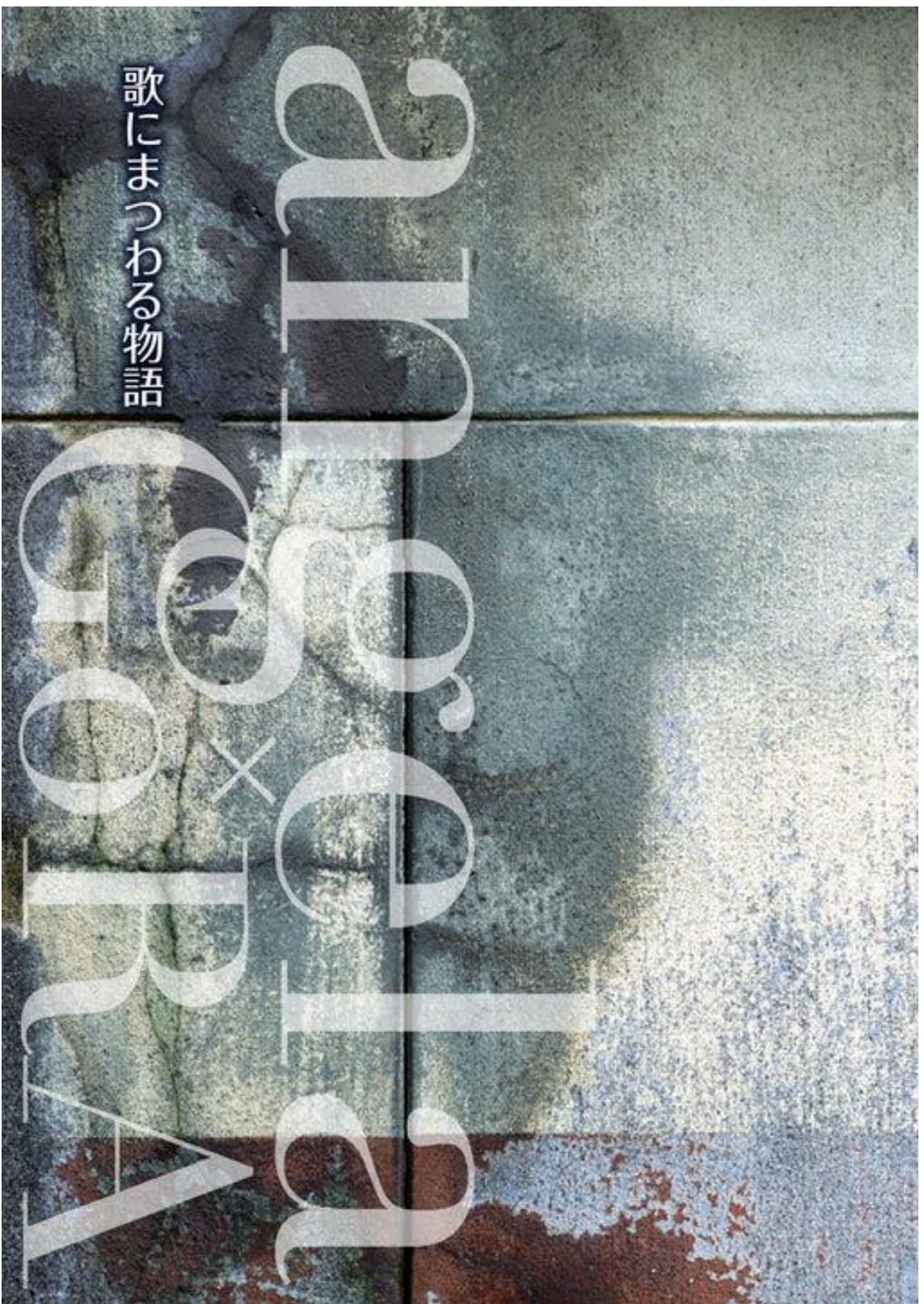


歌にまつわる物語



"ANGELA X GORA"

CHAPTER 3: SURVIVE! (SUZUKI SUZU)

TRANSLATION: NARU-KUN / K-PROJECT WORLD

Sukuna let out a shaky breath.

The rain was surprisingly cold and drained his body heat. It wasn't as if he regretted bringing a raincoat. Besides, the rain wasn't a bad thing. It hid his presence and footsteps. In a situation like this, surrounded by "Scepter 4", it could be said to be a blessing.

The problem lay more on earth than in the heavens.

"...Well, wait, Five."

Sukuna stopped, clicking his tongue, and turned over his shoulder.

Two small figures. They were pleading and supporting each other.

They were in a rainy alley, and they looked like a pile of garbage bags. However, their abilities were only garbage, and Sukuna knew they were the second-rankers, "Takaya" and "Miyuki".

Takaya begged, rubbing Miyuki's back while coughing.

"Miyuki is at her limit. Can we rest for a while?"

"Eh?"

He didn't even try to suppress the irritation in his voice. After using the supernatural ability application "Grassroot", he had finally found a way out of the encirclement, and now he wanted to take a break?

Sukuna and Takaya's gazes met. Takaya knew what Sukuna was thinking.

But he spoke firmly.

"Please. This is the mission, right?"

"....."

Sighing, Sukuna approached them.

"There's a warehouse about ten meters away where we can hide. Let's go."

"Uh, yes. Thanks!"

"Don't shout.", Sukuna muttered, stifling his words as he held Miyuki's body.

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A common misconception among low-ranking players is that "they shouldn't fail a mission".

Well, that's not entirely wrong. In "Jungle", the penalties for failing a mission are very severe. It's not uncommon to have to attempt a mission five or even ten times to make up for it. Failing a mission seems like the worst thing that can happen.

But Sukuna, who has reached G-Rank, knows that's wrong.

The worst that can happen is a game over.

Lost points. Arrested. Unable to recover. And dead.

Game over lurks everywhere. Sukuna has seen plenty of players caught up in it.

The most important thing is to survive.

He should have known.

And yet, the fact that Five ended up in this situation was proof enough that he was nothing more than an L-Rank.

The mission's failure was confirmed from the start.

The contents of a red container in Block L of the Third Seaside Center warehouse were to be stolen. The client was anonymous, but that's not unusual for this kind of criminal mission. It was a fairly easy job.

He thought so until he opened the container.

Was it a covert operation by "Scepter 4", a trap by a rival mafia, or simply a security lapse? At that moment, the alarm sounded.

There were six members on the mission, including Sukuna. As soon as the alarm sounded, three of them began fleeing like a swarm of spiders. Of course, Sukuna did the same. In situations like these, it's a general rule for everyone to flee in different directions to avoid the pursuers concentrating.

But there were two idiots following Sukuna.

They were Takaya and Miyuki.

He knew their names from the brief pre-mission briefing. Miyuki was about the same age as Sukuna, and Takaya was a bit older. They were both timid and seemed unreliable. Sukuna considered them "discharged personnel", and the other three recruits were probably the same.

Takaya and Miyuki followed him.

They jumped from roof to roof of the warehouse, slid through a skylight into the interior, and grabbed onto a beam. They smoothly crossed the steel beams, which weren't designed for human movement. But the two still chased Sukuna. Annoyed, Sukuna said in a low voice,

"Hey! Don't follow me!"

Takaya was out of breath. But he was better than Miyuki. Her labored breathing was harsh and heavy, and she clung to Takaya to support her body, which felt like it would collapse at any moment.

Sukuna narrowed his eyes. She was definitely a "discarded member".

"You're Five, right? There have been rumors about you lately..."

"That's what I mean. It's none of your business."

"Please. Help me. Miyuki, my sister, seems to have had a seizure."

Sukuna remained silent.

He was so stupid that he couldn't say anything else. Not only did he bring a sick person on the mission, but he also asked Sukuna, who only had a personal interest in it, for help. Some spoiled rookies think it's only natural to help them. Sukuna decided and tried to cut the conversation short.

Suddenly, Jumpy jumped out of Sukuna's PDA.

"Mission accomplished! Mission accomplished! 300 Jungle points added!"

"Eh?"

Looking back, Takaya clutched the PDA. A terrifying expression.

The expression of an older brother protecting his younger sister.

"It's an advance. Please. Accept the mission. Could you take Miyuki and me to safety?"

"....."

A request for a new mission had come in. The reward was 1,000 JP. This time it more than made up for failure.

The most important thing was to survive. Not die. And quickly finish off everything that stopped them. Five didn't understand.

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"They're in Block C!"

"Don't let them escape! Surround them!"

The men in blue rushed in, shouting at the top of their lungs. The sound of footsteps raising puddles mingled with the rain.

Inside a warehouse a few meters from the alley. Hiding among cardboard boxes and steel shelves, Sukuna heard footsteps.

"A-are you okay?"

"Don't talk."

While digging his nails into Takaya, Sukuna watched "Grassroot". Three blue dots of light wandered around the surrounding wireframe map.

"Grassroot" reveals the location of devices connected to the network. "Scepter 4's" PDA has tight security, but it's no match for "Jungle's" technology.

Finally, the dot of light went out, and silence returned to the surroundings.

Sukuna let out a small sigh; then, suddenly, he noticed something.

Miyuki covered her mouth and trembled.

"...Enough."

After saying that, Miyuki coughed uncontrollably. Takaya stroked her back.

"I'm sorry."

After a while, Miyuki calmed down a bit and murmured in a weak voice. Her face was pale and her breathing sounded like a whistle.

Sukuna felt irritated. Not with Miyuki, but with Takaya.

"Why did you bring this girl? Leave her at home."

Takaya lowered his head. He had the expression of someone who knows he'll receive criticism.

It was Miyuki who spoke in his place.

"I don't have a home. But I do have a place to sleep."

"....."

Miyuki's hand overlapped Takaya's.

"We promised. When we go on a mission, we'll do it together. Since we were alone together."

Sukuna gritted his teeth.

Sukuna wasn't saddened by the fact that two teenagers were involved in a criminal mission. Children without a home to return to and no one to rely on need strength to survive.

Sukuna understood this better than anyone.

Takaya gently held Miyuki's hand.

"If anything happens, I'll protect her. It's the promise we've made to each other since we began our mission."

Sukuna laughed coldly.

"And this is what you get? If you want to commit suicide with your sister, don't involve anyone else."

"I'm sorry..."

Takaya's low voice took away any desire to insist. He didn't care how stupid those guys were, or if they'd lost something important because of it.

He just needed the points. Everything else was irrelevant.

Still, Sukuna didn't understand why he felt so upset.

Block C, which "Scepter 4" had sealed, was precisely the hole in the fence Sukuna was trying to penetrate.

If Miyuki had had enough stamina, he would have been able to squeeze through easily. Sukuna didn't try to point it out. It wouldn't have been pointless, and he wasn't so useless as to mess with a sick person.

"We'll be on the opposite side, but we'll head for Block X. The blue suits seem to be concentrated on the north side. We'll go the other way."

"I understand."

Takaya looked at the PDA and nodded.

Sukuna squeezed into a gap between the containers. It was so narrow that only a child could fit through, making it the perfect spot for them. Miyuki followed him, and then Takaya.

The rain continued to fall.

Rainwater overflowed from the container, pouring down like a waterfall. There was no way around it. As he walked forward, speechless, Miyuki suddenly spoke.

"Hey, Five."

"What's wrong?"

"Why are you in Jungle, "Five"?"

Sukuna didn't turn around. He didn't want to show his unsightly, distorted face.

"Are you worried?"

"I'm not worried, I'm just asking?"

"You don't need to know."

"I don't need to know, I'm just asking?"

"Hey, Miyuki, stop."

Takaya couldn't help but intervene. But as they moved sideways between the containers, no one could stop Miyuki from saying anything.

Sukuna finally relented.

"It's because I left home. You understand, right?"

Miyuki was silent for a moment and then murmured,

"It's the same thing, right?"

She said with a touch of mirth.

Sukuna didn't reply.

Finally, Sukuna and the others crawled out from between the containers. They were at a dock by the coast. A huge freighter blocked their view like a flat wall. The night sea was black, and the white of the waves was nowhere to be seen.

Sukuna turned and saw Miyuki staring at him. Her large, bright eyes intimidated him.

"Hey, Five...!"

"Miyuki!"

Takaya shouted as if he wanted to stop someone, and grabbed Miyuki with one arm.

"Enough! Five is only helping us because we're on a mission. Don't cause us any more trouble."

Miyuki glared at Takaya. Her gaze was accusatory.

Sukuna searched for the words to say.

But in the end, he couldn't find them. Leaning into the shadow of the container, Sukuna spoke softly:

"It's about a kilometer from Block X. It's unlikely that "Scepter 4" is keeping watch, but make sure they don't detect you."

About three seconds after they started walking, they heard footsteps behind them.

Sukuna pulled out his PDA so the two wouldn't notice.

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Memories of the past began to emerge like maggots from a corpse.

Every time this happens, Sukuna tries to tune out. It doesn't work. As soon as he stops thinking, the bugs begin to gnaw at his brain, producing a crunching sound.

His face. His voice. His movements.

The look he had the last time he saw him.

He took a deep breath and then exhaled.

It wasn't getting any easier. He even felt nauseous. Sukuna pushed them away and continued.

Behind him, he heard Miyuki cough.

Then Takaya's voice came.

"Hey, are you okay?"

Sukuna slowed his pace slightly. He was worried about Miyuki. There were only a few minutes left until this was over. Even if he hesitated, it wouldn't change the outcome.

However, it seemed Takaya wasn't calling Miyuki.

"Five! Are you okay?"

"Eh?"

Sukuna turned around in surprise.

"Something's been wrong with you for a while now. You haven't said anything, and you look pale. Did you hurt yourself or something?"

Sukuna stared at Takaya.

Takaya was the one with a pale face. Probably due to tension, his body was stiff and his lips were trembling.

Sukuna took another breath and then exhaled.

This time it was a little easier. Miyuki stared at Sukuna's face, as if she wanted to say something. Looking away, Sukuna said,

"It's okay. It's nothing. I was just remembering something from the past."

"From the past?"

"It was different back then. I didn't play alone."

Talking to someone makes you feel better. He thinks he heard someone say that on TV. But Sukuna didn't want to feel better.

"I had one friend. Just one. We could talk about anything, do a lot of silly things together, and I felt like I could do anything with him."

Takaya said nothing. Miyuki coughed. Sukuna kept talking.

"He told me about "Jungle". I started as an E-Rank and gradually leveled up. It was fun back then."

The cold rain fell, draining his body heat.

"But in the end, it turned out to be wrong."

"What?"

The faint voice was Miyuki's. Sukuna replied without turning around.

"He wasn't a friend. He was just looking out for me."

"....."

The exit from Block O came into view. There was no one in sight. A steel gate between a wire mesh screen was visible, slightly open.

"So my best friend, the one I always trusted, respected, and thought I could rely on, turned out to be a traitor of the worst kind."

At that moment, Sukuna stopped, turned around, and twisted his lips.

"Isn't that funny, Takaya?"

Takaya didn't respond.

His expression was distorted by an unmistakable fear. His face was pale, and Miyuki looked healthier than him. Miyuki blinked repeatedly, looking back and forth between Sukuna and Takaya.

It seemed she was the only one who didn't know anything.

Sukuna longed for the exit.

"Go ahead. The mission is to get out of here safely, right?"

"....."

Takaya began to walk awkwardly.

"Hey, big brother, why...? What about Five?"

Miyuki was confused. Still, she continued walking, with Takaya leading her by the hand. She glanced at Sukuna several times until they reached the steel gate at the block's exit.

The two arrived and disappeared behind the gate.

After confirming this, Sukuna started walking toward the gate.

It was raining.

The rain wasn't all bad. It obstructs visibility and sound, making it a true blessing.

The three hiding in the shadows outside the gate and the two hiding in the guard post were probably thinking the same thing.

The guard post moved ten meters from the gate.

At the same time, Sukuna started running. A stun grenade hit the ground and exploded, piercing the darkness with an overwhelming light. Three people jumped out of the gate and began firing frantically with machine guns. The muzzles shook, and the muzzle flashes sparkled like fireworks.

Sukuna ran. To avoid the muzzle flashes and bullets, he ran in a semicircle. Angry shouts echoed in the distance. He had no intention of remembering their faces, voices, or names. There was only one thing important, one truth.

To survive.

Sukuna leaped into the guard post in one bound.

The two guards were already in battle mode. One stood on the right, the other on the left, and they attacked with stun sticks in their hands.

"Haha!"

Activating the supernatural app "Thunder Blade". Sukuna smiled wickedly as he brandished his green-bladed scythe.

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The rain stopped.

With the half-destroyed door behind him, Sukuna walked slowly.

Takaya didn't even seem to have any intention of fleeing. Protecting Miyuki behind his back, he backed away, his teeth chattering.

Sukuna muttered as he twirled his scythe.

"There's an N-Rank named "Widow". I met her on a mission a while back."

Miyuki looked at Sukuna in amazement.

"He's a skilled hacker. He's particularly good at hacking into the "Jungle". So I asked him to confirm the identity of the anonymous requester for the container theft mission."

Takaya didn't even blink.

"I'm shocked. He's an E-Rank. The lowest-ranking. And he only has one mission. He used most of that bounty to prepare for this mission."

The green glow illuminated Takaya's fear.

"It's a fake account. Also, "Widow" discovered that the mission participants were using the same IP address as the client. It was you, Takaya."

"Big brother..."

Miyuki murmured in a trembling voice.

"You betrayed Five?"

Sukuna laughed softly.

"No, Miyuki. That's not true. Your big brother didn't betray me. He just planned to frame me from the start."

Miyuki grabbed Takaya's shoulders, with enough force to break his bones, and with enough anger to make her sickly face flush.

"Why...?!"

"Why?"

Takaya smiled slightly. Tears filled his eyes, but his mouth twisted as he looked at his sister.

"You know, Miyuki. We need money."

Miyuki made a strangled noise.

"We don't have a home or anyone to rely on. We have to get everything ourselves: beds, food, medicine. We can't support ourselves if we do things normally. So I had no choice but to take the risk, huh?"

Sukuna placed his scythe at Takaya's neck.

"Whose orders are these?"

Takaya shook his head, tears welling in his eyes.

"I don't know."

Sukuna snorted. Well, it was true. Whoever requested this, there's no way they could have revealed their true identity. It's very likely they were the middleman themselves.

In the end, this guy is just someone who needs to be cut down.

And...

"Stop!"

Miyuki reached out and grabbed the handle of the scythe. Her strength was very weak.

But even so, Sukuna couldn't move it.

"Stop... I'm sorry... Please... Big brother, my big brother is..."

Before he could vent all his emotions, Miyuki coughed violently.

Takaya quickly stroked her back. But Miyuki was still staring at Sukuna, crying uncontrollably.

Sukuna switched off his "Thunder Blade".

He looked back. The half-destroyed gate was silent. But it was only a matter of time before "Scepter 4" rushed in.

Without looking away, Sukuna muttered,

"Mission accomplished. Pay me."

Before he could hear a reply, he ran off.

Using trash cans as footholds, he climbed over the air conditioning and ducts, gently climbing the side of the building. From below, a voice called out to Sukuna. Sukuna didn't even look back.

The most important thing is to survive.

It doesn't matter whether the siblings survive or not.

His face twisted with frustration, Sukuna leaped from building to building and disappeared into the night.

What should he do to survive?

At this point, Sukuna still doesn't know.