

Anja Reumschüssel: Deepworld

Deepworld

Age: 10+ | 224 pages | 978-3-551-55970-8 | pub date: March 2026



ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

© Carlsen Verlag GmbH, Hamburg

Translation by Rebecca Heier

Hungry

After school I picked up some more cough drops for my sore throat and rang Ruby's doorbell at 2 o'clock on the dot. In her room, we practiced a couple of basic sword moves with my hanbo and then scarfed down a bag of potato chips.

Afterwards Ruby switched on her laptop and we attached the sensors to our arms and thighs. I was just about to put the headset on when suddenly there was a knock at the door.

I winced. Wouldn't you know that at exactly that moment some adult would pop in and want something from her! And maybe even from me? I wanted to play!

Ruby, also holding her headset, just called out, "Yes?"

The door opened and her mom stuck her head in. I'd only seen her twice, but both times she'd hardly noticed me, and now she didn't even glance at me.

"I'm just going to visit Luca for a bit. Dad will be late getting home today, so feel free to order yourself a pizza or something," she said, pulling the door shut again.

Ruby had a faraway look on her face for a second, as though she could see her mother walking away from the door. She even jumped slightly when I, maybe a tad too curiously, asked, "So who's Luca?"

"My brother," she answered.

"Oh," I went, grinning like some dopey emoji. "And Luca doesn't live with you?" I asked.

"Not at the moment. He's in a coma."

"Oh," I went again. I lost the grin. "Um," I said then, because I couldn't come up with anything better.

Instead of just saying nothing, I finally asked, "For how much longer?"

"We don't know," was all Ruby said. "He's been in a coma for almost a year. The doctors aren't sure if he'll ever come out of it."

"Oh, okay," I said, and could have slapped myself silly. How could I have asked such dumb questions? Why were we talking about something that obviously made Ruby sad?

Ruby held the headset, fidgeting with it, and I wasn't sure if I should already put mine on.

"If you blab that around in school you can never come here again," she suddenly hissed.

Of course she knew that this was the worst threat of all. Nothing on the planet would be worth my losing the chance to play *Deepworld*.

"My lips are sealed, I swear!" I swiftly promised. Who would I even tell, anyway?

Suddenly Ruby seemed to shake it all off. She put on her headset and said simply, "Come on, let's get going." As if it weren't a game but a task to be done. Like the ninjutsu practice had been for me a short while ago.

I put on my headset as well. It fit snugly against my face and let me immerse myself in *Deepworld*.

We were standing on the riverbank again. Ruby coiled the rope she'd used to pull me across in the barrel and then trotted off. I plodded along after her. Toward the mountains that rose up beyond the meadows bordering the river.

It wasn't long before the first towering cliffs faced us. Steep, gigantic, as if someone had rammed each mountain into the plain directly in front of us. There was no way up. A wall of cliffs stretched in either direction.

"How are we supposed to get up there?" I asked Ruby. "Or do we look for another way somewhere else?"

Ruby was busy tying one end of the rope into a loop. “There is no easy way,” she said. “I’ll jump, you climb.”

She put the loop around my middle. In my ninjutsu training I’d learned how to tie a rescue knot; you could use it like a harness to lower people down on a rope. That would actually come in handy here, but hey, it’s a video game. It wasn’t like the loop that Ruby had tied around me could give me rope burns under my arms or anything.

Ruby leaped onto the nearest cliff. She looked just like Superman taking off.

Once up there, she tugged the rope and I started climbing.

It was unreal. I was standing in Ruby’s room, moving only my arms and imagining how I was pulling my legs up after me. But my eyes saw the rock face, watched how my hands and feet searched for finger pockets and toeholds in the cliff. Effortlessly I pulled myself up, as if my body were made of air. Still, my heart gradually started beating faster and I even felt like I was sweating from the exertion. Once I took a look around. Below us, the river glistened in the light of the virtual sun, the village in the distance lay there peacefully; only the dark forest in the background looked threatening somehow. A few narrow, white clouds drifted across the sky while two gigantic birds circled

slowly. When we reached the fourth cliff I finally asked Ruby, “I thought you couldn’t jump like that more than about twice because you lose power when you land, right?”

“If I fall the distance I jump then yeah, I do lose power. But here I’m just jumping up and not falling.”

Oh. If only I’d chosen the power of jumping! I wouldn’t have lost that as easily as I’d lost my chicken, Hedy, who just ran off into the woods without her head.

Panting, I pulled myself over the next cliff edge. Now I really was out of breath, even though this climbing expedition had actually only taken place in my mind.

Suddenly, not far above our heads, a scream pierced the air. It sounded like the whine of a chainsaw. So spine-tingling was this scream that for a moment, the fine hairs on my neck and arms stood on end.

But even worse was the sight that came afterwards. A bird landed on a cliff ledge directly behind Ruby. A horrifically ugly bird. An eagle would have been cool somehow. But this was more like a vulture. Scruffy, dirty gray feathers, naked, scaly skin on its neck that looked like overcooked meat. A curved sharp beak and milky white eyes that seemed to be boring into me.

The bird was ginormous. Bigger than Ruby and me put together.

Ruby drew her sword. The whole time she'd been wearing it on her back, the whole time I'd envied her for it. And now especially. She gripped it with both hands, stood with her legs apart and drew a bead on the vulture. It stared right back at her, spread its wings like it was going to pounce on her even as she was preparing to swing. But then, like an oversized parrot, it hopped to the next ledge, though without ever taking its eyes off her. Ruby followed the bird and I just stood there uselessly behind her, waiting for whatever came next.

What came was the second bird. But I didn't notice it until my field of view started shaking, the cliffs rushed by me and Ruby, below me, became smaller and smaller. She bellowed a not-very-helpful "Try to hold on!" after me. But the bird had snatched me up by the collar and I was hanging much too low to be able to grab onto it! For a moment I felt weightless. Then I looked up and saw dirty brown feathers, scaly skin, a beak sharp as a knife. Fear rumbled in my stomach like a boulder.

Before I could even think about how I'd manage to escape from this vulture and find my way back to Ruby, I fell. Hard. I

could tell by the painfully shrill whistling in my headset and the blood-red lights flashing all over my field of view.

I scrambled to sit up, the whistling lessened, my field of view cleared. Cautiously I looked around. I was sitting in a kind of nest, made of branches and ... bones. Gag.

Three eggs, all about half my size, were also in the nest. The hideous bird, now settled a couple of meters away, seemed to be ignoring me. It was looking in the direction from which Ruby and I had come - I could see the river in the distance. The nest had been built on a cliff directly on the shore of a lake that was completely surrounded by bizarre rock formations.

The cliff with the eggs and me dropped steeply on all sides. No way could I just jump out of here. Ruby hadn't told me what happens in the game when you get too badly injured. Because if I jumped out, that's what would happen. I could risk it, but what if I had to start again somewhere new? And maybe have to fight those monster worms without Ruby and Hedy? What then?

Suddenly another chainsaw shriek tore the stillness. The second bird sailed in with Ruby in its talons. I breathed a sigh of relief. The question of how we would find each other again had just been answered. The first vulture also let out a shriek, as if the

two of them were greeting each other. Apparently they were the parent birds.

From one of the eggs came worrying sounds of crackling and rustling.

Gradually it dawned on me: Ruby and I were surely intended as ... bird food.

CRACK! With a loud *snap*, which had hopefully come from the branches and old bones she'd fallen on, Ruby landed next to me.

"Hey, you okay?" I asked.

"Oh man ...," groaned Ruby "Jeez ..."

"Um, everything all right?" I asked again, somewhat helplessly stretching my hand out to her.

"Just leave me alone," she grunted in return.

It took a while until Ruby sat up. In the meantime the vultures had come closer, perched on the edge of the nest, eyeing us.

"Ruby? You feel better yet? So now what do we do? I think something's going to hatch out any minute now. Can you fight again? Or you could give me your sword ... Where's your sword?"

"Oh man, Gus, just shut up," Ruby grunted again and rubbed her face. Her headset was probably still whining and she

couldn't see properly because of the red flashes still going off in her field of view in the TripleM-headset. But it would soon let up, at least that's the way it'd been for me.

“What are we going to do now?” I asked again. The cracking in the egg next to us was now truly alarming. Besides that, it was rocking. And the vulture parents alternated between gazing lovingly at the eggs and staring gruesomely at us.

“What did you mean about my sword?” Ruby suddenly asked. “Oh no!” She looked at her empty hands, grabbed her back, where she always held her sword. Stared again at her hands, which were still not holding a sword.

“No, it can't be, can it? Now you don't have a weapon, either? What kind of a lousy game is this, anyway? Are we supposed to throw these vultures a punch, or what?”

“I've lost it. The best weapon I ever had,” moaned Ruby. I'd never seen her like that. She seemed really desperate.

“That bird was so fast, at first I fended it off, but then it snatched up the sword and me along with it and then chucked me back to the ground. I didn't come to until I was in the air. The sword must still be lying on the cliff!” Never had Ruby said so much to me at one time. But moaning about the lost sword didn't

help us now, either. Because now cracks were forming in the shell of one egg. And the other two eggs had also started wobbling.

“Then we need another weapon,” I said. I pointed to the branches the nest was built of.

That seemed to snap her out of it. She looked around. “You’re right. Quick!” She reached for several branches, pulling on each of them. One branch was loose, thick enough, and even a bit pointed on one end. She handed it to me. In real life, the fight controller I’d used to battle the giant hornets and monster worms was vibrating in my pocket. Apparently *Deepworld* was satisfied with my new weapon.

I could only hope the stick was enough to defeat the giant chicks and their parents.

Most of the animals in this game world were terribly big, it seemed. Except for Hedy. But then she suddenly got big, too.

With the next *crack!* the shell of the first egg broke and a much too pointy beak pushed its way through the fissure. It kept pulling on the shell, breaking off pieces, expanding the opening.

“Get ready, Gussie,” said Ruby. She stood next to me, holding a bone like a sword in front her. Broken off and splintered at one end, the bone possibly made an even better weapon than my stick.

The vulture parents didn't seem to be bothered that the bird food was ready to do battle. They gazed proudly down at their baby, who was now stretching its slimy, naked red head with pale googly eyes and that curved pointy beak, out of the egg. The beak, by the way, was pale yellow, like teeth that hadn't been brushed for years. In that moment I was glad the game didn't have a smell function. No doubt it reeked of rotten meat and foul breath all around us.

I was starting to feel a little sick to my stomach.

But there was no time for that. One of the vultures suddenly sprang toward us and pulled on Ruby's bone. She held it fast, as if there was no way she was going to let another weapon be taken from her. But the vulture seemed fine with that. It just pulled Ruby closer to the egg, as if it wanted to show its baby: Look at what a delicious snack I've brought you.

Now Ruby aimed her bone at the vulture chick.

"Um, Ruby, if you attack the baby bird, the parents will probably tear us to shreds on the spot," I whispered to her.

"You got a better idea?" she grumbled back.

"Weren't you here before? What'd you do then?"

"I jumped over the river back at the village. But I'm not familiar with this path."

It was of course the wrong moment for a friendly chat. Now the other vulture grabbed my stick and pulled me, too, closer to the eggs.

Suddenly everything happened really fast. A high-pitched, hungry-sounding shriek could be heard and the first chick, beak opened wide, lunged at Ruby. Reflexively, I wound up to strike a blow. The rest of the chick was still protected by the eggshell, but the long thin neck was open. I hit right in the middle, just like I had last time with the axe on the tree trunk. The neck buckled and the chick jerked its head back. Ruby stood frozen in fear. Both vulture parents screeched in anger and the bird nearest me grabbed my stick. Again I was swept up into the air.

Not until afterward did I realize what had happened. In that moment I only saw how the nest with Ruby, the eggs, and one vulture angrily flapping its wings was swiftly disappearing. All around me I saw blue sky, dirty gray feathers, sparkling water. Everything swirled together, interspersed with blinding sunlight.

Then the bird dropped me. Right over sharp, jagged peaks that raced unchecked toward me. Or rather, me toward them.

Comforted

Suddenly, a jolt went through my field of view. The cliffs were gone, the lake was approaching faster and faster, the wind whistled in my ears. Then impact, a splash, a roar in the headphones, but no longer from the wind, rather from the water. All at once, everything around me was bottle-green, tiny air bubbles floated up; sunbeams pierced the green like beacons pointing to the surface. And next to me was Ruby, thrashing around, still gripping her bone.

Then I saw a gray veil creeping in from the edge of my field of view, very slowly but relentlessly. Somehow I knew immediately that I was running out of air, that the gray veil would shroud my vision more and more the longer I stayed under water. I stretched my arms toward the surface and zoomed up. As soon as my head broke the water surface, the gray veil vanished. I saw the jagged cliffs surrounding me and heard the angry screeching of the monster birds above me. A moment later Ruby popped up and I heard her inhale deeply.

“Cool!” I wheezed. “Thanks! Awesome rescue mission!” Using her super-leap power, Ruby had intercepted me before I hit the cliffs and diverted me into the lake.

“We need to dive down before the vultures snatch us out of the water,” Ruby panted in response. She was right. We dived; I

stretched my arms and sped so quickly toward shore that I heard droning in my ears. I crawled up on land, ducked behind one of the rocks on the shore, and watched for Ruby.

She didn't come. I saw her far out on the lake, repeatedly sticking her head out of the water, then submerging, and after only a short distance, popping back up again to take a breath. As if she couldn't swim more than a few strokes under water. Above her, the vultures circled, gradually spiraling down. They had discovered Ruby. Why wasn't she swimming through the water as fast as I had?

When once again she submerged, I jumped back into the lake, zoomed over to her, saw her eyes widen in fright when right behind her a pointy beak stabbed the water. I surfaced and saw one of the vultures spiraling back up while the other positioned itself for the next nosedive attack.

I acted on reflex. I shot over to Ruby, who had just taken a breath, grabbed her, and with one arm securely around her torso and the other stretched out in front of me, swam in a zigzag pattern I hoped would confuse the vultures.

Once we reached the shore I pulled Ruby up on dry land. She was gasping for air. "Come on! We have to hide!" I urged her. We crawled over to some rocks and from behind them, peered

into the sky. The vultures were still circling over the lake but didn't seem to have noticed us yet. After a while they turned their circles over the other end of the lake. But they soon flew off, back to their nest.

Ruby and I leaned against the rock. "That was close," she said haltingly. She was still out of breath.

"Can't you swim?" I asked.

"Of course I can swim! But not as fast as you. How do you do that?"

"I thought everyone could do that in this game. I just stretch my arms out like I'm going to dive, and off I go."

"That doesn't work with me."

"But you can jump crazy high! I guess I just have a different superpower."

Superpower.

"That was the reward!" I shouted. "Remember last time we were here? You were pulling me across the river in the barrel because I couldn't jump like you and I told that skinny guy he should give me a superpower like flying or something? And he said I could start by swimming. I thought he said that because right after that my barrel tipped over!"

“Yeah, okay, seems to be pretty useful,” said Ruby coolly. She really wasn’t easy to impress. “Maybe we should stop now,” she added. “That’s enough for today.”

She opened the portal to her room again, and this time that was okay by me. I needed a break.

Besides, my sore throat was really making itself felt. We agreed to meet the next day. My mom had the day shift on the weekend, so I’d be able to spend the whole day at Ruby’s. I stuck another cough drop in my mouth and rode my bike home.

The next morning my mom brought a steaming cup of thyme tea to me in bed and put some smashed hot potatoes wrapped up in a towel on my chest. She believed in home remedies. And that good care was the best medicine. So she’d taken the day off because I was really sick. My throat was burning, I had a cough that racked my body, and my arms and legs were sore and stiff. I lay there dozing and even went back to sleep for a while.

Suddenly the doorbell rang.

My mom answered the door and I heard someone else’s voice, one that I’d come to know very well. Shortly afterwards Ruby entered my room.

“Hey, Gussie, I was waiting for you,” she said and sat down at the other end of the room on my desk chair. “Your mom said I could only come in your room if I promised to stay way far away from you so I don’t catch what you’ve got.”

Ruby was really chatty. I, on the other hand, could hardly talk.

“Don’t call me Gussie,” I croaked. “Been meaning to tell you that the whole time.” I coughed, sat up, and sipped my tea. “And sorry I didn’t let you know what was going on, I’ve been sleeping a lot.”

“No problem. I thought I’d just drop in and see what the holdup was. And maybe practice with your fighting stick a little. But your mom is here.”

“Yeah, she stays home when I’m sick, if she can.”

“Oh. That’s really nice of her,” said Ruby, as if it were something special.

My mother knocked and came into the room. “Ruby, I made you a cup of hot chocolate, I’m assuming you like it?” She set the cup down on the desk along with a few cookies. “Would you like to stay for lunch? I’m making chicken soup.”

“Um, no thanks, I gotta run. But thanks.”

After my mother left, closing the door behind her, Ruby stared, lost in thought, at her hot chocolate. After a while she said, “It’s been a long time since my mother made me any hot chocolate. And I don’t think she even notices anymore if I get sick.”

“I’m sure she has a lot of things to do, on account of your brother and stuff,” I commented.

“Yeah. For a year now, all she’s thought about is Luca ...”

“What about your dad?”

“He works lots and lots of overtime. My parents transferred Luca to a private clinic here in town so that someone can finally figure out how to help him. That’s what all our money is spent on now.”

“Really tough for your parents, I bet.”

“For my parents?!” Ruby jumped up and stormed toward the door.

“Hey, wait a minute. How come you’re so mad at me all of a sudden? I asked cluelessly.

“It’s always about Luca and my poor parents! What about me?” She threw the door open, rushed out and slammed the door behind her. I was unable to stop her, the slightest movement hurt. Besides, everything had happened too fast for me: here she is, talking about it all, then suddenly she gets mad and runs away. She was just really weird.

I heard my mother talking to Ruby. It almost sounded like Ruby was crying, but I couldn't make out what they were saying. I tried to eavesdrop but fell back to sleep in the process.

I woke up when my mother quietly entered my room with a bowl of soup. She helped me to sit up and handed me the bowl. While I ate, she explained something to me that seemed very important to her.

"Your friend Ruby is having a rough time, did you know that?" she began, and I just shook my head slightly while spooning up my soup. "She feels left out because for her parents, everything revolves around her brother now. And of course she's also worried about him. And then the move. She doesn't really know anyone here. Except you." My mother looked at me expectantly. I just nodded and kept eating. What did she want me to do? I felt sorry for Ruby and everything, but outside of *Deepworld* and a shared desk at school, we didn't have anything in common.

"In any case, I'm glad you two get along," Mom continued. "Ruby can really use a friend. And you've been alone a lot too since Wilhelm's been gone."

"But there's a big difference between Ruby and Wilhelm," I protested hoarsely. "Besides, she's a girl and everybody in the class thinks she's weird. But ..." – I had a sudden thought - "if you think it would be good for her, I could visit her more often." Then nothing would stand in the way of more adventures in *Deepworld*.

Nothing besides the cold I'd caught. Almost as if getting dumped in the river and swimming in the lake in *Deepworld* had been too much for my immune system.

"I'm sure she'd like that," my mother said, "but you can invite her over here too, you know. I think she could use a cup of hot chocolate once in a while."

Then she stroked my head like she used to do when I was little and went out, finally leaving me alone to eat my soup in peace.