscle.

Rank 2 completely heals stuff like cleaved-open stomachs, damage to the eyeball, and compound fractures.

Rank 3 allows to affix amputated parts back to the body and heals extensive burns.

Rank 4 returns limbs that had been crushed like goo to their original state.

Rank 5 returns limbs to their former state even when you've lost half of them.

Rank 6 returns limbs to their former state even after losing 80% of them.

Rank 7 returns lost limbs to their former state even after a little bit of time has passed.

Rank 8 ~ 10 haven't been discovered yet.

Considering all that, Ayesha would have needed a potion above rank 8, and as that hasn't been discovered yet, it was impossible to buy it.

"The price of each rank uses the market price of rank 1 as a basis. The rest will be generally calculated based on the drop rarity. Or to be precise, it's roughly the price of the previous rank x the potion rank."

"In short, if a rank 1 costs a million, rank 2 will cost two million as it's one million x two, and if it's rank 3 it'll be six million as it'll be two million x three, correct?"

"Yes. But then again, since the number of high-ranking potions is low, the actual trading prices are all over the place."

In other words, a factorial of the applicable rank x the price of rank 1, huh...?

"So, assuming that rank 1 costs a million, rank 5 will be..."

"120 million."

"Aye..."

No wonder that those siblings were surprised.

"In the first place, rank 5 doesn't really appear on the market oft—"

I quietly take out the items I have obtained this time and place them on the table.

Heal Potion (5)
Cure Potion (7)
Fang: Hellhound x 8
Pelt: Hellhound x 3
Tongue: Hellhound
Magic Crystal: Hellhound x 8
Pelt: Hellhound of Hecate
Horn: Hellhound of Hecate x 3
Magic Crystal: Hellhound of Hecate

"—Senpai, you gotta be kidding, all of these?"

"These are the loot items from a while ago."

"I kinda feel like the drop rate is weird..." Miyoshi says and then checks the items by touching them alongside rummaging sounds.

"It's probably thanks to LUC."

As soon as she touched a faint yellow-green, potion-like item, Miyoshi lifted her face in shock, "Senpai! T-This. This cure potion is rank 7, y'know!?"

Its value doesn't really hit home with me yet, but if I adopt what we've talked about just now, the factorial of 7 would be 5040. I guess you can call that surprising.

"What are you so laid back about this? A cure potion is used to heal illnesses, but at rank 7, almost all incurable diseases will be completely healed, understand?"

"Come again?"

"Let alone leukemia, there are even reported cases of dementia having been completely cured."

I almost spit out the water in my mouth. Dementia is treated as illness?

"If pushed to say, something like the recovery of nerve cells falls into the domain of a heal potion, no?"

To begin with, what's going to happen with the lost memory? Does that mean it'll just work out somehow by returning the hardware to its original state?

"Well, you're right. That's why that part might also be an issue of the 『awareness』 you mentioned, senpai."

"You're saying, as long as you recognize dementia as 『injury』 of the nerve cells, you might be able to completely heal it with a rank 6 heal potion?"

"Possibly. There's few places which can run such experiments, or rather...I don't think there's any at present."

After all high-ranking potions are dearly desired by a great number of people. It doesn't seem to be a situation where you could use them in experiments with unknown outcomes.

"Cure potions up to rank 4 are circulating on the market for relatively cheap prices. It sounds like even a rank 4 can completely heal a few among the incurable diseases."

On the whole, their appearance rate isn't all that different from heal potions, but with one mostly needing cure potions being ordinary people and as the demand for heal potions is largely different as explorers have a dire need for those, cure potions seem to be somewhat cheaper.

"Cheap?"

"At rank 4, it's at least 19,200,000 Yen."

"How's that cheap?" I ask while astonished.

If you use the same calculation formula as with heal potions, a rank 1 costs around 800,000 Yen.

"In reality, it's a sum of money that'll be used to treat intractable diseases. In other words, there are

many cases where it's far cheaper compared to the amount of money that'll be paid by the insurances. It goes to the extent that the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare is considering cutting down on the insurance expenses and establishing a distribution organization."

I suppose that means they'll cut the expenses and quickly heal diseases, which cost a lot of money to treat, with potions. Come to think of it, if it's the Kymria-something America for leukemia, it'll cost 475,000 Dollar, albeit only upon success. If it's Japan, it'll cost a little less than 33 million Yen, no matter whether you get cured or not. I guess that means 20 million is still cheaper...

If you use the expensive medical care system of the health insurances, the patient will just pay a limited sum of money he or she can pay out of their own pocket. If you file for a Eligibility Certificate for Ceiling-Amount Application, you'll be temporarily exempted from paying. If you want to call it a win-win relationship, it sure is, but...

"Hah, it totally fits to call it cancer for medicine developers, doesn't it?"

"Well, since the amount available on the market is low, it's not viewed as a problem at present, but if the availability on the market were to increase, it might turn into a life-or-death issue for those companies. It's also possible that they won't allow for such a distribution system to be set up."

That'd mean that our lives would be targeted if we were to swamp the market with a large amount of potions.

"Rank 5 and above starts to work against illnesses which are currently regarded as incurable or exceedingly difficult to fully cure, but because the difficulty of the monsters dropping them jumps up as well, they are rarely available."

I see. That's why medicine developers can fully ignore them.

"But then again, even if you were to go through all the troubles and develop a medicine against such an illness, you wouldn't make any profit because of the lacking number of patients. So, despite being a magnificent achievement in the sense of contributing to humanity, you'll probably find no investors to back such a research."

"In short, you're saying that it won't affect the development of medicines overly much even if we were to spread rank 5 potions and above on the market in the future?"

"Perhaps. Anyway, the current value of a rank 7 cure potion is roughly 4,032,000,000 Yen."

"Since it's not available on the market, it's no more than an estimate, though." She adds, but—

"Who's going to buy such medicine?"

"A multi-millionaire who ended up with acute dementia while still not having settled his inheritance, or someone like that?"

"That makes sense...wait, what about a rank 7 heal potion then?"

"A little less than 5 billion."

"Seriously?"

"Explorers are assets, after all. If they die, the orbs given to them go poof as well. I'm pretty sure that the top explorers of each country are regarded as national treasures that mustn't be allowed to die, no matter what."

And yet they gotta dive into dangerous dungeons, huh? It's gotta be tough to have to insure a warship that is operating on the premise of being sunk.

"The idea here is that 5 billion is cheap to care for nonexchangeable machinery?"

"It's less than one fighter plane if you include maintenance, that's how you've got to look at it."

"Feels kinda distorted to me."

"In reality, the acquisition is just that difficult, and it looks like it also costs quite a bit. Normally, it's nothing that'd drop at a beck's call..."

Yeah okay, they get these after diving several times in the expedition style, so she might certainly be right about this.

"Then, I'm going to——"

"Senpai, you waking up to social justice is your free choice, but even if you were to do your best, it'd just turn into easy money for the middle brokers. The price definitely wouldn't go down. The supply won't catch up with the demand, after all."

"——Figures."

Unlike orbs, items have no fixed time limit. In other words, it'd give middle brokers the opportunity for secret maneuvers — err, business.

"Let me tell you in advance, I also don't recommend walking around and distributing it to people, who can't obtain these."

"Why?"

"Even though that guy got one, I didn't - there's a big crowd of 『I's』 unable to tolerate that in this world."

Distributing potions to everyone is impossible. That's why it'd lead to a categorization of life. I suppose it'd be only natural to be resented by those who couldn't get one.

"Senpai, you witnessed it earlier yourself, didn't you? That boy from just a while ago. Those kinds of people...well, I won't call them the norm, but please understand that there are many like him."

"Haah, it never goes as planned, does it?"

"You won't feel angry if you consider such things as consumable pieces of art or gems."

A clear cut, as expected of Miyoshi.

"So, leaving the fangs, pelts, and horns aside, what are the tongue or magic crystal good for?"

"Magic crystals seem to be objects of super dense crystallized energy."

"What's the deal with that? I no understand. You use this as a substitute for oil?"

"It's an item that's occasionally produced by monsters above a certain level, and it's generally not understood that deeply, but it seems to draw very strong attention from countries with little fossil fuels. The name given to it is clean plutonium."

"That much?"

Ever since the appearance of dungeons, the world's going through changes on a daily basis. Sooner or later humanity might actually reach a point of depending on dungeons for its life like oil. Or rather, it's already on the verge of reaching that point.

"I hear there are various obstacles in implementing it, but...I think this is one of the crystals with the currently highest quality among those discovered."

The hellhounds' magic crystals have a diameter of less than two centimeters, but the ominously shining crystal of the Hound of Hecate is as big as a softball.

"And what about the tongue?"

"No idea. I think it's a rare material, but— oh, the search yielded a hit. Wait, wut!?"

"What's wrong?"

"Umm...it sounds like it's a food ingredient."

"You can eat that!?"

There's a plethora of things I want to comment on, such as the structure of its proteins or the genetic issues, but just what's going to happen if you eat the body of a creature originally not existing on Earth? Isn't that on a completely different level of any talks about the danger of genetically modified food?!?

"What about stuff like food safety or medical inspections?"

"It's the same as epidemic prevention for dungeons, and I don't understand the significance. But..."

"But?"

"It seems to be delicious. *sluuuurp*" (T/N: Gotta love Miyoshi rofl)

"No, now listen..."

Sure, deliciousness might be justice. Assuming that there's no danger for people to suddenly fall ill one day, that is.

"Moreover..."

"Hmm?"

"It seems there's a tendency for various abilities to be boosted if you eat dungeon native foodstuff."

"...What was that!?"

Again related to stats? If you can gain a difference in abilities by using some kind of means, people cannot help but to imitate that move in order to stay competitive. It's the same logic as your own country having to possess nuclear weapons if other countries possess them.

The elevation of stats might certainly allow humanity to grow as a whole, but...that in itself will result in a deepening of the dependence on dungeons.

"How can they believe that dungeons, which appeared all of sudden, won't disappear just as sudden one day?"

"Well, rather than worrying about the sky crashing down on your head, indulging in currently available profits is more wholesome and also essential for enterprises."

"Ah, so you mean, that there won't be any buyers, even if you build something to prevent the sky from crashing down, as long as it's unclear whether that event will actually take place?"

"That's how it works."

It makes me sigh in my mind, but in the end, ordinary people like us can't do anything about it, even if we rack our brains.

"Hmm, I guess we've got no choice but to leave the decisions in that area to those in high positions. Either way, we obtained your dearly desired <Different World Language Comprehension>, but...what are we going to do with this?"

"What are you asking? We'll obviously sell it, right? Or are you going to use it?"

"Please spare me from becoming something like the key deciding the world's fate, okay?"

"I've figured as much. Well, I kinda feel like trying to put one of them up for sale, but...don't you think that it'd develop into a full-blown competition between US and RU?"

"That's surely true, but now's the only time you'll make a big sum of money with it."

I explain to Miyoshi about the drop rate of the orbs owned by irregular, rare monsters.

"Hmm, you're right, senpai. It's a drop rate as if telling us to read the epitaphs, isn't it...?" Miyoshi says while tilting her head to the side.

Well, the issue here is rather "who" has come up with all of this. The rules inside the dungeons which match oddly well with Earth's culture, an affirmation of the passage theory which sounds absurd at a first glance, and the influence of the dungeons which is spreading like highly addictive drugs.

Even if I were to be told that all earthlings are actually managed from their birth in something like a matrix with this entire world being a virtual space, I'd be willing to agree with that at this point. I'm pretty sure that I'll be attacked by Mr. Smith anytime soon.

Wait a sec, am I, who obtained Making, currently in the role of Christopher Walken who chooses assassination to stop the president's rampage? [efn_note]Author's note: Role of Christopher Walken refers to the movie "The Dead Zone" from 1983, which is based on Steven King's book. It's about a man, who ended up seeing the future, trying to assassinate a presidential candidate who would start a war by pressing the button for the nuclear missiles if he should become the president.[/efn_note]

"In any case, I feel like we'd fail in our social duties way too much if we were to put up the orb for auction on our own accord. Oh, senpai, please hold onto the items for now. Just in case, since we don't know how the passage of time affects them."

"Got it. I'll take a shower, eat something, and go sleep then."

"Sure thing. I'll sleep after sorting today's data."

What she means is the video data of our dungeon trip, the 3D map data that was drawn up, and the bunch of parameters starting with the monster exp.

"All of this is actually valuable information that'd make researchers across the globe drool, isn't it...?"

"If you're so worried about it being stolen, just lock it away on your PC. Then you'll just have to retrieve it when you're going to use it, no?"

"Oh, indeed! But, always having the feeling of starting to work..."

"Girl, are you going to always pull all-nighters instead? How about getting SECOM for the office then?"

"Assuming someone were to come, you think it'd be at a level a private security could handle? For the time being, I've put up countermeasures against laser wire-tapping and stuff like that."

Now that she mentions it, she's said something along those lines, didn't she? That's why the remodeling expenses for the office became so ridiculously huge, right? Actually it's best to not stand out, but...recently I've started to believe that this might be impossible. How to put it best? It's kinda like having noticed that the truck you're riding has no brakes only after entering a downslope road.

"Anyway, put all the important stuff in one package, and run away after storing that pack away, if push comes to shove."

"Makes sense. I wonder whether we should set up a safe room. So that I can gain some time for you to come save me, senpai."

"I really don't wanna fight against some country."

"Eh? So you're not going to rescue me?"

"Ugh...no, I've got a hunch that I would."

"That's the hopeless and cool part about you, senpai," Miyoshi laughs.

§043 Exploration Trip Report and Special Training Promise 11/23 (Fri)

On the next day, around late afternoon, we decide to wrap up the exploration and return to the surface for the moment. The exploration effectively lasted one day. Moreover, we didn't go any further than the fifth floor, or in other words, went barely past the beginner floors.

"But well, we've achieved our objective, so it's fine, isn't it?"

"You're right."

As a result of us hurrying with me occasionally carrying Miyoshi while ignoring everything on our way, we managed to return to the surface around 2 p.m. of that day.

"Good work~"

"Good work. So, what're you going to do next, senpai?"

"Hmm, I think I'll get in touch with Ms. Naruse for a bit."

"You can't tell her that we were able to get the orb, okay?"

"I'm not stupid. We have an agreement to store orbs."

"Correct. I'm going back home to play around with my lovely numbers then. Somehow I've got the feeling there's some rule to the drop rate."

"Hee. Then I'll go back for a moment to change my clothes as well, I guess."

"Off we go then?"

"Aye."



After a shower and a change of clothes at home, I call Ms. Naruse, arranging for a meeting in front of the statue of Hachiko at Shibuya station. Having hurried to our meeting place, she reflexively stares at me in wonder when she hears what I've got to tell her.

"Eh? You're able to get your hands on what we talked about? Really!?"

"Yes, well, only maybe, though."

And then, we head from the station towards the Tokyu Department Main store, and start to chat while blending into the hustle and bustle. In the end, this is the safest method to avoid someone

listening to our conversation. The approach here is: the less room I have to feign ignorance, the less I can trust the JDA's conference rooms. And there's also the matter with Executive Director Mizuho to take into account.

"But, I never expected it to be so fast...wasn't it yesterday that you went on the exploration?"

"Well, I guess you can label that part as team effort."

The traffic signal of the diagonal crossing in front of Shibuya station turns green. Swimming with the flow of people, we go diagonally across the intersection, and start walking along Inokashira Street.

"Team effort, you say..." Ms. Naruse looks taken aback.

I mean, although intelligence agencies and organizations related to dungeons all over the world couldn't get a single hint on how to find the orb in question over the span of two months of investing all their energy into the search, a single party consisting of just two people reports only ten days after taking on the request, and moreover merely two days after heading out to explore, that they've got a prospect on being able to obtain it. Normally that'd be at a level where you'd doubt their sanity, let alone what they're saying.

"So, what kind of monster drops it? Is it the clan's shaman as you mentioned before?"

"No, we haven't verified the shaman yet."

"Eh? Then how...?"

"Let's see...if I were to put it in words, I'd go with luck, I guess?"

I give a vague reply that could or could not be understood with a sidelong glance at a billboard, which is put up in the Seibu Shibuya Store and which I somehow don't get at all. No matter what logic you use, denying luck is impossible. The future is always unpredictable. That's why this serves as the best excuse. But then again, it's also difficult to prove it.

"Haah."

"So, assuming we were to find it, what should we do? Is it okay to put it up for auction?"

Ms. Naruse doesn't answer right away, only wearing a troubled expression. We absolutely don't know any of the details as to who brought this story up with the JDA and why it was passed on to our place. All we know is that the entire world wants this orb.

Once we turn left at Seibu's corner, a crab signboard peers down on us. Seeing Kani Douraku's signboard, I think, the rule that it'll wake the urge in you to eat crab at any time is totally correct. While scratching my head in my mind as I'm pretty sure that Miyoshi would once again retort at me that I'm weak against advertisements, I try to exaggerate a bit.

"Miyoshi has said that its value would definitely go beyond a billion dollar..."

"I can't decide this at my own discretion. Is it okay to bring it up with my boss?"

"I don't mind, ultimately it's not that we obtained it, but just that we might be able to get our hands on it, okay? Accordingly it's a question about what we should do if we were to obtain it."

"Understood."

Passing below a huge sign board for non brand quality product, I stop in front the remodeled Apple store, and turn back at Ms. Naruse who has been walking diagonally behind me.

"Please keep praying to god that we'll be able to find it just as planned."

Once I look up, the cross of the Tokyoyamate Church quietly looks down on us while extolling god's peace in Hebrew.



"With that said, how should we proceed?"

Miharu, who returned to the JDA, had grabbed Section Chief Saiga, and dragged him out to Ichigaya without giving him any chance to refuse. When she began to cross the Ichigaya bridge after walking through Yasukuni Street at a quick pace, she started to speak about her conversation with Yoshimura some time ago.

"It's only ten days after we talked about it, Naruse. Just when I wondered why they'd return only one day after heading out on the exploration, this situation, huh? It's a quite amazing story, isn't it?" Saiga said and leaned his body against the bridge's guardrail.

'Normally, I'd consider this as nothing but pure nonsense, but the other party is that mysterious D-Powers.

"So, what's the reason for you expressly dragging me out all the way here?"

"It seems that Yoshimura doesn't trust the JDA or the JSDF in regards to this matter."

Hearing that, Saiga nodded.

'He's a simple G rank explorer forming a party with Miyoshi Azusa. Moreover, less than two months have passed since he got his WDA ID, or in other words, he's a total beginner. As far as we've investigated, his connection with her can be described as coworkers at the company both worked at before. The investigation report indicates that he isn't especially excellent or incompetent as explorer. However, I feel like there's some more to him than meets the eye.

"True, it's certain that various places would reach out for them as soon as they learned of the source."

"So, is it fine to give them permission to auction it?"

"Assuming we gave them permission, you think they would put 'that' up for auction?"

"That'd definitely invite trouble. As far as I've read the reports, I can't believe that they have the power to defend against those troubles.

"That I do not know, but...in the first place, just who has put up the request? In our talk, you didn't give me any instructions as to what should be done after it's found, chief." After making a little break, Miyaru quietly continued, "With the previous story in mind, it's like saying that you attached me as an exclusive assistant to D-Power for the sake of having them search for this orb..."

Saiga, who had been leaning against the railing, turned around.

"Even if it's someone's instruction, a billion dollar is set in stone if this is put up for auction. If Russia concealed information for some kind of reason, it's quite likely that the winning bid will go up to 10 billion dollars, isn't it? The JDA...or rather, Japan? Having the business carried out in their own garden will definitely come cheaper for them." And then, after looking up to the sky, she weakly continued, "Having said that, even if we try to somehow get the deal done in our own garden, it's still a matter that will likely exceed a billion dollar. It's not a situation where underlings like us can make any moves without clear orders."

Everything that Miharu said was reasonable. Even Saiga hadn't requested them because he believed that they'd find it, but because it was one method among many while groping for answers, but as long as they'd lead to at least one hint, it'd be a gain. That was his approach.

'Just who would imagine that a matter, which couldn't produce any result even after government agencies all over the world investigated it at full force for two months, would take this form in merely ten days due to a party consisting of two newbies?

"I got it. But, I can't make the call in my position either. I have no choice but to take it up with my superiors..."

'Just whom should I talk to about this? If I pass this story through the wrong place, all might very likely come to nothing.

"I will say it just in case, but please keep the involvement of D-Powers a secret between you and me."

"You don't have to tell me. If they were to get angry, it'd probably lead to a once-in-a-lifetime chance going up in smoke."

"After all it'd be unpleasant to watch Japan's liberalism being crushed underfoot in the name of 『For the sake of the state』, right?"

"I'm going to stay silent so that this won't come to pass."

"Please do. Also, it will be impossible for me to bring up this story if I don't get you to set a time frame at least.."

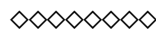
"You're right. Still, it's already Friday after work."

"Even if it were Sunday, I think, the US would make a move within two hours, though."

While smiling bitterly about her being completely right about that, Saiga said, "I will have an answer until Monday, the 26th. I'm sorry, but please have them hold back until then."

"I will do my best."

The outer moat of the old Edo Castle in front of them shone in madder red, illuminated by the setting sun. Saiga let a deep sigh escape over the prospect of him becoming exceedingly busy, despite the after-work weekend being right in front of his nose.



With the very first D-Powers exploration party having ended all too quickly, I make a call to fulfill another promise.

"Yep, right. Since the business I mentioned before has finished after two days, I'll keep you company unless you've got something planned for the weekend."

"It's fine! Let's go, please!"

"What day would be good for you?"

"We've got a holiday! So using both days of the weekend...would be bad?"

"I don't mind. But in that case, wanna play around by searching for GTB?"

"Searching for GTB?"

"Yep. It's a game of looking for goblin treasures. Only if you don't have any problems with goblins, though."

"Then I'll have you accompany me Saturday on my special training, and we'll look for GTB on Sunday."

"Sure. Saturday with the usual equipment, at Yoyogi...around 9 a.m.?"

"Okay! I'm looking forward to it! See you tomorrow."

After making sure that she has hung up, I end the call from my side by tapping on the smartphone.

"Was that Ms. Mitsurugi?"

"Yeah, I'm going to keep her company with her special training, just as I had promised her before."

"A date on the weekend, you're totally like a normie, senpai!"

Miyoshi acts surprised in an exaggerated manner.

"It's not a date, you know? So, how about you, Miyoshi?"

"I'm going to talk every day with my cute lil' numbers all by myself. Somehow it looks like I'll attain enlightenment anytime soon now."

"Oh my, good work on that."

"Muuhh!"

"And, did you learn anything new?"

"I've calculated your drop rate, senpai."

"Hee, what is it?"

"I can't say anything definite as there are too few samples, but going by the actual patterns, the drop rate of monsters, who have standard drops, is around 25% ~ 50%."

It seems she doesn't know at all whether that's high or low. After all there are no proper statistics to be found anywhere, and she hasn't found any comparison targets either.

"Also, about the magic crystal, that side is 25%. I feel that it's different, depending on the monsters. In any case, I've got absolutely no clue how the value of LUC affects any of these."

Figures, seeing how she has no samples to compare to. I guess this is a task for the future.

"Above all, there are no other targets than the 30 odd hellhounds."

"It was 34. As the number of samples is far too small, we don't have any positive proof, just as you say."

Well, if she keeps putting the numbers in order, she might learn a little bit more, sooner or later.

"Good job. Alright then, wanna go to 『Morille』 again?"

"Oh! It's your treat, right senpai?"

"Now listen...let alone getting treated, you're now in a social position where it's no biggie for you to eat at 『Morille』 three times a day, everyday, aren't you? They're not open in the mornings, though."

Since I had always used the company's card recently, I casually used my own card at the ATM the other day. When I did, I reflexively checked twice as my balance showed 200 million Yen. Come to think of it, Miyoshi said something about 1% being transferred to our individual accounts, didn't she? That's why just as much should be deposited on Miyoshi's account as well. And all this even

though less than two months have passed since I quit my company...

"That'd be boring. Or more precisely, the restaurant would be in a bind, to begin with. They would have to keep revising their menu in various ways."

"It that so?"

"Besides, there would be another, a much bigger issue."

"Hmm?"

"I'd get fat, definitely."

"Oh, I see. So, are you going to come?"

"I will. When?"

"Let's see, Sunday or something...would work, right?"

"That's okay. If I remember correctly, Monday is a holiday. But, isn't your date on Sunday?"

"That's why I'm telling you it's no date. It's been a while, so I'll bring Ms. Mitsurugi along as well."

"Another woman waiting for you at the dinner table during a date, you're the worst..."

"I'm telling, you're wrong."

"Senpai, I think that part of you is a reason why you're not popular with women."

I'm told by Miyoshi with her rolling her eyes, but we're not in that kind of relationship, so it'll probably be no problem. Hence, I made a reservation for three people in advance.

§044 Date? (Also Called: Slime Bullying) 11/24 (Sat)

And then Saturday came around. Ms. Mitsurugi waves her hand at me from a table in an inconspicuous corner of the YD Cafe, our meeting place in Yoyogi Dungeon.

An orthodox beauty behaving cutely has significant destructive power. I somehow manage to tighten my face before it becomes slovenly, betraying my initial misunderstanding, and head over to her table.

"Sorry for making you wait."

"No need, I actually just got here a minute ago. Are you going to order a drink?"

Ms. Mitsurugi's café au lait is almost completely empty.

"No, if you like, we can go right away."

"Gladly!"

It's not like I wanted it specifically for today, but I used the <Detect Life> orb. Its ability is close to being passive, and once I focus on the skill, as we descend into the dungeon, <Detect Life> immediately starts to do its job. How to describe it? It's kinda like vaguely knowing the locations of nearby people and monsters.

"This way." As I guide her with those words, I spot a slime much faster than usual.

"Today's a special training day, so wanna try to aim for a new record?"

"Sure! That sounds fun!"

This attitude might be the most amazing thing about her.

Afterwards we silently repeated the cycle of killing a slime, dashing back to the entrance, and tracking the next slime with my <Detect Life> skill. Even I, who only went along with her, was about to attain enlightenment due to the excessive tempo.

As a result of us continuing to fight, while even forgetting to eat lunch, she recorded an average of 50 slimes per hour, and 300 slimes in a little less than six hours. With 300 slimes, she's gained 6 exp just today. Even I, as her escort, have updated my personal best to 155 slimes in one day.

However, since we'd stand out if we were to leave through the entrance together, I couldn't benefit from the reset, as I always waited for her inside the dungeon.

"Pheew, as expected, that was really tiring."

"300 slimes, that's probably a new world record."

"We wasted almost no time searching for slimes. Still, I wonder how you could find them so quickly. Mr. Yoshimura, you're really amazing after all."

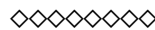
"I was just lucky."

Just as I reply to her, a cute gurgling sound echoes from her stomach, triggering her to look down with a beet red face. As it's almost 4 p.m., lunch time is long over, and it's far too early for dinner. If it's something that'd work—

"Oh, come to think of it, we haven't had any lunch. How about we go back and eat something at the YD Cafe?"

"Okay!"

And then, after eating a pasta set meal at the YD Cafe, we confirm our appointment for tomorrow, and split up.



"I'm back~"

"Ooh, his lordship Sir Normie hath returned."

"Shut it. Oh yes, Miyoshi, today I got plenty of experience."

"What was that? Don't tell me you were kissing inside a dungeon!"

"As if, idiot! Because of <Detect Life>, it was ultra-efficient farming, though. Thanks to that, I also defeated 155 slimes."

"So?"

"Of course the orb selection would pop up, right? I secretly triggered it without letting her see, but since all options were still cooling down for the second time, there was no orb I could get. And then..."

"S-Some secret option!?"

Miyoshi jumps up with \$ signs in her eyes.

"No, the selection window didn't show up. I noticed that it had expired after quite a bit of time passed."

"Thank you very much for news that isn't interesting nor delightful. Moreover, it means that you simply wasted one chance."

"Who cares, it was a fresh experience, y'know!? Also the pasta set meal at the YD cafe can't be described as anything but totally normal in taste."

"That's a nice piece of information."

"Really?"

"However, it hasn't shown up, you say? I feel like you're being told, 『A smart player should always think a bit whenever they pick up something, so that they still have room left.』."

[efn_note]According to the author, it's a text that was always displayed in the game Wizardry #4: The Return of Werdna, which was released in 1987. This sentence was always displayed whenever the player couldn't pick up an item because their inventory was full. By the way, a workaround like dumping items in your inventory on the spot, to make some space, wasn't possible.[/efn_note]

"You, just how old are you supposed to be?"

§045 Date? (Also called: Laying Waste to Goblin Dens) 11/25 (Sun)

When I headed over to the YD Cafe on the next day, as agreed, Ms. Saito was unexpectedly sitting next to Ms. Mitsurugi, who was waving her hand at me from her usual, inconspicuous, table in a corner.

"Long time no see, Ms. Saito."

"It's really been quite a while. I heard about the sushi party from the other day, you know? Jeez, I wanted to go as well!"

"You had a shooting, didn't you? I heard that you've become busy."

"Yep. It's reached the point that I'm just living for my job. Just for my job." Ms. Saito raises both hands, and bangs them on the table in anger.

However, it's completely soundless. It's what you'd call pantomime.

"But seriously, dungeons are amazing." Ms. Saito broaches a new topic, after selecting black tea from the array of drinks she ordered and taking a sip. "At first I reluctantly went along with Haru, but this girl is ridiculously diligent, you see? I mean, she was hunting in total silence. It'd be meaningless and dangerous if I strayed too far from her. So I got dragged into it, and also did nothing more than hunt silently, though..."

Ms. Saito looks at Ms. Mitsurugi next to her. Ms. Mitsurugi repeatedly scratches her cheek, obviously feeling awkward.

"I think it was after two weeks or so had passed. She had an audition for a minor role."

"When I tried to perform, somehow, my body just kinda seemed to move exactly like I wanted it to. I was totally surprised, wondering just what the hell was goin' on. Afterwards I committed myself to spending my days silently entering and leaving the dungeon together with Haru."

Although it was a minor role, it was a position with quite a bit of leverage. It seems that offers have been flooding in successively ever since then, seemingly because rumors about her spread through the director of that movie after she passed the audition easily.

"Eventually it reached the point that I could easily remember any script after just one reading. Is some kind of substance present in dungeons that makes you intelligent, or what?"

Ah, I suppose her INT went up because she had been hunting while paying attention to Ms. Mitsurugi.

"However, you see——"

"Mmh?"

"I haven't been offered any lead roles so far. I'm still not popular, after all."

"That will follow soon, won't it?"

"It'd sure be nice, but...becoming a famous supporting actor is something for after I grow old! While young, it's gotta be a leading role! I want a leading part!"

She moves her chair with a clattering, sits down next to me, takes my right arm, and presses it against her breasts.

What's with this honey trap!?

"That's why~ Become my angel, Mr. Yoshimura~"

"Angel?"

"It's about investing into a movie or something like that." Ms. Mitsurugi says while peeling Ms. Saito off of me.



"I don't have that kind of money. I'm a commoner."

"You mean a commoner could invest such a wonderful pearl into Haru after just having met her a little while ago?" Ms. Saito glares my way with a scornful look, after placing an elbow on the table and propping up her chin with the back of her hand.

"Invest, you say... No, look, that pearl was more or less my congratulatory gift for my pupil having accomplished something."

"You made a mistake with the digits, the digits, I tell you. Just how much does an earring of the M collection cost, do you think!? Even though I've done my very best, you didn't get anything for me."

No, that's because I didn't look at the price since I was in a hurry, okay? I just ordered it, confirmed the goods, handed over my card, and signed the bill.

"Okay, okay, if you land some leading role, I'll properly finance my cute pupil."

"Seriously!? It's a promise!"

Ms. Saito rejoices, smiling like a flower, but the part about it being unclear how much of it was an act is really terrifying. But then again, I kinda feel like she meant all of it seriously.

"However, as always, you're completely faithful to your desires, aren't you?"

Upon hearing my words, Ms. Saito laughs through her nose. "It's not like it's bad to be faithful to your desires. Especially in this world. If I show a will to compromise or something, I'll never get any roles. Lady Luck has no eyes on the back of her head!"

After making that declaration, she suddenly clads herself in a ladylike aura, and puts on a coquettish air.

"However, it's the exact opposite of my usual image. Hohoho."

Rather than being shocked, I admire Ms. Saito for that.

"Somehow, my vitality has been increasingly overflowing like this."

"Ryoko, you've been too busy recently, so it's accumulated a bit."

"What is it that has accumulated? Care to tell me? You sure got it good, Haru. You've got someone to treat you kindly, don't you?"

"Eeh?"

Ms. Mitsurugi covers her blushing cheeks with her hands. You know, that has the opposite effect if you blush.

"So, what is it that you want to do?"

"Something to get rid of what's built up." Ms. Saito points out with a look as if saying, "Hehe, isn't it kinda obvious?"

Girly, this is absolutely the wrong place for a woman, who has started to climb the ladder towards becoming a popular actress, to say something so indecent, isn't it?

"Let's see. I had pretty much planned to invite Ms. Mitsurugi for dinner after finishing today's exploration, but how about you come with us, Ms. Saito?"

"Evening? I've got time, but is it okay for me to intrude upon you guys?"

"Don't worry, Miyoshi is going to come as well."

"Oh, I see, Ms. Miyoshi was going to join, huh?"

Ms. Saito looks back and forth between me and Ms. Mitsurugi as if watching something disappointing.

"Anything wrong with Miyoshi?"

"No, not really. You're going to treat me, right? Of course I'll be there~" Ms. Saito grabs my arm once more, and clings to me.

I'm telling you, what're ya goin' to do if this results in a scoop, girl?

I contact the restaurant on the spot, and ask whether it's possible to increase the attendees by one more person. Luckily it seems to be okay.

"But, Mr. Yoshimura, you're a fairly nice guy, aren't ya?"

"Where's that coming from?"

"I mean, you don't look like you'd cheat, seeing as you're a herbivore. You seem to be quite loaded. And your looks are also acceptable, I'd say? I guess you really shouldn't look down on researchers."

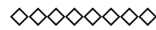
I got totally evaluated here. No wait, I'm a proper carnivore, okay? I just lack the chances and partner. ...Giving voice to that here would make me want to cry, though.

"It looks like science guys will shine if you polish them. Just, they hardly ever get polished."

"Hee, I wonder, should I try to polish one as well after you introduce me to someone who might be good as a raw gem?"

Hey, hey, that's not the thinking of young girls, okay...? Since I kinda feel like they'll start speaking about something frightening if I were to continue listening silently, I drain my remaining coffee in one go, and leave my seat.

"Okay, I think we should be off now."



Having descended to the dungeon's first floor, we continue towards the stairs leading to the second floor, unlike usual.

"It's your first time to come all the way here, isn't it?"

"Well, I've always headed in the opposite direction right away."

They're looking quite quite curiously around themselves, but the design of the first floor is mostly the same wherever you go. In any case, even if they've got zero experience, as it's their first time, these girls are somewhere around the top thousand explorers in the world. The likes of goblins should be easy for them.

"For both of you, it's your first time fighting goblins, right? They're humanoid, so if you feel reluctant, don't try to force it."

"Well, I'll give it a try for starters. So, that means it's fine to hit them?" Ms. Saito says while swinging her arm with a howl. I suppose she plans to wallop them barehanded...

While shaking off my astonishment, I retrieve two compound bows from my bag. Since ancient times, it's been a common trope for DEX-based builds to be archers. In reality I brought two so that Ms. Mitsurugi and I could use them together, but since Ms. Saito has joined in as well, I'll stick to guarding the vicinity. Also, I have magic.

"Eh? Bows? I've never used one, y'know?"

"I have some experience in archery, so far as it goes, but it's my first time using a normal bow."
[efn_note]The archery she mentioned at first is the Japanese archery done as a sport. The second means normal archery when hunting etc. pp.[/efn_note]

"Don't worry. You two have plenty of ability due to the slimes on the first floor. As long as you memorize how to use a bow, you'll hit your target accurately, even if it's your first time."

I mean, that's how stats work, after all.

"Seriously?"

"Yep, yep. Then, let me teach you how to shoot them."

"Okay."

Unlike Japanese bows, you nock an arrow on the left, and you pull the string up to your chin, and not all the way back. Afterwards, I finish by explaining how the releaser works. I'll place my trust in their high DEX, and the fact that the bows are equipped with triggerless clickers.

"Once you pull it to the point where it clicks, aim, and release, after adding a bit of tension."

It's coming in handy that I researched it, after I got interested due watching that woman called Ms. Mishiro or whatever.

"Okay, let's give it a try for a bit."

<Detect Life> clearly differentiates between humans and monsters. I lead the girls to a place with a straying goblin, in a direction with no people.

"Oh, there's one. Can I shoot it?"

"Go for it."

"Mmh, shoot..."

The figure of Ms. Saito, as she draws the bow after asking, already looks appropriate. The arrow, released alongside a whooshing sound, continues to fly, as if being pulled by a string, and splendidly hits the goblin ahead of us. The goblin immediately turns into black smoke, and vanishes.

"Well done! Does it look like it'll be okay for you?"

"Mmh, it's from a distance, and since it's not like they leave corpses behind, it doesn't feel real, but, yea, probably."

Afterwards, Ms. Mitsurugi also succeeds in her test shot. In this situation, it's not really clear which of them has the higher DEX.

"Alright, since it looks like both of you will be okay, we'll start the GTB search. Having said that, it's not like I've done it before either."

"Oh, I looked it up, just in case!"

"That's a big help. Let's start with going to a place that seems to be a den."

I put my <Detect Life> to work, and we head to a nearby place that might be a goblin den.

"But Mr. Yoshimura, you know your way around quite well, seeing how you're walking so quickly, don't you? Did you possibly do a preliminary inspection before today?" She nudges my side with her elbow with a force as if telling me, "Come on, admit."

"Hey, don't get careless. Once we turn around that corner, there's a community of around twenty goblins. Stay calm and don't worry, since I'll defeat any enemy coming closer than five meters."

"Understood."

"Please do~"

"Don't hit me, okay? That wouldn't be funny at all."

"He he he, I know, I know."

I'm worried...

We turn the corner, and the arrows, shot by the two women, assault the goblin community almost soundlessly. In the middle of it, several goblins run in our direction, but I get rid of them with Water Lances. Both seem slightly surprised when they see the spell for the first time, but they still continue shooting their arrows until the very end.

"Okay, good job."

While pretending to pick up the arrows, I exchange them with new arrows from my Safe, placing them into their quivers.

"I've really hit a lot. Next time, when I'm asked about my hobby, I think I'll say archery."

"Ryoko, jeez."

"I mean, look, isn't it kinda cool? Archery. There's also bow hunting and stuff like that, right?"

"Bow hunting? If I remember correctly, it exists in Europe and America, but it seems to be prohibited in Japan."

"Eh? Isn't it the same as a hunting gun?"

"It's a problem since the power is far lower compared to guns, I hear."

Killing prey with a bow is really difficult, and it seems that it'll become an issue if wounded prey runs away. Since the hunter hasn't obtained the prey, they might try to hunt one more prey without running into the hunting limitation. However, because the wounded prey will die somewhere, it'll be the same result as if the hunter has overhunted. In Europe and America this has also caused claims to be brought up that the animals suffer unnecessarily.

"In Japan it's 100% sport. Somehow I feel like it's a little bit cool."

"Right?"

While having such a chat, we arrive at a place surrounded by rocks where the goblins had been.

"So, I think that this is their den, but how do we look for that GTB?"

"Ah, it appears to be in normal chests or hidden in a space covered by rocks."

"Hee."

"Oh, Haru! How about this?" Ms. Saito, who has been rummaging around deeper inside, has

discovered a hollow space by knocking against the ground.

"How can we open this?" Ms Mitsurugi tilts her head in puzzlement.

"We've got a man with us for such times, don't we?"

It's always the same with Ms. Saito, but it's strange since her not being two-faced makes me like her instead. I guess it must be her personality.

"As you wish, milady. I shall do my utmost with my meager abilities."

My current stats aren't maxxed out, but I have raised them to a level allowing me to deal with any danger on the early floors. Of course I've left my LUC at 100. I'm pretty sure that Lady Luck will smile upon me.

Once I confirm the place by knocking against the ground, I place my hands at the edge of the board, and lift it up in one go.

"Ooohh~. You sure pack some power despite looking so weakly."

"Shut up. The 'weakly' was uncalled for."

"Oh, something's in there."

What Ms. Mitsurugi takes out are two potions (1). The rank 1 potions are surprisingly small. They are around one size bigger than pencils, have a cylindrical shape, and a length of approximately five centimeters. If you snap the pointed protuberance at the end, the mostly runny liquid within will stream out smoothly.

"Wow! Is that the big winner?"

"Definitely. It seems to have a fairly low probability to appear. Above all, if you buy one, it'll cost you roughly a million Yen."

"Eehh!?"

"Although rank 1 is the lowest, it'll instantly heal simple bone fractures and ruptured muscle fibers, and unless it's some fairly extreme injury to your face or body, it'll completely heal them without leaving any scars behind, so for your jobs, you should better take them as a charm."

"Eh? It's okay for us to take them?"

"I shall offer the first trophies to my Lady Lucks. I'll later have it turned into a pendant so that you can carry it with you."

"Thank you very much!"

The rest of the loot are several Japanese coins, and one rusty sword.

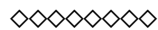
"Well then, let's capture several of them until afternoon."

"Fufufu, a million Yen, huh? I wonder whether we can find around ten more of them."

"If you could find so many, everyone would hunt goblins."

"Yeah, figures."

And thus we head to the next den.



"So what happened in the end?"

"Potions? We only found one more afterwards."

"But, that means three in total, right? It's the second floor, you know? Isn't that kinda amazing?"

The four of us are surrounded by dinner as we're sitting at the counter of 『Morille』. The course, which started with a mushroom bouillon as always, puts a highlight on chanterelle, girolle, and cèpe at several dishes, continuing over several servings. And then I freeze due to a single, plain dish that has been served nonchalantly.

"Eh, this, Ms. Miyo...shi?"

The dish in the shape of thin peel that has been shaved in heaps on top of eggs is something I'm almost never tasting. Going by my nose, it has an aroma that reminds me of gasoline.

"It looks white to me?" I unconsciously ask with polite language.

"Well, it's in season now, senpai. Look, your guests are only beautiful women."

"Don't lie! You just wanted to eat it, right!?"

"Now then, this also asks for a careful selection of the wine——"

"Listen when others speak to you, girl."

Watching that dialogue, Ms. Mitsurugi bursts into laughter.

"White truffles, I've heard Piemonte's Barolo goes well with them."

"Ah, that's a fat lie, so please forget about it. I'm pretty sure that they just wanted to sell their expensive wine."

"Hey, wait a sec. People have their own preferences. Don't reject them outrightly."

"Well, it's your own money. I think everyone's free to do what they like, but...I believe that it should be a crisp white with Mineraly after all. Or, if you want a peculiar one, Saint-Joseph's Marsanne blanche."

"That sounds French."

"It's Rhone. Well, I hear, it really fits. Let's try it out next time."

"No, that's the last eating of white truffles this year. Wallet-wise."

"Booh."

"Mmh, it's my first time here, but it's great." Ms. Saito says blissfully while holding her cheek.

Seriously, this girl is suited to be an actress loved by everyone. It's her nature, though.

"Delicious! These shabby-looking mushrooms math well with shrimp, don't they?"

"Don't call them shabby. Well, you're right, chanterelle don't look all that tasty."

"Like Mr. Yoshimura?"

"I don't think that senpai is that spindly."

"Hey, you girls remember who's sponsoring today's feast?"

"The dreamy Sir Yoshimura."

"My lovely senpai."

"Right on."

While watching that exchange, Ms. Mitsurugi tastes the white, greasy Alsace with its faint sweetness, and laughs happily.

In the future, I'd arrange the pendants, created to insert the potion (1) into a sturdy acrylic cylinder, with a 3 mm deerskin leather strap, creating three 『Charms』 looking somewhat like crude accessories, and send them to three people with a feeling of a master praying for the safety of his pupils.

I kinda don't feel like Miyoshi needs one, but just in case.



Moreover, the compound bows were snatched away by Ms. Saito, just as expected. She herself said that she was only borrowing it or something, but since she didn't look like she had any intention to give it back, I simply gave the bows to the two as presents.

I guess she's a Gian.[efn_note]Gian is the nickname of Goda Takeshi, a bully character from the Doraemon manga. He likes to steal the toys and manga from other children.[/efn_note]

§046 That wasn't the deal, was it? 11/26 (Mon)

Having spent a pleasant evening at 『Morille』, we greeted a new week, refining our plans to raise Miyoshi's level.

"The tenth floor?"

"Yeah, I think it's high time you were able to defend yourself, Miyoshi, but suddenly raising your stats would be difficult, right?"

Even if we keep diving and fighting together, you get less and less exp over time, due to the tricky rule that each kill of the same monster type within the same trip is worth less. Due to that, even that special Hound of Hecate was worth no more than 1.02 exp. I suppose that means the Mitsurugi system is really efficient. But then again, that method only really works in Yoyogi, since its first floor is populated exclusively by slimes, and doesn't get a lot of foot traffic.

"You're right. If I did it as diligently as Ms. Mitsurugi, I could be in the top one thousand explorers within a month, couldn't I?"

"If you were to use <Detect Life> as well, you could easily defeat 300 slimes a day, or in other words, get 6 SP. Wouldn't that be enough to reach the top two or three hundreds in rank, since you'd be able to earn 180 SP in 30 days?"

"Impossible. That's definitely out of the question for me."

Hearing about Mitsurugi's regimen, and imagining repeatedly sprinting to and from the dungeon entrance over and over, Miyoshi reflexively shakes her head at the excessive rigorousness.

In the first place, Ms. Mitsurugi's progress is probably due in part to the fact that she was blessed with an improved physique, so much so that she became one of the top few hundred explorers in the world. But yeah, it'd be hard for Miyoshi to pull that off all of a sudden, I guess.

"I see. Well, you can take it step by step——"

"So I'm going to do it anyway!?"

"You don't want to die, do you?"

"Uuuugh."

I think that Miyoshi, who possesses <Physical Resistance> on top of <High Recovery> and <Water Magic>, is relatively strong for someone of her stats, albeit lacking guts. But, if someone were to ask me what'd happen if an opponent came at her for real, she's basically no more than a simple girl. It would be better for her to raise her stats as much as possible, so that she doesn't die instantly.

"Enough of that. Our targets this time around are these two."

With those words, I point at the names barghest and monoeye on the list of the monsters on the tenth floor.

"Senpai, you defeated a barghest the other day. It's the base species of Hound of Hecate, isn't it?"

"Aye. That mob possessed <Darkness Magic (VI)>."

"VI? That's an unregistered skill."

"It's probably summoning magic. Of hellhounds, that is."

"Eeehh!? I don't think that summoning magic has been reported yet at all."

"You're saying that now, at this point? Anyway, using that skill, it might be possible to make it through sticky situations, even if the summoner themselves is somewhat weak, right?"

"Well, that makes sense, but it wouldn't be enough to handle a bunch of enemies on par with Mr. Simon would it?"

"It'd be enough to buy you some time to run away at least."

"You've got no basis for that claim, though. Okay, so what about the monoeye?"

I look at Miyoshi while grinning broadly, "Don't you think that this one is predestined to possess <Appraisal>?"

Right, the standard skill of any story about reincarnating in a different world, right up there with Item Box - <Appraisal>.

"<Appraisal>, eh...?"

Seeing how Miyoshi doesn't seem to be all excited, I try to pour some gas onto the fire.

"If you have that, it might be possible to check stat values, don't you think?"

"!? Senpai! Please, get it by any means necessary!"

"No, you're coming with me, remember? ...Whether we can get it depends on whether they possess it, though."

"Eehh~ I'm going as well, you say? The tenth floor...isn't that place crowded with monsters? Moreover, it sounds like it's a smelly floor."

It seems that the route through the tenth floor wasn't like that in the past, but after the adaption potion was discovered, it's become standard to get through the tenth floor by using that potion. Assuming that to be the case, I've got no doubt that the floor is swarming with monsters.

"I guess it's kinda similar to the slimes on the first floor."

"Well, yeah. Moreover, it appears that undead will swarm towards humans."

"Are we going to be okay?" Miyoshi pulls a reluctant face.

Having said that, I doubt there exist many women who like zombies. There might be quite a few women who like zombie movies, though.

"Since zombies and skeletons seem to appear whether it's day or night, we'll go for numbers with them. Matching that, we'll aim for monoeyes during the day, and barghests during the nights, I'd say."

"Does <Water Magic> work on them?"

"Since I have an INT of 100, I can overpower them with strength as long as they aren't immune to magic...at least I think I can."

"What about me?"

"If it doesn't work, you can use the iron balls."

"Gotcha. It kinda sounds like that method would be more effective against skeletons and the like anyway."

"As long as you don't run out of balls, that is."

Hearing that, Miyoshi starts to laugh fearlessly.

"Since I have so much space in my <Storage>, I bought an order of 10,000 iron balls from Funabe! It's exactly twenty tons with the 8 cm ones!"

She's throwing out her chest in pride, saying stuff along the lines of "Two buses of Fuso[efn_note]The bus and truck brand of Mitsubishi[/efn_note] are easy peasy." In my case, 500 iron balls would be the limit, but I guess it'll be okay if I get her to share some with me.

"Fu fu fu, please leave it to me. The problem is that I was told that it'd be impossible to deliver all the balls in one go, though."

"Come on, that sucks!"

"Ugh, I-I think it'll be alright since they'll deliver a reasonable amount in the first shipment. Well, if it doesn't work out, won't it be okay if you acquire <Fire Magic> from a lesser salamander on the 11th floor first? Although I don't know whether they can drop that."

"Hmm, you're right, they kinda sound like they might. Okay, let's go right away then? There's still more than enough supplies left from our last run."

"Eh? Right now? That's no good. I mean, it's today, right? The answer from the JDA."

"Oh, true. By the way, I haven't mentioned to the JDA that we have two of the orbs."

"Eeehhh? Not even to Ms. Naruse?"

"Well, no."

"She'll cry if she finds out, you know?"

"Even if it's someday in the future, <Different World Language Comprehension> will spread sooner or later. I mean, the dungeons are designed to aim for that, no? Hence, plucking the fruit while we still can——"

"——is what an Oumi trader is about, yep."

"Correct."

Both of our mouths leak a dark black laughter. Argh, no good. I feel like I'm getting influenced slightly too much by the Oumi trader.

Getting serious again after clearing my throat with a cough, I casually add, "Well, it might be fine to give Ms. Naruse one of the orbs after auctioning off the other."

We're going to force one of the important orbs on her in order to ascertain which of the two other skill owners is correct whenever they say something contradictory. With this it'll be like telling her, "The fate of the world rests on your shoulders." I'd say it's kinda something like a small political party, which is stuck between two, rival, large parties, skillfully holding onto the deciding vote in order to expertly interfere. Yep, yep.

"Once again you're being... how to describe it? Bold, or no, more like evil. Well, let's get her to bear with at least that much, seeing as how she also earned 2.4 billion in the two auctions."

The second I thought, 'No, Miyoshi, it's not like that's actually Ms. Naruse's money,' the doorbell rang.

"Speak of the devil, huh?"

Once Miyoshi checks the video of the entrance on her PC, she says, "Please come in, I have unlocked the gate."



Ms. Naruse, who entered with a meek expression, lowers her head before she has even said anything.

"I'm terribly sorry!"

"No, wait a sec please. Even if you apologize all of a sudden, we won't know what's what..."

After lifting her head, Ms. Naruse begins to very hesitatingly speak, while wearing an extremely apologetic expression. "Let me start from the conclusion. Even if you were to obtain the orb in question, we apparently won't have the budget to buy it."

That's a rather big surprise. I hadn't expected a conclusion where they might give up on purchasing it. I had expected that they would merely try to beat down the price after estimating the lowest, predictable price, but such a ridiculous conclusion of throwing national interest to the wind makes me feel doubtful about whether they've actually brought up the issue with the folks at the top of the country.

"That's yet another...drastic conclusion. I can't quite believe that to be the opinion of the leaders of the JSDF, the government and Public Safety."

Ms. Naruse fidgets around, looking hesitant to speak. I guess there's a hitch somewhere.

"What else were you told? Since it's not like it's actually your opinion, it's fine for you to give it to us straight, Ms. Naruse."

In response, she looks as though she's resigned herself, and begins to speak, "And — they said that if you're a Japanese citizen thinking of your country, they'd like you to contribute the orb to the country for free."

Ooooh, a template statement that shakes the principle of capitalism! No, they think that our side is rich enough already!

"Who is it that said something so utterly wild?"

"Directly, it was our Executive Director Mizuho."

Executive Director Mizuho...the old guy telling us to hand it over quickly since he's going to buy it for 10 million Yen, huh? Why is a mere executive director of the JDA involved with a matter of such global importance?

"Why does that idiot know about it?"

Uh-oh, Miyoshi, you show no mercy. Well, I also think that he's an idiot, though...

"After Saiga brought it up with his superior, the representatives of the Dungeon Agency and Ministry of Finances apparently gathered at the JDA and held a meeting at the bureau director level, but it looks like the executive director attended that meeting, too."

"The bureau director level? Isn't this a matter that should be handled at the undersecretary level, at

lowest, if we're speaking of the bureaucratic side? Why the bureau directors?"

"It's because the executive director took the initiative by calling out his own acquaintances or something like that."

What's the deal with that? I thought he was an idiot, but I hadn't expected him to be a person lacking that much awareness. He really did well to become an executive director.

"So you're saying, the other ministries and government offices took advantage of him trying to look good in there, and went along with his ideas?"

"Yeah, I think that describes it well."

However, is our country really alright with letting mere bureau directors make the decision on this matter? Moreover, Public Safety hasn't even participated. I guess I'll give a certain Tanaka a hint later on.

"I've fully understood what you've told me. As for us, we wanted to sell it to Japan, but it can't be helped. —Miyoshi."

"What's up?"

"You can get the auction started now."

"Eh? You sure?"

"If they held such a meeting without any sense of caution, it must have been leaked a good while ago already. I wouldn't be surprised even if many observers have been set on us by now. I can't really believe that to be the right attitude to deal with a situation that affects the power balance in the world."

"I'm sorry."

"No, it's not your fault, Ms. Naruse. Let me ask just in case, but that meeting was held to decide what to do in the event that we actually managed to find the orb, right?"

"That's right, but don't tell me..."

I stop her from saying anything further by pressing my index finger against my lips.

"Also, Miyoshi."

"Yeah?"

"Once you put it up for auction, we'll have to avoid being arrested until there's a winning bidder."

If they continuously come at us while mixing hard and soft approaches for 24 hours a day, we won't be able to hold out. The other side might have a lot of personnel, but we're just two people. It's certain that things would become bad once we got exhausted. After all, some countries specialize in

using such tactics.

"Oooh!? Somehow it's getting really exciting!"

"It's a big help that you've got that kind of character."

Still, I feel like we would be tracked if we went on a trip somewhere, so a place where we could get away even after being spotted...

"The safest place might be inside of the dungeon, don't you think...?"

"Then let's put the plan we talked about a while ago into action while we're at it."

It's the Grab-<Appraisal>-and-strengthen-Miyoshi plan.

"Makes sense."

"Umm...if you were to do something like that in this situation, won't people think you are diving in order to get the orb?" Ms. Naruse asks while looking worried.

"That's precisely the reason why any country, which doesn't possess the orb, can't cause any harm to us until they confirm where we go, right?"

It's what you'd call deterring movements. This doesn't work on a country possessing the orb, but the top explorer of that country still hasn't arrived in Japan yet, so I'd like to believe that only the second stringers would follow us into the dungeon.

"Ms. Naruse, seeing how things turned out this time, I'd be willing to let you join us, if you don't feel like staying with the JDA."

"Eh? Pupupu, are you proposing to her?"

"...I'm not."

"Senpai, that's the moment where you lift her face by her chin."

I ignore the mockery of Miyoshi, and continue, "I mean, Miyoshi probably intends to create a corporation anyway, once her project with Ms. Midori has launched."

"That's because I have no other option due to the dungeon tax."

"Once you do it, you'll need staff you can trust."

"Hmm, you're right there. Now that I think about it, aren't you the perfect candidate, seeing as how you're Midori-senpai's big sister? I'll treat you well with a high salary, okay? I've got plenty of funds."

"Well, that's only after you've launched the whole thing, though."

"For me it's already set in stone."

"Understood. I will keep it in mind for the time being."

Taking Ms. Naruse's reply as a signal, I clap my hands together, and say to Miyoshi, "Alright, let's use Thanksgiving as a cover for the start of the auction. With the implication that this is a gift to the world from D-Powers."

"Pardon?"

"Mmh? It's called thanks-giving, so it fits to a tee, no?"

America's Thanksgiving takes place on the fourth Thursday of November.

At that moment, Ms. Naruse says with an exceedingly reluctant face, "Umm, Mr. Yoshimura, the first day of this month was a Thursday, so..."

Wha-, don't tell me...

"Senpai, the fourth Thursday was last week."

"Oh, noooooooooo!" [efn_note]In English[/efn_note]

"We won't be able to gloss that over even by behaving like foreigners."

To mistake the date of Thanksgiving, you'd expect nothing less of me, a Japanese!

"Kuuh, the 28th...is a commemoration for Mauritania becoming independent of France!"

"That's completely unrelated to America, isn't it?"

"In that case, we'll call it the commemoration of the beginning of Rawhide's broadcasting! It's super-American, right!? As long as you've watched Blues Brothers." [efn_note]Rawhide was an old black and white TV show about cowboys in the old west. It was the breakout role of Clint Eastwood.[/efn_note]

"Yeah, yeah, at this point anything's fine. In short, it'll be the 28th, right?"

After all, it should take around one day to publicize the information.

"Anyway, I will go all out on spreading the news before the day is over. Also, senpai.

"Sup?"

"The 28th is a Wednesday, okay?" Miyoshi says with a weird giggle.

"Gotcha..."

Thanks to that, the event is now completely unrelated to Thanksgiving, but since we're gonna be

late by a week anyway, it doesn't matter anymore.

"So, once you're done with the PR..."

"We'll take refuge in the dungeon, right? Is it fine for me to splurge a bit on the preparations?"

"Use as much as you want."

"Senpai, saying things like that might make you slightly popular."

"I won't be happy even if I'm popular among such women."

Having said that, wild merrymaking in a shop with girls sounds fun. Well, at least it's something used for business entertainment. I've never done something like that, though. [efn_note]A vague implication towards hostess clubs, where women entertain (mostly) male guests by flirting with them.[/efn_note]

"We might be able to avoid trouble until the bidding ends in the dungeon, but the most dangerous time will be——"

"The day before...and the day after, on the way to the place of the hand-over, right?"

I nod at Miyoshi's remark. On the way towards the meeting place for the hand-over, we'll definitely have the orb with us. That would be the best time to steal the orb, or stop us from handing it over.

"A chase in the middle of the city would make it feel like an action drama."

We laugh, and bump our fists.

"Umm, that would mean that Tokyo will become the stage of a fierce competition, no? I beg you, please keep it peaceful and gentle." Ms. Naruse worriedly interrupts us from the side as we start getting carried away.

§047 Repercussions 11/27 (Tue)

When Miyoshi put the auction up on her site, and spread the news all over the place, the world reacted so quickly that it was astonishing. The phone of D-Powers's office, which shouldn't have been made available to the public normally, kept ringing so much that I thought it might never stop again. We dealt with it by pulling the plug.

I contacted the self-alleged Tanaka, gave him a rough briefing on the circumstances of the meeting held at the JDA, and informed him that we put up the orb for auction since Japan waived its first right. That was the first time when the phone number he gave me was of any use.

"H-Holy shit..."

"Well, that's how it is. Please take care of the rest."

That Tanaka is panicking on the other side of the phone. Seeing how they forcibly put a travel ban on us, I'll let him off with this much as a return favor, I think.

"P-Please wait a moment. Why has it turned out like that?"

"Please inquire about that at the respective ministries and government offices I've told you about just now. Oh right, it might be better for you to investigate every foreigner who has entered the country since the 26th."

I make the threat that even the trading place would very likely turn into a battlefield of many nations after there's a winning bid, cut the phone call, turn off my smartphone, and toss it into <Safe>.



The news raced across the world in an instant, causing a controversy among the dungeon research institutes in many nations. Chief Aaron Ainsworth of the US Dungeon Research Institute in Nevada received a summons from the Dungeon Department, and thus traveled down to Washington D.C.

The Dungeon Department had been established right next to the Department of Homeland Security as the latest, 16th Ministry. Because it had been an emergency establishment, it was currently renting a section of the Ministry of Home Affairs' main building.

"I suppose it means, dungeons are resources as well."

Passing through a narrow access road leading to Interstate 395 from the George Washington Memorial Park Way, the car got on a bridge crossing the Potomac River. The bank examiner, who became the origin of the bridge's name, paid with his life in exchange for saving two women.

[efn_note]The bridge is called Arthur Williams Jr. Memorial Bridge. Please check

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arland_D._Williams_Jr. to learn the background story.[/efn_note]
What it brought about as a result was merely that the name of the bridge was taken away from a French earl.[efn_note]It was called Rochambeau Bridge before that[/efn_note]

'We're standing on top of a dangerous boundary.' He understood that better than anyone else.
'However, like hell will I simply become the shield of humanity. All the more so, if the price will be my own life.'

They entered the 12th Street, and as they eventually drew close to the Smithsonian Station, light and shadow were cast on the car in alternation, thanks to the roads that crossed three-dimensionally. It was completely like the clash of the Demon and Angel forces battling during Armageddon. And then, within the final light, a straight road flanked by two, high museum walls appeared.

The optical illusion through the contest of the walls, which were gradually becoming lower as they drove uphill, was as if he was told that he had no means to escape his own fate. Once the car turned left immediately after escaping the walls, the Washington Memorial Tower came into sight on the left side, and the White House on the distant right.

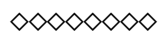
'This place is the center of politics. However, at the time when the world would be rewritten, I'm sure it'll become the furthest, remote region.'

Right in front, the flag hoisted up on the Second Division's Stone Monument fluttered in the wind at half mast.

'The burning sword, a symbol of Paris' defensive battle to block the German's advance, might be what's really needed to us right now.'

The car driving Aaron, who shook his head thinking that he had become somewhat too sentimental, entered the 18th Street NW from US-50, and before long, a square building with a trace of pink became visible to him on the left side.

'Yep, that place is my final stop.'



"So, just who the hell offered this for sale?"

The founding secretary of the Dungeon Department, Curtis Peter Hathaway cuts the greetings short, and immediately gets down to business.

Aaron concisely reports without any emotions, "It's a license code of the JDA."

"JDA? I've never heard anything of any orb auctions. Did something like that become possible recently, or what? I don't seem to have received any reports about it, though."

"As far as I know, it'd be possible to do if you can publicize it within 24 hours after finding the orb, gather the bidders within 24 hours, pull off the transaction after determining the winning bidder

within 24 hours, and make the hand over within 24 hours."

The secretary hits the desk with his pen's butt end several times while suppressing his anger, as if to say that he knows as much himself as well.

"According to that website, the bidding starts at midnight of November the 28th our time. Moreover, the bidding will apparently last two days, you know?"

"It's possible if they obtain the orb 『by coincidence』 on the day designated for the winning bidder to receive it."

"Doesn't that mean it's basically impossible?"

Aaron simply shrugs his shoulders at that without replying.

"Let me change the question. Can our country pull off the same?"

"No." Aaron replies straight away.

"Let me hear your report and analysis."

Aaron hands in the written report he had put together in advance, and begins to explain. According to him, he has received news that First Lieutenant Simon had already won two orbs on that website, and actually received them as well, meaning, it's no scam. The precise method is unclear, but going by the words of the trade partner, they obtained it "by coincidence." He further adds that the website in question has already sold two different types of unregistered skills.

"Because of all that, those related to the website either possess a technology to preserve orbs, or they possess a special technology for discovering and acquiring orbs, or——" Aaron makes a short pause there. It's because he hesitates whether he should voice it out, but in the end he decides to continue, "otherwise, they are loved by the gods, in my humble opinion."

Hearing that, Curtis warps his face faintly, but didn't say anything in the end.

Aaron hasn't included the story passed down from the EU about a magician, who supposedly met an Indian millionaire, because he thought that quite a bit of high society exaggeration has been added to it.

"If such a technology really exists, isn't there any way that we can obtain it by putting pressure on Japan?"

"Please talk about that with the State Departments or the White House. However, it's just my personal opinion, but——"

"Out with it."

"Even after two auctions have passed, the Japanese government hasn't made any movements. Isn't it very likely that it's completely unrelated to their government?"

"Hmm," Curtis ponders.

"So, what are you going to do about it?"

"You mean?"

"The orb itself is definitely necessary for the sake of keeping the balance in the world. I think you already know about it, but the only ones currently able to decipher the epitaphs are Russia."

"We don't know whether their translations are lies. The only ones knowing the truth is that country. That's what you're saying, right?"

"Exactly."

"If possible, I'd like to win the bid, but what is your estimate?"

"I haven't offered any estimate."

"None?"

"None. If you consider the budgets of the countries actually requiring it, I think it's safe to say that it'll be a billion dollars at the least."

"What was that!?"

"If Russia, which wants to keep its interests, the EU, which somehow wants to get its hands on it, and our country compete over it, it wouldn't be surprising for the bid to go beyond 10 billion dollars, I think."

"That means it'll be a cheap price to pay, if we can keep the balance of the world with 1.4% of our country's national defence budget?"

"If you can get back the world's balance with two aircraft carriers, I guess that'd be actually correct."

The needles of the clock hanging on the wall smoothly continue to make their rounds without a sound.

"If I put together what you've told me, it'd seem the simplest method would be to force those related to the auction to cooperate with us by kidnapping them."

Due to the extreme statement, even Aaron couldn't refrain from showing his feelings, "Something like that...would the public tolerate it?"

"Laws, morals and all that useless bullshit doesn't play a role on the front line where the interests of the world clash with each other. All you can find there is power. As long as the public doesn't know jack, it'll basically be as if it never happened."

Aaron listens to those words with a face full of resignation. He had no other way to deal with it.

Seemingly believing that he had gone too far due to Aaron's reaction, Curtis plays it down as a joke, "Having said that, we, the protectors of a free democracy, can't do anything like that."

He's likely convinced that he has glossed it over skillfully, but Aaron has a hunch that Curtis' true thoughts are the complete opposite. However, Aaron wouldn't make any statements that would corner his boss. After all, it's the sole method to be successful in society.

"Speaking of First Lieutenant Simon, why doesn't that person belong to the Dungeon Department yet?"

The DAD (Dungeon Attack Department) is an organization that was established at first under the direct control of the president, and the Pentagon has originally assembled its staff from the DEA and FBI under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. The Dungeon Department severely lacks field forces because it had been created last year, mainly for the sake of handling dungeons as resources, but as it was impossible to force a transfer of authorities that would counter the DAD Department to the Dungeon Department just like that, both are independent organizations for the time being.

"I'd say it's a segregation of capture and control."

"He's still in Japan, isn't he?"

"Officially it's treated as vacation after the successful capture of the Evans Dungeon, but as it appears that he got into contact with the aforementioned orb auctionists on his own device, he's currently diving at Yoyogi."

"Yoyogi is a magnificent mine, but Japan is sure lenient to allow other countries to dig up their resources as they please, aren't they?" Curtis reveals a smile as if he's holding something in contempt, but he immediately tightens his expression again. "However, I certainly don't think it's possible, but..."

"What is it?"

"First Lieutenant Simon hasn't been putting the orbs he acquired on the black market through those auctionists, has he?"

Aaron swallows back down the words, "No way." The possibility isn't zero, and the folks attached to the DAD are all people that are hard to deal with. But then again, he couldn't imagine that they would be able to deceive the control mechanisms of the WDA.

"If you're worried about that, how about mobilizing the army's internal auditing department?"

"It's never a good idea to owe the Pentagon." Curtis grins broadly. "Isn't it about high time for our field forces to start becoming active?"

Aaron couldn't see Curtis' face as anything but that of a sinister lizard.

"I will have a section of the Dungeon Department handle the bidding. It's fine for you to remove

things related to this matter from your duties."

"Understood." With those words, Aaron nods, and leaves the room.

§048 The Escapists' Exploration 11/27 (Tue)

On the day when King Abdullah arrived in Japan from Jordan, Tokyo was covered by a migratory anticyclone, turning it into a calm, mild, late autumn day. Late in the evening, as the sun prepared to set, Director of Cabinet Intelligence Murakita, and Chief of Joint Staff Nogawa, visited Prime Minister Ibe at his official residence.

"Our country waived its right to buy <Different World Language Comprehension>!?"

"It looks like that's how it turned out." Nogawa says with a gloomy expression.

"That's yet another bolt out of the blue, isn't it? Just who the hell did something like that, when and where?"

The Prime Minister had heard from the Director-General of the North American Affairs Bureau at the Foreign Ministry, and the Director General of the Bureau of Defense Policy, who had visited his residence this morning, that there were inquiries about the orb in question, which had suddenly been put up for auction, by the US, but he had never imagined that things would develop like this.

'A message about <Different World Language Comprehension> from America should have been handed down to the Dungeon Agency through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after Russia's announcement. I'm sure it's clear that the orb in question is an extremely crucial tool for diplomacy. It was obtained in Yoyogi, right? And yet our country waived the right to purchase it? Just what kind of joke is that supposed to be?

Murakita, who brought the report in, continues with a detailed explanation of the chronology and reports that the orb will be put up for auction at midnight on the 28th, EST.

"Why was such an important meeting held at the JDA in secret, and moreover, without even letting us know about it?"

"It looks like an executive director from the bureaucracy took the initiative..."

"You're saying a JDA executive director didn't understand the importance of this orb?"

'If he had only bought it despite that, he'd likely find as many buyers as he wanted. I think there are divided assessments on whether the JDA should be regarded as a profit-based enterprise or something else altogether, but even if you look at it as a for-profit organization, it's unthinkable to waive the right to buy the orb.

"According to Tanaka's investigation, when the vice-director of the budget bureau complained about a lack of funds, they apparently decided to demand the orb for free, or at a low price...it seems even the Ministry of Finance easily went along with that, as it would spare their budget."

"Demand it for free? Are the explorers relatives of the JDA or something?"

"No, that is, umm...it looks like they told them something along the lines of...it's only natural to contribute to the country, as Japanese citizens thinking of their nation."

"Haha, nowadays even the members of the Ministry of Defense wouldn't say something like that, would they? Still, unfairly forcing explorers to hand over their assets for cheap? Is the JDA a dictatorship or something?" Nogawa laughs dryly, obviously flabbergasted.

It's different during times of war or similar, but a country collects taxes exactly because it protects the individual, and it's not like the individual exists to protect the country.

"So?"

"According to what he has learned from D-Powers, they couldn't collect the money from the JDA, which had requested the search, because of a lacking budget. Since they were told to donate the orb to the country, they reluctantly decided to put it up for auction, they say."

‘What the hell! However, if they said that they'd do so reluctantly, there might still be some room for negotiations.

"The beginning of the auction is midnight of the 28th EST. In Japanese time——"

"2 p.m. on the 28th."

"If possible, we've got to buy the orb, and have the auction stopped, before then."

"It's said that the estimated price for the winning bid will exceed ten billion dollars, though."

"Okay, if the supplementary budget won't cover it, we will use the Settlement Adjustment Fund^[efn_note]It was set up to cope with a decline of tax revenue in 1977 with an initial capital of 200 billion Yen. The intention was the settlement of future deficits through payments of the Fund.^[/efn_note] During the second oil shock, 2.5 trillion Yen came out from there. Around a trillion Yen should be in there, right?"

"Since we haven't ever transferred any money into it since then, its balance is zero."

"We just have to temporarily transfer some money from the Debt Consolidation Fund. Let's pray that they will give their own country a little discount."

"But, what about the approval of parliament?"

"We can get the formalities done later on. We will have the Committee of the National Diet lay the groundwork, but the time is limited to 22 hours, after all."

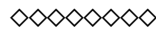
"Today, after this, I have a summit meeting with King Abdullah. And, starting the day after tomorrow, I must be in Argentina for the G20 summit.

"Mr. Kitamura[efn_note]Yep, author turned the name around here, it's not me![/efn_note], let's see, visit my residence tomorrow at 6:45 p.m. to report on the course of events."

"Roger."

"If this goes public, the opposition might start kicking up a fuss, but...then again, if this fails, far bigger expenses might await us.

The Director of Cabinet Intelligence left the Prime Minister's residence at a quick pace, while whispering something into the ear of the Chief of Staff.



Russia's dungeon capture organization is called the Dungeon Capture Bureau, and was established under the GUSP (Main Directorate of Special Programs of the President of the Russian Federation), and not the FSB (Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation) or the Ministry of Defense. And, just like the agents of the Special Programs of the President were called Moles, the agents of this bureau were called Weasels. But, in spite of that, since the president was at the top of their org chart, the GUSP bureau director didn't have any authority over them.

The Dungeon Capture Bureau had been established next to the seat of the president, at a place slightly down the Ulitsa Il'inka (street name), which was inserted between a tourist attraction, with the queer name Sredniye Torgovyye Ryady, and the Gum Store, coming from the Red Square.

"In other words, D-Powers still hasn't obtained the orb?"

On the other side of the office's large desk sat a man who was simply referred to as 『Bureau Director』, he was around forty years old, had an undercut, possessed a powerful build despite being slender, and had eyes like razors.

"Very likely."

The staff member Kurnikov, a tall man with a well-built physique, who seemed to be around thirty years old, answers the man's question while standing at attention.

"This time the timing of the auction has taken a form different from usual. The transfer of the orb has apparently been set to take place on the 2nd of December."

"In short, there's something that would trouble them if it were to be prolonged indefinitely, huh?"

"The situation of this orb is extremely special. Thus, it's possible that the bidding would continue indefinitely if they used the conventional system.

"I fear that it's likely the case."

"Hence, their acquisition of the orb, or their opportunity to do so, has to happen on the 1st of December, correct?"

"If D-Powers truly acquires the orb, and assuming they hand it over to a country other than ours, our country will lose the advantage it's holding in the area of dungeon exploitation.

Ignat, who was forced to use the orb <Different World Language Comprehension> against his will because of the circumstances, was an illiterate explorer hailing from a miner family. That orb made it possible for him to understand the words written in the language of a different world, but in order to translate that into Russian, the ability to describe the concepts written there in Russian was indispensable. Hence they had to first teach him the basic knowledge in order for him to be able to translate correctly, which was exceedingly inefficient.

"Are we going to send in personnel to obstruct them?"

Shooting a freezing stare at Kurnikov, who said that while looking at the face of the bureau director, he quietly said, "Please dispatch personnel that will cooperate with them."

"I'm sure Yoyogi will be teeming with more dangers than usual on that day. Don't you think it's necessary to make sure that their people can get back home safely, by supporting them with our guards?"

"Then, from the teams of the Dungeon Capture Bureau——"

"Have them dispatch one group from the FSB's department V."

"Huh?"

Department V of the FSB is a unit that was called Vympel during the era of the KGB. Back then, the unit was in charge of protecting nuclear facilities. However, its true nature can be described as an elite unit specialized in intelligence and subversive activities. Two of the elite units which had supported the KGB's illegal activities, nowadays, after many twists and turns, existed as Department V and Department A in the Special OPs Center of the Counter Terror and Political Extremism Bureau, under the jurisdiction of the FSB.

"Ah, don't worry, it's just a bit of insurance."

To Kurnikov it looked as if a smile had formed on the lips of the bureau director, which he couldn't see clearly, as it had become dark in the room.

"Haah... But will that be enough? If we assume that their people manage to safely come back to the surface, what can they do, other than simply being present at the place of the exchange?"

"There are times where you can't avoid accidents, even if you're careful."

"...It will be right in the middle of Tokyo, you know?"

"No matter how safe a country Japan might be, accidents happen, right?"

"That is..."

"It wouldn't be strange even if one took place on that day, by chance."

"I understand." Kurnikov says, and leaves the bureau director's office to handle the formalities.

"And yet, that might still be insufficient." Muttering that remark, the bureau director suddenly picks up the phone receiver, and enters the numbers to connect him with the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russian Federation).



We told Ms. Naruse how we'd contact her after leaving the dungeon, quickly wrapped up our preparations, and dove into the dungeon. And then we rushed downwards, taking the shortest route, while avoiding and ignoring all explorers and monsters. <Detect Life> played a big role in that.

We'd stuffed everything of importance into my <Safe> and Miyoshi's <Storage>, and as we didn't use up most of the goods we had prepared last time, most of it is still there. Having learned from last time, we didn't forget to prepare mantles to hide our conspicuous beginner gear this time. I had thought that people wore mantles just because they flutter in the wind, so it was a rather big surprise that they were actually really warm once I put it on.

"Senpai, the video feed from the back camera keeps showing glimpses of people every now and then. Isn't someone following us?"

"Wait a sec."

We've been following a different route from normal, while using <Detect Life>, but when I check very carefully, I spot four groups, apparently advancing while sticking close to us. The actions of each group are independent, and it doesn't appear at all as though they're cooperating, but since they're following us while maintaining a fixed distance, it makes me think that they must be quite skilled.

"Yep, they're there. And it's more like four groups."

"Four groups means...US, CN, and GB, who have been gathering at Yoyogi, and also JP, as expected?"

"What about RU?"

"I think it's a bit too soon for them. Unlike the other countries, they shouldn't have any interest in where we go. Their turn will come on December the 2nd."

In that case, it's rather unlikely that they'll attack us right now. We might actually receive protection from them instead. We've got to stay on guard, though.

"Still, it doesn't look like Simon's team is here."

I suppose it's because they're an assembly for top 10 rankers, but the feeling I get from them when I use <Detect Life>, something like power or vitality, is on a different level altogether. There's no doubt since I've tested it several times.

"None of the groups feels all that amazing."

"I'm pretty sure they're scouting units or something like that, don't you think? Organizations with lots of manpower do operate differently, after all." Miyoshi says with an envious undertone, and then laughs with the look of someone who just came up with something evil. "It sure feels like it'd be funny for all their teams to run into each other when they enter some narrow, straight corridor."

"They'd simply feign ignorance while looking as if they met by coincidence, no?"

"You think they won't restrain each other or something similar?"

"Even if they did, you see...there's no way they'd suddenly start killing each other. They can't afford to lose sight of us after all."

However, being tailed endlessly feels unpleasant, it's like being monitored. No, they might actually be monitoring us to begin with.

The instant we turn at a corner, I mark our pursuers with <Detect Life>, heave Miyoshi into my arms, and raise my speed, relying on my stats.

"Guee...uuh, did we give them the slip?"

"Hmm, I don't know whether we've lost them completely, but I think them following us here would confirm that they're tailing us."

Even though the guys behind us were out of sight for a short while, they definitely kept following us. They might possess some exclusive scouting technique to see footprints or something.

"Aren't they equipped with inter-personal radars? There aren't very many people in the fringe areas around here."

"Such small inter-personal radars exist?"

"Fifteen years ago, an MIT researcher built a device to detect moving bodies through wi-fi electromagnetic waves. Even though it was developed as a counter-terror device, it wouldn't be odd for them to have those."

"That's damn amazing."



"That's my full report about the most recent activities of D-Powers."

In a small meeting room of the JDA, Naruse Miharuru reported her support activities, and the recent actions of D-Powers, to Section Chief Saiga.

"Good work for the time being. After you got involved with them, Naruse, just the profit of the handling charges they brought the JDA amounts to 2,470,000,000 Yen. For a business lady that's beyond remarkable. If things hadn't gone well, we'd need to deduct three digits from that."

"That doesn't really stem from my effort..." she thought, but didn't comment on it in particular. 'Be it ability or luck, the result is what it is. That's how the world of adults works.'

Once Saiga closed the report in his hands with a bang, he changed his attitude, and crossed his legs as, if to start some idle chit-chat about God and the world.

"Right now, China's Huang, and Great Britain's Wiliam, are visiting Japan for orbs, right?"

"Eh? They still haven't gone back to their countries?"

"Far from going back, the other day Team Wiliam, and Team Fang, have entirely arrived in Japan from their respective countries."

"Huh?"

"I've been told to let them stay in Yoyogi for a while."

"Even their countries possess dungeons that are in the middle of being captured, don't they?"

"Most likely."

"However, there's few dungeons in China. For some reason, hardly any dungeons have appeared in the areas in the back of Japan, if seen from the Pacific Ocean."

"Why are they abandoning those dungeons and gathering in Yoyogi then?"

"Well, pretty obviously because of those auctions, no?"

<Different World Language Comprehension>. The auction for that orb will be held in Japan, and the hand-over location is Ichigaya. It's clear as day that the orb comes from Yoyogi.

"Moreover, France's Victor, and Germany's Edgar, including support teams, have filed a request to participate. It looks like the US will increase its personnel here, too."

"Support teams for Simon's team?"

"No, it seems the personnel of the Dungeon Department will be increased by several people."

"The DoD (Department of Dungeons)?"

"Yep."

Simon belongs to the DAD. This is an organization under the direct control of the president, initially created by calling in staff from the FBI and DEA. The DoD is a ministry created last year, mostly to treat the dungeons as resources. Having said that, because there was no way to simply transfer jurisdictions that would clash with the DAD to the DoD, the DoD had independent field forces. In short, the US possessed two organizations, with different command chains, related to dungeon captures.

"Is there discord between the DAD and the DoD?"

"No clue. That's none of our concern. I don't have any intention to poke my nose into the internal affairs of the US." Saiga said while spreading his arms. "Well, with that said, the international affairs surrounding Yoyogi have suddenly gained tremendous momentum."

"The lodging facilities of Yoyogi Dungeon can't handle all these people, you know?"

"I have already passed that on. Fortunately, there's a plethora of hotels around Shinjuku. The embassies of the respective countries will find something suitable, I'm sure."

"The top 20 soldiers, except for Russia's Dmitriy and Italy's Ettore, have assembled in a single dungeon?"

Saiga shifted his body's weight in his chair's backrest with a squeak.

"It might be the first time for such a situation to take place, since the nations put their systems in order after the dungeons appeared across the world."

"The Kiryas Kul'yegan Dungeon is closed, right?"

That's why everyone isn't over there, despite knowing that it's the dungeon where the orb was first discovered.

"Correct. But then again, a completely open dungeon like Yoyogi is rare. So, the guys from D-Powers have gone into the dungeon today, right?"

"Yes. They said they'd hang around there, and come back before the auction finishes."

"Them entering the dungeon at this time will make anyone believe that they've gone to get the orb, no matter how they think about it, right?"

"Well, that's..."

"As far as I can see from the entry lists, scouting teams from all nations are chasing them."

"If Russia were to be there as well, we'd have to worry about assassination as well, though," Saiga cracked a joke that wasn't funny at all.

"I don't know what those guys are thinking, but the handover has been specified to take place on

December the 2nd. Grasping their whereabouts on December the 1st will likely become the highest priority for the secret services around the world."

Yoyogi is wide, and has a large variety of monsters. Quite the effort will be necessary, if they were to comb through all the floors. However, if they can narrow down the floor with D-Powers on it, they should be able to lower that effort significantly.

"Moreover, it appears that after the folks from the security department went in, they lost sight of them. They came here to sound me out as well."

"Eh? They were surveillance targets?"

"Guarding targets. You're sticking to them from our side as well, aren't you?"

Miharu was surprised exactly because she wasn't quite aware of that.

"I can't believe that I'd be of any use as guard, though..."

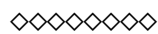
Hearing that, Saiga laughed, and said, "You see, it already makes a difference just to have someone watching."

"Anyway, given that the security department, which should have staff at every important location, can't keep track of them, it's very likely that even the scouting parties of the other nations have lost them. Around now they're probably panicking on-site." Saiga twisted his lips, looking amused. "So, can you get in contact with them?"

Miharu hesitated for a moment, but decided to report the truth. "Sort of, in case of emergency."

"That's fine then."

Outside the window, the shortening days meant the time was already fast approaching when the autumn sky would turn to crimson.



The area around the stairs descending to the ninth floor, where we arrived after having shaken off our pursuers, was covered by a dry moat and an earthen wall, and had certainly been fashioned into something like a base. As might be expected, there was no inn, but the slightly fantasy-like setting, with food and stuff being sold at a stall, was quite amusing. According to the lad at the stall, they seem to run their business with two teams changing every two days. Apparently, among the explorers capable of reaching the eighth floor, there are a lot of surprisingly wealthy people.

"Still, since you're an explorer, this is what you're after, right?" He says, as he held out a skewer of grilled meat to me. When I ask back, "Is it orc meat?", it actually seemed to be normal pig meat.

There are orcs on the eighth floor too, but the drop rate of orc meat isn't all that high, and I hear it's far more profitable to bring it back up to the surface. Nevertheless, one skewer costs 1,000 Yen,

location, location, location, I suppose. I finish paying, for both me and Miyoshi, with two 1,000 Yen bills.

Business between explorers, besides trade licenses, are handled with cash, or direct payment through WDA cards. The latter is an automatic withdrawal from the account linked to the WDA card, but it's limited to transactions below 100,000 Yen, and each time a commission, plus a tax of 100 Yen, will be automatically deducted from the sender's account. Since it's about the same as an ATM fee, it could be called convenient, but since the trade itself is open to scrutiny, there's basically no privacy. Furthermore, trades inside a dungeon are apparently settled at the moment when you leave through the dungeon's exit. Well, it's because the internet doesn't work here.

"It's definitely a bit burnt, but I guess it's part of the ambience. It's actually surprisingly good."

While saying something rude, Miyoshi stuffs her cheek with the grilled pork. The afternoon has already advanced quite a bit, with the time for an afternoon snack having passed. Our pursuers seem to have lost sight of us, seeing how they are out of the range of <Detect Life>.

We thank him for the meal while returning the skewers, and head to the stairs leading down to the ninth floor. Probably because the lad at the stall saw the beginner gear peeking out through a gap in my mantle, he pulls an astonished expression, and ends up asking, "You're descending with that equipment?"



"BO8. This is 18. We've reached the eighth floor. Over."

"This is BO8. The targets descended to the ninth floor just now. Over."

"BO8. You're kidding, right? No matter how you look at it, that's too fast. Over."

"I'm certain. A pair of a man and woman, in beginner gear. The woman was doubtlessly Miyoshi Azusa. Over."

The man, who had been selling grilled meat on a skewer, talked into a headset in the shape of a small earpiece, while standing in the shadows, away from the stall.

"Affirmative. We'll hurry and chase after them. Additionally, it looks like a lot of our colleagues have joined the rally. Be careful over there. Over and out."

The man removes the ear piece, and stands up.

"That means they managed to get a lead of one floor on our scouting team..." He mutters, while looking in the direction of the stairs the two had just descended. "Just who the hell are those guys?"



We emerge on the ninth floor in a climax forest rather than a jungle. Moreover, it has a Japanese style. Big trees similar to Japanese beeches are growing into the sky, while leaving quite a bit of space between each other. <Detect Life> registers several monsters. It's probably boar and bear types. According to the documents, even forest wolves and ogres seem to appear here. My current kill count should have 66 as the last two digits. The next 33 can be anything.

While pondering that it might be fun to experience the night on the tenth floor that everyone seems to hate so much, we continue walking towards the stairs leading down to the tenth floor. While Miyoshi devotedly hurls out iron balls on the way, she checks out various things. It looks like she can freely use <Storage> to attack, without spending any MP. I think she's got plenty of balls with her, too.

There are quite a few people on this floor. As long as you avoid the colony worms, ogres and king boars seem to be quite nice as prey. Of course, that is only if you can defeat them.

That's why the iron ball attacks are handier than magic. It's easy to deceive others since shooting the balls looks kinda like using a sling.

Based on my secret peeking at the other explorers, most seem to travel in parties of four to six people. The general principle of fighting consists of the vanguards stalling the monsters, the middle guards attacking them with hammers and spears, and the rear guards using composite bows, crossbows, and guns.

"I've heard that the JSDF forms a solid defense line with bunker shields, and fires volleys with rifles."

"Type 89s?"

"According to the rumors, there's stories about them having brought in Type 19s by Howa Machinery[efn_note]Look here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Howa_Type_20 The Type 19 is still in development as far as I understand it. But I think you get the drift.[/efn_note] or something like that."

Experimenting with the next generation of rifles inside a dungeon...well, seeing how there's quite a few humanoid monsters in here, it's quite possible.

Around the time when the sun is about to sink, we arrive at the stairs to the tenth floor, while avoiding the eyes of others as much as possible. Because there's a relatively decent camp on the eighth floor's side of the stairs connecting the eighth and ninth floor, the explorers, who spend the night in this area, concentrate on that area. In other words, no one is around here.

Thus we go down to the tenth floor without caring about the sun sinking beyond the horizon.



"Section Chief, there's a call for you on line three."

"And here I wanted to go home early for a change."

"You have my condolences."

Hearing that line, Saiga wondered for a moment whether he had made a mistake in training his subordinate, but he reconsidered that it might not be bad to close the distance to his subordinate, as long they kept up appearances outside the office.

"Yes, Saiga speaking."

What he heard from the other side of the telephone was the voice of a somewhat stiff-sounding JSDF officer.

"...Oh, Mr. Terasawa. It's been a while since our last contact. Yes. Yes. Eh? Right now?"

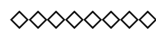
Seeing the shoulder of the female employee, who had received the call, twitch for an instant upon the comment he spontaneously blurted out, Saiga smiled wryly without saying anything. It's because anyone would hate troublesome work popping up at such a late hour.

"There's no time? Okay. ...Understood. Then—" After saying that, Saiga looked at the clock on the wall. The clock's hand was about to hit 6 p.m. "—how about 7 p.m.? Yes. Yeah, I know. Okay. See you later then."

Once he hung up, the employee, who had taken the call, asked, "Shall I stay back if you're going to meet someone after this?", seemingly taking him into consideration.

"No, it's fine. We will meet outside. Thanks."

Upon his reply, she bowed her head, saying, "Understood. Good work," with a relieved expression, and started to prepare to leave the office.



The taxi, which had entered the Tokyo-Idai-Dori from Tomihisacho[efn_note]An area close to Tokyo's Medical University[/efn_note], turned left at the crossing at the end of the Tokyo-Idai-Dori, just before the street would exit towards the Shiba-Shinjuku Uji Line, and after heading down the street for a bit, came to a halt in front of a rectilinear-designed multi-store building, with an inconspicuous entrance and a pure white wall, located on the right side.

The place in front of him, which had extremely low reviews, was a store that he would hesitate to enter if he hadn't been told about it in advance. When Saiga, who had pulled open the somewhat heavy door of the bar, named after an old cocktail for its first part, lightly lifted a hand after spotting Terasawa at the furthest seat of the counter, the bartender, who had immediately guessed that he was Terasawa's companion, drew back the seat next to Terasawa for Saiga.

"It's a nice and calm bar."

"Well, it's got the fact that there are no customers in the early hours going for it."

Seemingly having just opened, there were no other guests to be found at the ten counter seats, or the tables that were even further in the back. Using the serviette offered to him, Saiga ordered a gin and tonic, and immediately got down to business.

"So, what is it that you wanted to talk about?"

Of course Saiga guessed that it might be about the orb in question, but going by the fact that Terasawa had privately called Saiga to such a place that was unrelated to the Ministry of Defence or the JDA, it was highly unpredictable what kind of story might be thrown his way.

"Why did you watch all of this while remaining silent?"

Terasawa guessed that this section chief of the Dungeon Management Section, who was pretending to be a harmless office worker, had been able to obtain the orb in question since the very beginning. After all, a mere half month after he had nudged him with his own idea, the unbelievable situation of the orb in question being put up for auction came to be. There was no way to call it anything but world-shaking, but assuming it was related to D-Powers, it'd sound like a lie to say that he was unrelated.

"...What might you be talking about?"

Without addressing that question, Terasawa clenched his fists atop the counter. "You should have been able to handle this a lot smoother. To me it simply looks like you created this situation to suit your own purposes."

Saiga revealed a bitter smile at his overly blunt way of speaking, and took a sip of the gin and tonic that had been placed in front of him. The fragrance of the lime tickling his nose seemed to spur on his tired brain.

"Is this about the matter of that orb? I think you're overestimating me a bit too much." While keenly taking a second sip, he added another barefaced lie, "As you know, that's an item capable of triggering a competition between countries. It's not like a mere section chief would be able to do anything here, right? I simply bring it up whenever something happens that has to be reported."

Saiga pointed his finger upwards as if saying "with my superiors."

"However, since you haven't contacted my office, the one who requested your help, about it either, I can only believe that you had some motive."

"You're making way too much out of it. Above all, the orb still hasn't been found."

What Saiga had reported to his superiors was no more than the inquiry as to what he should do when the orb was discovered. But then again, his maneuver of contacting not only his direct superior, but also Executive Director Mizuho was definitely different from usual.

"But, D-Powers gave a preliminary announcement that they would put it up for auction. They

should have contacted you before that."

"I just asked my superiors about the first steps of the negotiations, such as what I should do when the orb was discovered, and whether we would buy it. Anything beyond that is none of my business."

Saiga, who had been thirsty, drained down the remaining gin and tonic in one go, looked in Terasawa's direction, as if thinking that it might be inevitable, and tilted his head to the side.

"And that's how that ridiculous outcome came to be?"

Terasawa, who had been informed about the details by Tanaka, reflexively held his head, being at his wits' end.

"That's above my pay grade." Saiga said.

Terasawa looked at him, looking suspicious. He could only think that this whole situation had been constructed by this man, by manipulating the timing and occasion of bringing it up, no matter how he thought about it.

At the moment when their conversation took a break, the bartender came over to take orders for their second round of drinks. Seeing that, Terasawa whispered to Saiga, "The single malt of this place is superb."

A large number of distinguished bottles stood close together at the back bar, lined up on the other side of a glass door. Even within the dark illumination, the characteristic bottle designs were clear.

"I don't really want to think about how much all of these bottles have cost, considering the steep price rises in the recent years, but if Terasawa recommends it, it must have a reasonably fair price.

However, currently it was a bad time for him to get drunk on strong booze.

"I don't hate drinking it straight, but it's a bit too early for that." Saigai laughed and ordered it diluted with water, while making a pun of Terry Lennox' famous phrase.[efn_note]Terry Lennox is a character appearing in the movie "The Long Goodbye." It's based on a novel by Raymond Chandler. I can't find the exact wording in the movie, so it might be a bit inaccurate.[/efn_note]

The bartender asked about the alcohol he'd like to have, once told to go with the standard, he nodded silently, retrieved a Famous Grouse[efn_note]tis one: https://kohei-fujimura.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/img_1113.jpg [/efn_note], and started to mix it with skilled hand movements.

"However, they still haven't gone to search for the orb, and by just saying that they would run an auction, it's not like that they actually started one either. Don't you feel it's somewhat weird in such a situation that the whole world has started to move as if they have actually discovered it?"

Terasawa could understand that argument, too. He even considered it to be reasonable. However, it was an undeniable fact that the intelligence agencies all over the world would pay close attention to their actions on December the 1st. Having said that, even if he tried to get to the bottom of it at this

point, it would have no meaning. His objective today was linked to Japan's wish to somehow recover their preferential right right now.

"Saiga-san, just as you say, the auction hasn't started yet. The scheduled start time is tomorrow 2 p.m., going by Japanese time."

Saiga silently listened to Terasawa without looking in his direction, while tasting the diluted Famous after placing his elbow on the counter.

"In other words, it's still not too late. If we can somehow stop the auction——"

"Mr. Terasawa."

Saiga had remained silent up to this point, but here he suddenly interrupted Terasawa. Terasawa didn't continue any further, staring at Saiga's profile, he sensed a sudden change in Saiga's demeanor.

"If you can prepare a satisfactory offer, you might be able to have D-Powers stop the auction by apologizing to them. At least I think that something like that might be possible." Saiga was doubtful whether they'd grant such a request at this point in time, but if he got Naruse to beg them in tears, while emphasizing all the troubles in regards to the trade, he felt like they might be unexpectedly willing to agree to it. However——

"In that case——"

"Tell me, what are you going to do after obtaining the orb?"

The ice in the glass clinked, as he rotated the glass while pinching its rim.

"...What do you mean? As a security guarantee, and also diplomatically, it will be a trump card to——"

"Trump card?" Saiga placed his glass on the coaster with a hard clack.



"Try thinking about it. Assuming Japan were to obtain this orb, just who do you intend to allow to use it? An expert? A JDA staff member? Or a bureaucrat? Or maybe you will have a soldier of your JSDF use it?"

Because Terasawa believed that it was the job of the politicians to decide what to do with the orb after obtaining it, he didn't have any reply to those questions.

"Now listen. No matter who might be made to use that orb, they probably won't be able to lead a normal life anymore."

'After all, there would be text passages only that person could read. If some outrageous secret was written there, would they really be capable of turning that into words? And assuming they were, would people believe those words? I wonder, just how many people exist who can live on while being persecuted by the suspicions of others? In this country, that is.

"But, someone must take on that duty."

"You might be right there." Hearing that remark, overflowing with a sense of duty, Saiga shifted the direction of their conversation, "Say, Mr. Terasawa, you're surely not thinking that anything goes as long as it's for the sake of Japan, right?"

"A bit, I'd say. Well, I do have this kind of job, after all." Terasawa said, with a slight hesitation after remembering the foolish remarks that were apparently made in regards to this orb trade.

"Thinking like that myself, and forcing that thinking on others, are two different pairs of shoes.

Hearing that, Saiga shook his head, "I see. But, is obtaining this orb really good for Japan?"

"What do you mean?"

Terasawa twisted his upper body, turning his body in Saiga's direction.

"Even if <Different World Language Comprehension> were to be truly put up for auction at this point in time, it would be one of only two in the whole world. Hence, if there were any discrepancies in translation, it would merely turn into endless arguments."

Terasawa nodded.

"Assuming our translation were to clash with Russia's, would Japan have the power to insist that Russia had lied about it?"

"The West should back Japan's translation. They should have at least that much trust in us, right?" Terasawa answered while smiling bitterly.

"What do you think, on just what will that trust be based?"

"I'd like to say that it'd be based on our great efforts as Japanese people after the Second World War, but the root of it might be the economic prosperity that came from the Japan-America Alliance."

Even though it was occasionally ridiculed as excessive American gratuity, it was an undeniable fact that it was a part of why Japan accomplished such economical flourishing.

Saiga nodded lightly, and continued speaking, "You're right. That's why, if I were Russia, I'd suddenly grant Japan some concessions in regards to the Northern Territories issue a while after the orb was used."

"That's..."

If something like that were really to take place, it might look as if there's some backroom deal, even if nothing like that happened.

"As it'd likely plant a seed of suspicion in the Japan-America relationship, it's quite the fantastic idea, isn't it?"

Even if it might be a small distrust at first, the demon's of doubt would gradually grow in size within the people's minds. And eventually, there might come a time when the root of Japan's credibility would corrode.

"A divisive maneuver, huh...?"

"Mr. Terasawa, this was just a terrible joke. It's something that's always used by the folks who are slaves to disputes over concessions and cliques within parliaments."

"The country possessing the strongest military force in the world likely won't rest as long as they don't have their own translator. It seems obvious that it'll result in them applying some kind of pressure at every opportunity."

"In that case, there's also the option for Japan to obtain it and hand it over to America..."

"I think you'd better refrain from that. Even our country has those kinds of people, right? At the moment the state became the seller, all kinds of pressure should swoop down on the authorities all at once. Exactly because the sellers are individuals, it would be a shame to apply pressure on the level of a state on them."

'So to speak, it's something like pounding away with a heavy machine gun to kill a water flea. I'm pretty sure it'd be completely exaggerated.

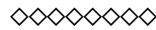
Saiga gulped down his drink, and said, "This is the best way to have the countries in similar situations constrain themselves. Russia will arbitrarily divulge things that America wants to hide, and America will do the same with matters Russia wants to hide. That keeps it all in balance."

"Both countries might come to an agreement, for the sake of something silly like trying to deceive the other countries, no?"

"If something like that really becomes reality, the world would be controlled by those two countries, and the existence or absence of the orb wouldn't make much of a difference, right?" Saiga replied to Terasawa's objection while revealing a dark smile.

'Certainly, if America and Russia seriously cooperated, no power would be able to match them militarily.

"Although they're sitting at the same table, using the same cards, America and Russia, and the other countries, play different games." Saiga quietly lifted his glass towards Terasawa. "That's why I'd say, let's have America pull the joker."



A Western-styled graveyard was expanding across the whole area.

"Senpai! It stinks, you know!?"

"Eh? Seriously?"

She's right, if you focus on the smell, a faint rotten stench hangs in the air. Since the opponents are zombies, you might say it's only natural, but just how does that work when they vanish once defeated?

After we travel for a bit, in the opposite direction from the stairs to the 11th floor, groaning zombies show up from the graves all over the place. For starters, I shower them with Water Lances. As there's no sign of explorers around us, no one is watching anyway. I can kill the zombies I hit in the head with one blow, but the ones I mistakenly hit in the legs are heading our way, dragging the upper bodies along the ground, even with their lower bodies having been blown away.

"Is this some kind of biohazard, or what!?"

Because the path isn't overly wide, with gravestones standing close together even next to the path, it's quite annoying to target them if they keep crawling along the ground. By the way, <Detect Life> only shows them as very small responses. In other words, they are almost stealthy. I can spot them if I focus on it, but this is quite a nuisance.

"Miyoshi, let's use the top of that hill over there as a base!"

"Sure thing."

The sun is about to go down anytime now. We run up the hill slightly ahead of us, while shooting spells and iron balls. Once we've finished exterminating the monsters in our vicinity, Miyoshi swiftly takes out the camper-van. We rush inside and close the door.

Since we've removed the rear ladder, it's a kind of a stronghold. Even if the tires get destroyed, it won't matter to us at all.

"Phew. Three more until the next 100, huh?"

Miyoshi boots up the surveillance monitor. Although it's already dark outside, the video on the

monitor is relatively clear.

"What's up with that? Infrared rays?"

"The current main filter is an amplification of visible light. Zombies probably don't emit any heat, right?"

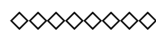
"Who knows. I've got no clue, but I guess anything works as long as we can see them. Or rather, the night on the tenth floor actually seems to have some light sources."

Once I look, stars are twinkling in the sky, despite this place being inside a dungeon. If werewolves and their ilk exist, there might even be a moon. Besides, it appears objects similar to torches occasionally flicker here and there in the graveyard. It's mysterious.

"Now, now, senpai. Let's leave the stargazing for later, and have dinner first."

Once I take out tea and bentos, we start our dinner, with the occasional sounds of the titanium covers being hit as BGM. Our bentos this time were ordered from a lunch vendor in the neighborhood by Miyoshi. I was astounded by the little extravagance when I heard about this, but as might be expected of a glutton's recommendation, they taste quite good.

After a short time, the sounds of the titanium covers being hit stopped. I don't understand what component of the living draws the undead to them, but now that we've secluded ourselves in the car, it doesn't seem as though there's anything drawing them here.



"Lao Wang. Are we really going down here?"

Chin Yen, the only woman on the team, confirmed with their leader, Wang Wei.

"What's wrong, Chin Yen, you scared?" The youngest among them, Wang Chi Yin, said as if mocking her.

Since he had the same family name as the leader, he was called Shao Wang, with the leader being called Lao Wang.

"The guidebook of Yoyogi states that even top teams avoid the tenth floor at night."

"What, it means the top teams of the amateur folks, right?" Having checked their equipment, Yu Han cut into their conversation with those words.

"Hanghua..."

Chin Yen saw that the JSDF-like scouting team avoided descending to the tenth floor, after confirming that the sun would go down very soon. In a slightly separate place, the GB and US teams, who had confirmed the same, apparently refrained from going down to the tenth floor as

well, seemingly copying the actions of the team well-acquainted with Yoyogi.

"Very likely it's because they didn't manage to prepare adaption potions.

"However, the JSDF team, which should possess adaption potions, and knows Yoyogi well, isn't trying to head down."

"Chin Yen, if the Yoyogi guidebook is correct, the effect of the adaption potion is weak during the night anyway."

"True."

"Besides, our targets headed down. With just two of them." Lao Wang said, hinting at the party that proceeded to the next floor a little while ago.

It was impossible for the party, which had calmly gone down to the tenth floor at night, an environment which made even the JSDF hesitate, to have reached the stairs leading to the 11th floor before the sun had completely set, no matter how you considered it.

"Alright, let's go then!"

Alongside Lao Wang's encouraging yell, the four went down the stairs leading to the tenth floor, chasing after D-Powers.



"Whoa! Wait a sec, isn't that the CN team?"

The JSDF's scouting team stared in wonder, while watching Lao Wang's team go down to the next floor in the distance.

"I don't know whether they're that confident, or simply don't have a clue about things, but you think those guys will be able to come back?"

"Wouldn't it be better if we went to rescue them?"

"Stop it. It's regrettable, but with our combat power, we'll definitely go for wool and come home shorn." Mimasaka, the commanding officer of the scouting unit, said with a vexed look.

"However, the D-Powers duo are Japanese. Moreover, they're currently treated as VIPs. Shouldn't we go to rescue them?"

"No matter how much of a VIP they might be, explorers have to manage their own risks. It'd be different if we had an order to do so, but we haven't received any orders to protect them. Our objective is ultimately to monitor them." Mimasaka tightly clenched his fists.

Even he would have gone down to the tenth floor right away, if only he had enough strength. But,

as the commanding officer, who precisely grasped their capabilities, he knew more than well enough that this would be beyond their abilities.

"Listen, don't try to do the impossible. Incompetent, hardworking, people will only invite the worst outcome."

Once he said so to his team, as if persuading himself, he kept looking for a long time, with a fierce glare, at the stairs where the CN team had disappeared.



Descending to the tenth floor, they immediately confirmed with their heat tracking sensors that the two people had apparently headed in the opposite direction of the stairs. After a few minutes of following the sensor, while getting rid of the undead, the sun fully disappeared beneath the horizon, and the temperature fell right away. And then, within the sun's afterglow, which was about to fade away, the sounds of rifles being fired in three round bursts echoed across the tombs.

"Lao Wang, our bullets won't last!"

Chin Yen shouted, while shooting his QBZ-95-1 at a crowd of zombies swarming the group. [efn_note]Look here: <http://pewpewpew.work/china/rifle/qbz95/95-1b.jpg> [/efn_note]. Hanghua had already entered close combat with his bayonet. However, unable to gain much distance due to the limits of his Bullpup, he struggled hard against the crowd of undead assailing him from three sides.

A zombie, who dragged his body along the ground after being reduced to just a torso, jumped out from in-between two graves, and bit the foot of Wang Chi Yin, who had been covering Hanghua.

"Guaahh!"

"Shao Wang!?"

Chin Yen, who turned around after hearing his voice, saw the zombie biting away at his foot, and reflexively fired at its head at point blank range.

"Stop! The ricochets!"

The graveyard's paths were stone-paved. A rebounding bullet grazed Hanghua.

"Fuck, withdraw!"

Lao Wang yelled loudly, and launched a grenade at the undead in the direction of the stairs leading to the ninth floor.



"Oh?"

"What's wrong?"

"Didn't you hear something like an explosion just now?"

"Explosion, you say...this is the tenth floor at night, you know? I don't think there's anyone besides undead here."

"No, something like a scream, too..."

"Did even banshees come out?" With those words, Miyoshi turns up the volume of the monitors.

Once the two strain their ears, they can faintly hear the sounds of guns being fired.

"Just as I thought, someone is out there, right?"

"Did some team come chasing after us, seeing as how it sounds like gunshots?"

"To the tenth floor at night? How reckless."

"Senpai, you're one to talk."

"Should we go out to save them?"

"It might get troublesome down the road if we reveal ourselves while saving them, if it's a scouting party from a foreign nation. Besides, they're kinda far away. It seems like they're gradually going further away, so I wonder whether they might be withdrawing right now..."

"It'd be really great if they're safe and sound."

As we're waffling about whether we should try to go save them, the gunshots gradually fade away, and a faint howling becomes audible.

"A barghest, I guess?"

The video feed from our cameras silently begins to be covered by a fog, and we can hear the sound of dragging chains.

"It's around 150 meters to the front. It'll be alright since there's nothing above us." Miyoshi says, while pointing at the ceiling.

Just when I'm about to head to the bunk bed, Miyoshi takes out a helmet with something bulky sticking to it.

"Senpai, wanna try to use this?"

"You, this is...a night vision device?"

"Apparently an AN/PVS-15. It seems to be a product of the USSOCOM (United States Special Operations Command) purveyor."

"You can buy stuff like that?"

"I bought it online no problem."

"Haah, what an amazing era we live in."

Once I put it on, after roughly scanning through its manual, I silently move to the car's front, and jump on the place where the bunk bed would usually be. As a door has been in place of the sun roof, it's become possible to get on top of the car from there.

Quietly sticking out my head from the roof, I carefully check my surroundings.

"Oohh, wow. You can see unexpectedly well with this."

The fog has steadily continued to get thicker, but unlike the darkness-like thickness caused by the Hound of Hecate, this one looks like normal fog. As I'm observing my vicinity for a short while, it appears with a low growl within the swarm of undead. It looks like it still hasn't summoned its companions.

I swiftly shoot Water Lances at the zombies in the area, and once I've defeated two of them, I immediately shoot Water Lances towards the barghest at full power.

The barghest, who noticed me after seeing the zombies fall apart, tries to immediately summon his hellhounds, but the instant the magic crest appears on the ground, he's pierced by my Water Lances.

Skill Orb - Detect Life 1/50,000,000

Skill Orb - Darkness Magic (II) 1/100,000,000

Skill Orb - Darkness Magic (VI) 1/280,000,000

Skill Orb - Abnormal Condition Resistance (2) 1/500,000,000

Skill Orb - Illness Resistance (4) 1/700,000,000

I swiftly jot down the contents displayed by Making, acquire <Darkness Magic VI> as initially planned, and withdraw into the car from the roof.

"If we assume that <Darkness Magic> IV is related to summoning, II will be the fog?"

"I don't know. It might be the other way around. Since I've never seen them erase the fog if they pull back or something, it's also possible that they're passively clad by it as long as they're alive."

"That'd be unpleasant. Let's put this on hold then. <Abnormal Condition Resistance> seems to be resistance against poison, paralysis, sickness, sleep, and charm. The Arabian number refers to its level."

"That one's amazing. Although it's 2, it might be good to get it for the future."

"I think <Illness Resistance> is an exclusive resistance against sickness among the abnormal conditions. But, 4 sounds amazing. Maybe you'll become immune to influenza or something like that?"

"In that case, it'd be great, but...well, even if we speculate about unknown orbs, it'll lead nowhere. We'll know once we obtain <Appraisal>, right?"

I point at the <Darkness Magic (VI)> orb I have placed in front of Miyoshi. "You're going to use this one after obtaining <Appraisal> then, okay?"

"Becoming a beauty clad in fog doesn't sound all that unattractive, but it'd be bad for shopping if you can't erase it."

"A beauty covered by mist inside a store, you say?"

"Senpai, that's a dirty old man joke."

"Anyway, I suppose I'll go raise my counter some."

I return to the bunk bed to kill the necessary numbers for the next orb in a hurry. As I peek out my face from the roof, waves of zombies and skeletons turn up in succession. The living must look like torches to them within the darkness of the tenth floor. It's an easy job to simply kill them with Water Lances, and store away the items that drop from them every now and then.

At that moment, I get carried away, and end up being careless. Because I've been attacking more than my MP recovery could handle, my MP keeps decreasing gradually. Right when it's about to fall below half, just when I started thinking that I should stop soon, something flies at me, grazing the back of my head.

"Uoohh!"

Once I reflexively turn around, searching my vicinity, I find a skeleton with a bow, standing in a slightly distant place.

"There's even skeleton archers!?"

Nothing but skeletons were mentioned in the documents, but at this rate, there might also be mages and such around as well, no?

The instant I go to counterattack with a Water Lance, the head of the skeleton archer bursts open.

"Ueeh?"

"Senpai, it's dangerous to get negligent."

Bah, Miyoshi, eh? Just how the hell...? As I timidly peek out across the roof, while wondering that, I see the heads of one monster after the other burst open. It looks like she's started to shoot her iron balls while looking at the monitors. From within the car.

"Hey, that's cheating, you know?"

The activation point of emission-type magic is basically next to you. That's why something silly like using magic while looking at a monitor inside a car is impossible. But, it looks like the iron ball shooting using <Storage> follows a different rule. Come to think of it, she mentioned something along the line of 『When taking out the bus, I could do so in a place somewhat further away than I had expected. It was fun』 when she checked the capacity of <Storage> with buses, didn't she?

The last two digits of the counter have become 84. Deciding to leave the rest to Miyoshi, I collect the items scattered in the vicinity.

Healing Potion (1) x 2
Magic Crystal: Barghest
Magic Crystal: Skeleton x 12
Fang: Barghest
Bone: Skeleton x 28

In spite of having killed quite a few, the number of dropped items is surprisingly low. Wait, zombies don't drop anything?

While pondering about such things, I quickly go back inside the car, closing the roof door.

"Haah, if that arrow had hit, it'd have been quite dangerous."

I flop down on the sofa with a thud.

"The helmet was a good idea, wasn't it?"

Maybe I would have repelled it with my VIT power, but I've got no desire to test it out. That Miyoshi, while just grunting at other people's words, she's looking at the surveillance cameras' videos, defeating one zombie and skeleton after the other. Or rather, she's quite good at aiming using just a video feed.

"You know, you can do that as much as you want, if we've got a base on the tenth floor."

"Dehehehe, feel free to praise me, okay?"

I look up to the ceiling as if having given up on her, and stand up, pondering whether I should take a shower.

"Don't play this shooting game all night long. Miyoshi, make sure to get some rest when you find a good stopping point, got it?"

"I know, I know."

I shrug my shoulders at Miyoshi, who answers without even taking her eyes off the PC, like a child who's totally absorbed in their game, and head to the shower room.

§049 Walk-in Mansion (Prequel) 11/27 (Tue)

"Hey! Look!"

Mimasaka, the commanding officer of the JSDF's scouting team, turns around in response to the voice of his subordinate, and looks in the direction of the stairs descending to the tenth floor. Over there, figures that seem to be humans are trying to drag their bodies up the stairs.

"We will provide aid! You two, come with me! The rest of you, get ready for treatment!"

"Preparations for treatment, roger!"

When Mimasaka runs over to the stairway, three men and one woman with tattered clothes are crawling up the stairs while being on the verge of losing consciousness. At once, his two team members run down the stairs, assist the people that have been climbing the stairs by lifting them up, and place them down on stretchers.

"This is, nasty..." A soldier, who has come to aid, mutters reflexively.

『Hey, you okay!?』

『Please...my subordinates.』

Once Mimasaka calls out to the eldest-looking man, who's at the end of the line, the man answers only that, and faints.

"China's scout team?"

"Very likely."

"Their wounds are terrible. Anyway, we will stop their injuries from getting any worse by using potions (1)!"

"I shall prepare the potions (1)!"

After seeing off the four being carried away on stretchers one by one, Mimasaka reconfirms the dread of the tenth floor at night while staring into the darkness of the stairs leading down to the tenth floor.



On the nightly tenth floor, where the Chinese scouts had run into a catastrophe and which the JSDF's scouting team revalidated for its threat, Miyoshi has been mowing down undead as if playing a simple game. I'm laying sprawled on the sofa, wondering whether it's about time for me to

go to sleep without a shred of nervousness.

"Hey Miyoshi, it's about time to——"

'——stop and go sleep,' around the time when I was about to finish the line with those words, it happened.

"Senpai!"

I jump off the sofa due to Miyoshi's flustered voice, and rush over to her side.

"What's wrong?"

"L-Look at that."

Something that shouldn't be there, no matter how you think about it, is reflected on the monitor at the end of Miyoshi's finger.

"...A western-styled house?"

At the bottom of the hill, a graveyard should have been spreading out until moments ago. But now a mansion, similar to that of nobles in medieval times, towers over there, and any presences of undead have vanished in its vicinity.

"What's that? Miyoshi, did you do something?"

Miyoshi vehemently shakes her head, says that she's simply killed the enemies around us, and apparently begins to examine possible reasons.

"Does it depend on the time? Is it upon the death of some kind of special monster? Or, is it depending on the number of killed monsters?"

It's also possible that we've been transferred to another place...

"That probability is low since the surrounding terrain hasn't changed at all, except for that having appeared."

"Then, a hallucination or something similar?"

"Even the ultrasound sensor for mapping shows a response."

In other words, that mansion, which has suddenly popped up, has substance and exists physically.

"It's also not a value that would make a fixed spawn time or a relation to the moon cycle feasible. It looks like it was a zombie I defeated last when that appeared, but I can't really say that it felt like some special monster." Miyoshi explains while rewinding the recorded video feed of the surveillance cameras. "If it's the numbers...I think it'd mean it appeared when I killed my 373rd zombie on the tenth floor today."

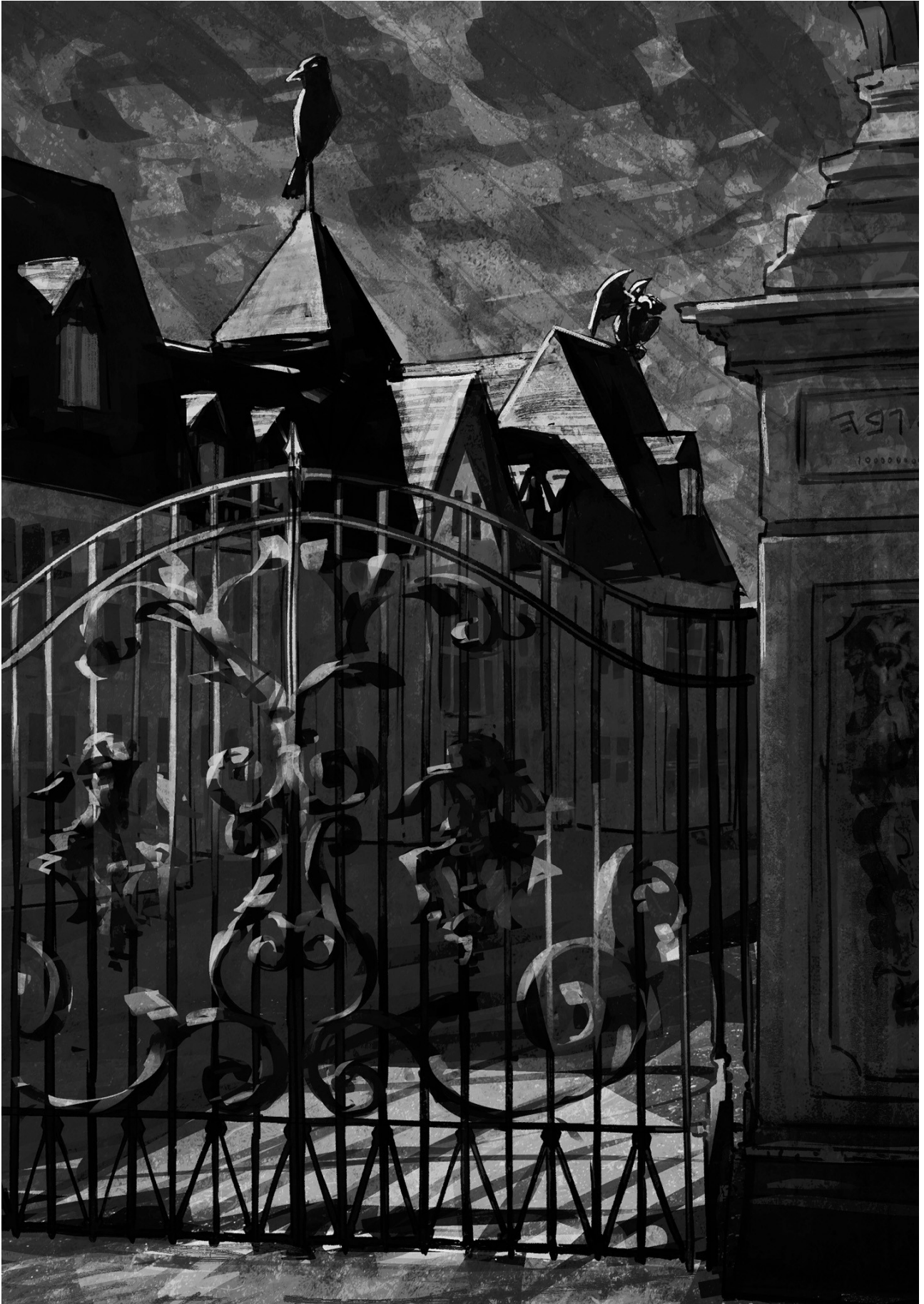
373rd? Wait, you're telling me you killed this friggin' many!? Though it's kind of a surprise that there's so many zombies around in the first place.

"Is that some special number? Like 666 would be?"

"Well...373 is a palindrome prime number." [efn_note]Palindrome refers to words and numbers where it doesn't matter whether you read them from the front or back as it'll be the same like 12321 or "A man a plan a canal Panama"[/efn_note]

"The heck?"

"It's a prime number that will have the same value whether you read it from the front or back."



"But, there's plenty of such numbers, right?"

I mean like 11, 101, 131.

"373 is the 13th palindrome prime number counting upwards. Isn't that kinda the Earthen culture you talked about, senpai?"

"...So, when all's said and done, this is Golgota's Hill?"

"Certainly, there have been plenty of skeletons here," Miyoshi says with a laugh.

Golgota, where Jesus Christ has been crucified, means 『Skull』 in Aramaic-derived Greek. Me as a G-rank on Golgota's Hill. That sounds like Armalite's going to blow out fire.[efn_note]Author's Note: Quote from Golgo 13[/efn_note]

"If it comes to western-styled mansions in graveyards, it's standard for the opponents to be vampire species, but..."

But, such monsters haven't been found yet. It appears werewolves exist, but they won't turn into humans. Inugami don't exist in this world either.[efn_note]Author's note: Reference to Kazumasa Hirai's "Wolf Guy" novel.[/efn_note] Not yet, at least.

"So, what're we going to do? I don't know how long that mansion might stay there."

A mansion that (possibly) appears after killing 373 zombies in a day, eh? Moreover, the monsters have vanished from the vicinity as if we've been invited...

"Not to mention crosses, we don't have any silver bullets, holy water, or even garlic, but do we have any choice but heading over to take a look, now that we've come this far?"

"From your mouth to god's ears!"



After we've carefully put our preparations in order, we leave our base car, and store it away. It's because we don't know whether we'll be able to come back. The undead, who have infested the hill's vicinity in such big numbers, are nowhere to be seen.

While cautiously looking around us, we descend the hill, heading towards the mansion. After a while we're greeted by a slightly rusted double-winged iron gate with complex motifs similar to flowers and ivies carved into it. Weird character-like symbols are drawn on the gatepost.

"Kinda like...cuneiform writing, but then again not. You can't call them hieroglyphs either though..."

"They're characters similar what you'd see in SoraHoto." [efn_note]Another author's note, this time very Japanese...SoraHoto -> An abbreviation of Sora wa Akai Kawa no Hotori, a manga by Chie Shinohara, called "Anatolia Story" in the west. Reading "Sora" as sky (ten) was quite difficult for the book readers. Even when looking at the front cover of the book, there were no ruby or romaji added to the title. Only when I saw an advertisement of the flowery comic after diligently skimming through the end of a book, I was able to grasp that "sky" was meant here.[/efn_note]

"What's that?"

"It's a story about a modern high school student becoming the Tawananna of the Hittite Kingdom after traveling through time."

"Hee, so you're saying it's writing of the Hittites? Oh, Arabic numerals have been written down below."

"What a messed up combination." Miyoshi photographs it with her smartphone while smiling wryly.

| 0000000000000666000000000000 | is written in small letters beneath the gatepost's characters. What the fuck?

"Again a prime number, huh?"

"Eh? This is a prime number?"

"It's a prime number famous in certain circles. Clifford A. Pickover has named it Belphegor's Prime Number. It's palindrome prime number with a 666 caught between 13 zeroes on either side."

"Belphegor, eh...?"

In demonology, Belphegor is one of seven princes of Hell. It's said he'll help people to discover something.

"Is that an analogy telling us that we'll find something important here?"

"I wonder. All of it might be simple ambiance, kind of like a flavor text. However, it's definitely true that it's a rather clever setup."

Prime numbers in an 'incomprehensible' (indivisible) world. Belphegor in a place that looks like there's something. And an array of 13s and a 666.

"Assuming that it's kind of the magic crest you've carved into the orb cases, doesn't it seem like the dungeon creator has a profound knowledge of religious studies and math?"

It should have been recorded on video, but just in case, I photograph it with my smartphone, too.

Once I touch the iron gate looking as if it's been firmly shut, it opens with a shrill screeching. As if it's inviting visitors on its own accord.

"Isn't it way too clichéd for it to screech like that at times like these?"

"Well, it comes in a package with an eerie silence and a fog wafting in the area."

I feel like it's the opening day of a hell house.

Ahead of the wide front yard lies a big, two-storied, western-styled mansion with a spire on top. It stands there with an overwhelmingly unrealistic presence. I know by just looking up at it. It must be that. That what 『stands』 silently there while embracing darkness inside the building, having gone crazy. 『and whatever walked there, walked alone』.[efn_note]A quote from Shirley Jackson's "The Haunting of Hill House." It's a phrase at the end of the beginning act.[/efn_note] I'm sure we'll be able to hear sound effects of Kubrick's *Shining* the second we peek inside the mansion through the open door.

"Senpai, this..."

"Yeah."

You should turn around and go back — my inner self screams at me.

After living at the Belasco House[efn_note]A reference to Richard Matheson's "Hell House."[/efn_note] and being turned into nourishment for the mansion, we'll turn into photographs, decorating the wall above the fireplace. I'm 100% sure it's that kind of mansion. But you see...

"I guess that means Sudara Bushi is right." Muttering that, I step into the front yard. I fully understand, and yet I still can't hold myself back.[efn_note]Sudara Bushi is an old song. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ZnSzleli54>. The "I fully understand..." is a part of the songs lyric, the catchphrase.[/efn_note]

"...That's what I had expected." Miyoshi sighs, obviously having given up, and follows me.

At that moment, a huge, black bird spreads its wings on top of the spire, and raises a screeching voice. With that voice as a signal, the black panther-like statues, which possess wings and are positioned at every corner of the second floor, turn alive, and look in our direction all at once.

"Those are gargoyles, and assuming they follow Earthen mythology, they're going to attack us as soon as we try to enter the mansion or something? The one on top of the spire is a big crow?"

"I'm pretty sure it won't make any difference with it crying 『Nevermore!』 [efn_note]A reference to Edgar Allen Poe's "The Raven"[/efn_note]. Anyway, senpai, rather than that, it's about those edges of the eaves..." Miyoshi tells me that while looking spooked.

Edges of the eaves? The instant I follow her eyes, I feel a chill traveling down my spine. Many round things are squirming around on the edges of the second floor's eaves. Looking closer, those are eyeballs. Just like the black panther's faces, all of them turn in our direction as if observing us.

"H-How gross...but, are those possibly monoeyes?"

"Weren't they monsters floating around alone? I don't think you can describe that over there as

anything but...a colony, can you?"

"Make sure to pay attention. If those come attacking, we dash."

"Dash, you say...to where?"

To where? The mansion's interior is an unknown area. I'd like to be spared from being eaten after being offered on a silver platter. Having said that, even if we run outside the premises, I don't know whether we'll be able to get away if they come chasing after us.

"Now that you mention it, we've got no place of retreat, do we?"

"Senpai..." Miyoshi glares at me with a look as if seeing a moron.

"Okay, okay, for the time being it'll be outside. Outside the gate."

If I keep attacking them while running away, we'll be able to get away eventually...I do hope.

"...Okay."

While scared by the countless eyes looking down on us from atop the roof, we quietly keep walking, moving to a spot several meters away from the mansion's entryway.

"Hey, Miyoshi."

"Yeah?"

"Did automatic doors exist during the medieval times?"

"There are stories about Heron having built some in ancient pre-era Egypt."

"I see."

Once we get close, the double-winged front door in front of our eyes opens widely without a sound. It's as if it's telling us that it's waiting for the miserable sacrifices to enter after having come all this way to be imprisoned.

"Hey, Miyoshi."

"What's up?"

"This is the moment where we should turn around and..."

When I turn around in the direction of the gate, the large, black bird, which should have been on the spire, is now sitting on the gatepost and tending to its feathers without me having even noticed it move. I feel like I can see the world fully reflected in its large, jet-black eyes that lack any white after being bent by their spherical shapes. And then the bird cried with a loud voice.

"Nevermore!"

"...go back, it seems? I suppose that means the chance for that is now gone."

"Senpai, I feel like...we'd get attacked if we were to turn around and go back."

"What a coincidence, so do I." With those words, I put on a smile while looking up to the roof.

Humor is a valid method to fend off fear. Having said that, it's no use for us to indefinitely stay all jittery here. While being careful of what's going on above our heads, we walk into the mansion.

§050 Walk-in Mansion (Conclusion)

Inside we only find a spacious, deserted, room.

"Isn't it kind of expected that the front door to a mansion like this should open onto an entrance hall, and a double-circular stairway leading to the second floor, or something like that?"

"Circular stairway? What's that?"

"A stairway that curves as it goes up."

"Ah, you mean the ones they tend to have in palatial residences in movies, eh?"

I look around me. We're in a commonplace room made out of stone, with a high ceiling. However, it's vast. It seems to measure around 30 by 30 meters. Bookshelves are installed on the walls, and although it's not clear from the entranceway, it appears as if they are crammed with books. But, why are there bookshelves in an entry hall...?

Sculptures with grotesque shapes like you'd find them at Notre Dame have been set up in all corners of the room. I carefully scrutinize the center of the room, suspecting that the sculptures are definitely going to start moving if we go in the room's center.

"Are those some kinds of gargoyles as well?"

"If this was a game, those would very likely become active if you approached the room's middle. Should we take the safe approach and destroy them from here in advance?"

"Following your game logic, such things are usually indestructible until they activate, aren't they?"

"We simply have to test it out."

Just as Miyoshi says so, the sculptures in the four corners blow up. That amount of firepower means she must have launched the eight centimeter balls.

"Huh? Maybe they really were simple marble statues..."

At the moment Miyoshi says so, accompanied by a "Tehe," the door behind us slams shut.

"Uh oh, maybe we made them angry?"

"Well, I think it's only natural for someone to get pissed off if you enter their home, and suddenly break their sculptures in the entry hall."

As we move backwards towards the entrance, while vigilantly looking all around us, three magic crests appear in the room's center, and something gradually rises up from within them.

"Skeletal Executioners!?"

It's very likely their first appearance in Yoyogi. They are huge skeletons that walk around while dragging gigantic swords behind them. Usually their movements are sluggish, but it seems that they'll charge with quite a lot of speed while brandishing those swords when attacking. It's a troublesome enemy if you're cornered.

"I'd say, victory goes to the one who makes the first move here."

I swiftly invoke Water Lances as usual, and destroy the three monsters...at least that was the idea.

"Ooohh!?"

The water spears, that were shot out at high speed, are repelled just in front of the monsters by something like an invisible barrier, and disperse in the next moment.

"Senpai, use the iron balls!"

I take out an eight centimeter ball, and throw it with full power at the monster closest to me. The monster is pushed back with a loud thud, but it doesn't look like it's been destroyed. So you can stave this off as well!? However, it looks like there's at least some effect, unlike with magic.

Thinking that I just have to do it over and over again, I throw another iron ball. At the same time as the ball hits, the monster's knee is smashed up.

"Huh?"

"It seems their resistance will spread out, if you attack them at more than two spots simultaneously." Miyoshi says, having shot an iron ball at its knee right as I threw a ball aiming for its head.

"Nice goin', Miyoshi! You'd look cool right now if you weren't hiding behind me."

"What are you saying? Senpai, you're the one with the shield, so it only makes sense!"

Well, she's not wrong there...anyway, the remaining two monsters—

"Argh! S-Shit!!"

"Eh!? What's wrong?" Miyoshi asks with a surprised look as I suddenly cry out.

"No, it's just, we're finally facing enemies you could call boss mobs, but since there are no small fries with them, the numbers won't work out!"

"...Senpai, you're unexpectedly calm about all this."

When Miyoshi rolls her eyes, while launching balls to hold back the remaining two skeletons, one monster finally begins to rotate.

"Miyoshi, the corner!"

The Skeletal Executioner's attack is circular. It's a threat if you're surrounded by several such circular attacks in an open space, but in a square room like this—

"The room's corners are safe areas, aren't they?"

We stand atop the fragments of a broken sculpture in a corner. The monster's rotational slashing attack scratches against the room's walls, but doesn't advance any further.

"The bookshelves haven't budged in the slightest."

"Same applies to the entry hall's windows, doesn't it?"

The worst possibility would have been if the monster was able to approach while destroying everything around it, but the walls and door are sturdy enough that you could almost say that they're indestructible, which results in the rotational attack being unable to get close to us.

We take some distance while waiting for the rotation to stop, and then we break the monsters' knees with more two-staged attacks. After immobilizing them, all that's left now is simple labor to destroy the two bodies.

Healing Potion (3) x2
Magic Crystal: Barrow-Wight x2
Scimitar of Deserts

"Apparently those monsters were actually Barrow-wights, and not Skeletal Executioners."

"Tolkien this time!? Dungeon boy has fairly extensive knowledge, doesn't he? Then, when all's said and done, this mansion is a grave, and that sword is Frodo's sword?"

What Miyoshi is pointing at is a scabbard-less scimitar, with deep blue gems embedded into its hilt, that has fallen to the ground. When I pick it up, my face is reflected in its beautiful blade.

"It's the first time I've actually seen a weapon drop. It's also not listed in the weapon catalog in the explorer's guide...Frodo's sword was called Sting, wasn't it?"

"That's the sword he received from Bilbo. The sword he obtained at the Barrow-downs was a poor sword that had its place stolen by Sting, as it remained unrepaired in Rivendell after it was broken by the Witch-king of Angmar."

"No, calling it poor..."

『Scimitar of Deserts』, is it? If this was the Downs, it wouldn't be weird since it's got a reputation for being full of sand, but we're in a mansion right now, you know?

"Senpai, look!"

At the same time as I finish picking up all items, something manifests in the room's center. I put myself on guard, suspecting that it might be a new monster, but what's gradually rising up from the ground is a pedestal with something placed on top.

"An epitaph?"

Something like the pages of a book, which are decorated with elegant ornaments, are laying on the pedestal. Something is written on that pedestal, with characters resembling those we saw at the gatepost. After photographing it with our smartphones, we fixedly stare at the page-like objects in the middle of the pedestal.

"...I can't read those."

"Well, of course not. However, that seems to be interesting as well, but it also makes you curious about the books on the shelves around us a bit, doesn't it?" Miyoshi trudgingly approaches a bookshelf.

"Don't wander around too much. Traps might——"

The instant I pick up the epitaph while cautioning Miyoshi, the chimes at the spires ring loudly, and I'm assailed by a weird sensation as if the space of the room itself is being warped.

"Miyoshi!"

As I yell, both of us run towards the entrance.



Fortunately, the entrance door hasn't been locked. And, we're grateful that we aren't sucked into some different dimension that appeared immediately after opening the door, or something like that.

[efn_note]A reference to a horror game with the name "Alone in the Dark" that's been released in 1992.[/efn_note]

Tumbling out into the front yard, we're greeted by the big crow, which sat on the gatepost, and gargoyles, which had been atop the roof, attacking us all at once.

While experiencing the world in slow motion, I intercept the crow, coming from the front, with an iron ball held in my hand, and then, after making Miyoshi go ahead, I pound away water lances while holding up my shield as rear guard.

The gargoyles plunge at us, while keeping up their momentum, without batting an eyelid even as their wings, legs, and heads get broken, but capitalizing on my high stats, I knock them down with my shield and defensive body movements. Miyoshi is apparently providing support as well while running away. A few monsters are blown away in front of me.

"Senpai!" Miyoshi yells at me, as I feel relieved for an instant over having repelled all gargoyles, pointing at the mansion's second floor, which is continuing to lose its shape.

A huge amount of eyeballs continue to drop down from the eaves over there. And, the eyeballs that have fallen to the ground are crawling our way.

"Geh! Jus-, wha-!"

I reflexively cast many Water Lances at those in the lead, as I start to run away towards the gate.

In a corner of my eye I see Making's Orb Selection screen pop up, but I don't have the slightest moment to pay any attention to that. I absolutely don't want to get buried by such a large number of eyeballs.

With the spire's bell continuing to toll, the mansion gradually loses its shape, as if melting away with the sound. The ground leading up to the gate has become soft, as if it's dissolving, making it difficult to run. At the same time, the pressure of the swarm of eyeballs behind us swells up. We keep running, struggling desperately amidst all that, and exit through the iron gate.

At that moment, the chimes, which were ringing all that time, suddenly cease, and the pressure weighing down on us from behind completely vanishes.

"Huh?"

When I look back in surprise, only several items are left laying on the ground, with the night-time graveyard silently spreading out, as if nothing else had ever been there. I spontaneously fall on my backside, sitting down on the spot. There are a lot of things I don't get at all, but for the time being, it seems to be correct to assume that we've been saved.

"Senpai, just what was that?"

"Who knows. However, it looks like it was worthwhile to go through this terrible experience."

Skill Orb - Fear 1/40,000,000
Skill Orb - Surveillance 1/300,000,000
Skill Orb - Appraisal 1/700,000,000

I'm also curious about Fear and Surveillance, but either way, we've obtained our objective – Appraisal.

§051 Appraisal (Prequel) 11/28 (Wed)

We deploy our base car atop the previous hill in a hurry, and rush inside, while ignoring the undead climbing up the hill bit by bit.

"Pheew. Somehow, I'm completely pooped now..."

"Explorations are a matter of life and death, after all. We got a little glimpse at the reality of that."

I fling off my armor, and flop down on the dinette's sofa with a thud.

"The mansion vanished because we took those epitaph pages, right?"

"Maybe, but...I won't know the exact moment without checking the time on the recording, but the bell began to toll at 11:59 p.m., and the mansion vanished at precisely twelve o'clock."

"Does that mean it only exists during the day it spawned? How kind of it to adhere to the local time."

"I think that's possible."

I sluggishly open the refrigerator, take out two cans of beer, and place them down in front of Miyoshi and me.

"Isn't it okay to let loose a bit at a time like this?"

"It feels a bit incautious, but I agree with you."

We pull the ring-tabs, letting out a fizzing sound, somehow manage to toast, and gulp down the beer in one go. As my throat has apparently been parched out of nervousness, the cool beer feels as if it's permeating my body. The coolness reminds me of a jug full of ice water, after the burning heat of the sun beating down on the court has melted all the ice.

""Haaa~""

And then, at last, our smiles have returned.

"Well, it was a near-death experience, but for the time being, we've achieved our goal."

I take out the <Appraisal> orb in front of Miyoshi.

Once she timidly touches it, she suddenly cries out, "I'm going to stop being human~!"

"Pfft."

As I spit out my beer due to her sudden yell, the orb turns into light as always, scatters, and is absorbed into Miyoshi's body, as if winding from the part she had touched.

"Wai-! Senpai, you're the one who told me to say that, okay!?" Miyoshi sullenly purses her lips while wiping away the beer that hit her face.

"Sorry, sorry, it's because it was so sudden."

"Grr."

I take out another orb.

"Then, the next one is this, I'd say."

It's <Darkness Magic (VI)>.

"The one that might end up being fog?"

"That's why you should try to appraise it."

"Oh, I see! —But, how do I do that?"

"No clue. Please tell me once you figure it out."

"Hmm?"

Miyoshi mumbles various things under her breath while staring at the orb.

"Since we're at it anyway, you should also get out the items we picked up this time."

Healing Potion (1)

Healing Potion (2)

Feather: Munin

Magic Crystal: Munin

Magic Crystal: Gargoyle x2
Obsidian: Gargoyle x3
Crystal: Eyeball

I guess that big crow wasn't a raven but a munin. 『Memory』 in a dream-like mansion, that's yet another witty one.[efn_note]Munin is one of the ravens of Odin in Norse mythology. It has a twin called Hugin. While Hugin means "Thought", Munin refers to "Memory."[/efn_note]

Moreover, for it to cry "Nevermore!" despite originating from Norse mythology, what a versatile fellow.

"Ah, this, the 'poor' sword, right?" Miyoshi picks up the scimitar, which I can't see as anything but a Persian sword no matter how I look at it.

"Poor sword...you could at least call it a desert sword or something."

"Ah!"

I reflexively put myself on guard due to Miyoshi suddenly yelping.

"What's wrong?"

"Senpai, I've grasped how to use <Appraisal>!"

Letting my body sink back into the sofa, since that's all it is, I ask her to give me the details.

"Congrats. So, how do you use it?"

"You simply look at something while asking yourself what it might be."

"Hah? Just that?"

"Seems so. I feel like an idiot for having muttered stuff like 『Detect!』, 『Observe!』, and 『Discover!』 for a while now..."

Well, I get where she's coming from.

"Anyway, about this sword. It's a desert sword."

"Eh?"

"It uses plural, so it's a sword of retribution."

"'Desert' with such a meaning is..."

"It's actually written like that." Miyoshi says while sticking out her tongue, and then starts to write down the sword's description on a notepad laying on the table.

Sword of Retribution - 'Sword of Deserts'

Damage +40%

Attack Speed +5%

5% Chance to Blind on Hit.

20% Reflect Physical Damage.

What brings about calamity will be purged by calamity.

Retribution shall be given to those bringing about calamity by thou.

"Oh? But what's with this flavor text-like description?"

"It's not just like flavor text, it really is flavor text, no? I mean, it's written just like one."

"I kinda wonder who wrote a thing like that...anyway, did you become able to appraise the all-important stats?"

"Well, you see, about that, it's being displayed after a fashion, but, look at this..."

With those words Miyoshi jots down a chain of numbers.

Yoshimura Keigo 11.3 / 4.6 / 4 / 1 / 15 / 1 / 9 / 0

"That's what it looks like for you, senpai."

"The heck?"

"Moreover, for me it's all zeroes."

"Haah?"

Currently my stats are set to their dungeon setting.

HP 250.00

MP 190.00

STR 100
VIT 100
INT 100
AGI 100
DEX 100
LUC 100

Next, I have her appraise my normal stats, with all values set to 30.

Yoshimura Keigo 9.9 / 26.1 / 6 / 3 / 13 / 8 / 4 / 0

As expected, I don't get what those numbers mean.

"Senpai, what's this about?"

"Alright, time for some tests!"

Most scientists love to run tests. We're getting excited just because a few weird numbers popped up, even though we should be tired as it's past midnight now. If not for <High Recovery> doing its job, we'd definitely become sleep-deprived. I take several sandwiches and coffees out of <Safe>, and then we begin to run the tests while I raise my stats one at a time, starting from 1.

◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇

"I see~ You wouldn't stumble on this right away."

We found a hint. When Miyoshi checked her own stats, all values were zero. At first I thought that it was set so that she couldn't appraise her own stats.

But in reality the values displayed by <Appraisal> are the remainder after dividing the target's stat values by the user's own stat values. It's close to not being able to use <Appraisal> on the stats of people who are of a higher level than the user, as it often comes up in fantasy novels. That's why it's all zeroes when she uses <Appraisal> on herself.

The proof was that she could correctly appraise my stats once I set all my stats to an exceedingly low value, like 1 for example. Using this, we precisely determined Miyoshi's stats, too.

HP 21.70
MP 30.90

STR 8
VIT 9
INT 17
AGI 11
DEX 13
LUC 10

"My stats are pretty shabby, aren't they?"

"The average of a normal adult is something 'round 10, so aren't they quite decent? My stats at the start of all this are the baseline, though."

"Really?"

"But, a simple division remainder, eh...? If you make a stat value display device, the algorithm will end up getting leaked right away due to <Appraisal> and measurement testing, no?"

"I think the measurement values will be oversimplified through the device's accuracy, and <Appraisal> is rare, so won't it be fine? Well, it'll get parsed eventually, so we've just got to patent it at a suitable time." Miyoshi answers in a carefree manner.

"Come to think of it, Miyoshi, what about the skills?"

"It looks like they're not being shown at present. That's great, right?"

"No kidding. Let's check <Darkness Magic (VI)> then." I say, and take out another orb.

§052 Appraisal (Conclusion) 11/28 (Wed)

Skill Orb - Darkness Magic (VI)

Summons hellhounds. The limit of summoned hounds is INT / 4.

If you open the gates of hell and summon its kin, the surface might transform into a paradise of darkness.

"It's actually hellhound summoning, but..."

"Seriously, just who's writing these flavor texts?"

I smile bitterly after reading what Miyoshi has written down.

Man, is this supposed to be some kind of card game?

"I suppose that means you can summon four, Miyoshi. Use it at once. I'd like to get started on the tests as soon as possible."

"Are we going to turn them into the watchdoggies of our office?"

"Hellhounds as watchdogs, I think that'd probably be a world's first."

While asking something along the lines of "Are they going to become named monsters if you give them names?", Miyoshi touches the orb and mutters the usual phrase.

"I'm going to stop being and so on."

Once the light is sucked into her body, she suddenly stands up, and no sooner than thrusting her right palm towards the sky, she shouts, "Summon! Cavall!"

"Oh my god, come on."

As if to ridicule me, who said this with a fed up voice, a magic crest with a diameter of around three meters extends on the floor of the van, which isn't big by any standards.

"W-What's that!?"

And then something jet-black manifests from within.

"Uoohh...wait, isn't this a hellhound?"

The one that has appeared is obviously bigger than a normal hellhound no matter how you look at it, it's got a height of around 1.5 meters, and a body length easily exceeding 3 meters. A bengal tiger...?

"Holy smokes, it really appeared!"

Miyoshi rubs her face against its muzzle mumbling something, it being fluffy or something. No, wait, there's not really much distance between its mouth and Miyoshi's head... A huge, black, dog with a matte coat that would melt into darkness, and a tough build like that of a wolf... Huh? Its eyes aren't red like those of hellhounds? They're of a hue close to gold.

"By the way, Miyoshi, what's Cavall?"

"It's the name of the dog in King Arthur's party. I've been constantly thinking about it since you told me about the summoning, senpai. If I got three more hounds, their names will be Aethlem, Glessic, and Drudwyn!" [efn_note]Please read up here about Arthur's hunting dogs:

<https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Cavall> [/efn_note]

"You won't be able to remember those. Pochi, Hachi, Shiro, and Taro will do, right?"

[efn_note]Very typical Japanese dog names[/efn_note]

"What are you talking about, senpai? Shiro or something like that will never work. Names and natures often agree, right? Come on, please take a close look at his imposing physique!"

"I'll admit that it's imposing, but can you go out on a walk with him? It's no different from a Bengal tiger, is it?"

"It'll be fine! It's a mythical creature after all, so I'm pretty sure he can shrink down." Miyoshi says with a grin, while patting Cavall's body.

Cavall looks like his face is drenched in sweat as he looks my way, with eyes pleading for help. When I tell him to do his best with my eyes in reply, he tries to shrink his body by curling up while whimpering quietly, but fails.

Yep, no wonder. No matter how much of a rare species it might be, hellhounds don't possess such a function.

"Kyaa, how adorable."

Miyoshi throws herself at Cavall who has failed at shrinking. So you were a dog person, eh?

"So, can you send him back, Miyoshi?"

It's spacious in here, but it's still a camping-van. Cavall's huge frame is a hindrance, not allowing much room to move anywhere. In the first place, this guy won't fit through the entrance door, will he?

"I wonder?" Miyoshi says while adopting her previous pose once more, "Release!"

A deadly silence lowers upon the room. Cavall sweats once again...looks like.

"So you can't..."

"I see...so that's why the surface will become the darkness' paradise. As soon as you open hell's gates and summon its kin, you can't send them back."

I guess it was kinda pointless to make the hellhounds summoned by the barghest go back each and every single time...

"Eehh?! S-S-S-Senpai! W-W-What should I do!?"

"No, even if you ask me..."

Judging from the barghest, this guy will even leave a corpse behind. In that case, he'll stick around until Miyoshi's death, or until a resummon. But then again, it's not like Miyoshi would approve of either method.

Wait a sec. As hellhound he can use darkness magic, can't he? Since it's called darkness magic, he should at least be able to dive into shadows, right?

"You can use magic, correct?"

Cavall nods. To me, he's left the domain of being a monster with that.

"Then, something like being able to hide...right, can't you slip into shadows or something like that?"

Cavall tilts his head, looking like he's thinking about something, but in the next moment, his body vanishes into Miyoshi's shadow, as if he melted away.

""Ooohh!""

As Miyoshi and I yell out in surprise, Cavall's head pops out from within the shadow, and he inclines his head as if asking, "How about this?"

"You're great, Cavall!"

Miyoshi taps his head and makes him eat a ham sandwich while kneeling. Wait, that's certainly what you'd do for training a dog, but this guy seems capable of understanding our words to begin with, so is there any need to train him? Also, hellhounds eat sandwiches and stuff like that?

I'm already bursting with all kinds of questions, but I give up on pursuing them, thinking that it's fine since the two in question here are enjoying themselves.

"Alright! Let's name that magic Shadow Hiding."

"It just describes what it is."

"Stone Cold would also work."

"What's that?"

"It's the original title of Robert B. Parker's 『Walking Shadows』." [efn_note]You can check author here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_B._Parker [/efn_note]

"It just describes what it is."

"How about Shadow Evasion Arts, or Dark Evasion Arts, or something like that?"

I think those would be more appropriate for a hell dog than a hellhound, though.
[efn_note]Hellhound is always written in English, hell dog is written as jigoku inu aka it's the JP version of hell hound.[/efn_note]

"Let's just go with Shadow Hiding." Miyoshi waves her hand as if it doesn't matter to her at all, and looks back at Cavall. "Hide yourself until I call you, okay? You fine with that?"

Cavall nods and sinks into Miyoshi's shadow without any further ado.

"Hah~, how cute."

"No, it's fine and all, but you'll be eaten if you act that way with a regular hellhound, okay?"

"You think I'm stupid, senpai? I know at least that much. I'm not a small child."

I wonder whether that's really the case, but I mustn't give voice to that thought no matter what. That's the trick to making relationships go smoothly (Wait, what am I saying? We're not in a relationship, right?)

"Still, hellhounds can use some pretty cool magic, huh?"

Just imagining them slipping into a shadow during a battle in order to launch a surprise attack makes me think of them as troublesome opponents. But, I've never seen any of the hellhounds I fought before do something like that. I wonder, is this actually a trait of hellhounds? Considering that he had tilted his head slightly, it kinda seems like it's a 『magic it became capable of using just then』, though... There's also the matter of his eye color, so he might have attributes that are different from normal hellhounds after all.

"Should I summon the others as well?"

"No, wait. It's better to do that outside, right?"

If one that's a lot bigger appears, we'll be crushed to death.

"Eh? But it's the undead floor at night, you know? They'll swarm us as soon as I open the door, no?"

"...We'll do the test tomorrow then."

"Makes sense."

"The last thing is the page-like paper we obtained at the end, I'd say."

I take it out and put it down in front of Miyoshi. She looks at it closely, and writes down the appraisal's result.

"This appears to be a fragment of a book called 『Book of Wandering Things』."

Book of Wandering Things (Literary Fragment 1) - The Book of Wanderers (Fragment 1)

Original copy of a book that has come in contact with the dungeon's abyss. The fragments have been enshrined in wandering mansions. There exists only one volume of the original. The dungeon epitaphs are equivalent to hand-written copies of these fragments. Because of that, there exist variations in their contents.

Those touched by its wisdom might fall prey to madness.

"Madness? The hell!? It sounds like Cthulhu."

"Unfortunately it looks like you won't understand its contents with <Appraisal> either. The western-style house we encountered is one of the 『Wandering Mansions』?"

"Likely. That probably means that fragments of the original will appear in mansions that are summoned by killing 373 specific monsters."

That's easy to say, but killing 373 monsters in one day would actually be quite hard. It'd be quite a chore using normal means, except in areas that don't get cleared out much and have little explorer traffic, like the first or tenth floor in Yoyogi.

"The existence of just one copy of the original means..."

"It's very likely that the mansion won't appear even if you hunt the correct monsters, or even if the mansion does appear, you won't find anything inside it."

"Reporting this...is vital, isn't it?"

"Of course we'll do that, but the conditions for the mansions' appearance and disappearance are completely based on guesses. I wonder what we should do about the details...and there's also the matter with the characters on the pedestal."

"Ah, the SoraHoto characters."

"Stop that already. What are we going to do about their translation? We know that there's differences between the words on the epitaphs, but either of them are gibberish to us..."

"Well, we've got no connections to the liberal arts. How about trying our luck with asking Ms. Naruse?"

"I guess we've got no other option."

At that point a big yawn forces its way out. It seems I get sleepy even with <High Recovery>, if I relax my attention. But then again, without that, it'd just be insomnia.

"Okay, time to sleep. We're going to focus on hunting for several days anyway."

"You think the people from earlier are alright?"

"They're probably people who received training in their home country, so let's believe that they managed to get away."

"I wonder what the scouts and aces of the various countries are doing around now."

"I'd say they're investigating our target floor while hunting monsters on a suitable floor. Once they find out, they'll investigate the monsters on that floor to extinction, no?"

It's a strategy that could be called 'giving it a try since you've got nothing to lose anyway'.

"With tracking teams formed by scouts as cornerstones?"

"Yep. After all, we went diving after putting <Different World Language Comprehension> up for auction. I'm certain they're thinking we've come here to get the orb."

"Right?"

"That's why there's also the option of getting them to advance towards clearing by going down to the lowest floor at the end. Since it'd be a pain to get back up, we'll show ourselves on the ninth floor, which will hopefully inspire everyone to hunt the colonial worms."

"Whoa, how nasty!"

"It's hard to take you seriously if you say that while laughing. Anyway, tomorrow we'll devote ourselves to hunting skeletons around here, stocking up on plenty of low rank potions. It seems handy to have them around."

"Got it."

"Miyoshi, you can use the bed deeper inside. Good night."

"Okay, good night."

§053 Report and Arthur's 11/28 (Wed)

"Tolling bells?"

The man selling pork skewers on the eighth floor repeated his question to a thin, but muscular, man who had just ascended back up from the floor beneath.

"Yeah, it looks like that's what the folks who camped at the stairs leading down from the ninth floor after missing their chance to return to the eighth floor, have heard."

"What's up with that? Some moron going haywire?"

The thin man gnawed on his skewer while smiling bitterly.

"They were apparently trying to get back to the eight floor, but couldn't make it before evening, and so they hunkered down at the stairs to the tenth floor as a last resort."

'The chance to encounter colonial worms rises at night on the ninth floor, but as the area around the stairs is relatively safe, it's possible to run away to the stairs if you end up encountering the worms.

"It appears that the sun was set to go down soon around the time they arrived at the stairs, but I hear the area was in kind of an uproar."

"Uproar? At night? There shouldn't have been any people in that area, though."

"You see, they say these folks, that seemed to belong to the militaries of various countries, pitched several camps while keeping their distance from each other."

"Military? Why?"

"No clue. The JSDF isn't so bad, but when it comes to the armies of other countries, you never know what might happen. People wouldn't want to get involved with that, right? Having said that, it's dangerous to stay too far from the stairs area, too. It seems those guys reluctantly camped halfway down the stairs to the tenth floor."

"Doing it like that sounds like it'd get them dragged into troubles all the more, though."

'After all, they'd have no place to run away.

"If you separate from the stairs on the ninth floor, you won't know when you might encounter colonial worms, correct? Especially after the sun has set. Besides, if you pitch your tents close to military folks, you gotta stay on guard, no matter what. That would really suck, no? In the first place, I can't believe that there's anyone who'd try to come or go to or from the tenth floor at night."

'Well, I can understand their feelings, I suppose,' the pork skewer seller assessed. 'It's questionable whether you can take a proper rest there, though.

"So, according to those guys, the guys on watch faintly heard bells tolling just when the date was rolling over, I hear." Saying so, he put the second piece of hot meat into his mouth. "It seems to have come from the tenth floor, so the guys apparently went down the stairs, having their interest piqued as to what might have happened."

"It's the perfect example of curiosity killing the cat."

The man swallowed down the meat, and laughed while saying, "No kidding."

"So, when they timidly sneaked a look at the tenth floor, bells like you'd find on church spires were loudly ringing from the opposite direction of the stairs to the 11th floor."

"There was something like a church on the tenth floor? I thought it was full of gravesites..."

"I've never heard of it either. Anyway, the guys apparently thought that some special event might be going on, but..."

"Hmm, I can understand their feelings."

'Anyone walking through the tenth floor after sunset, even if they've got the adaption potion, is crazy. I think that's the commonly shared opinion among all explorers.

"Meanwhile, the bell sounds vanished as if they had suddenly stopped."

"Didn't they simply finish ringing?"

"It looks like there were no lingering reverberations."

"Hmm. It'd be great if some treasure came out of it as well."

"It was just a sound, wasn't it?"

The man said with a laugh, tossed the skewer into a bucket serving as a replacement for a trash can, and left.

"Military folks that put up their camps at the ninth floor's exit, eh...?"

'It's probably the result of the various scout teams chasing the targets in question, but in that case, just where did the missing targets go? Don't tell me, the tenth floor at night?

While thinking about the relation between the tolling church bells and <Different World Language Comprehension>, the man, who worked for the guard division, took out a new pork skewer, and started to roast it.



On that day, after finishing our breakfast, we summon the remaining hellhounds in front of our base van. Each time Miyoshi yells out, "Summon! Aethlem", "Summon! Glessic!", and "Summon! Drudwyn!", a large magic crest appears, and hellhounds, which are no different from Cavall in regards to their huge bodies, are summoned out of it.

She also tries summoning a fifth hound, but as expected, nothing happens.

The summoned hounds gleefully hunt the approaching undead in the vicinity. Since it doesn't seem like they'd lose that easily, going by their appearance, we decide that we'll let them do it for the time being.

Only Cavall remains sitting next to Miyoshi, small and quiet.

"What, you're acting as the guard?"

"Gau."

Hearing that reply, Miyoshi happily taps Cavall.

"Senpai, you won't get a summon?"

"The cooldown time for the barghest's <Darkness Magic (VI)> is three days. It'd be troublesome to wait that long. In the first place, I suck at taking care of living beings. I can boast a bit about having dried out a cactus."

Cactuses are fairly sturdy plants that'll grow properly even if you neglect them for quite some time. However, even though I didn't do anything during the dormant season, it lost its vitality without me noticing, and became limp. Quite the riddle.

"What's there to boast about? Anyway, speaking of care-taking, what are these children going to eat?"

Yesterday Cavall ate food catered towards humans, but it's impossible to acquire something like that inside a dungeon on a daily basis. If we start pondering here whether it's based on protein structures or disassembly of enzymes, it'll be endless. I mean, they can eat dungeon-native meat. So I guess it's not all that weird for them to be able to eat our food as well. At times people get eaten by them as well. *shiver*

"If we simply let them free in the dungeon once in a while, we won't need to prepare any fodder or such for them, right?"

When I say this, as someone who's a failure as caretaker of living beings, Cavall, who has been listening, briskly walks up to in front of me, and shakes his head.

"Eh? Is there something you guys eat?"

nod nod

"Come to think of it, you looked like you had enjoyed eating the sandwich yesterday, didn't you?"

nod nod

"Eh? Is that something you gotta do to take in the nutrients necessary for living?"

In response, Cavall stares into the far distance with a vacant look.

"So you're saying you want to eat it every now and then just because it's delicious? Isn't that kinda more like indulging in the taste rather than taking in necessary nourishment?"

To me it looks like I can see illusionary sweat gather on Cavall's forehead as he keeps averting his eyes more and more.

"Sheesh, give it a rest, senpai. Isn't it okay? Even Cavall and the others want to eat something delicious every now and then!"

Cavall swiftly moves next to Miyoshi, sits down there, and bobs his head up and down with his golden eyes sparkling.

"No, I was simply curious. It's not like I mind in particular. You guys, work properly as Miyoshi's guards."

"Gau."

However, summoned monsters, huh? I had expected that they might exist, but now that we actually ended up obtaining some, there's a lot we don't know...such as whether we must register them with the JDA, whether we need a license for them, or what to do about immunization. The things we must ask Ms. Naruse about have increased once again. Besides, what's going to happen once they die? Will the individual be revived upon a resummon? Or is it going to be a new individual? My curiosity is truly overflowing, but if I were to intentionally test it out, I'd probably piss off Miyoshi. Well, I'll find out sooner or later anyway.

At that moment, several explorer-like presences pop up on my <Detect Life>.

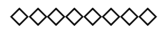
"Senpai?"

"We've got guests."

This place stands out as it's atop a hill. Our guests take the way around the hill on the other side. Before they reach a place where they can confirm this place by sight, we clear the area in a hurry, put away Dolly, and make towards the graveyard, while making sure to go around the hill so that the view of us remains blocked.

"The surveillance people, eh? They sure work hard at this. I wonder, how did they know that we were over here?"

"Who knows. My guess is that the group which kicked up a fuss last night, managed to return alive."



The tenth floor at daytime is dull, as almost only zombies and skeletons are roaming around as opponents. Having said that, their large numbers are likely tough for normal explorers.

"It's really no wonder that it's called the tenth floor of Hell." Miyoshi says as she gazes at the continuously approaching undead, while ordering her hellhounds to finish off a monster that I failed to destroy with magic.

On top of the undead being unpleasant to look at, and swarming on like surging waves, their drops are nothing of interest either. Coupled with the fact that this floor is full of graveyards as well, the explorers refer to it as hell.

"To me it looks like the other party is fine, though."

I can't sense the group walking along the road on the other side of the hill being engaged in battle. However, their travel speed appears to be quite slow. It might mean that they're proceeding while being cautious of their surroundings.

"The adaption potion is more effective than expected, huh?"

"As long as you walk along the road during the day, that is."

Not to mention that the nights are off-limit, it seems that you'll be attacked during daytime as well, if you stray off the road. That's why I think that they won't leave the road and cross the hill as a shortcut even if they were to notice something but, just in case, we get away from this area with more than twice the other party's speed.

As always, the zombies drop nothing, but skeletons seem to drop potion (1) at a rate of around one per 25 kills.

"Speaking of items, all the monsters that dropped something have given more than 0.04 SP."

Now that she mentions it, despite having killed so many goblins, wolves, kobold, slimes and so on, they haven't dropped anything. That's the reason why the floors on the way down to Yoyogi's fourth floor are labeled as beginner floors or amusement floors.

Without drops, it's impossible to be active as a professional. I doubt that there's any way to only aim for GTB either.

"Is there some kind of wall at 0.04 SP?"

"In that case I'll leave the skeletons to you, senpai, since I'm going to focus on zombies."

"Roger."

"I'll also ask Arthur's to focus on zombies."

Upon hearing Miyoshi's words, I can hear small answering barks from within Miyoshi's shadow and the surroundings. It looks like the hellhounds pay attention to what's going on around them, so far as it goes.

"What do you mean by Arthur's?"

"It means these children."

It looks like she uses Arthur's when referring to all four summoned hounds together. I asked why it's not Arthurs, but she said something about King Arthur being a relative of Culhwch or whatsoever. Since I didn't really get it either way, I just accepted it the way it is. [efn_note]Culhwch is a cousin of Arthur. If you want to know more: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culhwch> [/efn_note]

She probably just feels that Arthur's is slightly cooler than Arthurs. [efn_note]This is a spelling thing between アーサーズ and アルスルス. Both are read as Arthur+s. But the first one is how you'd officially spell Arthurs. The second is more or less a creation by the author with a definition on his website.[/efn_note]

After proceeding for a little while, the group on the other side of the hill leaves the range of <Detect Life>.

"Playing tag inside a dungeon is quite thrilling!"

"No, labeling it as thrill... Sure, we've taken refuge inside the dungeon to avoid the troubles related to the auction, but leaving Russia aside, I don't think it'll develop into a battle just because we have met them inside the dungeon."

"I mean, we won't know what team it is with just your <Detect Life>, will we? Russia might have secretly given orders to send out a Zaslon [efn_note]A Spetznaz group belonging to the Special Operations Department of Directorate Z, I think. I liked the title of this article: "Russia's 'Zaslon' Military Operators Are So Shadowy They Make Ninjas Look Like Amateurs". Source: <https://www.businessinsider.com/russian-zaslon-special-operations-2013-5> [/efn_note] unit." Miyoshi says happily.

The Zaslon corps are special forces attached to Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service. Even among Russia's special forces, they seem to be a corps with the highest level of confidentiality.

"You're watching too many movies."

"Eeehh?"

"Oh, it's orb time."

Still, the number of enemies on the tenth floor is high. As we do our routine work even while chatting about trivial stuff, the time to choose an orb arrives soon. This time the last mob is a skeleton.

Skill Orb - Detect Life 1/20,000,000
Skill Orb - Magic Resistance (1) 1/700,000,000
Skill Orb - Immortality 1/1,200,000,000

I quickly jot down the contents of the list, and pass them to Miyoshi.

"<Magic Resistance> is a well-known skill."

Since Arabic numbers attached to skill orbs and items reflect the level, while Roman numerals reflect the type, this one is probably the weakest among all magic resistances. I suppose this is the reason why the effectiveness of my Water Lances is slightly worse than usual.

"<Detect Life> kinda fits undead, doesn't it? Is this why they're heading towards the living as if drawn to them?"

"Does that mean that the adaption potion is actually a medicine to slip past <Detect Life> then?"

"I wonder about that. I mean, the folks on the other side of the hill were spotted by your skill, weren't they?"

Come to think of it, that sounds right. Is there something else to it then? Although undead are displayed as exceedingly small responses, it's not like the skill doesn't work on them at all.

Putting that aside...<Immortality>? What the heck!?

"If he had this, even Xu Fu could have brazenly returned to his country, I think." Miyoshi mentions a name appearing in Chinese classical literature without translating it into Japanese.

"No, no, no, wait, wait, wait. It'd be something else if an Elder Lich or a No-Life King had dropped this, but skeletons? This gotta be a trap. It's written as immortality but reads as undeath or something like that..."

As might be expected, <Immortality> is an unregistered skill. But, there's nothing to fear! After all we've got <Appraisal> now! We obtain <Immortality> being cautious while still acting on our desires.

"Here, Miyoshi. It's in your hands."

"Sure thing."

Arthur's kill the surrounding undead, which keep attacking us in considerable numbers, skilfully and efficiently. I'd expect nothing less of hellhounds. Even looking at the experience points, it's no wonder that they're close to twice as much as skeletons...hmm, wait a sec. As soon as they clash against a skeleton, it's smashed apart, and with one swing of their paws, zombies are split in two.

Were hellhounds actually that strong?

"Ueehh..." Miyoshi reflexively groans after using <Appraisal>.

Skill Orb - Immortality

You gain a body that endures for eternity. Turning undead (skeleton).

One might say that those who violate the principles of life suffer a just punishment.

"This is...nasty."

"In short, it means you become immortal, but you end up becoming an undead — a skeleton in this case — in return, huh?"

"That requires giving people a heads-up, right?"

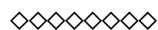
"But, you will be asked how you found out, won't you?"

Even if we leave it alone, this orb will hardly ever drop. I mean, the drop rate is one every 1.2 billion skeletons. But, something that has a possibility to occur will always occur sooner or later.

"It's just like with <Premature Birth>. There's no other way but to try it on a pig, right?"

I don't know what'll happen if you actually do that, but since the drop rate is very low, and it'd be complicated to run tests on it, it might be fine to just ignore it.

"I guess this one will rot away in <Safe> for the time being." With those words, I store away <Immortality>.



"Captain Mimasaka~ This is nuts." Noro of the scout unit threw in the towel due to the large number of undead loitering around in the vicinity.

"Keep your cool, Noro. You sense anything?"

"Nah. The only human-like responses are us and the folks behind us."

Noro owned <Detect Life>. Even with the same <Detect Life>, its nature differed depending on the individual's practice and attributes. Probably because he had trained to extend the range of his

detection towards the direction he concentrated on, the passive range in all directions was shorter than that of Yoshimura. What served as a blessing for D-Powers was the fact this was the tenth floor, and the general wisdom was that people were unlikely to leave the road now that the adaption potion had spread. Because of that, Noro focused his detection along the road.

"The folks who went down at the same time as us, huh?"

"They're very likely from Great Britain. The US group apparently went towards the 11th floor."

The effect of the adaption potion lasted around four hours. However, this seemed to be quite unstable. If they were to consider the way back, they had two hours to search for their targets at most. It appeared possible to use multiple potions in succession, but its efficiency would apparently keep dropping.

"Weren't the guys from China just duped?"

"We're going in this direction by following the battle traces left behind by the guys from China who chased after them last night. DBP87 shells are laying around here and there. Traces brought in from outside will vanish eventually, but it's not like they will be completely gone in one night or anything.

"Either way, it's a fact that some kind of battle took place over here."

It was a half day since the scout teams of all nations lost sight of their observation targets. At present there was at least no report that their targets had passed an area monitored by the JSDF or the guard division.

For the present, their unit had no other choice than searching the tenth floor.

§054 Dragon? 11/28 (Wed)

Even after having obtained the <Immortality> orb, we focus on walking around and exterminating undead, using the good opportunity of not spotting any explorers with <Detect Life>. Yesterday we had to be careful, but because the surprise attacks out of the hidden shadows of gravestones, and the hide n' attack approaches of lurking zombies, are completely blocked by Miyoshi's watchdog clique, our efficiency has gone up even further. We quickly finish a complete set of skeleton orbs, and our collection of potion types is proceeding well, too.

I've been hesitating to kill 373 skeletons because it's too early in the day, but even without that, it doesn't look that easy to reach that quota, since the number of skeletons is somewhat lower than that of the zombies.

"Going by this, isn't it quite hard to kill 373 monsters of the same type in one day?"

"Sure is. Maybe if you come up with a plan that would make the same monsters gather, or if you continue hunting for 24 hours, starting right after midnight..."

That got quite the black flavor to it. [efn_note]The black here refers to black companies which exploit their employees by working them to the bone.[/efn_note]

If carnivorous plant monsters exist as well, I feel like they could drop items and skill orbs that lure in monsters...

"In the end, there are probably enough slimes on the first floor to test it out right away."

"Right? Won't it be okay if we do it deeper inside the floor then?"

Since Ms. Mitsurugi established the great record of 300 slimes in six hours the other day, I'm pretty sure that it'd work out if we focus on killing slimes without going back to the entrance area.

Because there's a lot more zombies than skeletons, I'm tuning the last digit to match on my side. Miyoshi's iron ball + storage combination seems to exhibit its devastating power as usual. Her annihilation drive on the tenth floor is far above mine. After all is said and done, withdrawing and depositing things in <Storage> doesn't seem to use any MP.

"It might consume some if you repeat the process several times over, but it feels like my natural MP recovery covers that part," or so she says.

For that reason it looks like she can use it indiscriminately without any need to pay attention to her MP recovery timer. Since close combat, which had been her weak point until now, is dealt with by her four hound servants before anything gets close to her, you might call her peerless on the tenth floor, as long as she doesn't run out of iron balls and no unique monster shows up.

"The costs are the problem here."

"Costs?"

"Senpai, we're nonchalantly using iron balls, but one 6 cm ball costs roughly 6,000 Yen, if it's one of the 8 cm balls, the price is 12,000 Yen."

"Ooohh? T-They're surprisingly expensive, aren't they?"

Iron balls are worth that much? If we don't recover them whenever feasible, we're quite likely going to go into the red.

"The small ones are cheap, but the big ones hurt. I had also considered getting them to cut out rectangle steel material without processing it into balls, but nothing like that was for sale."

Well, it might be a question of what you'd use a rectangle object for. Besides, I wonder, will a rectangle steel sheet fly straight if you shoot it out at high speed?

"That's why I'll try to use 2.5 cm balls with low precision as a test, too. Those cost 200 Yen a piece. Recovering them will be close to impossible, though. If you shoot three at once at a zombie, it'd become kinda like firing a shotgun using larger buckshots."

I think that only applies to <Storage> though. Throwing 2.5 cm balls by hand will surely be difficult.

"It sounds like I could use them by flicking the balls with my finger..."

It'd be what you commonly call a finger flick.

I tried doing it at once, but leaving aside the fire power, I didn't even hit the targeted spot. I guess this will require a bit of training.



Four men wearing combat uniforms with MultiCam Camouflage Patterns walked in the direction of the stairs leading to the 11th floor, while uncomfortably looking at the undead around them.

"Damn it. Just when I wondered why I had been transferred here from Fort Bragg, I gotta deal with spooky graveyards and zombie assholes. What shitty luck."

"What, so you were a Delta?"

Reed Chapman, who had been swearing just now, was certainly a soldier transferred from 1st Special Forces Operational Detachment, but upon being asked by someone he'd met here for the first time, he clad his body in a faint aura of bloodthirst.

"...Why do you say that? There are many other units stationed at Fort Bragg, aren't there?"

"No need to get so defensive about it, is there? You see, I simply heard that the field units of the

DoD belong to the SMU."

Among special forces, units that have their existence and activity concealed are called SMU (Special Mission Unit). On the other hand, units acting in the open are called SOF (Special Ops Forces). The most famous SOF is the Green Berets.

"Unless you provoke the other side or step off the road, you'll be OK for three more hours."

"You — Duncan, was it? — are who?"

"A PMC team. I'm this guy's companion." Duncan Lane pointed with his thumb at a small, taciturn man while asking himself, 'You ask that only now?'

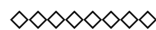
During regular missions several specialists would be dispatched from PMCs (Private Military Companies). The small man called Rat was also one of them. Chapman was fed up with the hasty measure of dispatching two people from a PMC in one team and moreover having met them just a few days ago, but a job was a job.

"So, what's the situation, Mr. Human Radar? Did you find the targets?"

The small man merely shook his head as if the faint scorn mixed into the questions didn't bother him at all.

'As far as I can tell from observing the Japanese and Britain teams, they apparently haven't spotted the missing targets as of yet either. It looks like they moved in the direction of where the guys from China suffered a terrible fate, but I've got absolutely no interest in moving towards a place where such strange things might happen. If we're not going to find them anyway, it's better to keep the danger level low,' Chapman judged.

And then, after they had walked on for a while, the man called Rat suddenly lifted his head. It was an act completely similar to an animal that had sniffed out its prey.



Having strayed off the common route, we're nonchalantly exhibiting our peerlessness within a graveyard.

"So, about the next orb, senpai..."

"Next? Going by the usual fiction tropes— Ohaa!"

Suddenly an arrow comes flying in, aimed at my head. The instant I begin to worry about what will happen if it hits me, a black dot appears in front of me, and spreads to a diameter of several centimeters. The arrow fully disappears into the black hole.

"Eeehh!?"

Miyoshi destroys the skeleton archer while I remain surprised.

"Right, there are archers around here too, huh?"

"They seemed dangerous enough back when I experienced it back then on Dolly."

"Accidents still happen, even when you've gotten experienced at driving a car."

"Well, yeah. Anyway, that just now was..."

I say towards Cavall, who looks proud of himself as he throws out his chest.

"You guys' work?"

"Wau."

I smile bitterly in my mind in response to Cavall's attitude that seems as if he's braggingly asking for praise, but it doesn't change the fact that he saved me.

"Thanks. I guess we can let you eat human food every now and then."

"Wauwau?"

"It sounds like he wants to haggle here."

"Don't get cocky."

"Kuuun."

Still, those guys can do things like this as well, eh? I wonder, maybe they can even block bullets for us.

"So, what were you saying?"

"About the next orb."

"Oh, yeah. With item box and appraisal having appeared, the next would be healing magic, I'd say? However, I don't know of any monsters that could have it."

"Yet, it's safe to say that such a monster exists."

"Eh? It's already known?"

"No, something like Heal hasn't been registered as of yet, but...senpai, do you know of the saint?"

I'm taken aback by the topic Miyoshi has suddenly brought up. Sure, if you speak of healing magic in fantasy settings, saints would come up, but...don't tell me, the female ninja handed down in legends of the Matsushiro Domain...no way, right? [efn_note]The Matsushiro Domain is the former seat of the Sanada clan. It's said Umemura Sawano, a kunoichi, worked for him. So maybe it's a

reference to her, seeing how many various works of Japan's Warring States era are around.
[/efn_note]

"Someone like Jeanne d'Arc?"

"Not quite...or wait, maybe it fits?" Miyoshi tilts her head in doubt while telling me about her research.

"A secret society?"

"That's the feeling I get from them. I haven't looked up anything that goes beyond common rumors, occasionally they pop up as hot topics on SNS."

It appears that posts about someone being saved by the divine act of the saint come up sometimes. However, rumors like that tend to just fade away over time.

"Is it a con using potions or something like that?"

"The costs would be way high, I'd say. Besides, I hear she's healing big injuries by just holding her hand above them."

The heck? It might be amazing if she's the real deal, but considering it normally, she must be a fake.

"Such posts would be normally ignored, wouldn't they?"

"That's true, but a fairly well known celebrity once dropped their name in reference to religion."

"That sounds like a totally calculated comment. The punch line here is that it was immediately deleted anyway, right?"

"It's as you say, but...senpai, your mind's corrupted, you know?"

"Shut it."

While shooting a Water Lance at a skeleton readying its bow in the distance, I try to chop the back of Miyoshi's head, but she nimbly dodges.

"Fufufu, I won't let you do that so easily!"

Tsk, not bad.

"Anyway, some people looked into it, and they legally exist — as a French corporation though."

I'd expect nothing less of an era where all humanity acts as net investigators.

"Once they did, they apparently discovered a proper notification to the Conseil d'État."

Religious groups in France can legally establish nonprofit organizations and corporations. Normally, the founding of a nonprofit organization doesn't require a license or notification, but in

order for a religious group to become a legal corporation, they need to file a notification with the Conseil d'État, and in the case of a monastic order, a license becomes necessary on top of that. It's said that this system was originally set up to tighten the regulations on monastic orders and other religious groups, which have historically opposed the government on many occasions.

"This sounds more and more like stealth marketing. So, the saint of that organization is going around healing celebrities or something?"

"Looks like it."

"Stuff like that is a story you could hear from any religious group, no? Leaving aside whether it's the truth or not."

If I had to comment on it, I'd say most people would believe that to be a publicity stunt using comments on the web. Normally, pretty much anyone with a decent education would likely be skeptical about such a story. As long as they look at it rationally, that is.

But then again, nowadays everything's possible thanks to the dungeons...like <High Recovery> or all kinds of potions.

"Okay, I got the part about the saint now, but how does that link to healing magic?"

Miraculous cures exist in great numbers in this world, even without using Lourdes[efn_note]Spa at the border between France and Spain[/efn_note] as an example here.

"The name of the organization is Altum Foraminis."

"Foraminis as in 『Hole』?"

There's a similar term in English as well.

Miyoshi nods at my comment, and says, "If you translate it into Japanese, it'd be Deep Hole. Don't you think it'd be a really weird name if it had nothing to do with dungeons?"

After all, it's a country with 80% catholics that had a concordat (an agreement between church and state) until less than a hundred years ago. If the cult named itself following the same nuance, I think 『Abysm Ilento』 would have been more appropriate. That's the place those demons begged Jesus not to send them to in The Book of Luke. Why just 『Hole』 instead of Hades, the Abyss, or Tartarus?

"In this world it sure sounds dungeony."

"Right?"

"However, why haven't I heard of them at all? It's something that should make a lot more waves, no?"

"Senpai, would you want to become famous after obtaining healing magic?"

"...Definitely not."

Just imagining the mob swarming around me like biting lice already gives me headaches.

"I think it's a pretty clever setup to use a religious organization as a front, manage the usage of the healing skilfully, and get big shots, who idolize the occult, to cover for you."

"Oh come on."

Having said that, I'm doing something similar, am I not? The one I'm having cover for me is Miyoshi, though. ...Ugh, I feel like it's slightly pathetic, hearing it out of my own mouth.

"And in the meantime, they also get plenty of donations!"

Donations to religious organizations are exempted from taxes in France as well. Moreover, if you donate as a company, up to 0.3% of the company's turnover can be treated as financial loss, on top of a carryover across five years. Certainly, if it's under the pretext of donating in exchange for receiving free healing, both sides can avoid taxes, so it's a win-win, so to speak.

"Anyway, with that as a background, I think that healing magic might actually exist."

"A saint who possesses healing magic, eh...? Did she obtain it in a French dungeon?"

"I've got absolutely no idea. In the first place, it hasn't even been registered in the skill database, you see? So it was probably some kind of special procurement method, right?"

Special, huh? Like dropping rebars into an earth fissure?

"And thus, senpai, do you remember the clan monsters back when we talked about <Different World Language Comprehension>?"

"Hmm? Oh, yeah."

It was a talk about the prediction that shamans might possess a language-based skill, I think.

"I don't think it'd be odd for priests to exist as well, if shamans exist."

"An undeveloped nature worship as a primitive religion of monsters? It's one thing if we talk about shamans who are all crazy about playing around with stuff, such as communicating with supernatural beings, but would priests in the sense of clergymen serving the gods really appear among monsters?"

"What if we put aside the idea of a belief system, and think of them more as sacred monsters then?"

"Let's see. Imagewise I feel like unicorns would possess such a skill if they actually exist."

This dungeon world was definitely built based on the imagination of humanity. That's why I'm pretty sure that monsters that seem like they would have such skills really will possess them.

"Sacred monsters, hmm? Let's have a look at the WDA's monster database once we get back home."

"Sure—mmh?"

Four dots have appeared at the edge of my <Detect Life>. Furthermore, they seem to be headed straight this way.

"What's wrong?"

"There are folks heading this way after having left the road."

"Huh? Won't they get attacked if they leave the road?"

At that moment, we can hear gunshots in the distance.

"Evidently."

"You think it's a coincidence?"

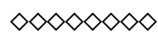
"No, it seems like they're making a beeline for our location. Besides, two of them appear to be quite good."

I won't say that they're at Simon's level, but their stats appear to be far above those of the scouts so far.

"Since the stairs to the 11th floor are a bit further ahead, let's hurry and go down. How about hunting lesser salamanders later?"

"Sure, I guess we'll go with that."

We keep going towards the 11th floor as we put some more distance between ourselves and the dots chasing after us, while preparing the kill count for the next orb.



"How about it?"

Around the time we arrive at the stairs down to the 11th floor, the folks that have been pursuing us pass outside the search range of my <Detect Life>.

"I'm not sure, but I think we gave them the slip for the time being."

"Do they possess some kind of detection skill?"

"Most likely."

Leaving aside that we're in a maze-like dungeon, the distances are too great for some small device

to track us, so there must be someone who possesses a skill like <Detect Life> among them.

"Still..."

I survey the 11th floor at the base of the stairway. The 11th floor is what you'd call a volcano area. The temperature has jumped up, and smoke is rising into the sky all over the place.

"It's something I've suddenly thought of, but..."

"What's up?"

"You think we need something like <Fire Magic>?" Asking that, Miyoshi intensely stares at me, with her arms folded and both hands grabbing her elbows.

"W-What?"

"Senpai, if you hate the heat, being clear about it is..."

"Isn't it wrong to suspect someone unjustly, Ms. Miyoshi? Look, if it's just about starting a fire, a lighter or a Chakaman would suffice, right?"

"Senpai, haven't you been totally devoted to using <Water Magic>?"

"Well, it's convenient after all."

"What are you going to do if you encounter an enemy who's immune to water magic?"

"Run away."

At the same time as Miyoshi rolls her eyes at my immediate response, a fireball with a diameter of around 50 centimeters comes flying our way.

"Uwah!"

I reflexively grab Miyoshi's head, lay down on the ground, and shoot several Water Lances without aiming in the direction the fireball came from.

"W-What's going on!?"

"Well, I think something shot a fireball at us, but I wonder from where?"

The four hellhounds smoothly slip out of Miyoshi's shadow. One hound dashes to the front, and crushes a rock cluster underfoot with crunching sounds.

"GYOWAAAANN!"

In the next instant, something that looks like a rock starts to rampage around, as if wiggling back and forth. It has the shape of a big salamander, with its body covered by rock, and an overall-length of around 1.5 meters.

"That's a lesser salamander?"

"What we saw on the picture was its figure after its camouflage had come undone, huh?"

While it's camouflaging itself, it apparently won't be shown even by <Detect Life> as long as it's not very incautious.

At that moment, its tail, which the hellhound has been pinning down, suddenly snaps off loudly, and the main body quickly runs away.

"Whoa, it's just like a lacertid!"

"Senpai! The tail is a rare item! Please defeat it quickly!"

If you leave the snapped tail alone, it'll eventually dissipate into black light. It appears that you have to defeat the salamander, after it has amputated its own tail, before the tail disappears, in order to get it as a loot item.

Hearing that, another hound catches up with the tailless salamander, which is trying to swiftly get away, and crushes its head within its jaws before I can even shoot a water lance.

"Yahoo, got it!"

『Tail: Lesser Salamander』 is being displayed in front of Miyoshi.

"I hear it's an ultra-high-class ingredient for Chinese medicine!"

"Kinda like pilose antlers, eh?"

Miyoshi approaches the hound who defeated it, and strokes its head while saying, "Well done, Drudwyn."

"Good job on telling them apart."

"I just somehow know. It was Cavall who pinned it down first, and Drudwyn who crushed its head."

As expected of the summoner. To me they look completely identical.

"Wait a sec, won't we be unable to achieve our objective if it's not me who kills a salamander?"

I've taken such great pain to adjust the kill count.

"Now, now, senpai. Let's consider it a good thing, since we managed to obtain a tail! Well then, Arthur's, you're going to find the next salamander, right?"

""""Gau.""""

The hellhounds's noses seem to outclass my <Detect Life>, as they easily see through the

camouflage of another lesser salamander. This time it's Aethlem (I think) who tramples down on its head. Going by the fact that no fireball has come flying, that might actually be a kind of fire breath rather than magic.

As I make sure to finish this one off with a Water Lance, the usual orb selection screen gets displayed.

Skill Orb - Fire Magic 1/40,000,000
Skill Orb - Self-Amputation 1/200,000,000
Skill Orb - Self-Restoration 1/200,000,000
Skill Orb - Ultimate Flame Magic 1/1,700,000,000

Putting aside our objective, <Fire Magic>, the likes of <Self-Amputation> and <Self-Restoration> sound utterly dangerous.

"<Self-Amputation>...a human has no tail, right?"

"If it's men, they have something similar, though..."

"Hey!"

Spare me from any Abe Sada Incidents[efn_note]A homicide with pennile amputation[/efn_note], moreover, doing it yourself...yep, no way.

"Won't it grow back with <Self-Restoration> anyway?"

"Now listen..."

"What's on your mind, senpai. Hair, I'm talking about hair. It's your looong friend."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever."

I guess this girl has also watched old CMs. There's various of those on YouTube. Sooner or later, she might start yapping about "Look, look" or similar. [efn_note]This seems to be a reference to extendable camera CMs, on Narou one user has linked it to Pentax. But I don't really watch commercials, be it Japanese or not, but if we're talking about funny Japanese CMs related to looong...have a look at this, it's hilarious: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZsJyCyGBSI> [/efn_note]

However, if we're talking about regrowing lost parts unrelated to hair, it's a good skill, easily on par with <High Recovery>. Moreover, the cooldown timer should be far shorter than with <High Recovery>, too.

"Still, with things like this, <Self-Amputation> and <Self-Restoration> are probably pair skills, right?"

"I think so as well. Isn't <Self-Restoration> a skill allowing you to regrow the parts lost through <Self-Amputation>?"

Considering that it's a skill that will regrow anything, I kinda can't come to terms with the monster dropping it, and the drop rate is too high as well.

"If monsters called Planarians or similar exist, a true <Regrowth> might exist as well, though."

"I can live without a kind of regrowth where two body halves become identical replicas of yourself after your body is divided."

"Nevertheless, even humans do similar stuff like cloning."

Well, if she says that, it might certainly be true, but still...

I remain silent, acquiring the skill <Ultimate Flame Magic>.

"Are you going to use it?"

"Well, as long as it seems alright after using <Appraisal>."

Miyoshi casts a glance at the orb, and only says, "It doesn't really seem like a trap."

Feeling relieved after hearing that, I hold up the orb, "Well then, I will stop being a human, yup!"

Alongside the typical line, the light shining from my right hand melts into me.

"<Ultimate Flame Magic>, somehow that sounds quite nasty, doesn't it?"

"You used <Appraisal> on it, didn't you?"

"It's not like that tells me the exact spells."

"Seeing how it has no Roman number attached to it, it's an unspecified skill. I guess I've got no choice but to keep searching along the lines of what's imaginable from its name."

"Time for even more super hero stuff!"

Miyoshi giggles, seemingly recalling the time when I was muttering Making under my breath.

"Just leave me alone. Besides, it's not like there's absolutely no hint either, you know?"

"Hint?"

The magic's name is ultimate flame after all, so this one should definitely be included.



A ring-shaped fortress, scorched red by eternal flames, filled with felons and fallen angels, and a brilliance of benevolence burning everything to cinder in an instant with its bluish white flames—



While imagining Dante's book, I quietly extend my right hand, and shout its name, "Inferno!"

In the next instant, something like a pure white flash shines in front of my eyes, and alongside the thunderous sound of something evaporating, I feel like large amounts of something escape from within my body.

"Nuna!?"

While frantically trying not to fall to my knees, I let out an overly stupid sound as I watch what I did with my recovered eyesight.

"Senpai, this..."

There's nothing there. Rocks, weeds, magma, steam, smoke, and even the monsters that might have been there; only flat ground, solidified into black glass and covered by something similar to a fine, white, powder, is silently spreading out before us.

There weren't any people around, right...? I think there weren't, but if I'm wrong, they've probably completely evaporated just now. I can only beg pardon if some amazing scouts, whom even I haven't noticed, had been there. Well, I don't think that's the case, but...

While storing away the items that have appeared in front of me into <Safe>, I see in my stats that my MP has decreased by 100.

"Yep, I think I'm going to seal this one away."

"...If someone were to see this place, they'd think that a dragon has gone on a rampage here, I'm sure."

"Guh..."

"What's wrong?"

"It's the lively group of four."

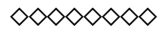
It seems our shadows are about to descend to the 11th floor.

"Let's escape!"

With those words, Miyoshi quickly moves in the opposite direction of the four behind us, with her four dogs timidly peeking their faces out of her shadow.

"Ah, oi, wait for me!"

I chase after Miyoshi in a hurry.



"They here?" Lane asked Rat.

"For an instant it felt like they were here, but they immediately disappeared." Rat answered and pointed in a certain direction.

"Disappeared? What's that supposed to mean?"

Lane answered Chapman's question in Rat's stead, "Just what he's said. They vanished, ran away, or hid themselves. We're going to give chase?"

While gazing in the direction that the finger was pointing, Chapman thought about the consumption level of their equipment. They had used their guns too much on the tenth floor.

"Thanks to that crazy shortcut, we're short on ammunition. We'll go after them for the time being, but we'll retreat immediately if it looks dangerous."

They began to move again, abiding by his words. Rat quickly led them to the place where their targets had disappeared.

"What the hell...is this?" Choline Allenby, a former Delta, who had stayed silent so far, spoke up.

"It totally looks like a super-high-temperature bomb exploded right above a city. Everything and anything has been vitrified."

The area was still maintaining a fairly high temperature.

"You saying they did this?"

Allenby shook her head, answering, "Something like this is impossible, unless they brought extreme nuclear weapons with them."

"Then, what the..."

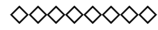
"Hasn't a dragon appeared?" Lane said casually, but they were surrounded by a volcanic area that made the appearance of a red dragon quite likely. None of them could laugh at that as a bad joke.

"What's the probability that the targets disappeared after getting dragged into this and evaporating?"

Chapman asked Rat while looking at him seriously.

"It's not zero."

Hearing Rat's reply, they immediately decided to withdraw.



4:18 p.m. - Director of Cabinet Intelligence Murakita visited the prime minister's residence.

"The very best for the world; that section chief sure talked big there."

Saiga's proposal had been brought up with Murakita by Terasawa through Tanaka.

"But, if you consider it calmly, it's not that bad of an idea."

Murakita explained to Prime Minister Ibe while being reminded of the many scenarios drawn up by his subordinates.

"In the end, no matter which country wins the bid, it will create friction with Russia. Even the EU, which depends on Russia for its energy, isn't a monolith by all standards. I think there will also be many countries who want to avoid any possible trouble."

"In regards to the future, the dungeon issue also affects national interests, but there are many countries who will be in quite a pinch if the pipe-lines were to be cut off at once.

"Won't all countries be able to keep face if we stop competing among the Western countries, including the EU, and let America win the bid on the condition of sharing information in exchange for monetary support?"

"So you think, by unifying and guiding everyone towards that end, it will also lead to a strengthening of our country's influence, and the reinforcement of our position in the international community?"

"Yes."

"The end of the year period is also a time of meager budget. America, which runs a budget deficit even under normal circumstances, will likely go along with this plan, as they consider the orb a shield rather than a weapon. So they'll be able to pretty much maintain their budget and their reputation this way as well, won't they?"

"We will urgently get in touch with England, France, and Germany, and have them consolidate the EU. Also the European Commission, I guess."

"Even though they have relatively little clout due to being manipulated by the steady members of the UN, economic powers, and large countries, the European Commission should have some influence as well. The current commission president Juncker is a man who places importance on growth and

employment. I don't think that he'll oppose the avoidance of pointless expenses.

"Afterwards, India and Oceania. I don't think that Africa and South America will pose much of a problem."

"I doubt they have either the motivation or the funds to actively get involved with this issue."

"Then, the Middle East, huh...?"

"The Middle East at present is complicated. The circumstances surrounding the Islam are way too tricky."

"Won't it be impossible to get them to cooperate with America in the current state of affairs, since America's withdrawal from the international nuclear agreement?"

Ibe nodded at that remark. "Having said that, it might be possible to get them to passively enter the support frame. Mr. Chamenei continues his opposition towards America, but he has stated that he won't go to war with them. France might be able to get them to cooperate."

"France has a deep relationship with Iran, and the current president has been trying to build a framework of financing on the assumption that payment will be done through crude oil in the future."

"If we manage to get them to join the support framework, even passively, it might alleviate their bilateral issues a bit, right?"

"Well, America's approach is based on their connections with Israel."

"In the eyes of us Japanese it's at most an issue of religious beliefs, and thus we can only consider that twisting and complicating of the real world as unbelievably foolish."

"Well, it's because they're hoping for a world in which it's not just 'at most', correct?"

"There doesn't exist any solution besides accepting foreign cultures, though."

"Even people using that— no, don't mind me. This discussion won't lead anywhere."

"I suppose the problem will be China."

"Although they have only a few dungeons, it's a country that places extreme value on honor, while also boasting economic strength. Telling them to line up with America in political measures against Russia is far too unreasonable. All the more nowadays, when suspicions about Chinese companies spying for the state have been raised."

"I believe we won't be able to avoid a confrontation on this with them."

"Very likely."

"Anyway, we have no choice but to do what we can do. Cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign

Affairs, and put all efforts into reconciling all nations until the very last minute when the auction ends."

4:31 p.m. - Director of Cabinet Intelligence Murakita left the residence.

"If America hides something, Russia will disclose it, and if Russia hides something, America will, huh? You could call that the perfect balance." Ibe muttered, while reflecting on Saiga's statement, which had come up as part of this scenario of the future.

§055 【Gift to the World】 D-Powers 108 【Different World Language Comprehension】

1:Unknown Explorer ID:P12xx-xxxx-xxxx-3321

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.

143:Unknown Explorer

Did ya guys see? The first bid is in!

144:Unknown Explorer

Totally. If this was ebay, the auction woulda been removed.

145:Unknown Explorer

They marketed it as a gift to the world, but once the auction went online, it was just one orb up for sale, right?

Moreover, 60,000 JPY. that's way cheaper than all the orbs up till now. Even I could buy it at that price.

146:Unknown Explorer

What, maybe I should make a nice memory by placing a bid as well?

147:Unknown Explorer

>145 I think that's definitely impossible, but if you can really place a bid, you gotta be a multi-millionaire for sure.

Btw, watch the denomination.

148:Unknown Explorer

? It's JPY, right? > 147

149:Unknown Explorer

That's not the point 147 wanted to make lol.
Now, look closely, the denomination here is...

150:Unknown Explorer

...million JPY!?

151:Unknown Explorer

The fuck!? orz

152:Unknown Explorer

Eh? Then that's 6 billion JPY?

153:Unknown Explorer

Calm down n' count again roflmao >> 152

154:Unknown Explorer

Wut? One, ten, hundred...what the fuck!? One orb for 60 billion JPY!?

155:Unknown Explorer

Now that you mention it, I realized it.
But, why such a high bid?

156:Unknown Explorer

There was an article about it on a site exclusively reporting about dungeons.
It said that this orb had been discovered in Russia in September, and that it allowed its user to read the epitaphs, which use mysterious characters, that had been found in various dungeons.
So, only one orb has been found around the world.

157:Unknown Explorer

Eh? Does that mean that guy's translation is the sole source?

158:Unknown Explorer

Aye. On top of no one being able to check whether his translations are lies or omit parts, it's very likely that something sensational is written on the epitaphs.

159:Unknown Explorer

How would you know? > 158

160:Unknown Explorer

Although two month have already passed, the contents haven't been publicized at all, and exactly because those contents were distributed to various related places, it's conceivable that a stupidly mad competition will start on this auction.

In addition, the country possessing the one person capable of translating is Russia, got it?

161:Unknown Explorer

So they want to verify it, huh? In that case, it's a safe bet that the bidders will be at the level of nations.

162:Unknown Explorer

Huh? If it's such an important orb, why don't they sell it to Japan, instead of auctioning it off? Wouldn't it be kinda logical to bring it up with the government?

163:Unknown Explorer

At this level, the JDA might intervene as well. I think even the state would suggest to trade it domestically, seeing how it would likely become a terrifying diplomatic card.

164:Unknown Explorer

Maybe they couldn't agree on a price or something?

165:Unknown Explorer

If the person in charge was someone like 162, I wouldn't sell it either, you know?

166:Unknown Explorer

Why is that? > 165

167:Unknown Explorer

You'd be pissed if they came onto you with an attitude as if it's only reasonable to sell it to Japan, no?

168:Unknown Explorer

Oh, true. Besides, if they had such an attitude, even the offered price would be ridiculously low, right? No, going even further, it's very likely they'd start talking about contributing the orb for the sake of the state.

169:Unknown Explorer

Hey! It's already gone up to 89 billion.

170:Unknown Explorer

Srsly?

171:Unknown Explorer

Uwah, it's true. Oof...

172:Unknown Explorer

Wow, this is already an amount of money allowing you to play around for the whole life.

173:Unknown Explorer

D-Powers is already at that level with their buyers' premium of the past two auctions. Probably.

174:Unknown Explorer

With that power of collecting orbs? They might have several hundred members, you know? > 173
However, if they obtained the same orb tomorrow, this'll surely become a big loss for the bid winner.

175:Unknown Explorer

It's because you got no clue whether the same orb might appear tomorrow, in a year, or even 100 years. > 174
And during all that time, your security guarantee will be threatened with just one foreign country grasping the core of the information.

176:Unknown Explorer

Well, a country like America is using close to 70 trillion Yen every year for that security guarantee.

177:Unknown Explorer

You mean, the current bid amount is just a light sounding out?

178:Unknown Explorer

Well, I guess so. It's also possible that the EU is going to win the bid by forming an alliance in the UN.

179:Unknown Explorer

If it's that, it'd be just fine to form a worldwide alliance and get the orb for cheap...

180:Unknown Explorer

That not being possible is owed to the current global situation, isn't it? The past sins strike back.

181:Unknown Explorer

By the way, what's that Okajio system that's in use this time? [efn_note]Word play by the author.
Rest follows below. オカジオ (okajio)[/efn_note]
Is it a system created by Okashio?

182:Unknown Explorer

Until now, the bidding was simply prolonged in steps of ten minutes even when the auction reached its deadline, right?
When the bidders have huge amounts of money, and must obtain the bid item at any cost, it's possible that the bidding won't end, no matter how much time passes.

183:Unknown Explorer

Well, if you add the minimum bid each time, six times per hour, you can drag it out by a day as long as you renew your bid 144 times.

184:Unknown Explorer

Yep. This time the handover is set to 12/2 for some reason, so they'd be troubled if that happened, right? In case the deadline runs out, the extension time will be 12 seconds after the bid price was updated while not knowing the highest bid, they say.

185:Unknown Explorer

In other words, if you don't put up an amount of money exceeding the highest bid within those 12 seconds, the bidding will end then and there. So, it won't be possible to keep adding bids with the aim to extend it indefinitely?

186:Unknown Explorer

Correct. That's why it's also possible that the bid amount will jump up all of a sudden after the time has run out.

187:Unknown Explorer

Hahaha, so that's why Okajio, eh? It's kinda like 'occasio.'

188:Unknown Explorer

The heck?

189:Unknown Explorer

GG. It's Latin. It means something like opportunity or chance.
Nice one > 186

190:Unknown Explorer

If you used English for that, it'd be written as occasion. lol
Anyway, why 12 seconds? It feels kinda odd as an extension time.

191:Unknown Explorer

They felt like it?

192:Unknown Explorer

A chemistry joke about 1 Mol?

193:Unknown Explorer

What's the deal with that? > 192

194:Unknown Explorer

One mol is the number of atoms contained in 12 gram of Carbon-12. The chemical symbol for Carbon is C. If it's beyond base 13, the notation for 12 is C.

195:Unknown Explorer

Oh, okay. But, no matter how you look at that, isn't that way too sophisticated?

196:Unknown Explorer

About that, just the other day, it was changed into a definition not depending on the kilogram standard at the 26th General Conference on Weights and Measures in France. [efn_note]The change of the mol definition took place on May 19th 2019.[/efn_note]
Quite timely, right? >> 194

197:Unknown Explorer

Eh? Seriously? > 196

198:Unknown Explorer

You guys, why do you know so much 'bout all this? rofl

199:Unknown Explorer

Isn't it a mathematical joke then?
It's the smallest abundant number.

200:Unknown Explorer

What's that?

201:Unknown Explorer

Google the term abundant number.
I wonder whether it's about the overtime being excessive.

202:Unknown Explorer

Alright, it's settled with that.

203:Unknown Explorer

It is!?

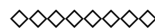
§056 The Second Different World Translator 11/30 (Fri)

A small bus with twelve men raced along Russia's Federal Highway A105 through Moscow. The sun had already set. Along the highway, weakly basking in the sun's afterglow, signboards using English letters were closely lined up here and there, and a big Huawei Mate 20 Pro advertisement was affixed to a railroad overpass. After all, it was the 21st century. An era where McDonald's, Pepsi, a Hardrock Cafe, and moreover Starbucks could be found at Moscow's Arbat Street, and the Matryoshkas sold in gift shops, which had 'souvenirs' written on their signboards, were made in China.

After they drove for a little while, a cylindrical, futuristic, building made out of glass, which looked like part of the arms of the Derelict Ship from the movie *Alien*, came into sight. It was the Domodedovo International Airport.

The men silently got out of the bus, each only carrying one small piece of hand baggage, and turned to the person inside. That man, wearing a uniform, also came out of the bus, and said, "It's been arranged for you to get your gear at the embassy."

A man nodded lightly, saluted, and turned on his heels. Together with the other men, he blended into the airport's terminal. The badge on the uniform of the remaining man displayed a B mark in Cyrillic characters.



After the deadline on the end date of the auction passed, we returned to the surface. Over a period of two days, we moved around between the ninth and twelfth floor, while giving the scouting parties, very likely from several countries, the slip. Given that we spotted Japanese people mysteriously camping at the entrances of each floor at the end, they were apparently trying to at least figure out which floor we were on by sending in reinforcements from the JSDF or similar.

Because they should have been expecting the real gig to go down on December 1st, the nations of the world were probably shocked when we returned to the surface on the day before that.

After returning to our office, I quickly check the last bid, and cry out in reflex, "416,142,000,000 Yen!?"

Wait, is it still going up? What the hell?

"Within the realm of public finance, it's almost exactly as much as the annual budget of the Mie or Gunma Prefecture. Or, if we're talking about actual expenditure, it's at the level of the Saga Prefecture, exceeding the Shimane Prefecture."

Is that so? The budget of the prefectures is unexpectedly high, isn't it? —Wait, that's not the friggin' point here!

"As expected of an Oumi trader. You sure are calm 'bout this. I'm totally trembling over here."

"Senpai, if this was auctioned following the traditional bidding rules, it wouldn't be weird even if it had gone beyond ten billion Dollars, you know?"

Ah, now that she mentions it, there was some special rule for the automatic time extension this time, wasn't there? So the auction is actually over now I guess.

"The last raise was 210 billion Yen. So the twelve seconds apparently expired even when the other bidders added a hundred million, a billion, ten billion, and a hundred billion."

In short, the bidders were still in the mood to go on with the bidding, I suppose.

"Besides, in the eyes of us commoners, ten or a hundred billion make no difference. Since we simply perceive both values as absurdly high sums, neither bears a sense of reality."

Well, she's definitely right about that.

"So, which place won in the end?"

"The bid winner is...this one, probably the DAD. It's odd that an ID apparently belonging to the DoD had competed with them until the very end..."

Not the USDA, but the DAD? Moreover, they competed with the DoD despite both being from the same country...? Are they on bad terms?

"Because the NATO member-nations, and the countries that signed partnership agreements with them all suddenly dropped out midway, hasn't it turned into a competition between fellow American organizations? India and the Middle East soon followed the other countries as well, so I believe intense negotiations happened behind closed doors."

"You're saying they've bid while cooperating with many countries or something?"

"Even if we're talking about nations here, unplanned, high expenses at the end of the year will likely be difficult for all of them."

"The issue is whether the country that won the bid will pass on correct information to the other countries, though."

"I'm sure that part will be as complicated as military alliances, so they must have reached some kind of decent compromise."

Well, there's no point even if we worry about it. Still, assuming they persuaded and adjusted the interests of the various nations within merely three days after the auction started, the mediator must be fairly skilled.

"And the one orchestrating all this?"

"It's just a guess, but isn't it our country?"

"You kidding. What's your reasoning?"

"There was absolutely no bidding from government sources."

"It's not at the level of the bureau director meeting held at the JDA, but absolutely no bids sure is suspicious. I guess you never know."

The auction of the century has come to an end with this. Officially, that is.

"But, Miyoshi, what're we going to do about this? Even if it hasn't reached ten billion Dollars, it's a bit too much money for a single party to earn, don't you think?"

Although it's only now, I'm worried about Miyoshi, who's our public face. So far only her WDA ID has been publicized, but after such a showy move, and with the bid winner being something like a representative of an international alliance, it'll probably be impossible to avoid a leak. If an individual obtains a large amount of money, strange fellows tend to come out of the woodwork...

"Are we going to build a factory for the stats measuring device?"

"It's a product whose demand will peak as soon it becomes widely available. Since it doesn't have any other uses, a factory churning out units might be too much."

"Figures. Still, I think, a certain extent of industrial capacity will be necessary."

"Yeah."

"Afterwards, donation or maybe a fund?"

"A fund?"

"In our case, something for the sake of explorers, I'd say?"

"A fund, eh...? Well, it's 400 billion Yen, anyway."

"Senpai, senpai, for normal merchants, there's stocking up. Since you can make profit by selling them, it's not like you're going to share all of your profit, right? The buyer's premium of an auctioneer is at most 10% for such an amount of money."

I have the scales fall from my eyes after hearing that. I was thinking about things from our perspective, so of course we get the full amount. But, if you think of us as middlemen, our entire party would only get around 10%. I didn't even think of that since the impact of the huge amount of money was too overwhelming.

"Even 10% is still quite a lot. We should try to consider that part a bit."

"Understood."

Just as Miyoshi answers, her private phone vibrates.

"It's Ms. Naruse." Miyoshi says while looking at the caller's ID.

I'm pretty sure she checked the dungeon exit records. She's quite enthusiastic about her work, considering it's a weekend night.

"Ah, Ms. Miyoshi? Good work. Naruse speaking."

"Thanks. Something wrong?"

"No, that's——"

According to Ms. Naruse, the JDA is asking whether they should dispatch people from their side, given that the winning bid boasts such a huge amount of money. It's not that we can't trust the JDA, but putting aside the outside world for now, we turn down guards on our grounds. Currently the grounds of our office are dangerous, as four guard dogs are lurking in the shadows.

Unlike ordinary hellhounds, they've started to use magic, but not only Hiding Shadow. How to describe it? Let's call it magic for the sake of satisfying our demands.

For example——

"Listen, Arthur's. Catching intruders and being my guards is your job."

""""Gauu.""""

——ever since that exchange, they've started to use Shadow Pit, a spell that causes a hole to appear at the target's feet, dropping them into a prison of darkness, and Shadow Bind, a spell that binds the target with a darkness rope, which causes abnormal conditions like paralysis and sleep. Not limiting it to just that, they've even begun to do things like moving across shadows. Moreover, all the spells have been christened by Miyoshi.

"With this, our guard protocol will be flawless," Miyoshi rejoiced, but I have been trembling in fear, wondering whether some ordinary salesman or a door-to-door solicitor of a religious organization might not fall prey to them one day.

Furthermore, those guys seem to like magic crystals. They obtained the skeleton crystals, which Miyoshi had been examining, by begging her, and gnawed on them while looking really happy. They see our food as luxury stuff, but we'll be in a bind if magic crystals become their fodder. After all, in terms of available stock at retailers etc., they're more than rare. I'd like to be spared from going out to get new magic crystals every day. I'd be more than happy if they could think of magic crystals as reward snacks.



Three brawny men had gathered in a room on the fourth floor of La Fontaine, a five-storied

condominium next to their office's grounds.

"It looks like their team came back." The dark blond Adams said while setting up monitoring devices on the veranda.

"So the room's hand-over barely made it in time, huh?" Their leader Curtis checked the pair of man and woman walking from the gate to the office through a scope.

Adams, Beats, and Curtis had been ordered by their country to watch the house in front of them together with the other two, Denver and Ecle.

Around half a month ago, a big shot with connections to the government called Thomas had apparently been led around by the nose after getting involved with an Indian, but creating a base by going as far as deliberately buying up the condominium behind their office because of that alone sounded weird, no matter how you spun it. Moreover, the team was composed of just a few people as if telling them that it was no more than a wait-and-see approach for the time being. If they had genuinely needed to gather secret information, a lot more people should have been dispatched. Thus, they couldn't quite get rid of the feeling of a mismatch.

"So, what's to be found in that house?" Adams, who had finished setting up the devices, asked while entering the room.

"What, Adams, did you sleep during the briefing?"

After Beats, who had finished the cleaning of the room's interior, showed up from the foyer room while shoveling up his bright light brown, close to red, hair, and teased Adams, he made his report to Kurtis.

"There's no bugs. All clean."

Kurtis nodded.

"Well, I do understand that it's the home of the guys who started the orb auctions, but...what are we actually supposed to investigate?" Adams asked while booting up and tuning the remote laser listening device he had set up.

"That part has been kept ambiguous at the briefing. Even if we're told to investigate, it's kinda difficult to move if they don't make it clear...whether we should investigate the secret allowing them to hold orb auctions, discover some kind of illegal acts, or grasp their weaknesses to be used for negotiations.

"I'm pretty sure, the higher-ups aren't certain themselves either. That's probably why they've told us to gather information for the sake of pinpointing that."

Kurtis indicated a direction while studying the rent information of the condominium they were using, and a detailed map of the neighborhood.

"I'd say our most urgent task is to grasp the movements of our targets around the first of the next month."

The acquisition of the <Different World Language Comprehension> in question was originally supposed to happen on December the 1st.

"Isn't it unreasonable for us to investigate even the dungeon's interior?"

Even half a month ago, Denver and Ecle, who had accompanied Thomas, were apparently skilfully warded off.

"The DCU (England's Dungeon Capture Unit) folks are going to handle that part. Our side will focus on SIGINT (Signals Intelligence) on the surface."

"I'd really like to be spared from being forced into doing stuff like industry espionage, though."

Everyone mostly shared Adams' opinion on that, but orders were orders. Kurtis only nodded lightly at his words, and returned to checking the information.

'Left and right of the target are private houses with contracted security companies. It might be possible to trespass the grounds, but it'll be a pain if something happens. There's a road on the other side, so it's only this building located in the back that's actually suited for surveillance, but for some strange reason, there had been seven cases of families moving residence in this place very recently. All that despite this building being a five-storied condo with only thirty apartments.

"It seems there's droves of guys in the same business as us bustling around here, no?"

"Are we going to remove them?"

"That damn Beats is way too hotblooded.

"No, this country is a paradise for spies, but they're extremely good at criminal investigation. If sparks fly our way, we'll have no choice but to dispose of them, but I don't think it's a good idea to act as firestarters."

'Very likely, the other parties are thinking the same,' Kurtis shrugged his shoulders. 'There's no point in sabotaging each other when it comes to non-hostile countries. But, it's necessary to keep an eye on where they are going.

While thinking, he looked down through the window at their investigation target's house. The building, which had been erected right in the middle of a somewhat big plot, was separated from all adjoining plots at equal distances, which would likely make them stand out quite a bit if they were to invade the grounds.

'Moreover, if guys in our trade are watching, we'll definitely get spotted. If we don't make sure from which country they are in advance, it's quite likely going to be used as a chip against us in the future. Having said that, I think it's not like not doing anything would be an option either...

'The game board is the plot in front of my eyes with 70 square feet. Depending on the circumstances, seven teams are going to ruthlessly compete in such a small area?

"It might possibly turn into a truly troublesome job." Kurtis muttered, looking depressed, and closed the materials.

The three had at first believed that gathering the information on an ordinary family would be simple with a safe and sound, remote wiretapping. However, each time they booted up their devices, they were struck by the realization that this wasn't a house that could be handled by ordinary means.

Adams, who wore big headphones, shook his head as if giving up, "The laser wiretapping is being completely blocked off."

'With just noise against wiretapping being circulated into the windowpane of an ordinary home, it's equal to announcing that something is hidden in there. However, that's something we've known from the very start.

Even Beats, who wore another pair of headphones, also took them off, and said, "The sound collector is also no good, I guess."

To the bitter end, the house's outward appearance was that of a normal home.

"How about going through the telephone line?"

In response to Kurtis, Adams shook his head as they had apparently taken countermeasures against that.

"I guess that means, in the end we've got no other choice but to directly go in and plant bugs."

'We have no option but to trespass into the house for the sake of smoothly carrying out our intelligence gathering. Be it concrete mics or camouflaged wiretaps, we won't be able to even set them up if we don't make our way to the house. However, assuming we try to do that, it's set in stone that'll be discovered by the other intelligence units.

"Still, there are no relevant buildings, so we're truly in a bind here."

"I've checked the placements of the newspaper box, the air-conditioner's outside installation, and the ventilation fans, but..."

'Every single one of them has been placed in truly nasty locations, making it even seem as if they're traps.

"It's a completely detestable house."

"It'll become dark soon. Are we going to scramble?"

Kurtis considered it for a while, but then nodded, obviously having resolved himself.



After a short time, Miyoshi ends the call with Ms. Naruse.

"So, what did she say?"

"She'll stop the dispatch, but it looks like Ms. Naruse is going to come over."

"Now?"

I look up to our office's clock. It's past 6 p.m.

"Quite the workaholic, isn't she...?"

"Well, if you look at it from the JDA's point of view, it's a job worth 40 billion Yen."

Now that she mentions it, the JDA's handling fee was 10%, wasn't it? Wait, isn't that way too much? Only now I slightly feel the absurdity... (while deliberately ignoring the buyer's premium though).

"But you know, I don't really think that Ms. Naruse is the type that would go out of her way to visit a business partner on a weekend evening for the sake of her job."

"Sometimes I don't quite get whether you're thickheaded or perceptive, senpai." Miyoshi laughs, adding, "She's probably just worried."

I think so as well.

"But, her timing couldn't be better, could it?"

"Why?"

"I mean those SoraHoto characters."

"Oh, I see."

I suppose it'll be a good opportunity to try asking her about them while she's here anyway.



"It's a writing style combining classic Hebrew and Aramaic, but it appears to be written with old Hebrew or Phoenician characters."

Once Ms. Naruse, who had soon after arrived, sees the photo data of the SoraHoto characters, she immediately uses a friend as intermediary, and manages to get in contact with a person of the theology department of the Doshisha University. It seems to be a university department distinguished even within Japan for its language study related to the Bible. I hear they also give lessons on Hebrew and Aramaic.

Even the person introduced to us appeared to be excited about a commission by the JDA, and immediately provided us with the translation. All of this despite it being 8 p.m by now...

"What's this? So complicated."

"The Hebrew letters were originally derived from Aramaic letters, but because the Aramaic letters borrowed characters from the Phoenician alphabet, the Aramaic alphabet mostly overlaps with the Phoenician alphabet, I guess."

"Also, as ancient Hebrew letters means they were used to write Hebrew before the Hebrew alphabet was put to use, it seems to also overlap with the Phoenician alphabet at greater parts."

"Oh, so that's why you can write them while mixing them together?"

"Yes. And, with classic Hebrew apparently having little vocabulary, it looks like the text in question has added Aramaic for the vocabulary."

"But, I wonder why they'd use classic Hebrew?"

"Isn't it because it's the language of God?" Miyoshi carelessly comments.

"What a ridiculously sophisticated act of grandeur." Out of reflex, I smile wryly at Miyoshi's words which are totally fitting here.

"God resided in heaven, and then moved to the Internet, and now he's started living in a dungeon, at long last, you say?" I ask while pointing to the sky, then to my PC, and finally to beneath my feet.

"The guy, who translated it for us, has left us an interesting comment."

"Comment?"

"He said that it's as if an AI, which got in touch with the literature of that era, learned the language while considering Hebrew and Aramaic to belong to the same language."

AI, eh? If dungeons have intelligence, it might really be something like that.

"So, what's the essential meaning behind that text?"

"The pedestal's part uses very roundabout expressions, but in short, it seems to say, 『Oh wanderers, touch onto the wisdom of the true grimoire』."

"And the gatepost?"

"Wandering mansion, it seems."

The part about 『true』 must refer to the original copy of 『The Book of Wanderers』. However, it'd be absolutely necessary to translate it in order to touch upon its wisdom. I wonder just what the hell's written in there.

"So...just what's this mansion you're talking about? Don't tell me, this can be found in YoyoDun? As far as I know, something like this has never been reported, though..."

Miyoshi and I look at each other, but then immediately start to explain the events we experienced in our dungeon run.

"...In other words, you're saying, as long as you meet certain conditions, a 『Wandering Mansion』 will appear on that floor, continuing to exist until the end of the day?"

"Just so you know, those are merely our conjectures."

"So, about that mansion——"

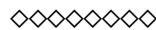
"Ah, I think it'll be faster to simply show you."

I lower the blinds of all our office's windows, retrieve the memory card with the video edited by Miyoshi, and play it on the 70 inch monitor in the reception room.

"This is..."

"It's after we've entered the mansion. The video comes from the action cameras installed to our helmets."

Miyoshi has removed the sound. Well, I'm sure it's because she's embarrassed about her own scaredy-cat-lines appearing.



A little while after sunset, two men stood in the shadow of the fence below the condominium, wearing inconspicuous, black clothes. An unmoving man was laying at their feet, but it was unclear whether that person was dead or simply unconscious.

"This is Alpha. Weasel seems to be tired. Over."

"This is Base. Roger. The picnic will go down as planned. Out."

"These guys will be OK, right?"

"If you kill in Japan, it'll turn into an obstacle for later activities. It's troublesome, but we're just having them sleep for a while."

"Then it's fine. Now then, it's time for a picnic."

"Base, this is Alpha. We're starting. Over."

"This is Base. Alpha, roger. Out."

Adams finished the transmission, and quietly climbed over the garden's fence. Because trees and plants were growing around the fence, he likely wasn't worried about showing any opening at this point in time. A garden that seemed to be completely harmless spread out in the visual field of his night vision goggles, but there was no doubt that he'd be noticed by some country's team, monitoring this place just like them.

'But then again, even if we are exposed, I don't think they'll know our affiliation, so they shouldn't interfere with our job.

However, there was no need to pointlessly brave danger. Adams traveled between the trees, taking a roundabout path to the house's side. In front of him merely laid the defenseless garden, just as it had been all the way here.

'My first goal is the ventilation fan located on the side from here, at the outer wall of the living room. I'll quickly get close to the house, and quickly plant the bug. That's all there is to it.

As Adams was waiting for a good chance for a little while, the blinds of the living room were lowered.

"Uh-oh, our chance has come."

With all blinds on the first floor lowered and the light leaking from inside the house almost completely gone, Adams counted down with hand signs, informing Beats behind him of the timing to rush out. At a count of zero, Adams jumped out with a low body posture, and ran the shortest distance to the targeted wall...that was the plan.

However, in the next instant, his consciousness blacked out.

Beats, who had watched him from behind through his night vision goggles, didn't understand at all what had happened. He felt dumbfounded for a moment, but immediately contacted Base, obviously confused.

"B-Base. This is Bravo. Alpha has vanished—in front of my eyes!!"

"This is Base. Vanished?"

Kurtis, who heard this in a room of their apartment, called out to Alpha in panic.

"This is Base. Alpha? Hey, Alpha! Come in! Over."

However, the transceiver remained silent, barring any kind of answer.



On the fifth floor of the same apartment building, the local Japan team of the US had taken up position after being contacted by Yokota. They had been monitoring their target's, Miyoshi Azusa's, residence starting with the beginning of November, and when she moved her residence to this place,

they followed suit.

While at it, they also kept an eye on whether Team Simon would pull something off, but it hadn't been expected for them to yield any results on that side. In the first place, they had no means allowing them to suppress those supermen and -woman besides relying on the DAD's command structure.

"Whoa! The idiots that just moved in today immediately went into action."

Larry, who had nightwatch duty, informed his buddy Kayama.

Kayama, who had been munching a cheeseburger which he had ordered for take-out, immediately rushed in front of the monitor of the night vision camera, and cracked a joke, "They should know they'll be hated, if they're too quick."

"They've got quite the trained body movements going for them." Larry said while watching the two figures skilfully climbing over the fence and swiftly moving towards the front entrance while using the trees as cover.

"If they're going that way, I suppose they're first going to install a concrete mic at the living room's outer wall."

"We might have to do that sooner or later too, so let's use them as ref—haah?" Larry spontaneously cried out when he saw what happened on the monitor in front of him.

"Hey, he vanished!?! How's it going on your side?"

Being asked, Kayama carefully checked all monitors, but he couldn't spot the figure, which should have rushed out, anywhere.

"The other guy seems to be doing something at the preparatory spot, but..."

"I can't catch him over here either."

"What? Those guys aren't actually special forces of Japan, having already implemented optical camouflage or something, right?"

Hearing that, Kayama thought in Japanese, 'The only thing people have implemented are high bills to rip off high T&E expenses.'^[efn_note]This is a pun that doesn't really carry well in English. It's a play on 光学迷彩 and 高額明細, both spoken as Kougaku Meisai. First means optical camouflage, second high bill.^[efn_note]

"Maybe."

While answering, Kayama rewound the recording, playing back the problematic scene a second time. Even after watching it frame-by-frame, the milliseconds of difference between before and after the disappearance showed no variation except the person being there and then not.

"This won't go anywhere with 30 fps. We'll need equipment with a better frame rate."

Having said that, he couldn't believe they'd send such high-level equipment and the necessary personnel over for a simple observation like this, though.

"Isn't our country in deep shit if they've put such stuff to practical use?"

"No, the person in the rear is trying to get away in a hurry. After seeing this, my guts tell me that this was an unplanned disappearance."

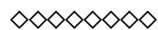
"What about their transmissions?"

"As if you could normally hijack military communications nowadays. It might be a different matter if we had access to the analytic parts of the NSA's and Echelon's systems, though."

As Kayama stuffed the half-eaten cheeseburger into his mouth, he frowned, seemingly disgusted by its taste, and washed it down with cold coffee.

"Well, that's around as much we can do with the equipment we have at hand here. If we make a report, the higher-ups will handle the rest, right?"

With those words, he curled up the burger's wrapping paper, and made a long throw, aiming for the trash bin in the room's corner. The paper ball flew through the air, hit the bin's edge, and bounced upwards once, before falling into the bin at the end.



(Senpai, immediately after you lowered the blinds, they apparently caught someone.)

(Hmm, I guess they might've been curious what's going on inside. Still, the cockroaches sure are careless.)

(I think later they're going to want magic crystals again, you know?)

(Please limit it at least to the skeleton ones. Ah, afterwards, we're also going to entrust her with that box, aren't we?)

(You're giving it to Ms. Naruse after all?)

Miyoshi casts a fleeting glance at Ms. Naruse who's completely focused on the monitor.

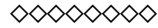
"She's suitable, isn't she?" I whisper to Miyoshi.

"Well, you might be able to say so."

"I don't mind having you do it, y'know?"

"She's suitable! I'm going to fetch the box!"

Miyoshi turns around in a hurry, and flees in the kitchen's direction. Just where's that girl planning to go to take out the box that ought to be in her <Safe>?



"So, what happened?" Kurtis asked Beats who came back totally flustered.

"...I don't know. Adams started to run, trying to reach the house, and then suddenly vanished after taking several steps."

"Pardon?"

"He vanished, I'm telling you! All of a sudden! How else should I describe it so that you understand!?"

"Calm down!"

"Doesn't...Doesn't the wireless connect?"

"There's no reply."

Even after listening to Beats and playing back the camera's video, there was no new information. What they knew was no more than Adams having suddenly disappeared in front of Beat's eyes. He simply vanished without any heat or light remaining at the spot.

"These guys might be too much for us."

Kurtis started the preparations to urgently contact their country.



It was a little while afterwards that Ms. Naruse finished watching the video.

She sinks back deep into the sofa, as if all the tension during her concentrated watching has left her, spits out a long, deep sigh, and looks up to the ceiling. Seeing that, Miyoshi begins to brew some coffee.

"Is something wrong?"

"About everything? Just what the hell is this?"

"Yeah, those eyeballs at the end were quite gross, weren't they?"

"Not that! No, wait, you're also right about that..."

Ms. Naruse shuts her eyes, obviously brooding over something, and once she opens them again after some time, she suddenly asks me, "So, how much of this do you plan to report?"

"Even if you ask me how much...we've simply informed our Lady Deputy Chief, so there's no how much or how little, is there?"

"Eh? Oh, y-yeah, that's right, isn't it!? Then it means it's alright for me to report all of this to my superiors."

"Of course."

I crack a shady smile, and at the same time, Miyoshi offers her a coffee.

"Please."

"Oh, thank you."

After waiting for her to take a sip, I clap my hands together.

"Now then, that's all for today's work as deputy chief."

Hearing that, Ms. Naruse's shoulders jump up.

"By the way, Ms. Naruse."

"Yes?" She answers, obviously being wary.

"Do JDA staff members have their D-Cards regularly checked or similar?"

"No? Apart from the tablet-shaped device that appeared from the 『The Ring』 located at WDA headquarters, being used for the ranking lists, we can't control D-Cards in the first place, so the WDA cards are in use for the usual management operations. I think the only occasion requiring D-Cards is the verification of skills when joining a party."

Nice, so it's just as I've heard back during the short course.

"Got it. Then, Ms. Naruse."

"What is it?"

"Won't you try using this?"

I place the aforementioned titanium box, containing a <Different World Language Comprehension> orb in front of her, while attempting to go with a devilish gentle smile.

"This is a skill orb case as it's being used by D-Powers, isn't it? Telling me to use it..."

After I urge her with my eyes to open the box, she timidly follows suit, and the instant she touches the orb laying within so as to check the skill, she audibly freezes solid.

Miyoshi signals her to not shout out by placing her index finger in front of her lips. Miyoshi has been insistent on installing wiretapping preventions, including measures against laser spying, but you're never sure who might listen to an unnecessarily loud voice.

"T-T-Th-This..."

I nod slowly.

"I should..."

I nod once more.

"Use this...?"

I nod a third time.

"P-Please wait a moment! W-Why me!?"

"Well, you see, this won't last until the delivery anyway."

If you consider it normally, it's just as I say. After all, the delivery has been set to take place on December the 2nd, but right now it's the evening before December the 1st.

"Even if that's the case, wouldn't it be fine for you, Ms. Miyoshi, or you, Mr. Yoshimura, to use it?"

I silently shake my head, "It's obvious after grasping the meaning of the Phoenician characters just now. I believe we need to know the contents of the epitaphs and grimoire as fast as possible."

Ms. Naruse bobs her head.

"If we consider who's going to get in contact with many epitaphs and information pertaining to them among us, you're the most suitable one, Ms. Naruse."

Above all, she's a JDA staff member. Moreover, right now she's in a fairly good position. There's no doubt that she can obtain a lot more information than us ordinary explorers. Of course, the WDA makes the epitaphs available to the public, but it's probably a privilege of its staff members that they can get access to data, which is as close to the raw information as possible, a lot earlier. If it's us, I'm pretty confident about not even knowing what's being publicized to what extent.

"You're not wrong about that, but..."

"It's not like we're actually telling you to spy for us. The objective is to get access to information of the published data, that's as unfiltered as possible, and to translate it correctly. However, I think it'd be better for you to hide that you can read it."

It's quite possible that she'll be kidnapped if it's found out.

Ms. Naruse swallows her spit, "Still, people who are much more suitable such as researchers..."



I reject her idea by shaking my head.

"Such people are cut off from society. We need someone who can freely translate in their position while remaining hidden in the process for this project."

"Project?" Ms. Naruse tilts her head to the side in confusion.

I retrieve the project draft drawn up by Miyoshi inside the dungeon, and hand it to her.

Seeing it, she mutters in surprise, "Epitaph...translation service?"

Indeed, it's a plan to launch an anonymous website, and make translations of the publicized epitaphs available to everyone on the Internet. Since it's going to only be a posting of translations for the epitaphs that have been publicized, there's no reason for it to turn into a problem. There exists no copyright for the epitaphs, after all. Although it's likely going to be flamed for being absolute bullshit.

Having read the document to the end, Ms. Naruse spontaneously burst into laughter.

"Hahaha, what's up with this website name?"

"I think it'll work."

『Heaven Leaks』 [efn_note]It's written as hibun riikusu. Hibun is the pronunciation for epitaph (碑文). So it's a word game by the author.[/efn_note] is written on the document. It's the rip-off of a certain website leaking confidential information. It's written as 『Heaven Leaks』 in Western languages. As for the bad pun, it might be cryptic if you don't understand Japanese, but it's not such a bad idea to leak information from God's domain. Besides, since the West regards Japanese as cool for some odd reason, it'll be fine like this. It'll quite likely be called an old man joke in Japan, though.

"However, no matter how often I hear it, that still sounds quite cringy, doesn't it?"

"It's alright, since that's the aim here."

"Even if you were to make such a website, no one would take the translations on it seriously, would they? Though I think it's an interesting idea," Ms. Naruse inclines her head to the side.

"Outrageous, occultish sites are a dime a dozen nowadays, so it's not like our website would be shut down for that reason, right?"

"Well, I can't argue that."

"Besides, we'll insist that we're just running the server and domain without having any business with its contents. The Japanese Newspaper Association has published a declaration about editorial rights in 1948, and we're just going along with that." I laugh, adding, "Well, the truth might be plain obvious though."

Ms. Naruse curbs her eyebrows, sighing very deeply.

"Besides, about the contents..."

"Hmm?"

"In the first place, there will be two organizations definitely knowing whether what's written on the website is true or not."

The two organizations possessing the orb.

"I believe it'll work as deterrence against these two organizations trying to conceal information or spread lies."

After all, it'd earn them a big backlash if either gets exposed to the world.

"And, there's one more thing."

"What could that be?"

"Currently, the dungeon epitaphs are generally handed over to the WDA and then publicized, correct?"

"Yes."

"But you know, when many countries reach the point of possessing <Different World Language Comprehension> in the future, those epitaphs will be hidden, if things stay like they're now."

Seeing how it's the dungeons' wish, the number of people capable of reading epitaphs should eventually grow. The more of an advantage their contents will give to those knowing about them, the higher the probability that the countries will keep newly discovered epitaphs hidden.

"I'm aware of that. But, somehow I can't believe that <Different World Language Comprehension> will become so common."

"In any case, I believe by publicizing the translations now that <Different World Language Comprehension> hasn't spread, it's possible to influence the course of events into trying to obtain information by making it publicly available rather than translating it by relying on the power of one's own country."

It's something like interdependence in economics. If you already have what you need while having the possibility to supply it at reasonable costs as it's being used widely, there's no need to produce something similar while stemming the costs yourself. Nowadays it's somewhat dodgy if it comes to national security as there exists a precedent with a major Chinese company [efn_note]A/N: The events in this novel and so forth are faithfully following the year 2018, even in the small events that have taken place in public parks, but it's an actual fact that Mrs. Meng had been arrested on the next day, December 1st 2018. T/N: This is a reference to the arrest of Meng Wanzhou, the CFO of Huawei, in Vancouver.[/efn_note], but well, for the most part this theory applies either way.

"Besides, if we're talking about credibility, I think it's possible to prove that the website's postings

reflect the truth if the translations contain completely new information that can be checked by anyone. I'm confident that such information definitely exists within the epitaphs and grimoire."

I don't know what kind of person the dungeon creator might be, but if that creator has set the table up to such an extent, there's no way that such information can't be found within the epitaphs and grimoire. Components similar to Earth's RPGs are included as core of this guy. I'm 100% sure of that. On top of that, the creator is trying to increase the dependence on dungeons by tying it to profits and stirring interest in dungeon exploration because of that. All of this might sound like a far-fetched delusion, but in reality, it's the only feasible explanation to me.

"With that said, please go ahead."

Ms. Naruse, who has been fixedly staring at the orb, closes her eyes as if having resigned herself, and touches the orb with her right hand. Immediately following, the light from the orb creeps up her arm, and gets fully absorbed by her body. It's the birth of the world's second different world translator.

"She didn't say anything about stopping to be human or similar, did she!?" Miyoshi saying so as if playing the fool, causes everyone to burst into laughter.

§057 Visitors in the Early Morning 12/1 (Sat)

"Good morning."

As I come down the stairs with sleepy eyes, Ms. Naruse greets me from the office's dining room.

"Ah, mornin'."

In the end, Ms. Naruse spent the night at Miyoshi's room. Right now, both of them seem to be in the middle of breakfast, seeing how she's nibbling on a toast.

"You're up early."

"I have to leave earlier than usual to change my clothes at Yoyogi."

It looks like she's left a change of clothes in her locker at the JDA for such occasions. According to her, she'll raise suspicions about having slept over elsewhere and get teased for it, if she were to attend work in the same clothes as the day before.

Isn't that actually sexual harassment?

"Huh? Today's Saturday, isn't it? You've got to attend work?"

In response to my question, she washes down the toast in her mouth, and shoots back, "I need to work this weekend thanks to a certain party," while smiling.

Sorry.

"What are you two up to?"

"What, you ask...we've got to go pick up the orb for tomorrow, don't we?"

As I sit down on my chair, Miyoshi prepares coffee and toasts for me.

"Which reminds me, D-Powers is recently being called Orb Hunters and similar. I hear quite a few requests for introductions are delivered to the JDA on a daily basis."

"Eh? I'd totally hate to deal with those, okay!?"

"Usually, the JDA doesn't pass the contact address of explorers wishing to stay anonymous directly to outsiders, so it'll be alright."

"Well, after all, the JDA won't earn any dough if it doesn't act as mediator."

"Well, that's a part of it."

She's glossing it over by biting into the toast smeared with butter and jam, obviously pretending to be calm, but it's pretty much obvious that we've hit bull's-eye here. But, I consider the part about "usually" to be the scary thing here. After all it means that exceptions might exist. Besides, recently Miyoshi's face has become well-known, too.

It's not like we've come back here to hide. I mean, there was a flood of phone calls when the auction was publicized...oh, come to think of it, the telephone cable is still plugged out, isn't it?

"It's cool. It's a phone line we've set up for the registry. People can get in touch with us through our cell phones, right? If it comes to the point that strangers call us on those, we just gotta block their numbers."

"How about setting up an answering machine?"

"If we're not going to listen to it anyway, it's less of a pain to not install one in the first place. Phone calls of people we need to speak with will arrive on our cellphones, and if it's an important message from some stranger, I'm sure that it'll reach us someday. To begin with, if I were to listen to such a big number of recordings, I'd take me all day," Miyoshi answers in a huff.

While thinking that she's got a point there, I speak up to Ms. Naruse, "About the thing we talked about yesterday, I think it's better that you only translate at our office, assuming that you can take out photos of the epitaphs or similar. We've got at least some security in place here."

"Security?"

"We'll tell you the details another day. There's also something I wanted to ask about that."

It's about how Arthur's is going to be treated, but since it'd likely trigger a commotion, I think it'll be a good idea to wait until the hand over of <Different World Language Comprehension> is done.

Ms. Naruse nods, despite looking puzzled, "I understand. Since pictures aren't highly classified information or anything like that, it shouldn't pose a problem."

"Furthermore, since there ought to be some documents I believe to possibly become centerpieces, I'd like you to translate at least those tonight or tomorrow - anyway, as fast as possible."

"Centerpiece documents? Wait, don't tell me, what was shown in that video..."

"Yes. The grimoire of the wandering mansion. The literary fragments of 『The Book of Wanderers』."

It's no issue to use that as its official name. After all, you'll know its title if you touch it, just like with other dungeon items. It's called 『The Book of Wanderers (Fragment 1)』. But, it'd be a total let-down, if the contents were no more than a preamble.

When Ms. Naruse is about to answer something, the bell of our office rings.

"Oh, today morning I've contacted a certain Tanaka. That should be him. But, he sure is early." With those words, Miyoshi looks at the monitor, but then adds in surprise, "Mr. Tanaka...and Mr.

Simon?"

"What's with that odd combination?"

Once I get Miyoshi to open the gate, I stand up and head to the entry hall.

"Good morning. I'm sorry for disturbing you so early in the morning," Mr. Tanaka says.

"Good morning. Why are you two together?"

"It's not that we've come together. We just met at the gate by coincidence."

"Haah."

『Yo, Yoshimura. It was us who won the bid for the you-know-what, right? So, I was told by our boss to come and check the situation.』

『I don't know what you might be talking about, but I've heard that the hand over is tomorrow, if you mean the auction.』

『Well, I know that...』

At that point, Mr. Tanaka cuts in, 『Excuse me. Our side's business is urgent. Can I have you wait with that issue for the moment?』

『S-Sure, sorry man.』

Mr. Tanaka is someone who allows me to feel an amazing pressure from him every now and then. He looks like an old guy you could find anywhere, though.

"Miyoshi, hand him over to Mr. Tanaka in the back."

"Sure thing."

"Please go around to the back from over there. Is it going to be OK for you to handle it alone?"

"Then, would it be fine for us to directly drive the car to the back?" He asks while pointing at a big car parking at the gate with his eyes.

"Go ahead."

He gives a signal to the car, and walks towards the house's backs.

While looking at his back, Simon comments, 『Somehow he's a guy with a weird impact. Just who the hell's this Tanaka?』

『Who knows.』

『Come again?』

『He's kinda like a big shot in the government, who's monitoring us, but...as for the details...』

『Monitoring...as always, you guys are really lax about this all.』

『Japanese are peace lovers after all.』

『You say that, but somehow the air around here smells dangerous...』 Simon says while surveying the thickets around the house.

As expected of a top explorer, he's got a sharp intuition. That area is the territory of Arthur's.



『Isn't that just your imagination? So, did you visit today just to check the situation?』

『No, I guess it's about tomorrow's escort. Somehow my boss seems to sit on hot coals.』

The DAD (Dungeon Attack Department) is an organization under the direct control of the President. If he's talking about his boss, there's no one but the president, is there?

『With boss you mean Mr. President?』

『Well, yeah. It's probably because his hair would fall out if it got snatched during the transport.』

『Transport or whatsoever, no one will know who the winning bidder is until they see the ID. Also, there's still more than 24 hours left until the hand over. Currently there's nothing here.』

Upon my comment, Simon stares down on me. Since he's a tall guy, I'm going to be looked down on either way, right?

『I guess we'll leave it at that.』 Simon shrugs his shoulders lightly. 『With that out of the way, today's the first, so I think the surroundings are going to be a bit noisy, but don't worry about it, okay?』

『Haah? Even if you say that, we're about to leave, you know?』

『Hmm, just think of them as bodyguards and ignore them.』

『The bodyguards are not going to attack us or something?』

『Hahaha, good joke!』

Simon laughs loudly, clapping on my shoulder.

Ouch, that hurts, buddy. Your stats label you as the strongest among humanity, so show some restraint!

『Okay, I got it...but, we're going to continue with our lives normally.』

『OK. See ya later then.』 Simon says and leaves.

Ugh, how troublesome.

"That just now was Simon Gershwin?"

"Whaa-!?"

Mr. Tanaka stands right next to me without me having even noticed him approaching. This guy really has no presence.

"Please don't startle me like that. But, you're right. He's the top explorer of the DAD."

"I beg your pardon. However, how come you're acquainted with him?"

"I think you'll find out if you check the IDs, but he won an orb in one of our auctions. During the hand over, we got to know each other a bit."

"Hoh. I've completely thought that he might have come here to pass you the orb."

"No way. He'd directly hand it over to the DAD in such a case, no? Even if he tried to swindle his way through, the money flow for items related to dungeons passes through the WDA."

"Certainly, they would immediately know if money were to flow from D-Powers to Mr. Simon."

"You see? So, what about the guy we caught?"

"He's probably from some place's intelligence department... Just how did you catch him?"

"Well, I simply went for it when he's been careless. That's all."

Mr. Tanaka reveals a slightly disappointed look.

"You simply went for it, eh? I guess, just as you would expect from an explorer. Still, it startles me for a G-Rank to be capable of that."

"It was luck, simple chance. Rather than that, I thought that you might be guarding us, but it doesn't appear that way."

Hearing that, Mr. Tanaka's eyebrow twitches up, and he merely groans, "Hrm."

Eh? Have they possibly been guarding us, and these guys slipped past that or something? Shit, did I make a gaffe?

At that moment the entrance door opens, and Ms. Naruse steps out, "Mr. Yoshimura, I'll be going now. I'll come back another time."

"Oh, thank you for your help."

With those parting words, she lightly nods at Mr. Tanaka, and walks away in the direction of the gate.

"What did a JDA staff member need from you so early in the morning?"

"She's our exclusive deputy chief. We've been putting the exploration information together yesterday until late in the night."

"Hoh. How hardworking. Anyway, I will be off with this as well. Please contact me if something happens again."

"Ah, yes. I'm looking forward to your help at that time."

I watch their car leaving through the gate while standing in front of the entrance. Thereupon, Miyoshi shows up with the comment: "No matter who it is, we sure are only surrounded by people who can't be dealt with by ordinary means."

"No kidding. It seems that even the surrounding buildings are jammed with intelligence agencies from all over the world."

"Oh, that's quite the scary stuff. Makes me shiver. What are we going to do if they start to snipe at us or something?"

"It's true that Arthur's can protect us from arrows, but the speed of bullets is totally different. I wonder whether they'll be able to deal with it?" The instant those words leave my mouth, I feel like I've heard a "Woof" reply from somewhere.

"It looks like they say to leave it to them." Miyoshi comments with a laugh.

"What a reassuring bunch."

""That's why, please give us magic crystals,' they say."

"Oh, that's quite the scary stuff. Makes me shiver"

This means, if I don't find out what food they like as fast as possible, I'll be in a bind, forced to get them magic crystals. Once that happens, it'll be only a matter of time until our power relation reverts with me becoming Arthur's servant. I think I should start buying up magic crystals.

"Miyoshi, have magic crystals been up for sale?"

"They've been traded for research purposes."

Then I might be able to buy some if I'm lucky.

"Even if they might have attached the name 'clean plutonium' to them, it's not like they can already win energy out of them."

It seems they still can't quite curb the rate of energy output. Once they begin to draw it out, the crystals' response speeds up tremendously, leading to the energy being emitted in an instant.

"Eh? Doesn't that mean they grandly blow off...?"

"On the contrary, the instantly released energy doesn't turn into light or heat, but instead becomes something else, I hear."

"Something else? What's up with that? It's not energy?"

The dungeon physics are really a mystery.

"I'm pretty sure it turns into a D-Factor. Look, isn't it said that energy turned into particles in the beginning of the cosmos?"

"Just how much energy is that supposed to be?" I smile wryly. "If that's the case, I guess the demand on the market isn't that big yet. Can you look into it for the time being?"

"Sure, sure." Miyoshi laughs out as if suddenly remembering something, "I'm 100% sure that no one would ever imagine that we're buying those as a reward for our pets."

"Definitely not."

Catching her laughter, I head back inside the office.

December, the First. The day, supposed to be the only chance to get the orb, has begun.

§058 Forum [Too Wide] YoyoDun 1356 [Almost Lost]

A/N: About "epitaphs": There were some comments asking whether those are letters carved into big stone monuments, but in this novel, the term is used to describe text engraved into solid objects such as stone and metal. Since it doesn't really fit with "Ancient Inscriptions on Monuments", I'm using "epitaph" which is usually used for the translated text of stone monuments.

182:Unknown Explorer

Hey! Did you see the JDA's YoyoDun News Blog!?

183:Unknown Explorer

The dungeon news blog? In the past I did, but nowadays I don't check it much. It's become slightly stereotyped, lacking any catchy news, right?

184:Unknown Explorer

No, what's that movie? Some movie trailer? Doesn't it have "Advertisement" written in small letters somewhere?

185:Unknown Explorer

Eh? Did they up something interesting?
Video, you say, what kind of?

186:Unknown Explorer

Just go and look at it. It's a must-see.

187:Unknown Explorer

I saw, I totally saw. It's fuckin' awesome! >182
Just what was that? The 10th floor?

188:Unknown Explorer

Oh, it's so amazing? Gotcha, I'll go have a look as well!

189:Unknown Explorer

Well, in the first scene when they drew close to the mansion, you can see something like a gravesite in the vicinity, so it should be the 10th floor >187
Starting middle of last month, the top explorers of all over the world have been sighted in Yoyogi, not to mention 2nd Lt. Kimitsu, so it might be a new floor beyond the known 21 floors.

190:Unknown Explorer

It's got the subtitle "Wandering Mansion", and the weird numbers on the gatepost are pretty neat. Or rather, to me it totally looks like fiction with dungeons as the theme.

191:Unknown Explorer

About that >190

Just look at the gargoyle-like things looking our way from the roof when they're about to enter the mansion.

No, don't look at me!

192:Unknown Explorer

I'd feel really uneasy to go ahead with those things, y'know?

193:Unknown Explorer

Well, many of the explorers heading to the lower floors seem to have a screw loose anyway.

194:Unknown Explorer

Look who's talkin.

195:Unknown Explorer

That huge crow thing sure adds to the mood.

196:Unknown Explorer

The part when it's grooming its feathers on the gatepost, just when the door opens and they look back towards the gate in a fluster. I laughed so hard that they went out of the way to edit it for the upload.

197:Unknown Explorer

Oh, so that's why the pixels are so blurry around that part rofl

198:Unknown Explorer

I watched it! Amazin' shit! Though it's slightly regrettable that there's no sound.

199:Unknown Explorer

I'm pretty sure it'd be full of screaming and stuff. Especially at the end.

200:Unknown Explorer

The monsters that appeared inside the room for a moment were Skeletal Executioners?

Those haven't been spotted on the 10th floor. >189

201:Unknown Explorer

This mansion itself hasn't been spotted there to begin with.

202:Unknown Explorer

Hey, hey, my acquaintance, you see, said that he'd heard the tolling of bells on the 10th floor later at night on the 27th November.

All of us poked fun at him about having misheard, but maybe it's related to this?

203:Unknown Explorer

Srsly?

204:Unknown Explorer

At the end, when the camera suddenly points up to empty space in the room, it could be interpreted like that, if you imagine that a bell rang just then and there.

205:Unknown Explorer

Ah, when the room was about to become all warped and wound up.

206:Unknown Explorer

But before that, what had these guys been doing on the 10th floor in the dead of night?

It's common sense that wandering that place at night is impossible, no?

207:Unknown Explorer

He missed returning to the 8th floor, and apparently set up camp on the stairs between the 9th and 10th floor.

208:Unknown Explorer

Kinda sounds like a lamer team.

209:Unknown Explorer

Well, don't be so hard on them. So, they did go to have a look at what those bells were about, right?

210:Unknown Explorer

I asked the same, and then got scolded that there was no way they could have walked around the 10th floor at night.

211:Unknown Explorer

...Hmm, makes sense, I guess.

212:Unknown Explorer

Can't be helped.

213:Unknown Explorer

The gargoyles came attacking at the end, but were blown away. What was the deal with that?

214:Unknown Explorer

Hasn't the party member of the filmer shot them with a gun or something?

215:Unknown Explorer

Then it was a JSDF unit after all, huh?

216:Unknown Explorer

Iori-chan rooocks!

217:Unknown Explorer

Towards the end it turned into a real disaster movie.

The real hiyou of Ushi and Tora are gonna haunt me in my dreams. [efn_note]A monster appearing in the manga Ushi and Tora. Here a picture: <https://dic.pixiv.net/a/%E5%A9%A2%E5%A6%96> [/efn_note]

218:Unknown Explorer

Gross!?

219:Unknown Explorer

Well, in it's own way. If I had to choose either, it's more of a horror movie.

220:Unknown Explorer

I'm kinda curious what happened at the part with the pedestal in the room.

221:Unknown Explorer

Oh, you mean the "Oh wanderers, touch onto the wisdom of the true grimoire"?

222:Unknown Explorer

I felt like the text was much longer though...

223:Unknown Explorer

That's captioning, so it's been shortened, no?

Since it looks like it's an Earthen language, unlike with the epitaphs, someone should be able to translate it.

224:Unknown Explorer

Wanderers? That's about us?

225:Wandering Explorer ID:P12xx-xxxx-xxxx-0192

I changed into a Wandering Explorer.

226:Unknown Explorer

An information page for the wandering mansion has gone live!

GJ > 225

227:Unknown Explorer

Eh? For real?

228:Unknown Explorer

Wait, the hell's this!? The condition to make it appear is to defeat 373 monsters of the same kind in a day?

Something like that is possible??

229:Unknown Explorer

If it's the slimes on the 1st floor...

230:Unknown Explorer

Slimes are surprisingly troublesome. Well, there's probably enough of 'em around though > 229

If you're unlucky, it'll take around 5 mins to kill one. 12 in an hour, 240 in 20 hrs...R.I.P.

231:Unknown Explorer

It looks like the mansion in the video appeared after killing 373 zombies.

232:Unknown Explorer

The fuck? Dude, that's the very definition of horror!

233:Unknown Explorer

As if it was a game in a GamCen...Team I sure is crazy.

234:Unknown Explorer

So it's been totally set in stone that this was done by Iori-chan's team.

235:Unknown Explorer

I mean, does anyone else ring a bell with you? Or you think the Shibuya Team pulled this off?

236:Unknown Explorer

You think a team like that would be prowling around on the 10th floor or something...?

237:Unknown Explorer

It can only exist during the day it appeared (?). Is this ToSpo, or what? lol [efn_note]ToSpo refers to Tokyo Sports I think, but I don't get the reference. Maybe the articles in that thing last only a day or something. Or maybe it's a comment going in the direction of this being very challenging as in sport activity.[/efn_note]

It's not limited to the 10th floor > 236

238:Unknown Explorer

That's something we don't clearly know, yeah.

Someone to investigate as follow up...probably doesn't exist...

239:Unknown Explorer

Even if I wanted to do it, it's impossible.

10th floor cuz zombies, right? > 237

240:Unknown Explorer

Let's look forward to Iori-chan's next news!

241:Unknown Explorer

Ye, ye

§059 Party 12/1 (Sat)

"And that's why we're heading into the dungeon right away?"

We quickly wrap up the entry formalities for Yoyogi early in the morning, and immediately begin to head to the lower floors, taking the shortest route. Today there's no need to shake off our pursuers.

"No, you see, we gotta get <Different World Language Comprehension> today, right?"

"Well, sure, but...is it going to be the ninth floor after all?" Miyoshi says looking annoyed by the daily dungeon runs.

No, look, for me it's a pain as well, okay?

"Yep. Since we got them to experience the tenth floor the other day, I'd definitely like them to have some fun with the colonial worms on the ninth floor today."

"That's what you say, but it's not like you've actually experienced them yourself, have you senpai?"

"Seeing pictures of them is more than enough for me. In the first place, I'm pretty confident that I'd lose any drive on the spot, if I encountered worms like that in reality."

"And yet you're luring others to such a place? Are you a devil?" Miyoshi frowns at me as if to say that I'm a terrible person, but her lips are forming a smile.

"Besides, look, if we can have all teams hunt colonial worms, an stomach-like item, like the one you mentioned before, might drop, right?"

After all, colonial worms are the prime example of monsters that aren't hunted by anyone. In short, not enough of the worms have been killed in the past to allow an estimate on their item drops. Since such a chance might never show up again, I'd like them to go all-out on hunting them.

"Turning them into sacrifices for the sake of confirming the drop items; how nasty."

"With that smile on your lips, you're an accomplice as well. Besides, if it's a team possessing weapons allowing them to attack a bigger area, kinda like suppression fire, they should be able to somehow handle those, no?"

"Scouts possessing Squad Automatic Weapons or similar heavy weaponry?"

"Those folks all got assault rifles."

"All of this sounds to me as if they're going to run out of bullets in no time, though."

A magazine had 30 bullets, hadn't it? Even if they have three magazines each, it'll last an instant

assuming they fire their rifles on auto...

"Oh well, I think those guys are the elites of their armies, so I doubt they'll die in a place like the ninth floor."

It'll leave a bad aftertaste if they're killed, but the information of the ninth floor has been disclosed, and explorer teams chasing after us up to such a place won't be done in so easily, I believe. It might turn into a trauma for them, though.

In order for us to be able to hunt long enough on the ninth floor, we must advance at a fairly high pace. After all, the limit is today.

"Having said that, we can't put out a speed that leaves our pursuers in the dust either, can we?"

"I think a G-Rank party leaving pro scouts in the dust on a simple route would be the much bigger issue here."

Sure, she's right. If it's some complicated route, even lower ranks might give professionals chasing them the slip for a moment, but same happening on a set route with no obstacles at all would be weird, to say the least.

I advance at a fast running speed while making sure with <Detect Life> that our leeches are with us. Even so, we're going at quite the speed, considering we're inside a dungeon, since we haven't been cautious of monsters at all, but let's take that as the foolhardiness of amateurs.

"I had expected that they might have doubled their personnel, seeing how we toyed around with them before, but it doesn't seem so."

"I believe it's kinda difficult to double the number of foreign explorers, and moreover, people, who received special training, in merely a day."

Makes sense. If they had that much leeway in personnel, they'd send them in from the very start.

As we continue to descend several floors, I notice that it's always the same kind of people in the vicinity of the descending staircases.

"Miyoshi, you noticed?"

"Noticed what?" Miyoshi looks confused as she turns her upper body back towards me while walking in front.

"There have been people whenever we went down the stairs."

"That's only logical. We're still at the upper floors."

I place a hand on my chin as if pondering, "No, that's not what I meant."

"What is it then?"

"I think they smell like observers."

In all parties one person has been carrying a big backpack, no matter how you look at it, that totally points to a communication device. As a result of chasing us around before, the Japanese folks, who had been toyed with by us, have apparently changed their approach.

"But, they won't be much of a guard unless they manage to follow us, you know?"

"The ones who've been trying to guard us are the guys of the security department, right? Those guys are much more military-like."

"So what is it that you're saying?"

"I think they're JSDF members."

If it's okay for them to not guard us directly, they'll be fine as long as they can confirm on what floor <Different World Language Comprehension> drops. In such a case, it's the most efficient method to deploy someone at the entrance and exit of each floor since they just gotta need to spot us there.

"This is the strong point of organizations that can quickly prepare personnel."

"Should we disguise ourselves then?"

"Now listen...what would be the point in that?" I say while rolling my eyes.

Even if they found out on what floor we are, that information in itself bears not much of a meaning. Miyoshi definitely enjoys events such as running away or giving the slip way too much. I have no doubt that she's already lost sight of our objective.

"This ain't no game of tag or hide-and-seek."

"Eeehh? What're we doing here then?"

"What, you ask..."

Tentatively we're posing, telling them that we've come to get <Different World Language Comprehension>? Or something like doing an exchange with another explorer inside the dungeon?

"It's a pretense for the sake of claiming that we've come to pick up <Different World Language Comprehension>, no?"

"Ah, so that's why we've been staying closer to the passing explorers than usual?"

"Well, yeah."

The higher the number of people we've got in contact with, the more difficult it should become for them to narrow down the target.

"But, wouldn't it be much smarter to run around in the upper floors where there's a lot more people then?"

She's absolutely right. You can't really say that there's any need to particularly come down to the ninth floor.

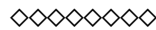
"Well, it's also because I wanna get a tiny bit of revenge."

Being monitored all the time feels quite yucky, so I actually feel like putting our observers on the spot.

"In other words, you're acting childish?"

"Come on...how about phrasing it a bit nicer?"

While trash talking like this, we drew close to the passing explorers or tried veering off the path in a somewhat meaningful manner. But in the end, we still reached the eighth floor at a considerably high pace.



"Hmm? It looks like several coming."

"Several what?"

Of the four groups that have been sticking on our tail, three have taken routes that seem to be shortcuts, trying to get ahead of us. I guess those three groups are here to confirm our current floor. If they reach the stairs descending to the ninth floor before us, they'll immediately know, as soon as we don't pass them there, that we're taking action on the eighth floor. I'm sure they've adopted this strategy to avoid being toyed with by us like yesterday.

However, the movements of the remaining group are different.

"Several members of a group, that has been tailing us, apparently couldn't hold still any longer." That group has been swiftly shortening their distance to us. "There's six of them in total. Still, they sure got serious quickly."

They've split in three groups of two, spreading out so as to pincer us from spots where we won't be able to see them.

"What are we going to do?"

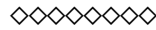
"Even if you ask me...Arthur's is already on the move."

Cavall and Aethelm have apparently started acting.

"Well, they got excited as it's an enemy obviously heading this way with hostile intentions."

"Maybe we won't get any turn in this?"

"Likely."



'It happened all of a sudden. No, I don't really get what has actually happened. The men moving in front of me suddenly disappeared.

"Hah!?"

The remaining two reflexively stopped moving, took cover at a nearby tree, and scanned their vicinity. However, be it above, beneath or all around them; there wasn't anything that could be called a presence.

"What happened? Did you see?"

"No, it looked like he suddenly vanished in front of my eyes."

'A person abruptly ceasing to exist is impossible. Even if he's been attacked with a silencer, a corpse has to be left.

He tried to call the man using his wireless radio in an attempt to somehow collect himself, but no reply came back. On the contrary, he also tried to contact the team that had gone around to the other side to inform them of the situation, but—

"Why won't they answer!?"

"It's difficult to imagine that all the wireless radios broke at the same time."

In short, there was only one possible explanation.

"You mean, the other side has been annihilated?"

The one asked nodded silently.

"No way..." With those words, he surveyed the vicinity once more.

At that moment, he heard a thud from behind. When he looked back, the man who should have been standing there was gone. Only the man's automatic rifle was left, laying at his feet.

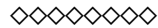
"H-Hey! Stop pulling jokes at such a time!" He shouted at a volume improper for their team, but only a thick silence answered his plea.

"Y-You gotta be kidding..."

'We're here after having the best training humanity has to offer. Being unable to even confirm the other side's figures, let alone being incapable of doing anything, is beyond ridiculous.

"Hah, hah."

Suddenly, as he stood still in a daze, the man heard the breathing of death from behind, a lukewarm, humid breeze tickling his nape. But, before he could turn around in surprise, his consciousness was plunged into darkness.



"So, what are we going to do with these?"

"Even if you ask me that, I mean..."

We groan, looking at six men laying in front of us like corpses. At this point, there's only one organization that'd come to attack us. These are likely its members.

"They're still alive, right?"

"That part seems to be OK, but assuming from the guy we captured at our office, I doubt they're going to wake up within half a day."

Right now we're inside a dungeon, so it looks like throwing them all into a pit doesn't work on this floor. It might be owed to the space being different here. Going back while carrying them would be difficult, and we can't even contact Mr. Tanaka in this place either.

"How about secretly depositing them at an inconspicuous spot inside the pork skewer shop?"

I don't think that they'll get attacked by monsters over there.

"Wau wau." Cavall says something to Miyoshi.

"What did he say?"

"It sounds like it'd be tough for them to carry such a big luggage."

"Well, he might say so, but we can't simply store them away——"

For the time being, we've completely disarmed them, and stored away all their belongings, but the men themselves are an issue.

"——Hmm, please handle it somehow."

"Gau gau."

"He says that it'll cost six magic crystals."

"One per person, huh...? Wait, don't tell me, you want six per person!?"

Hearing that, Cavall immediately averts his eyes to gloss things over, and whimpers quietly close to Miyoshi's ear, "Uuh, wafuu."

"He says, they will compromise at two per person."

"The price has gone up!? Well, whatever. It can't be helped, so please do what you must."

"Bau."

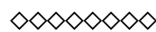
At the same time as Arthur's bark in one voice and fade into the shadows, the bodies of the six men vanish as well. Their destination is an inconspicuous spot at the camp located at the eighth floor's exit.

"Hah, it sure is one event after the other since early in the morning!"

"We've finally come this far. The main event is going to start from now on, though."

Afterwards we safely descend to the ninth floor, advance to an area where colonial worms spawn while taking our pursuers along, and loiter around over there for a while. Then, after giving them the slip by moving around at full speed, we return to the surface, pretending to have achieved our objective on the ninth floor.

The folks, who have been set on us around the stairs of each floor, should have very likely witnessed our triumphant faces. I'd like them to firmly believe that the ninth floor qualifies as a place to obtain <Different World Language Comprehension>. Since all of them should be high-leveled, I don't think that they'll get injured on the ninth floor. They might suffer mental damage, though.



"I'm home."

The instant I open the door of our office, Ms. Naruse runs up to us, seemingly agitated going by her faintly flushed face.

"Mr. Yoshimura! H-Here, look! Look at this!!"

In her hands she's holding a copy of the literary fragment we obtained in that mansion.

"What's wrong?"

"This is a major scoop!!"

Ms. Naruse seems to have downloaded as much of the epitaph pictures, stored on the WDA's public

server, and their properties (things like the dungeons and floors they were found at, and the finders) on a memory card as she could. Since she was somewhat afraid to get exposed, she downloaded them at a public WLAN spot. When she told me later, I praised her for being precautious. It's very likely that she would have been suspected if our website suddenly goes online after leaving behind many access records from a JDA account.

If it's a public WLAN spot, it won't be possible to specify the user so easily, even if they trace the login. Even a police investigation has to first specify the access point from the public WLAN spots and the illegal use of the WLAN by analyzing the logs, then stake out the vicinity of the place where a repeated access takes place, before finally going for the arrest. Given that it'd have at least been published as a case in the reports of the Security Measure Council, she must have felt quite relieved. I totally get her.

At the time when she came to our office after finishing the downloads, and was about to start on the translation, Miyoshi apparently entrusted her with this copy. Because we told her that it was urgent, she translated this one first, and then——

"This contains information about how to form a party!"

"Party, you say...you simply fill out your name and ID into the specified form, and hand it in with the JDA, no?"

"No, no, no, not that!"

The fragment apparently describes how to form a party within the dungeon system. Moreover, it also mentions the effects you gain from forming a party. According to this, you can gain following advantages by forming a party with your D-Cards:

- You will somewhat know the party members' location even when apart.
 - You will know the members' health (probably HP and MP or something like that)
- [efn_note]"Health" is written in English, that's why the explanation.[/efn_note]
- You can pass on your intent to other members by using something similar to telepathy. The range is 20 meters.
 - There are items and skills affecting the stats of all party members.
 - The experience share ratio of the registered members is set by the party leader.

"But why 20 meters? Does it have something to do with a factor of 13 again?"

Once I ask Miyoshi, she immediately looks something up on her PC.

"I had suspected it might be the case, but it's probably about the Harshad Number."

"What's that?"

"It's a nonnegative integer that is divisible by the sum of its digits when written in that base. In the case of 20, it's $2 + 0 = 2$. The 2 becomes the divisor of 20. 20 is also the 13th harshad number."

"What does that mean?"

"It's a number discovered by an Indian mathematician. Harshad seems to mean harṣa (joy) + da (give) in Sanskrit."

"I see, so 『Telepathy brings joy to a party』?"

It's as cunning as ever, or whatever you want to call it.

"No, umm, that's not the part I wanted you to comment on..." Ms. Naruse says with a dampened spirit after listening to our exchange.

"I guess we should try it out then." I take out my D-Card while making sure that Ms. Naruse can't see its surface.

D-Cards are necessary to form a party. All you have to do is to have those wishing to form a party touch each other's D-Cards, and then get the person who's going to become the leader to chant "Admit."

The instant I follow those instructions, I feel like some mysterious connection is formed between Miyoshi and me.

"I wonder...did it succeed?"

(It looks like it did, I'd say?)

"Oohh?"

Ms. Naruse eyes me strangely when I look back at Miyoshi while reflexively crying out, surprised by the telepathic message reaching me from Miyoshi.

"Did you hear that just now?"

"Eh? You mean the 『I wonder, did it succeed?』?"

It looks like only party members can hear the telepathic messages. This is definitely convenient.

"No, but it appears to have worked."

Hearing that, Ms. Naruse takes out her D-Card, apparently unable to contain her curiosity. "Is it okay for me to try it out as well?"

"Sure."

Once I chant "Admit" while touching Ms. Naruse's D-Card with mine, I sense how I gain a connection with her, just as it happened with Miyoshi.

"Eh?"

Ms. Naruse has apparently felt the same, seeing how she's staring at our touching cards, puzzled.

(How is it?)

"Wh-Wha!?! That just now was telepathy?"

"So it seems."

At that moment, Ms. Naruse frowns, and says slightly uneasily, "Eh? But...what if everything you think is passed on with this?"

"Senpai's perverted thoughts would get exposed!"

You! That's slander!

"T-That's a lie! I don't think anything like that to begin with! Also, Miyoshi's thoughts about being hungry haven't streamed in either!"

"How did you know!?! So they're leaking through after all!?"

(Were my thoughts just now passed on?)

Suddenly being asked this by Ms. Naruse, we reflexively turn around to her.

""Eh?""

"No, nothing."

"They weren't transmitted."

"It looks like they'll only be sent around if you actively try to talk. This is quite amazing."

Ms. Naruse alone has been checking things out calmly. Ugh, doesn't that make us look like idiots?

"But, senpai, I wonder, how come this command is in English?"

"Admit, you mean...?"

Now that she mentions it, yep. Normally the text on the D-Card uses the native language of the looker. And yet, almost all keywords are in English. Come to think of it, the appraised names had an English translation written next to them as well, didn't they?

"...The original language of the dungeon designer is English, or something like that?"

"That's ridiculous," Ms. Naruse spontaneously blurts out.

Well, I guess it's only inevitable to have your sanity doubted when claiming that the dungeons have been created by an English native.

"Maybe it's possible, seeing how English is the language with the most users in the world?" Miyoshi suspects.

That argumentation sure has some logic to it, but...

"Wouldn't it be Chinese then?"

"Oh, true."

"Which reminds me, where was Area 1 again?"

"Since it covers the longitudes $110^{\circ} \sim 120^{\circ}$, it's mostly around the western edge of North America. It's an area including Los Angeles and Las Vegas in the US, and Calgary and Edmonton in Canada."

As expected of a JDA staff member to smoothly have that information at hand right away.

"The English language part might stem from that place being the epicenter?"

"But wait, senpai, didn't recent news mention that Area 0 had been discovered in the Polar region?"

Hmm, I feel like I had heard such news as well.

"Yes, it seems a male Inuit obtained a Area 0 card in Canada."

"I see. However, you see, I've got the feeling that it's a somewhat likely reason..."

Maybe it's a confidential piece of information that English will become important. For example, assuming Japanese would immigrate to some planet, and the civilization on that planet would develop, then it would result in Japanese becoming the common language on that planet. And if several tens of thousands years passed like that, it wouldn't be odd for the same language to continuously be used across the whole planet, I think.

If such civilizations exist on the other side of the dungeons, it might be possible that they misunderstood the language, which they got in contact with first, as our common language.

"Senpai, that still wouldn't explain why you can see the text on the card in your native language."

"About that, the most likely candidate here would be that the general concept is being fed back as information to the looker's brain, but in that case, it wouldn't be possible to explain the reason for the commands being in English, would it...?" I fold my arms, peering upwards.

"I don't think we'll find a solution to this, even if we brood about it now."

"Well, you're right there. Wait, it was you who brought up the topic in the first place!"

"Tehee." Miyoshi slyly sticks out her tongue, and immediately scurries away on the other side of Ms. Naruse.

I guess pets and owner resemble each other. She acts just like Arthur's.

"Also, what's the experience share ratio at the end of the text about?" Ms. Naruse asks while ignoring our antics.

"Guessing by the words, it'd mean the ratio of the experience points shared between the members while forming one party."

"Experience points!" Ms. Naruse shouts with her eyes sparkling. "So they existed after all! And stats as well!"

Since the document also lists 『There are items and skills affecting the stats of all party members』, I think it only makes sense. Seeing how a ranking exists, experience points are considered to exist out of convenience, but it's not like their existence has actually been proven. After all, humans are life-forms that accumulate experience in life.

Even if they actually felt like having become stronger, you could dispute whether it's owed to a gain of what's called life experience, a gain of something like experience points, or the addition of some mysterious power. However, the outlandish strength of the top explorers is nothing that can be achieved through gaining life experience, resulting in theories about an indirect influence by the dungeons.

"But, how do you set the ratio?"

It's not like something similar to an interactive screen like with Making has appeared.

"Ah, that's written in the fragment. It looks like you have to use the back of the D-Card."

"Back?"

When I turn around my own card, I notice that the members of my party have been listed there without me even realizing. Suddenly Ms. Naruse peers at my card.

(Uwah! That's dangerous!)

"Eh? What is?"

"Ah, no, you see..."

I panicked because it seemed as if she would be able to see my rank and skills, but fortunately only the card's backside was visible.

However, Mr. Telepathy, don't do anything unnecessary...

"Ah, no. I guess I just got a little startled when you brought your face close all of a sudden."

I give such a lame excuse while even myself thinking, 'You think she's a certain soccer player or what?'

"Senpai is still a little boy in such matters." Miyoshi adds as follow-up, obviously having understood what's going on.

"Ah, haah..." Ms. Naruse turns slightly red.

"W-Well, leaving that aside, the list of party members is properly written on my D-Card's backside."

"Oh, they're listed on mine as well. A list of the members belonging to the party, that is. I guess it's the 33% added behind my name...?"

The one at the top of the list is the leader — in this case me — but the sharing ratio isn't written next to my name. According to the grimoire fragment, the leader gets the rest after deciding the share ratio of the other members. To change the share ratio, I just have to touch the member's name on my card, and think 20% for example. Also, by simply thinking about an even split, the share ratio is reset.

"I've understood it for the most part, so let's dissolve the party."

It'd become a major issue if I accidentally activated telepathy and transmitted something that should stay hidden. I gotta be careful with this until I get used to it.

Just as with the addition to the party, you just need to chant "Dismiss" with the D-Cards touching to have a member leave the party. It's also OK for the leader to touch the name of a specific member to dismiss them individually, or touch their own name to dismiss the entire party. Moreover, it has the mysteriously convenient feature of knowing who has been selected.

"Furthermore, the upper limit of party members——"

"Oh, that's written in the fragment. It's eight people."

"Eight, eh? Somehow that's very normal."

Since it's a number smaller than 13, I doubt that it has anything to do with a factor of 13. Unless it's a value that increases or decreases.

"I'm pretty sure it's because the name area on the D-Card's backside seems to only have eight lines." Miyoshi laughs, seemingly taking it as a joke, but she might actually be right here.

"Moreover...I'm also curious about what will happen if a person, who's already a party member, forms their own party."

"I think we should just try it out. Luckily there's three of us here."

First Miyoshi forms a party with Ms. Naruse as member, and then joins my party. Next, I form a party with Miyoshi, and then Miyoshi adds Ms. Naruse as party member.

Starting from the conclusion, all of it is possible. When someone being in a party joins another, P2 will be displayed behind the name of that member on the cards of the parent party, and R1 before

their name on their own card.

"Does it signify that the target has joined a (p)arty?"

"Probably. Though it could also mean (p)arent."

"What's with the 2 then?"

"I think it means that two members belong to the target's party."

"Then, R1 would be...Relationship 1?"

"Maybe. Or isn't it their position in the party hierarchy of the party they're belonging to?"

We might have been able to test it out more profoundly if we had one more person with us, but either way, it has cleared away any doubts about the possibility of forming child parties. There's a lot of things I want to check out like what'll happen to the allotment of experience, or whether it's possible to create grandchild parties, but all of that is impossible right now.

But then again, if the numbers point to the hierarchical level, it makes the possibility of grandchild parties very likely.

"I wonder, are clans formed...by stacking up parent-child-party relationships?"

Clan originally refers to Scottish family structures, but over time the term's meaning has deviated, turning into a definition for a user community in games. Simply put, it's a concept similar to a gathering of many comrades.

But she's right. That possibility exists. By fellow parties possessing parent-child-relationship, it could be possible to create an infinitely big clan connected by telepathy and experience sharing. Just like with the literary fragment at hand, there might exist other fragments or epitaphs depicting information about clans.

"This is a major discovery, isn't it!? We have to immediately publ——"

I interrupt the excited Ms. Naruse, putting a temporary halt on her drive, "No, Ms. Naruse. Please wait for a while."

"Eh?"

If we were to publish it right away, it'd turn into a question where we obtained that information. By no means could we simply say that we read the literary fragment of a grimoire. Besides, this——

"I'd like to use this as proof that the information of heaven leaks is correct."

——can be immediately checked out by anyone as something that isn't known by anyone else. It's a piece of information as if it's been arranged as the perfect security to prove the site's credibility.

§060 The Orb Transport is Life-Threatening? 12/2 (Sun)

A man received an encrypted message in a room of a hotel in Shinjuku, and passed it on to his leader. The leader scanned the message's contents, and said to the gathered men, "It looks like the unit that tried to dispose of the targets inside the dungeon was annihilated."

"The guys from the V Bureau? Unbelievable."

"I agree with that opinion, but it might just mean that the other side had an advantage in the field of explorers."

The leader lightly knocked on the table once, causing all noise inside the room to instantly disappear.

"With that said, the baton has now been passed on to us."

They were a unit of illegals (illegal secret service agents) secretly dispatched by Russia's SVR, however, they went by the simple name 『Bulwark』.

"There's countless routes the targets could use to head to Ichigaya." The leader spread a map of Tokyo on the table. "It'd be no problem if we could get them to use a car," he said, pointing at the two streets with the JDA in-between. "It'd be set that they would eventually use either the 302th (Yasukuni Street) or the 405th (Sotobori Street)."

"But that'd be right in front of the Ministry of Defense, no?"

"The ones moving out when there's a large car accident are the police. No need to worry about that side."

"Roger."

"Trains would pose a bigger problem." The leader pointed at Shinjuku Station. "The routes usable from Shinjuku are the Chuo Line running on the surface, and the Toei Subway-Shinjuku Line. It'd also be possible for them to use the Namboku Line and the Chuo Line after getting to Yotsuya Station on the Marunouchi Line."

"Tokyo's train map is totally crazy. Why are there so many lines running next to each other?" Another man asked while looking at the many lines.

"I think it'd be the fastest to blow it up."

‘In the case of a subway, making it cave-in would probably be the safest approach to confine the targets.

"We have no clearance for a direct attack against mass transportation systems."

"If we actually carried it out, it'd simply give accident a different kind of meaning. That would likely make Japan take it seriously." The leader said, and then explained the operation's details, instructing each team on their position.

"Team 1 is going to shadow the targets from their office while continuously reporting back."

"Team 2 is going to cause the car accident."

"Team 3 is on standby with me, as backup."

The respective team leaders nodded.

"In case they take the subway, go for it at a spot where you can finish them off. Since the distance between the stations is short, you'll probably be able to escape from anywhere."

"In case of a surface train, the point of attack will be here." The leader pointed at a place between Yotsuya and Ichigaya where the Subu and Chuo Line were crossing next to the Sotobori Park General Ground Tennis Court. [efn_note]Use the Park's name for Google Maps if you want to know about the precise area mentioned here. There's a map at the end of the book but it contains spoilers. [/efn_note]

"Luckily blinds have been set up on both sides of the railway at this section, so we'll strike here."

"This is the equipment."

Walking through Tokyo while carrying assault rifles would be against the laws. The leader placed pistols and ammunition on the table.

"P320?"

The SIG P320 was a handgun adopted as successor of the Beretta M9 in the US, with plenty of accessories available. Even in Russia's army existed units using SIG products, but the P320 hadn't been adopted yet.

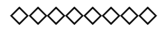
"It's nothing we could play off as fakes. Besides, the guns are equipped with silencers and subsonic bullets."

"The silencer is likely just an insurance. If used, the shots will be too loud to hide, and the silencing effect in a place bustling with people is also negligible."

"In short, you're saying it doesn't matter if we eliminate the targets?"

"Although it was inside a dungeon, the other party took on the V Bureau with a mere two people, and won. Even we won't be able to take them down with a half-baked attempt, I expect."

"If possible, I'd like things to finish by just stealing the orb, but—" The leader said with a cruel smile on his lips, "—it's normal for the unforeseen to happen on-site."



On the appointed day of the orb delivery, we're heading to the Yoyogi-Hachiman Station.

"Senpai, wouldn't it be better to use a car?"

"I wonder. It's one thing if you assume that a large-scale terror attack might take place, but don't you feel that using a mass transport full of people would be safer otherwise?" While answering her, I took out a real-looking box from a coin-operated locker we had prepared in advance as a dummy, and put it into my bag.

If someone was watching, it should look like the place for the handover was here. Then we got on the next train. Odakyu was a residential area all the way until Shinjuku, and a place where people would spot a commotion in no time. In the first place, I think it'd be unreasonable to set up any large-scaled traps on a railroad within one week after the announcement. All the more since they wouldn't know whether we'd board at Odakyu.

"Which reminds me, it looks like Ms. Naruse publicized the information about the mansion right away."

"True. Besides, didn't she fully cut out the scenes where we appeared?"

"I was the one who edited it~"

"Oh, really?"

It's no wonder that the parts with us appearing were properly cut out. I mean, if they had outsourced it or something similar, we'd be exposed at the editing stage.

"It was volunteer work, ahem!"

"Good work then."

I still had turned down a JDA escort. It's the epitome of standard templates to switch out the bodyguards, and the JDA escorts would just become a hindrance during an escape when we entrust things to my stats and Arthur's. The DAD and Mr. Tanaka's friends might be watching from somewhere though...

"What are we going to do after reaching Shinjuku? Usually we'd use the Sobu or Shinjuku Line, but in this situation..."

"The Sobu Line is easier for transferring, so we'll use that one. We'll be close to our destination once we get through the ticket gates."

"Eeh...? That's your reasoning?"

"You don't wanna take a long walk through the Shinjuku Station with its many foreigners, do you? Besides, subways don't have any escape routes."

The underground is friggin' dangerous. We'd be buried alive if they just went all-in by blowing up the whole place. If we get pincerred from the front and rear, there won't be any side roads, limiting our options to run away. Moreover, since the visibility is bad underground, it's likely easier to start something compared to when we use the train services on the surface. Well, I don't think they'll go as far as bombing a train station, but for some reason I have more of a peace of mind staying above the ground.



A man wearing something looking like a business suit and a woman in casual dress were sitting one train car behind the one with Yoshimura's group.

"Man, now we've got to follow around a huge gigolo, good gracious."

"I don't think that anything is going to happen at this point. But rather than that, you look pretty stylish there."

Usually Joshua wore clothes that were simple, albeit having a sense of freshness, casual, and possessed an odd looseness, as characteristic of people with plenty of leeway, but he somehow felt like wearing a tightly fitting business suit had its charm as well.

"I heard that foreigners in suits wouldn't stand out in Shinjuku, okay?"

"Who did you hear that from? I thought that the common wearing of suits was limited to a small part in the west."

They, who had conspicuously tall figures, hadn't been trained in skills like shadowing in the first place. Holding the book 『For Whom the Bell Tolls』 [efn_note]A book by Ernest Hemingway[/efn_note] - probably with the intent to use it as part of the camouflage - caused the man in business suit to stand out all the more. And even before that, the number of men who usually wore such clothes opening a book inside a train was extremely low.

"The story of a man, who died in the line of duty for the sake of stopping a military operation to take place while knowing that his own mission bore no meaning, truly fits us to a tee, doesn't it?" Joshua bragged.

Natalie nonchalantly surveyed their surroundings while answering with a joke, "Well, it sure sounds like you also let many women go you shouldn't have." [efn_note]This joke, and the line before refer to the contents of the book. You can look it up if you haven't read it. I can only recommend this book of Hemingway, it's written rather well.[/efn_note]

"Aren't the surrounding Asians a bit shady as well?"

"It looks like some guy called Tanaka is also watching our targets, so aren't they people working with him?"

"They might be Chinese."

"I can't really tell Chinese and Japanese apart by their outward appearance after all... You lived in Japan during your childhood, didn't you?"

"I wouldn't be so troubled now if that was all it needed to tell them apart."

"Is that how it works?"

"Can you distinguish Americans and Englishmen?"

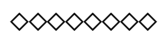
"Of course."

"Really?"

"If I let them speak."

"Even I'd be capable of that much," Natalie barked back at him.

Several minutes later, the train had entered Shinjuku Station.



Passing through the ticket barrier at Odakyu and going up to the platform of the Sobu Line, we calmly walk while aiming for the fourth wagon from the back.

"There's a quartet of foreigners two cars behind us, I think."

"We're in Shinjuku right now? There'll be many of them around here."

"They don't have the giddiness typical of tourists. They've been walking at our pace without even trying to secure open seats. Well, take a look."

Having walked slowly on purpose, we jump on the fourth car from behind just as the train is about to depart. Of course, something like the door closing with the train departing right away only happens in movies.

There's no way that the station attendant monitoring the platform would overlook such a situation at Shinjuku Station. The doors, which had been about to close, open up once more, and then close again in no time.

"I wonder whether the people behind us transferred?"

"You really shouldn't underestimate the number of people taking the train in Shinjuku. Even if it might be Sunday, moving within the train is rather impossible, I think."

I won't say that the train is crammed full, but the train is crowded enough that there's no space that

would allow walking around.

"Besides, you see, I'm pretty sure this train will run into an accident before Yotsuya."

"How would you know?"

"It's because the folks behind us have been using their cell phones. Besides——"

Yesterday I checked today's route on the street view. From the point of view of stealing something by attacking someone on a train, that is. And that's where I noticed. On the track between Shinjuku and Ichigaya on the Sobu Line exists only one place where the train becomes difficult to see by the surroundings as both of the track's sides are hidden by trees.

"If they're going to attack us, it'll be around Sotobori Park."

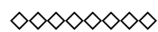
That's the place where the Sobu and Chuo Line cross.

The train starts to slowly move.

"Is Simon's team possibly following us today as well?"

"Going by his state before, it wouldn't be weird for DAD staff to lurk around somewhere, but...Simon's team is working as escort for the receiving side, aren't they?"

Well, it's never a good idea to count on something unreliable during times like now.



"It looks like they've noticed our movements."

"In that case, it seems like it'll be impossible——"

As the man was about to answer, the train shook sharply, and a man, who had held onto the strap next to the speaker, leaned against him.

『Ah, sorry』

While answering with his eyes to the man, who addressed him in Japanese, that it was no problem, the man continued, "——to get close to them inside the train at this rate."

"At the next station we're going to cram ourselves on the same wagon in preparation for the scheduled action point."

"Roger."



Around the time when the train begins to run parallel to the Metropolitan Expressway Route No.4 Shinjuku Line, an announcement informs us of the arrival in Sendagaya.

"Next station~ Sendagaya~, Sendagaya~"

"Miyoshi, get ready to get off."

"Huh?"

"At Yoyogi their group got into the same car. It looks like they plan to pincer us in this car before reaching the aforementioned point."

As the announcement in the car comes to an end, the train gradually slows down.

"Now listen, we'll go down the stairs and turn right in a dash after getting through the ticket barrier. Once we do, we'll immediately arrive at the Excelsior Caffé, so we'll turn right immediately after passing it, rushing under the tracks."

"D-Dash, you say? I'm not going to brag here, but I'm not overly confident in my stamina..."

Come to think of it, this girl's VIT was 9, wasn't it?

"It's certainly impossible for you to ride a hellhound, right?"

"Well yeah, that's definitely a no."

The instant the train stops and the doors open, we jump out, running down the stairs in front of us. At the moment we've held up our PASMOS, allowing us to get through the ticket barrier, Miyoshi throws in the towel.

"S-Senpai! A-Any more is impossible!"

Hearing that, I quickly grab Miyoshi, carrying her under an arm like luggage while relying on my stats, and run past the Excelsior Caffé. In the end it's going to be fine as long as the train passengers on the other side of the glass don't take any pictures. Otherwise it'd very likely look like I was caught red-handed on an abduction, if things go badly.

"Y-You meanie! Isn't that the time where you'd hold me in a princess carry!?"

"Shut it, or you'll bite your tongue!"

"Nguguuh!"

When I turn to the right, I'm immediately in front of the girder bridge of the Chuo-Sobu Line's Hachiman-Mae Station. Luckily there's no people under the tracks here, so there's no need to fear being photographed.

The <Detect Life> skill is useless within a crowd of people as long as you haven't marked any targets. And even if this skill could distinguish the individuals, you won't be able to tell apart ally and foe. That's why I had planned from the very start to head to a place where the skill would work.

On the right side of the exit of the Hachiman-Mae girder bridge lay the Shinjuku Gyoen Park. However, that place is surrounded by an iron fence with a height of close to two meters on top of a stone wall with a height of three to four meters.

I run up the stone wall while carrying Miyoshi. The stone wall mostly consists of orderly piled up bricks, and continues for a while, but the wall right after exiting the bridge tunnel is obviously rugged with its fieldstone-like style. With my current stats it's no hurdle to run up the wall with Miyoshi in tow as long as I don't slip on moss. Thus I do so, place my feet on the steel frame depicting yellow and black stripes in alternation, referred to as height restriction bars, leap over the iron fence in one go, and plunge into the forest of the Gyoen Park.

"S-Senpai, are you some kind of action star!?"

"It's a grace bestowed upon me by my stats. Anyway, no matter how trained as soldiers they might be, with this they shouldn't be able to follow us easily."

The Sendagaya Station is adjoining the Shinjuku Gyoen Park, but currently there's no means to exit it towards the Gyoen Park. If they try to chase after us, they should have no choice but to run in the opposite direction of us after getting out of the ticket barrier, jump over the two meters tall iron fence on top of a hill coming up far ahead, or normally enter through the Sendagaya Gate that is even further away.

The Sendagaya Gate is too far away. Normally they'd probably have no choice but to go with the second alternative, but the place where they could jump over the fence would be a forest at the edge of the cherry tree park inside Gyoen. It's not a place tourists would enter. Hence, anyone entering that place is going to require special attention.

"You're definitely amazing, but I feel like Gyoen would want us to pay the entry fee..." Miyoshi retorts calmly after having apparently settled down a bit.

"Ughh..."

No doubt about it. It's 200 Yen. Let's have them wave it under the label of an emergency measure.

"Besides, we also need a ticket at the time of leaving, you know?"

"Seriously!?"

"Mmh." Miyoshi grunts with her arms folded while being carried by me.

"It looks like being a star was too heavy a burden for you after all, senpai. Even if a star is what it is..."

"What're you talking about?"

"Since it was such a flashy action, a roller coaster would be the perfect description."

Are you playing passenger here, or what!?

"No, look, make it at least mei'star' or something like that."

"If you keep complaining about this and that, disa'star' will catch up with you, right?"

That'd suck. Eh, wait, all this talk about star here and star there has made me hungry for oy'star'.

"I guess it can't be helped. Let's simply leave it at pretending that it was barely safe."

The appearance of her repeatedly nodding with her arms folded while being carried under my arms is totally sloppy.

"Though, what's with you talking down on me?" I smile bitterly while heading north.

In any case, I suppose I've got no choice but to jump over the fence on the left side of the Okido Gate. The area close to the parking lot is full of guardsmen, but if it's the left side, I should be able to deceive them somehow by quickly leaping over, I think.

While making such plans, I exit at the lower pond. There we run into a crowd of people holding cameras...what the fuck? I put down Miyoshi in a hurry.

"The lower pond is a famous maple place, and right now is the best season for them."

Damn it! What shitty luck!

Over there, a huge maple tree with a beautiful coloring is reflected on the pond's surface. It almost looks as if it'd be faster to look for people not holding a camera, seeing how the tripods are bunched up alongside the pathway.

At that moment I see responses in an area with no people on the other side of the Cherry Tree Park.

"As expected, someone's been pursuing us."

"Aww, what a thrill~!"

"You sure are carefree, girl. Are your watchdogs properly guarding us?"

"Drudwyn is in your shadow, senpai. Cavall and Aethelm are in my shadow. Glessic is watching our office."

There's one in my shadow as well? Please doggies, it'd be bombastic if you could prevent any sniping. If it comes to such a level of attack, we've got no choice but to rely on you guys, so work for your share of luxury treats.

At that moment I hear quiet, dry pangs pangs from the direction where our pursuers showed up.

"Senpai, that just now——"

We look at each other.

"——totally sounded like gunshots."

Firing guns at a place full of people? If it's a group that doesn't get the concept of TPO at all, this whole thing goes way beyond being thrilling. But, what did they shoot at?

We start to move in silence. Passing the rose beds, we escape in the direction of the Okido Gate. Soon a big greenhouse comes in sight on the left.

"It appears they are holding an European Orchid Exhibition."

『30th Shinjuku Gyoen European Orchid Exhibition』 is written on a banner hanging at the big greenhouse Miyoshi is pointing at. It seems today's the last day of the exhibition. So that's why the greenhouse is so crowded! What bad timing. Well, probably no one is looking in the back of the greenhouse (wishful thinking). I feel like we'll be observed through the glass though...

Geez, for everyone to possess a means to take pictures; what a troublesome era.

Once I take a peek, our pursuers in the back are still in the middle of the thickets at the outer area of the Cherry Tree Park. They're not going to move?

"Oh well, no other choice, I guess."

"Please wait!" Miyoshi stops me as I make up my resolve to force our way through, and walks towards the Okido Gate in calm confidence.

"Excuuuse me. It seems like we've thrown our tickets away by mistake, or maybe we lost them. Would it still be okay for us to leave?" Miyoshi asks with a friendly smile.

"Hmm? Oh well. Be more careful next time, okay?"

"Yes, of course. Thank you very much. The maples were very beautiful, so we'll come back here soon."

"Okay, thanks for your patronage."

The old man at the reception lets us pass with a smile that totally looks like that of a good-natured old grandpa. What a tightly-knit community.

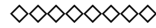
"That was really amazing, you know?"

"It's something else when entering, but we're talking about leaving here. Senpai, you're about the only idiot who would force his way through a place teeming with guardsmen."

"Uuughh!"

"I wonder what the group following us is going to do?" Miyoshi says with a worried look.

It looks like they haven't moved from their spot yet.



"Jus-, Just a moment!"

Joshua forced the train door back open, following the men, who jumped off moments ago, together with Natalie.

"Where are we!?"

"Sendagaya!"

"Yeah okay, and that's where?"

"You saw the map during the briefing, no!? It's at the southern edge of Gyoen!"

Just when the two turned right towards the railroad bridge, they spotted the men sprinting around ten meters ahead of them. And then, at the exit of the tunnel under the bridge, the legs of a man carrying something—

"Vanished!?"

From their current location, the exit on the other side of the tunnel was no more than a narrowed space, not really all that visible from the distance, but it looked like someone had been there before suddenly disappearing.

"Look at the guys in front. I'm pretty sure he climbed up over there."

"In an instant?"

"You'd be capable of that as well, right?"

Being told so, Joshua looked at the sign with 3.3 m written on it. It very likely meant that the height was 3.3 meters.

"Well, now that you mention it, probably."

They lowered their speed, and watched the men, who had begun to climb the cliff, while hiding at a street corner.

"Highly trained, I'd say." Joshua commented as he watched the men smoothly climbing the wall, although simply jumping up the wall seemed to be too much for them.

"Openly chasing them up to this point must mean that they belong to our northern friends, right?"

After confirming that they had scaled the wall, the two followed them at an astounding speed, and jumped up to the height limit bar at the bridge tunnel's exit. In one fluent motion, they also crossed Gyoen's fence.

The four men, who tried to chase after D-Powers, looked back wondering who might have suddenly appeared behind them, and immediately took action to remove the threat. The two in front quickly drew their guns, firing.

Joshua and Natalie avoided the bullets by hiding behind a tree in the instant they grasped the bullet's trajectory.

"Come on, you gotta be jokin'. Those fuckers really just shot at us!?"

"They sure are quite brave to pull this off in Japan."

'Calmly shooting around in a society where several hundred policemen would get mobilized over a single gunshot clearly shows that they're used to battlefields, or rather, not used to Japan...

With the two behind backing them up, the two in front moved so as to circle around the tree with their guns up. They had likely judged that their opponents were unarmed, seeing how there had been no counterattack.

"Josh, don't kill them just because they're a pain, ok?"

"Yeah, yeah."

'That's the last thing I wanna be told by a former DEA,' he thought. Stuck between getting killed by a drug cartel out of revenge after exposing one's true identity and the lacking validity of a testimony in front of a jury while still undercover, it was a matter of course for that organization to shoot its targets to death rather than arresting them.

Seeing the two in front coming around, Natalie acted swiftly. She formerly belonged to the DEA's FAST, and was a professional at interpersonal combat to begin with. She jumped out of cover with an unbelievable speed while staying clear of the gunpoint, knocked down her opponent's gun, and shoved the heel of her palm against his chin. All while preventing the men in the back to get a clear shot by using the man she was fighting as cover.

Joshua was even faster than her, thanks to his stats. When Natalie was about to knock down the first man's gun, he swept the second man's feet immediately after stabbing him with a small knife, driving the back of his head into the ground.

Just like that, the two knocked out the two men in the back, and then dragged the bodies of the four men into the shade of a tree.

Watching Natalie silently search the men's belongings, Joshua said, "Just give it a rest, there's no way you're going to find something, is there? Should you find something that could point to their identity, it'll be fake anyway."

"Maybe. Their guns are SIG's P320. Just like the ones deployed by the US."

Once she had disarmed and bound them with quick movements, she approached a man sitting on a promenade bench along the Cherry Tree Park, and put the weapons down next to the bench while saying, 『We can leave the rest to you, right?』, in Japanese, just to immediately chase after Yoshimura and Miyoshi without waiting for a reply.

"Hey, was that really okay?"

"Obviously. I mean, it's pretty clear that he belongs to the team of that Tanaka guy."

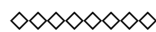
Those guys had also gotten off at Sendagaya. However, there had been no sign of them following behind Natalie and Joshua.

‘In that case, they must have entered Gyoen through another entry, or sent another unit. Besides, no matter how quiet the battle might have been, the promenade is still just around the corner. It’s impossible to not have noticed the strange atmosphere. In the first place, guns have been shot twice. It’s unthinkable for a man nonchalantly sitting on a nearby bench to be an ordinary citizen.

"So, what are you going to do if it was someone completely unrelated to all this?"

"He will definitely contact the police. And that got nothing to do with us."

The common-sense man in their team, Joshua, was surprised by Natalie's actions, but accepting that it couldn't be helped anymore, he chased after her.



"So, what are we going to do from here on, senpai? Are we going to exit at Yotsuya on the Marunouchi Line? Or are we going to keep heading north on the Shinjuku Line?"

"We'll cross Shinjuku's District 1 crossing, and pick up a taxi along Gaien-Nishi Street or Shinjuku Street."

A reasonable number of taxis are parked in the area around Okido Gate's exit, but we can't say with certainty that our opponents haven't set up a trap of waiting for customers there. That's why I've decided to go with the option of picking up one of the taxis driving around Shinjuku's District 1 crossing. Preparing for such an erratic action on a beck's call shouldn't be possible.

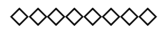
"Got it." With those words, Miyoshi runs across the intersection, and catches a taxi without a moment's delay.

It's one of those JPNTAXIs, the ones with sliding doors. There's many bad comments about them, like the opening and closing of the sliding doors being slow resulting in the clients being pressured on streets with high traffic, the windows being tightly locked, and so on, but they're quite comfortable for their big interior.

"Please exit to Yasukuni Street, and drive us all the way to the JDA's Ichigaya Head Office."

"As you wish, customer."

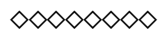
Once I tell the driver our destination, the car begins to move as if gliding across the street, uneventfully advancing north along Gaien-Nishi Street, turning right at Tomihisacho-Nishi's crossing, and entering Yasukuni Street.



"Hey, look at that!"

The two men who had been driving a car coming from Yotsuya confirmed how their targets were just about to get into a taxi. And yet the signal of the pursuit team was still being transmitted from deep in Gyoen. Since the car was luckily waiting at the traffic light of the Shinjuku's District 1 crossing, the man in the passenger seat quickly got off the car, and ran towards Gyoen to check the situation.

The driver suddenly made a U-Turn the instant the light turned green, and began following the taxi with their targets to make sure of their route while earning himself a honking orchestra from the surrounding cars.



"Hey Natalie, the guy who just passed us..." When Joshua called out to Natalie, concerned about the man who had just run past them outside Okido Gate, he heard faint screeching from the crossing, and watched how a car forced a U-Turn. "Fuck! This day is way too busy!"

The two started to run, and jumped into a nearby taxi.



"What was that?"

"It looks like Team 1 was restrained." The man, who had gone to check the situation inside Gyoen, saw several men contacting some place, and his four comrades lying on the ground.

"Restrained? You mean, they weren't able to kill themselves?"

"All of them are unconscious."

"Unconscious? Knocking one of our teams out without killing a single of them? Have they used gas, despite being in the center of a city?"

"So, what about the targets?"

"They appear to be heading north by car on the 319th."

"Roger. We'll leave the rest to Team 2."

"If this were a war zone, we'd take more drastic measures, but our hands are tied too much here. The limit will be an attack after a fake accident."

"So, does it look like you can steal the object from the other side with your current lineup?"

"If we've got appropriate gear, and assuming that it'd be alright even if it turned into a massacre. Otherwise it'll be impossible with what we have on hand."

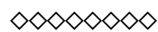
"Got it. Then continue the surveillance. If you see a chance...go for it."

"You're going to leave the timing to me?"

"If you're confident in your success, I'll leave it in your hands."

"Roger."

The leader cut the call, and turned his feet towards the JDA, with his mind made up to use his final trump card. According to the information, the orb's existence would be guaranteed as long as they killed one of the two targets. The man shrugged his shoulders, as if accepting that it was inevitable, and summoned the members on standby in the Hotel Grand Hill Ichigaya.



"We've completed the first stage, I'd say?" Miyoshi breathes out deeply while watching the scenery pass by through the taxi's window.

"True. Once we enter Yasukuni Street, I think it'll be difficult for them to make any big moves, but..." While saying so, I've become very worried.

"What is it?"

"Well you see, no matter which route we take, our destination remains the same, right?"

"Obviously."

"Wouldn't they lie in wait near the JDA then, in case we'd manage to shake them off?"

"Eehh? It's right in front of the Ministry of Defense, you know?"

Just then we pass the front gate of the Ministry of Defense, and right at the moment when the taxi

drives past the sign informing that the Sotobori Road is 300 m ahead, I see how a big trailer speeds up, driving down the opposite, middle lane of the road which gently curves to the left. Somehow having a bad feeling about this, I signal Miyoshi with my eyes.

Suddenly, in the instant Miyoshi sees my signal, the trailer veers off to the right as if having lost control after a tire on the right got punctured. In no time the whole thing topples over with a roaring crash, with the trailer part maintaining its inertia and sliding our way. Swaying around due to the centrifugal force, it fully blocks the three traffic lanes heading east. There's no escape with the right having cars on the opposite lane, and the left closed off by a fence and boundary wall. Our driver panics, trying to step on the brakes.

"Don't stop! Keep going straight!" Shouting so, I have Drudwyn step on the accelerator from the shadows.

The taxi suddenly picks up speed, and plunges towards the container without the driver having any time to throw the wheel around.

"Eehh!?! Noooo!" The driver screams, closing his eyes.

"Cavall!"

Upon Miyoshi's yell, Cavall jumps out of the shadow of the sliding container, which is on the verge of crashing into us, as if to deliver a blow against the container with his shoulders. The container runs up into Cavall, gets repelled, dances through the air, leaving just enough space for one taxi to pass through beneath, and crashes back down on the road immediately afterwards. If this was a movie, it'd definitely be a scene showing the triple action in slow motion.

The container, which causes loud squishing sounds, mows down the municipal bus stop in front of the Ministry of Defense while tumbling around, keeps sliding along the road, and finally comes to a stop close to the ministry's main gate.

"W-We're alive?" The driver babbles with a stupefied look.

We whisper among each other so that he wouldn't hear.

"Nice one, Miyoshi."

"Afterwards, magic crystals, okay?"

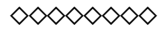
"Ugh, no choice, I guess." I answer with a sidelong glance at the driver.

Our car, which has kept moving due to inertia and the creep phenomenon, comes to a halt just before the Hotel Grand Hill Ichigaya.

Usually it's forbidden to cross the street here, but as there's a major accident behind us, no cars are following us anyway.

"You can keep the change."

Telling the driver that we're going to get off, we pay with a 10,000 Yen bill, quickly exit the car, and cross the street. The JDA is literally in front of our nose.



A man wearing inconspicuous clothes under his camouflage cover took out a roughly 120 cm long rifle from his bag on the roof of the building next to the hotel opposite of the JDA. A SR-25M. It was a sniper rifle used by the US marines. Its MOA (Minutes of Angle) was 0.75. In short, it roughly spread by 2 cm per 90 meters.

The man thought to himself that it'd have been perfect if he had a T-5000 (a Russian Bolt Action rifle), but because the plan this time was to abandon the rifle and escape, something out-of-the ordinary had been prepared for him.

'But then again, it didn't feel all that bad when I tested it out yesterday.

The JDA building had long eaves at the entrance, and there didn't exist any good sniping points on the other side of the river.



As for the hotel's rooftop they had designated at first, he'd need to lean out himself too much since the angle was too steep, and he'd be in plain sight from the windows of the JDA building since the hotel was smaller than the JDA building. The rooftop of the DNP Ichigayasanaicho Building would be a fairly good spot, but with its distance being 300 meter, and as the fireline would pass between other buildings, he'd have only one, momentary chance. The sniper was confident enough to hit the target over such distance on plain ground, but as it'd be a shot passing a street flanked by a river with buildings on both sides, he wanted to avoid any coincidences when also incorporating the target's movements into his calculations.

In the end, after examining several buildings close to the hotel, he chose this one where he could also enter the roof.

The distance to the target was approximately 100 m. Usually it'd be a shot he'd be able to pull off with his eyes closed — at that moment, a huge trailer rushed past in front of his scope.

'It looks like my customers have arrived.

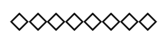
The instant he saw the trailer fall over on the street drawing a gentle curve to the right, the man knitted his eyebrows.

'Team 2 is clearly overdoing it.

The JDA building in front of him was taller than this one. Hence, the number of people, who'd peek out through the windows if a big accident on the street below took place, would increase. No matter how camouflaged he might be, it'd be better to draw as little attention as possible. Fortunately everyone was looking in the direction of the crash site, opposite of him.

'But then again, maybe I won't get a turn this time,' he wondered when he watched the trailer sliding, completely blocking the road.

At that moment, the container floated up unnaturally. Seeing the car, which his targets apparently used, passing beneath undamaged, the man completely switched his attitude.



"Senpai, the accident just now..." Miyoshi falters to continue while looking back at me with a somewhat pale face as we head towards the entrance at a quick pace.

"I spoke about it at JDA the other day, didn't I?"

"About what?"

"Look, about not being able to guarantee the safety of the orbs entrusted to us, if you or I died."

"Ah, now that you mention it, there was a bluff like that...wait, don't tell me!"

"It's just my assumption."

Assuming that information got leaked, it wouldn't be odd for others to reach the conclusion that they'd just need to kill one of us to get rid of any orbs in the worst case, if they don't manage to steal them.

"Senpai, we're in Japan right now, aren't we?"

"Well, the trailer falling over might be a coincidence, and all of it might be us being delusional, but..."

...it's a fact that someone has been chasing us at Gyoen, and I think it's rather weird for a trailer to drive along Yasukuni Street at such a convenient time. Just where had they planned to transport its load? They'd have ended up right in the middle of Shinjuku if they had followed the street, and if they drove on even further, they'd end up in Hachioji and Otsuki. Wouldn't a trailer be headed in the direction of Kawasaki or Yokohama?

Just then, police cars and ambulances drive past, leaving a dopplered trail of the sirens in their wake. While admiring the Japanese emergency cars for their fast initial response, I'm about to turn in the direction of the JDA's entrance when it suddenly happens.



The face of a woman was shown in the center of the cross-haired reticle within the scope with its fourfold magnification. He had heard that the man would be okay as well, but the man liked to watch beautiful faces burst open.

A downward shot, tailwind, and a simple movement of walking forward. With all conditions met, making it impossible to miss, the man squeezed the trigger.



As soon as a black sphere of around 5 cm came into existence in front of Miyoshi's head alongside a faint pang, it immediately disappeared. It was the black hole I had previously seen on the tenth floor.

"Wait, that just now..."

No way, she got sniped at?

Normally we should have immediately run for cover, but not having received any such training, we look towards the roof of the building from where the bullet seems to have originated.

"Aethelm!" The instant Miyoshi yells, Aethelm has probably materialized in the shadow of the sniper like a bullet of darkness.



It was a sure-hit shot. And yet, the face in the reticle only looked surprised, but else remained completely unhurt. Not to mention that there wasn't a single sign to be seen in the scope that the bullet had impacted anywhere.

"!?"

'Just where the hell has the bullet gone? The distance is a mere 100 m. Even if the scope is misaligned, it's impossible for the scope to be so off that I wouldn't see the bullet's impact.

Even while confused, the man placed his finger on the trigger, trying to accomplish his mission, even if he had to use up all of his remaining bullets. However, he never was able to carry out that intention. At the same time as it abruptly got dark in front of his eyes, his consciousness was engulfed by darkness.



No second shot comes our way as we stand still without even trying to run away. The sniper has either given up after one shot, or suffered the same fate through Aethelm as the guy who tried to trespass into our office.

"Miyoshi, you okay?"

"No way, for me to truly get sniped at...I totally experienced something amazing there." Miyoshi answers rather dispassionately.

In response, I squeeze out my voice while rolling my eyes, "Now listen..."

"Arthur's bragging to leave all of it to them wasn't just for show. But then again, it doesn't really feel like I got sniped at either. I haven't seen the bullet, and there was just a sound," she laughs.

If I remember correctly, it happens exceedingly often that people start to escape after someone collapses, even when watching foreign movies of random shooting incidents. Having said that, I doubt that it changes the fact that it causes a shock. I gently put my arm around Miyoshi's shoulder, as we head into the JDA's lobby.

§061 Third Different World Translator 12/2 (Sun)

"Ah, Ms. Miyoshi!" Ms. Naruse runs up to us after discovering us entering through the JDA's automatic door alongside a warm wind blowing against our faces from within the building. "What's going on? You're strangely chummy today, aren't you?" She adds with a baffled look, seeing me having put my arm around Miyoshi's shoulder.

"Ah, well, yeah, various things happened." As I remove my arm with those words, Miyoshi giggles.

Well, I suppose it's okay now.

"Now that you mention it, it's been quite an uproar out front. Are you two alright?"

She probably means the matter with the trailer. Ms. Naruse asks, seemingly believing that the various stuff mentioned by me is about the accident.

"Well, we're safe. So far as it goes."

Even if I were to mention here that we were sniped at, it'd just cause a big fuss. As long as we manage to wrap up the trade, only reporting back to Mr. Tanaka will be enough, I think. I can't even begin to imagine that they'd go as far as bombing the JDA next. It'd be exaggerated and too unreliable in regards to the results.

Going by the short peek we took, the sniper seems to have fallen into the pit immediately after losing consciousness atop the building's roof. Movement inside the pit's space has the same underlying principle as movement in normal space. If you want to move something that doesn't move on its own, it's necessary to carry it. Because this action appears to be fairly costly, Aethlem told Miyoshi to do something about the guy in there. Of course, it's absolutely no problem to simply let him rot, if we don't make Aethlem move him around. In short, it'd be the safest approach to quickly restrain the assailant and let Mr. Tanaka handle the rest.

Anyway, first comes business. As long as we hand over the orb to the DAD, we should be able to get back our days of peace - at least that's what I want to believe.

『Hello. You're the orb people?』

At that moment, a girl, who looks like a junior high school student, addresses us from behind Ms. Naruse. But, why is such a young girl in a place like this? She looks like an US-American, so she might be involved with the DAD, but...

『That's right. I'm called Yoshimura. Are you staff of the DAD?』

In response to my question, the girl shows a pleasant smile, answering 『I'm Monica Clark. Nice to meet you』, as she holds out her hand.

While clasping it, I have complicated feelings about this.

"Senpai, a researcher in their forties, or a researcher in their teens; which would you want to use an orb worth 400 billion Yen, if neither has genetic diseases in their family?"

The orb's skill will go poof if it's holder dies, no matter how much effort and money you throw at it. It's not that I don't understand the idea of extending its usage as much as possible, but...

"No, I mean...say whatever you want, but she totally looks like a middle schooler, you know?"

"That's a matter concerning the other side. It's nothing we should interfere with."

It's just as Miyoshi says, I know all that, but contrary to Ms. Naruse's secret usage, using this orb under orders of an organization right now is equal to announcing that she'll become a caged bird for the rest of her life.

『Yo, Yoshimura』

Just when I face Monica, about to speak up, Simon, who has apparently checked the situation outside, lifts a hand in greeting as he passes through the lobby's automatic door.

『It was a miraculously narrow escape that would put Hollywood to shame, wouldn't you say?』

I guess he's talking about the stunt of us passing beneath the container earlier.

『Why would you know that?』

『We watched from behind』

A tall, slender man with ash blond hair says from behind Simon. If I remember correctly, he's the scout of Team Simon. His name...ah right, he mentioned it was Joshua Rich or something like that, I think.

『Oh, so you were also following, just as expected』

『We were of no use at all, though』

『Were you possibly responsible for the guys following us from behind in Gyoen having stopped to move?』

Joshua winks, doing a thumbs up.

Miyoshi, who's been making call at the wall, quickly runs up to me, and says, "Senpai, I got in contact with Mr. Tanaka. It looks like he's been delayed a bit because of the mess at Gyoen."

"Roger."

『Well, that's how it is. Anyway, once we tried chasing after you with a taxi, the trailer rushed over. That was quite surprising, or rather, really scary. I was damn sure that you'd die then and there』

He says and laughs. Their guard targets being killed right in front of their noses would also reflect back on them as it'd be their failure, but it's only their stats that stand out. They're no bodyguarding experts. Unexpectedly the US might be running short on personnel, too.

『Still, you sure made a mess out of things for us, didn't you?』

Simon tries to put up a sullen face, but fails as the corners of his mouth slacken in amusement.

『What could you be talking about?』

『The ninth floor』

Ah, it's about the ninth floor where we moved to at the end. It looks like the search teams of the various countries had a really bad time in the colonial worm section on that floor.

『Our country seems to have sent a DoD team after you as well. It doesn't sound like the worms are super strong, but...that appearance and those numbers? After completely running out of bullets in no time, it soon developed into a freaking trauma of a battle, you know?』

Simon says while stifling a chuckle, and Joshua shrugs his shoulders exaggeratedly behind him.

『So? Did the colonial worms drop any items?』

Simon's eyes brighten up once Miyoshi asks.

『Is that another way for saying that those mobs drop some important items?』

『Eh? I'm just curious, okay? Still...why are you telling us all this?』

『It's 'cause you showed interest in it, Azusa』

『Pardon?』

『Whoa, come on. Currently you're the second hottest explorer in the world. You didn't know?』

According to Simon, Miyoshi has drawn the attention from all over the world because of her orb auctions to begin with, but with the sale of <Different World Language Comprehension>, she's apparently become the world's most famous trade license owner. If the WDA were to release a trade license ranking, she'd single-handedly dominate the first place by leaps and bounds.

『With your ability to easily find an orb highly sought after by explorers all over the world, you're in the center of attention among even military authorities and politicians, not to mention other traders』

『It was just coincidence, though.』

『As if anyone would believe such bull』 Simon shoots down Miyoshi's reply at once.

Because it's not overly smart to allow the conversation to continue in this direction, I casually change the topic, 『If Miyoshi is the second, who's the first? Team Simon who cleared Evans?』

『It pains me to say, but I think we're already third or even below that. Not in my wildest dreams had I expected that our clearing of Evans would be overshadowed in like no time』

『Then who?』

『Don't ask the obvious, man. A certain world rank 1 who became famous overnight』

Ugh, I've stirred up a hornet's nest there.

『But, nothing is known about that guy. I tried asking around all over the place in Yoyogi, but let alone not a single explorer knowing who it is, not one of them has even the slightest idea who it could be』

『Wouldn't that simply mean that this person isn't in Yoyogi?』

『Maybe? Well, you might be right. Either way, neither the JDA folks nor the explorers have the slightest clue about their true identity. They've been given the nickname "The Phantom." Some also called them Mister X, but it's not like the options are limited to men only』

Yeah, it's equivalent to saying it's all a show.

"Senpai, I wonder, which is cooler, King Salmon or The Phantom?" Miyoshi asks while suppressing a laugh.

As if I'd care!

『Well, having said that, Azusa, you're already a worldwide legend. After all, you're being considered to be the Number One Orb Hunter. But then again, there doesn't exist a number two either』 Simon laughs.

I'd say it means she's the sole orb hunter in the world.

『In any case, recently Area 12 has an abundance of topics for sure』

Monica has been silently listening to our silly chit-chat with an expression dyed with great interest.

『On that subject, Simon, who's she?』

『Ah...I guess there's no point in hiding it any longer now that we're here. She's the orb user, I heard』

I get slightly angry over the reply which follows my prediction. I won't brandish my commoner logic, which would be misunderstood as stunted, by talking about social justice here or anything like that, but I'd like to at least ask if she's being tricked into it.

『You know what this means, right?』

『I get what you want to say, Yoshimura. But it's a matter that doesn't fall under my supervision』

Nothing less of a soldier. I bend down, matching my line of sight with hers, and ask, 『Say, Monica』

『Yes?』

『Are you aware of the circumstances surrounding the orb you're going to use?』

『Of course』

『Have you agreed to using that orb? On your own judgment, without having any kind of pressure applied on you?』

『As people are living in a society, they can't fully escape those kinds of pressures. No matter how free they are, it won't be anything but simple chaos if no rules exist at all』

Monika answers, revealing a slightly grown-up smile.

『Hey, Simon. You're not going to pull a joke like saying that this girl is actually thirty years old or something similar, right?』

『No clue. However, I hear she's got a career of having enrolled at the MIT at an age of nine, and becoming the youngest Ph. D. just before turning fourteen』

What the hell! But then again, intellectual and emotional growth are two different pairs of shoes.

『You see, human emotions sometimes can't be explained with logic』

『I know』

『Even if you consent to it now, it might become unbearable at some point』

『Okay』

As I look into her eyes, I hesitate on what would be the best to tell her. That's why I smile and simply tell her what comes to mind.

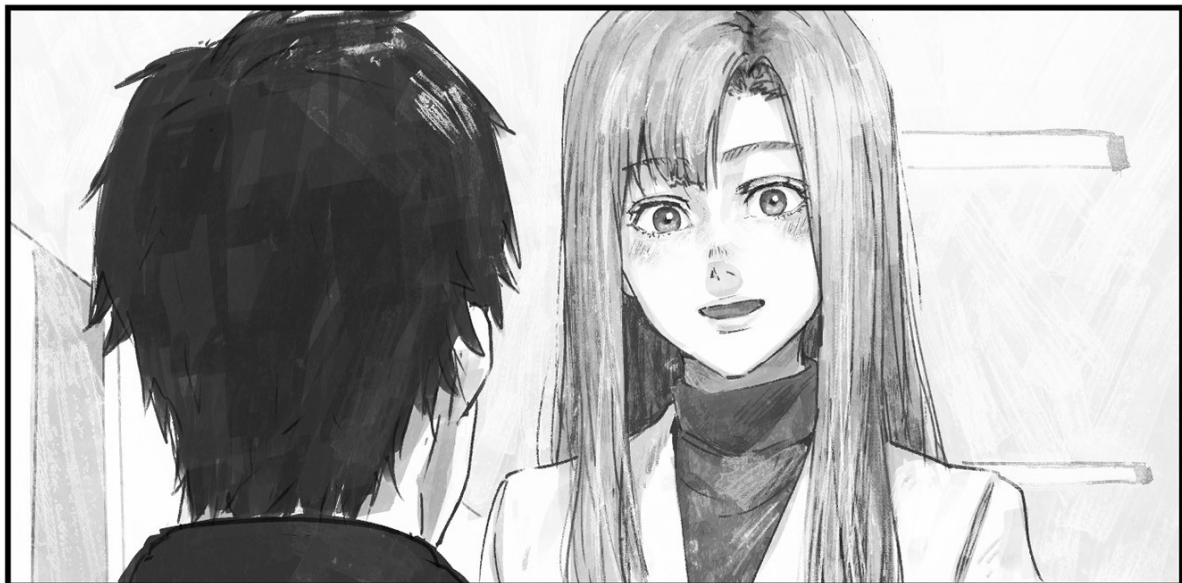
『But it's okay. When you become an adult, you'll have a lot more freedom than now』

After all, the dungeons are trying to spread <Different World Language Comprehension>.

She has listened to my words, which must seem to be completely unfunded, with a serious look. I bring my face close to hers so that no one else can hear us, and quietly tell her of the URL I heard from Miyoshi.

『Please access this site on Christmas Eve. However, keep it a secret until then』

『Understood! It's a secret magic chant!』



She happily says, showing a childish smile this time.

『A secret magic chant?』

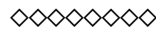
『Mr. Simon has said that you're a magician』

Simon? Just what kind of crap is that guy spreading about me...?

At this time I still didn't know that a Japanese magician had become a hot topic in the Indo-European high society because of Ayesha.

"Senpai. It's Yes to lolita, but No to touching."

"Now listen, I don't have any such preferences."



The team around Tanaka, who had arrived on-site after being contacted by one of its members, handled the settling of the incident caused by Joshua and Natalie at Gyoen.

"Their equipment is US-American, but their race seems to be eastern Slavic." Tanaka's subordinate said while examining the unconscious, bound four men.

"When all's said and done, it's been handled very skilfully." Tanaka surveyed the vicinity, obviously fascinated.

Although the line of sight from the promenade was blocked by the grove of trees, they had taken on four special force members of some country close to the promenade in Gyoen on a Sunday, knocking them out while making sure that no one noticed the whole event. And very likely bare-handed at that.

"The gun has been fired twice."

"Easily dodging gunfire by a trained shot, and knocking out all four before the other three could fire their guns...putting it into words makes it sound easy, but would our guys be able to pull off something like this?"

"According to the men who received their equipment, it was apparently a couple of a man and woman."

"This only strengthens my belief that it's nigh impossible."

At that moment Tanaka's smartphone vibrated.

"Sorry, give me a moment." With those words, he took the call while separating from the scene a bit.

"Yes."

"Ah, hello, it's Miyoshi."

The carefree voice on the other side of the line told him something completely unbelievable.

"You caught a sniper?"

"Yes, that's how it turned out, I guess. We've seized him alongside his weapon, so please come pick him up at a suitable time."

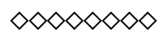
"Eh? Just a moment, Ms. Miyoshi!"

While staring in a daze at the smartphone, which showed that the call had ended, Tanaka had absolutely no clue just how they had apprehended that sniper. 'It's completely different from catching a spy who got close on his own. Just how the heck did they catch someone who'd run away right away after sniping at them from a fair distance?

He felt ashamed hearing that someone had been freely using a weapon capable of this within Japan, but what was even worse was their structural problem, making it impossible for their organization to track everyone who had arrived from Domodedovo on the 29th.

"We're very obviously lacking manpower."

'Are we really going to be able to prevent a large-scale terror attack from occurring during the upcoming Olympics by just mobilizing the police? Maybe it'd be smart to simply request the folks of D-Powers to guard the VIPs,' he wondered while smiling bitterly.



The orb trade itself finished without a hitch in almost no time. Monica used the orb immediately, right then and there. Then, some adult brought in documents, and after looking at those, she discussed something with the new arrivals. My guess is that they made sure that she now had really become capable of understanding the written contents.

"Senpai, Senpai."

"What's up?"

"Ms. Naruse told me just moments ago, but my trader license has gone up in rank or something, and I received a new card."

"Figures, you're a legend now, right?"

"Please stop with that."

"So, did you go up by two levels in one breath or something?"

"About that..."

The license card Miyoshi secretly holds out to me is different in some respects to the plastic card I possess. It's completely black, and its catchy appearance carries some dignity as well. On top, it's shining radiantly, and an "S" is written on in a pearly, glossy color...

"A special seven rank promotion!?"

"Hey! Don't make such a pun as you make it sound like I've died or something. At least use "skipped" or "advanced" or such. Please?"

The WDA's ranking doesn't reflect actual ability, but ultimately shows your level of contribution to the respective national DAs. If it comes to trading licenses, things like what merchandise you've traded and how much handling fee you've paid to the JDA should play a major role. Considering it logically, the JDA has earned 40 billion Yen from just this one trade. It's no wonder that she's become an S rank with that.

"Probably S rank will grant you that template reward."

"Template reward?"

"A free pass into all dungeons restricted by the states."

The WDA's ranking limits the sale of weapons and armors, and is used as an estimate for the pricing when an enterprise hires an explorer, but in addition, it also limits access to restricted dungeons.

"I see, orb hunter, eh?"

"Yep, yep."

We're basically two slackers who want to do our beloved research while leading carefree lives. Being ordered to go get various orbs for some big shots is a big no go.

"Let's make it a rule to turn such requests down whenever they crop up."

"Sure thing."

『Hey, Azusa, Yoshimura』

Right now Monica is still talking about something with the people around her on the other side of the room. Thus, apparently bored to death, Simon chats us up.

『Those guys will soon go back to our country, but since we've decided to genuinely tackle Yoyogi for a bit, you've got to put up with me and my team for a bit longer, 'kay?』

Eeeh? Just scurry back home and do your job properly, dude! Oh, which reminds me!

『Are you going to escort them up until Yokota?』

『Hmm? Well, yeah, but what 'bout it?』

『As a matter of fact...』

I pull Simon into a corner, and tell him in a whisper that Miyoshi had been sniped at.

『What was that!? ...Don't tell me, that trailer too?』

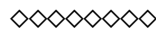
『I can't say so for sure, but I have my suspicions.』

『So, what about the offenders?』

『The sniper should be restrained, but I think it'd be better for you to be careful until you enter Yokota』

『Got it. Thanks a lot for the heads-up』

With those words Simon goes out onto the corridor. He's probably going to call some place via his cell phone. This room is shielded after all.



『Mr. Yoshimura. Thank you very much on various accounts』

Monika says and holds out her hand when she's about to leave the conference room. It looks like it's been decided that she'll fly back to Yokota with a helicopter from the Ministry of Defense. Come to think of it, Japan also cooperated in the acquisition of the orb, didn't it?

While grasping her hand, I say with a wink, 『If it becomes too much of a pain to be stuck between research and politics, you just gotta selfishly do what you aren't forbidden to do, even if you don't do what you've been told to do. It's fine. Even if something happens, as long as you're not told to do something, you'll be able to have them let you off the hook to some extent』

『If something happens, contact us at any time』

Monica nods lightly, and gallantly walks through the corridor while grinning broadly. If possible, I'd like her to become happy. After all, it's not necessary for her to live by sacrificing herself for something, just as her name suggests. [efn_note]Her name Clark originates from cleric. Clerics are clergy.[/efn_note]

『You're really a nice guy. Though you're a bit too much of a busybody』

I cast a fleeting glance at Simon, who has positioned himself next to me without me even noticing, and curtly answer, 『Far from it』.

I'm merely trying to live while following my own emotions as much as possible. That's why it's only natural for there to be many contradictions and futility in my actions. The trauma of having

worked at an exploitative company isn't just for show.

『Whatever. Just make sure to be as careful as possible. Nice guys tend to die sooner or later in dungeons』

While casting a sidelong glance at Simon who's put his arm around my shoulder in an over-familiar manner while giving me such peptalk, I bump his chest with the back of my right hand.

『In short, we'll be alright as long as you're alive』

Hearing that, Simon grins broadly, removes his arm, bids farewell by lightly lifting one hand, and runs up next to Monica. Miyoshi and I leave through the lobby and see their group off while experiencing a feeling of being completely drained.

"It's finally over, huh?"

"Yeah, we're done here."

The leaves on the roadside trees having turned into a vivid crimson is tolling the beginning of winter. Monica gets into a limousine parked in front while surrounded by Simon's team and her SP. The trip to the ministry will take just a minute. As long as the front gate isn't fully blocked by the trailer's container or some such.

§062 Contents of the Epitaphs 12/5 (Wed)

Three days after the turmoil over the <Different World Language Comprehension> came to an end.

Ms. Naruse's translation work for the sake of publishing the party information has been bloodcurdling. I think her own curiosity towards the real truth played a big role for her motivation. Moreover, because she understood well that it was a matter that had to be handled discreetly, she spent not just the nights, but instead, all day and night secluded in our office.

Just as its name suggests, <Different World Language Comprehension> is a skill allowing one to understand the written language of another world. The important point is that it's not a different world language translation. In other words, it requires quite a bit of knowledge and practice to convert concepts that don't exist on Earth, different cultural aspects, game-like terms, and language rules into any given language used on Earth.

Ms. Naruse has translated the epitaphs, which are publicly available right now, with quite the verve. Above all, she already possesses quite a bit of knowledge about dungeons, which kept the number of concepts unknown to her rather low, allowing her to translate at an astounding rate.

When I asked her whether it was okay for her to not attend the JDA, she gave me a really extreme answer: "Didn't I earn 400 billion just the other day? Even if I were to play hooky for the next ten years, they wouldn't have any reason to complain!"

"Oi, Miyoshi. You're a bad influence on Ms. Naruse, you know?"

"What are you saying, senpai? No matter how you look at it, that's obviously your fault."

"Eh? Why?"

"Please think about it. As soon as she starts on a part, she gets completely absorbed in it, losing all relation to time, right? It's the vicious cycle of working late into the night, then failing to be on time in the morning, and thus simply staying over at the company. See, that's so very you."

"Wait a sec, that's not what I meant!"

I've been just talking about the part with playing hook for the next ten years, is what I'm about to say, but since I'd get argued down anyway, I simply give up and avert my eyes.

In any case, it looks like she's been reporting back to the JDA every day, probably telling them that she wants to concentrate on her job with us. In reality, if you consider that we're going to publicize all her translations, you could very well describe this as the very definition of a Dungeon Management Department's duty anyway.

Within just two days, the Japanese-styled room with a size of 24 m² on the first floor of our office turned into Ms. Naruse's work and nap room. Probably accepting it as inevitable, Miyoshi had a relatively nice sofa bed brought in for her.

"Even if we got heating installed there, her sleeping on the ground is a no-no, right?"

That means Ms. Naruse is all the time in our office, but Miyoshi has said with a laugh, "Everything of importance is password-protected, and since we don't leave anything really important in there in the first place, it'll also be fine for a spy to stay in our office by herself."

The truly important stuff is stored on a single notebook, and Miyoshi should have put all the paper documents away into her <Storage>. After all, <Storage> has a function to automatically catalog all the items within, even if you randomly toss stuff into it. It's a truly handy skill.

The finished translations got added to the website prepared by Miyoshi. However, given that fonts of the characters used on the epitaphs didn't exist, she added photos of the epitaphs if possible, and the epitaph IDs as references next to the translated parts.

For the meantime all of it is in Japanese only, but she said she's considering translating it into English before the publication. The publication date will be - just as I told Monica before - on Christmas. We missed Thanksgiving, but it appears we're the same as the dungeons in regards to using religious events as pretext.

As the translations proceeded, we got the impression that the epitaphs at hand are fragments of two different books. One is 『The Book of Wanderers』, which proved to actually be a dungeon manual. Beginning with an explanation of the dungeon system, the fragments of that book record the characteristics of dungeons, and their surprising properties.

Ms. Naruse kept slightly different nuances in the epitaph translations when describing the same object without caring about consistency. After all, it's going to be the job of researchers to reconcile all of this in the future. No matter how much you call them copies, hasn't the creator of the epitaphs gone a bit too far with the elaborateness? Strange historical passages have been engraved onto epitaphs that seem very unlikely to belong to 『The Book of Wanderers』.

"Maybe it's because these are something like the flavor text we talked about before?" Miyoshi got frustrated when she picked out the parts that obviously don't belong in the dungeon manual and tried to sort them into some sort of meaningful order while glancing at their translations.

"Could it possibly be an introduction of the world on the other side of the dungeon?"

"I think they could have simply left behind a book without choosing such a roundabout method, if they wanted others to learn about their world, though..."

"Well, gradually collecting epitaphs is more likely to draw the interest of researchers and explorers over a long period of time, right?"

"Sure, that might be true... Either way, since it's probably a waste of time to brood over it, we should try lining them up in the order of their discovery and other methods of categorization." With that, Miyoshi stands up and stretches, obviously to reset her thinking.

"I think I'm going to take a break."

"My words." Miyoshi fills the coffee-pot with water, and lights the heater, thus starting to brew coffee in the dining room. "Which reminds me, the other day news about that trailer accident appeared on TV."

The truck driver was pulled out by an emergency rescue worker, but it looks like he was already dead from a heart attack at that point. In the end, the whole accident was treated as sudden death of the driver.

"Somehow I really get the feeling that the world is overrun with evil intentions and schemes, you know...?"

"And here we just want to lead peaceful, carefree lives..."

"No kidding..."

"It's probably a pity for your little idea of a peaceful life, but...I think that's going to be slightly impossible." Cutting into our conversation from behind, Ms. Naruse timidly holds out the translation of RU22-0012

The epitaph ID is a code consisting of the abbreviation of the country that discovered it, the Area ID, and a code describing its rank in the discovery sequence. In other words, it's the 12th epitaph which was discovered by Russia in Area 22 (around Moscow).

It contains information that might throw all explorers into a frenzy. And, this is very likely the part Russia must have intentionally held back. After all, all the top explorers wouldn't have gathered in Yoyogi if this had been publicized. And as if to prove this, Russia's second rank on the WDARL hasn't actually come to Japan.

"Infinite mineral resources are deposited on the 20th ~ 70th floors of a dungeon and beyond...huh?"

The epitaph states that you can obtain infinite mineral resources from dungeons.

"Even if this was really true, for argument's sake, the amount of looted resources is actually limited because carrying out a big amount of resources is difficult at the current point in time, isn't it?"

"But, if it's rare and precious metals we're talking about, it'd have an impact on the world's resources distribution, no?"

"Well, of course. Besides, mineral resources might also include jewels."

"It makes you really wonder what's to be found on the 80th floor and beyond, doesn't it? Seeing how nothing else is mentioned about it on this epitaph, this cutoff somehow feels like a nasty teaser, though."

"I'm pretty sure you'll find mithril, orichalcum, or some such down there." I joke around in response to Ms. Naruse's question, but I think the possibility of my answer being true is rather high.

The dungeons are inviting mankind to dive into their deepest parts. That's why they should have prepared appropriate rewards to boost the motivation to keep going.

"There's a text passage saying that the resources obtainable on a floor differ between dungeons, but it explicitly states that only on the 50th floor you can find... 『Gold』."

All dungeons across the world produce gold on the 50th floor? Moreover, infinitely?

"Okay, if this gets out, the gold price will take a nosedive, no doubt."

"You said it yourself moments ago, senpai, but don't you think it'll be quite a chore to take out many thousand tons of mass from the dungeons?"

Currently, the annual amount of mined gold is around 3000 tons. Taking such an amount out of the dungeon, and moreover a deep floor like the 50th surely might be hard. If things don't go well, the mining costs might actually explode instead.

"Also, it sounds like it won't be that easy to obtain either." Ms. Naruse scrolls through her translation. The latter part of the epitaph also explains the mining methods. "It's dropped by monsters related to the earth attribute. Only when you obtain a skill called <Mining>, it becomes possible for monsters beyond the 20th floor to drop mineral resources, you see..."

The mineral resources that will be dropped seem to principally depend on the floor, and not on the monster types.

"<Mining> is an unknown skill at present."

"Monsters related to the earth attribute, huh...? Considering it from the intended usage method for <Mining>, I think it should drop from some monster before the 20th floor."

"The ones immediately coming to mind in Yoyogi are the Great Desmana, I'd say."

"Them, eh? Hmm, they sure are related to earth."

They're moles, after all.

"If only gnomes, genômos, gnoms, or while we're at it, dwarves exist..."

"Huh? Senpai, genômos should be present in Yoyogi." Miyoshi says after hearing my casual muttering.

"Seriously?"

"If I remember correctly..."

"They inhabit the 18th floor," Ms. Naruse adds. "It's a floor with steep mountains. Genômos are monsters living in caves within those mountains, but with the floor consisting mostly of steep mountain ranges and troublesome underground caves, coupled with all of it seeming to expand forever when looking at it from the mountains' foot, the explorers ignore their existence."

"That totally sounds like a winner."

"Are you going there?" Miyoshi asks with sparkling eyes.

Well, infinite mineral resources are at stake here. It's got the potential for dreaming. But, you see...

"If you can't obtain the minerals unless you possess <Mining>, isn't the restriction way too tight?"

"About that..." Ms. Naruse scrolls further through her translation.

Seeing the contents, I knit my eyebrows. "Unique and 49 people?"

The text says that it'll become possible for anyone to have the respective minerals drop on any floor with more than 49 <Mining> holders.

"Miyoshi."

"It's our lucky number." Miyoshi answers almost instantly.

"Huh?" Ms. Naruse looks confused.

"This time it's going to be good luck, I'm sure."

I guess she's right that it'll be wonderful for countries with few resources...

"The name came from an anecdote about people croaking if they were in an unlucky location."

"Just what are you two talking about?" Ms. Naruse interrupts, obviously not understanding the slightest.

"49 is the lucky number of the 13-sequence, and it's a lucky number as it signifies the place where someone would survive when people got thinned out in a set order."

"No matter how you look at it, you're overthinking this." Ms. Naruse says with a doubtful look.

However, just as seen in earlier examples, we definitely can't ignore this if we assume that the dungeons are referencing culture on Earth.

"Either way, it looks like the acquisition of <Mining> will be connected to a fair amount of dangers."

"But, in the end you're going to try getting it, won't you?"

"Well, I suppose it's inevitable."

I don't really get what's inevitable, but poking our nose into something unknown is definitely inevitable. I mean, that's what it means, right?

"Please wait a moment. <Mining> is fine and all, but there's actually one more matter of note."

"One more?"

BF26-0003 is written on the document Ms. Naruse holds out to us with yet another apologetic look.

"BF?"

"It's Burkina Faso."

"Somehow sounds like a dinosaur name." Miyoshi comments while laughing.

Burkina Faso is a country located in West Africa, and since a few years back, droughts and food-crisis repeatedly affect the Sahel Region (a dry area at the Sahara's southern edge) in its north. You might describe it as a country relatively familiar with such disasters, seeing how even Japan has been providing aid.

That epitaph was apparently retrieved from the Dakoay Dungeon, a dungeon that appeared south of a huge pond called Dakoay which is situated around 30 km northeast from Gorom Gorom, the biggest city in Burkina Faso's northern Oudalan Province.

"They did really well to have discovered the dungeon in such an area."

"I heard a member of Bird Life International was the first to spot it."

"The heck's that?"

According to the information Miyoshi immediately looked up, Bird Life International is the largest international, environmental NGO in the world with the goal to protect birds. With Dakoay being a treasure trove of birds in that area, various environmental protection programs have been adopted there since 2000.

Moreover, that document is far more sensational than RU22-0012.

"Food!?"

"If you believe the epitaph, dungeons - just as it's with mineral resources - infinitely produce food in their upper floors, from the 2nd to 20th floor."

If the epitaph isn't wrong here, it'll be possible to resolve all food issues in the Sahel Region. On the contrary, it might be possible to resolve not only the poverty problems of areas having troubles with agricultural produce, but also the world's overpopulation issue.

"If you look at this in regards to all mankind, won't that produce much more of an uproar than something like the mineral yield?"

"The problem lies in the condition, though..."

"I bet it's requiring an orb called <Harvest> or something again, eh?" Miyoshi jokes.

However, the condition noted further down the translation is something else.

"The number of explorers?"

Indeed, the trigger for food to drop is the total number of explorers.

"If the number of explorers exceeds 500 million in total, food will start to drop in the dungeons, it says."

Right now, just three years after the dungeons' appearance, the number of explorers amounts to less than a 100 million. If you take it from there, meeting the condition is pretty obviously a matter of far ahead in the future...

"If this condition becomes publicly known, the countries worrying about their future food supply due to drastic increases in population might very likely have their citizens register as explorers as a state project."

China will be the very first to do that. Food availability has the highest priority for every leadership. It wouldn't be weird if some states were to force their citizens to register as explorers.

"Alone the Asia/Africa regions are statistically inhabited by more than 5 billion people, so reaching 500 million might become a breeze."

"But, senpai, it might be fine for areas where starvation occurs, but won't it result in chaos for the goods distribution and food producers in areas where starvation isn't an issue?"

The major cause for areas to exist on Earth where people starve is clearly the uneven distribution of the food production. But then again, that's unavoidable if you consider distribution and costs.

"Since you don't earn much money with the sale of food, the food would be mostly consumed by those living in the areas where people starve, I think. Areas that don't have starvation issues wouldn't have any merits from actively procuring food from dungeons, right?"

However, Miyoshi shakes her head, "Senpai, weren't there talks about explorers observing dungeon food boosting their abilities?"

...True that, I think we spoke about it before. In short, dungeon food equals material to mass produce Superman.

"If dungeon food really raises abilities, even the areas not affected by starvation will start to hunt for it en masse. After all, it could be obtained as early as the second floor of any dungeon."

"But, wouldn't it coexist with the current food as expensive, additional food then?"

Of course, if you look at it from the production amount, the number of dungeons is negligible compared to the Earth's size. Ultimately I can't believe that it would be possible to obtain an amount of food, which could replace the majority of the food consumed by all mankind, through the dungeons. Rather than causing a lowering of the prices for the existing food through the loss of sales opportunities, I feel like the food produced by the dungeons is going to be treated as luxurious, expensive extra food, likely establishing a market different from the current food markets.

Depending on the prices, it might develop into a situation where areas affected by starvation will export the dungeon yield to earn money. I guess we've got no other choice but to hope that it'll be bartered for normal food.

"Haaah...seeing all this, I've got a gut feeling that the world will drastically change, starting with next year."

"That means it's possible to make a killing by going all in on selling derivatives, no?" I've said this as a gag, but in reality, the impact of this information is going to be big.

The prices of food-related derivatives should temporarily hit rock bottom. If you look at it calmly, you'll see that there's no way for this to allow such a mighty increase in production amounts that it would cause a huge effect. Putting it in simple words, it'll be just like an explorer having built a field to feed their family in the garden of their house. For the time being at least.

"Since we'd get attacked all over the world if they trace us back through trade history, it's better to abandon that idea."

Figures. I feel like it can't be really called insider information, but when the markets start to shift because of the leaks related to D-Powers, there's no doubt that Miyoshi would be denounced as the one whose name represents our party.

"Even if we publicize this right away...people won't believe us, will they?"

I can fully understand Ms. Naruse's feelings on this. However, as the publication of the epitaph information is currently a very delicate matter, it's essential to gain trust at the start.

"Unfortunately. Using the party information as leverage, we have to gain enough trust for people all over the world to at least try it out, otherwise it'll end with us getting ignored."

Ms. Naruse nods, obviously accepting that there's no other way around it.

"But, not all hope is lost. Things are heading in a direction where it's quite possible for a epitaph mentioning something along the lines of 『If you keep descending through the crater located at the peak of Snæfellsnes, you'll be able to reach the center of the world』 to be discovered sooner or later." [efn_note]It's a reference to Jules Vernes' Journey to the Center of the World. I don't have the exact phrasing in the book at hand, but yeah. Also the mountain Snæfellsnes is located on Iceland. [/efn_note] I say jokingly while surveying the epitaph information that's yielded way too many, different results.

"Actually a dungeon exists at Snæfellsjökull in Area 28. If I recall correctly, it should be open for sightseeing."

"A journey to the center of the world in reality!?" I spurt out.

I'm pretty sure the minerals yielded over there will be crystals and diamonds.



Epilogue

"Pheew."

Monica took a breather after finishing the translation of one of the epitaphs found in the U.S. The place she's currently staying at isn't New York where the USDA is located, nor the current headquarters of DoD at the Ministry of Home Affairs, but a section of a multi-floored building near the White House that's managed by the DAD. Her living space and research rooms have been set up next to each other there. Putting it nicely, it allows her to focus on her research. But, if you regard it critically, you can effectively call it confinement.

'The dungeon research is very interesting since it relates to many different fields. Besides, it might be necessary to gather as much information as possible in preparation for a first contact with whoever lives on the other side of the dungeons. That's why I was truly happy when I came into a position allowing me to use a precious skill orb.

'However, the difference in standpoints between science and politics started to slowly give birth to conflicts. In spite of only a few days having passed since the handover.

She thought about the adult man she met in Japan, who told her, 『If it becomes too much of a pain to be stuck between research and politics, you just gotta selfishly do what you aren't forbidden to do, even if you don't do what you've been told to do』.

"What a strange man he was."

He had been different from anyone who had been around Monica so far. Even though he seemed aloof from the world, the most important aspect lay in the odd persuasiveness of his vague words, giving her the feeling that he was fully convinced of them.

"Indeed, somehow it felt like a bam."

That's why Monica intuitively believed that his statement, 『When you become an adult, you'll have a lot more freedom than now』, would certainly come true, exactly because those words came out of his mouth.



She took out a small piece of paper from her pocket, and gently opened it.

'I probably haven't looked forward to Christmas so much ever since I became old enough to enter kindergarten.

While forming a childish, innocent smile on her lips, she repeatedly opened and closed the paper with the URL she had received from Yoshimura.

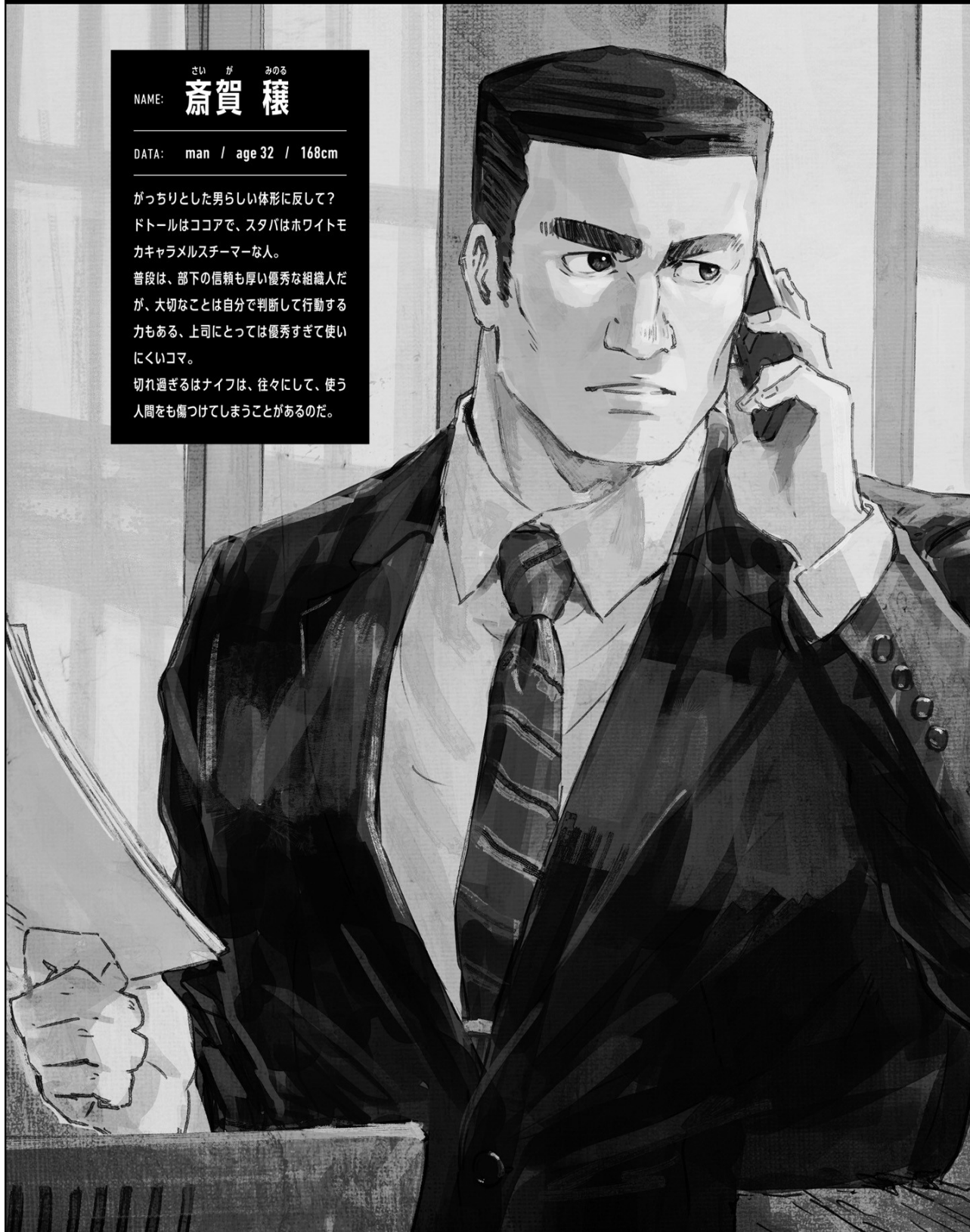
NAME: さい がみのる
齋賀 穰

DATA: man / age 32 / 168cm

がっちりとした男らしい体形に反して？
ドトールはココアで、スタバはホワイトモ
カキャラメルスチーマーな人。

普段は、部下の信頼も厚い優秀な組織人だ
が、大切なことは自分で判断して行動する
力もある、上司にとっては優秀すぎて使い
にくいコマ。

切れ過ぎるはナイフは、往々にして、使う
人間をも傷つけてしまうことがあるのだ。





NAME: さいとう りょうこ
斎藤 涼子

DATA: woman / age 21 / 164cm

わりとずけずけものを言っても、憎まれたりしないお得な彼女は、甘言暴言をものともせず、戦車の如くつき進む、肉食系（役柄に）の女優の卵。

まるで猫のように、するりと相手の懐に滑り込む華麗なテクニクは、とうてい凡人には真似できない。

可愛い外見を武器にして、誰にでも好意を意識させる達人は、時折、演前で姉御肌の責任感溢れる女性の顔ものぞかせる。

軽そうに見えるものが本当に軽いのかどうかは、持ち上げてみるまでわからないのだ。

