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Mushoku Tensei

jobless reincarnation

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MUSHOKU TENSEI
~ISEKAI ITTARA HONKI DASU~ VOL. 1

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First published in Japan in 2014 by
KADOKAWA CORPORATION, Tokyo.
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PUBLISHER: Jason DeAngelis

ISBN: 978-1-64275-138-3
Printed in Canada
Revised Edition: March 2021
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Seven Seas Entertainment

MUSHOKU TENSEI VOLUME 1: CHILDHOOD

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*"You're standing on the precipice of a cliff.
Step forward and smash into the ground below,
or stay where you are and endure constant
mockery; the choice is yours."*

—I don't want to work, no matter what anyone says!

*AUTHOR: RUDEUS GREYRAT
TRANSLATION: JEAN RF MAGOTT*

Prologue

I was a thirty-four-year-old man with no job and nowhere to live. I was a nice guy, but I was on the heavy side, didn't have good looks going for me, and was in the midst of regretting my entire life.

I'd only been homeless for about three hours. Before that, I'd been the classic, stereotypical, long-time shut-in who wasn't doing anything with his life. And then, all of a sudden, my parents died. Being the shut-in that I was, I obviously didn't attend the funeral, or the family gathering thereafter.

It was quite the scene when they kicked me out of the house afterward.

My brash behavior around the house hadn't won anyone over. I was the sort of guy who'd bang on the walls and floors to get people's attention without leaving my room. On the day of the funeral, I was halfway through jerking off, my body arched in the air, when my brothers and sisters barged into my room in their mourning garb and delivered their letter formally disowning me. When I ignored it, my younger brother smashed my computer—which I valued more than myself—with a wooden bat. Meanwhile, my older brother, the one with a black belt in karate, stormed over in a blind rage and beat the crap out of me.

I just let it happen, sobbing uselessly all the while, hoping that would be the end of it. But my siblings forced me out of the house with nothing but the clothes on my back. I had no choice but to wander around town, nursing the throbbing pain in my side. It felt like I had a broken rib.

The biting words they hurled at me as I left our house would ring in my ears for the rest of my life. The things they said cut me to my very core. I was completely, totally heartbroken.

What the hell had I even done wrong? All I did was skip out on our parents' funeral so I could spank it to uncensored loli porn.

So, what in the world was I supposed to do now?

I knew the answer: look for a part- or full-time job, find myself a place to live, and buy some food. The question was how? I had no idea how to even begin looking for a job.

Well, okay, I knew the basics. The first place I should check out was an employment agency—except I seriously had been a complete shut-in for over ten years, so I had no idea where any of those were. Also, I remembered hearing that those agencies only handled the introductions to job opportunities. You'd then have to take your résumé to the place with the job on offer and sit for an interview.

And here I was, wearing a sweatshirt caked in a mixture of sweat, grime, and my own blood. I was in no state for an interview. No one was going to hire some weirdo who showed up looking like I did. Oh, I'd make an impression, for sure, but I'd never land the job.

Moreover, I didn't know where they even sold résumé paper. At a stationery shop? The convenience store? There were convenience stores within walking distance, but I didn't have any money.

But what if I could take care of all that? With some luck, I could borrow some money from a loan company or something, buy myself some new clothes, and then purchase some résumé paper and something to write with.

Then I remembered: You can't fill out a résumé if you don't have an address or anywhere to live.

I was hosed. I finally realized that, despite having come this far, my life was completely ruined.

It started to rain. "Ugh," I grumbled.

Summer was over, bringing with it the autumn chill. My worn-out, years-old sweatshirt soaked up the cold rain, mercilessly robbing my body of precious heat.

"If only I could go back and do it all over again," I muttered, the words slipping unbidden from my mouth.



I hadn't always been a garbage excuse for a human being. I was born to a well-off family, the fourth of five children, with two older brothers, an older sister, and a younger brother. Back in elementary school, everyone always praised me for being smart for my age. I didn't have a knack for academics, but I was good at video games and had an athletic bent. I got along with folks. I was the heart of my class.

In junior high, I joined the computer club, pored over magazines, and saved up my allowance to build my very own PC. My family, who didn't know the first thing about computers, barely gave it a second thought.

It wasn't until high school—well, the last year of junior high, I suppose—that my life got all messed up.

I spent so much time fixated on my computer that I neglected my studies. In hindsight, that was probably what led to everything else.

I didn't think I needed to study in order to have a future. I thought it was pointless. As a result, I wound up going to what was widely considered the worst high school in the prefecture, where the lowest of the delinquents went.

But even then, I figured I'd be fine. I could do anything I set my mind to, after all. I wasn't in the same league as the rest of these idiots. Or so I thought.

There was an incident from back then that I still remembered. I was in line to buy lunch from the school store when someone cut in front of me. Being the morally upstanding young man I was, I gave him a piece of my mind, getting all up in his face, striking an awkward, humorless, and self-conscious pose.

But as my luck would have it, this guy wasn't just an upperclassman, but one of the real nasty ones, vying to be the school's top dog. He and his buddies pounded my face swollen and

puffy, then hung me from the school gate, buck naked, practically crucified for all to see.

They took a ton of pictures, which they circulated throughout the school like it was some simple prank. My social standing among my classmates plummeted to rock bottom overnight, leaving me with the nickname Pencil Dick.

I stopped going to school for over a month, holing up in my room instead. My father and older brothers saw the state I was in and told me to keep my chin up and not to give up and other patronizing things like that. I ignored it all.

It wasn't my fault. Who could bring themselves to go to school under circumstances like mine? Nobody, that's who. So, no matter what anyone said, I remained steadfastly holed up. All of the other kids in my class had seen those pictures and were laughing at me. I was sure of it.

I didn't leave the house, but with my computer and my internet connection, I was still able to kill plenty of time. I developed an interest in all sorts of things thanks to the internet, and I did all sorts of things as well. I constructed plastic model kits, tried my hand at painting figurines, and started my own blog. My mother would give me as much money as I could cajole out of her, almost like she was supporting me in all this.

Despite that, I gave up on all of these hobbies within a year. Anytime I saw someone who was better at something than me, I'd lose all motivation. To an outsider, it probably looked like I was just playing around and having fun. In reality, I was locked inside my shell with nothing else to do during my time alone.

No. In retrospect, that was just another excuse. I probably would have been better off deciding I wanted to be a manga artist and posting a silly little web comic online, or deciding I wanted to be a light novel author and serializing stories, or something like that.

There were plenty of people in circumstances like mine who did that sort of thing.

Those were the people I made fun of.

"This stuff is crap," I'd snort derisively upon viewing their creations, acting like it was my place to be a critic when I hadn't done anything myself.

I wanted to go back to school—ideally to grade school, or maybe junior high. Hell, even going back a year or two would be fine. If I had a little more time, I'd be able to do something. I might have half-assed everything I'd ever done, but I could pick up where I'd left off. If I really applied myself, I could be a pro at something, even if I didn't wind up the best at it.

I sighed. Why hadn't I ever bothered to achieve anything before now?

I'd had time. Even if that time was all spent shut in my room in front of the computer, there was plenty I could have done. Again, even if I wasn't the best, I would have accomplished something by being halfway decent and applying myself.

Like manga or writing. Maybe video games or programming. Whichever the case, with the proper effort, I could have gotten results, and from there, I could have made money and—

No. It didn't matter now. I hadn't made the effort.

Even if I could go back to the past, I'd only trip up again, stopped in my tracks by some similar obstacle. I hadn't made it through things that normal people managed to breeze through without thinking, and that's why I was where I was now.

Suddenly, amidst the downpour, I heard people arguing. "Hm?" I muttered. Was someone having a fight? That wasn't good. I didn't want to get involved with that sort of thing. Even as I was thinking that, however, my feet kept carrying me in that direction.

"Look, you're the one who—"

"No, you're the one who—"

What I saw when I rounded the corner were three high schoolers in the midst of what was clearly a lovers' quarrel. There were two boys and a girl, dressed in the now-vanishingly rare tsummeri jackets and a sailor suit, respectively. The scene was almost like a battlefield, with one of the boys, an especially tall fellow, in a verbal spat with the girl. The other boy had interposed himself between the two in an attempt to placate them, but his pleas were completely ignored.

Yeah, I'd been in situations like that myself.

This sight brought back older memories. Back in junior high, I had one childhood friend who was real cute. And when I say cute, I mean like fourth- or fifth-cutest in the class. She wore her hair very short, since she was on the track team. Of every ten people she passed by on the street, at least two or three would turn to look back at her. Also, there was this one anime I was super into at the time, so I thought the track team and short hair thing was cute. Even her less-attractive attributes were fine by me.

She lived nearby, so we were in the same class for a lot of grade school and junior high. All the way up to junior high, we often walked home together. We had plenty of chances to talk, but wound up arguing a lot. I did some regrettable things. To this day, I can get off three times in a row to the prompts "junior high," "childhood friend," and "track team."

Come to think of it, I heard rumors she'd gotten married about seven years ago. And by "rumors," I mean overhearing my siblings talking in the living room.

We certainly didn't have a bad relationship. We'd known each other since we were little, so we were able to talk to each other pretty openly. I don't think she ever had a thing for me, but if I'd

studied harder and gotten into the same high school she did, or if I'd joined the track team and gotten admission that way, it might have sent the right signals. Then, if I'd told her how I felt, maybe we might have wound up dating.

Anyway, we'd get into fights on the way home, just like these three kids here. Or, if things went well, we'd hook up and do naughty things in some abandoned classroom after school.

(Shit, this sounds like the plot of some adult game I must've played.)

And then, I noticed something: There was a truck speeding right toward the group of three students. The driver was slumped over, asleep at the wheel.

The kids hadn't noticed yet.

"Ah, h-hey, look...look out!" I shouted—or tried to, anyway. I'd barely spoken aloud in over a decade, and my already-weak vocal cords had further tightened due to the pain in my ribs and the chill of the rain. All I could muster was a pathetic, wavering squeak that was lost in the din of the downpour.

I knew I had to help them; at the same time, I didn't know how. I knew that if I didn't save them, five minutes later I'd wind up regretting it. Like, I was pretty sure seeing three teenagers splattered into paste by a truck moving at terrific speeds was something I'd regret.

Better to save them. I had to do something.

In all likelihood, I'd end up dead on the side of the road, but I figured that, if nothing else, having a bit of solace wouldn't be so bad. I didn't want to spend my final moments mired in regret.

I staggered as I started to run. Ten-plus years of barely moving made my legs slow to respond. For the first time in my life, I wished I'd exercised more. My busted ribs sent a startling jolt of pain

through me, threatening to bring me to a halt. For the first time in my life, I also wished I'd gotten more calcium.

Even so, I ran. I was capable of running.

The boy who'd been yelling noticed the truck approaching and drew the girl close to him. The other boy had looked away and hadn't spotted the truck yet. I grabbed him by the collar and yanked him behind me with all my might, then pushed him out of the vehicle's path.

Good. Now that left the other two.

At that very instant, I saw the truck right before me. I'd simply tried to pull the first boy to safety, but instead, I'd bodily switched places with him, putting me in harm's way. But that was unavoidable, and had nothing to do with the fact that I weighed over a hundred kilos; running at full speed, I'd simply stumbled a bit too far.

The instant before the truck made contact, a light blossomed behind me. Was I about to see my life flash before my eyes, like people said? It only lasted a moment, so I couldn't tell. It was all so fast.

Maybe that's what happens when your life is hollow and half-lived.

I was struck by a truck more than fifty times my weight and thrown against a concrete wall. "Hurgh!" The air was forced from my lungs, which were still spasming for oxygen in the wake of running flat out.

I couldn't speak, but I wasn't dead. My ample fat must have saved me.

Except the truck was still moving. It pinned me against the concrete, crushing me like a tomato, and then I was dead.

Chapter 1: Is This Another World?

When I opened my eyes, the first thing I saw was dazzling light. It grew to encompass my entire field of vision, and I squinted in discomfort.

Once my vision adjusted, I became aware of the blonde young lady gazing at me. She was one gorgeous girl—wait, no. She was definitely a woman.

Who is she? I thought.

By her side was a young man of roughly the same age, his hair brown, his awkward smile directed at me. He looked strong, proud, and impressively muscled.

Brown-haired and stubborn-looking? I ought to have reacted negatively the instant I saw this big oaf—but to my surprise, there was no feeling of ill will. His hair must have been dyed that color. It was a very fetching shade of brown.

The woman looked at me with a warm smile and spoke. Her words were oddly indistinct and difficult to make out, however. Was she even speaking Japanese?

The man said something in reply, his face losing some of its tension. I likewise had no idea what he said.

A third unintelligible voice joined the conversation, but I couldn't see who was speaking. I tried getting up to figure out where I was and to ask these people who they were. And let me tell you, I may have been a shut-in, but that didn't mean I didn't know how to talk to people. But somehow, all I could muster was this:

"Ahh! Waah!"

Nothing but garbled whining and moaning.

And I couldn't move my body. I mean, I could sort of move my fingertips and my arms, but I couldn't sit up.

The brown-haired man said something else, then suddenly leaned down and picked me up. This was absurd! I weighed over a hundred kilos. How could he lift me that easily? Maybe I'd lost some weight after being stuck in a coma for a few weeks?

That was a pretty nasty accident I'd been in, after all.

There was a good chance I hadn't come out of it with all of my limbs. For the rest of the day, I dwelled on a single thought:

My life is going to be a living hell.

Let's jump ahead a month.

Apparently, I'd been reborn. The reality of my situation had finally set in: I was a baby.

I was finally able to confirm that after being picked up and having my head cradled so I could see my own body. But why did I still have all of my memories of my prior life? Not that I was complaining, exactly, but who would imagine someone being reborn with all their memories— to say nothing of that wild delusion actually being true?

The two people I first saw when I came to must have been my parents. If I had to guess, I'd say they were in their early twenties. Clearly younger than I'd been in my past life, at any rate. My thirty-four-year-old self would have written them off as kids.

I was jealous that they'd gotten to make a baby at that age.

Early on, I'd realized that I wasn't in Japan; the language was different, and my parents didn't sport Japanese facial features. They also wore what appeared to be some form of old-timey clothing. I didn't see anything that resembled home appliances; a woman in a maid outfit came by and cleaned with a rag. The furniture, eating

utensils, and the like were all crudely fashioned from wood. Wherever this was, it didn't seem like it was a developed nation.

We didn't even have electric lighting, only candles and oil lamps. Perhaps my parents were so poor that they couldn't afford to pay the electric bill.

But how likely was that, really? Seeing as they had a maid, I figured that they must have money, but maybe the maid was my father's sister, or my mother's. That wouldn't be too odd. She'd at least help out with the housekeeping, right?

I had wished that I could go back and do everything over again, but being born to a family that was too poor to pay for utilities wasn't exactly what I'd had in mind.

Another half a year went by.

After six months of listening to my parents conversing, I'd begun to pick up some of the language. My English grades had never been great, but I guess it's true what they say about how sticking solely to your native tongue makes it harder to advance in your studies. Or maybe, given that I had a new body, my brain was better suited to learning this time? I felt like I had an unusual knack for remembering things, perhaps because I was still so young.

Around this time, I started learning to crawl as well. Being able to move was a marvelous thing. I'd never been so grateful to have control of my own body.

"As soon as you take your eyes off him, he slips off somewhere," my mother said.

"Hey, so long as he's good and healthy," my father replied, watching me as I crawled around. "I was worried back when he was born and he never cried."

"He doesn't cry now, either, does he?"

I wasn't exactly the age to whine because I was hungry. The times I let the wailing out were when I tried, and invariably failed, to stop myself from soiling my pants.

Even though I could only crawl, I learned a lot from being able to move around. The first thing I learned was that this was definitely the home of a rich family. The house was a wooden, two-story structure with over five separate rooms, and we had the one maid on staff. At first, I'd assumed she was my aunt or something, but given her deferential attitude toward my mother and father, I doubted she was family.

Our house was located in the countryside. Outside the windows stretched a peaceful, pastoral landscape.

There were few other houses, just two or three nestled amidst the wheat fields on any given side. We really were out in the sticks. I couldn't see any telephone poles or streetlights. There might not even be a power station nearby. I'd heard that in some countries they ran power cables underground, but if that were the case here, it was strange that our house didn't have electricity.

This place was way too pastoral. It grated on me, since I was used to the comforts of modern civilization. Here I was, having been reborn, practically dying to get my hands on a computer.

But all of that changed early one afternoon.

As the things I could do were pretty limited, I decided I'd look at the scenery. I clambered onto a chair as I usually did in order to get a peek out through the window, and then my eyes went wide.

My father was in our yard, swinging a sword around.

What in the world was he doing? He was old enough to know better than that. Was this the kind of person my dad was? Some sort of fantasy dweeb?

Uh-oh. In my daze of astonishment, I started slipping from the chair.

My underdeveloped hands grabbed the chair, but couldn't support my weight—not with how top-heavy my head made me—and I fell.

I hit the floor with a thud and immediately heard a cry of alarm. I saw my mother drop the load of laundry she was carrying, her face going pale as she brought her hand to her mouth.

"Rudy! Are you all right?!" She rushed to my side and picked me up. As she met my gaze, her expression slackened with relief, and she stroked my head. "Aw, you're fine, see?"

Easy there, lady, I thought. Careful with my head. I just whacked that thing.

Given how panicked she'd looked, I must have had a pretty nasty fall. I mean, I did land right on my head. Maybe I was going to be permanently stupid. Not that that would be a change from the usual.

My head was throbbing. I tried to reach for the chair, but couldn't muster the energy. My mother didn't seem so nervous now, though, so I probably wasn't bleeding or anything. Just a bump or something, in all likelihood.

She peered carefully at my head. The look on her face suggested that, injury or no, she was taking this pretty seriously. Finally, she rested her hand atop my head. "Just to be on the safe side..." she began. "*Let this divine power be as satisfying nourishment, giving one who has lost their strength the strength to rise again—Healing!*"

What the heck? Was that this country's version of kissing the boo-boo to make it all better? Or was she another fantasy nerd like

my sword-swinging father? Was this a case of the Fighter marrying the Cleric?

But as I thought that, my mother's hand shone with a dim light, and the pain in my head was instantly gone.

Bwuh?

"There we go," she said. "All better! You know, Mommy used to be a pretty famous adventurer." Her voice rang with pride.

My mind reeled in confusion, various terms whirling through my mind: sword, fighter, adventurer, healing, incantation, cleric...

Seriously—what just happened?

My father, having heard my mother's earlier scream, poked his head through the window. "What's the matter?" he asked. He was sweating, probably from swinging that sword of his around.

"Honey, you have to be more attentive," my mother chided. "Rudy managed to climb up onto the chair. He could have been seriously hurt."

My father seemed much more composed. "Hey, boys will be boys. Kid's got a lot of energy."

This sort of back-and-forth was pretty common with my parents. But this time, my mother wasn't simply backing down, probably because of how I'd hit my head. "Honey, he isn't even a year old yet. Would it kill you to show some more concern?"

"It's like I said: falling and stumbling and getting bumps and bruises is how kids grow up to be tough. Besides, if he does get hurt, you can just heal him!"

"I'm just worried that he might get hurt so badly that I *can't* heal him."

"He'll be fine," my father assured her.

My mother clutched me more tightly, her face going red.

"You were worried early on about how he wouldn't cry. If he's this much of a little scamp, then he'll be fine," my father continued, and then he leaned in to give my mother a kiss.

All right, you two. Get a room, will ya?

After that, my parents took me into the other room to put me to bed, then headed upstairs to make me a baby brother or sister. I could tell because I could hear the creaking and moaning coming from the second floor. I guess there was life outside the internet.

And also...magic?

In the wake of all that, I paid extra-close attention to the conversations my parents had with one another and the help. In so doing, I noticed them using a lot of words I wasn't familiar with. Most of these were the names of countries and regions and territories—all clearly proper nouns that I'd never heard before.

I didn't want to jump to conclusions, but by this point, that could only mean one thing: I wasn't on Earth anymore; I was in a different world.

A world of swords and sorcery.

And it occurred to me: if I lived in this world, I could do all those things, too. After all, this was a place of high fantasy, one that didn't obey the same rules of common sense as my past life. I could live as a typical person, doing the typical things for this world. Where I stumbled, I would get back up, dust myself off, and forge onward.

My former self had died full of regret, died feeling frustrated at his powerlessness and how he'd never accomplished anything. But now I knew all of my missteps. With all the knowledge and experience from my past life, I could finally do it.

I could finally live life *right*.





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