

LIVE comment

¥ 50,000

AN UPPER-LIMIT SUPER A SECOND AFTER THE STREAM STARTS LOL
THAT NO-BLOCKING STYLE, ALWAYS STUBBORNLY MEETING IN PERSON
A NEWBIE...?
THEY'RE SUCH GOOD FRIENDS NOW HAHA
I THINK I'M GONNA CRY
THE FACT THAT HAKERUN HAS SUCH AN EASY TIME PLAYING THE TSUKKOMI CONCERNS ME, ALSO HER DEFENSES ARE TOP NOTCH. WHAT A LEGEND
AWA-CHAN HAS BEEN WEIRDLY POWERFUL LATELY EVEN WHEN SHE'S NOT ALL SHUWA-SHUWA
IT'S LIKE THEY'VE BEEN BATTLING EACH OTHER LOL. WHAT EVEN IS A STREAMER ANYMORE
MY TEAR DUCTS HAVE BURST.
I'VE DROWNED. I'M DEAD
RIP THAT BRO

Harerun
Off-Collab

#WeatherSquad

VTUBER LEGEND: HOW I WENT VIRAL
AFTER FORGETTING TO TURN OFF MY STREAM 3

AUTHOR: NANA NANATO ILLUSTRATOR: SIOKA KAZUNOKO

VTUBER LEGEND:
HOW I WENT VIRAL AFTER
FORGETTING TO TURN OFF MY STREAM 3



HARERU ASAGIRI

"Heya! It's me—the sunlight in everyone's hearts, Hareru Asagiri!"

An energetic high school girl who loves putting smiles on everyone's faces. Extremely curious and—carried by her momentum—frequently does or says things that nobody would have ever expected.



SEI UTSUKI

"Hey, ladies and gents! It's your girl, Sei-sama!"

In her past life, she was a succubus who lived off the vigor of men, but died of starvation since she only ever showed interest in other women. She reincarnated, bringing us to today. Her horns are a holdover from that past life.



SHION KAMINARI

"Kon-miko, everyone! It's everyone's mama, Shion Kaminari!"

A shrine maiden whose body is inhabited by a nine-tailed fox and who safeguards the people as a servant of the kami. Because of how fiercely her nine fluffy tails swing around based on her emotions, caution is needed when standing behind her.



NEKOMA HIRUNE

"Nya-nyan! I caught a whiff of something great and came running!"

A beast girl with heterochromia who loves naps—but whenever she sees someone close by eating food, she immediately gets up and goes over to them with sparkling eyes. She'll be happy if you give her something. She'll also be happy if you pet her, even if you don't give her anything.



ALICE SOMA

"Ma'am! Alice Soma, at your service!"

A member of the Resistance, an idol group focused on self-liberation. Her cool looks make her popular with men and women alike, but inside she's somewhat incompetent, so she works hard to protect her image.



EHRAI SONOKAZE

"Heya, everyone! Are you all doing well? I am! I'm Ehrai Sonokaze, zookeeper at Ehrai Zoo!"

An elven zookeeper at Ehrai Zoo, a major theme park featuring every animal under the sun. Respected to the point of complete obedience by all the animals there, for some reason.



KAERU YAMATANI

"You can cross the mountains and dales, but you can always return here. Welcome to Kaeru Yamatani's stream."

A mysterious, mystical woman who is said to appear before kind, loving hearts that have been grievously wounded, grant them her healing, and then return upon the wind.

Live-On
Live-On

The Chosen Shining Girls



MASHIRO IRODORI

"Kon-mashiro, everyone! It's me, Mashiro Irodori, also called Mashiron." An illustrator who lives to draw. While she can be a little scathing with her remarks, she's actually a kind, friendly girl.



AWAYUKI KOKORONE

"Good evening, everyone. Another nice, light snow is falling tonight? I'm Awayuki Kokorone."

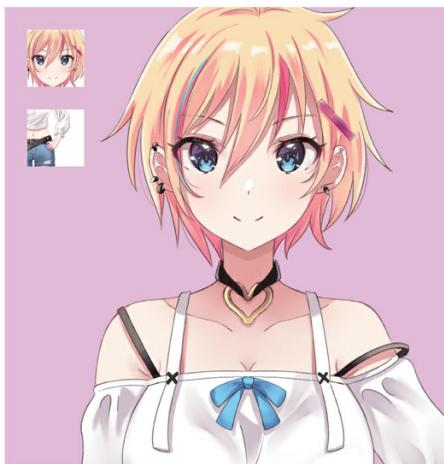
A mysterious beauty who only appears on days when a light snow is falling. Her purple eyes draw you in with the promise of something hidden deep inside them...



HIKARI MATSURIYA

"Kon-pika, everyone! The light of the festival is here for all to enjoy! It's me, Hikari Matsuriya!"

A festival girl who appears at festivals throughout Japan. Some say she's even appeared at the same time in two different festivals held in separate places.



CHAMI YANAGASE

"Hello! It's Chami Yanagase-oneesan, the one who always guides everyone to the pinnacle of healing."

Originally a gloomy character, but rallied her courage and debuted as a sunny one—to thunderous applause. Inside, though, she hasn't changed, making her a gloomy character wearing the skin of a sunny one.



Set List

Prologue

Chapter 1

Idle Talk: Suzuki and Hareru

Chapter 2

Idle Talk: Hareru and the
Second Generation

Chapter 3

Epilogue

Afterword

THE SACRED THREE-DIGIT NUMBER

¥ 1,550

LET ME IN ON THAT!

SHE CAN'T SERIOUSLY BE THE SEISO
ONE OF THE GROUP

ALICE SOMA: ¥ 50,000

!?

!?

HUH? THE REAL ONE!?

Awayuki
Kokorone

#StroZeroWhenTheyOpen

VTUBER LEGEND:

HOW I WENT VIRAL AFTER

FORGETTING TO TURN OFF MY STREAM 2



Story Summary

99,999 views • May 20, 2021

9999

155



StroZero Clip ch
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In the beginning, just like how the balance between light and dark is maintained by Lady Gaga half of the time vs. Lady Gaga the other half of the time, VTuber Awayuki Kokorone of Live-On's third generation was composed of two beings: Awa and Shuwa.

This was all in a different world from the one where, as a result of the merger between M***nald's and K****cky Fried Chicken, their company name became Sub***y for some reason, inciting huge flame wars all over the internet.

After being confessed to by Alice Soma, her junior in the fourth generation, Awayuki became the mommy of Kaeru Yamatani, also in the fourth generation, leaving the final fourth-generation member, Ehrai Sonokaze, to become the baby of Shion Sonokaze, a second-generation member, in the very zoo where Ehrai works as the zookeeper.

The aforementioned glories led Awayuki to mature even further as a VTuber, who then cohabi-gay-tes for a night with Mashiro Irodori, a fellow third-gen member. They had a doki-doki heart-pounding cohabigaytion session.

Dokidoki-dokidoki-Dokin-chan?! I love her! I love Dokin-chan! When I see her, my heart goes dokkin-dokkin! I love her! I love all of her! I especially like the feeling of touching her head! It feels just like Majin Buu! I love Majin Buu! I really, really love Majin Buu! Chocolate Beam!

Incidentally, as a result of the merger between the aforementioned Subway and Starbucks, their company name became Gyoza no **sho, which was fine with the masses, and the fires of the flame war were quelled. In her journey to become **sho's manager, Awayuki has advanced to the part-time interview phase.

And—wouldn't you know it—Hareru Asagiri, the only member of the first generation and the person Awayuki respects the most, asks if Awayuki wants to participate in a live concert with her.

Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Prologue](#)

[Chapter 1: The L-1 Grand Prix](#)

[Idle Talk: Suzuki and Hareru](#)

[Chapter 2: Horror Games without Honor or Humanity](#)

[Idle Talk: Hareru and the Second Generation](#)

[Chapter 3: Diamond Dust](#)

[Epilogue](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

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Prologue

On the day after the sleepover ended and Mashiron went back home, I had a meeting scheduled with my manager, Suzuki-san. I figured we would just discuss my upcoming streams, as usual, but no sooner did we start talking...

“I called today because I have a special favor to ask of you, Yuki-san.”

“A favor?” I wondered what it could be. An invitation to a new project? I felt like that wouldn’t constitute a “favor,” though.

“We received a collaboration request from Hareru Asagiri of the first gen, and I’d like you to take part in it.”

“Wait. For real?”

Then... Then it's finally happening! The time has come! I thought. Ever since all those implications during the *Worldcraft* stream, I'd been quietly waiting for that collab with Hareru-senpai. *What does Suzuki-san mean, she has a favor to ask? I should be the one begging her for this. As a Harerun fanatic, my only answer is yes, yes, yes!* wwwwww

“I will! I will do it!” I exclaimed.

“Umm, about that,” replied Suzuki-san. “I’m grateful you want to accept the request, but I feel like you might want an explanation of the project before saying yes. Just to be sure.”

H-Huh? Why is she stammering like that? That's not like you, Suzuki-san. True, this was Hareru-senpai we were talking about. I couldn't deny that the projects she came up with were only possible because of the screw she had loose in her head—and the screwdriver she'd jammed down into the gap.

“Er...” I said. “What does she want to do?”

“I’ll explain, but keep it to yourself until we reveal info about it,” she began. “We’re planning on renting out a concert hall for a live Hareru Asagiri solo concert. It’ll be a real live concert—right down to the performance and the stream itself.”

“Wait, rent a concert hall? Like, a place in real life? And you’re inviting actual people to come watch, like, in person?”

“Yes. This will be Live-On’s first foray into the idea, so we plan on

finding a venue that can hold about three thousand people and livestream it at the same time.”

“Three thousand people?!”

“Yes, although given Hareru-san’s popularity, we’re aiming rather small.”

“You can’t be serious...” Three thousand people in one place to listen to music... I had a ton of people coming to watch my streams every day, but this wouldn’t be over the internet. They’d actually be coming to see her in person. I’d be overwhelmed, if it were me.

“And that’s where my favor comes in,” continued Suzuki-san.

“Oh, I don’t have a good feeling about this,” I replied.

“Hareru-san wants to tag in with you at the very end of the concert and sing a brand-new song with you.”

“Ran ran ruu ☆”

“That reference brings me back! Who was that again? Umm, Donar... Dornal... Anyway, it’s probably a dead meme.”

“Hey, don’t say mean things like that.”

I know Hareru-senpai said it would be something amazing, I thought, but she really hit me in a blind spot with this one! As expected of the personification of Live-On. What you get is always so much more than you expect. It’s making my hare stand on end... Sorry.

“Wh-Why would she want to give a big role like that to me in particular?” I asked.

“You’d have to ask her that,” responded Suzuki-san. “She is, however, saying that she won’t do this unless you’re there, Yuki-san.”

“Huh?! Won’t do what? The entire concert?!”

“That’s right. And that’s why this is a favor. It’s still in the planning stages, but if you ask me, we really want to have this concert to promote Live-On much, much more. And so we want your help with it.”

...I don’t get it! I have no idea what Hareru-senpai is thinking! She’s able to say no to being the hero on stage depending solely on whether a single kouhai goes with her?

“I understand your confusion,” said my manager. “Live-On is just as shocked as you that Hareru-san is even giving the idea a chance.”

“Huh? What do you mean?”

“She’s very stubborn about not wanting to do any projects that put her in the spotlight. She’s refused many times already...”

“W-Wait, really?! You’re kidding!” In disbelief, I thought back on all the collabs that Hareru-senpai had taken part in.

And Suzuki-san was right. From the moment the second generation had debuted until today, not one of those projects had been specifically for Hareru-senpai. She had such an overwhelming presence that I hadn’t ever realized it... And if I hadn’t known, almost nobody on the internet would have caught on either.

“But why not?” I asked.

“Because she considers her position as a Live-On employee just as important as her position as a VTuber. Long story short, she really wants to support Live-On from the background. We’ve asked her several times if she wanted to focus on streaming, since she’s always been so busy with her other tasks, but it goes in one ear and out the other.”

“I’m, um, really surprised. I always felt like she was constantly running ahead of everyone, right on the front lines.”

“She does put every ounce of energy and spirit into projects that are for her kouhais’ benefit. But she hates being the main character. Only she knows what the underlying reason is, though.”

“That’s so strange. She’s not averse to VTubing, right?”

“It doesn’t seem like it. She constantly talks about wanting to personally make the VTubing world more exciting.”

“Hmm...” She really was a slippery, intangible person. She looked free-spirited, but she also had a powerful will.

“So, we once again asked her at the last company drinking party. She told us she’d do it, as long as Shuwacchi appeared at the end. We thought a miracle had occurred.”

“Okay. I think I get what’s going on.”

“I’m happy you’re so quick on the uptake. To be clear, you are free to refuse if—”

“I’ll gladly accept!”

“R-Really?! Thank you so much!”

I was surprised, but how was I supposed to refuse an invitation from *the* Hareru-senpai? That’d be the biggest mistake of my life! The whole thing made me nervous too, but still—a live concert of this magnitude was too precious an opportunity to pass up. If it worked out, I’d remember it for the rest of my life. It was time to show her that I was a big kid now!

“All right,” said Suzuki-san. “Just so you’re aware, I’ll be calling you more often, if that’s okay.”

“That’s fine with me! I’m looking forward to it!”

It was looking like I wouldn’t have to worry about being bored in the near future.

Chapter 1

The L-1 Grand Prix

I may have decided to join Hareru-senpai's live performance, but I still had to keep to my daily streaming schedule while preparing for it. And for today's stream...

"Kon-miko, everyone! It's Shion Kaminari, also known as Shion-mama, who wishes she could be even Mother Teresa's mommy! And today, I have a barrel full of laughs with me! Can you all say hello?"

"Kon-miko!" all of us responded.

"That was very good!"

- : It's happening!
- : We haven't had a big collab like this in a while!
- : Just hearing their voices gives me a real bad feeling about this LOL
- : did i just hear a pull tab opening while everyone was saying kon-miko?
- : hey shuwa-chan, don't say hello by opening another can!

Pshhh pshhh! Bing (cheers noise) pshhh pshhh!

Hello hello hello hello this is Shuwa-chan, who is currently dumping StroZero straight into her neural pathways!

Given the scope of my collaboration with Hareru-senpai, preparations were going to take a long time, so I was waiting for further news. In the meantime, I'd gotten Shion-mama's permission to participate in her big collab, which she called the L-1 Grand Prix! *And she's about to explain what that is in the same way a porn actress would describe all her physical traits! Guys, I'd better see your ears getting hard while listening to her hypnotic voice! And girls, you'd better let that voice penetrate your ear-hymens!*

“Today’s program is the Live-On-1 Grand Prix—or L-1 Grand Prix for short—and I’ll be both the tsukkomi—in other words, the straight man—and the host, Shion-mama! I’ll start by explaining what this project is all about. I’m sure many of you thought from the title that this was going to be a comedy or manzai competition, but what we have for you today is a little bit different. We’ll be having all the VTubers here today form teams of two and put on improvisational performances based on specific topics!”

To summarize her very concise, kindhearted explanation, the project would be going like this:

We would be participating in teams of two

For each team, Shion-mama would spin a wheel for a topic, and that team would do a little improv performance based on it; nobody but Shion-mama would find out what any of the topics were until she gave them to us

Since the stream could easily end up veering way off the rails with just two people doing improv with zero prep work, Shion-mama would be participating in the performances as the facilitator and broadcaster

Each performance was allowed three minutes, and whichever team left the strongest memory would be the winner

“The performances themselves may end up being very comedic,” she continued, “which is why I said it would only be a little bit different. But this will all be improv, which means this could very well descend into unadulterated madness, which is the real highlight of this collab!”

: I get it
: it's chaos every day to begin with. you mean it's gonna get even more chaotic o_o
: this feels like a certain comedy production doing acting classes and the talents involved saying it was absolute hell...
: i mean, who would even volunteer to do something like this? lmao
: Apparently everyone here did...

“I didn’t think anyone would come at first either,” said Shion-senpai.

“But Live-On never disappoints! I’m sure they were all basically like this: Hey, something’s going on LOLOL we should join in LOLOLOL! And I’m about to show them all hell!”

In my case, I’d said yes while drunk, then regretted it when I’d sobered up. Yep.

“But hear me out! Since this is supposed to be a competition, there will, of course, be prizes! The grand prize will be an amazing 200,000 yen—100,000 for each team member! Mama got a little excited and decided it’ll be coming out of her own pocket too. Eheh heh!”

So it was like some extra income, or a bonus. *This is gonna be fun! Fweh heh heh.*

- : For real?
- : **Here's something to make up for it ¥30000**
- : it's coming out of Mama's "pocket"? you mean like a c-section?
- : I bet every single Liver here is here because they think they'll get that 100,000 easily
- : Livers: "Apparently I can get 100,000 yen if I take part lolol, oh I'm so lucky for getting in lololol"

“Also, I asked all of the contestants about how eager they are to be in this competition and what they’d want to buy with the prize money! My opinions on it don’t matter, but I wrote something down anyway for your perusal!”

Big subtitles appeared on the screen as she said “perusal.”

Name: Shion Kaminari

What She Wants to Accomplish: Violating

What She Wants to Buy With the Prize Money: B*****ug

- : whaaa?!
- : that sound she just made was so yabai hahahahaha
- : violating LMAOOO
- : I wonder if Shion-mama's tired of raising children or something...
- : She does have ten in all. I guess you can't blame her

: what the heck is b****ug??
: she's being way too lewd for me

Shion-mama, welcome to our Shangri-La.

I've heard before that in places where there are no men around, like all-girls high schools, people frequently awaken their yuri instincts. And now, because only the most unique booze is around, even Shion-mama—the pure water—has finally fermented into alcohol.

So long, days of our youth. And cheers.

"Huh?! Wait, what?!" exclaimed Shion-senpai. *"I didn't write any of that!!! I'm certain Sei-sama was the one who wrote these subtitles... Agh! Get over here, Sei-sama!!!"*

"This is Sei-sama. My apologies. It was my mistake—it seems like I swapped yours with mine. Over."

"You did it on purpose! Just put up the right one!"

"Roger that."

Name: Shion Kaminari

What She Wants to Accomplish: Taking care of the others, even if it kills her

What She Wants to Buy With the Prize Money: Orphanage

"Yes, that's the right one! Why'd you do that?"

: I can sense a pretty profound darkness coming from this one too, though...
: yeah, like she's plotting a human instrumentality project behind the scenes
: her feelings toward the contest are too real
: She is the paragon of a host
: does the fixed version need another fix? lol

"But that's enough of an intro! Let's get things moving, shall we? I'll show you the name and thoughts on the contest for each contestant as they appear! The members of the vanguard team to be performing tonight will be Awayuki Kokorone (Shuwa-chan) and Sei Utsuki! Give it up for Team

Streaming Accident!!!”

Oh! We’re up first!

“It looks like we’re up, Awayuki-kun,” said Sei-sama. “Why don’t we give them a real show?”

“I agree, Sei-sama,” I said. “Let’s kick things off with a blast and show off a streaming mistake good enough to be a model for the rest of the teams!”

“*Shuwa-chan, streaming accidents can’t be forced,*” pointed out Shion-senpai. “*They’re called accidents for a reason.*”

- : lmaooooo
- : failing out right from the team name!
- : I feel like the main character of a Kamen Rider show and the red character in a sentai show just partnered up
- : It's more like matter and antimatter teaming up, isn't it?
- : And when they collide, their annihilation is called "getting banned from the stream." I get it!
- : please just don't get the rest of us caught up in that reaction...

“Since Sei-sama’s was already on screen, let’s put up Shuwa-chan’s thoughts and what she’d do with the prize money, since I asked her too. Here you go!”

Name: Awayuki Kokorone (Shuwa-chan)

What She Wants to Accomplish: Honestly just came because it was happening!

What She Wants to Buy With the Prize Money: Moontory

- : man she has zero cares about her own life XD
- : is she a reincarnation of that Raoh Funeral Honestly-Just-Came-Because-It-Was-Happening Girl?
- : don't make her sound like an anime superweapon lol
- : Wait, you mean that lady who went to that big publicity stunt without knowing who Raoh was? is that where that meme came from??

: The lightness of her feelings on the contest and the grandness of her ambitions about the prize money are so shockingly different
: But at the time, 100,000 yen was actually 100,000 yen in today's money!!!
: that...didn't change at all
: bet you moontory's white as a ghost now that she's announced she wants to buy them out
: I mean, ANYONE would feel a sense of crushing defeat at compulsory education after hearing someone wants to buy out one of the biggest companies in Japan for 100,000 yen

"It's time to spin the wheel to find out what topic they'll have!"
announced Shion-senpai. *"Can I have everyone's attention, please?"*

A roulette wheel appeared on the screen, containing quite the handful of possibilities, ranging from seemingly easy, common situations to ones that appeared utterly indecipherable at first glance.

"Ah, I see..." I said. "Well, I'm sure we'll have an easy time no matter what it lands on. Isn't that right, Sei-sama?"

"Indeed," she replied. "In fact, I'd love it if we had to put three situations together instead of just using one."

"Oh?" asked Shion-senpai. *"Are you sure about that? I'll actually do it."*

Sei-sama and I both sang at the same time. *"Dame da neee, dame yooo, dame na no yoooo..."*

"I swear, you children..." sighed Shion-senpai. *"Okay! I'm spinning it! Let's begin the countdown to hell!"*

The needle rushed hurriedly over the wheel, and as everyone held their breath, it eventually landed on...

"There we are! Your topic will be 'convenience store'!"

That was a pretty good draw, wasn't it? It was a pretty vague situation for us to play with. The question was, how were we going to ruin the whole thing? However we did it, I'd need to work with Sei-sama to pull it off. *But we're tightly bound by the bonds of lust, so accidents are the only possible outcome of this situation. I can relax a little.*

"Sei-sama, any roles you particularly want to play?" I asked.

“Hmm... Maybe I’ll be the cashier.”

“Understood. In that case, I’ll be a customer.”

“Great! All set? Doesn’t matter—we’re starting anyway! You have three minutes, and your topic is ‘convenience store.’ Ready, set, go!”

On “go,” I rewrote the streaming attitude in my mind with a performance one. And if I was the customer, I figured I should start by going into the store.

“Ooh, it’s so cold out...” I muttered. “What should I get today...?”

“Welcome to 6-Nine!” came Sei-sama’s voice.

“Huh? Did that cashier just say something?”

“Welcome to 7-Eleven!”

“Oh. I must have misheard her since she was talking so fast.”

“Just fire her...” said Shion-senpai. “All right, all right. Shuwa-chan has just walked into the convenience store!”

: whoa that's not what you want to hear going into a conbini

: Didn't take her any time at all to let loose...

: wow, Shion-mama, tell us how you really feel

Great. Now that I was inside the store, it was time to look around for items. “Maybe I’ll buy something warm...” I mused. “Oh, they have this new manga here.”

“Oh, my beautifully stunning customer,” said Sei-sama. “Do you have a moment?”

“What?”

“What’s this? Sei-sama approached Shuwa-chan as she was browsing the store!”

“We’ve just started selling videos at this store,” continued Sei-sama.

“Would you like to have a look?”

“Huh? Videos? Like movies?” I asked. “Sure! What do you have?”

“For now, I put out *Jujutsu Kaisen*, *Howl’s Moving Asshole*, and *Violent Neversemen*.”

“Those are all porn parodies!”

“Don’t you have any *Waifu-On*?” I asked.

“And don’t you dare try to make a Live-On parody!”

“Sure do,” replied Sei-sama.

“You do?! I was too late!”

: what.

: is it true that this is a normal conversation?

: I mean, it’s exactly like their usual streams, so yeah, pretty normal

: The fact that the words “porn parodies” came out of Shion-mama’s mouth means she’s pretty much infected already

: Streaming accident? I doubt there’s a single scene in this one that you could broadcast...

: Without Shion-mama, there wouldn’t have been a tsukkomi. How terrible would that be?

“Anyway, I’ll decide after I look at some other things,” I told her.

“Of course!” replied Sei-sama. “Here at Sei-sama’s Convenience Store of Primal Desires, we have *everything* in stock.”

“Okay, thanks!”

“Couldn’t the name of your store have been a little...better?”

“Also, the primal cravings are 1% hunger, 1% sleep, and 98% lust,” explained Sei-sama.

“Wow, this place is amazing,” I remarked. “Even random porn shops are more convenient for feeding yourself than this so-called ‘convenience store.’”

“Okay, okay! We’re pressed for time, so pick out your items!”

Shion-senpai hurried me along, so we moved from the picking-out-items scene to the ringing-up scene. At the rate we’d been going, we’d have used all three minutes just picking out products. But I wanted to win, so I was thankful for the prompting!

“Thanks. Then I’d like these, please,” I said.

“Time for the scene to change! Shuwa-chan sets her items down at the register!”

“Very well,” said Sei-sama. “Would you like some of the hot snacks next to the register with that? My recommendation would be two meat buns and one hot dog—the futanari set.”

“Arrest her for sexual harassment!”

“Actually, the Morton salt girl is my fetish,” I explained, “so, well, I’ll have whatever you have that has salt on it, please.”

“Banish her from this world!”

: Sorry, I think my ears have gone bad. Did you just say your fetish is the Morton salt girl?

: I WISH my ears had gone bad before hearing about that deeply sinful fetish

: that's such a specific fetish that my genes are getting very confused

: I can't believe she answered Sei-sama's best joke with an even better one lmaooo

: Hahaha they're literally leaving all the tsukkomi to the facilitator

“Anyway, aside from the salt, what did you buy, Awayuki-kun?” asked Sei-sama.

“First, these stockings,” I answered. “Mine were starting to run, and I didn’t have many left.”

“W-Will you be equipping that now? Haah... Haah... Gulp!”

“You’re very good at pretending to be an RPG armor shopkeeper.”

“This is some terrible slander against armor shops... I’m sorry, armor shopkeepers in every fantasy world out there!”

“Since you said that thing about 98% lust,” I added, “I was worried you wouldn’t have stockings, but you did. What a relief!”

“What are you saying?” she asked, incredulous. “Stockings fall under the category of ‘lust’ too, you know.”

“Oh, was that why they were next to all the school swimsuits? You sure do have every niche here, don’t you?”

“Please help... So many apologies I need to make...”

“Now then, Awayuki-kun, what else did you buy?” asked Sei-sama.

Hmm, I thought. I see. We’re pushing right through to the end like this, huh? Okay, gotcha. Perfectly understood. So then, next up is... “I also bought some StroZero,” I said. “I mean, when you type in StroZero, you basically get Shuwa-chan in the search suggestions, so I figured it would be weird if I

didn't buy any."

"W-Will you be equipping that now? Haah... Haah... Gulp!"

"Huh? Equip it to where?! The human body wasn't designed to equip StroZero! And why are you turned on?!"

"Huh? C-Can I really?" I said. "Well then, maybe I'll try equipping it, just to see how it feels. Eheh heh!"

"Hey, how is this conversation still even working? Am I the crazy one here?"

"Since you're doing that anyway, you might as well equip the stockings right here too!" exclaimed Sei-sama. "Come on, Awayuki-kun!"

"Good idea! And I think my current equipment is going to get in the way of enjoying the new stuff, so I'll just unequip everything except the StroZero and the stockings."

"Aha ha! Man, you look *good!* I bet everyone would love you if you strode out during Paris Fashion Week!"

"Then I'll just book a flight to France real quick."

"Wait! You're not going to just walk out on the runway like a pervert, totally naked with just stockings and StroZero equipped, and say hello, are you?! Please, stop! You'll embarrass all of Japan!"

"Hey, Sei-sama, did you just hear someone call me an embarrassment to Japan?"

"Aww. That sort of compliment does make a girl blush. Maybe we should change our team name to Live-On's Japanese Embarrassments."

"Oh, calling us Japanese Embarrassments implies there's other branches of Live-On! Cool! I guess even we have to go international, right? Although it'll be *my* job to embarrass us internationally in Paris! Hah hah hah!!!"

"Could someone make some kind of pet-care kit for them? I can't handle them anymore..."

: what in god's holy name is this (i am euphoric rn)

¥ 2000

: Armor Shopkeeper: I buy used equipment higher than the original price (wiggly eyebrows)

: actually, i bet it would be so insane during Paris Fashion Week that it would loop back around and get treated as cutting-edge fashion

- : This is improvised? Are you for real? How are they so in sync?
- : lol it's more like a whole short story than a little improvisation
- : "Equipping StroZero" is such a profound phrase

Beep beep beep! Beep beep beep! The alarm went off, marking the end of our team's allotted time.

"O-Okay, enough!" cried Shion-senpai. *"Your three minutes are over! I'm so tired... I thought this was supposed to be hell for everyone else, not me!"*

We probably would have been able to get things even livelier if we'd had more time, but I thought we'd still had a pretty good run. I thought I remembered the comments scrolling past fairly quickly.

"Good job, both of you! Could I get your impressions of your performance? One at a time. First, Sei-sama!"

"Hmm. I think we were pretty natural about the whole thing—I almost didn't feel like we were performing at all. Maybe it's because of how compatible my thought processes are with Awayuki-kun's. I'm sure our bodies are just as compatible."

"Leaving aside the last part! Shuwa-chan, what about you?"

"But the last part felt so good!" I said.

"Shuwa-chan, what about you?!"

"I'm sorry. I thought we did a pretty good job, to be honest. I'll be eagerly awaiting that prize money."

"What's this?! An inflammatory remark toward the later teams! And with that, these two are going back to the audience! That was Team Streaming Accident! Let's give them a round of applause!"

"Thank you!" we both said in reply before leaving the call.

Now the only thing left was to enjoy the later teams' performances. Man, this feels so good! What a high! Now it's time to see if anyone can manage to defeat me—the one they call a living streaming accident, the VTuber version of Egashira2:50! Don't disappoint me now!

"Okay! It's time for our next duo to make their appearance! Next up we have Alice Soma-chan and Hikari Matsuriya-chan's High-Energy Combo!"

"Yahoo! The light of the festival is here for all to enjoy! I'm Hikari

Matsuriya!”

“All roads lead to Awayuki-dono! My designation is Alice Soma!”

“*Thank you for introducing yourselves! And I see you've formed a group with each other again. Seems like you've become good friends lately.*”

Oh, I'd been thinking something along those lines too. Recently, they'd been collaborating with each other every now and then. Was it because of their similar energy levels? They seemed to me like they'd have pretty different interests, but evidently, they made a good team.

“Yes!” replied Alice-chan. “While attacking other third-gen members familiar with Awayuki-dono—to clear out the obstacles in my way, naturally—I realized that I was having a lot of fun whenever I talked to Hikari-dono.”

“Wow. *Talk about impure motives...*”

“Heh heh heh,” said Hikari-chan. “One day I'll end up being the senpai you idolize!”

“Hah. Don't get full of yourself, you huge-boobied loli.”

“What was that?! I'll have you know I am *not* a loli! I'm old enough to drink!!!”

“My apologies. I meant to say *legal* loli.”

“I meant take back the loli part!!!”

With stuff like this, who needs professional wrestling? I was the same way with Sei-sama and Mashiron. You couldn't establish a relationship like that without trust. It was proof that they were getting along well. I'd actually been a little worried about Alice-chan being such a fervent fan of me that she'd neglect forming relationships with the other members, but maybe she was surprisingly social.

“*But won't Shuwa-chan get jealous that you two are such good friends, hmm? I'm sure everyone is watching as you flirt with each other!*”

“Wha?!” exclaimed Alice-chan. “I-It's not what it looks like, Awayuki-dono! It truly isn't! If you are my lawful wife, then Hikari-dono is my onahole!”

I stand corrected. What the hell is she on about?

“Huh? What's an onahole?” asked Hikari-chan.

“It's a do-it-yourself tool.”

“Wait, so I'm like a DIY kit to you, huh? I have no idea how much that's worth, but...”

“Ah, I see. Alice-chan enjoys dirty jokes a lot, huh? Influenced by Shuwa-

chan, no doubt. What a handful..."

: LOL
: did a kouhai just treat her senpai like an onahole?
: oh, it's fine. there's a much worse StroZero in the third gen anyway. we good.
: I love their vibe. It's like two dumb little kids fooling around
: Even if neither of them understand a dang thing, they both bulldoze ahead, and it makes their conversation total nonsense
: It's so nonsensical people are gonna show up and try to really think hard about it, lmaooo

"In any case, why don't we hear the next contestants' goals for the contest and what they'd use the prize money on! Graphics, boom!"

Name: Hikari Matsuriya

What She Wants to Accomplish: Having as much fun as possible!

What She Wants to Buy With the Prize Money: PF5

Name: Alice Soma

What She Wants to Accomplish: Doing XXXX to Sei-dono for teaming up with Awayuki-dono before she had the chance

What She Wants to Buy With the Prize Money: Awayuki-dono

Yep. Seeing Hikari-chan's goal sets my mind at ease! How warm and cozy. As for Alice-chan, let's head out behind the school building for a moment.

"Alice-chan! Bad girl! No giving advance notice to the entire world about your human trafficking or senpai assaulting!"

"Ignoring the assaulting part, I am not engaging in human trafficking! Although it may indeed result in Awayuki-dono bidding her purity farewell,

gweh heh heh heh heh!”

“I guess I have to shove this baby bottle in your mouth to keep you from talking... Meanwhile, Hikari-chan wants a game system. That’s very on-brand!”

“Eheh heh! There’s a remake for a video game I’ve always liked! I need to visit that bloody, barbarous world again and get me some more of those unpolished, life-or-death battles...”

“Yep, there it is. I figured as much. I don’t think I’ll ever be able to go back into normal society after this...”

: **Don't ignore the assaulting part! ¥6000**

Sei Utsuki: If I'm XXXXed, I always XXX right back. Don't worry, I'll treat you real nice. Awayuki-kun is MY number-one egg vibrator.

: the confidence of the strong! she's really gonna...let her have it, heh

: seems pretty popular lately for live-on members to compare each other to adult toys

: oh i get it!!! this is why they sometimes do those bans on nicknames in elementary schools

“Right, right, anyway! It’s time to spin the wheel. You’d better enjoy yourselves while you still have the chance!”

All right then! It’s not an overstatement to say your fates will depend on the topic! Round and round the needle went, until eventually it landed on...

“The hero and the demon lord! It’s the hero and the demon lord! Hey, it looks like we’ve got a pretty tough one!!!”

*Whoa. Shion-mama suddenly sounds like she’s really enjoying this... Maybe she had a desire as the facilitator to mess with the actors as much as possible. Of course, the first act had had Sei-sama and me *really* messing with her. Messing her up, even.*

But enough about that. How are they gonna react?

“This is my specialty!” exclaimed Hikari-chan. “We’ve got it in the bag.”

“Oh? Do you have any proof of that?” asked Alice-chan in a challenging way.

“Yeah! It’s because it sounds kinda cool!”

“I figured it would be something like that. In any case, this will be a breeze for me.”

Wow, they’re raring to go! Judging by their confidence, they definitely had something to show us. *Good shit, good shit.*

“Can I please be the hero?” asked Hikari-chan.

“Very well. I think I’d be better at playing a demon lord anyway.”

Then I’ll get the timer started! The hero and demon lord’s improvised performance begins...now!”

Once five seconds had passed since the numbers on the three-minute timer had started counting down, Hikari-chan, having made up her mind, spoke first. “Heinous, diabolic demon lord! I, the hero, am about to send you to an early grave!”

Whoa. Isn’t this a tough role to get into? I thought. Sei-sama and I had been a convenience-store worker and customer, which was an everyday situation. This one strayed into the realm of fantasy, though. You’d need to really be convincing—to yourself as well. Otherwise, you could easily let your own embarrassment get the better of you.

“Hah!” laughed Alice-chan. “A single lousy human thinks she can defeat me? The demon lord? Dreams are best left for when you’re asleep.”

Oh, that’s good! Your intro lines really put an image of the whole thing in my mind!”

But my unease only lasted a moment. Their voices were brimming with confidence—they didn’t seem to have any resistance toward acting this out.

“Even if I’m alone, I can’t lose this battle! On this day, I will take revenge for those who have perished! Daniel! Dunny! Greg! Leila! And Daniel!”

“Wait, did you just say Daniel twice?”

“Oh...”

“Er... Y-You did have two friends with the same name, didn’t you?”

“Y-Yeah, you’re right, I did! I was just about to say that!”

: lmaoooo the demon lord is helping her out

: That didn't take long...

: Just, one more thing... The Daniel that we have lost... Never forget him.

...Right, I thought. They may be willing, but there seem to be a whole lot of other problems here...

And, as expected, it continued to happen.

“I suppose I should congratulate you on making it this far, so-called hero. But I am the demon lord. Without the power of the sacred golden apple, you’ll never even scratch me.”

“*And there we have an important-sounding term!*”

“And I had Rubian of the Four Fiends guard the apple. There’s no way you’d have it. You have no chance of beating me!” Alice-chan added.

“Argh! But I still can’t lose this battle!”

“W-Wait. D-Don’t you actually have the apple on you?”

“Huh? O-Oh, yeah, I do! But, well, um... I sort of ate it!”

“You ate it?!” exclaimed both Alice-chan and Shion-senpai at the same time.

“Well, I was just so hungry yesterday, so... Yeah.”

Ahh, I thought. So she ate the sacred golden apple because she was hungry, huh...

“O-Oh! But I still have the holy blade Excalibur, imbued with holy prayers and bestowed upon me by the princess herself! I just know I can beat you!”

“I... I see. Indeed. Um. W-Well, those prayers or whatever are really just imitations, right? If any human urchin could take my head with a simple ritual, then why have the lot of you struggled so much against me in the past?”

“I see! The demon lord is using pessimistic viewpoints to try and confuse the hero’s heart! How will the hero respond?!”

“I-It’s not just an imitation! This sword now contains the princess’s power in it!”

“And do you have any proof of that? This princess of whom you speak—did she not simply come up with a suitable excuse for sending you into this land of death? From my point of view, that princess seems far more like a demon lord than I.”

“I have proof! It’s true because I used this holy blade to stab the princess!”

“You stabbed her?!” shouted both Alice-chan and Shion-senpai.

“I had no choice!” cried Hikari-chan. “It was the only way to beat the

demon lord!”

“Wait. So the princess is dead now?”

“Yeah. But I won’t let her death be in vain! I now stand atop a mountain of sacrifices!”

“I... I see. I feel a little guilty about this now...”

Shion-senpai giggled. “*This is good! This is great! The situation is out of hand! This is exactly what I’ve been hoping for!!!*”

: What...is this...??? ¥2500

: that seems like being WAY too prepared to beat the demon lord.

: it went totally dark fantasy lol

: And if this goes on any longer, there will be a whole lot more sacrifices

: wait, but the princess's name wasn't even in that list you gave for people to take revenge for!

: I thought Daniel was the princess?

: you mean it's not Leila...?

: I'm glad Shion-mama is having so much fun.

I could tell what was happening. Both of them were just randomly adding backstory into the scene to throw things into confusion. But they were also trying to push straight through all of that, and now they'd created a realm of literal chaos. Maybe their friendship was actually built upon a miraculous balancing act...

As I was busy being impressed, for better or worse, the timer kept on ticking.

“H-Hey, you two only have thirty seconds left! Do your best to wrap this up!”

“What? That much time has passed already?!?” Alice exclaimed. “I-In that case... Mwah hah hah! Hero, there is one thing I must tell you before our battle. I told you that you couldn’t kill me without the apple’s power, but you can actually kill me without it just fine!”

“Umm, I have something to say to you too! For some reason I felt like I’d lost a whole bunch of friends and even hurt the princess to get the holy sword, but none of that actually happened! Whooaaaa, here I gooooo! Take

this! My regular sword attaaaaack!!!”

“Gwahhh!!!”

“*And that's it! Time's up! It's over!*”

I want my money back! I thought.

And so, the improvisation ended, having steamrolled along like a weekly manga that the editors decided to suddenly shut down a week from now.

“*Good work, both of you! What did you think about it? You first, Hikari-chan.*”

“I killed the demon lord, so I have no regrets!”

“*So that's all you wanted... Next, Alice-chan!*”

“Even if you defeat me, the true demon lord Awayuki-dono will avenge my death!”

Please. Please, I'm begging you, don't get me involved in this...

“*And that was the High-Energy Combo! Everyone, give them a round of applause!*”

: 8888 ¥8888

: you got through 3 minutes! i'm so proud. i approve of this

: Talk about tossing so many loose story threads around that you'll never be able to tie them back together. Is this loss?

That was all for the second team. Considering there were only two people left, the next one up would be...

“*Unfortunately, we only have one more dynamic duo for you all! What sort of surprise ending are we in for after such a wild and crazy pair of performances?! Next up is Nekoma Hirune and Kaeru Yamatani's Reversal Team!*”

“Nya-nyan! Nekoma here! I got up from my afternoon nap and came here because I sensed the beginnings of some real dumpster-fire stories from this project!”

“Konni-chikubi, chat mommies. This is Kaeru, who is currently seething after being called a nipple-baby with shitty greetings after mentioning on stream once that maybe she's been overusing that intro line recently.”

Yep, I nodded. Looks like the end of this collaboration is in sight. Still, though—this last pairing seemed pretty devoid of commonalities. Even I, personally, harbored just as much surprise as the viewers did.

“I’d like to thank both of you! As far as I know, this is the first time Nekoma and Kaeru-chan have collaborated! I’d like to ask what brought you two together for this.”

Thankfully, Shion-mama popped the question on all our minds. No wonder she was so well-liked for consistently meeting our expectations.

“Kaeru went to Nekoma and asked if she wanted to team up,” Kaeru said.

“I was still looking around for a partner, since I wanted to take part too. I gave her the insta-okay on that one.”

“Huh! Really? I see. Kaeru-chan was the one to invite you, huh? Huh.”

“K-Kaeru can hear the smirk in your voice... Is there something wrong with this arrangement?”

“No, I was just thinking how much you’ve changed since your collab with Awayuki-chan, that’s all.”

“Teasing Kaeru isn’t a very good look for you,” replied Kaeru-chan. “This is why you can’t become a true mommy.”

“I... I see. As someone on a quest for motherhood, I’ll keep that in mind.”

I almost couldn’t believe that the generally pessimistic Kaeru-chan had grown so much that she was able to invite a senpai she’d never spoken with to a collaboration... *Mommy’s so proud of you that her StroZero is feeling very StroGood right now! I suppose daughters always grow up while you’re not looking*, I thought, being younger than she was.

“In any case, why did you go with the name ‘Reversal Team’ for your pair?”

“Nekoma will explain all of that! Firstly, my favorite items are the direct opposite of everyone else’s. Second, Kaeru-chan gets younger and younger the more time passes. That’s why we’re the Reversal Team.”

“I see! I totally randomized the team order, but out of sheer coincidence, we’re now looking at a real possibility for a reversal victory in the final round!”

: i'm so glad kaeru-chan is enjoying herself more lately
: ^ this, so much this.
: and here i am, amazed that her "true" mommy is the

personification of debauchery, someone only interested in booze and women

: "Personification of debauchery" is such a powerful phrase

: If she's the personification of booze, doesn't that mean she'd absolutely reek?

: I never thought I'd see the day when the word "reek" would be applied to a VTuber

"Let's now go to their thoughts on the competition and what they'd use the prize money for! Ba-bumm!"

Name: Nekoma Hirune

What She Wants to Accomplish: Wanted to feel like Ed Wood ☆

What She Wants to Buy With the Prize Money: Travel expenses to go overseas in search of kusoge, since I've gotten bloated on domestic ones

Name: Kaeru Yamatani

What She Wants to Accomplish: She is a baby, so please spoil her by voting for her

What She Wants to Buy With the Prize Money: Paid content in the mobile game Princess Correct to achieve her dreams of becoming a baby

: Oh. oh no. they're all way too loyal to their own desires.

: Who's Ed Wood?

: An amazing man who left behind so many really odd works of art and managed to get called the worst director of all time

: Well that's not a good sign!!!

: Kaeru-chan likes Princess Correct?

: I think she does? She mentioned the game made her feel intense hatred toward any character with round glasses

and huge boobs so I think she plays it a lot
: never forgive the shitty glasses girl!
: The human trash that turns stones into new friends,
right before the player's eyes
: My headcanon is that she's not even human, but
actually a medusa.

With the preface out of the way, Shion-senpai spun the roulette wheel to choose a topic again, the same way she'd been doing. But when she did, the team ended up with a very interesting topic.

“An apology press conference! That’s your situation! An apology press conference!”

“What...?” murmured Kaeru-chan.

“What in the world...?” said Nekoma-senpai.

Shion-senpai giggled lowly. *“Looks like this could be very entertaining!*
Oh, I just can’t wait!”

“What should we do?” asked Kaeru-chan. “Have you ever apologized to anyone, Nekoma-senpai?”

“Nope.”

“That’s troubling. Neither has Kaeru. We’ve stumbled on the very first step.”

“How are you two able to so quickly pretend you’re saints or whatever?!
Maybe Nekoma should be apologizing for working me to the bone as a
tsukkomi in the past.”

This was looking like it’d be a wild ride from start to finish.

“Well, if Kaeru remains silent, we will get nowhere,” said Kaeru-chan.
“Kaeru can be the one apologizing.”

“Hey, sounds good!” replied Nekoma-senpai. “Then I’ll be a reporter asking you all the questions, nya. And I’ll make up everything you’re apologizing for, so you don’t have to worry.”

“Kaeru is looking forward to it.”

“It looks like they’re both ready! Let’s start the three-minute timer for this
apology press conference in three, two, one, go!”

“Um, hello,” began Kaeru-chan. “Thank you all for coming here despite your busy schedules. We will now begin the apology press conference of

Kaeru Yamatani.”

Wow! I thought. That's just like what you hear on TV! She really set the scene!

“Kaeru takes all of the trouble she has caused for the rest of society very seriously, so she would like to explain the entirety of the situation without keeping anything hidden.”

“*Thank you,*” said Shion-senpai. “*We will now enter the question-and-answer session. Catgirl reporter, the floor is yours for questioning.*”

“Nya-nyan! I'm Nekoma Hirune from Live-On's second generation, and I'll be asking the questions! Miss Yamatani, you snuck into a famous NLK education program, *Together with Mom*, and pretended to be one of the young child extras during the recording. You then proceeded to thrust adoption registration forms into the faces of two cast members—namely, the singing mom and the exercise mom. Finally, you turned to the camerapeople and threatened them, saying, ‘You're getting all this, yeah?’ This incident has become widespread in the public eye. But is it all true?”

It's all over! I thought. *Even if it's fictional, that's not an incident any human would be able to turn a blind eye to!* It looked like Kaeru-chan had made a big mistake the moment she'd let that prank-loving Nekoma-senpai decide on her crime. *My condolences...*

“Ah. Yes. Right, right... Yes, right.”

Look! Even she's reacting like, “Now she's gone and done it”!

- : LMA000000
- : this isn't just a streaming accident! it's a streaming crime!
- : the pain in kaeru-chan's voice... is it over?
- : She probably would want to do that for real
- : really interested in where this goes

“W-Well, what's your response?”

But if she stopped here, it would ruin the progression of their already time-limited improv sketch, so Kaeru-chan took a deep breath and then opened her mouth to speak.

“Um, yes,” she said. “It's all true.”

Whoa! I thought. *She actually went with the “say yes to everything”*

option. As expected of the surprisingly up-for-anything woman Kaeru-chan.

“Nya-nya! Thank you for the honest response! Might I ask what led to you causing this disturbance?”

“Um, to give you the short answer, Kaeru knew it would be bad, but couldn’t hold in her desire to revert to childhood.”

Look, you.

“To begin with,” continued Kaeru-chan, “Kaeru’s body may be an adult’s, but the fiery soul sleeping within that body belongs to a baby. Thus, Kaeru very much regrets her actions being called a ‘disturbance.’ At the very least, in that moment, Kaeru’s thought capabilities had lowered to the level of a baby out of excitement about being on a television program she’s always loved.”

“Huh, I... I see? What you’re saying, then, is that you are a baby, Miss Yamatani? Forgive me my rudeness, but might I ask your age?”

“Age is just a number! Old people just don’t understand!”

“No baby would ever say that! A-Anyway, fine, then. Next, I wanted to ask what your thoughts were regarding giving the singing mom and the exercise mom adoption registration forms.”

“If they are going to call themselves moms, then they must become Kaeru’s mom! That is all!”

“Nya... Nya-nya? I, um, I don’t understand what you mean!”

“Kaeru is not surprised that you don’t!”

: Can you believe it?! This is a real apology press conference!

: omg she's totally lashing out at the reporter lol

: Okay, so it's like, one of those "you call yourself a mom? you can't even name four of her albums" things?

¥240

: kaeru isn't surprised nekoma doesn't understand, but I doubt she even wants to anyway

: I'll be right back, gonna send her 3 million yen over 195 supers

“And why am I the only one being criticized, anyway?” continued Kaeru-chan. “I have information that the reporter named Nekoma has many things

of her own to apologize for!"

"Nya?"

"You stinking furball, get your ass up on the execution platform! It's my turn to go on the offensive!"

"Nya nya?!"

"Get ready, because I'm about to lay bare every last atrocity you've ever committed!!!"

"Nya nya nya?!!?"

"Hello, I'm Kaeru Yamatani, a reporter. I have a few questions I'd like to ask."

"Whoa! What's going on here?! I can't believe it, but the defendant and the reporter have been traded to the opposite teams—no, they've had their positions changed! The two of them are now in each other's shoes! But there's only one minute left! What are they going to do?!"

Be idiots, probably, I thought.

: omg lmfaooooooo

: huh? I didn't realize press conferences for people apologizing were considered sports

: I mean, they are kind of mental sports. They're for seeing which person's shoulders we can place all the world's hatred on.

: they got traded and both teams are now worse off. oof

: Hey, is this why they're called the Reversal Team?

"May I ask you some questions, Miss Nekoma?"

"Sure thing. Guess I had it coming."

"First, let me get my facts straight. Is it true that, despite inviting three of your friends to play baseball, you forced them to play one of history's worst kusoge, a baseball game nicknamed *Dumb-Major*?"

"Y-Yeah, but so what?! Why do I have to have an apology press conference just for making them play a kusoge?!"

"Please don't play dumb with me! One of those friends died laughing too hard after seeing the umpire running over to make a call while insistently pointing his ass at the pitcher. The second friend, despite being on her school baseball team, was so astonished that she completely lost track of what

baseball actually is and came down with a case of the yips. The third friend was just about to clear this torture *you* call a game when it froze and she suffered a mental breakdown. And now you're going to pay for ruining their lives!"

"I refuse to accept that the damages were that severe! Apologize to my favorite game *Dumb-Major* right this instant!"

"In that case, *you're* the one who should apologize to all the kids who saved up their paltry allowances to buy the game because they liked the original manga!"

The duo was engaged in a light-speed game of hurling abuse at one another, if that's what you can call it. Their chain of comments went so fast that Shion-mama didn't even have a chance to cut in and get things moving along. *Watching this is gonna make us the ones who die laughing...*

"Nya... Your logic is too good! But I can't lose! I'll be okay. I'm not alone. I have a lot of friends on my side: a cleft-chinned Red Comet, that weird gross green thing named Jashi who seems like he can play mahjong but can't at all, and that adventurer who dies from falling off a single stair! They're all with me!"

"And all of them are insane! What, do you live in some kind of weird version of the Great Tomb of Nazarick?!"

"Nya-nya! You have me there! As a reward, I will grant you one of these evil god images. Choose one: Balancing Sasuke, the Evil Goddess MOCCOS, or the Evil Goddess Saber!"

"I don't know what any of those are, but I do know I'll regret picking any of them."

But eventually, Shion-mama couldn't ignore the timer, so she steeled herself and interrupted their conversation to try and get them to finish the sketch. *"One moment, please! There's not much time left, so try and wrap things up, all right?"*

"Guh..." said Kaeru-chan. "At this point, it would be impossible for Nekoma-senpai and Kaeru alone to wrap up this sketch. Don't you think we need a third party to judge which press conference was done better?"

"*I... What?*"

"Nyan. You've got a point. Let's have Shion decide."

"*What...?*"

"Shion(-senpai)!" they both said. "Whose was better?!"

“You both need an apology press conference to apologize for your apology press conferences!!!”

The timer buzzed as Shion-mama made the wittiest retort she could come up with, bringing their far-too-dense three minutes to an end. That was the last team to perform.

: Don't make the facilitator wrap things up for you
lmaooo
: I mean, both the idiots basically threw all of the tsukkomi job in her lap, so...
: coming in like a 3-minute-long hurricane
: How much shit does Nekoma even have stored in her head??
: Ok, let's see which one will win...

“Let’s hear your impressions. Kaeru-chan, what did you think?”
“Kaeru didn’t really understand what was going on.”
“But you were one of the two people in the sketch!”
“But it was fun, so Kaeru is feeling A-OK!”
“I, er, I see... What about you, Nekoma?”
“What just happened?”
“I’m going to deck you.”
“Nya-nya?! Er, I found it easy to do because Kaeru-chan went along with what I said!”
“That’s better. Now, it’s time for everyone to come back on stage.”
Here we go, I thought. *The heart-pounding results announcement.* We all hopped back into the call and quietly waited for the results. I was pretty sure we’d done good, but—
“We have a winner! The team that best used the situation and put on the most memorable performance was Team Streaming Accident!”
Sei-sama and I let out a cheer right then and there, our voices a mix of all sorts of emotions. I swung both hands up into the air in glee like a referee signaling a touchdown.
“I think a big part of it was how in sync you two were. It went over really well!”

“Cha-ching, baby! Cha-ching!” I exclaimed. “Let’s all go out for steak soon! Sei-sama’s and my treat!!!”

“That’s a good idea,” agreed Sei-sama. “Whatever members want to come along, just tell me. You don’t have to have taken part in this collab either. Actually, if any Live-On staff members want to tag along, feel free. We’ll make it a night to remember.”

All the others—disappointed at the same time Sei-sama and I had cheered—then started cheering themselves. *Yes! Yes!* I thought. *It’s always more fun with everyone!*

“Um... *Are you two okay with that?*” asked Shion-senpai. “*Going out for steak with so many people won’t leave much prize money left over... Weren’t there things you wanted to buy?*”

“What? I can’t buy Moontory with 100,000 yen. You must be tired or something, Shion-mama.”

“*I hate that you just said that. I really hate it.*”

“Awayuki-kun and I talked about it before this started—we already wanted to go out to eat with everyone if we won.”

“*Oh? Really? You should have just said so! What, can you not breathe unless you’re making dumb comments?*”

Mwah hah hah hah!!! Did you see that, everyone?! This is the true power of the second generation’s pervert and the third generation’s ace!!!

First Sponsored Stream

In front of the Live-On offices...

“Woo! Here we go!”

Though we called them offices, Live-On didn’t have a particularly stringent, corporate atmosphere, so I was able to relax when visiting. But today, I wasn’t here for my regularly scheduled meeting with Suzuki-san.

No! In fact, I, Awayuki Kokorone, had received a sponsored stream offer from a mobile game!

It’ll be my first sponsored stream! Ever! Live-On usually accepted such sponsored streams as long as they didn’t see any issues with them, but I hadn’t been blessed with any until now.

At first, before the streaming accident, I'd been rather lackluster. Most of the sponsored stream offers for my generation had come to Mashiron and Hikari-chan, who were better at talking.

After the incident, my popularity had quite literally exploded and really gotten me on track, but... Well... It was just—my character, you know?

You've probably guessed it by now. Nobody would entrust a messenger pigeon with state secrets, right?

Looking at the tendencies of the Live-On members who got the lion's share of the sponsored stream offers, we had...

Shion-senpai = good planner, sense of security

Mashiron = deep knowledge as well as popularity with regards to illustrating

Hikari-chan = energetic reactions

Ehrai-chan = deep knowledge regarding animals

From that, one could see that they each had their own strengths that just worked better for sponsored streams. But apply it to me, and it would look like this...

Awayuki Kokorone = the StroZero girl

What do you want them to do? What on earth were companies supposed to ask me for? I already had too much of a bias toward a specific target—Moontory—but just putting plain old “girl” at the end of it *killed* me.

Fantastically *shuwa-shuwa*. In shogi terms, the sheer purity of having such a singular inclination was like always taking your very first turn to place your jeweled general right behind a gold general—a dirty joke that spelled out the word “testicles” in kanji, a formation designed to attack your opponent’s mind. The person you were playing with would run away, and then nobody would play with you. It would be the birth of one of the greatest masters of the game—the Shunned Master, who was never invited to play.

Anyway, those were all the reasons why I understood how hard it would be to leave a company’s pride and joy to my variety-show antics.

However! I had, in fact, received a sponsored stream offer! Someone had acknowledged me as worthy of asking for a sponsored stream!

And that wasn't all! This wasn't just *any* sponsored stream offer—they'd asked me to become their brand ambassador for this mobile game! Which meant it would be chock-full of VIP perks!

I was honestly mystified by why they'd want me that much, but that was why I was here for my first sponsorship-offer meeting and excited about it to boot!

My emotions drove me to take longer steps than normal as I entered the offices and had them tell me which room we'd be using for the meeting. Apparently, the company's representative was already there, and my manager Suzuki-san was currently speaking with them—the plan was for us both to attend the meeting.

I hurried to the room and knocked on the door. “Excuse me!” I called out. “Sorry for being late!”

“Don’t worry about it,” said an unfamiliar female voice, who must have been the representative. “I got here a little too early, that’s all. The meeting isn’t scheduled to start for another few minutes anyway.”

“Hello, Yuki-san,” Suzuki-san called. “No need to get all flustered.”

As I entered the room, both women smiled at me. *That’s a relief. Though maybe just a temporary one...*

After that, we did the whole greeting-each-other-by-exchanging-business-cards thing, then finally got into the purpose of the meeting—the sponsored stream.

As for the mobile game’s details... Simply put, it was a game where the characters were all personifications of various types of alcohol, but also idols. Its title was *Sake-dol!* I’d known all that already, so this meeting was more to discuss what sort of stream I’d be doing.

“In any case,” said the rep, “we’d like you to advertise it on Cheeper, then stream yourself playing the game on the planned date, Awayuki-san. Would that work for you?”

“Yes!” I replied. “And I actually drew up some plans for the stream that I wanted you to look at...”

“Oh?”

I handed a sheaf of papers to the rep and Suzuki-san. I’d taken it upon myself to make this—it was packed with all of the things I wanted to do for this sponsored stream, expressing how seriously I was taking it.

Look upon it and tremble! My perfectly written, no-extra-fluff streaming

plan to convey the appeal of this game! From an outline of the stream to the lines I want to say, I created this with millimeter-level precision! And, of course, drinking on stream is out of the question!

“We can go through the plans together,” I told them. “I’ll explain my thought process!”

Seeing their shock so early on put me in a pretty good mood, so I started my presentation—a skill I’d honed to perfection during my time working for that exploitative company. Those assholes would seriously criticize me for everything like some mother-in-law interfering with a newlywed couple’s household. At one internal meeting, I’d gotten yelled at for a full hour once because I’d used the wrong kanji in one little place. I’d sworn I’d write the next documents in Chinese—that would show them, especially since I can’t write Chinese. Ultimately, companies like that just made you want to grab hold of whatever reason you could to vent your daily frustrations, which itself brought forth new daily frustrations, causing the entire company to sink into a deep, black abyss.

But today I was going to put that experience to good use for once! *How do you like this? The most sublime presentation ever written—and search as you might, you won’t find a single flaw or missing item!*

“And that’s the long and short of how I’d like to approach things. What do you think?”

Mwa ha ha ha! They’ve forgotten to even blink as they look at me, elegantly finishing up my presentation! I’ve completely grasped the flow! The sponsored stream is sure to be a huge success! Rumors will spread and spread until eventually the path will be paved for my future as a business-style VTuber who gets sponsored stream offers every day!

Oh, but I’ll have to do my normal streams too, of course! It’s gonna get busy for me! Ah ha ha ha ha ha!!!

“Um...” they both said.

“Yes?! Here it comes! The wild applause! The shrieks of delight! I can hear them now, in a future where I am worshiped and praised as a god!

“Wow...” they both said.

“Yes?! Yes?!”

“None of it will work,” they said, again in unison.

“But whyyyyy?!?!?”

Right, I thought. I hadn't wanted to admit it, so I'd done my best to avert my eyes, but midway through the presentation, I'd had a feeling it would turn out like this...

"Why not?!" I repeated. "There's so much in here! I'd understand if one or two parts wouldn't work, but the whole thing?!"

"Well, how should I put this..." said the rep lady.

"Yuki-san, this is all my fault for not informing you like I should have," said Suzuki-san. "I'm really sorry. This offer was actually for the Shuwa-chan inside of you."

"Uh?"

The rep looked like she was having a lot of trouble giving the reason for that, so Suzuki-san explained the circumstances. "I just didn't think you would create all this... I'm really sorry for not realizing how passionate you were about the offer."

"Well, I mean," I stammered, "I sort of kept quiet about it because I was so excited to bring it here as a complete surprise and show you how great I am, so I should be the one apologizing..."

"Oh!" said the rep. "You're a very cute person even off stream, Awayuki-san!"

"Quit being impressed at my expense!"

"Yuki-san, sit. Stay. This is an official meeting, remember?" Suzuki-san chastised.

Ack, crap! My emotions were so riled up that I'd automatically gone into streamer conversation mode. This representative was a real human being, so she'd probably cringe if I spoke to her the same way I did other members of Live-On. Gotta be calm, gotta be cool...

"Getting back on topic... Why Shuwa, if I may ask? I know it might sound strange coming from me, but she'd cause a streaming accident."

"Oh?" replied the rep. "A stream accident as a premeditated crime! How novel. Hee hee hee."

"What do you think you're laughing about, anyway?!"

"Yuki-san, sit! Sit!"

Wait, why wasn't this rep lady getting ruffled? Didn't she understand how dangerous entrusting a sponsored stream to Shuwa would be?

"Please, I just want to know why!" I said. "I'm pretty serious about this, so I would really like a proper reason!"

“A reason?” said the rep lady. “Sure. The reason is, of course...!”

“Of course...?”

“That it would probably be funny!”

“Your brain’s already end-of-service.”

“Yuki-san, stay! Stay!”

Ahh, I’m really starting to get a headache... At the same time, though, now I understood why this woman had requested me, of all people, for this sponsored stream. It wasn’t only the game that was filled with booze—it was the employees of the game company too! *I guess booze-lovers really do flock together!*

“To be quite honest, since the game is centered around booze,” said the rep lady, “it matches Shuwa-chan-san perfectly. I’m confident she will make it fun!”

“I mean, I guess it might be pretty funny,” I replied, “but I feel like it’ll only come with the sacrifice of any future advertising for the game...”

“Oh! Well, Shuwa-chan-san may be record-breaking, but she always carries through with things once she’s made up her mind, doesn’t she?”

“It seems to me like that ‘record-breaking’ part is enough to make her unfit for a sponsored stream... You know she won’t be planning anything out for the stream at all, right?”

“We believe the best advertising we can possibly do is to have Shuwa-chan-san enjoy our game. She can play it in whatever way she likes, and we’ll be okay with it!”

“This is starting to sound kind of fishy... If she thinks anything about it is bad, she’s *going* to say so.”

“Please, by all means! We have confidence in the game we’ve created, so bring it on!”

“Hrm...” *What should I do?* I thought. *She seriously seems to want Shuwa to do this stream... Should I? Should I go for it? Drinking during a sponsored stream—is that even allowed?*

“Yuki-san,” said my manager, “I think this could work.”

“Suzuki-san...”

Perhaps unable to just watch, Suzuki-san started to persuade me as well. “I’ve been talking about it with her since before you arrived,” she explained. “She’s a serious fan of Awayuki Kokorone.”

“Huh?”

“I am!” replied the rep. “I’m a huge fan of you, Awayuki-san, and you’re super popular at our company in general! That was why I made this request in the first place! I didn’t for a moment think to ask you just because you’re popular. We’re asking because we *want* this to be in your hands!”

“Wow, are you serious...?” *What an amazing company. And I mean that for real. I’m impressed.*

“And as your manager,” Suzuki-san interjected, “I decided this would be a good idea for you. That’s why I told you about it.”

“I see how it is...”

Right, I thought. They’re both saying the same thing—that this wasn’t all just on a whim. Maybe I should take on the challenge. After all, I know best of everyone that you never know what life is gonna throw at you next!

“Oh, and if you choose to accept, we’ll send you a next-day delivery of a variety set of StroZero, both as a show of gratitude and to use on your stream!”

“I’ll do it.”

“Such a prompt response,” remarked the rep lady. “Please don’t reduce all your previous arguments to zero as soon as someone mentions StroZero—no matter how much you like it.”

“The hell did you just say to me?”

“Yuki-san, stay! Kill yourself!”

“Whoa, that went from dog training to something entirely different!”

“Oh, my!” said the rep lady.

Anyway, a few days later...

“Good evening, everyone. For today, hmm. For the first time, I’d like to do a sponsored stream for a mobile game. And I’d like to be quite serious about it, only doing the most earnest and sincere things. With that said, *pshhh!*”

- : You just contradicted yourself in record time
- : She sounds so serious, and then pshhhes with zero hesitation lmao
- : pshhhes (verb form)
- : Her vocal cords are being controlled!

: lol @ doubting her vocal cords instead of her actual hands

: Wait, she's drinking? On a sponsored stream? Fr?

: nah, it's gotta just be a joke lmao

“Gulp, gulp, gulp! Ahhhhhh!!! Booze on the day of a sponsored stream goes down so gooood!!!”

: LMFAO

: That quote's gonna go down in history

: what???

: Could you stop it with the sexual cosplay role-play?

: Could you stop calling Awa-chan chugging StroZero in a special situation "cosplay role-play"?

: Oh god, she's actually drinking...

: Is this even okay?? LOL

“Okay, wait, just hear me out! Even I'm not dumb enough to ruin a sponsored stream by drinking! There's a really, really good reason for this!”

I proceeded to explain to my viewers, who were clearly very excited for all kinds of reasons from the first second of the stream, what had transpired during the meeting.

: This just in. The game company was just as shuwa-shuwa as her

: TSE-listed company in the -196th Section

: listed as in, it fell over and sank in the ocean, right?

: I mean, I doubt any normal company would ask Shuwa-chan for this lol

: I can kinda understand though, it's better press to have someone have fun with the game instead of explaining all the little bits and pieces

: i'm losing it at cute awa-chan fishing for praise

“Anyway, I'm going into this with literally no plan, so I'm just gonna

ignore all that sponsorship stuff and go for it! Don't blame me for what happens next! Just you watch, game devs! I'm blowing a raspberry at you!"

- : the world was nowhere near ready for this www
- : I've never heard someone say they were blowing a raspberry instead of actually doing it
- : Yep, that would be the alcohol talking. Already...

Now then! This *Booze Collection* game, to go into some finer detail, contained personified versions of each type of alcohol, with the player being the chief sake brewer (you mustn't concern yourself with the fact that there's things other than sake). The player has to work hard, enter the contest that will decide the world's number-one alcoh-idol, and bring home the victory.

The tutorial screens flew by, helping to flesh out the setting. *Hmm, I see. Nothing standout about anything just yet.*

In any case, it was high time for the traditional gacha portion of mobile games. And this one, like most others, had you using "gems," a type of currency, to pull for random characters.

"Right, uh. This game has apparently been officially released already, but since this is a sponsored stream and everything, they're letting me use a game file that has a bunch of gacha gems already."

- : K
- : Aw, so you're not gonna crash and burn when you run out of them but didn't get what you wanted...
- : Is this for real?

"Awesome! Time for my first ten-pull! I'm going after one thing: StroZero! I will make my StroZero the number-one booze in the world, mark my words!"

With colorful entrances, characters named for types of alcohol began to appear, one at a time.

Whoa... These character designs are pretty elaborate... Their movements are so smooth, even though they're just 2D models. The voice actors are first-class too. I can already feel the effort they put into making this.

Although impressed, I was watching the screen for StroZero-chan to

appear. But when the fourth character showed up, I couldn't help but widen my eyes and let out a grunt of surprise.

"Could this be...? A male? What would a male be doing here?! That's not possible! ...Wait, is he the stand-in eroge MC? No, his face is way too good for that... When stand-in MCs are too good-looking, they'll get criticized..."

: i'm dying at this reaction lmfao
: Don't call men "males"... Actually, since he's booze, maybe it's okay?
: Maybe they're an Amazoness?
: stand-in eroge MC lmaooooo
: I knew it, the guy's from one of those worlds where the male-female ratio is totally messed up and chastity values are swapped
: I mean, there ARE regular male idols, aren't there?

"I, er, I see. I suppose it's not strange for them to put a male idol into the game... I assumed based on my own lust for only women that it couldn't happen..."

I collected myself and continued on through the gacha screen.

In this game, characters came in three rarities—one-star to three-star. From what I'd heard, there was one of each type of alcohol for each rarity. For example, if there was a character named Beer, there would be one for each rarity, but their abilities, illustrations, and clothes would all be different.

My first ten-pull ended.

"No three-stars... But that doesn't matter to me much! I'm only after a three-star StroZero-chan! I'm gonna keep on pulling until she comes home!"

: Shuwa-chan...
: Got some news about StroZero-chan...
: Hint: they haven't put in any branded product characters yet

After that, I kept on pulling and pulling, after one thing and one thing alone. I got a few three-star characters, but for some reason, I didn't see StroZero-chan anywhere.

And then, on my final ten-pull...

“Buff fwhyyy?!”

...I crashed and burned, not even drawing a three-star at all.

“This is weird... It doesn’t make any sense... I’ve given her more love and affection than anyone else...”

Why? I thought. Just why? Why why...

“...I see,” I said. “I finally understand, StroZero-chan. This is a test of my love, isn’t it? Welp, time to bring out the wallet.”

: ?!

: Oh no. Shuwa-chan acquired the yandere attribute...

: Taking alcohol dependency to a whole new level

: Wait, this is a sponsored stream, right?

: The end of the road for wage slaves is when they pay to do work...

“Huh? I can’t press the payment button! Why not?! I must convey my love to StroZero-chan!!!”

No matter how many times I tried, even reopening the whole app, I couldn’t get into the payment window.

So, it’s come to this...

“I’m gonna go have a talk with the devs.”

: ?!?!?

: Is she legit filing a complaint on a sponsored stream

: So dumb it's actually genius

“Yes, hello?”

“Hello, is this the representative? It’s Awayuki.”

“Hello! Yes, I know that. I’ve been watching your stream. In fact, I can hear your voice through the stream at the same time as well. It’s all so

shocking to me that somehow, I'm remaining calm.”

“That makes things easy. Please let me purchase gems.”

“*Awayuki-san, look. We gave you a save file specifically for the sponsored stream. Once its time runs out, the data will all disappear! That's why we made it so that you can't make payments.*”

“Then I'd like a new save file, please.”

“*What?!*”

“Would that work?”

“*I mean, I suppose it would, but...*”

“Then please, I'm begging you. Right this instant.”

“*R-Right this instant?*”

“What, you can't do it? You can, though, right? You just said you supposed it would work, right? That means you can do it, right?”

“*Awayuki-san, you're starting to come off as very mean!*”

: oh my god she's got the dev backed into a corner
: I've never heard of doing a reroll on the data they gave you for a sponsored stream
: That's super efficient, though only the chosen ones can pull it off
: But the data doesn't last for long. That's pretty inefficient, isn't it?
: that mean attitude. tskr

“I need to convey my love to StroZero-chan at all costs, okay? So please, I need gems. Give me gems...”

“*Umm... Awayuki-san?*”

“Yes?”

“*Well... This is very difficult for me to say, but...*”

“You already shot down my entire project proposal! What could it possibly be now?! Oh, just say whatever you need to already!”

“*All right... Umm. I'm extremely sorry for potentially being a wet blanket here, but... This game doesn't have any characters named StroZero.*”

“Eh?”

“*Well, there are copyrights, you know. We haven't been able to implement any characters based on any specific brand-name alcohol yet,*

including StroZero... ”

“.....”

For a few seconds, my mind shut down. Silence followed.

“What? Wait, does that mean I can’t see my StroZero-chan? That no matter how much I try, no matter how many gacha pulls I do, my love will never reach her?”

“Yes...”

...What? “Pretty shitty game, then.”

- : Shuwa-chaannnnnnnnn?!?!
- : wwwwWW
- : HEYYYYY!!!!
- : She said the one thing you should never say on a sponsored stream lmfao
- : (sponsored) stream accident
- : No matter what part of it you clip, she'll always be our streaming accident
- : streaming accidents personified
- : The virtual accident faker
- : We may not be able to hear the dev, but it's so easy to guess what they said XDDD

“P-Please calm down, Awayuki-san! This game does have Lemon Chuhai-chan!”

“Shut up, shut up! My StroZero-chan is one-of-a-kind! How dare you lump her in with rabble like that!”

“You misunderstand! You can give your booze names in this game! And their abilities will change when you power them up too!”

“Oh?”

“What I mean is, you can name your three-star Lemon Chuhai-chan ‘StroZero’! And then it’s just a matter of raising her more than any of the other characters! With some effort, you might be able to create your own StroZero-chan!”

“I... I can’t believe it!!!” I saw a single ray of light in my mind, which had sunk deep into the bowels of the earth. “This game is godlike!”

“Well, well. It seems like you’re experiencing a critical bug in your

evaluation of the game.”

“Now that I know that, I’ve gotta pull for a three-star lemon chuhai right away! I can’t make purchases, so please, give me a new data file for it!”

“*You’re actually requesting it, huh... You pulled a two-star, didn’t you? Is that not enough?*”

“It’s written right there in the *Kojiki* that StroZero-chan can’t be any rarity but the highest, you know! You’re being quite disrespectful of our national history!”

“*I think that’s more an irrational history than our national history.*”

But after that, she finally agreed to give me a new file for the stream anyway. As I explained what had just happened to the viewers, I went through the game a second time, progressing up to the point where I could pull again.

“Awesome! The devs were kind enough to let me pull gacha more, so it’s time to give it the old college retry! I’m after the three-star Lemon Chuhai-chan! I’ll train her up and make her into an excellent StroZero-chan!”

: Telling the person who requested all this "shut up"?
You're the one being rude lmaooo, not her
: Lemon Chuhai-chan, quick, run away!
: Kojiki: "StroZero-chan cannot be any rarity but the highest."
: please stop doodling in the kojiki
: Yata-no-Kagami, Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi, Yasakani-no-Magatama, StroZero
: checks out
: Quit it with the ooparts!
: oopanties?? wait, are you a no-panties proponent?
: That's the first time I've seem someone mishear something based only on the letters
: Ah yes the Shuwa-chan-Sutozero-no-Mikoto theory
: That doesn't even exist! there's no theories about it!!!

In high spirits, I dove into the sea of gacha once again. But it was already so tough to get three-star characters. Aiming for just one of many was not an

easy task. My second round eventually ended with all my gems gone and the character not in my inventory.

“I’m just gonna make a call real quick...”

“Hello?”

“Encore! Encore!”

“Wow, you’re actually starting to sound vaguely pure.”

Using a new save file to reroll my account and the gems that came with it, I took on the gacha again.

But it still didn’t work! My feelings weren’t able to reach StroZero-chan!

“Just gonna make a call real quick...”

“Hello?”

“Alcohol! Alcohol!”

“Oh, my. I’m the one who wants alcohol right now.”

After that, I tried to get my revenge many times, but out of sheer bad luck, all I had to show for it was a pile of dead save files and wasted time. *I feel like, going this long, I should get her eventually, but...*

For each of my rerolls, I had to go through the whole tutorial process, which took some time. I didn’t mind it at first, but quickly it became a loop of getting through to the gacha screens, not drawing what I wanted, and then restarting. As a streamer, it made me start to panic a little.

I mean, I guess most people would feel like me doing this kind of stuff on a sponsored stream means it’s already too late to worry about that. And they’d be right. So right that I wouldn’t be able to argue. But personally, I still wanted to do something to keep the stream funny.

At first, rerolling an account on a sponsored stream was funny because of the shock factor, but the viewers would probably get bored soon with the same old loop happening again and again. A lot of them were probably now in it just to see me finally pull StroZero-chan, but I really had to be careful not to be *too* persistent here.

Since this was a sponsored stream, I had to show off more than the gacha. There was a whole game here too. Considering how much time was left, I’d probably have to make this save file the last one... My stream had started at 9 p.m., so dragging this out while people started to leave for the night would make me feel bad for the sponsors.

“Ugh, it’s no good... Am I doomed...?!”

But just because this was the last save file didn’t mean fate would

intervene. My gems continued to dwindle without delivering StroZero-chan to me. Feeling crushed by the hopelessness, I finally reached the final ten-pull my gems would allow me...

“Howaaahhhh?!?!”

It happened! The animation that told me I’d be getting a three-star for sure!!!

“She’s here! At the very end, she’s come to me! StroZero-chan is such an entertainer—she knows exactly when to make her entrance!”

: ?!
: Did she get her?!
: If I pull StroZero-chan out of here alive, I'm gonna go home and get married
: She's won. The band is out on the field
: omg all these death flags lmao

“Yes! Now! Come home, StroZero-chaaaaaaaaaaa...ahhh?”

With a dazzling animation, in a burst of light, she appeared—

“Hmm? So, you’re my brewmaster? I suppose I could have ended up with worse.”

—an attractive, charming girl with short, silver hair and a boyish aura about her: White Wine-chan.

I stared at her for a few moments in bafflement.

Sure, I was shocked it wasn’t StroZero-chan, and even I thought I’d be literally kicking and screaming if another character came instead of her. But this one was...

“Great... Amazing... She’s like Mashiron...”

I’d gotten a few of her already in lower rarities, but she’d always been wearing a hood, so I’d never had a good look at her face. But in her three-star version, with her face totally visible, everything was so much like Mashiron —her figure, her personality, everything—that it hit me right in the fetish.

I’d only imagined total victory or utter defeat, so this development had me at a loss... What was I supposed to do now?

For the time being, I closed out of the gacha window and changed the game’s home screen to show White Wine-chan’s full-body shot. The home screen was elaborately made as well, and you could touch the character’s

body to get a voice line as a reaction. So cute.

“Bweh heh. Mweh heh hee hee. Oho hoh...”

: afghjkhksajl that's so gross lol
: Oh...wow...
: Where is that voice even coming from
: Project more from your ass!
: ^ I really hope that bro realizes that he's the
strange one, not us

Touching softer parts of her body, like her face, I let the boku-using White Wine-chan—who reacted in a somewhat cold manner—heal the wounds of not being able to meet StroZero-chan. I was just getting back into the groove of things when it happened.

My eyes were drawn to one comment in particular.

: White Wine-chan is a dude
...What? I thought.

“Huh? Is that comment right? Wait. This is a boy? Wait, is that even possible? If this cute little thing is a guy, then I'll turn into an ambidextrous hermaphrodite who wields both two cocks and two sexualities.”

: Huh?
: That's a guy...?
: He's an otokonoko. And a natural one at that
: You said that last sentence so...so casually... I
can't...
: I mean, you'd have two balls, so why not two rods too
: Then what, do you call your crotch Miyamoto Musashi or
something?

Flustered, I switched to White Wine-chan's character profile.

...They're right. His gender has a big old ♂ in it. No doubt about it—he's a man.

“Huh... Then he looks like this, and he has one of those attached... Huh...”

.....*Poke, poke.*

“Hyaah?! Where do you think you’re touching?!”

: DON’T TOUCH HIS CROTCH LMFAO

: no, no! it’s just a way to make sure he’s not lying about what sex he is! it’s tooooootally not creepy!

: doing it like Colonel Volgin is the wrong-ass way to go about it!!!

Poke, poke... Poke, poke... Poke, poke...

: How many times are you gonna do this lololol

: It’s actually terrifying how quietly she just keeps touching his groin

: srsly, she’s been poking it constantly XD

Poke, poke... Poke, poke... Poke, poke... Poke, poke...

: Oh, god, this is getting bad! She’s already been touching him for ten minutes!

: I came here bc i heard a Live-On member was massaging a male character’s groin at length on a sponsored stream without even saying a word

: she’s YOU guys’ oshi! do something about this!

: I feel like White Wine-chan should be climaxing soon

: I want to drink White Wine-chan’s white wine

: yep, that’s gonna scar me for life

“...Right! I’ve come to a conclusion!”

I’d been debating in my head whether this White Wine-chan character’s existence meshed with mine at all, but I finally figured it out.

“With looks that adorable, having something attached is just a bonus!”

Otokonokos were totally fine with me!

: hahahaha lmfaooooooooooooo
: Such a deep understanding
: sweet! i'm off to buy some fake cleavage
: There's no way someone so cute could be a girl!
: Chat's power level is so fking high rn

“Just hang on. Think about it in simple terms. If you have two weapons that each have the same starting stats, but one of them has an extra attribute, you'd go with the one with the extra attribute, wouldn't you? That's how it is.”

: I have a very simple counter to that
: Yeah, but then the other one WOULDN'T have a certain thing you'd think it would have, right?
: Exactly. Men can get pregnant too
: ?!
: I was reading an otokonoko doujinshi, and the faceless MC guy, while banging him, formed a uterus inside the otokonoko's ass. Definitely legit
: ?!?!
: I understood literally none of that lmfao
: Basically, the MC's thrusts were so skillful they changed the inside of his ass to be shaped like a uterus.
: what a genius
: There's sexual technicians, and then there's...whatever that is
: It's rare for the conversation to get THIS incomprehensible, even here
: i am loving the purity that bro needed to say it was definitely legit because he read it in a doujinshi
: They're basically sex-ed textbooks, so I don't blame them

“Fweh heh heh... White Wine-chan, you're so cute... I want to make a *real* woman out of him... Maybe next time I see Mashiron in real life, I'll make a

woman out of her too.”

: This is a sponsored...y'know what, forget it
Mashiro Irodori: But I'm already a real woman

“Mashiron?!”

: OHHHHHHHHHHHH
: Mashiron, that's not like, a little dangerous for you to say...?
: Breaking news, Ms. Mashiro Irodori admits to being a REAL woman
: ah, so she was already made into one, huh
: I'm so glad I'm alive

Mashiro Irodori: No, I meant I've always been a woman
: I can see her face getting bright red
: the image in my head is so adorable i wanna die
: That's way too much high power man...
: femashiron!

Mashiro Irodori: I was worried she was making a mess of the sponsored stream, but it looks like I'm too late, so I'm going back home

: KIMASHITA WA
: Ahh, ahh,,, ahh,,
: lmao that bro's so happy he can't even form words
: But Shuwa-chan, what about StroZero-chan?!

“Wha?!”

O-Oh right! StroZero-chan! I'd been so preoccupied with White Wine-chan's cuteness and Mashiron's remarks about being a woman. But wasn't all my hard work rolling on the gacha just to get my beloved StroZero-chan?!

But we're really pressed for time here... Especially since I made White Wine-chan's character intro into ten solid minutes of me touching his groin...

“StroZero-chan... I know everyone wants to see her... But we don't have time...”

What was the right move here? I wanted to see StroZero-chan, but it was

gacha, so I didn't know how long a lemon chuhai would take to come home. I wasn't paying for gems either, so there was literally no upper limit.

And I had a desire to just go with White Wine-chan and his amazing adorableness.

- : I guess that's how it has to be :(
- : Luck is everything in these games! You did your best!
- : white wine-chan is a good pick!

Everyone started sending me really considerate, kind comments. *Aww... Thanks so much, everyone... Ah, but my heart won't let me cheat on StroZero-chan...*

“...Wait, I know!”

If what the dev said earlier was right, this game would let me give a name to White Wine-chan!

“Umm, oh, here's the name change button! Okay! Just gonna do this, and this...”

StroZero (White Wine-Flavor)

“WOOOOOHOOOOO!!! HOW DO YOU LIKE THAT!!!”

- : LMA000
- : she's really trying to force her way past this haha
- : "Are you sure you want this to be his name? Y/N"
- : I know you're super confident from that scream, but everyone else is having some trouble with this...
- : most of all white wine-chan for having his name changed, probably

“*StroZero (White Wine-Flavor)... Is that my name? Huh. You actually have good sense.*”

“Mm-hmm?”

- : Literally just an mm-hmm is enough to convey everything she wanted to tell us
- : Don't overwrite his very existence!
- : white wine-chan, come to your senses!
- : I bet he was being sarcastic
- : maybe the name was the reason Lemon Chuhai-chan never came home?

Anyway, now I could finally move past the gacha stage. *Thank goodness...*

“And so ends the very, very long tutorial! Time to shake off the gacha blues by having fun with the actual game!”

I didn’t make any major blunders like with the gacha after that, and I played through the game extremely smoothly. And as I did, I found the game to be almost unusually elaborate. You couldn’t just level up your characters —every three-star character had their own story about the struggles and conflicts and growth of their journey to becoming the number-one idol. They were very much worth a read.

As for White Wine-chan, while he always acted cool, he had a passionate streak inside him, which was some amazing characterization. Part of the way through, I found myself playing the game for fun, rather than because it was a sponsored stream.

And finally, the day of the contest arrived...

“All right. I’m heading off.”

“Stick out your chest and stand up straight! I’ve trained you up to the limit. You’re now truly StroZero-chan!”

- : StroZero (White Wine): “I’m White Wine, but sure...”
- : StroZero is finally standing on the global stage!
- : Get the whole world drunk!
- : <Japanese hentai drink>
- : make up your mind! white wine or strozero??

And so, that night, StroZero became the number-one booze in the world...

The day after the sponsored stream, I woke up and immediately called up the game's developer to apologize to her. But instead of being criticized for it, I was thanked instead.

Apparently, the stream had gone over *extremely* well, and they were already getting way more downloads since yesterday. I had mixed feelings on that, as the person who had put together that detailed proposal only to have it shot down, but all's well that ends well.

Several days after that, perhaps because of these results, I began to get requests for sponsored streams on a regular basis.

...And by "I," I mean Shuwa-chan.

Idle Talk: Suzuki and Hareru

“Hinata-san, here you are.”

“Oh, hey, it’s Suzuking! I’m surprised you found me.”

The Live-On offices had several small rooms they used for meetings and conferences. Hinata Mogami—also known as Hareru Asagiri—sat in one of them at a laptop.

“I thought I saw you come this way,” explained Suzuki. “I just went on break, so I came to check. May I join you?”

“Sure, go right ahead!”

Suzuki sat across from Hareru.

“That’s nice,” continued Hareru. “And I have a reward for you for finding me.” She rummaged around in the bag next to her and came out with something, which she held out to Suzuki.

“...What is this?”

“Mushiking cards. Why?”

“I mean, I can see that...” Suzuki’s expression grew troubled as she looked at the stack of cards, topped with a strangely shining illustration of a rhinoceros beetle.

“Don’t worry,” said Hareru. “It’s the full set!”

“That’s amazing. What I don’t understand is why you even have them on you, or why you’re giving them to me.”

“Huh...? Wait, you don’t like Mushiking...?”

“Why are you looking at me in disbelief? It’s Mushiking! *The* Mushiking. Are you a little kid from ten years ago, or what? You’d have to be a serious Mushiking lover to not be weirded out by this present.”

“Oh, wait, I get it!”

“I’m glad you do.”

“You’re more of a Dinosaur King person! It’s okay—I have those too!”

“How many dimensions does that bag even have in it?”

Hareru handed her a stack of cards with dinosaur illustrations on them this time. She looked a little guilty, though. “Sorry, Suzuking...” she said. “I

know you're more into Dinosaur King, but I'm actually missing Shantungosaurus. It's the only one, though..."

"You can apologize all you want, but that doesn't mean I have any clue what a Shantungosaurus even is. Also, I'm not 'more of a Dinosaur King person' anyway."

"Wait... Suzuking... My whole life has been a lie..."

"If you think those two things are everything, you might want to rethink your life."

"But Mushiking and Dinosaur King are both awesome!"

"Right, I mean, I get it, but unfortunately, neither of those things are even in the same ballpark as what my demands are as a consumer."

"...Oh! I'm sorry, Suzuking! I finally realized what you want! You want Suzuking, don't you?"

"Huh? Wait... What?" said Suzuki, her head tilting to the side, confused by what Hareru said.

Hareru looked at her, just as mystified. "Huh? You don't want that either?"

"Umm, I just don't know exactly what you mean... Suzuking is me, isn't it? What do you mean by me wanting myself?"

"No, I meant Suzumushiking. You know, like a bell cricket. I just abbreviated it."

"Could you not go so far off course when you're already off course? You can't draw in customers by putting out variations of suzumushi. I get beetles and dinosaurs, but no matter how hard you try, a suzumushi is never going to be anything more than a suzumushi."

"Oh, but I have that too." For a third time, Hareru rummaged through her bag, then held out a stack of cards with exquisitely illustrated bell crickets on them.

"Are you serious?! Wait, this is amazing!"

Seeing Suzuki yelp in surprise finally put a satisfied grin on Hareru's face. "I actually made these myself, just for you!"

"My entire life has been a lie."

"Don't I know it!"

After that brief tomfoolery, a more serious mood began to grow between them. In general, Hareru Asagiri had a habit of cutting in with nonsensical remarks nobody knew what to do with right at the beginning of

conversations. Suzuki herself struggled with this, but she was sharp enough to realize that Hareru was doing it to de-stress her.

“What were you doing here?” asked Suzuki.

“Prepping for the concert,” answered Hareru. “There’s a boatload of stuff to do.”

“Oh, I see. I wanted to thank you again for agreeing to have the concert at all.”

“Ah ha ha! Suzuking, you were the most stubborn at trying to persuade me, you know.”

“...I’m insistent about what I think, not stubborn. I’m sure all of the other people who work here felt the same way I did.”

“I’m happy to hear that, but I guess, well, that makes it a little embarrassing for me to show my face in front of everyone.”

“Really? Why’s that?”

“I mean, when I said yes to the concert, I explained why I did, right?”

“Ah, I see.” The workday after accepting the concert proposal, Hareru had explained to her colleagues why she’d finally said yes.

“Pretty hard to go out there after saying all that stuff, you know? That’s why I’m in here doing my work all by my lonesome.”

“I’m sure everyone would welcome you warmly.”

“And I wouldn’t be able to stand the heat!”

Suzuki did, in fact, watch warmly over the bashful Hareru. Hareru Asagiri was both the first generation of Live-On and the main pillar of support for the company, which she’d supported with that small body of hers until they’d hit it big in the VTuber industry. Suzuki looked up to her a lot.

But Suzuki had to get back to work soon, so to wrap things up, she tried asking something she’d been helplessly curious about. “...Why Yuki-san, anyway?”

“Ahh... Are you referring to the surprise?”

“Yes.”

“Well... I guess I can tell you, Suzuking. You *are* Shuwacchi’s manager, so I’m sure you’re super curious. But don’t tell her, okay? When I first saw her popularity explode... That was the first time I’d ever felt like I could set down some of the burden I have as Live-On’s first generation.”

“.....”

“It’s like you just said when we were joking around. It turned into a really

good chance for me to reevaluate myself.”

“I see... Thank you for answering.” That was the last thing Suzuki had wanted to ask. She got up to leave and walked to the door.

And then she turned back to Hareru and looked at her. Finally, with a smile, she said the thing she’d wanted to say the most.

“You’ve done an amazing job, Hinata-san.”

“...Thanks.” Hareru looked a little surprised at first, but quickly returned the smile. “I’m still young, but I’m talented. It’ll be easy to move up in the world. And you’ll be in charge of managing Live-On.”

“Right..... In any case, I’ll just be going now.”

After studying each other for what felt like both a moment and an eternity, Suzuki left the room.

A Lesson With Hareru-Senpai

“Sweet! I think we’ve got a good grip on things now.”

“Thank you!”

Right now, I was in a certain recording studio in the capital, getting a little private singing lesson from Hareru-senpai. Suzuki-san had told me the other day that the original song I’d be singing with Hareru-senpai at her solo concert was finally complete. Today was for practicing that really, really important song.

We literally took the entire day so that she could teach me to sing it until my legs literally gave out—though we took regular breaks, of course.
Naturally, just singing wouldn’t be enough. This would be Hareru-senpai’s big moment on stage, and a lot of people would be paying money to come see her. I had to sing in such a way that I brought out one hundred percent of the song’s quality.

Throughout the day, she’d taught me every last little emotion in everything from the harmony parts to the lyrics—or, at least, as much as time allowed. That was why I felt like I now had a proper understanding of the song’s meaning while singing it.

“But I gotta hand it to you, Shuwacchi,” she said. “You’ve got some pipes on you. For real—it’s genius-level talent. I can really feel the reassuring strength in my heart whenever you sing the less poetic lyrics.”

“Well, thank you. I can’t say I’m nearly as good as you on the technical side of singing, though.”

“The most important thing is to make sure your singing hits a person right in the heart. All the technical skills are just supporting that. Oh, but don’t take that to mean I’m admitting defeat! I’m pretty confident in my own singing!”

“I know that. Although I don’t think I lost here either.”

“Heh heh heh. Wouldn’t be fun otherwise!”

I’d only figured it out today, but apparently ever since my karaoke off-collab with Shion-senpai and Sei-sama, Hareru-senpai had seen me as a singing rival, and occasionally she would throw the usual “you won’t beat me at singing” my way.

I mean, she was literally the greatest. Funny, popular, great at singing, and cute!

And, as you could probably tell from how I responded to her comment just now, I’d since found confidence in my own singing. I was sober at the moment, but after learning how it felt to sing so comfortably *with* a StroZero in my hands, I could just about sing the same way *without* being all shuwa-shuwa. Lately, I’d been coming to realize how far a little confidence could go to change all sorts of things.

Still, that certainly didn’t mean Awa was as mentally tough as Shuwa. Get me nervous, and the same shit would happen.

“I have to say, Hareru-senpai, you’re really amazing.”

“Whoa, Shuwacchi coming in with the fastball, here.”

But that only applied to the singing part. During today’s practice, I’d discovered another awesome aspect of my senpai—how good she was at understanding things. The melody for this original song was one incredible earworm, but if I was being honest, the lyrics were a bit on the incomprehensible side. It was hard to explain, but there was a definite weight behind the words. And yet she had deciphered them all within moments, understanding them to such an extent that she could teach me what sort of emotions to sing each part with. Now that I could look at the lyrics and understand the feelings behind them all, it felt like a totally different song to me, compared to when I’d first read them. How long would it have taken me to fully understand the whole thing on my own?

Anyway, I complimented her to that effect, but...

“I mean, yeah, of course I’d understand the words,” she answered. “I

made this.”

...then time stopped for a few seconds.

“Uh... Wait, you... You made what now?”

“The song.”

“You? You made it?”

“Yup. Did the composition, the lyrics, and the arrangement. All me!”

I was so surprised I was speechless. Was she claiming to have made a song of this quality *herself*? Until now, I’d never doubted for a second that some acclaimed composer had written it.

That made sense, though. It had been nagging at me for a while now—why we hadn’t seen the composer anywhere, even though we were practicing their song. The composer had been right in front of me the entire time.

How far beyond the capabilities of normal humans is she gonna go before she’s satisfied?

“Live Start wasn’t specifically for me, so I didn’t work on that one at all,” explained Hareru-senpai. “But since this’ll be the last song in the solo concert, I figured it’d be a good chance to roll up my sleeves and really dig in!”

“I see,” I said. “I have so many questions, but I suppose I’m fine with the answer to all of them being ‘because Hareru-senpai.’ But why me? It’s an important song to you, isn’t it?”

“Yup! And it’s fine! It’ll only mean something if I’m singing it with you, Shuwacchi!”

“Oh.” I don’t really get it, I thought, but if she wants this, I can’t exactly say no. If she weren’t here, I might not have been here either. We’ll make this a concert to remember—that’s how I’ll repay her!

“Anyway, we should probably head out! Shuwacchi... Wait.”

“Yes? What is it?”

“Er. I know it’s been literally all day, but I just realized you’re not shuwa-shuwa right now, so maybe I shouldn’t be calling you Shuwacchi. More like Awacchi?”

“Oh, has that been bothering you? I really don’t mind either name, you know.”

“Okay, gotcha. I’ll call you Awacchi when you’re not drinking! Okay, Awacchi, let’s head home. I’ll drive you.”

“Thank you so much!”

Suddenly, as I was sitting in the passenger's seat on the way home, Hareru-senpai popped a question. "Hey, Awacchi?"

"Yes?"

"Isn't there something you want to ask me?"

"...Why would you think that?"

"It's written all over your face. I'm pretty sharp, you know. I pick up on these things."

Sheesh, I thought. Whenever we talk, it always feels like she can read my thoughts. "...In that case, I did have a question for you."

"Mm-hmm. What is it?"

I'd been hesitating over whether to ask this, but running away at this point would make me look like a coward. I decided to ask her what I'd been wondering about ever since my initial talk with Suzuki-san.

"Why did you say yes to this solo concert?" I asked. "I heard from Suzuki-san that Live-On has been asking you for a long time now."

"Hmm. Yes, yes. I can see why you'd ask that."

"You're not...going to retire after it, are you?" That was the worst-case scenario, something that had come to mind after my talk with Suzuki-san and my two or three brain cells rubbing together. The possibility that maybe she'd said yes to make it her crowning glory and round off her VTuber career had been weighing down my heart this entire time.

"...Ha ha ha ha!!! No, no, no, of course not!!!"

But then Hareru-senpai blew all of my doubts away with that uproarious laughter of hers. The weight fell from my heart and the clouded expression that had kept crossing my face broke into a genuine smile. "R-Right! I'm sorry, that was a weird question to ask."

"Seriously! I'm way too talented not to take this so much further!"

"So much further? You're already the number-one VTuber. But in that case, why *did* you say yes?"

"...Hey, Awacchi, you ever taken an IQ test?"

"An IQ test? I don't think so."

"I see. Well, I have. I got a 160 on it."

I didn't honestly know whether that was high or low, so I just kind of casually said, "Wow," in response.

"Oh, we're here! Good work today!"

“H-Huh?! What about the answer to my question?!”

“That was the answer! Look, I can’t park here forever. People behind me will get mad. Out you go, then!”

After she hurried me out of the car, she legit just left me with a “See you later!” and drove off.

I don’t understand! I don’t understand any of this!

I went inside, then eventually looked up what her IQ meant since I was curious about it. That was when I had another shock.

“...What?!”

Apparently, an IQ of 130 was around the line where people would call you a genius. And 160, which was Hareru-senpai’s IQ, made her a literal genius among geniuses, according to this.

“...Wait, that still doesn’t answer my question!”

Nope. I literally can’t keep up with anything she does or anything she thinks... And I’m too tired to try, so it’s bedtime for me.

Seriously. I can’t even count the number of times she’s surprised me to date...

Chapter 2

Horror Games without Honor or Humanity

The date of the concert was fast approaching, and I'd started to brace for impact. But if I broke my focus, it would lead to mistakes. I'd figured this amount of tension was just the right level to maintain until the concert—when right before it, the perfect project fortunately fell right into my lap!

"Pshhh! It's me—everyone's antidepressant, also known as Shuwa-chan! And it's time to stream! Today, I invited Ehrai-chan to be a guest for this horror game! Woohoo!"

"This zookeeper doesn't want to play a horror game!"

"It's really too bad that you have to, then!"

- : Pshhh!
- : Is this about the bet they made?
- : **This happened sooner than I expected! ¥5000**
- : Wait, but that means the zookeeper picked Shuwa-chan specifically LOL
- : Why on earth would she pick Shuwa-chan? She's like, the polar opposite of horror

There was a bit of a story behind today's horror game collab. It had all started when Ehrai-chan had done a stream called "Seeing if Zookeepers Know Every Fact About Animals." In essence, she would choose ten animal-related questions at random from her chat, and if she couldn't answer them all, she would do one thing as a penalty, decided by a survey.

The whole idea of it was brutal. Who knew what sort of weird questions she was going to get? But as most people had expected, her overwhelming knowledge had gotten her correct answers on the first eight questions in a row. But just as people were starting to get excited that she'd get all ten, the ninth question came flying in.

Q: What is the weight of a Zookeeper Ehrai?

The sender was the greatest tactician in the history of mankind. Because it *was*, in fact, a question about an animal.

Ehrai-chan hadn't shown any clear confusion at the question, but she'd taken around ten minutes to really think about it, then eventually just admitted her defeat.

She had thrown herself into a world of suffering to protect that which she needed to protect. And despite not being able to answer the question, her chat at the time had been a storm of applause at the bold, courageous stand she'd made. A certain clip called "The Zookeeper's Final, Ultimate Sacrifice (For Herself)" was super popular at the moment.

In any case, it set her up to take the penalty, but that was when a bit of trouble came up. The penalty that got the most votes on the survey was to play a horror game—which our resident zookeeper was apparently terrible with. But it wouldn't be a penalty if she liked it. And so she'd begged to at least bring a buddy along, promising to do all the gameplay herself. Her chat, of course, unanimously voted to let her do it.

I mean, considering what's at the source of this problem, it's no wonder things turned out like this.

Anyway, it was I, Shuwa-chan, whom she chose as her honored "buddy"! I'd always talked about how I wanted to do a horror game collab at some point, so I was ready and willing! "Come, now, Ehrai-chan! If you loved me enough to pick me as your buddy, you should have told me earlier lemme smash!"

"I don't need any more penalties on my plate, okay? And I picked you because you were most likely to lighten the horror in horror games~"

"Ah, my heart! Do you mean I'm the pillar propping you up lemme smash?"

"I meant you're one of the biggest jesters in Live-On! And I'm not an easy woman, you know. I wouldn't let you have my body that easily~"

"Well, I'm easy lemme smash."

"All you think about is smashing! You're like some cat in heat!!!"

"Seeking a beautiful woman to match with this kitten who is in heat all year round. Let's drown ourselves in a bathtub of StroZero and do some of

the best StroRole-Play you've ever seen! My number is 000-0000-0000-1919454519194545." Reading 1919 as iku-iku, or come, of course, and 4545 as shiko-shiko, or boner-boner. *Heh heh heh! I'm a genius.*

"What the heck planet is that phone number even from?! Also, don't use StroZero for anything but drinking! Please!"

"If I uploaded a video of me in a tub of StroZero, people would probably flame me for it. Pretty wasteful, after all."

"But you're the one who just said she wanted to do that! This conversation is already getting way too far out of control for me~"

- : The StroZero Girl Who Begged For Sex
- : What do you mean she's the opposite of horror? Her very EXISTENCE is horror!
- : some characters say "ze" at the end of sentences, some say "desu wa," but saying "lemme smash" is so far ahead of its time holy shit
- : Ahead of its time? more like returning to monke
- : I'm surprised the zookeeper is even keeping up with this. Pretty amazing tbh

"Ugh! Whatever. I'm gonna play the game by myself now, okay?"

"Playing with yourself to a game? Just did that yesterday."

"TMI! I don't need to know about your eroge habits. Okay, starting now!"

We'd be playing the free game called *Murasaki Oni* today, so not only was it easy on the wallet, but a horror-game beginner like Ehrai-chan would probably be able to beat it without throwing her controller.

In the game, a bunch of middle school kids get trapped inside an empty mansion on a dare, and they have to escape while avoiding a giant purple monster called Murasaki Oni—meaning “purple demon”—which roams the building.

The horror in the game wasn't psychological as much as it was panic-based, so I wanted to assume, at least, that even Ehrai-chan's fragile psyche would hold up to it.

This game had been pretty popular a while back, so I knew basically how it went. But Ehrai-chan apparently kept her life as far away from horror games as she could, so while she'd seen the titular monster before, this really

would be a blind playthrough.

And so it began. She played as the main character, named Hiroki, in a group of middle school kids as they entered the mansion. Suddenly, they heard a noise, and cocky Hiroki went straight toward it and picked up the Knife item. But when he went back, nobody was around anymore. That was how the prologue ended and the game proper started. The doors of the mansion were all shut now; the main character couldn't get out.

“.....”

But even just watching her play the game told me exactly how little tolerance Ehrai-chan had for the horror genre. She would take a deep breath, then move forward, only to quickly stop and retreat a little, all without saying a word. Then she'd do it again, and again, and again.

And that meant it was my turn to act! I couldn't give her advice or spoilers since I knew the game already, but I could give her the best pep talks I could!

“Oh, right,” I said. “If you get to a scene where you’re not doing much, we can answer Castellas during them. Sound good?”

“I’ve been wanting to answer Castellas for a long time now...”

“Now, now. Horror games are great stuff—really! Just think of it this way. The game’s developer has you at his mercy. He can surprise you all he wants, and you’ll be helpless. Kind of a turn-on, isn’t it lemme smash?”

“It is not a turn-on, and I don’t think that’s how horror games are meant to be enjoyed~ Also, you’re being far too persistent about your propositions~”

“Aww, come on! It’s just one of those things characters add to the end of sentences. Kinda like how you’ve basically been ending every sentence in a tilde! Now we match!”

“Then maybe it’s time for me to stop doing that.”

“Aww, why?”

But even as we bantered, she started getting through the game much more quickly than before. Maybe she was less nervous now. Great—all according to plan!

It was almost time now for the first scene where the Murasaki Oni appears. As soon as she entered the next room, its face flashed onto the screen for just a moment.

“Hyaah?!” she yelped. “I-I just saw something! Near the top! I swear it was there!”

“H-Hey, Ehrai-chan, calm down. That was a lot of sentences without a tilde.”

“But it was there for sure! How am I supposed to help it~”

“Okay, okay. Maybe it really was there.” Though I felt bad for her, another part of me felt a rising desire to tease her—I wanted to see how she’d react to the various horror elements in the game. *It’s the destiny of mortals... The SaGa of all living beings.*

“I just want to go hooome...” she whined.

“Now, now. You’re locked inside, so you’ve gotta look for your friends who disappeared.”

“No, I’m not staying another minute in this dangerous place! I’m getting out of here!”

“You might not want to say that—in the horror world, that’s the chant for a sure-hit insta-death spell (target: cannot choose anyone but yourself).”

But Ehrai-chan knew just as well as I that she had to get on with it at some point, or the stream would never end. She moved Hiroki to the space below a shining item on a desk.

And this was one of the best parts of the game! The moment you pick up the item, the Murasaki Oni shows up out of nowhere and you have to play a life-or-death game of tag until you shake him off!

Also, Ehrai-chan wasn’t allowed to look at her chat for this, and since she was playing blind, predicting it would be impossible.

How is it gonna turn out? wkwk!

And she...takes the item!

“AAaaaAAahahhhh?!?! It’s coming! It’s coming this way?! Stay away from meeeee!!!”

I’m sorry, Ehrai-chan. I almost burst out laughing. Also, is it okay for you to be making noises like I did during Long Fit? I feel like the facade of the “sensible member of the group” she spent so long building up is crumbling away... Maybe I was witness to a historical moment no less important than the destruction of the Berlin Wall.

: XD

: The zookeeper sounds more like an animal than animals do!

: you need a lot of acting talent to have despair come

through in your voice like that
: I don't think she's acting

“You gotta run away!” I said. “Otherwise, the oni is going to do terrible things to you! It’s gonna be one long doujinshi that the author got way too into! And it’ll be a threat to your chastity too!!!”

“Don’t start with your psychological attacks! Whose side are you on, anyway~?!”

Ehrai-chan began to run all over the mansion, controlling the character in an obviously clumsy way, but she chose the wrong path and ended up driven right into a corner.

There was nowhere left to run. The Murasaki Oni was closing in fast, showing no signs of stopping.

That was it. She couldn’t get out of the Game Over. At least, that’s what I thought...

“Haah, haah, haah, haah... Corner *me*, will you?!”

“Huh?”

For some reason, Ehrai-chan turned back to face the purple giant, then charged straight at it. And then...

“I’ll slice you into tiny little pieces with this knife, you bastard! What the hell color blood do you even need to look like a swollen blueberry, anyway?!”

“Huh?!”

“Not like it matters anyway! If it’s red, then once I carve you up, I’ll make strawberry jam out of you! If it’s purple, it’ll be blueberry!!!”

“Huhhh?!!?”

“Die, you bitch!!!!”

With flawless precision, Hiroki and the oni flew at each other as if magnetically attracted, then touched. But the game didn’t let you kill the Murasaki Oni. It didn’t matter whether you had the knife or not—it was Game Over.

“What?! What the hell do you mean, Game Over?! (bang bang bang bang!)”

“.....”

The main issue was whatever the once-zookeeper had just turned into as she repeatedly slammed on her desk in gamer rage, producing a dull bass

drum-like sound as though she were playing heavy metal.



: ?!
: ?!
: ?!
: wat
: whaaaa?????

Neither the chat nor I could conceal how disturbed we were.

“...Wait. Oops,” said Ehrai-chan.

“Huh?”

That moment felt like a storm. I couldn’t say anything but “huh” now, as though a violent tempest had blown away my drunken thoughts—and my actual, normal-brain thoughts along with them.

“Oh, umm... Shuwa-chan-senpaaai? Can you hear me~?”

“Huh?”

“H-Heey! Earth to Shuwa-chan... It’s me, Ehrai the zookeeper, remember~?”

“Huh?”

“.....”

“Huh?”

“O-Oh, okay, I get it now! I just have one question to ask you! Umm, that is... Could I be, well, on the path to becoming a comedian?”

Her voice was clearly tense as she asked the question—but that, at least, was one question that even I could answer, despite the utter chaos swirling around in my brain at the moment.

“Ehrai-chan, welcome to Live-On!”

“NooOoooOOooOOOoo!!!!”

: lmfaoooo
: I did not see this coming
: The late bloomer! Was she the Shuwa-chan of the fourth generation all along?
: wowowow. i thought she was a zookeeper, but she's actually like the gang leader of the animals, like a girl chief
: Def gonna start calling her the Chief now

“I can’t believe this happened... That’s why I didn’t want to play horror games...”

A few minutes after the incident that went past the Berlin Wall coming down and straight to destroying the entire country, Ehrai-chan had finally calmed down, but she was still down about it. *Yeah, I get the feeling, Ehrai-chan. I can perfectly empathize with you there. I feel like I’m looking at myself from back then.*

“Now, now, cheer up,” I said. “Come on, try putting tildes at the end of your sentences again. Come on, try!”

“Shut up, you frickin’ troll!”

“Eek! P-Please give us a break, Boss! Organized violence is all we’re good for here at the office! Without it, what do we have?!”

“I’m not your boss! I’m the zookeeper!!! And I’m not actually that kind of person, got it?! It’s just that I used to be super into movies like that a little while back and I guess a teeny tiny little bit of it got inside my head.”

“Then yer already done fer, Boss. We’re in the business of sellin’ our characters. Do it once, and ya can never go back. Just look at me now, and you’ll understand—when I used to be so proud of bein’ seiso.”

“Quit trying to force that situation just by using the accent! I’m not done—it’s not over yet! I’m still a zookeeper!”

“Naw. It’s all over.”

She racked her brains worrying about it for a while after that, but eventually she seemed to give up and decide it was impossible to ever go back, considering how excited chat was and how the topic was now trending on Cheeper. In the end, she admitted that the way she’d just acted *was* actually closer to the way she really was.

“B-But listen~! I don’t want to throw away my life as a zookeeper either~ That may have been a more genuine me, but the zookeeper is just as much a part of me! So I’ll keep working hard to be your animal-loving Ehrai-chan too~”

“Heck yeah! And I totally get it. I consider Awa to be very precious to me as well.”

“No more regrets! I’m not a weak person! I won’t turn back! Even if it was an accident, I’ll accept it as a part of me and use it to walk on to a brighter future~! Even if some of you have lost all hope in me, I swear the new me will make you turn back around to take a second look!”

“Well said! That’s our Boss for you!”

: uhhh, LOL
: that was so manly! i'm with you!
: I'll follow you forever, Boss!
: Even Shuwa-chan was confused for a little while...
You're so talented!
: So cool...
: Not only has she evolved from a zookeeper into a yakuza boss, she's even made all the zoo patrons into her minions
: at first i was confused. then i realized this was just business as usual at live-on

“Sweet! Let’s continue the horror game, Ehrai-chan!”

“...Umm, I think I’ve been penalized enough, so we should just call it—”

“No can dooo ☆”

“I think I made a huge mistake picking you as my buddy~...”

The game resumed and she started back where she’d gotten the Game Over, when she’d picked up the item and the Murasaki Oni had appeared. But even she didn’t get scared the second time around, and she didn’t yelp or scream. She picked a different escape route, then went into an unlocked room of the mansion. Right before the oni got inside, she hid herself behind a barrel and successfully threw the giant off her trail.

“Phew. Shaking him off just once was exhausting... Isn’t there a way to beat that monster~?”

“Unfortunately, this game has none of the pistols or revolvers you’re hoping for.”

“Really? Well, I guess I figured that much~”

“Wait, did you actually want something like that?”

“Huh? ...Oh.”

“Oh.”

“Oh,” we both said simultaneously.

I wasn’t sure whether we were super on the same page or super not. *For now, let’s just play the game...*

The next cutscene was the one where she met up with the first of her

disappeared friends in that room. The friend's name was Takeo. A weak-spirited boy, he too was hiding behind a barrel and shaking out of his fear toward the Murasaki Oni. He was so terrified he couldn't even speak.

"Oh hey, sup, human vibrator?" I greeted him.

"Come on, quit butting in!"

"Oh hey, sup, vibrator gjinka?"

"Why did you even think I'd have a good way to respond to that~"

"Sometimes people say a man is so handsome that just looking at him will get you pregnant. So if some people's faces can act like penises, why can't there be someone whose whole body is a sex toy?"

"Stop making it sound weirdly cool, please~"

Even as she spoke, she indifferently picked up the items in the room and then left. She didn't know where to go next, so she started taking a stroll around the mansion.

"Could we just read some Castellas no—*goyehhhhhh?!*"

But the Murasaki Oni picks exactly those moments of emptiness to make its appearance.

"Pfft," I blurted out. "I've never heard someone yell *goyehhhhhh* before."

"Stop laughing at me! This purple monster's not the only demon here!"

Her game of tag with the oni began yet again. This time, she chose the room Takeo had been in before as her escape route.

Wait, I thought. I'm pretty sure Takeo is already hiding in the cupboard there...

And then, as expected, she tried to open the cupboard, only to find it tightly shut.

"Hey!!! Open the frickin' door! I know you're in there, you son of a bitch!
(bang bang bang bang!!!)"

"H-Holy crap! Gamer rage in real life! I've never seen that before!!!"

Ehrai-chan was then gobbled up by the Murasaki Oni.

After that, she got several Game Overs, but eventually she seemed to figure the game out and started progressing more quickly. As she came to a pretty difficult puzzle she had to solve, I decided that it was a good time to start answering some Castellas.

"I'll handle reading out the Castellas, so if you have a chance, help me answer them, okay?"

"Roger that~"

“So, here’s the first one! And it’s apparently from the person who submitted the ninth quiz question—the very one that caused you to end up playing a horror game!”

“Oh, have they come to have their finger cut off~?”

“I’m legit terrified.”

**Q: Hello, I’m the one who submitted the ninth question
I actually have a confession to make**

**My intent was to drop my oshi into the abyss so that
she would overcome the cruel world of Live-On and become
stronger as a person**

But I regret that things came to this...

**When I think back, I didn’t know how scary Live-On
could be either**

**And now the zookeeper who always played at the zoo
with the animals is being devoured by a starving beast
inside the Live-On coffin...**

I’m pretty sure this is God’s punishment on me

**I probably won’t be able to handle anything but
ShuwaEhra NTR fanfics anymore**

But I don’t mind

**If that’s the destiny handed to me as one of your
fans, then... *heavy breathing*...**

“Forget cutting off their finger, I think I need to cut off their head~”

“Wait, aren’t I the one really being eaten right now? I’m not just being betrayed by a trusted follower, I’m having a gun shoved in my face!”

“I will dismantle this oppressive establishment, board by board~!”

Q: A: Mind if I drink this StroZero?

**B: Go ahead. By the way, how many cans do you drink in
one day?**

A: Two cartons or so.

B: And how long have you been drinking?

A: About thirty years.

B: I see. Well, you see the Moontory company building

over there?

A: Yes.

B: If you didn't drink StroZero, you could have easily bought it.

A: I own the company.

^ My vision for Shuwa-chan's future

“You drink for leisure, I drink to take control of the booze company. We are not the same.”

“Cartons of alcohol...? Anyway, I get the feeling you’re going to get bigger and bigger in the future, Shuwa-chan-senpai.”

“Huh? For real? Why’s that?”

“Because you have the ability to move people~”

“Wait, you mean I was a hypnotist psychic all along? I had no idea... I need to go to a girls’ high school right now. Gotta use my powers to hypnotize their skirts into losing five centimeters around the waist.”

“At this point, you could have a dirty old man for a model and it would still fit perfectly~”

: I doubt the bro who submitted the 9th question expected the boss to crawl out of the abyss he pushed her into

: Was it this Clean Ehrai (Zookeeper) you dropped? Or was it this Dirty Ehrai (Boss)?

: ^ That guy definitely chose wrong and died. Rest in peace

: love those uniforms, they're basically a staple gag element of hypnosis eroge

: Wouldn't those girls catch a cold? (childish reaction)

Q: Let's all bring back prohibition to prevent Shuwa-chan from drinking too much~

“Sorry, Ehrai-chan. I have to go become the world’s ultimate life-form. There’s a world I need to protect.”

“The fact that you’re silly enough to try and become the world’s strongest

life-form instead of, like, the president or prime minister is rather endearing~”

Q: ¥ooooooooo!!!/

YOU LOSE

Energy Drink wins!

Go home and be a family man

Maybe then you too could have an IQ in the high 130s

Anyway, I'm having this (Fanta)

“Nothing about that comment is consistent at all!” cried Ehrai-chan.

“Maybe they made it look like they were drinking the energy drink that won, only to drink the completely unrelated Fanta, thus implying that winning and losing isn't everything?”

“...That could actually be the case~”

“No, it couldn't!”

: Conversation-skill-wise, she's already at the top of the world

: shuwa-chan is so adorably dumb

: It could also be a psychological attack, like Energy Drink was way too strong, Fanta is more than enough to handle you

: no it couldn't (merciless)

: Stop putting your palm on the hot sandwich press

“Hey, I solved the puzzle~!”

“Oh, perfect timing. Let's set the Castellas aside and focus back on the game!”

The game was entering its middle phase, and if possible, I wanted her to finish the whole game before today's stream was over.

“Hey, Ehrai-chan, anything you've been particularly into lately?”

“Particularly into? Let me think... It's not really ‘lately,’ but I've always liked watching videos of animals. You know, AVs (animal videos).”

“Oh, well, you know I love AVs (adult videos) too. You say ‘always,’ but how long is that, exactly?”

“Hmm... It was so long ago I can’t remember. I’ve been really into them ever since before grade school, though~”

“W-Wow. Talk about an early bloomer.”

“Wait, was it really that early? Isn’t that normal for kids~?”

“Huh?” I couldn’t believe it. Even I’d only been into flowers, educational programs, and anime meant for children before entering grade school. *Maybe sex ed has really ramped up more than I thought.*

“But that’s only because I don’t remember it. I watched them before that, actually~ I’m seriously addicted, so maybe I saw one the moment I was born! Ha ha. Wouldn’t that be funny?”

“The moment you were born?! You saw an AV the moment you were born?!”

“I was only joking~ That wouldn’t make any logical sense~”

“Right, right! Phew. Okay.”

“Why are you so surprised—oh, I see what’s happening~”

“Huh? What’s happening?”

“Nothing you need to worry about~”

: lmfao the epic misunderstanding

: Shuwa-chan definitely has the wrong idea hahaha holy shit

: The boss even SAID videos of animals, so how is this even happening?

: If someone showed me an adult video at the moment of birth, I'd be traumatized. I'd want to rebel

: but this is bad if they keep misunderstanding, isn't it?

: Nah, can't ya tell Boss has noticed it, stinky?

: yeah seems like it

“Umm, so, what sort of genres of AV have you been watching lately?” I asked.

“I just saw a very moving video about an elephant~”

Ahh, I see, I thought. The elephant—she means the male stand-in, the faceless dick character. Oh, that’s such a shy way to go about saying that! She’s so cute. Still, she was moved? By an AV? Did it have a story with it?

“I was so moved that I couldn’t stop crying~”

“I’m sure the elephant in the AV was crying along with you, but his tears were white.”

“Huh? What do you mean~?”

“Oh, wait, you didn’t get that? Ah, to be young and innocent.”

“Er, whatever. Anyway, the elephant was amazing! In the video, it could use the end of its nose to grab objects and draw pictures~!”

“Wait, are you serious? Is that even possible? Like physically, with how the tip is shaped? Maybe if you trained really hard...”

“And they can even swim too~”

“They can?! Wait. Is it like, they keep compressing and expanding to swim backward?!”

“And they don’t care at all when people get on top of them either~”

“Oh, I can understand that. Cowgirl-style, right?”

“That’s exactly right~”

: BOSS THIS ISN'T FAIR XDDDD
: hahah she's totally playing with her!!!
: That's exactly wrong on all counts~
: Imagining it shriveling and hardening over and over again to swim made me literally spit out my tea
: Did she seriously think Boss was talking about swimming with your nose (pole)? LMAO
: You've discovered a new swimming technique. What will you name it?
: Butterfly already exists, so just go with Rhinoceros Beetle
: loooool

After a little while more of our mismatched conversation, I finally looked at chat and realized what had just been happening. “Ehrai-chan, you can be pretty mean sometimes.”

“Look, I said ‘animal video’ right upfront~! The way you misunderstood me was really weird!”

“Aw, be quiet! AVs will always be adult videos to me! The one and only!”

“Oh, look, I found a new survivor~”

“Don’t ignore me!” *Mgh. Well, nagging all day won’t get me anywhere*, I thought. *Time to get back to the gameplay.*

Ehrai-chan had found another of the friends who’d come to the mansion, named Mikan. She was the prettiest one in the game. When Ehrai-chan talked to her, Mikan said that she had run from the Murasaki Oni and stayed in this room the whole time, afraid.

And then you got two choices:

1. Work together to escape
2. Leave her here

“What’s it gonna be, Ehrai-chan?”

“I don’t even have to think twice~! She’s my friend, so we’re both going to go home alive~!”

Ehrai-chan picked option 1 without blinking. That’s our Boss for you! What a compassionate person!

And upon hearing those words, Mikan-chan said...

“Excuse me?! We can’t just go walking around with that monster out there! Are you stupid or something? Ugh. I want to see Takumi again...”

.....

“I see. Yes, I see.”

“B-Boss?”

“Your name’s Mikan, yeah? Well then I’m gonna take this knife, you see, and skin you just like I would the fruit. Get ready!”

“So long, Mikan-chan. You probably would have been happier caught by the oni...”

We had to be close to the game’s ending by now. Time to put in one last spurt of effort!

Now, the next barrier in Ehrai-chan’s way was a subtype of the Murasaki Oni that would reach you in the blink of an eye—but only if you ran in a straight line. The monster looked like a big flat plank, which totally ran counter to the rest of the game’s mood, but never mind that!

“Shuwa-chan-senpai, what’s this thing called~? It looks like one of those things kids use in the pool if they can’t swim.”

“A kickboard?”

“Yes! That~”

“We could just call it Kickboarda-chan, right? Like Melonpanna-chan.”

“You can't just add an ‘a’ onto any random noun to make it a girl's name~! And the Anpanman universe doesn't need any monsters like this!”

“Personally, my oshi is Baikintaman.”

“Who the heck even is that~? Adding that ‘ta’ in the middle just turns him into testicles!”

“My new ‘pole’! Ahn-ahn-man! Ahn-ahn! My man is going ahn-ahn and becoming Ahn-ahn-man!”

“You need professional medical help...”

- : She needs professional help! (but it's too late)
- : i can't handle ahn(ko) as in moaning/bean paste and man(ko) as in man/pussy in the same sentence i'm sorry i think i'm gonna be sick
- : Four-pussy I mean four-panel manga is my oshi
- : I love the part when the smooth Koshian-man "fights" the coarse Tsubuan-man
- : i almost cried when they gattai'd at the end to form the jiggly Youkan-man
- : what are you two FUCKING talking about...?
- : Judging by how crazy this chat is, I'd say it's true how chat always takes after the streamer
- : hey, Boss is dodging that thing pretty well

As the last comment remarked, in the game screen behind us, the Ehrai-chan-controlled Hiroki skillfully kept himself out of the direct path of the enemy, dodging its attacks.

This was the very, very end of the game now. And through it all, our Boss faced countless trials, escaped the jaws of death itself, and grew stronger—and she did it with panache.

It wasn't a perfect final escape, but it was well-done. She dodged properly and managed to get out.

“Awesome job, Ehrai-chan! You're right at the exit!”

“Really~?! A-At last, this hell will end... I think I'm going to cry~”

“This is no time for crying! Look, the Murasaki Oni is here! Run away!”

A Murasaki Oni stubbornly attacks you at the very end, but it was just a regular one this time. It didn't stand a chance against Ehrai-chan.

Full of confidence and composure, fully believing this to be in the palm of her hand, Ehrai-chan began to flee.

But you see, Ehrai-chan, the Murasaki Oni at the end... There's actually two of them.

“Ahhhhhhh?!”

Her scream was just incredibly weird-sounding, pathetic, and monkey-like.

Takumi, her once-friend, had just appeared in front of her to block her escape.

Being able to reunite with him at the end of it all was a wonderful thing. That is, if he hadn't transformed into a terrible Murasaki Oni himself, anyway.

The pincer attack caught Ehrai-chan perfectly, and Hiroki died.

- : Her voice lolololol
- : Where did that sound even come from?
- : That sounded just like a siamang's cry
- : She sure has a lot of variety in her screams

“Whoever the *hell* just called me a siamang, Keiji-kun, I want to see you in my office, stat!”

“At least call it a zoo instead of an office. Also, nobody gave you that name.”

After that, she seemed to have a hard time dealing with two Murasaki Onis at once, and she started to get Game Over after Game Over.

She screamed in an approximation of English, “<Fakk you! Fakk you fakk you!> (bang bang bang!)”

“C-Calm down, Boss! You're too old for this—you'll hurt yourself!”

“Who the *hell* just called me old?”

“Keiji-kun.”

- : OY
- : I've never seen such a clean blame shift in my life!
- : Kaiji-kun, I'll never forget how heroic you looked

- : you might want to try remembering his actual name first
- : Designated Criminal Organization for the Protection of Animals, Team Eirai

Hiroki's life was as a candle in the wind. The bad guys were serious now—it was the end of the game, after all.

But the moment was upon us suddenly.

Once again caught in the pincer, Ehrai-chan slipped by both Murasaki Onis by a hair's breadth.

And then she continued running through the maze, finally located an exit, burst out of it, and never looked back, leaving the mansion behind her.

She'd just won the game—and that was the end of her penalty.

“I-Is it over...?” she murmured.

“Congratulations, Ehrai-chan. Now it's over for real.”

“Oh, good... That took forever...”

- : 8888
- : ¥ 50000
- : You really showed 'em what for! You looked cool, Boss!
- : Grats!
- : talk about a densely packed span of time

“In any case, Ehrai-chan...”

“Yes? What's the matter~?”

“Good luck in the future ☆”

“Aa,” she croaked out, remembering how she'd never shown even a glimmer of this “boss” side of her until this stream.

And so, the stream ended in the same way it had progressed—with Ehrai-chan screaming.

The Struggle for Awayuki Kokorone

One afternoon, while I was taking a break from planning out my streams, I was scrolling around on my Cheeper time line. I'd been so busy lately with my concert practice on top of my normal streams that I really missed less

busy times like this. There were a boatload of cheeps from Live-On members that I hadn't seen yet. While I was a member of the same company, I was also a fan—looking at their cheeps was a lot of fun.

As I was lying down and scrolling down my phone screen with glassy eyes, I realized I'd just passed over the name "Awayuki" and stopped. "Huh? They're talking about me?" There were two cheeps—and they belonged to Alice-chan.

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

I stipulate that the most compatible Live-On member for Awayuki-dono is none other than myself!

The reason being that I have love!

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

I would be able to do anything Awayuki-dono asked of me.

For her, I'd take all the tiny bones out of a fish just to get headpats. I'd lick her zori and warm them up to get a kiss from her! I'd massage her whole body and wash her in the bath in order to have sex with her!

Without meaning to, I started saying comments aloud as if I were on stream. "At first you think she's really trying to show off her contributions, but then she asks for payment every time... Also, I wouldn't want to kiss *anyone* who licked zori... And I think that last part is basically just what Alice-chan wants to do, isn't it?"

I would have just put the phone down and said, "That's just Alice-chan being Alice-chan," but then I noticed one of the other members had replied to her cheeps.

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

Ha

That was...Mashiron? The cheep was literally two letters, so at first I didn't know what she was even getting at. Alice-chan, though, seemed to sense something, so she then replied to that reply.

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

You have guts to waltz up to me like this, my rival in love! Today is the day I finally reclaim Awayuki-dono!

“You never owned me in the first place!”

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

Of all the desirous, lecherous, greedy things to cheep. Awa-chan is probably cringing as she reads all that

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

Silence, you thieving cat! Those were just my fantasies! I'd gladly let her call me a shitter and tell me to piss off if she wanted!

In fact I'd consider it a reward! Please, abuse me more!

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

You're a shitter, piss off

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

I didn't want YOU to say it, Mashiro-dono!!! It's only a reward if it comes from Awayuki-dono. I am not going to be a horrible masochist for just anyone!

[Nekoma Hirune@Live-On]

I think I just heard someone call for a shitter cat

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

You'd come if we called you that? Wow. also we didn't call you at all

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

I have a good idea. Nekoma-senpai, are you interested

in helping me compile a clip compilation of all the times Awayuki-dono has ever sneezed?

[Nekoma Hirune@Live-On]

Nya nya! That sounds like one shitty kusoge! Count me in!

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

Huh? Did you just say kusoge? Did you just call making a clip video of Awayuki-dono a KUSOGE?

You didn't, right? You'd never call the world's godliest game KUSO, right Nekoma? Right? Right? Right?
???????????????????

[Nekoma Hirune@Live-On]

Awayuki-chan is literally a god and I will not be hearing arguments at this time

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

I knew you'd agree, Nekoma-dono!

[Nekoma Hirune@Live-On]

Nya nya! That was a close one. I almost ran away from playing the kusoge of the century

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

Dumbass

I couldn't help but crack a pained grin at seeing the two girls plus the stray cat engaged in the strangest battle I'd ever seen over someone who hadn't even been present for it. "This is a social media platform, not a pro wrestling ring, girls..."

Huh...? Wow, I thought it was definitely over, but it just keeps going... It looks like Alice-chan is going on the attack this time too.

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

No, you're the one being rude to Awayuki-dono,
Mashiro-dono!

If Awayuki-dono says yes, you say yes! If she says no, you say no! If she says have sex with me, you say (happily) oh Awayuki-dono, you're always like that...!

Is that not the utmost standard of morality?!

"That isn't how it works!" If that's what she thinks morals are, then she needs to go back to elementary school.

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

It's not always best for a person to indulge them in everything, you know

Sometimes I treat Awa-chan coldly if it's for her own good

It's because we have such a strong bond as best friends, genmates, and mother and daughter

How do you casually say the most embarrassing stuff, Mashiroooooon?!?!

I'd noticed this phenomenon before—how Mashiron came off as a cool cat, but then said the most embarrassing stuff you could think of! It was so bad for my heart!

A strong bond, she says... Hnnngggggghhh!!!!

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

GAAAAAHHHH!!! I hate how you act like you've already won!

And I hate myself for not being her genmate...

But like I said right at the start, my love is stronger than yours! Love can overcome anything! I'm clearly the only choice for Awayuki-dono's FWB!

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

Go right ahead with that

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

Wait I messed up, I meant, I'm clearly the only choice for Awayuki-dono to use as fap material!

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

Go right ahead with that

Okay, now they're just fooling around.

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

Alice-chan, if you want to be Awa-chan's number one that badly, why not just have her decide?

Wh-What? I'm not sure I like the direction this is going?

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

...Elaborate.

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

At some point, we should stream together with Awa-chan, and we should compete in various things to decide who's best for her

Her word's final, and you did say before about how if she says yes, you say yes, didn't you?

[Alice Soma@Live-On. Awayuki-dono is my oshi]

Ah, I see! For a hostile, that's quite the master plan!

I shall accept this challenge!

And the one to be chosen as Awayuki-dono's lawful wife will be me!

[Mashiro Irodori@Live-On]

Right, right, okay, then we'll settle this later

I don't know where your confidence is coming from, but I'll snap it like a twig

“Hmm hmm hmm...” I laughed softly, my gaze turning up toward the ceiling after seeing their banter to the end—they really seemed to be getting along.

Hey, everyone. Sometimes a person gets roped into a collab without even being told. That's just what happens in Live-On.

A few days later...

“Hello and kon-mashiro, everyone. This is Mashiron, also known as Mashiro Irodori.”

“Ma’am! Alice Soma, reporting for duty!”

“.....”

“What’s the matter, Awa-chan? Hurry and introduce yourself,” Mashiron said.

“May I go home?”

“You may not!” insisted Alice-chan. “You’re the highlight today. Without you here, we wouldn’t have a stream!”

“I see... Yes, it seems a nice, light snow has begun to fall tonight. I’m Awayuki Kokorone.”

And so, as if this were all completely normal, our collab stream began. *Well, to tell the truth, I did get an invitation from them after they cheeped about it, and I did agree to this whole thing. I suppose I’m not against it. Let’s go with that. And I’m really very grateful to them for providing the idea for a good stream. But... How do I put it? It’s like I don’t know how excited or energetic to be for this collab...*

“Anyway, I’m sure those who have seen the Cheeper thread between me and Alice-chan can see where this is going. Basically, the two of us are going to fight over who is most suitable for Awa-chan.”

“And so begins a battle I must not lose... Today is the day I shatter the greatest obstacle in my way of proposing to Awayuki-dono!”

“Yes, that’s what’s apparently happening...” I muttered.

“Oh, what? What’s the matter, Awayuki-dono? You don’t seem like your normal self today—oh! I understand!”

“Finally, Alice-chan understands!”

“As today’s leading role, you want a big sash with letters on it! I’ll go get one right now!”

“No I don’t need it I don’t need it I really really don’t need it!” *Ugh, it’s*

really starting...

“What’s wrong, Awa-chan? You could be a little happier. You’ve got two super cute girls waiting on you hand and foot,” Mashiron said.

“Please don’t put it like that. It makes me feel bad. And, well, am I even in the right position here? I mean, I’m not good enough for someone to seek me out like this. It feels like one big misunderstanding.”

“You’re right. You always did belong to me, anyway.”

“Awayuki-dono, you are more than good enough! You are the greatest in the world!”

“No, I can smell it already. Alice-chan aside, you just want to play the idiot role for a while, Mashiron. I kind of figure you’re trying to use the situation to watch me get embarrassed. Because you never say that kind of stuff, Mashiron! And I can hear the smirk in your voice!”

“Oh, come on, Awa-chan. I want to prove to this *whelp* that I’m the most compatible with you, and also tease you and embarrass you and get you back for those moves Shuwa-chan always pulls on me. That’s all.”

“That’s all?! You *did* have ulterior motives! You need a better hobby. Do you find it fun, making your genmate into a laughingstock?! I bet you only said all that stuff about us having a strong bond because you wanted to bully me!”

“Huh? No, that one was me being serious.”

“Huh?”

“Oh?”

“.....” we both said.

“Respectfully, don’t leave me out of this ten-cent romantic comedy, you assholes!!!” Alice-chan yelled.

: Awa-chan is now officially the protag in her own harem rom-com

: ugh i'm so jealous. maybe i could make a harem if i drank strozero in the workplace and went crazy too.

: Wouldn't that be a reverse harem? And by "reverse" I mean you'd literally have nobody around

: awamashi teetee!

: I love this new possessive side of Mashiron

: Just make sure you understand that Mashiron is filled

with love for Awayuki-chan at any given moment
: She comes off as a tsundere, but doesn't bother to hide it
: Why are they fighting over something like this?
: If they said the new StroZero flavor would only have a single can printed, there'd be a war over it. Same thing as that
: That analogy almost just barely makes zero sense please stop
: wouldn't a threesome just solve everything???
: Ah, you're one of those pacifists drowning in desire
: That sounds so cool
: Ah, you're one of Sei-sama's clan
: That sounds so not cool at all like whatsoever
: Ah, you're a yuri-lover (in a sexual sense)
: That sounds so cool
: wwwwWWWW

“A-Ahem!” I cleared my throat. “Anyway, right, so I’m not quite, like, into this.”

“Shouldn’t you have just tossed back some StroZero and turned into Shuwa-chan instead?” asked Mashiron.

“I held myself back because I knew I’d need to be the straight man to your complete idiocy!”

“Awayuki-dono, you mean you were being that thoughtful of me?”

“Whoa...” I muttered. “I think I just realized why people call it a ‘crush’... Her feelings are crushing me real good...”

: Awa-chan immediately cringing from Alice-dono lmao
: you did real good, awa-chan!
: do your best, lemonade-san!
: lmfaooo calling Awa-chan lemonade
: Well, she IS the non-alcoholic version...
: lemonade was never made to be alcoholic to begin with??? what?????

“Argh... This isn’t what my character is supposed to be. Other people aren’t supposed to be after me—I’m supposed to be going after other people! I’m supposed to be getting all shuwa-shuwa in the corner and dying from playing the idiot!”

“Seeing you embarrassed and confused from being in an unfamiliar situation is way too adorable, Awayuki-dono. I am now removing my panties.”

“Could I ask you to not Shuwafap on stream?”

“This would be Awafapping.”

“That’s not the issue here!!!”

“All I did was decide to learn from my all-time favorite person and conduct myself in a way true to myself whenever I see something wonderful.”

“That’s amazing! And you’re using that reasonable-sounding logic to take off your panties! Who the hell changed you into this?!”

“It was you, Awa-chan.”

“I am so, so, so sorry!!!”

I can’t! I have no idea how I’m supposed to be acting! I’ve been streaming for a while now, but I’ve never had a stream like this!

Okay, calm down... Calm down... Alice-chan’s love is way too heavy for me, and Mashiron is going in for the kill in a whole bunch of different ways. I have to take them both on at once. I won’t be able to hold out if it keeps on going like this...

I sighed. “Anyway, you two are trying to fight over me in this stream, right? I have literally no idea how I’m supposed to be telling who wins or loses.”

“Well, you see... Neither do I,” Mashiron said.

“Huh...?”

“I also have no idea, ma’am!”

“Haven’t either of you ever heard of how important it is to have a plan before doing something? Things aren’t always going to go well if you simply do everything unplanned.”

“About that incident, Awa-chan...”

“Yeah, She Who Forgot to Turn Off Her Stream.”

“Wow! I guess I should rename myself Boomerangman.”

: I've never seen Awa-chan this overwhelmed, I'm so glad I came

: what is this an FC2 livechat stream?

: what is this a CF livechat stream?

: CF? wouldn't that just be a racer doing big punches and introducing lunches?

: They'd probably be someone who shouts FALCON FINISH whenever they climax

: Boomerangman sounds like a Showa-era hero.

: Is it true the long white thing stuck to Awayuki-chan's hair is a boomerang?

: She just looks way too cute on the outside to be a 'Boomerangman'

: What about on the inside, then?

: a boomerang

: Guess we can't even call her a gjinka at this point

“Anyway, there’s no way I’m losing to this upstart, no matter what.”

“Why, youuuu! If you’re going to provoke me, then we’ll let chat decide! Everyone in chat, please give us quiz questions about Awayuki-dono!”

“These streams are supported by viewers like you,” said Mashiron. “As always, thank you.”

I couldn’t help but hang my head at the development.

: No, thank you!

: mashiron is so cute when she's boasting

: They're probably still new to the whole "having kouhais" thing, she's probably so happy she's a senpai

: mashiron maji suki ron!

: she acts so cool and calm, but she's actually just cute

: Where does Awa-chan wash first when she's bathing?

“Oh! Yes, that comment! Our first duel will be over Awayuki-dono’s bathing situation! This should be easy as long as you have love for her!”

“Okay. I’m fine with this one.”

I calmly stopped them before the flow carried me away. “Hold it right there.”

“Hm? What’s the matter, Awa-chan?”

“If this is going to be in quiz format, you’ll naturally need an answer, right?”

“Well, I don’t know if chat’s gonna be satisfied if there’s no right answer to a question, so I suppose, well, yeah, you need one,” Mashiron concluded.

“Why should I have to expose my bathing situation in front of the masses like this?!?”

“You could just tell me and nobody else if you wanted,” suggested Alice-chan.

“Really? I mean, I smell danger in letting you know, but in that case, we’ll do that—”

“Wait. Wait, Awa-chan.”

“Yes?”

“I’m not sure if you’ve ever heard of it, but there’s this thing where keeping something hidden only makes it lewder. By purposely hiding the answer, people will start fantasizing about it being something really lewd that you weren’t allowed to say on stream!”

“Wh-What!?”

“So I’m pretty sure you should just answer normally in this situation, Awa-chan. Unless...it really *is* something lewd...?”

“Uh... Okay, okay! I’ll answer! Are you happy now?! If the alternative is having people blatantly misunderstand me, I’ll answer!”

“Hooray!” cheered Alice-chan.

: GJ MASHIRON

: I expected no less from the woman whose flame of life burns brightest for borderline sexy illustrations!

: When she gets into this mischievous devil mode, she's DEVASTATING

: She's cold to Shuwa-chan, but so attached to Awa-chan, I love it

: I'd never say it to her, but I'm so curious it could kill me

: Then I'LL say it to her! I'm curious!

: yes!!! we get to hear about strozero's quality control process!!!!

: fuck yeah bruh!

: now that we're all excited for it, awa-chan feels obligated to do it... what a responsible girl T~T

: just coming to the realization makes her a genius!

...Yep, just gonna ignore chat.

“Anyway,” said Mashiron, “I know everything about Awa-chan, so why don’t you go ahead and answer first, Alice-chan?”

“Even considering the possibility that you really do know everything terrifies me,” I remarked.

“I don’t know *everything*. I just know about you.”

“Was that supposed to make my heart skip a beat?”

“How dare you try and seduce Awayuki-dono, you lascivious woman! Well, it’s time to watch your confidence come crashing down around you! As someone with dozens of hidden cameras placed all over Awayuki-dono’s home, there is no way I can lose this battle!”

“Okay, hold it, stop!”

“Ma’am! Temporarily ceasing all biological operations!”

“Awa-chan, can’t you at least let Alice-chan breathe? I’ll apologize with you, okay? I don’t want you to take a girl’s whole life away like this.”

“Why are you two making me out to be some crazy power-abusing bad guy?! I never told anyone to stop breathing!” The combination of these two was really tossing me around like a stormy ocean, but I stubbornly persisted in correcting our course. Alice-chan had just said something I couldn’t ignore. “Alice-chan, you have hidden cameras in my home?”

“Three hundred sixty of them, ma’am!”

“Well, that’s nuts. I might as well just have glass walls everywhere!”

“All of them are set up in the bathroom, ma’am!”

“Spread them out more! That’s just crazy, you know! How much do you want to see me naked?! When you set up hidden cameras, you’re supposed to spread them out—that way you can get all sorts of other scenes *and* they become easier to miss!”

“Why are you giving her advice on how to set up hidden cameras, Awa-chan? Are you into that sort of thing?”

“No! It’s just that as a Live-On streamer I am forced to make witty retorts to this idiot’s insane level of camera-planting! It’s like she has one in every single tile in the bathroom!”

“Wow, you prioritized making witty retorts over your own safety, huh? Guess that’s our occupational disorder, huh?”

: lmfaoooooo
: Oh, I get it, that's one of those 360-degree cameras coming out recently, yeah?
: She is so so so dumb and I love her so much
: I'm just surprised she set up that many and they were never spotted, it's insane
: insane(ly seiso)
: It's past glass walls at that point, it's like a reverse magic mirror
: reverse magic mirror lmaooooo

“Anyway, I’m joking, of course!” Alice-chan said.

“Well, of course you are. I wouldn’t have known what to do otherwise. You shouldn’t even know where I live.”

“The number-one rule of a fan is not to make trouble for their oshi!”

“That’s a good mindset,” put in Mashiron. “Still, I’ve played plenty of pranks on Awa-chan before. Not only that, I’ve settled into her best-friend spot and we flirt with each other every day.”

“Be right back, buying those cameras.”

“Who the hell would put three hundred and sixty cameras in someone’s house as a prank?! Mashiron, stop inciting her! When she gets serious, there’s no telling what she could do!”

“Gomenasorry.”

Ugh, I’m already exhausted, I thought. I need some booze. I need to drink and blow this all away...

“Okay! Here’s my answer!” said Alice-chan. “Time to prove I’m the one who knows Awayuki-dono the best! The first place she washes when she bathes...is her legs!”

“Oh, huh. You heard her, Awa-chan. Is she right?”

“Um... No, that’s wrong.”

“Be right back, gonna go die.”

“Don’t die now. The world is going to think I’m the one who caused the death.”

“Now, now, Alice-chan, these things happen.”

: She doesn't even have legs to begin with

: why, because she's a lemon? no, wait, because she's numbers?

: Uh, are you saying she's a can of StroZero?

“I-It’s not over yet!” cried Alice-chan. “This battle hasn’t been decided! Mashiro-dono, your turn! And if you’re wrong, it’s a draw!”

“Okay, okay. The answer is her head.”

“Oh, that’s right!” I replied. “That was really good, Mashiron!”

“Be right back, gonna go die.”

“Insert what Awa-chan just said to respond to that a second ago.”

I can’t believe Mashiron so easily got it right on the first try!

...Wait a minute. Doesn’t that just make it scarier?

“Mashiron... Wait, you don’t have hidden cameras up, do you?!”

“No! We took a bath together when we had that sleepover, remember?”

“Oh, right... Wait, but that means you were staring at me washing myself that whole time! You pervert!”

“Why wouldn’t I look at something so attractive?”

“Fungyaaahhhhhh?! I-I-I-I won’t let you sweet-talk your way o-o-out of this—”

“Wow, it’s really working.”

“Awayuki-dono! I’m even *more* of a pervert than she is!”

“Stop competing over it!”

: mashiron's power level is through the roof holy shit

: I love how Alice-chan comes up with lines that are just slightly off point every single time lol

: Even her reason for joining Live-On is literally crazy

: So she washes her head first... Eureka!

: Eureka what?!

: that sleepover stream was some good shit

“Actually, that wasn’t very fair, Mashiro-dono! You already knew the correct answer! I call foul play!”

“You were the one who wanted to ask about her bathing rituals. It just happened to be something I’m an expert in.”

“Mgrgrgrgr... What are your thoughts, Awayuki-dono?”

“What, me? Hmm... I think it’s probably more fair to ask something neither of you know.”

“I knew you’d agree, Awayuki-dono. Let us think of a new question!”

“Fine, I guess...” muttered Mashiron.

Thankfully, chat started writing in more questions for us. I focused on them, trying to find the perfect fit, but the first one to read a question aloud was Mashiron.

: What's troubling Awa-chan right now

Apparently, this one suited her well. “Only someone who could support Awa-chan when she’s suffering could be considered a *true* partner for her,” she said.

“Ah!” replied Alice-chan. “You manage to say some good things every once in a while, Mashiro-dono!”

“You cheeky little kouhai. You want me to make an awful, gross doujinshi about you?”

“Sure, as long as I’m paired up with Awayuki-dono in it!”

“There’s just no rattling you.”

As they went about their friendly banter, I considered what sort of troubles were on my mind at the moment. *What’s troubling me... Hmm...*

...*Oh.* Suddenly, I thought of something. *Yes, this should work.*

“So, Awa-chan? Is it a good question?”

“Yes!” I replied. “I’m just full of troubles right now! And neither of you know about any of them!”

“Ah!” went Alice-chan. “To have troubles unbeknownst to someone like me, who has created a list of every single one of her on-stream remarks—I see you value a constant sense of curiosity!”

“Really?” asked Mashiron. “We talk off stream a lot. But I don’t know it?”

“Yep. It’ll be perfect. Bring on the guesses!”

“Huh,” the other two murmured, confused at my confidence, sinking into thought.

Maybe it's weird to be boastful about there being something troubling me, I thought. Still, coming up with this idea was making me swell up with pride.

“Hmm... What could it be?” mused Mashiron. “Maybe it’s about how Shuwa-chan told me how happy she is reading comments that call her cute. Do you wish you could be called cute more often?”

“U-Umm, no, aha ha ha! That’s not it, aha ha ha ha...”

“Oh, wait, it’s about your search for a cute plate to display a dish you made to your viewers and have them compliment you on it! Er, hold up. You did say I wouldn’t know, but you told me about this one. That can’t be it. Sorry, sorry.”

“You’re doing this on purpose! What are you doing, telling everyone all that embarrassing stuff?!”

- : That's the cutest fucking thing I've ever seen
- : Both Awa-chan and Shuwa-chan are cute! duh!
- : Mashiron is the savior for everyone who considers Awayuki their oshi
- : shuwa-chan is so gosh dang cute!
- : I can't wait for the picture of your cooking

Look, you made chat act weird! I thought. And it's chat's fault too for being so into this weird vibe! Ugh... My face feels so hot right now...

“Anyway!” I exclaimed. “Alice-chan is up next! What do you think is bothering me right now?”

“This is a pretty hard question... Could it be how StroZero doesn’t come out of faucets?”

“That’s where you’re wrong, Alice-chan,” said Mashiron. “She already has a StroZero hookup at home.”

“I apologize for underestimating you!”

“No, I don’t,” I stated. “Besides, the best part of StroZero is pressing your lips to that shiny can like a kiss. It would be too different.”

“That was a really weird denial,” commented Mashiron.

“Please accept my humblest apologies,” said Alice-chan. “I

underestimated your love for StroZero.”

And now I'm slipping up and saying weird shit! Now I'm even more embarrassed! “I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm back to my senses now, please do your best to forget what I just said!”

“Hmm... Still, I'm really having trouble with this one, I'm ashamed to say,” remarked Mashiron.

“I'm not sure what it is either... Awayuki-dono, what could be troubling you so?”

“Okay, time to compare answers! The main thing troubling me right now is...” I paused to take a deep breath, close my eyes, and reflect on the feeling. Then I said, “How I wish the two of you wouldn't fight like this.”

“A-Awayuki-dono...”

“Awa-chan...”

“You deserve better than me, so don't fight over me. I just want to see the two of you smiling.”

I'd done it! That was perfect! Every fiber of my being had gone into that strike, and now the flow was mine. It had to have been super effective. Now this incomprehensible conflict would end, and the three of us could spend the rest of the stream peacefully and have lots of fun.

Ahh, I'm terrifying! Terrifyingly adaptable to sudden situations! I almost pity them!

“I don't want to, because you're mine, Awa-chan.”

“Awayuki-dono, there are times in a person's life when they must fight. This is one of those times.”

Ahh, it's terrifying how they're even more competitive than I am adaptable! “But how...? That was supposed to perfectly wrap everything up... Can't we just agree that Mashiron can have Awa and Alice-chan can have Shuwa?”

“No! Awa-chan and Shuwa-chan are both mine.”

“Only in your dual personality are you truly you, Awayuki-dono. Both have to be present.”

“You're basically just getting a kick out of teasing me at this point, aren't you?”

After that, we went through the whole song and dance a few more times, which had the result of revealing more embarrassing information about me.

: Awayuki-chan's ideal proposal

“I will go first,” said Alice-chan. “Imagine a room with romantic illumination and many people in it, and the proposer calls out loudly, ignoring all the rest. She says, *Awayuki-dono, I'm fine with StroZero being your number one! Please make me your number two!*”

“If anyone did anything that crazy, I'd immediately pretend to be a stranger and run away. That's the worst idea for a proposal in history.”

“Awa-chan's ideal proposal, huh...” said Mashiron. “She seems like the sort who wouldn't like any big flashy shows in her private life, so it would probably be a comfortable moment of nothingness at home.”

“Uh, aha ha ha ha ha! That would be nice. That's correct! But having you hit the bull's-eye like that is really, er, embarrassing...”

“You must really value your everyday routine, Awayuki-dono!”

“A-Anyway, let's move on!”

: Awayuki-chan's most sensitive erogenous zone

“Great! I think we'll go with this question next,” suggested Alice-chan.

“Rejected,” I said. “You just want to know what it is.”

“I've been found out! Let's make the question about Mashiro-dono's erogenous zones, then.”

“Wait, what do I have to do with this?” asked Mashiron.

“Because I assume Awayuki-dono wants to know.”

I replied, “I'm giving Alice-chan a point for knowing me so well.”

“Hey!”

: The gap moe when Awa-chan makes a cute noise confuses me. but i'm kinda into it ngl

: I'm firmly in the “please love each other irl in the future” camp

: Awa-chan is cute, and she can do chores, and she's caring, and she's funny, and she's just all around wonderful!

: i literally want to marry her

: #1 person i'd want to drink strozero with
: erogenous zone lmaooo
: I love how occasionally awa-chan will let shuwa's
desires through her filter

Given the constant craziness I engaged in as Shuwa, I sadly had no shame left anyway, so all of this was just another drop in the bucket. *It's been a while since I had to stick to the tsukkomi role like this, though. I'm tired...*

“Urk...” grunted Alice-chan. “Looks like we’re almost out of time... It seems to me we honestly haven’t figured out which one of us is more suited for her.”

“You’re right,” agreed Mashiron. “I doubt this will be a question easily answered. Our battle is sure to continue into the future. But, well... You’re happy now that you’ve gotten to know Awa-chan better, aren’t you, Alice-chan?”

“Wha?! W-Wait, Mashiro-dono, were you doing this all for me?”

“Considering I’ve been friends with her for so long, I had a big advantage. Although ultimately, she *does* belong to me, and our battle will prove that.”

“Once again, taking it upon yourselves to figure things out, I see...” I murmured.

“But I’m serious,” insisted Mashiron. “I don’t want to give you to anyone else.”

“Aaaahhhhhhhh please stop saying things like that I’m *begging* you!!!”

“Mashiro-dono... You are truly a worthy rival!”

From beginning to end, the pair never broke their friendly banter.

The stream ended then. Now alone in my quiet room, though, I thought back on the things that were troubling me—I’d actually fudged the answer to that question a little bit.

Troubles, huh... In all honesty, Hareru-senpai’s actions had been completely out of left field recently. My own participation in the live concert was supposed to be a surprise, and it had to do with her circumstances as well, so I couldn’t tell them any of that.

Hareru-senpai, what are you thinking right now? And why did you finally, at long last, decide to have a concert?

The Live-On Common Sense Squad

At last, the day of the concert was right around the corner. I'd probably only be able to do a handful of streams before it; I couldn't afford to exhaust all my stamina going crazy with my streams at the moment. Instead, I came up with a plan for one that would be calm while also exciting.

And so...

“One! It’s everyone’s mama, Shion Kaminari!”

“Two! It’s the personification of seiso, Awayuki Kokorone (Awa)!”

“And three! It’s everyone’s wife, Chami Yanagase!”

“Together, we are the Live-On Common Sense Squad!” we all cried out.

- : What?
- : what?
- : **What? ¥2000**
- : what's with this grouping...?
- : hitting back on my browser
- : hitting the dislike button twice
- : You shouldn't fake your identity! Not in modern Japan, at least!
- : could someone PLEASE tell these girls that mirrors exist?
- : Are they waiting for someone to butt in with a witty retort, or...?
- : don't you mean, 1. It's the one with crazy mommy energy 2. it's the one with crazy everything energy 3. it's the one with crazy bad communication skills
- : The Blatant Lie-Stars
- : Someone put them back in elementary school for six years to teach them what "common sense" means
- : One and three are just barely fine, I guess, but number two? Two is right out!
- : Did you think it would be okay just because you're Awa-chan? Your mind might be dull right now. Want a StroZero?

- : wow, bringing out the punchline on the very first panel
- : Something awful got mixed in when she was turning into the personification of seiso...
- : That would be the memes

All right! The stream was on, and we had the usual loving revilement and abuse in chat already! It was time for the three of us to get this thing under way!

Our group today might have been kind of surprising. Shockingly, the one to propose this collab had been Chami-chan, who was famous for her shyness. I'd probably been more shocked than anyone was now when she'd invited me, but since it had probably taken so much courage, I simply hadn't had the option to refuse!

"Okay, okay!" began Shion-senpai. "Chami-chan was the one who proposed this little project of ours, but she's once again left the facilitation to me, Shion-mama! First, I'll explain what this is all about!"

"Thaaanks!" said Chami-chan and I.

"Umm, so first off, Live-On is full of total weirdos."

"Yeah! You tell 'em!" we replied.

- : Yeah! Like you three
- : Uh, guys, you know you actually need someone to be the tsukkomi, right?
- : #2 is like the BIGGEST weirdo. Do you even have eyes?
- : What's happened to you, Chami-chama...
- : Wait, could it be... No, that's not possible

"And so the three of us—the only ones with common sense—are just so tired from having to deal with them day in, day out. Think of this as a meeting for the laborers to lick each other's wounds..."

"We're sooooo tired!" we echoed.

- : We're sooooo tired! (monotone)
- : Whoever wrote this script is a genius
- : Oh come on, say "of course, wounds aren't the only

things we want to lick" already! Just say it!
: Is it gonna be like this from beginning to end? man, I
wish I had their steel willpower
: This is the most Live-On thing I've ever seen

"Anyway, with the fourth generation in business now, it feels like Live-On's chaos has gotten even worse. Don't you think so, you two?"

"I do," I agreed. "In fact, I started wondering if Live-On's HR lady is actually an AI-equipped StroZero."

"They are all quite something," said Chami-chan. "Though I haven't actually collabed with them yet."

"Wait, really?" said Shion-mama, sounding surprised.

I couldn't recall Chami-chan doing any collabs with them either. She never really did *that* many of them to begin with, but still...

"They really spooked me!" explained Chami-chan. "They're all so unique."

"Pop open the lid on those girls, and you've got the same old Live-On as usual..." I remarked.

"Says the one who changed our zookeeper into a gang boss just the other day," retorted Shion-mama.

"It was the horror game's fault! It's not my fault! I'm not to blame!"

"But as their senpai now, seeing them working so hard makes me think I should try my best to improve too," said Chami-chan. "That was partly why I invited you two to this today."

Huh! I thought. I see. So that's what it was about.

"I'm going to try my hardest to talk today, so please watch over me warmly!"

"Roger that," I replied. "But just remember that having a screw loose doesn't mean you're doing your best or doing things properly!"

"That's right!" chimed in Shion-mama. "Common sense already doesn't work when you're in Live-On. So make sure to hang on to your true feelings!"

: she says, from experience,,
: Shion-mama just didn't realize it herself. She was already Live-On deep down

: omg i'm so proud of chami-chan
: I feel like Chami-chan has a ton of hardcore fans from her ASMR streams and stuff, so I think she's doing really well, personally.
: Everyone was talking about the voice pack she made recently too
: She's cute! Just cute. Which kind of makes her the odd child in Live-On I guess?
: lmfao yeah, with everyone else being an odd child, it's odd that she's almost a normal person

“Anyway, that’s enough of an introduction!” said Shion-mama. “To put it simply, we’re basically just gonna have some idle chat about the yabai things Live-On members do.”

“I did ask everyone else if there was anything off-limits we shouldn’t talk about, but they were all like ‘Nothing in Live-On is off-limits!’ so I don’t think there’s much need to worry,” I explained.

“Everyone here loves doing off-limits stuff publicly anyway,” added Chami-chan.

As expected, the chat filled up with comments saying, “You’re ones to talk,” but paying attention to it would just be embarrassing. *Time to keep a clear head and move on with the project!* “Where should we start with these troubling stories?” I asked.

“U-Um, I want to see where the conversation goes, so I’ll jump in in a few moments,” stammered Chami-chan.

“Then I’ll start, I suppose.”

“Uh-huh? Okay, Shion-senpai, you have the floor.” She always gave this impression of being so tired from all her collabs, so I was interested in what story she had for us.

“Where should I start... In my case, *everyone* is troubling.”

“Indeed they are,” I replied. “Thanks for all your hard work.”

“It really has been hard, Awa-chan! Really, really tough.”

“Wh-What is it? I think I’m too seiso to have caused you any problems...”

“Oh, no, you’re fine. As a mama, I love all my children, even the handfuls. You can feel free to be true to yourself, okay? I’ll take good care of you until the last day.”

“Chami-chan! Please, help me!” I cried. “I think I accidentally tripped the ‘prison ending’ flag!”

“Ha ha ha... I’ll have to be careful so the same doesn’t happen to me.”

Shion-senpai, seeming to realize our chat was veering off course, began to quickly think about what to talk about. She knew as well as we did that if she, the facilitator for the collab, started going wild, the whole stream would break down. Being able to keep her head on straight even after awakening to her true nature made her a one-of-a-kind streamer in Live-On.

I’m being one hundred percent honest when I say thank you for everything, Shion-senpai... In fact, partly as an apology, I’ll give her some support. “What’s happened just recently that caused you the most problems?”

“Well...” she began. “I was playing a game off stream with Sei-sama last night, but she kept trying to play all these weird pranks to try and surprise me. She basically does it every time at this point, but still.”

“Classic Sei-sama,” said Chami-chan. “I expected nothing less.”

“Say what you want, but we’ve known each other for a long time. It’s eternally exhausting!”

- : These two are like the classic Live-On pairing
- : how are they such a good fit when their personalities are totally opposite
- : Seems to me like Sei-sama believes Shion-mama will just clean up after everything she does
- : She did say before that when she does collabs and stuff, if it’s not specific people she needs, she almost always asks Shion-mama to join in
- : Harerun was how Live-On got its start. but I think these two have really helped it grow

“Speaking of which,” I said, “what was it like when you first met Sei-sama?”

“Oh, I want to know too. We third-genners don’t really know much about that stuff since we came in later,” said Chami-chan.

“When I met her...” wondered Shion-senpai aloud. “Actually, I don’t think I’ve ever told the story on stream. Not that it’s very special or anything, but still.”

She then began to tell us what had transpired, slowly, as though reminiscing about a fond memory.

The first time she'd met Sei-sama had been a little before the second generation had debuted, during a face-to-face meeting at the offices. That said, they didn't immediately hit it off—at most they just said polite hellos and gave each other a little encouragement. Their first meeting had been really normal. And then the day of their debuts came, and Shion-senpai began doing her streams as a member of the second generation alongside Sei-sama.

This might come as a surprise, but Sei-sama had actually inspired some incredibly mixed reviews from her audience. I hadn't actually seen it myself, since it was a long time ago, but it was a pretty famous story.

At the time, Hareru-senpai had been so big that people would say “Hareru Asagiri’s Live-On” instead of “Live-On’s Hareru Asagiri.” Plus, at the time, Live-On wasn’t as known for being full of crazies as it was these days.

As Sei-sama’s extreme character had risen in fame and infamy, many more heartless comments began to appear about her on social media. Apparently, this had been at a time when even other second-geners didn’t talk to her that much.

I’ve occasionally thought that if I’d been streaming back then—though chronologically impossible—and had that accident where I forgot to turn off my stream, something similar probably would have happened to me. That was how important our audience’s preconceptions of us were.

And eventually, Shion-senpai, the “soothing” member of Live-On, had even started to receive comments here and there along the lines of:

: You're better off not getting involved with Sei Utsuki

In response, Shion-senpai had boldly come out and said that while she was grateful that everyone had her best interests at heart, the decision of who she got involved with was her own, for better or worse. A few days later, she invited Sei-sama for the now-famous pairing’s first collab.

At the time, Sei-sama had given her a very dodgy response—for the above reasons—but apparently Shion-senpai kept on inviting her so much that she eventually agreed.

And then, during that collaboration amidst that awkward, weird mood, they’d succeeded in destroying everyone’s expectations. Shion-senpai would

respond to Sei-sama's ridiculous idiot comments with funny straight-man ones of her own, each of them boosting the other. Today, it was one of the streams that people counted as legendary.

After that, Sei-sama had begun talking to her more frequently, getting closer and closer to what they were like these days, and eventually the criticism of her died down.

"That really brings me back. Now that I think of it, I wonder why she suddenly became so friendly with me," said Shion-senpai after she'd finished telling everyone about the beginning of her little relationship with Sei-sama, sounding troubled but also somehow happy.

I didn't think it needed much thought. Sei-sama never broke that gallant, powerful persona of hers, but she was still a living, breathing girl. Things made her happy, and things hurt her. To Sei-sama, Shion-senpai was a precious friend who had saved her. And I was sure Shion-senpai felt the same way, talking about all this like she was opening a box with precious treasures inside...

God, these two were just the best!!!

"I didn't know about any of that. I'm kind of moved," I remarked.

"How precious..." said Chami-chan. "My heart feels full now."

"I-It's not that big a deal! We just became friends, that's all!"

: just pulling all this tee-tee preciousness on us like it's NOTHING

: **The SeiShio ship has sailed ¥10000**

: they're practically married already!

: Sei-sama has those gothic-like black clothes with crosses and stuff on them, and Shion-mama has a shrine maiden outfit so she's white. They're opposite both on the inside and the outside. and that just makes them seem more like a couple!

: everyone in the second gen actually has red eyes

: Was Live-On specifically trying to make this happen...?

: We should have the wedding ceremony on the roof of the

KIMASHITo-wer!

: How can a tower be so beautiful?! It's completely covered in blooming lilies!

Sei Utsuki: What are you even talking about, Shion-kun? Tell them a story where I'm acting more like myself. You know, like my eyes' ability to guess the color of a girl's panties just by looking at her. My direct-sight molestation.

: Sei-sama's here??

“Oh hey, it’s Sei-sama. Heya!” I said.

“S-Since your eyes are the same color, can you guess the color of people’s panties too, Shion-senpai?”

“Of course I can’t! What are you even talking about, Chami-chan?!”

“Are you sure?” I asked. “Maybe you can, but you just haven’t realized it yet. Just as a test, try guessing the color of the panties I’m wearing right now.”

“You’re wandering out of Awa-chan territory again... Blue! Happy?”

“Huh? Wait. Hold on a second. I have to check...” I paused. “Oh.”

“Huh? Wh-What?”

“Uh, nothing, nothing at all! Let’s get on with the next story!”

“Why are you reacting like that?! You make it sound like I was right! Please, stop!”

“Suddenly a lot more trustworthy,” remarked Chami-chan.

Sei Utsuki: This right here is what I like to see.

Nekoma Hirune: Ha ha, you’re blushing ☆

Sei Utsuki: I am not blushing. I am not blushing!

Nekoma Hirune: you continue to insist as you slowly shrink and transform into a corn cob.

: Hey, the whole 2nd gen is here!

: 2nd gen lovers creaming their pants right now

: Awa-chan, you don’t seem to realize this, but what you just did is not seiso in the slightest...

“Anyway!” said Shion-senpai. “My story’s done. You’re up next, Awa-

chan. What's been bothering you lately?"

"Who, me? Well, I've been receiving some pretty awful defamatory comments because of someone with the same last name, same first name, same appearance, same voice, and same life doing some crazy things."

"We have a much simpler way of saying that. She's the same *person*," pointed out Shion-senpai.

"Also, for some reason, I keep meeting people who are really unusual."

"Unusual people? What do you mean?"

"Umm. Well, just recently..." Searching my memories, I told them about a very strange person I'd run into recently.

It had happened when I went to a video rental shop to get a movie to watch. As I was walking down an aisle, I saw a woman who looked like she was in her twenties scouring the shelves very seriously for an old children's anime called *Mushiking* that used to be popular.

Huh, I'm surprised someone her age likes that show. Or maybe she has a kid, and it's for them? I wondered, staring a little rudely at her.

But a moment later, something happened that sent a chill down my spine. I accidentally overheard something the woman muttered to herself. In that slightly cloying voice, she had most definitely said this:

"The pairing of the classic hottie Hercules Beetle and the muscular, stocky Elephant Beetle is just too good! They crash their vigorously erect male symbols together so roughly, aiming for each other's weak spots... *Mushiking* is the greatest BL work of all time!"

"?!?!" Shion-senpai and Chami-chan said.

: ?!

: what??????

: huh? wait. what?

Both of the others, as well as the entire chat, immediately erupted into noise and chatter. But their surprise would never compare to the shock I'd felt at the time. I literally hadn't been able to move for several seconds after hearing that.

"And then, after that, she saw a couple of beetles fighting and said this: 'This is what sword fighting really means. I no longer feel anything when humans do the fake version together. And with all the role-play where they're

covered in tree resin...? Yes, I'll have this one today!'"

"W-Wow... Some people really have some crazy fetishes..." said Shion-senpai.

"Not surprised it happened to you, though, Awa-chan. Birds of a feather!" said Chami-chan.

"Hey, don't group me in with her!"

"I think she'd be a pretty good match for someone who proposed to a can of chuhai, don't you?"

"...No comment."

: A fujoshi who only gets turned on by rhinoceros beetles? She must be a storied veteran
: and a future candidate for Live-On
: Stag-beetle-oshi yuri addict, coming through!
: What even does any of that mean...?
: I see. Hercules beetles have two big, uh, horns, which would make them dual-wielding...futanari...? Huh? Wait, Shuwa-chan, is that you?
: My theory is now that Awayuki Kokorone is a hercules beetle
: I feel I must object to that (as part of the irl futa brigade)
: The chat turned into total chaos

After telling everyone about the serious *Mushiking*-lover (meant sexually), I went on to explain several other strange people I'd encountered by chance. And then my turn to talk was over.

The next storyteller was supposed to be Chami-chan at this point, but...

"I don't actually have many chances to interact with people around me that I would call troubling."

"Ah..." said Shion-senpai and I. Right from the start, she'd come out with a blatantly honest excuse, causing the air to grow heavy.

"That's very..." said Shion-senpai before trailing off. "But you must have at least one, right? Even if it's something minor."

She was trying to give Chami-chan some backup, drawing the conversation out of her. I thought of helping her out myself, but then Chami-

chan said something that betrayed our expectations.

“Oh, you don’t need to worry about that. I’m the one who thought of this collab, remember? There is someone troubling me right now.”

“Oh! Okay. But you said you didn’t have much of a connection to anyone troublesome, didn’t you?” Shion-senpai asked.

“I don’t!” As Shion-senpai and I wondered what on earth she was talking about, she declared, “The one troubling me most right now is none other than myself! And I’d like us all to think about what I can do about it!”

Shion-senpai and I both groaned. That was a very Chami-chan-like thing to be troubled about.

“You see, I’ve been thinking,” she explained. “Don’t I, like, lack personality?”

“It doesn’t really seem that way to me,” I replied.

“My whole character is looking like a sexy lady but actually being shy and clumsy, though.”

“Calm down, Chami-chan!” cried Shion-senpai. “That’s already a lot of individuality! Live-On is just one big, terrible Deep Darkness, that’s all!”

: lmao

: oh, just a big terrible deep darkness? and here i was worried for nothing...

: Maybe they put her in this strange environment as a psychological experiment?

: Shion-mama's penchant for analogies is hecking strong

Shion-senpai had tried to keep her in check, but her efforts didn’t seem to do much, and Chami-chan’s voice remained gloomy. “But topics about the rest of you just seem to explode, you know? I don’t have any experience with that...”

“Getting into the news doesn’t mean all the conversation is good, you know,” I reminded her. “I think you’ve kept up a pretty steady level of popularity. The number of passionate fans you have speaks to that.”

“You...think so?”

“We do!” insisted Shion-senpai. “There’s just a disproportionate number of us with way too much impact. I think that’s all it is.”

“Over ninety percent of the conversations about me are basically just

memes,” I said, “so sometimes I get jealous of how people simply call you cute sometimes, Chami-chan.”

“I see! Maybe the grass is always greener on the other side.”

“And I feel like trying to add on extra character traits after the fact that you don’t actually possess is generally a recipe for disaster,” pointed out Shion-senpai.

- : I think I can understand that
- : isn't it just that you can't keep up with the rest of Live-On unless you have those kinds of crazy traits naturally?
- : Awa-chan, you're really cute too! (on the outside)
- : I'm fairly certain she's got a core fan base who thinks she's cute on the inside too
- : She does have a good track record of supporting Live-On too, so she's starting to be talked about for more than just being funny

We could hear Chami-chan’s voice growing steadily cheerier as we strained to persuade her. Her trouble was a difficult sort to deal with, but Shion-senpai was right—you could crash and burn if you tried to force it too much. And more importantly, you ran the risk of taking all the fun out of streaming. I didn’t want to see one of my friends like that.

Striving to improve oneself is a wonderful thing, but accepting yourself for who you are is just as important sometimes.

Oh, and there was one other thing I wanted to tell her. “Also, I think you have a very distinctive voice too.”

“Yes!” agreed Shion-senpai. “And I think you’re at the top of Live-On with acting skills too, right there with Shion-mama!”

“My voice? Oh, yeah, I guess I do ASMR streams a lot.”

“It’s calming, and sexy, and I never get tired of listening to it. It’s actually kind of addicting,” I said.

“Really?” replied Chami-chan before giggling. “It makes me feel good to be praised for my voice.”

“My voice doesn’t really stand out much at all, which means I can really tell these things,” I added, casually opening up a little about how I truly felt

about it.

But then Chami-chan cried out more loudly than I'd ever heard her, "Th-That isn't true at all!!!!!"

Shion-senpai and I were taken aback at the uncharacteristic outburst, but she wasn't done. She kept on going...and going.

"Your voice doesn't lack individuality! Nothing could be further from the truth! People's voices are many and varied, and everyone has a unique one! Individuality is something everyone has by default! I may be a human creature like you, but just like my appearance and personality, my voice belongs to me alone. And the sounds our voices create with mere vibrations are unbelievably vivid and wonderful, as I'm sure you two would agree! A voice is both a miracle and a mystery of human evolution, something divine and precious!!! I feel that both of your voices are incredible in completely different ways. Awayuki-chan's voice is just a little low and lazy-sounding, which is literal bliss to the ears, and her tiny bit of vocal fry when she draws out certain vowels practically makes me shudder in pleasure! And then Shion-senpai's voice is like a pure projection of her personality! It wraps you up in its gentle embrace, just like a living Ave Maria, healing the wounded simply by giving them your voice! Aren't you two proud of your voices?"



Chami-chan's exquisite, hurried speech was like an otaku talking about their hobbies. *Huh. Wait, wait a minute. You're kidding, right? Was everything during this stream...just some kind of amazing foreshadowing for this?*

"Do you understand how beautiful voices are now?" asked Chami-chan. "Well, maybe I haven't explained enough. Can I keep explaining? 'Cuz human voices are crazy amazing!"

Completely ignoring our astonishment, Chami-chan kept going on and on, more fluidly than I'd ever heard her speak before. *That last part even rhymed. Weird.*

This is bad, I thought. I don't know exactly what part of it is bad, but my sixth sense is warning me that if we let her keep going, things are gonna spiral out of control!

Shion-senpai seemed to have picked up on something similar too. As she said "uh-huh, uh-huh" several times, sounding more troubled each time, she searched for the right words to say.

Leave this to me, Shion-senpai! I'm her genmate, so I'll save her from this crisis! I shall not falter! And I won't beat around the bush either! I'll stop her right here, right now!

"Chami-chan. No."

"I won't take no for an answer. Anyway, first off—"

"Ubowaaahhhhhh!!!"

"A-Awa-chaaaaan!!!"

: uh...chami-chama...?
: oh. oh no. OH NO
: Shit! She went to the evolution screen! b b b b b b!
: Too bad! You don't get to choose!
: Are we truly beyond salvation?!
: We have a name for this phenomenon of suddenly letting your repressed self go wild: streaming after midnight

Crap, it's not working! She's a runaway steam engine now! Once she got started, she lost all ability to even think about stopping!

"Umm, let me explain this so it's easier to understand!" she continued. "Oh, I know! Awayuki-chan, you always claim things are 'basically sex,'

right? I'll use that as an analogy!"

"Eek!!! Chami-chan!" I cried. "Girls aren't supposed to use lewd words like 'sex'!!!"

"I'm sorry, *what?*" said Shion-senpai in a voice that for a moment sounded *extremely* cold and terrifying. *But I don't have time to pay attention to that right now!*

"If you ask me, humans have sex with their *voices*. Your genitals are just tangential to the whole thing. I mean, think about it. So much of the sexual excitement comes from the voice, doesn't it? That goes for moaning, of course, but also for when you're talking dirty—the color of your voice during those moments is what brings about that sexiness. And I think the fact that DLSite has 18+ voice packs—where the voices are literally front and center—proves my point. Do you understand now?"

Ah, yes. I see, Chami-chan, I thought. I'm quickly beginning to understand what you're getting at. Why, you ask? Just look at me—I'm an emotional mess now because of Chami-chan's voice. I'm being toyed with by her voice's awesome power.

"So just replace all that with regular life. I want you to realize that there's almost an infinite number of different feelings you can express with your voice. And feelings are what tie people together—in other words, they're sex! The same goes for our streams! Everything that's exciting and surprising to our audience starts from our voices. And we streamers make a living off of it—we're vocal illusionists! Now do you understand how wonderful voices are? To sum it all up in a simple way, I'll use the 'basically sex' analogy again. In short, we Livers are having sex with our audience with our voices! And that means...!!!"

"Th-That means?" we repeated.

"That Livers are vocal sex illusionists!!!"

Ohh... Yeah... It's all over now...

: LMFAOOOOOOOO

: the explosive birth of the most powerful job title known to man

: uhh, sorry, I just lost my virginity with my voice, anyone else need to lose it?

: Hello! I'm Chami Yanagase, a vocal sex illusionist

with Live-On! <- Right, I get it. Got it. I have no idea what that means.

: She's really gotten into talking about voice-related hardware on other streams, but I didn't realize she was SUCH a voice otaku...

I could sense the light leaving my eyes. Chat's comments came in like a torrential downpour. I knew exactly what I'd see trending on Cheeper after the stream.

Actually, I'm getting this awful sense of déjà vu. Wasn't it just like this when the zookeeper became a gang boss?

What? Wait, is this my fault? Do I have the power to cause people's fetishes to run wild?

U-Uhh. Well, strangely enough, ultimately, I resolved Chami-chan's problem of wanting a stronger character by bringing out something the very person herself had been hiding all along. Yeah, you know what? I'm just gonna think of it that way. If I don't, I'll never have a bright day again.

I mean, just look at Shion-senpai! She's just been going "I see, I see" and trying to escape reality. It is extremely rare for her to abandon her post as facilitator!

"Umm, I think this discussion is getting a little too broad, so let me bring us back down to earth," continued Chami-chan. "This all started when you said your voice had no personality, right, Awayuki-chan? As I already stated, your voice is actually *full* of charm. Personally, my favorite is how the tone of your voice changes when you turn into Shuwa-chan. Normally you're so calm and relaxed, but when you drink StroZero, you go up a few keys and start getting that lazy, mumbly trait. What a gap! I can't get enough of it. When I think about you using the same voice for Shuwa-chan's vaunted storms of dirty jokes as you do for Awayuki-chan's normal speech, I can't help it, my crotch just..."

She went on and on, the runaway steam engine showing no signs at all of stopping until it reached the end of what little time we had remaining in the stream.

Furthermore, both Shion-senpai and I received a message from her that I initially thought was the sequel to her thesis, based on how many words it was, but it was actually a letter of apology. It wasn't as though any of this

had damaged *us*, though, so it didn't matter much to me.

As for Chami-chan, nobody ever let her forget about this in future streams, and she safely found herself in the position of “bullied voice-otaku character” from then on.

Idle Talk: Hareru and the Second Generation

“Awesome, we’ve got it down perfect! Good work, everyone!”

“Thanks.”

“Yes, you too!”

“Good stuff!”

Four resplendent voices echoed in a space that contradicted itself: a large stage, but no audience in sight.

On this day, they had been doing a rehearsal for Hareru’s solo concert, using the actual venue to practice. Present aside from the first-generation Hareru Asagiri were all three members of the second generation: Sei Utsuki, Shion Kaminari, and Nekoma Hirune.

As part of her set list, this group of four would be unveiling a new cover song and performing it live. Its end would mark the halfway point of the concert, so they were currently taking a little break before the second half began.

“It feels almost unreal that we’ll be coming out on such a huge stage in front of everyone,” said Shion.

Nekoma and Sei nodded in agreement.

Hareru saw them nodding and burst out laughing as memories of what Live-On used to be like came rushing into her mind. “Boy, that brings me back! Unlike now, the three of you were barely hanging on by a thread.”

“Not so for me!” objected Nekoma. “I got to do what I wanted, and I basically didn’t feel any pressure to begin with, since that’s just who I am. The other two, on the other hand...” She glared at them, causing Sei and Shion to look away awkwardly.

“Oh, come on,” said Shion. “After seeing Hareru-senpai being such a hit and imagining what a wonderful world that must be, I came crashing down hard! I was happy about all the people who came to my first stream because of her influence, but for a while after that, my viewer count would go down

stream after stream... And it was so hard to set up for the streams too. Problems kept happening with my equipment! Help for that stuff on the internet is really hit-or-miss. I guess reality slapped me across the face pretty quickly..."

"But after a while, you got on track and your popularity stabilized, right?" replied Hareru. "You didn't have my coattails to ride at that point—people were drawn to you because of you."

"That's why I feel so relieved right now!!!"



“There, there,” said Hareru, giving Shion a hug as she came to her crying.

“Oshio” was Hareru’s unique nickname for Shion. Whenever Hareru referred to another member, or to someone she was close with, she almost always used nicknames like those. There was actually a reason behind it too—it would both strengthen the person’s impression of her and close the distance between them by picking out one trait about the person and making it seem special. It was a way to build harmonious human relationships.

Hareru was *extremely* smart.

“I don’t think I was nearly as bad off,” commented Sei as though she had nothing to do with this. “Certainly not bad enough for Nekoma-kun to glare at me like that.”

“Yeah, right,” said the other three in unison, glaring at her.

“You were having some *serious* trouble. Far and away the worst of it, in fact,” said Nekoma.

“Add me being worried sick about you to that list of things from back when we all started, Sei-sama!” cried Shion.

“Yeah, you were super on edge back then,” pointed out Hareru.

“...You know, I’m pretty sure I was the most popular one at first.”

As the thorns of their eyes and words stabbed into Sei, she made an excuse and looked away again. The three others laughed, eventually drawing Sei into the laughter as well.

They had all experienced the dawn of Live-On, supporting each other, eventually passing the baton to the third generation, and building the foundation of Live-On’s current popularity. The four of them had made it through a lot of hardship together, and that gave them a unique bond all their own.

“From my point of view, I’m surprised you said yes to a concert at all,” said Sei.

“Oh, you’re right!” agreed Shion. “You generally come across as someone who wants to be in front of everyone, but you’re surprisingly not like that.”

“I’m curious too!” chimed in Nekoma.

Nobody had been told *why* Hareru had decided to do a concert at all, aside from employees of the actual company—and that went for the other members too. Hareru thought about their question for a few moments, then quietly shook her head. “That’s still a secret!” she said. “You’ll have to wait until the

end to see!”

The other three whined a little about it, but they didn’t press any further.

“Anyway, I’ve got more rehearsal-ing to do, so I’ll be sticking around here!” said Harerun.

“Gotcha,” said Sei. “What’s the concert going to be like in the second half, Hareru-kun?”

“Hmm, well, I’ll sing a few songs by myself, then do the ending with Shuwacchi.”

“Oh, that’s right—Awayuki-chan will be in the concert too! I just saw her backstage before!” exclaimed Shion.

“It’s still a surprise for everyone not involved, right? I bet you’re planning something insane...” muttered Nekoma.

“Aha ha ha!” laughed Harerun. “Again, you’ll just have to wait and find out! Whoops, the second half is starting.” Seeming to have finished preparing for the second half, she gleefully gave them a few parting words and dashed over to the stage wing. As she turned her back to them, she murmured something to herself:

“They’ve really all grown into amazing girls.”

Yakiniku with Hareru-senpai

“Cheers!!!”

Our glasses clinked together. Before me was a vivid reddish-orange color sparkling with fat—meat that looked so delicious, it almost verged on *sexy*. And underneath that was a metal grating, flames burning within, as if waiting for their prey.

That day, I’d had a rehearsal with Hareru-senpai for her solo concert that had started bright and early. With her having tapped me as a participant, the two of us were currently having a little party at the yakiniku place Sei-sama’s family owned.

Several other members had come to the rehearsal as well, since they’d be guest participants—though not surprise ones like I was—but not only were they busy, we also couldn’t exactly all celebrate in one big group. They’d gone home shortly after the part of the rehearsal they appeared in. And I was fine with that, but the rarity of the situation had led me to stay and watch the whole thing. I’d felt a little guilty for sticking around, but then Hareru-senpai

had invited me out for some lunch.

Our drinks washed through our tired bodies—StroZero for me, which had been mysteriously added to the real menu after that karaoke collab, and beer for her. When Hareru-senpai had asked someone who seemed like a new part-timer here for beer, they'd been very taken aback. *She is a legal loli, I guess. Can't help that.*

And then Hareru-senpai had taken the opportunity to thrust her identification in the person's face, saying, "Hello. My name is Hinata Mogami. You carded me. Prepare to serve me a beer," like a certain fairy-tale fencer might. Unfortunately, with her actual age already being in question, it didn't come off as very "cool" to me.

Our celebration began. We chatted about nothing important as we filled our empty bellies with the cooked meat. Eventually, as our stomachs stopped complaining and the booze started to get to us, we started hopping from topic to topic more quickly.

"It's like they're trying to make gamer versions of *everything* these days," commented Hareru-senpai. "Look at those RGBs."

"Yes. There's even been masks coming out like that now. That doesn't really seem to be related to games at all, though..."

"Bet you they'll come out with gamer panties soon. Think you'd like a pair of light-up panties? Only that area would be glowing underneath your clothes."

"Wouldn't it be super funny if guy's tips were the only thing lighting up?"

"Ah ha ha! Joysticks! The perfect gamer accessory!"

"But what kind of joy would it be used for, hmm? Very interesting."

Our conversation got very lively at a certain point as we treated the place like our own private room. But eventually, the topic turned to the day's rehearsal.

"I have to hand it to you, though, Hareru-senpai."

"Huh? For what?"

"Well, you were just having so much fun all day! I think I would have been having a mental breakdown."

Throughout the rehearsal, Hareru-senpai had been constantly relaxed. Things were planned out already, but a whole bunch of things had to be adjusted during the rehearsal that didn't seem to work out. And yet she'd been the ever-present mood-maker in the room, even providing plenty of her

own ideas whenever the staff was at a loss. She'd been so magnificent that I couldn't even imagine her messing up on the day of.

"Hmm... If I had to say why, it's because you never know what'll happen during the actual concert," explained Hareru-senpai. "Nothing wrong with preparation, but that's why I was kinda carefree the whole time."

"The fact that you can even do *that* is incredible, though. I wish I could."

"Really? You're kind of making me blush here, Shuwacchi." She giggled nervously. "I've actually felt sort of the same way toward you at times."

"Wait, really? Like how? I'd rather you stay as yourself and not change..."

"Well... To be specific, I once thought I wanted to be more like Awacchi —before your true colors came out."

"Me like I was before? You wanted to be plain and boring?"

"Yes!"

And now she's saying stuff I don't understand! I thought. An eccentric might have wanted to be more like me now that I'd settled into my current comedian position, but I couldn't think of a reason she'd want to be the me I'd been before. *But it doesn't look like she's joking about this.* "You once thought that way? Does that mean you don't anymore?"

"Hmm... I guess not."

"Hey! That was really mean!"

"Ah ha ha! I didn't mean it in a negative way. I meant it in a positive way!"

"You're not just pulling my leg, are you? It's not just that you don't want to be the booze-loving, dirty-joke-spewing skirt-chaser I am, is it?"

"I'm serious. I've realized I have to keep on being myself. That's all."

"Fine, I guess I'll let you off the hook."

"But I'll ask you the same thing. Have you ever felt like you wanted to be someone else?"

"Me? Hmm..." I thought about it for a little and came to one conclusion. "No. At least, not recently. Every day is so much fun now that I can't help myself. I can't even entertain the idea of letting it go."

"Ah. I think that's a really good answer!" said Hareru-senpai with a snicker.

That conversation ended there. I thought about asking about all that IQ stuff from before, but decided against it, since I probably wouldn't get an answer out of her. *I'm sure it means something*, I thought. *She'll tell me one*

day.

With the rehearsal over, we were now that much closer to the real deal. The concert venue tickets sold out in no time flat, and the number of online viewer reservations just wouldn't stop going up.

And so I vowed to myself that I would do everything I could, as best I could.

Chapter 3

Diamond Dust

Alone in the backstage greenroom, I shut my eyes and let out a long breath to calm myself down.

The day had finally come—the day of Hareru-senpai’s solo concert, which we’d long been preparing ourselves for. Naturally, my heart was beating about as fast as a melodic speed metal band’s music, so I was currently deep in meditation to try and keep a level head.

Knock knock knock! Suddenly, there was a knock at the greenroom door.

“Huh? Coming!” Wondering what they needed—there was still some time before the concert began—I opened the door and found Hareru-senpai standing there.

“Yo!”

“Hareru-senpai! Wait, are you done with all the preconcert checks?” I’d actually run over to her to say hello as soon as I’d gotten backstage, but she’d been surrounded by a whole bunch of staff members, seeming to have her hands full with going over all the little details in advance of the concert. I’d basically just given her a quick “hello” and then left.

“That’s why I’m here! Next up is going over my performance with you.”

“Oh, gotcha, understood! I’ll be ready in a second!”

And so the opening of the concert inched ever closer...

“Great! Everything looks good, Awayuki-san!”

“Thank you!”

The staff members finally let out their collective breath at that. We’d just finished going over the lines and equipment that would be used in the segment I’d be appearing in, and that seemed to be the last thing they wanted to check beforehand. There had been no major issues, so the only other thing I had to do was my best. Without any other duties to handle, Hareru-senpai and I took a break in the waiting space, moments before the concert.

“You nervous?” she asked.

“You could tell?”

“Your face is so stiff that anyone could! I get it, though. This *is* the day of the big concert where we plan to mobilize a total of 1.35 billion air guitarists, after all.”

“Wow, that’s a lot of air guitars. Considering how many we have on Earth, we must have aliens coming to visit too, right? Shouldn’t we be doing this in, like, Alaska or something?”

“Nah, they’re using the whole state for the international egg-boiling championship, so we couldn’t grab it.”

“That makes sense, then. Although I’m not sure there would be much of a quality difference in boiled eggs, no matter how much effort you put into cooking them...”

“But don’t worry! This building is something long by whatever wide by some such height, so if we use all the space, we’ll be able to fit everyone coming!”

“Wait, if we’re using height too, does that mean we’re going to be stacking people on top of each other?! So *that’s* what all the group gymnastics back in elementary school were for!”

As we chatted and laughed about dumb things, I strangely felt my tension fading away. I could already hear the audience chattering so close to us, and yet my senpai was just smiling as usual. She seemed so reliable, she was setting me at ease. But this concert was an experience it would take a miracle just to have once in your life. What on earth was going through her head?

But as I was thinking about it, Hareru-senpai murmured some astonishing words. “This is pretty nerve-racking, huh?”

“What? Are you...nervous?”

“Of course. Wanna hear my heartbeat?”

“Umm, if it’s all right with you, then sure.” I simply wanted to know the answer; my mind didn’t have room for any wicked thoughts at the moment.

Hareru-senpai nodded. I squatted down a little, then pressed my ear to her short body’s chest area. And I heard it—her heart was pounding at about the same speed mine was.

“It’s true... Are you scared?”

“Mm, not of the concert, exactly. I’m confident I’ll pull that off.”

“Wait, what? But your heart’s beating so fast!”

I was being tossed about by waves of shock and confusion, but Hareru-senpai just looked at me straight on with eyes that could suck you into them.

“I’m nervous about being on stage with my idol Awa-chan,” she said.

“...Huh?”

“Hareru-saaan! It’s time to take your place!” someone called.

“Oh, okaaay!” As I stood there petrified, she walked away toward the stage with a “Time to break a leg!”

Was she teasing me? No, I don’t think she was. It might be arrogant of me to think, but it felt sincere.

Hareru-senpai... I believe you told me that today, you were finally going to reveal all those intentions you’ve been dancing around, didn’t you?

The concert lights darkened. When they turned on again, there was such applause that it shook the entire hall.

It was beginning—Hareru Asagiri’s solo concert, *Hallelujah*.

“Senpai looks like she’s having a blast out there.”

“She does indeed.”

With my part fast approaching, I was waiting in the wings with my manager, Suzuki-san. In the concert hall, Hareru-senpai’s model—all dressed up in an idol outfit—was being displayed on screen, showing her being seriously awesome at times and seriously silly at others to try and get everyone excited. The audience was loving every second of it too; I felt a weird sense of unification, like the entire hall had morphed into a single living creature.

And amidst it all, I found myself on the other side of nervousness—I felt strangely calm. It was like I was having a completely unrealistic dream or something.

“Suzuki-san?” I asked.

“Yes?”

“What kind of person is Hareru-senpai to you?”

Why had I asked that question? Because that straightforward gaze Hareru-senpai had looked at me with before was still on my mind. Unlike me, Suzuki-san was a staff member at Live-On, not a VTuber like Hareru-senpai. I was wondering if she saw her differently.

“What kind of person... She’s basically my senpai as well, so I’m not sure

if I should say this, but she's a very awkward person.”

“Wait, *awkward?*” I couldn't help but tilt my head in confusion.

“Awkward” was the last word I'd think of to describe Hareru-senpai.

“I didn't think of her that way until a little while ago either,” explained Suzuki-san. “But recently, Mogami-san explained why she'd finally decided to do a concert, and...” She giggled a little. “The reason she gave was very awkward.”

“Uh-huh...”

“She really is so smart, but so awkward, and so straightforward.” Suzuki-san smiled remembering it.

From on stage, Hareru-senpai announced, “Anyway! This next song is going to be the last one... *However!* We've got one heck of a surprise in store for everyone!”

“...!” I'd wanted to pursue this a little further, but apparently it was time for me to go.

“Yuki-san, get ready,” prompted my manager.

“Right!” *Time to steel my nerves and head out there.* I'd never thought it would be this mentally taxing just to take part in another person's concert. *I wonder if I'll ever be in a position like she is one day...*

“Yuki-san?”

“Yes?”

“I just want to say that you are a much, much, *much* more amazing person than you give yourself credit for. Hold your head high and knock 'em dead.”

I had no idea what she'd had in mind when she'd said that, nor what she'd even really meant by it. Maybe she was just trying to give me courage. Regardless, though...

“Thank you! Time to do this!”

...I couldn't find a reason to deny those words.

“That's right—we have a special guest appearance! The one you've all been waiting for... It's Awayuki Kokorone-chaaaan!!!”

“Hello, everyone! Awayuki Kokorone here!”

The hall erupted into mad applause. This was the closest I'd ever been to my viewers since becoming a VTuber.

This treatment for a sudden appearance? Makes me feel all warm and cozy... Their cries of “Shuwa-chaaaan!” and “Awa-chaaaan!” gave me the last push I needed.

“Awacchi! Thank you so much for coming today!”

“Not at all! I’m honored beyond words you’d want me to be here!”

“Gosh, you must be so nervous in front of all these people, though. And I bet that’s making you thirsty! Why don’t we both have a little water first?”

“All right! (*pshhhh!*”)

“Huh?”

“What?”

“What was that you just opened?”

“Water, why?”

“Really? I thought I heard something that would *never* come from pure, innocent water... Well, whatever. Time for some water myself. Gulp, gulp!”

“Gulp, gulp, gulp... Feels so goooood!!!”

“Eh?”

“Oh. What’s up?”

“Nothing. I’m just almost certain that’s the kind of sound people make when drinking alcohol, not water.”

“Well, I was super thirsty, so it tasted *so* good.”

“Really? *Really* really? You’re not, say, drinking that StroZero stuff, are you?”

“I mean, in a broad sense of the word, it *is* water.”

“Wait! You *are* drinking StroZero!”

That earned a whole hall-ful of laughs right from the start, and the StroZero would give me the rest of the energy I needed. It was perfect—two birds with one stone! I could honestly say this was the perfect plan, meticulously put together by Hareru-senpai beforehand.

“You might be wondering why I had Shuwacchi come on. Minor events aside, this actually marks our very first collab!”

“You did say you wanted to make our first collab something to remember!”

“Well, we’re Live-On’s first-generation ace and its next-generation ace, together, right? We can’t pull any punches here!”

“You’re right!”

“And now, for all of you...”

“We’ll be singing a brand-new song!!!” we both shouted.

Those words ushered in the loudest cheering so far that day. *Awesome!* *This is great! The voltage levels are maxed out!!! Now it’s time for our song*

to start playing...

“But before that...” said Hareru-senpai. “I have one other song that I’d like you all to hear, including Shuwacchi and all the other VTubers in Live-On.”

.....*What?*

“Composition: me. Lyrics: me. The name of this song is *About Me*. I wrote it just for today, and I won’t ever be singing it again. It’s a super, super rare song!”

“Huh? What’s all this? I don’t remember hearing about any of this...”

In contrast to the second round of wild cheers and clapping, I was frozen like a pole in confusion. I had no idea what was happening. None of this was in the script!

Then Hareru-senpai gave me one of those straightforward stares again. “It’s a surprise! So... Surprise! Well, I’m not sure it’s something to get excited over... But I’d really like it if you listened.”



That's a low blow! I thought. How could I do anything but nod in agreement if she looked at me with eyes like that? *What a cruel person. How much is she going to manipulate me?*

She's such a handful, so much to deal with—and an important person who gave me a shot at being saved.

I would gladly see whatever she wants to show me to the end.

“Phew... Crap! Now I’m getting a little embarrassed! Look, this really just is an ‘about me,’ so if you don’t like that kinda stuff, just mute the stream, okay? Or use your hands to mute your own ears, if you want!Okay? Ready? Then cue the music.”

The song began to play, starting with slow acoustic guitars, plucking out a delicate melody that sounded like water droplets falling from green leaves.

The melody repeated over and over as Hareru-senpai overlaid her words on it.

The song calmly progressed. But it was like listening to a fairy tale or a very old story—it was less a song and more her actually just talking.

And she talked about a certain girl...

One day, a normal girl was born into a normal family. She was named after the sun.

The girl was very, very smart. She could understand anything at a glance. As her talents developed, it didn’t take long before others called her a genius.

But this unique trait of hers applied to things outside schoolwork too. With her exceptional curiosity, the girl showed an interest in things people within the framework of “normal” couldn’t understand. Over and over, she would give her childish mind free rein and do things others might call odd. Her intellect was so far off the charts that she couldn’t be kept within the bounds of “normal” as defined by the majority.

Eventually, other children her age—and even some adults—began to dislike being around the girl. Humans always feel very uneasy when placed next to someone their understanding hasn’t prepared them for, even if that someone is just another human. They ultimately created their own space that they called “normal”—an environment where they could be at ease.

And that made the girl alone.

Nevertheless, the girl was *very, very smart.*

She had always felt somehow stifled, but as she entered her adolescence,

she began to wonder why she couldn't adapt to the environment around her. And after thinking about it a lot, she came up with a brilliant answer. She studied that framework of "normality," understood it, and tried to forcibly squeeze herself into its confines.

And as she'd planned, the girl was no longer alone. But she had sacrificed who she truly was in order to get there.

The girl continued to grow, and before she knew it, she went to university. She was no longer a girl, but a full-fledged woman.

She lived a life in a normal human environment. She did well in her studies, of course. But somewhere deep down, she felt bored—and like there was a hole in her heart.

She never experienced any of the things people would attribute to youth, like conflicts or romance. She played out her false normality, believing she couldn't allow herself to touch another's heart when she herself was living a lie. And so, when around people, she strove to be no more of a presence than the air in the room.

But her life at university wasn't as empty as her life in the past—for there, she met four people she could call her friends.

Frankly speaking, the four stood out at university, and while they got okay grades, they were dreamers—people who hadn't forgotten what it was like to be a child.

But maybe that was exactly *why*. They did dumb stuff at school and horsed around, sometimes earning angry talks from teachers, but if they found something they wanted to do, they'd just give it a shot. The girl was strangely fond of watching them.

She felt as though she were seeing her original self in them, the part she'd locked away, and it greatly moved her. She rallied her courage and spoke to them—and the four gave her a warm welcome.

She was still living a lie, but thanks to them, her life changed, just a little bit. But as graduation approached, the end was in sight.

And as it did, one of the four—a woman—blurted this out:

"I'm going to start my own company and be the president! And you're all coming with me!"

It was all so sudden that the other four, including the girl, were very

confused. What had made her want to do something like that?

And so she began to proudly explain, as though telling tales of victories in war. But her reasons all clearly presaged the whole thing failing. “I want to live the life of a company president!” she said. “Why does everyone decide to get hired as a new employee when you could just start a new company and be its president right away?” she said. “IT! The trend of the times is IT! Let’s put our cutting-edge youthful knowledge to good use and seize this era!”

The girl grinned wryly, of course, but the other three... The other three were all for it.

In the end, they *did* actually start up their own company. So, after some thought, the girl decided to go with them. Her mindset was that these people had made her life at university fun, so she wanted to repay them somehow. And if she could, she wanted to keep on watching these four bozos.

And so her adult life began as a founding member of a new small IT company called Live-On.

The outset is always most important...but theirs was naturally pathetic. They hadn’t gone into this with any real plans, and the world wasted no time teaching its painful lessons to all five of them.

Their backs coming up against the wall with every day that passed, the girl—who was sticking to her support role—found out about VTubing, which had only just started showing glimmers of the craze it would later become. To save her friends, she finally suggested a business plan of her own.

As one last stand, they used all of the company’s remaining funds, as well as the full knowledge and schedules of all five of them, and managed to get to the point where they could actually implement the idea—and then even to the testing phase.

But the girl knew this part would be what decided everything. Just because they’d created a VTuber model didn’t mean it would become popular. They absolutely needed someone with a powerful, impactful personality.

And so, the girl volunteered to become the test VTuber Hareru Asagiri...

Smart as she was, she knew from experience that her personality was intensely impactful and that it would draw people’s attention, for better or worse. Her idea, though, was that it would be for better when it came to VTubing, since the internet was favored by more unique and idiosyncratic people. She wanted to take advantage of that.

She was scared. She could see how to make this succeed, but she feared this might cause her four friends to bully her and distance themselves from her. It would put her right back into that empty lifestyle she'd just come from.

But she didn't quit. Even if they came to hate her and left, she'd consider her debt repaid as long as she could leave her VTubing knowledge behind and boost Live-On's renown.

She suppressed her tears, resolved herself, and began to stream...

Several months later, she was laughing with the other four as they celebrated their success at Live-On's office.

Everything had gone exactly according to the girl's plan. The only thing she hadn't expected was how positively her four friends had accepted her.

"Why'd you keep it a secret?" they said. One messed with her hair, another gave her pats on the back, another played the archived stream loudly throughout the company, and the other watched and laughed as they made an enormous order of food for delivery.

They called her true self their savior—and their friend.

At Live-On, for the first time since she was little, the girl could be herself in front of others.

Eventually, they brought kouhais on board, and the company's finances stabilized. She was never bored for a moment.

"...And now that girl becomes me."

With those words, the song quietly faded out.

Drawn by the song's silence, the concert hall was silent as well—but then, like a balloon being filled to its max, spirits began to strangely soar.

One audience member started clapping, and the balloon burst right then and there, exploding into an overwhelming cacophony of clapping and cheering.

Nobody had known Hareru Asagiri's background before this. And she'd even packed secrets about the birth of Live-On into the song. It was unbelievably shocking—for me most of all.

"Okay! That's all for *About Me!* Agh, that's so embarrassing! I can't stand it! This is going into the bin with all the other things I never want to think about again! Ahhhh!!!"

She was squirming uncomfortably now—the very one who had brought all of this about—but the rest of the concert hall started looking at her with even warmer gazes, so it had probably had the opposite effect.

“A-Anyway, there’s a really good reason I subjected myself to this public execution, promise! Whoever it was who sounded like they were crying and said, *I’m so happy for you!*—no need to get all emotional! Don’t give me that *Thank you for being born* stuff either... Ugh, just listen to what I’m saying!!!”

Hareru-senpai’s face was so red she seemed like she was about to run offstage at any moment. But then she cleared her throat and turned to look at me.

“Hareru-senpai,” I said, “I think the StroZero I consumed earlier is about to pour out of my eyes. What do I do?”

“How should I know? If it’s gonna come out of somewhere, it should involve the excretory system, shouldn’t it?”

“Awayuki Kokorone! StroZero Golden Shower! Launching!”

“Okay, I walked into that one. If you want to pee in front of tens of thousands of people, do it on your own stream. Also, why’d you have to say it like a Gundam launching scene?”

Facing each other, we shared a laugh. *Phew, it looks like maybe her excitement has come back down to normal levels. All hail StroZero. Actually, maybe it’s about time to have a StroZero World Expo! We can build a tower, not of the sun but of StroZero, and have everyone come worship it.*

“All right, anyway, let’s get on with it,” said Hareru-senpai. “That was all stuff from the past—so what’s next is where it gets real!”

The concert hall broke into excitement yet again. I couldn’t believe it—somehow, she still wasn’t satisfied with how high she’d gotten spirits to soar. I took a deep breath to steady my racing heart, then listened carefully to what she had to say.

“That’s basically how I came to stand here today. Live-On has taken care of me, and I’ve done what I’ve done for its sake. That’s why I feel more like an employee at Live-On than one of its VTubers. Which I think a lot of you know, since I’ve said on streams that I also work as an employee.”

The entire concert hall began to listen attentively as her voice returned to a more serious tone.

“The whole reason I became a VTuber was so that I could save Live-On, not because I particularly wanted to be one for myself. Kind of weird, right? I

know some of you may not think this way, but to me, it feels...twisted, somehow. And so I planned to raise a new group of Live-On kouhais—and once I knew they'd be fine without me, I was going to bow out. I wanted to support Live-On from the background this time. I know that sounds selfish, and I apologize. But I've always been pretty guilty about coming out in front of you all feeling like that. I'm really, really sorry.”

Hareru-senpai bowed deeply. The entire concert hall fell totally silent for a moment. Everyone present gaped, including myself, speechless in astonishment.

Those words pointed straight toward Hareru Asagiri retiring.

Ignoring me—my mouth was silently flapping open and closed like a goldfish—Hareru-senpai came back out of her bow and continued. “Live-On’s gotten pretty big, hasn’t it? The second generation has done such a good job, the third generation has been knocking it out of the park, and now we even have a *fourth* generation. I think we’ve grown past calling it ‘Hareru Asagiri’s Live-On’ to calling me ‘Hareru Asagiri of Live-On.’ I doubt things would come crumbling down if I were to leave.”

I...could not accept this.

She already told me she isn’t retiring! I heard it! I still feel that sense of relief now from hearing it then! She told me she wasn’t going to stop at just this!

Forgetting we were live, I almost said those things out loud. But right before that...

“However!”

Hareru-senpai’s voice pulled a one-eighty, turning bright and sunny. She was smiling. Her eyes were sparkling. Every bit of her was *her*—Hareru Asagiri.

“Then I started to feel something else! And the reason for that came about when the second generation was really starting to get famous. When Awayuki Kokorone-chan, who is here with us today, went viral for forgetting to turn off her stream—that’s when I was sure of it.”

Hareru-senpai came right up to me, looked me square in the eyes with that straightforward gaze of hers, her own eyes almost glowing, reflecting me in my dumbfoundedness.

“I thought, *Look how much fun these people are all having!* People call me a genius, but even I hadn’t been able to predict this. I wanted to know

more about them. I wanted to be better friends with them. I wanted to stand on stage with them. That's how I felt. At first, I just wanted to be another VTuber, watch them, and not care about my own position, but I'm not satisfied with that... And these feelings kept getting bigger until I realized that I, me, the person, wants to be with everyone. *I want to be a VTuber.*"

Ahh, I see, I thought. Now I finally understand what Suzuki-san said before.

"So a little while ago, I told those four good friends of mine that I wanted to focus more on my VTubing career—but if it put too much of a strain on their management work, I'd give up on the idea. You know what they said? *You finally told us what you want to do. You've always been sacrificing yourself for us, so I'm happy you said you want to do something. We may be idiots compared to you, Hareru, but we're still growing and getting better!* And, *Don't worry about us—get out there and live life!!!*" Tears streamed down Hareru-senpai's face as she looked between me and the audience.

I'd always thought of her as too high for me to reach—as living in a totally different world than me.

"And when I told all the other staff at Live-On, they all gave me their blessings. So please, I know this is selfish, but hear me out! I know some of you might have gotten disillusioned with me from that explanation, or hate me now. But I promise I'll bring you back into the fold, so... Please, let me be a VTuber!!!"

But I'd been wrong. She was the same as me. She was just a little smarter. But she was awkward, clumsy—incapable of doing twisted things. She was just a girl.

This time, Hareru-senpai bowed even more deeply. And then...applause. So much of it that I legitimately thought the hall would come crashing down around us. It physically shook my entire body, beating and jumping like one big heartbeat.

And as Hareru-senpai looked back up, she extended a hand to me.

"Shuwacchi, will you let me be selfish this one time? You're what made me this way. I don't want to be above you or below you or off to the side—I want to stand on the same stage as the rest of you. Would you accept Hareru Asagiri as a brand-new member of Live-On?"

For some reason, I felt tears flowing.

I was just so happy, happy beyond words, that my savior, Hareru-senpai,

felt that way about me—that I’d grown into a person who could have this much of an effect on someone else...

As I looked back on the past, I realized that I’d slowly but surely started thinking of everything differently. At first, I hadn’t even been able to accept myself—so many of my remarks had been weak-willed and self-deprecating. But at some point, they’d started calling me the ace of the third generation, and I’d started to be proud of that. And then I’d even gotten to help my kouhais, starting with Kaeru-chan.

Crap, I thought. There was such an insane storm of emotions whirling inside me that it was all already beyond my understanding.

Nevertheless, though, I didn’t hesitate to take her hand.

And as the two of our hands joined together in a tight link, the band began to play the new surprise song.

“That’s what I’m talking about!” shouted Hareru-senpai. “Listen to this one! I’m the composer and the lyricist for it!”

“We’ve got a brand-new collaboration song for everyone! And its name is...”

“*Diamond Dust!!!*” we both finished.

And then the snow reflected the light of a clear morning, and even the drifting mists shone like diamonds.

The Newcomer Big-Shot VTuber

“Hello, everyone. Another nice, light snow is falling tonight. I’m Awayuki Kokorone.”

“Hey hey hey! It’s the rising sun in everyone’s heart—Hareru Asagiri, the brand-new VTuber!”

“Wait, is that how you’ve always introduced yourself?”

“Well, I am a newcomer to the VTubing world, so I thought of a catchy new greeting to entrench my name in the minds of the viewers!”

“I get it. That’s a pretty good mindset to have. When did you think of it?”

“You know, when you get right down to it, things like these generally just come to you—like a revelation. I heard a voice from the heavens just now and decided to go along with it.”

“Then you literally just thought of it now.”

: ¥50000
: lmao, instant max super with no comment
: I loved your concert!
: hahaha the order's all messed up tho? your first collab was in a concert hall, and the next one you have is an off collab lol
: She meets people in person at all costs, what a brilliant no-guard style
: newcomer...?

One night had passed since Hareru Asagiri's solo concert, *Hallelujah*. Today, I'd invited Hareru-senpai over to my place for a stream where we looked back on the concert and had some light chat with the viewers—the number of which was absolutely *insane* right now, since the fever from the concert had yet to wear off. I was managing to keep my cool, though.

"Well, anyway, my name's Hareru Asagiri, and I'm a newcomer VTuber to Live-On's first generation. What's up, everyone?"

"That's a strange title to have. I can't tell if you're a senpai or a kouhai to me."

"I'm everyone's senpai—and everyone's kouhai, *and* everyone's genmate!"

"Oh, I see. You're an easy woman. I've carved this information into my mind."

"Um, wait. Are you sure that's the right expression?"

"But am I wrong, though?"

"Yes!"

"In that case, I'll call you a woman who offers plenty of options. I've carved this information into my mind *and* body."

"Your body too? You'd look like a dangerous tattoo lady who puts everything she has into claiming she offers lots of options."

"It's a little old-fashioned to lump every tattoo culture into one and reject them all, you know."

"I wasn't rejecting that! I was rejecting the rest!"

"Anyway, all jokes aside... To put it simply for those who are unaware, Hareru-senpai decided to turn over a new leaf at her concert yesterday. Anything goes for her now. Please watch over her warmly."

“Yup! Finally started doctoring my past. Today’s teardrops are tomorrow’s love juices, as they say.”

“As *who* says? Dirty jokes are not allowed in this household, young lady.”

“Gaahhhhhh youuuuuuuuu!!!!”

: lmfaoooo

: Why are they suddenly such good friends hahaha

: They said on Cheeper they had a party after the concert, so maybe they warmed up to each other then

: All that idolizing and hero worship, gone like the wind

: She's essentially the mother of all Live-On members, so yeah, she's a pretty big shot newcomer

: After watching yesterday, this is making me cry.

Harerun, you were so good up there... I'm crying so much that my mouth and my bottom mouth are covered in spit

: hey, quit getting a hardon and being a public nuisance. you thought we wouldn't notice?

: But if they said bottom mouth, they might be a girl

: hey, aren't you proud for performing such a sacred act to contribute to society?

: flipped your attitude faster than gurren lagann's drill spins, there

Like chat mentioned, we'd had a party to celebrate the concert's success afterward with the staff and the streamers who'd been part of it. Getting to see Hareru-senpai going a little crazy, her face bright red with embarrassment, had been a lot of fun. Particularly memorable was how she'd told the Livers there that she wanted them to treat her as a genmate from now on. Everyone else had accepted with heartwarming gazes—moving stuff, really. The two of us had especially partied it up, since I'd been such a big part of the concert. Eventually, we'd gotten to be buddy-buddy like we were now.

Argh, the way she's perched on the chair next to me is so freaking cute!!!

“Huh? What are you suddenly hugging me for?”

“You're cute.”

“Wait. You were just saying mean things, and now you’re trying to hit on me? Talk about whiplash. You could put out the sun with that kind of force. You’d destroy the world. If you suddenly slap me or something, my brain is just gonna bug out.”

“Okay, okay, just settle down.”

“Hey, why’d you just put me on your lap? I’m serious, I’m gonna bug out! I’m a genius, which means I’m very easily confused!”

Wow! It’s just like her name implies—she’s so warm and cozy! “Anyway, Hareru-senpai is now also my kouhai. And you know what? I think I’m getting hungry. Hey, go buy me some sweet bread, would you?”

“Wait, am I being given a problem on the level of Fermat’s Last Theorem? I really doubt your brain would be able to prove my solution, Awacchi.”

: I don't think I've ever seen Harerun on the back foot like this

: Harerun can really push others around once she has control of the pace, but man, Awa-chan is pretty strong. Coming at her like a stampede rn

: and the fact that she can still casually throw a tsukkomi or two in there is nuts. i guess true warriors are first-rate at defending too

: I'm low-key terrified how powerful awa-chan has been lately even without strozero

: lmao what are they battling it out for. what's a streamer even supposed to be like really

“What’s the matter? It doesn’t have to be sweet bread. I’m fine with French bread too.”

“Mgh! I’m pretty sure you’re a lot nicer to all your other kouhais!”

“This is payback for you always getting the better of me. And you know what? Get me somehardtack too.”

“Why do you keep suggesting unappetizing kinds of bread? You’re gonna be eating bread for your meals with bread as a side dish. It’ll dry out your whole mouth! I really think you should just go for one that’s supposed to be a side dish...”

“Anyway, I’m actually pretty hungry. I’m gonna go put some ham and cheese on bread and heat it up.”

“Second breakfast?!”

“You want some too, Hareru-senpai?”

“Yes! Please!”

(A little later...)

“Munch munch... It’s amazing!”

“I agree. Ham and cheese is one of those classics that’s hard to mess up.”

“This Awaccheese made from Awacchi’s breast milk is just as thick and stretchy as I expected it to be.”

“I bought this at a store. Don’t make weird stuff up.”

“Oh. Well, that explains the lack of bitterness, the absence of lemony acidity, and the fact that it doesn’t smell like booze. My mistake.”

“Are you implying the flavor would change based on what I consumed beforehand? What am I, a sea urchin?”

“I will now imitate a sea urchin. *Uniii!*”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“I truly apologize, *uniii...*”

“Apologizing for something *while* doing it again? That’s a new one.”

As we were relaxing with our freshly baked ham and cheese sandwiches—and drinking some coffee I’d made as well—we started reflecting on the concert.

“So, Hareru-senpai, what are your general impressions of the concert?”

“Hmm... It’s definitely a good memory, that’s for sure. It’s just...”

“Just what?”

“There were a few too many parts of it I never want to remember again. If they started selling it on Blu-ray later down the road or something, I doubt I’d be able to watch.”

“Okay, okay! This is sudden, but I, Awayuki, am going to sing! The name of the song is *About Me*, composition and lyrics by Hareru Asagiri! Please listen!”

“*Stop! Don’t kill me! I don’t want to die!*”

“Eek! Hareru-senpai, would you settle do—*mphgh!*”

Hareru-senpai, on my lap, put her hands over my mouth to stop me from speaking. Out of spite, I continued to try and sing even as she tried to prevent it. Eventually that evolved into silly horseplay, and by the time it ended, we

were laughing and breathing somewhat heavily.

: this is getting a little lewd
: WHAT
: Bing! Harerun learned Double Team! 4545454545
: apologize to pokemon lmaoooo
: tee tee ¥1000
: I love Fake Akagi. I could really get addicted to his superb faking skills.
: I wonder if we could make Fake Akagi into a PR character for donating blood
: they wouldn't just take a donation, they'd bleed you totally dry lmao
: I actually kinda want to try playing mahjong but donating blood every time I lose points
: The Genius Appears

“Hoo. Let’s calm down, Hareru-senpai.”

“All right. Getting back to the concert!”

“What do you want to talk about first? Maybe the part with the second generation?”

“Oh, sure, that sounds good! I’m sure those who came to the concert know already, but Oshio and Seisei and Nekomaaa all came!”

The name “Seisei” had shown up during the Worldcraft stream—it referred to Sei-sama. Oshio was another Hareru-specific nickname, this one for Shion-senpai. A lot of people already called Nekoma-senpai with that long “a,” to sound like *Nekomaaa*, but the truth was that Hareru-senpai was the one who’d started that.

“That part was really exciting!” she explained excitedly. “I have so much gratitude for the three of them giving me time out of their busy schedules that I don’t even know what to say. So allow me to use this chance to just say, *Thank you.*”

“It had been a pretty long time since the four of you were all together,” I pointed out. “That might be part of why it got everyone so excited.”

“Yeah. Before the third generation came along—when there were only four of us—we got together a lot. But as more people came on board, that got

more and more rare.”

“The second gen still has group collabs from time to time.”

“Ah ha ha. Well, after that incident, I started trying to avoid making trouble for the second generation.”

“I see, I see.”

The incident she referred to was probably when she’d talked about the possibility she’d retire. At first, she’d shown up a lot in the second generation’s collabs as support, but kind of fell out of that as they grew. Thinking about it that way, Hareru-senpai definitely seemed to be in that guardian or teacher position, watching over the other members.

Shion Kaminari: I'd love to do one again!

Sei Utsuki: Yes. You did say you were now like a genmate to us, Hareru-kun. You understand what comes next, don't you?

Nekoma Hirune: You're practically the only one who can fully understand the stuff I talk about
: ahh! (dies of tee tee overload)
: the second gen is as warm as that old vermonter in those mittens

“Look. All the second-gen members are in agreement.”

“Ah ha ha. Then let’s do a collab soon, all of us together. It’ll be just like old times. Me and Seisei and Nekomaaa making dumbass comments, and Oshio playing the straight man, and...sniff.”

“Have a tissue, Senpai.”

“Mm. Thanks.”

She wiped her tears; it was pretty clear to me now how many burdens that little body of hers had been shouldering this whole time. *She's done so much for us. It's our turn—we have to be a place for her to let those burdens down.*

“Phew. My humblest apologies. Umm. Right! So the second-generation members came to the concert, and after a little reminiscing, we sang that song.”

“I wish I could have watched it from the audience as a fan.”

“Ha ha, yeah. If only I could have experienced the sense of unity in the hall. But we couldn’t have that, Awacchi. You had a huge role to play at the

end of the concert, after all!"

I laughed modestly. "You're right. I'm sorry." It looked like we'd accidentally let the mood get quiet and thoughtful. I wanted to keep things bright and cheery for the rest of the look back on the concert. *Maybe it's time to have a little bit of idle chatter to make the mood.* "Oh, come to think of it!"

"Hmm?"

"We were talking about tattoos before. If one of the second-gen members got a tattoo, what do you think they'd get? Like, I bet Sei-sama would look good with one."

"Huh, you're right. Seisei has that pink heart with wings on the bottom part of her clothes, but I bet she'd have something like that on her skin too."

"Oh, yeah! She totally would, wouldn't she?"

"For sure. Beyond the shadow of a doubt."

"In conclusion, Sei-sama's got a tattoo."

Sei Utsuki: Wait, what? I thought this was just speculation. I have a tattoo now?

: I can legit imagine that, so...yeah
: tattoo? you're talking about a womb tattoo, right?
: Those things usually light up when something sexual is happening, right? I wonder how they do that
: probably LEDs
: WOW such science

: I bet Sei-sama would even make a womb tattoo look weirdly cool

Sei Utsuki: Really? Then maybe I'll get one all over my body until there's no room left.

: is that you, angra mainyu?
: All the World's Lust

"As for the others..." said Hareru-senpai. "I bet Nekomaaa would have a little cat emoticon—that would fit her. Oh, and Oshio would have one of those albino snakes—a *shirohebi*. They're pretty auspicious, right? Perfect for a shrine maiden."

"Oh, I like those ideas," I agreed. "Tattoos aren't really common in Japanese culture, but it's fun to think about it! What kind of tattoo do you

think Ehrai-chan would have?”

“Pfft, that’s obvious. She’d have one of those super-scary dragons or tigers that covered her whole back!”

“She could also have just a single kanji character—like ‘justice,’ or ‘extreme’! It would be nice and simple!”

“What about ‘heaven’? You know, like the devil from Street Fighter?”

“Beyond a Real Raging Demon—it’s an Anytime Raging Demon!”

- : lmao
- : A true master of the art
- : LOL you only brought up Boss for the memes
- : We all have the same interpretation
- : you went straight to wabori tattoos like it was the obvious choice XDDD
- : Anytime Raging Demon? That would break the game. Don't take that outside training mode
- : Can you believe it? That she was originally a zookeeper?
- : Ultimate Mastery of the Way of Animal Raising

Great, I thought. *We’re speeding back to a brighter mood.* Which meant it was time to go back to our original topic—the concert.

We proceeded to talk about the selection of solo songs she’d gone with, as well as some background info about the prep work and such. Eventually, we came to the final segment of the concert.

“Okay,” I said, “I think it’s time to talk about *Diamond Dust* now.”

“Aha... We’re doing this? I’m still a little embarrassed about it.”

“We have to! If we don’t, everyone will be mad at us.”

“Yeah, you’re right...”

- : what we've all been waiting for!
- : That part made my tear ducts explode. I literally drowned
- : RIP that bro who drowned
- : ykw i get it tho. caught me in the crossfire and i bit the dust.

: we've been homicided!

“Umm, so to give a little explanation,” I began, “*Diamond Dust* was the brand-new surprise song Hareru-senpai and I sang. And just before it, Hareru-senpai revealed that she wanted to focus fully on her VTubing career from now on, so I think it stuck in a lot of people’s memories.”

“Even I was nervous—and I’m a genius!”

“The song itself was really, really well done. And everything else was too, of course.”

“I poured my whole soul into that song! If it fell flat after that whole bit we did before it, I’d have been ashamed for the rest of my life!”

: I mean, she really is a genius. Just composes it and writes the lyrics like it's nothing

: I feel like we hadn't seen Harerun use her talents properly for a long time before that

: She always self-destructs in elaborate ways just to get laughs

: release the song cowards

: Please release the song!

“Heh heh,” I chuckled. “We knew you’d all say that. Don’t you worry about a thing! We’re starting recording this week!” It would’ve been far too much of a waste to limit that song to that concert, so Live-On had hauled ass to plan a recorded version of it.

“We’ll have a music video for you all too! It’s gonna be amazing.”

The chat exploded with activity and Hareru-senpai watched it fly by, grinning happily. This was probably one of the greatest joys you could ask for as someone who made songs. The concert had been absolutely incredible, but we’d sworn to ourselves to do as good a job as possible on the recorded version too, while aiming for a slightly different nuance at that.

“It was so hard to make, though!” complained Hareru-senpai. “Except for the name. That part was easy.”

“Diamond dust,” I said. “It happens on really, really cold days with clear mornings—like ‘Hareru’ and ‘Asa’—where snow—‘Yuki’—is piled up on the ground. The moisture in the air in front of you will freeze, then glisten in

the sunlight for a while before falling down to the ground as snow.”

“Yeah, that’s it!” agreed Hareru-senpai. “Perfect for the two of us, huh?”

“It is perfect. In fact, I can’t imagine having gone with anything else.”

“I love singing in general, but that might have been the first time I had that much fun doing it.”

“I still don’t even remember what I felt like when I was singing it—thanks to your little surprise right before it.”

Hareru-senpai laughed. “You were half in tears as you were singing!”

We both laughed as we remembered the events of that day. *Yeah, I think that wraps up our “looking back” segment.* I asked Hareru-senpai, the hero of the concert, to close out the stream.

She nodded in assent, then took a deep breath before saying loudly and powerfully, “Now that I’ll be focusing on my VTuber activities, I’ll be having way more concerts in the future! And probably a lot more collabs too! I hope you’ll welcome me—Hareru Asagiri, the latecomer newcomer VTuber!!!”

Epilogue

One day, as I was finishing up a regular solo stream, I noticed the chat suddenly start getting a lot noisier, even though nothing was happening.

- : Wait, Sei-sama?!
- : Sei-sama's reiatsu disappeared?!
- : Huh? What are you talking about? What happened to Sex-sama?
- : Oh, shit! Sex-sama finally went bust!
- : Sei-sama is busting!

What's going on? I keep seeing Sei-sama's name pop up. Is she in chat right now? I wondered. No... The comments seem a little panicked for that.

“What’s wrong, everyone?” I asked. “Sex-sama is busting? Isn’t that the same as always? It happens every day.”

- : No not that! Sex-sama's monetization went bust!!!
- : lmfaoooooooooo
- : Sei-sama's monetization got revoked apparently
- : oh, so it wasn't her, but her channel that busted one o_o
- : I thought it was the dirty kind of busting, but it was actually the physically violent kind
- : It's really out of nowhere too. What could have caused it?

“Whaaaaaaaaat?!” I exclaimed at chat’s unexpected report. *I know I shouldn’t scream, but she lost her monetization! That’s how VTubers live—supers are a main source of income for us! If she got it revoked, that means she’s gone back to how I was before going all shuwa-shuwa!*

I’m sure Sei-sama has enough savings to live off of, but this is all so

sudden... Ugh! Why does Sei-sama have to go through this shit?!

.....

Actually, now I'm starting to wonder how Sex-sama, of all people, has been totally fine doing what she does until now.

Uh, anyway, that aside...

[Sei Utsuki @ Live-On]

Breaking news! Sei-sama has been violated!

She has been deflow--demonetized...

“Oh, she made a Cheep about it too.”

Great, that means this isn't a joke. She really had her monetization taken away... Miraculously, nobody in Live-On has ever lost monetization before. I'm not sure what to do...

Ugh, what now...? Maybe I'll ask her in person.

“Umm, okay. Well, I was going to close out the stream at this point anyway, so let's call it a day. I'm going to call Sei-sama!”

- : okaaay!
- : ty for the stream
- : You're gonna have sex with her to cheer her up, right?
- i get it.
- : Did she purposely go bust for this very purpose...?
- : That would be a premeditated crime. Which is still a crime, as far as I know.
- : The woman who busted her channel in order to bust with a kouhai
- : I'm kinda laughing, but also genuinely worried
- : ^ this

Everyone was treating it with levity because it was Sei-sama, but just like a few of the commenters, I was worried. Despite being the way she was, she was still a senpai who had taken care of me.

I ended the stream, and after a careful check to make sure it was actually off, unlocked my smartphone to contact Sei-sama. *I'll send her a chat message first—no, wait, I'm worried, so I'll call her. If she doesn't pick up,*

I'll send a message her way. I touched the call button and waited for it to get through.

But after waiting for a few moments, nothing changed—the inorganic call sound just kept on going. *Maybe she's not gonna pick up... I'll have to give up for now...*

But just as my thumb hovered over the button to hang up, she answered.

“...Oh!” I said. “Hello?”

“Hello. Is that you, Awayuki-kun?”

She must have realized she was getting a call in the nick of time. Her usual affected voice came through the speaker.

“This is sudden. What did you need? Were you missing me? I’m only 155 yen including hotel expenses. How about it?”

“No thanks.”

“Wow, even I didn’t expect you to immediately refuse, even though I’m way in the red.”

“I mean, if you’re in the red, what was all that ‘including hotel expenses’ stuff about? You make it sound like there’s a hotel out there where you don’t have to pay any more than 155 yen.”

“There is.”

“For real?”

“My bedroom.”

“But that’s a stigmatized property.”

“Ha ha! Perhaps it is stigmatized, but only because my scent being everywhere causes very unfortunate accidents involving people’s crotches getting super wet.”

“I’ll have to fumigate the place then.”

“Couldn’t you at least tone it down to some Febreze?”

My conversation with Sei-sama started to devolve into our usual dirty-joke party. *Hmm. She doesn’t seem too concerned about the monetization thing, I thought. Was I worried over nothing?*

...No, it’s still too early to judge. I have to actually talk about it with her.

“You know this sort of talk will go on forever with us, so could I change the topic?”

“You want to talk about my monetization getting revoked, right? It’s fine; I know. Shion-kun just called me a little bit ago about the same thing.”

“Right... I guess that’s the only thing I’d be calling about, huh?”

With a slightly troubled tone of voice—and a wry grin on her face, most likely—Sei-sama explained how much she'd worried Shion-senpai. The two of them were especially good friends, and Shion-senpai looked after her sometimes too. Apparently, Shion had been in a panic. “Near the end of the conversation, she started getting really serious and saying, ‘Mama will do her best to take care of you until your monetization comes back,’ so I made up an excuse and kind of hung up on her.”

“That does seem like an opportunity she’d jump at... But the fact is, she’s worried about you. Talk to her for real later, okay?”

“Right. I really did make her worry, huh?” Sei-sama groaned again, still seeming troubled.

...Yeah. I guess even Sei-sama isn’t totally unfazed by the whole thing, I thought. “Anyway, I just thought I’d ask you too. Are you fine financially? You’re not using up all your money on brothels?”

“Oh, that’s no problem. I can just fantasize about all your bodies! So it costs nothing to free myself of my lustful feelings. And thank you for that, as always.”

“Not the role I want to have. Please pay me back enough to make up for how much you fantasized about me.”

“W-Wait, but I had my monetization revoked, remember? Do you have, like, a double personality or something?”

“Well, yes.”

“Oh, right. You actually do.”

“No, that was a joke...” I sighed. “Whenever I talk to you, it feels like all the tension drains away. Too much of it, usually.”

“It’s proof you’re letting me into your heart. I hope you’ll let me into other places too. My other places, incidentally, are constantly flowing with juices.”

“I didn’t know you were that old.”

“I’m not talking about incontinence here.”

I sighed again. *I don’t mind talking to her like this, but the conversation’s getting nowhere. She’s clearly not going to be forthcoming with anything, so maybe I’ll ask some questions.* “Anyway, more importantly, do you know what caused this whole thing yet?”

“Hmm. Actually, that part bothers me a little too,” she confessed.

“What do you mean?”

“I get that I crossed some sort of sensitive-content line, but I’ve gone through and looked at everything, and I don’t think I ever did anything against the rules. That also means that since *everything* I do is in a gray zone, I’m basically taking stabs in the dark at what was *too* gray.”

“Yeah. You do sideways hops back and forth over that line as easily as you breathe.”

“Waaahhh... And because of that, I’ve been soiled!”

“What are you saying? You’re the one who soiled it.”

“Umm, so anyway, I did a deep dive into why they took away my monetization and eventually decided it was because I’m Sei-sama.”

“I guess that’s that, huh?” *But if she doesn’t know the reason, I thought, it’s a little hard to offer any solutions. What to do...?*

“I mean, I can guess that maybe a recent ASMR stream went too far or something. I might have to delete the VODs of any videos that might be over the line.”

“That’s probably best for now,” I agreed. “And you should learn a little moderation from now on!”

“Sure, I’ll be more careful than before, but... I’m still good old Sei-sama, you know? I won’t change.”

“You’re stubborn... Though I guess that’s very like you.”

“Besides, to be honest, losing my monetization isn’t what I’m really worried about.”

“It’s not?”

“Well, I’m Sei-sama. How did I even have monetization this long to begin with?”

“Oh, so you’re aware of it? Seriously. So many members of Live-On know *exactly* what foul deeds they’re committing.”

“Have you ever heard of a boomerang?”

Despite what I’d said, I really had been concerned for her. *If she’s not that worried, then that’s a relief.* “But if monetization isn’t what you’re really worried about, then is there something else that’s worrying you?” *The way she explained it was a little off.*

“...Well, everyone’s got a lot going on, right?”

“You dodged the question!”

“Ah ha ha! You might understand if you got your monetization removed too, Awayuki-kun.”

“I’m not about to jump into a trap I know is there.”

“Ah. But seriously, take care. You do some pretty dangerous streams yourself, don’t you?”

“Yeah. It feels a lot closer to home when someone nearby gets hit, so I’ll take that to heart. But I’d rather you worry about yourself more than me.”

“All right, then. Whoops, it looks like it’s time to do some stuff. Sorry, but that’s it for our secret little love talk.”

“I didn’t feel a scrap of love from it... But all right. Sorry for calling you so suddenly.”

“Don’t be! I was happy to hear your voice, Awayuki-kun.” Leaving me with that comment I didn’t know how to respond to, Sei-sama hung up.

Hmm... I thought. Well, she didn’t seem too worried about stuff, so I guess I accomplished my goal in calling her. But now I feel like I just have more questions...

But if she doesn’t want to talk about it, that’s fine. If she does, I’ll hear her out with sincerity.

I’d always thought Sei-sama was just a sex-crazed silly person, but maybe she was more secretive and enigmatic than I’d imagined.

Or so I thought, anyway. At the time, I had no way of knowing I’d get mixed up in what I soon did...

Afterword

Thank you for purchasing Volume 3 of *VTuber Legend: How I Went Viral After Forgetting to Turn Off My Stream*, or just *VTuber Legend* for short. I'm the author, Nana Nanato.

I started writing what would become the contents of this volume back at the start of 2021, though I've added a few extra things. That was about a year before this volume was printed.

With each volume, I've been subtly changing my approach to how I write this. But I personally think Volume 3 represents the completion of that, so the *VTuber Legend* world will continue to expand using this volume's style as a base.

How did you enjoy the story? I'm always writing *VTuber Legend*'s story with a desire to allow you all to enjoy the entirety of Live-On as a single unit, rather than just the main character Awayuki. There are other oshis in Live-On besides her, after all! Try looking for one if you have the chance!

Thanks to your wonderful support, barring any unforeseen issues, it looks like Volume 4 and beyond will continue to be printed like this. Even I've been shocked at how popular this series has been getting. It's been a big motivating factor for me.

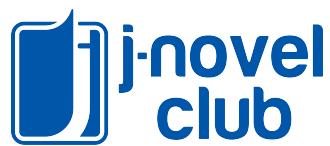
But partly because of that—and as I'm sure you've all realized—there was one particular part of the story where the censoring of words had to be tightened up a little. That's not to say anyone got mad at me! But for the sake of developing the series out into the future, I don't exactly have the option to not censor things, so... They're not censored out in the web version, so please forgive me! Awayuki will surely do everything she can! The editorial side of things has been infinitely understanding of *VTuber Legend*'s ferocious style too, so that part won't be totally destroyed either. But that one part—there was just so much that I couldn't do anything about it! Actually, it's weird that I've been doing things like that until now to begin with!

As I mentioned before, this is all in order to expand *VTuber Legend* as a series, and because of that sacrifice, I've been able to take a huge step

forward. I'm still going to pull crazy stuff that will shock all of you, so please, look forward to it. Don't worry! The production side of things is still borderline obsessive. They're still showing no signs of major caution about this volume's story aside from that one point of revision, so it's a little late now!

Finally, to wrap up this afterword, I'd like to give a sincere thank-you to everyone involved in making Volume 3 a reality, including the readers for supporting us.

Thank you again for Volume 3! Let's meet again in Volume 4.



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