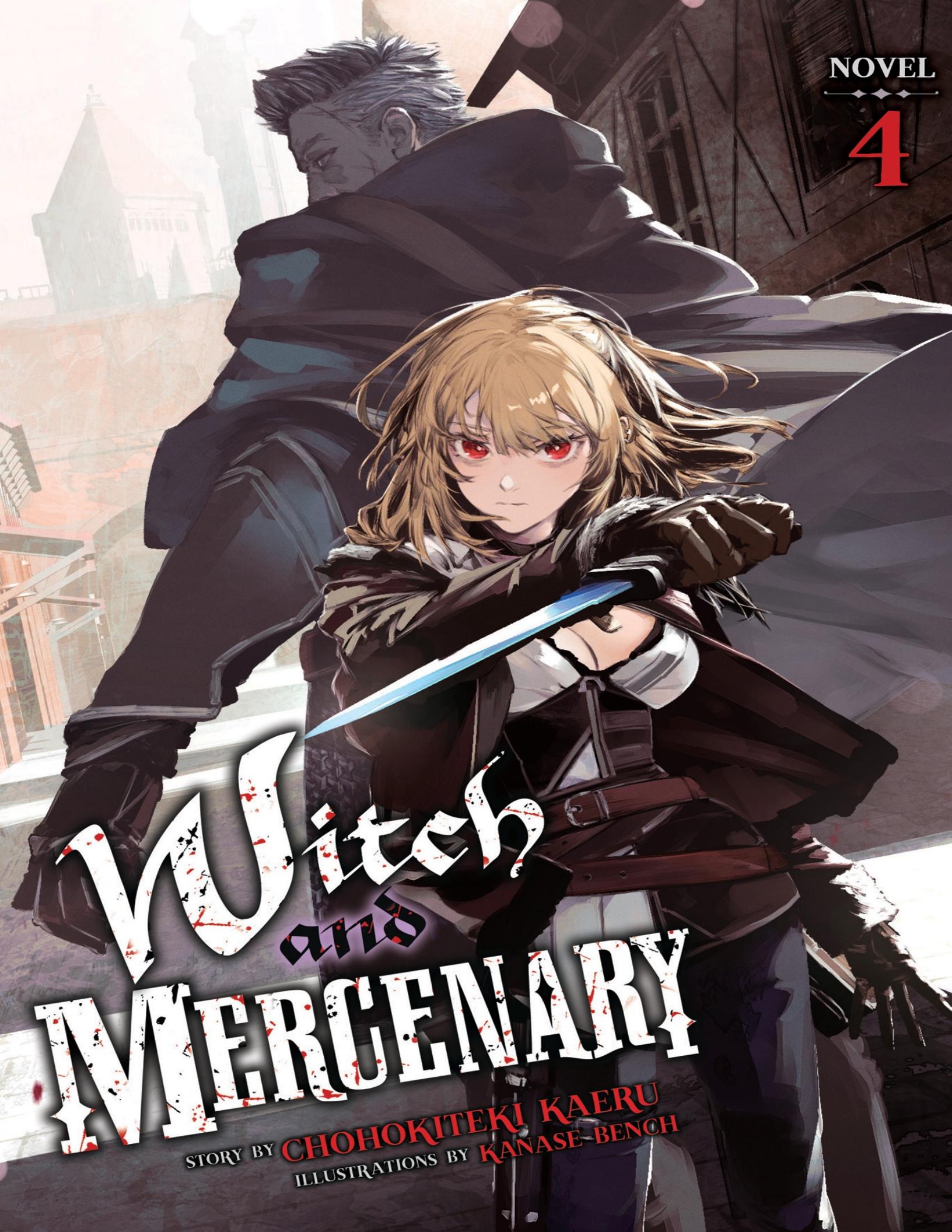


NOVEL

4



# Witch and Mercenary

STORY BY CHOHKITEKI KAERU  
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## **Newsletter**





*"You must be *very*  
confident in your abilities."*

*"Perhaps. Come  
and test them."*

Elsia closed in on Zig. Tylon had his greatsword on his back while Zasp moved sideways with his sabers, looking for an opening.

## CHARACTERS





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**MEN, TOOLS, AND THEIR USES**

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CHAPTER 4  
**BIRDS OF A FEATHER**

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# Witch and MERCENARY

NOVEL

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WRITTEN BY

**Chohokiteki  
Kaeru**

ILLUSTRATED BY

**Kanase Bench**



*Seven Seas Entertainment*

## Chapter 1: Return to Normalcy and a Looming Threat

**C**RACKED PAVEMENT WITH HOMELESS PEOPLE LINING the menacing back alleys: Such was the state of Halian's northern district. While not too far from the town's center, it was a far cry from the well-maintained downtown area.

Early in the morning, a large man was already walking through its familiar streets. He was an impressive two meters tall and gave off a menacing aura even when standing still. Despite his height, he was actually eclipsed by his bulk, and his muscles visibly bulged beneath his clothes. His face was blank, but his eyes were sharp and alert.

“Hmm.”

After a moment, Zig Crane nodded to himself in satisfaction.

The mercenary from a faraway land was currently away from his client Siasha. Instead of guarding her, he was wandering around in back-alley stores —a peculiar hobby of his. Meanwhile, his ward was currently back at the inn,

fast asleep after a night of reading the grimoires she'd checked out from the library.

“Didn’t think I’d dig up a gem like this.”

Zig’s good mood was evident as he held up a slightly dirty bottle of wine. He’d found it in a general store—stolen and fenced for cheap, he assumed. To be honest, *most* of the items in the store were probably pilfered goods.

Upon spotting the bottle, his eyes had widened, and he’d bought it without saying another word. While he was still learning the ways of alcohol, he knew that wine had a universal production process, so he strained to inspect the bottling, vintage, and the state of the drink itself. Based on his experience and intuition, he knew he’d found *good* wine.

“I’ll have to get some snacks to go with this. Where was the cheese store again...?”

Zig liked alcohol, but he loved looking for food to pair with it even more. In fact, he usually liked looking for drinks to accompany snacks instead of the other way around—but a wine as good as this shouldn’t be limited to mere *snacks*.

“Cheese is standard, but meat might go better with a wine this age...”

“The *hell* did you say to me, bitch?!”

As he cheerfully contemplated wine pairings, a man’s scream broke through Zig’s concentration. A fight, maybe a mugging. These things happened all the time here. He would just go on his way. There was no need to interrupt the ordinary ebb and flow of life in the backstreets.

“Hands off, scrub. You don’t know who you’re messing with.”

The voice was quiet but imposing.

Realizing that a young woman was speaking, Zig stopped and turned to look at the scene. Three men were surrounding a woman who was backed up against a wall. The woman had shoulder-length chestnut hair and appeared to be in her late teens, though he couldn’t be sure. Her eyes carried too much experience for someone so young.

Her gaze was sharp and dignified as she crossed her arms, unimpressed by the three men’s attempt at intimidating her. Her clothes were plain but of high quality, suggesting that she came from a well-to-do family.

She looked bored by the men threatening her with knives, as if they were nothing but a bunch of yapping dogs. The menacing criminals clearly lacked

the walk or the talk—or both.

As the woman remained unfazed by their threats, the men lost their tempers.

“Guess we’re doing this the *hard* way!” one shouted, sending a fist flying toward her face. It lacked precision, being fueled with nothing but raw power, but there was enough force in it to harm her.

Both Zig and the woman observed the punch with the same cynical expression.

She dodged it as it came inches away from her face. All the force of the fist crashed into the wall behind her.

“Shit!”

The woman grabbed the wincing man’s wrist and pulled him toward her, yanking his face into the wall. There was a thud, followed by the crack of the man’s nose. He staggered as blood gushed out of his nostrils. The woman then took his legs out from under him with a sharp low kick. Unable to maintain his footing because of the pain in his nose and his chipped teeth, the man toppled to the ground.

“Huh?!”

Though she'd taken one of her attackers down, the woman kept moving. She drove her boots into the rough pavement before kicking the stunned man to her left. The hard tip of her boot connected with his crotch, knocking him senseless before he could make another sound. The only thing that could be heard was the sickening crunch of his groin being crushed.



She jumped over the man as he doubled over in pain to avoid the last one trying to grab her. She then kicked his rear, knocking him into his friend.

“Hey, get off me!”

“Wake up, slowpokes!”

There was a flash of ferocity in the woman’s eyes. Planting a foot on the ground, she launched a roundhouse kick with the other by spinning her upper body. Her heel, drawing power from her breath and centrifugal force, connected with her opponent’s chin. It rattled the man’s brain, causing him to crumple like a puppet whose strings were cut.

“Try again in ten years,” she said before dusting off her hands. As sharp as her words were, they were backed up by a finesse that had reduced the thugs’ advantage in numbers and size to nothing. “Hey. You want a piece too?”

Her stern gaze landed on Zig, who had been watching everything from the sidelines. She tensed, sensing that his extraordinary size wasn’t the only thing that made him different from the men who had been harassing her.

Zig shrugged and pointed in her direction. Her eyebrows knitted in confusion about what the gesture meant, but he casually said, “I’d compliment

you on a job well done...but you forgot to stay on guard.”

“Huh?!”

Her senses jolted when she realized he was pointing behind her, the back of her neck prickling like gooseflesh. Turning, she instinctively put her hand up to guard.

Something hit her so hard it felt like her arm was about to break. Through her blurred vision, she saw the first man she had knocked out. She thought she had incapacitated him, but he’d gotten up to attack her again.

Though she was able to defend against his ambush, his strength was nothing like before.

“Urgh!”

Her small frame flew sideways, crashing into the wall across from one of the men she had beaten down. Her vision shook, the air rushed out of her lungs, and she couldn’t hear anything for a few moments from the power of the impact. She’d managed to protect the back of her head, but she could hardly breathe in the aftermath.

Somehow, she pulled herself back on her feet, though the vertigo remained. It would take a while before she could start moving again.

Unfortunately, her enemy wasn't going to let the opportunity slip by.

"This is bad," she muttered.

"Heh! Heh heh heh." The man approached, his eyes wide and bloodshot. "This is what you *get*, you stupid little girl!"

Blood still dripped from his mouth and nose, and a number of his teeth and his nasal bridge were visibly broken. Despite that, he showed no signs of pain. The woman could tell from his rapid breathing that he was not in a normal state. She could also guess his blood flow was elevated from the state of his groin. Knowing what would become of her if she didn't, she desperately tried to move.

"I've never seen anyone put a combat drug to such waste."

Zig stepped in between them with a shake of his head. The sinister man—his eyes wide, foam pouring from his mouth—came to a halt. From the pulsating veins, lack of pain response, and brutal strength that the man had displayed, Zig deduced that the drug was on the potent side.

The man became even more furious when he realized that Zig was keeping him from his target.

“Th-the fuck do *you* want, huh?! Get out of my way before I kill you!”

The man’s enhancements were much stronger than his own body could handle. Without regard for himself, he launched himself toward the mercenary like a rabid animal.

But if the man was an animal, Zig was a monster.

“Go sleep in the dumpster, trash,” Zig said.

He evaded the man’s attack and countered with a kick to his side. Before the man could utter a word, he flew headfirst into a mound of garbage. The trash cushioned his landing, preventing his death, but he was definitely out cold this time.

Zig relaxed, even if he never dropped his guard. “Man. Combat drug regulations are a pain in the ass, but seeing what idiots like that can do with them, I’d say it’s deserved. It’s not something you use to settle petty arguments.”

Combat drugs enabled their users to go beyond their bodies' physical limitations, but this would inevitably cause unnecessary injury to the body if the ones using them were untrained. They were widely distributed back on Zig's continent to fighters, but the thugs back home kept their hands off them. They knew of the dangers. Forcing yourself to go past your limits, which were there to protect you, came at the cost of your own body. You needed to build up your musculature to withstand the drug's demands, and those who weren't willing to put in the time and effort would find themselves with permanent injuries.

Zig had knocked the man out before he could suffer irreversible damage. Lucky for him, he would only be spending all of the next day in bed.

“Who are you?”

Zig turned to see the woman watching him carefully. Impressive, considering she hadn't completely recovered from her wounds. She was leaning against the wall, trying to size him up as well as looking for an opportunity to escape.

“I'm just a mercenary passing through. I didn't want to get involved, but then he went and used those drugs.”

“A merc... You're not with the Cantarellas?”