

CLAMP SCHOOL  
**PARANORMAL  
INVESTIGATORS™**



Written by Tomiyuki Matsumoto  
Illustrated by CLAMP

3

# ***CLAMP School Paranormal Investigators Vol. 3***

Written by Tomiyuki Matsumoto

Illustrated by CLAMP

---

Translation - Ray Yoshimoto  
English Adaptation - Jamie S. Rich  
Copy Editor - Abigail Phillips  
Proofreader - Peter Ahlstrom  
Design and Layout - John Lo and James Lee  
Cover Design - Jorge Negrete

Editor - Nicole Monastirsky  
Digital Imaging Manager - Chris Buford  
Pre-Press Manager - Antonio DePietro  
Production Managers - Jennifer Miller and Mutsumi Miyazaki  
Art Director - Matt Alford  
Managing Editor - Jill Freshney  
VP of Production - Ron Klamert  
Editor-In-Chief - Mike Kiley  
President and C.O.O. - John Parker  
Publisher and C.E.O. - Stuart Levy



TOKYOPOP Inc.  
5900 Wilshire Blvd. Suite 2000  
Los Angeles, CA 90036

E-mail: [info@TOKYOPOP.com](mailto:info@TOKYOPOP.com)  
Come visit us online at [www.TOKYOPOP.com](http://www.TOKYOPOP.com)

CLAMP-GAKUEN KAIKIGENSHO-KENKYUKAI JIKEN FILE VOL. 3 All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means without written permission from the copyright holders.  
© Tomiyuki Matsumoto 2000 © CLAMP 2000  
First published in Japan in 2000 by KADOKAWA SHOTEN PUBLISHING CO., LTD., Tokyo.  
English Translation rights arranged with KADOKAWA SHOTEN PUBLISHING CO., LTD., Tokyo through TUTTLE-MORI AGENCY, INC., Tokyo.  
This manga is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

English text copyright © 2005 TOKYOPOP Inc.

ISBN: 1-59532-093-8

First TOKYOPOP printing: March 2005

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the USA

# CONTENTS

YA  
CLAMP SCHOOL  
319-6964

<b>Character Introductions</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Prologue</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Angel, Presently About to Descend (Part 1)</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>The Angel, Presently About to Descend (Part 2)</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Epilogue</b>	<b>185</b>
<b>Manga Short</b>	<b>190</b>





*CLAMP School Paranormal Investigators* takes place in the famous CLAMP Universe, a self-contained, self-sufficient fantasy world of endless possibility. At the Universe's center is CLAMP School—a collegiate utopia—where the Paranormal Investigators reside. From kindergarten through university level, CLAMP School serves as a haven for overachievers and a paradise for prodigies.

The campus—nearly as magical as the students themselves—is shaped like a large pentagram, with a clock tower as its centerpiece. Surrounded by grassy parks and rivers, the campus also houses a subway system, hospital, bank, art museum, and much more! It's no wonder that the members of the Supernatural Phenomenon Research Association (Takayuki, Mifuyu, Yuki, Rion, and Koji) never want to leave.

Another important thing to know about *CLAMP School Paranormal Investigators* is that the manner in which characters address one another is essential to the overall personality and charm of the series.

Sometimes characters will call each other by their first name, sometimes they will use their last name, and sometimes they'll use either of the above with suffixes called honorifics. It might seem a little unusual at first, but you'll get used to it in no time. You see, in Japan, the way people address one another says a lot about their relationship. And, to make sure your reading experience is as authentic as possible, we've kept these naming conventions intact.

**Below is a list of some of the honorifics you'll see in *CLAMP School Paranormal Investigators*.**

**-kun:** Used as a familiar for someone of the same age or younger.

**-chan:** Feminine version of -kun.

**-senpai:** Used for upperclassmen and/or someone in an organization with more experience.

**-san:** Used among peers who are not intimate; the American equivalent is Mr. and Mrs.

Well . . . that concludes our lesson. I hope you enjoy this final volume in the *CLAMP School Paranormal Investigators* series. Make sure to check out *Slayers: Vol. 3* in bookstores now!

CLAMP SCHOOL  
**PARANORMAL  
INVESTIGATORS**

**Character Introductions**



**Takayuki Usagiya**

High School Division,  
second year, Class B, age 16.  
The master of Koizumi-  
san. (She's a ghost and  
Takayuki's former maid.)

**Mifuyu Mizukagami**

High School Division,  
third year, Class Z, age 18.  
Get past her innocent face  
and airhead personality,  
and you'll find a master  
swordfighter who never  
goes anywhere without  
her ace blade, *Kotetsu*,  
strapped to her back.



## **Yuki Ajiadou**

High School Division,  
second year, Class A, age 16.  
Although a male in body,  
in heart s/he is a woman.  
Yuki, the Chairman of the  
Association, has teleporta-  
tion powers and the hope  
of becoming a sensational  
actress.



## **Rion Ibuki**

Middle School Division,  
second year, Class C, age 14.  
The daughter of a proper  
Shinto family, Rion was  
born in a shrine. The  
youngest in a long line of  
spiritual mediums, she is  
heir to a power that allows  
her to see spirits and read  
their thoughts.



## **Koji Takamura**

Elementary School Division,  
sixth grade, Class A, age 11.  
A grade-school ninja born  
into one of Japan's most  
preeminent ninja clans, the  
Takamura family. Koji has  
an innate talent for the  
ninja arts; however, his  
physical stature has yet to  
catch up with his skills.



# Prologue

In an empty space, within an infinite darkness, a new consciousness, a being of thought, was born:

Where . . . am I?

*Where?*

The being had no words.

He had no voice; he could not form the sounds.

He spoke only to himself, within his own existence.

He searched for an answer in the void:

Who . . . am I?

And so it was that he, a singular point of life manifested as a growing point of light, came to be and began to drift slowly across an endless sky.

*This is a bad sign.*

A cherub stood at a lonely vista and looked upon the night sky. He frowned as the heavens revealed their new inhabitant.

*There's a star traveling on its own, ignoring the rules of the universe. It's an omen. It brings bad tidings to everyone.*



The angel was on a nameless, isolated mountaintop in a remote and faraway land. His thoughts were in an ancient tongue, and though his appearance was that of a boy, his age was that of a man. He looked behind him, over his shoulder, and then back over the horizon where he had seen the star. Then, as if making a silent resolution, he turned around and started off in the opposite direction of where he had been going.

But then, he stopped.

*Hmm, he thought. Now that I consider it further, this is the direction of—*

He cut his thinking off short. He wanted to be sure. The cherub scanned his own memories. Images of his own personal wars and the resulting peace flickered through his mind like an old, silent film.

*Yes. Just as I feared. The path of instinct is leading me directly toward that school.*

He remembered the sea.

An oceanside campus.

And a coed who hovered in his memories like a goddess.

*Mifuyu-dono.*

He checked the straps that held a large sword to his back. He tightened their knots, took a deep breath, and resumed walking, this time at a much quicker pace.

XOXO

*I wish that I could become an astronaut. I wish, I wish . . .*

Across the world, in the East, a young girl was also watching the night sky. When she saw a falling star, she closed her eyes, put her hands together, and wished upon it.

*The hoshi-sama has flown from my view! Oh, shooting stars are wonderful! I hope it heard my wish!*

The girl stepped away from her window and retreated to the confines of her bedroom.

In the center of the room was her bed, decked out in bright pink linen. Next to it were her stuffed animals—a chubby, round cat and a raggedy polar bear. Next to these rather normal-looking toys was a large monster. It had big eyes and a spiny back, like a tiny dinosaur.

“Zetton,” the girl whispered.

She was dressed in her pajamas, ready for slumber. She climbed onto her bed and picked up the toy monster. She squeezed it in her arm and rubbed her cheek lovingly against its plush surface.

“Please wait for me until I can come to see you, okay?”

She ran her fingers across the round nubs that ran along the toy’s back, following them along its short tail.

There was a tag on it that read: My dear friend Sakiko. The girl giggled at seeing her own name. She was remembering who had given it to her, who had written the tag. *Koji-san . . .*

Squeezing the doll in her arms again, one hand wrapped around the tip of the monster's tail, she whispered, "Thank you."



CLAMP School's campus was built on Tokyo Bay. It was a massive school, designed on a circular layout.

The University Division took up the southeast side. Among its many buildings was the Science Center. In one of the bigger laboratories, another girl was silently working at her computer.

"Phew," she whistled, taking a deep breath. The girl rubbed her brow with her forearm, finally looking up from the monitor after what seemed like hours (and very well may have been). "The analysis of the research data is now complete!" she announced to herself. "At last my project is coming together!"

Removing her thick milk-bottle glasses, the girl rubbed her eyes, as if she were trying to wipe her tiredness away. It had the opposite effect, though, and drew a yawn from her mouth. She reached her arms above her head and stretched.

When the morning had begun, her hair had been combed into a perfect braid. Now, as the day drew to its close, it was coming undone. Several ragged ends were poking out, pointing in directions all their own.

Perhaps she had been staring at the computer screen even longer than she thought.

She suddenly froze, like she had been jolted with a bolt of lightning and paralyzed. She was looking at a thick blue file sitting next to her workstation, almost as if it was the first time she had seen it. The girl squared her shoulders and energetically hopped off her seat. She grabbed the file.

Written across it in marker was:

### Supernatural Phenomena Research Association Case Files

*It doesn't matter how many times I look at it, she thought, it still has the same effect. It's like electricity is racing through my body! I hate them so much!*

She swiftly flipped through the pages.

A mysterious train wreck eerily emerged from the tunnels, wreaking havoc aboveground.

She turned to another section.

CLAMP School's commemorative tree withered in a single night. . . . Unbelievable monster surfaced in the back hills of Genbu Park. It fell upon the high school division and immediately started to destroy what it found.



The folder was filled with detailed reports covering a wide range of inexplicable events that had occurred at CLAMP School. Many of the stories had photographs chronicling the bewildered reactions of the student body.

Also, in each report, there appeared the same name over and over. It was the name of the group whose members were in all of the photos.

The Supernatural Phenomena Research Association.

*Pfffft!*

The girl scoffed.

*Every time this suspicious-sounding and seemingly unscientific group goes into action, our campus is turned into a vision of hell! They defy the laws of God and are libertines of the worst kind!*

The girl emitted a vigorous snort and shut the file emphatically.

Miharu Takanashi put her glasses back on.

*As long as I am the chairman of the CLAMP School Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee, I will use all my power to put a stop to this fraudulent organization! I will never let them have their way!*

Across the room, the door opened. A thin man wearing a lab coat poked his head through. "Oh," he said, speaking in leisurely tones, "is the physics lab usually open this late?"

This sudden appearance of another person startled Miharu. "P-professor!" she stammered. She immediately stood, straightening her back at attention.

"I appreciate your passion for research," the teacher said, "but I wouldn't recommend a young girl such as yourself staying on campus so long after business hours."

"Y-y-yes, sir."

She didn't know why she was stuttering, but Miharu took it as a sign and began straightening and gathering up her things.

The Professor had a desk at the lab, and he walked over to it. He began absentmindedly digging through a mountain of papers. "What are you working on?" he asked.

"S-sir . . . I was studying the relationship of light to the immune systems of major and minor organisms."

"Oh, you don't say?"

"Some organisms, especially mammals, receive a variety of biological benefits from light. I was—er—studying the reactions of biological immune systems exposed to different degrees and wavelengths of radiance."

"Well, never let it be said you aren't ambitious. That's quite a complicated research subject." The Professor spoke gently and backed up his words with a reassuring smile. "Just try not to overdo it. Overworking isn't good for anyone. This is the sort of project you should tackle a little bit at a time, day by day. Go ahead and finish up what you're doing, and then why not call it a night."

"O-okay, s-sir. Thank you very much."

Validation from the Professor gave Miharu an unexpected thrill, and she couldn't suppress her grin. She hurriedly gathered the rest of her things and left the lab.

Once Miharu was gone, the Professor sat back in his chair and breathed a sigh of relief. He retrieved a large blue file from one of his drawers and began to look through it.

Coincidentally, the outside read:

### Supernatural Phenomena Research

#### Association Activity File

*Heh-heh-heh, he chuckled to himself. Now then, let's check and see what the gang has gotten itself into lately. It's been a quiet couple of weeks, but I have a feeling it's only a matter of time before more wackiness ensues.*

The Professor smiled contentedly as he made his way through the report.



There was a snapping sound.

The hand that had been flipping the cards over, stopped in midair.

“What was that?”

All of this was happening in an exceptionally clean one-room apartment. As far as apartments go, this one was

something of a mansion. It was expansive and well-kept. In the center of the room was a marble table on which sat a burning candle with a red flame. Its flickering light revealed a set of antique tarot cards laid out neatly on the marble.

A young woman was conducting the reading. It was her apartment. Just as she was about to reveal the latest card, she felt a strange sensation in the air. She got up from her chair swiftly, almost knocking it over, and opened the curtains.

She said nothing as she peered at the world outside. Only silence peered back at her.

No, not silence. Rather, the sound of stillness—a thing like silence but yet—not. It echoed through the dark streets.

After several extended moments of nothing, the young woman returned to the table. She restacked the cards and shuffled them before starting to lay them out again.

*A lonely star . . . a lost child . . .*

She flipped over each card, one at a time. Once again, her hand stopped in mid-action. The second-to-last card she flipped over was the one that foretold the near future.

The illustration on the card was of a castle destroyed by lightning. Its meaning: misfortune and destruction.

*It seems that something, she thought, measuring out her words as if she were explaining them to an unseen person, is about to happen.*



Closing her eyes, she lifted her face toward the heavens. Exhaling, she opened her eyes, and they shone with a newfound determination.

*The result will be . . .*

The young woman flipped over the final card.

What she saw hit her heart like a pinprick, but she steeled herself against it. She must have strength!

*It appears that I must go to the school.*

She stacked the cards once more.



Time was on the march and Kei was keenly aware of it. Like so many people across the world, he was watching the stars, patiently watching them drift, traces of light moving across the sky. Each seemed like the ticking of the second hand on an old watch.

He hadn't been back to CLAMP School for some time, but he was about to return once more. The first visit had been a memorable, albeit brief, adventure. He marveled at the possibilities his second visit might present.

"I must save them," he said, almost as if telling it to the stars themselves, before disappearing into shadow.

## **The Angel, Presently About to Descend (Part 1)**

“Heads up, everyone! It’s almost time for the Cultural Fair!” screamed the all-too-familiar happy voice.

The voice came from beneath an out-of-the-way stairwell at the top of one of the buildings in the CLAMP School High School Division campus.

“Among the various activities that are assigned throughout each division are: the Incoming Students Welcoming Festival, the impromptu Student Body Spur-of-the-Moment Festival, and so many others, more than I have time to name! CLAMP School loves to throw a party. Even so, the fall’s All-School Cultural Fair is the main event among main events! This is the one where all the divisions: Kindergarten, Elementary, Middle School, High School, University, and Graduate School, join for one massive shindig!”

The owner of the happy voice spun around, letting his skirt rise in the air as he executed a perfect pirouette. His long hair twirled with him, flowing luxuriously, and his eyes sparkled with an intelligent curiosity.

“The fair is our time to shine! These days it seems like most of the activities are geared toward the sports clubs, but the Cultural Fair is tailor-made for those of us who don’t go for all that athletic grunting and sweating. I don’t think it’s too much of an exaggeration to say that our performance here will dictate how we’re perceived for the rest of the year, and probably even years to come. Everything hinges on the Cultural Fair!”

Another boy was seated next to the exuberant blond. The words of his excited friend were pumping him full of energy. He was tall and gangly and wore silver-rimmed glasses. He was taking notes. “This will be the first official event the newly reestablished Supernatural Phenomena Research Association is going to enter,” he said matter-of-factly, without a hint of a smile. “Until now, all we’ve done is make the occasional research announcement and statement of intent about our path of learning. By all accounts, it’s been pretty dull stuff.”

Next to the tall boy was a third male student. He leaned back in a chair made of metal piping, his knees pressed together. He scratched his cheeks, which were especially popular with the coeds of CLAMP School. He mumbled, “Yeah, all we did was post our handwritten

reports on a wall in the corner of some classroom or other, put on one slideshow, and passed out flyers at the school entrance. I wouldn't exactly call that an exuberant effort. Hardly anyone even came to our slideshow, either. It was pretty much like we were putting on a show just for us."

"But it was fun, wasn't it?"

This time a girl spoke. She was on the other side of the third boy. She had a slightly dazed look about her and idly fondled a sharp Japanese sword. Normally, she kept it strapped on her back in an ornate scabbard, but she had taken it off and was playfully rolling it over her lap.

"It's fun to make announcements," she said. "Sure, I like the Cultural Fair, too, but it's fun working hard and doing research and writing what we find on big pieces of paper. I like ordering pizza and staying up all night making the flyers, too."

Next to her was another girl, always the last to speak. She was younger, and she nervously pinched the ends of her skirt. She spoke softly. "That's usually how it goes anyway, isn't it? Even at festivals?" Her head moved slightly with each word, setting off a chain reaction that traveled through her hair, making the two large pigtails on either side bob up and down. "There's so much going on all at once, it's hard to get noticed."

"So what? A festival is a festival!" cried the first boy.

And so we come full circle, back to the original flamboyant child with the dancing feet! No doubt would

deter his joy. His face was one giant smile as he resumed his impassioned speech.

“Don’t you think that when it comes to festivals, the happiness people feel as part of the event inspires them to forgive *anything*?! The Festival Planning Committee—hey, even the Student Body Executive Committee, which runs practically every student activity at CLAMP School—will be so caught up in a festive mood, they’ll surely see our Association in a whole new light. This is our best chance to finally be recognized by official channels!”



CLAMP School Incorporated was an immense, circular-shaped academic institute built at the edge of Tokyo Bay. It measured 3.2 kilometers in diameter and housed six thousand faculty members and students (ten thousand if you include associates in the count).

With its gates open to all young people, regardless of birthright, social status, or financial position, CLAMP School boasted a student body that was representative of a diverse and free academic system. It had produced a large number of distinct individuals and talents, making it a singularly unusual school.

CLAMP School’s academic motto was “Purely, Surely, and Beautifully.” The core purpose of the school

was to promote purity based on virtue and a belief in one person's duty to help another. Each student was responsible for developing these ideals within him or herself. Some rules of thumb for the students were: keep oneself neat and clean; greet everyone with kindness; help those in need; be proactive and try anything; and above all else, be responsible for oneself.

These maxims stressed that the responsibility for the school's goals rested in the hands of its pupils. In return, they were free to do as they wished, thus building a caring foundation of trust between student and institution. No other school in Japan—or possibly the world—had as independent a student body as CLAMP School, nor one that got along so well.

According to one CLAMP School attendee, “This place is always gathering to have gatherings.”

Which was rather nice when you considered the implications.

Every spring, the school sponsored cherry blossom watching. In summer, everyone swam and attended fireworks festivals and bug-catching tournaments. In autumn, there were fairs and various sport competitions and fruit-picking festivals (pears, chestnuts, grapes, persimmons, to name a few).

Winter brought Christmas parties, ski trips, and snowball fights. There were concerts to say farewell to the year and, of course, the New Year's Japanese Shuttlecock Tournament.

Amid all this activity were field trips, study trips, school-wide cultural fairs and theater festivals, movie-watching, opera-viewing, painting contests, *Bon Odori* and harvest festivals, spur-of-the-moment festivals put on by whatever school division had the urge, schoolwide quiz meets, treasure hunts, and whatever else anyone could imagine.

The list of events was only limited to the energy the kids could sustain. At all times, there was some kind of gathering, festival, or tournament somewhere on campus.

It wouldn't be over-the-top to suggest that every day at CLAMP School was a gathering, every moment a festival.

So the event at hand, the All-School Cultural Fair, was merely one of the first, a way to kick-start the year and celebrate the turning leaves of autumn. Considering its scale and level of extravagance, though, it tended to be the star among stars, the top festival amid a slate of festivals miles long.

This was when all the Clubs came out, announced themselves, and established a presence among the CLAMP School Student Body.



“And so,” the vivacious blond boy continued, “this time we have to properly organize our activities and make a formal announcement! This is the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association’s big chance!”

"So," the boy with the glasses began slowly, "what's our theme going to be, then?"

He sounded as if he were scared of the answer.

"That's what we're here to decide!" the blond shot back, acting as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

"I knew it," the boy with glasses mumbled to himself.

"Huh?" the third boy asked him.

But he got no answer. The group was silent. None of them was particularly surprised by the response, but they still absorbed it soberly. Only the blond boy seemed in any way excited.



What was, or rather, *who were* the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association?

They were a special-interest group (albeit one not yet officially recognized by their alma mater) formed by their original Chairman, Kyoko Karyuin (now working at Nanigashi Bank). Their purpose was to unofficially investigate supernatural occurrences that would crop up at CLAMP School over the course of a school year. Initially, the Association's activities consisted entirely of collecting data and formulating reports in regards to these mysterious incidents. It was all very low-key and based one hundred percent on theory.



However when Kyoko graduated, she personally chose her successor—a CLAMP School High School Division second-year male student, Yuki Ajiadou, a member of Class A. Once Yuki—whom you know as the blond boy—took over, the group's activities took an aggressive turn. Rather than study the paranormal from afar, they began to examine these events up close, and the new approach yielded a succession of eye-opening results.

The verification of the cursed ice cream.

The discovery and identification of an unknown item unearthed from campus grounds.

The presence of a weapon of mass destruction that had come to CLAMP School from somewhere beyond this world.

The sighting of a monster that was destroying one of the school's natural habitat parks.

The disposal of two other monsters who had traveled to the present by way of the past.

The battle for treasure with the mysterious and secret group dressed entirely in black.

... Just to name a few.

These were all missions spearheaded by Yuki, the new Chairman, a charge into the heart of the supernatural realm. It brought the group together as a unit, and each member contributed his or her special talent.



The meeting continued:

"Anyway, I want to hurry up and have our Association recognized by the school as an official Club! I want this to happen. I want to do it in honor of Karyuin-senpai, my revered elder who nominated me for this position and made me your Chairman."

Dressed in a schoolgirl's uniform, Yuki Ajiadou knew he was the prettiest one in the room, and his smile beamed a certain self-confidence that was exactly what the Association needed; yet those who knew that smile well may have also seen the slight hint of anxiety creeping in.

"We've had plenty of time since Karyuin-senpai left us," he continued. "Our renewal of the commitment to the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association has put us on a steady road of progress, moving ever closer to our goals. Still, the Student Body Executive Committee has yet to recognize us! How can I possibly face my senpai, the older student who did so much for me?!"

"I don't think it's a bad thing if we just continue to remain an underground society," the youngest boy, Koji Takamura, said. He was still scratching his cheek bones. "We have our supporters, like the Professor. He's all the way up in the University Division, even. There are also several members of the Student Body Executive Committee of the Elementary School Division whom

we've helped, and countless others who quietly follow our exploits. If nothing else, we're recognized by the public at large."

"What are you talking about?!" Yuki shrieked. "You can't say that we're publicly recognized. Don't you get it? Here at CLAMP School, you're an official Club with a capital C only when you are registered as an official Club with the Student Body Executive Committee. And if we are recognized as an official Club, not only will we get operational funds from the school, but we won't have to keep asking for permission to do our research. In order to ensure the desired progress of our group, we have to be recognized and given our big C!"

Yuki sucked in a deep breath.

He was right, you know.

The Achilles' heel of the Association was that they were not an officially recognized Club. As mentioned previously, although the group had built quite an impressive resume of activities, there was never any documented proof of their actions, and thus in the public eye, they remained no more than a privately assembled group of aficionados.

Still, in its own way, CLAMP School was an institution open to new ideas.

The core business operations of the school were almost exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Student Body Executive Committee, which was a student

organization. This means that, for all intents and purposes, the students run the school. The freedom of the students was a fundamental priority in the foundation of CLAMP School. Thus, Club activities were run freely, and no matter how minor or narrow the niche, the school (or, if you will, the Student Body Executive Committee) was eager to offer its full cooperation and support.

Unfortunately, after the Club would leap over one big hurdle of red tape, there was another one facing them.

That hurdle was otherwise known as the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee, which worked with the Student Body Executive Committee.

Although "Freedom for All Students" is an unofficial motto, the powers that be knew it could not be a free-for-all. With freedom came responsibility.

"What ideals are your Club based on? How will it be operated, and how will activities be organized and conducted?"

These were the questions that needed to be answered in order to be awarded your big C. If these items were not clearly developed, no sense of responsibility among the Clubs could ever be fostered. And eventually the student organizations would dissolve amid hurt feelings, animosity, and aimlessness.

Ill-defined gatherings of kids could not win the capital C.

It was up to the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee to evaluate prospective organizations for their ability to meet the aforementioned criteria.

And for whatever reason, the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association's application for Club status was never accepted by the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee.

*(And though I say "for whatever reason," it was really for no other reason than that they had not produced any evidence of their achievements. Which is not to say that Yuki and the gang did not try, but how do you prove you saw a ghost?)*

If the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association could be recognized as an official Club, then their activities would be publicly acknowledged, the other students wouldn't view them with suspicion, and they would gain the full backing of the school, allowing them to engage in off-campus activities as part of their Club's agenda. They would also gain access to an almost limitless budget to fund these activities.

The difference between being an official Club and not being one, in terms of freedom of movement, was as far as the distance between heaven and Earth. So it was



understandable that when the subject came up, Yuki's voice got louder and more adamant.

The boy with the silver-rimmed glasses was Takayuki Usagiya. He was the oldest male member of the Association and often the voice of reason. "Perhaps it would aid our purpose if we narrowed down our research theme," he said. "If we stick our fingers into every pie at the banquet table, we're just going to end up with sticky fingers and a lot of messed up pies. Pretty thin results, by any standard. If we want to showcase our unique discoveries and successful missions, then we should pick one theme and research it through and through."

"Do you have any good suggestions, Takayuki-senpai?" the girl with the pigtails asked. She was Rion Ibuki, and she achieved the special effects in her hair by the clever placement of dainty pink bows. She looked Takayuki right in his eyes.

Takayuki folded his arms and pondered Rion's question. "Well . . . I could choose randomly, but that wouldn't necessarily be the best way to motivate every member of the group. We have to pick a subject everyone here would be interested in."

It was now time for the girl with the sword to speak up. "But, Takayuki-kun," Mifuyu Mizukagami said, "don't you have faith in our ability to do *anything* we put our minds to, regardless of how we come by the mission? It's not like all the messes we've gotten involved in didn't come to us randomly."

"Yes, I suppose that's true," Takayuki replied, but then he countered with a question of his own. "Still, Mifuyu-senpai, isn't there something you'd like to dig deeper into?"

"Well, uh . . ." Mifuyu stopped to think, before concluding, "no, anything is fine with me."

Takayuki nearly fell out of his chair. He shouldn't have been surprised by her complacency, though. It's not like there was ever any "deeper" for Mifuyu to dig into. She was all surface.

Koji sighed. "It's no fair! Mifuyu-senpai can have fun doing whatever she wants. Some of us aren't so lucky."

"Well, then what would you want, Koji?" Yuki was needling him. "What's your suggestion?"

"Huh? Me?" Koji shuffled his feet. "Hmmm . . ."

Koji wanted to give it all the thought he could. "Well, now that you ask," he said finally, "I'm drawing a total blank. I can't think of anything. What about you, Rion-senpai?"

"Me?" Rion fiddled with her bows. She wasn't expecting this sudden confrontation and was not prepared to answer. "Uh, well . . . what if we stick to investigating the spirits that have been known to haunt the school?"

"But only you have the power to see them," Mifuyu interjected matter-of-factly. "Seems a bit self-serving, don't you think?"

Takayuki adjusted his glasses, slyly covering the fact that he was rolling his eyes. "True, Rion-chan is the one who is especially sensitive to poltergeists."



Although the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association was a minor gathering without official sanction, the group's extrasensory abilities were notorious among the rumor mill. As if their solving several supernatural mysteries wasn't enough, their remarkable superhuman abilities were starting to make them urban legends, not unlike the strange cases they investigated.

All of them could perform feats beyond what a normal human being was supposed to be able to do.

For example, Rion Ibuki, a second-year member of Middle School Division Class C, possessed powerful extrasensory perception, commonly known as ESP. In other words, she was a spiritual medium, born into a family where the possession of spiritual powers extended back over several generations.

Rion had the power to see and sense a variety of spirits and lingering elements from people who had left this world. Due to her timid nature, she was usually unable to do much more than that, but even so, it made her a valuable contributor to the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association's investigative missions.



Mifuyu averted her eyes.

Koji sensed something was bothering her. "What is it, Senpai?" he asked gently.

As soon as the question mark left Koji's mouth, it was replaced by a girlish scream. As if in answer to his query, Mifuyu had unsheathed her sword *Kotetsu*, and sliced the air by his head. It was a single movement, and it took less than a second, but it still scared the wits out of Koji. He struggled not to faint, and stared at the shimmering blade, trembling with fear. His eyelids fluttered.

No, not his eyelids, but something in front of his eyes.

A butterfly.

A single cabbage butterfly fluttered in the air before him, seemingly having appeared out of nowhere. "Wow," he gasped.

"I'm sorry," Mifuyu said, still holding her sword where she had frozen in mid-slash. "It seemed to materialize out of thin air, and at first I thought it might be more than an average insect."

A split second more and the butterfly would have been sliced in two.

Mifuyu quickly returned *Kotetsu* to its sheath. Her demeanor was casual, as if nothing at all had occurred. "Say? Where's Yuki-chan?" she asked.

"Huh? What?" The others looked confused.

Because, sure enough, their Chairman, who had been so intensely debating his point, was nowhere to

be seen. Where he had stood just moments before was now empty.

But then, a familiarly high-pitched voice rang up from below them, on the stairwell landing one floor down.

“Aaaaah! C’mon now! You shouldn’t scare a girl like that!”

“Yuki-senpai?”

“Chairman! What are you doing down there?”

Rion looked worried, while Koji went to the foot of the stairs and looked down them, appearing totally flustered.

“Mifuyu-chan freaked me out when she drew her sword like that, and I panicked and teleported myself down here.” Yuki climbed back up the stairs, wearing a tired expression.

Koji realized that his scream had sounded extra loud because his Chairman had also screamed at the exact same time.

“So, how far did you actually teleport?” Takayuki asked him.

“Oh, I don’t know. Three or four stories down, I suppose.”

Takayuki smiled. “That’s a good distance, even for you, Chairman!”



Yuki Ajiadou possessed the power of teleportation. Originally he was an aspiring actress in the Theater Club,

and he literally stumbled upon his special ability when, by sheer accident, he fell from the stage. He blacked out for a second, and when he came to, he wasn't lying on the ground, but was standing comfortably back on the stage.

*(And yes, we know Yuki's a boy,  
but since when has that ever stopped  
anyone from being a beautiful actress?  
He had a dream from a very young age to be  
the Japanese version of Brigitte Bardot,  
and who are we to say he couldn't?)*

In this world of ours, there are many things that science cannot explain. There are, though, certain moments in life known as catalysts—the simple agents of cause and effect. The event of his teleportation was the trigger that would eventually lead to his being Chairman of the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association.

Although the distance Yuki could cover when he teleported was unknown, and although the conditions of his power were that he had to jump from a height of at least forty centimeters, his talent proved invaluable in many situations.

Including staying out of the way of the blade of the Association's oldest member.

A third-year in the High School Division Class Z, Mifuyu Mizukagami was a master of the ancient

sword-fighting arts. Her parents had given her Kotetsu, and it traveled with her all around the world as she trained and honed her skills. Kotetsu could slice through just about anything, and when she wielded it, Mifuyu was undefeatable. As a result, she was in charge of all combat operations executed by the Association.

Perhaps because she had lived a life singularly devoted to the martial arts, however, Mifuyu's intelligence, at least when compared to the high school average, was a bit low. In fact, there were times when she was judged to be on a level comparable to that of a kindergartner. It lent her an air of strange duality, coupling her high-level assassin's skills with an innocent child's smile. It was a peculiar and curious characteristic that unsettled friends and foes alike.



"Let's not worry about all this swordplay," Yuki said. "Let's get this question settled. What are we going to perform at the fair?"

Koji held his head in his hands. "You say 'performing' like we're putting on some kind of sideshow."

"Good point," Yuki acknowledged, "because the research announcements *are* a form of sideshow. And the more attention we get, the better. Our research theme should be as exciting and sexy as possible. Think of something along the lines of Takayuki-chan's ghost maid, Koizumi."

"You're not suggesting we put Koizumi-san on display for everyone to gawk at?" Rion asked. Her brow was furrowed with worry.

"Don't be silly." Yuki laughed. "I was just using her as an example. I was suggesting something *like* her, someone whose existence we can easily prove and share with the rest of the student population. Something simple and easy to understand."

There was a small *poof* sound, followed by a woman saying, "Hello, did you call me?"

Her voice seemed oddly calm in this strange stairwell.

It was Koizumi. She had appeared behind her employer, Takayuki, with only the slightest of sounds. Her hair was in braids, and she was dressed in an old-fashioned maid's outfit.

"Oh, uh, well . . . we didn't exactly mean to call you. That is to say, it wasn't intentional," Yuki said hurriedly. He was starting to sweat.

"Oh, I see. Well, then, I still have to clean Takayuki-sama's room."

Another *poof*.

Koizumi disappeared again with only the tiniest sound, no louder than a mouse inhaling.

Takayuki removed his glasses again and pinched the bridge of his nose with two fingers. *No*, he thought, *she's not exactly the sort of supernatural phenomenon we can show people. It wouldn't be fair to exploit her that way.*

Takayuki Usagiya was in his second year in the High School Division, Class B. He was, for all intents and purposes, the number two man in the Association. While his intelligence superseded that of the rank and file in both the Association and the school proper, it wasn't all he had to offer the group. He had a special something that no one else could imitate.

Her name was Koizumi.

Koizumi was a spectral maid who served the Usagiya household. She had been with Takayuki's family for generations. Since she did not possess a real body, she could get into just about any place imaginable—a skill useful both for cleaning and for revealing the unknown; for reaching dust in corners too small for human hands to squeeze into and for passing through walls and locked doors that her master couldn't access on his own.

Furthermore, (and this is probably something even you would have guessed in advance) when it got too dangerous for Takayuki to proceed on a mission, she could take his place. Or, at the least, she could provide added support—an extra pair of eyes and hands that could essentially split the effort and allow him to be in two places at once.

Koizumi's only weakness was that her brain grasped science only from her century. If Takayuki could have somehow modernized her mind, Koizumi would have been the perfect partner.

*(But then, where's the fun in being perfect?)*



"Oh, no!"

Koji, who had been in deep thought, suddenly lifted his head.

"What is it, Koji-kun?" Rion asked.

"I'm sorry, I have to go!" He grabbed his book bag from the floor beside his seat, threw it over his shoulder, and hurriedly headed for the door. "I really do apologize but I have a personal matter to deal with that I can't cancel, so I have to leave right now."

"Hey, Koji!" Yuki yelled angrily after him. "What are we going to do about our research theme?!"

Koji stopped. "Uh, well . . ." he muttered, hesitating for a brief moment. "No, I'm sorry! I'll have something for you by the next meeting, though!"

He bowed his head and dashed down the stairs like a torpedo going through its tube.



Once the sound of Koji's footsteps had receded, Yuki quietly spoke. "Darn him! He's got to figure out what's more important—his girlfriend or the Association."

"What can we do?" Takayuki asked. "It's only been a month since we solved her case."

"And don't you always say it's important to follow up after a mission?" Rion added. "You should cut him some slack. He's just behaving like you've trained him to."

"Huh?" As usual, Mifuyu seemed hopelessly lost in regard to these new developments. She looked around the room in utter confusion. "Where did Koji go anyway? Did he leave?"

The others giggled and winked at each other. Poor, dim Mifuyu!



*It's two kilometers from here to the Kindergarten Division, so I don't have time to dillydally!* Koji thought as he dashed out of the High School Division building. He glanced up at the clock on top of the street post before diverting his eyes from the sidewalk and leaping onto an off-road forest trail. It was as if his determination had sent a burst of energy to his legs.

*Whoa.* Even he was impressed with his own agility and speed.

The trees of the forest were thick and well-decorated with branches. He dodged through them in a

flash, jumping from branch to branch with a swiftness normally reserved for someone like Mifuyu.

*Hmmm . . . I never thought I would have to use my monkey-jumping technique in a situation like this.*

Koji kept his conversation, even though it was with himself, to a minimum, not wanting to delay himself for even a second.



As the youngest member of the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association, Koji Takamura—Elementary School Division, sixth grade, Class A—was the latest descendant of the Takamura *sengoku* ninja family.

Although his clan possessed a peaceful air about them, they had produced legions of bodyguards and security experts. From the time he could walk, Koji had been trained in the art of *ninjutsu*. He was now proficient in the throwing star, known as a *shuriken*, and several sword-fighting techniques. Additionally, he was adept at various forms of covert weaponry, combative martial arts, and lock-picking.

Koji's only problem was his age. As a grade-schooler, he was often expected to be capable of less, but his comrades had found he was extremely reliable when it came to a fight (although sometimes he proved to be too reliable and was left to do the fighting all on his own).

“Sakiko-chan! Sorry to keep you waiting!”

Koji rushed into the artificial park located in the western region of the Kindergarten Division’s campus. Seated peacefully at a sunlit bench in the center of the park, framed by trees with leaves that had already changed color for autumn, was a little girl with beautiful long, straight hair. She wore a smock-style apron with a star-shaped name badge pinned to her front.

“Oh, Koji-san!” Sakiko’s face lit up with a grin. She stood to greet him.

“I apologize for being late,” Koji said, catching his breath. “Our meeting ran overtime. I’m sorry.”

“Oh, don’t worry. I just got here myself!”

Sakiko’s hair was tied back with a ribbon. It swayed from side to side as she moved.

There was a long pause. Neither of them spoke, but they drew close to one another, shyly staring into the eyes of the object of their affections.

“Uh, uh . . . well, why don’t we do our study session at the usual place?” Koji asked, breaking the mood.

“Okay.” Sakiko picked her pink pencil case and memo pad up off the bench. She spun around on her heels and led the way toward the library.

Koji trotted after her, scratching at his blushing cheeks and quietly smiling to himself. He had caught a glimpse of what she was working on—astronomy and aerodynamics.

*So, she's really serious about becoming an astronaut, he considered pleasantly, before moving on to thoughts more romantic. I guess you can't exactly call this a date, but if it makes Sakiko-chan happy, then it makes me happy, too.*

Two months ago, a terrible monster that had been exiled to outer space by an ancient civilization more than ten thousand years before, crashed back into the earth's atmosphere and landed at CLAMP School. His name was Zetton, and he had inadvertently been found and raised by this little girl, Sakiko Hoshinosuka.

Thanks to the heroic efforts of Koji and his cohorts in the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association, the monster from space was defeated—except at a price.

Zetton could no longer control his monster powers, and with his explosive energy threatening to tear him—and everyone else—apart, he chose to fly back into outer space where he couldn't harm Sakiko or any of her friends, a sacrifice that would save the world!

Sakiko had been saddened by the loss of her friend, and she promised to become an astronaut so that one day she could be reunited with Zetton.

Koji felt a connection with this brave girl, and he volunteered to help her by starting up a study group. He called it the How-to-Become-an-Astronaut Study Session.

*Ahh, he thought to himself. I wish peaceful days like this could just go on forever.*

Of course, had he known about the menace that was approaching, Koji never would have allowed himself a moment of peace again. But he and his friends were blissfully unaware of any doom on the horizon, and thus were able to steal the rare quiet day to enjoy a relaxed mood.



Later that night, the sound of heavy breathing pierced the darkness.

*Huff, huff, huff . . .*

Panting. Wheezing. Rustling.

Someone—or something—was frantically searching through the tall grass in the woods. A shadow with short breath slithered between the trees.

*Huff, huff huff . . .*

And just as suddenly as it started, the panting stopped. Nails dug into the trunk of a tree.

*(Or were they claws?)*

"Aghhh!" A cry echoed in all directions. A pained scream.

The tree's bark was being audibly scratched away.

The forest was jittery with noise. The scent of blood that ran down the scratching fingers traveled on the wind. The only one oblivious was the shadowy creature, who pushed through the pain and continued to scrape at the tree trunk. It screamed again before it finally stopped and darted back through the woods.

"My . . . my body . . . my body," it wheezed.

Its voice was raspy; speaking was such an effort that it shook his entire being.

"What's . . . happening . . . t-to me?"

"What are you doing there?" another voice asked.

The beam of a flashlight stabbed at the shadow.

"This area is restricted! Leave here immediately!" ordered a security guard, out on patrol. He wore an armband with his task force's insignia: CLAMP School Security Committee.

The shadowy figure cared nothing for these symbols. It was more concerned with the guard's collar. Or, more specifically, the pale neck that it covered. The figure's breathing got heavy once more, like a dog that hears the sound of its food bowl being filled. *Throat . . . neck . . . blood!*

"Aaaaaaagggghhhhhhh!" Another scream, but this one with force; this one laced with desire, rang out through

CLAMP School Central Park, shaking the tops of the trees and scattering the birds that were nesting there.

Only the cold, dark blackness of night answered it.



Elsewhere, in a different cold, in a different dark, “He” maintained his form as a light particle and floated through space.

Friend.

He uttered the first word that came to mind.

*What is . . . friend?*

For some reason, that word would not vacate his brain. But what did that word mean?

He floated there, alone, in what seemed to be an infinite expanse of time, pondering a word whose meaning was as far from his current situation as could be.



“You called me, Chairman?”

The office for the Chairman of the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee was located on the third floor of CLAMP School’s High School Division Student Body Hall.

“Thank you for coming, Ryugasaki-kun. Please, take a seat.” The Committee Chairman, Miharu Takanashi,

wore a severe expression. She pointed at a sofa pressed against the wall.

"Thank you." Taro Ryugasaki was a second-year in the High School Division, as well as a member of the Lifestyle Monitoring Committee. He followed Miharu's command without question. Except . . .

There was a stiffness to his movements. He was a bit slow to take his seat. Hesitation was unavoidable in these mysterious circumstances. *What am I in for?* he asked himself. He had a particularly bad feeling about this meeting. It wasn't normal for Miharu to call members out individually.

Taro was trying not to betray his concerns. He breathed calmly, and quietly scanned the Chairman's office, trying not to turn his head. It was a large room, but it was designed simply and decorated with the utmost efficiency. The walls still shone as if they were newly painted; the ceiling was free of dust. Everything looked like it had just been built the second before he stepped inside. He was afraid even his tiniest sigh would somehow leave a mark.

Then he remembered that the walls had been destroyed when the monsters had fought. *Oh, yeah*, he thought, *there was a big hole right there, and you could see the horizon for miles and miles.*

"Let's get to business, Ryugasaki-kun," Miharu said purposefully.

"O-okay."



"I'm giving you a special assignment."

"Really?" Taro's spine suddenly loosened and he relaxed. "A special assignment? Me?"

"That's right. I'd like for you to infiltrate the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association."

"What?" That was not the sort of assignment Taro had imagined.

"Ever since they banded together," Miharu explained, "I have continually refused to accept their application for Club status. The reason is simple: I believe that they contribute nothing of value to the student community. Rather, they flaunt their flagrant disregard for school rules and sully the dignity of the CLAMP uniform. I feared they were a dangerous, subversive presence in the student body.

"And lo and behold, it was just as I thought! My instincts were exactly on the mark! Ever since the Association came into being, they haven't engaged in a single activity that hasn't caused a major disruption to CLAMP School business."

Miharu was so agitated that Taro thought her glasses were going to pop right off her face. He was prepared to dodge if that happened.

"I want to disband the Association!" she continued. "Completely! If we let this rogue element continue to exist, they could one day cause the destruction of everything we know to be CLAMP School. They'll bring

down every building, destroy every plant and living being. We can't let that happen. We need evidence to back up our belief that they instigate and magnify these incidents they purport to solve. I want *you* to get me the proof!"

Miharu fixed her glasses. Taro was right. They had extended to the tip of her nose, and with just a few more proclamations, they'd have flown right off! She took a deep breath, the inhalation raising her shoulders. "So, Ryugasaki-kun!" She slapped the palm of her hand loudly on her desk.

"Y-yes, ma'am?"

"Consider this an extreme version of your regular Club review duties. You'll simply be exercising a little extra scrutiny. Don't worry about your other Committee duties, I'll have them taken care of. This is your number one priority. I'm giving you a special Chairman's order!"

On the one hand, Taro was flattered, but there was also an acute doubt nagging him from the back of his mind.

"Uh, exactly how long," he asked with severe trepidation, "do you want me to spend with the Association?"

Miharu answered with no hesitation.

"As long as it requires."

Taro had expected as much, but his shoulders drooped nonetheless. He said no more out loud, but his mind carried on. *The Chairman*, he thought. *Once she starts, she just never stops.*

The following day, the CLAMP School Supernatural Phenomena Research Association reconvened in their usual spot.

"I've settled on a theme!" Yuki said as soon as the meeting was called to order. He held out his hands, addressing the rest of the members. "We're going with vampires!"

"Vampires?"

"You mean like Dracula and Buffy and stuff?"

"Exactly." Yuki grinned. He appeared oblivious to the hesitation of the other Association members. The way he saw it, his vampire theme was a foregone conclusion that the others should have seen all along.

The Chairman sat up straight on his metal-pipe chair. He looked at all of the members, moving his eyes from one to the next. "You all know about the increase in the number of students suffering from anemia lately, right?" he asked. "When I heard about this, I began to wonder why. I mean, I know it's a lack of blood and all, but I started to wonder if vampires were responsible. Do you realize there isn't a paranormal entity more famous or more recognizable to the common person than a vampire?"

Yuki's eyes sparkled like those of a child who had just discovered where the Christmas presents were hidden.

"Oh," Koji said absentmindedly. "So, when you say we're going to research vampires, you actually *do* mean like Dracula. You want to get into the history and the myths, that sort of thing?"

"It can be Nosferatu, *kyonshi*, anything like that, yeah!" he answered excitedly. "As long as it's the walking dead and it survives by feeding on the blood of the living, it would fall in our department. We'd be grouping them all together as one common threat."

The occult terminology rolled as easily off Yuki's tongue as if he were speaking the names of famous fashion designers, or his favorite classical actress. Vlad the Impaler, Dolce & Gabbana, Rita Hayworth—all one and the same! One could always rely on Yuki for a charismatic, poetic speech.

"It sounds like fun," Mifuyu said, her eyes lighting up as she dreamed about being a vampire slayer.

Mifuyu's words were like a key to the cage that had been housing everyone else's reactions—and despite early doubts, they were warming to the concept.

"If that's the case," Takayuki said, starting to run calculations in his head, "then we should comb through all of the ancient and modern folk legends from both the East and the West."

"I'll go the central library and start making a list of relevant reference books," Rion added. "Oh, and I'll go to my grandmother's shrine and check and see if she has any information on these types of creatures from Japanese legends." She began looking over her student ID, checking for any restrictions on library use.

"We mentioned Dracula already, and I think that examining fictional vampires who have appeared in movies and books would be a good starting point," Yuki suggested gleefully. "Besides, it would go a long way toward compiling a database so we can start separating fact from fiction. Like, what traits do we think vampires have that some writer just made up, for instance."

"Dracula was based on a real-life person, right? I'll check out that angle and make a report on it," Koji said. He looked around at the faces of the four other associates. "Seems like everybody is pretty fired up about this topic, eh?"

"It certainly does," Mifuyu said. She was maybe even happier about it than the Chairman.

Takayuki chuckled to himself. "Well, you know this Association. No progress is ever made until somebody takes the first move."

"Yuki-san-sama-sama is the *man*," Mifuyu giggled with a big smile.

"Oh, come now," Yuki smiled back. "You know how I hate to be *that* specific!"



After the meeting, Mifuyu immediately got to work.

Let's see . . . turn right at the corner and go three hundred meters and then turn left.

She studied a memo from Takayuki. He had written it in his notebook and torn it out to give to her. It still had the ragged edges from the binding.

"When it comes to vampires," he told her, "we're talking the Middle Ages, that period in Western civilization from about the fifth to the fifteenth centuries. There's no better place to get acquainted with the Middle Ages than a museum. Mifuyu-chan, go to the Renaissance Museum in the Kindergarten Division and make a list of all the artifacts on display that pertain to the period in question. Just work with what's obvious and easy for you to understand, okay? Don't bite off more than you can chew. If there's anything there that we can use for our own display at the Cultural Fair, I'd like to see if we can borrow it or take a photograph of it. Okay?"

Mifuyu was excited to be given such an important task. She smiled to herself, content as a house pet just given a treat, happy that her friends were putting so much trust in her.

*The museum . . . I bet it's a pretty exciting place! Lots of neat old stuff and other things!*

And for her, it would most likely be as exciting as she expected. She was so used to looking at swords and swords only, that just about every day at CLAMP School gave her some new kind of stimulation. Practically everything she saw or heard was a new experience, and there were an infinite number of things on campus to satisfy her underdeveloped knowledge and boundless curiosity. She had enrolled in CLAMP School on a swordsman scholarship and was admitted into the ultra-exclusive Class Z. All of her academic classes that didn't pertain to the blade were assigned to a special, free-floating curriculum schedule, and as a result, Mifuyu ended up with more free time than the average high-school student.

And so, while the other Association members were busy studying, she was able to run time-consuming errands like this one. She liked the alone time it afforded her. *Taking a walk, taking a walk*, she chanted to herself. *It's so much fun! The sun is so warm, and the clouds are so fluffy.*

The end of summer had marked itself on the foliage, and she was aware of the lighter touch with which the autumn sun caressed the school. She loved the way the leaves turned colors, so bright, almost like fire. Mifuyu's head danced with delight each time she saw the change. It was like she discovered something new each and every year.

*Mr. Leaves, let me touch you!*

A high-pitched cry rang out from a distance.

*Mr. Bird, cheep cheep!*

CLING!

CLANG!

The cry was immediately followed by loud, metallic crashes.

*Could it be? Are those swords clashing?!*

Mifuyu ran in the direction of the sound, following it into the deep woods by the side of the road.

*Damn, damn, damn! Where did you go?!* As if in answer, she heard a man yelling. It was a voice she swore she knew. *He's close!*

WHOOMPH!

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a dark shadow jumping around. Its movements were familiar, a style she had seen before.

"There you are!" she said aloud.

CLANG!

If you weren't paying close attention, you wouldn't have seen it, but Mifuyu pulled out Kotetsu. Just in time, too. There was a flash of sparks, metal blade meeting metal blade. She had stopped the stranger's sword before it could come down on her head.

"Ha!" she laughed.

The small shadowy man withdrew his sword and returned it to its scabbard. "Forgive me," he said, lowering



his head and bowing. "It was wrong of me to point my sword toward someone such as yourself! I have no words sufficient for the apology due to you."

Returning Kotetsu to its sheath, Mifuyu stared vacantly at this strange person.

He wore a kindergartner's smock-style uniform from another school.

He was small in stature.

And he wore shorts.

Several scattered strands of hair stood up sharply from his closely cropped scalp.

And on his back was strapped a very large sword, which she knew by its formal name, *Tachi*.

Raising his head, the young boy finally took a good look at the person with whom he had collided. He cried out in surprised recognition. "*Mifuyu-dono?!*"

"Well, duh." She laughed. "I totally knew it was you, Bunzaemon. I could tell by the noise you made when you were leaping around like a rabbit."

Mifuyu's eyes suddenly widened. "Wait!" she exclaimed. "What are you doing here? Are there bad spirits about to attack CLAMP School?!"

Before Bunzaemon could answer, Mifuyu received a signal from the Association that trouble was brewing.



The rest of the team had already gone to the Professor with their dilemma, and Mifuyu took Bunzaemon to the teacher's office. The gang quickly filled Mifuyu in on what was happening, and she in turn filled them in on who her companion was.

"Let me introduce you to a specialist at handling spirits," Mifuyu said. "Professor, this is Bunzaemon Sakaki. I think his talents will come in especially handy on this case."

The Professor was the one member of the faculty who had taken an interest in the Association, though mostly because he was a fan of Yuki's. More important, though, he listened with an open mind when things got weird—and a spirit expert still wearing a Kindergarten Division uniform seemed particularly odd for its trappings of normalcy.

"Y-you're saying this kid is an exorcist?" Koji chimed in.

"My name is Bunzaemon Sakaki. Pleased to meet you."

Bunzaemon spoke with a voice that had not yet broken into manhood, yet it had more confidence than most voices. His attitude was bold. He didn't give an inch to his elders, not even Takayuki.

His calm presence belied his young age, subduing the rest of the group, who under other circumstances might have had their feathers ruffled.

"So, I understand we have no time to lose. I'd be most grateful if you could explain the details of the situation."

"Really?" Yuki said, hurriedly. "Sure, sure . . . of course. I'll fill you in on the way."



"It had all started two months earlier," Yuki explained.

*(Some of you will remember this, some of you won't . . .  
but it's a good refresher either way, so listen up!)*

"An evil, high-level spirit, the worst kind of apparition, had invaded CLAMP School. It was attempting to perform a ceremony that would transform itself into a human.

"The apparition had caught wind of a rumor: if someone were to travel through the entire subway line, then that person's wish would be granted. Consequently, the apparition took possession of a railcar and began to destroy the subway.

"Thanks to the work of the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association, which had caught on to the apparition's plan, the ghostly rampage was halted. Then in desperation, the spirit had taken another railway car and was trying to transform the body of the train into some kind of human form.



BOOM. BOOOOOM. Its footsteps shook the entire University Division.

Yuki mimicked the apparition, lifted his hands in the air, and stomped down hard on the floor. "And *that's* the story," he cried.

"I see."

Hearing Yuki's explanation of events, Bunzaemon took hold of his sword and headed straight out the door.

"We have no time to waste," he said briskly. "We must stop this spirit immediately, or else the school won't be the only place in danger. This spook isn't going to stop until the entire city of Tokyo is completely destroyed."

"Hold up, I'm coming, too!" Mifuyu called out, stepping in right behind her friend.

"It's too dangerous!" Bunzaemon barked. "Please, let me handle this."

"Don't worry, I can take care of myself." Mifuyu cinched up Kotetsu's scabbard, feeling it tight against her spine. She brought up her pace so it was even with his.

"I see," he joked. "I wasn't aware you had any knowledge of swordplay."

"A bit," Mifuyu said, and gave him a wink.

Bunzaemon moved faster now, too, as if daring his ally to keep up.

Yuki burst through the door. "Not so fast! We're going, too!" he exclaimed.

"What?" Takayuki said. "Whaddaya mean we're going, too?"

"You heard me! There are only so many fun paranormal cases with this level of activity that we're going to come across in our careers. We can't pass it up. It could even be the thing we need to break through and get our Club status!"

Yuki waved for his reluctant troops to follow.

Then, without warning—

"Rion-chan!" Takayuki called out. "Watch yourself!"

There was a powerful crash, and the echo of the terrible sound it made reverberated through the building, demolishing one whole portion of it.

"Eeeeeee! S-senpai!"

It was all happening so fast, no one knew quite what was going on. Mifuyu scooped up Rion, and cradling the young girl in her arms, leapt away with all the strength her legs could muster.

Koji and Yuki had been knocked unconscious and lay by the side of the road.

"M-Mifuyu-dono . . ." Bunzaemon's voice was strained as he pushed himself to his feet. He held his sword in his right hand.

Time was losing its meaning in the chaos. Several minutes passed, but for some it was like hours, for others like seconds.

The enemy had made itself known. The apparition was once again laying waste to the school by materializing as a railway monster and taking a subway car.

Unfortunately, the evil spirit had learned from the previous skirmish, and it had armored itself with a specialized metal. It was a more formidable opponent now. Not even their new spirit specialist, Bunzaemon, knew how to proceed.

Koji had been knocked out in the first explosion, the same one that had put Rion in harm's way. Yuki had lost consciousness in an attempt to retrieve Tachi, Bunzaemon's sword, which had been knocked away from its owner by the explosion of the monster car. As soon as he touched the sword, Yuki was knocked back as though he'd been hit by a speeding car.

"Tachi has been sealed with 'the will of one,' " Bunzaemon explained to Mifuyu, "and thus cannot be handled by a normal human. That's why it knocked Yuki-dono out cold. Anyone who dares to handle the sword has to have a strong and singular will. Otherwise, the blade will refuse you, and you will be subjected to serious psychological damage."

"I'm not sure I understand," Mifuyu said, "but I think I have the basics. You just need to have strong thoughts and a sturdy sense of self, right? Well, no one could ever accuse the Chairman of being of one mind!"

Mifuyu set Rion down next to Yuki. She steadied her breathing, reached out, and laid her left hand on Tachi where it rested in its sheath.

The sword emitted a white light and illuminated the entire area in a brilliant, unearthly glow. Its luminescence silhouetted Mifuyu from behind.

“Mifuyu . . . dono . . . ?” Bunzaemon stammered just before losing consciousness. He stamped what he saw onto his brain, though, swearing not to forget Mifuyu’s strength.

XOXO

“In the end, it was all I could do just to protect myself,” Mifuyu said. She reviewed the details of the fight in her mind. The battle was over, and the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association had conquered once more.

Mifuyu stretched out on a black-colored bench in front of the museum, smiling as she thought about what she was saying. “It was actually you, Bunzaemon, who struck the final blow.”

“I-I believe that is so.”

Perhaps it was because he was nervous sitting so close to Mifuyu, but Bunzaemon clutched his kneecaps with both hands and spoke without relaxing from that position.

"When you received the full brunt of his punch with my sword," he said, "I have to be honest, I was frightened."

When that had happened, Mifuyu had been knocked back by the impact. She tumbled through the air, and though she wasn't injured, thanks to the protective barrier Tachi created, it still knocked her out.

"Takayuki-dono is the only one who really saw the whole thing. According to him, several of the monster's arms and legs were shorn from its body at the same time."

"Really?" Mifuyu thought it kind of made sense. When the railcar had tried to humanize itself, several limb-like appendages had appeared on its makeshift body. Mifuyu had torn off at least one of them in the clash.

Once one limb was removed, it became harder and harder for the monster to hold itself together, and when the body fell apart, the apparition was expelled from the train car. Bunzaemon regained consciousness just in time, and just as the spirit lost its hold on the steel machine, the young boy delivered the *coup de grace*.

"If Koji-dono hadn't gotten his bearings at the last minute, you and Rion-dono would have been crushed under all that falling metal."

"Yeah, it was sure a close call!" Mifuyu said, sounding almost like she hadn't been one of the ones who was almost squashed.



"After he came to, Koji-kun grabbed Rion-chan's limp body and carried her out of harm's way," Mifuyu added. "He even looked after me and Yuki-chan, though it was taking all the strength he had. I don't remember much of it, but I've been piecing it together. Like how Takayuki managed to stay awake, practically by sheer force of will. It must have been that display of mental stamina that allowed him to carry your sword to you, Bunzaemon."

"I owe a great debt of gratitude to all of you in the Research Association," Bunzaemon admitted sheepishly. "I wouldn't have been able to do it alone. Especially . . ."

"Yes?"

"I-I especially owe you, Mifuyu-dono, a great—"

The boy suddenly looked to the ground. He shuffled the dirt around with his feet.

"Tell me? What is it?"

Mifuyu peered into his face.

"Er, oh . . . it's nothing," Bunzaemon replied. He averted his eyes. His face was growing hot, his skin turning red. "B-but more important, Mifuyu-dono . . ."

He strained with all of his might to change the subject. It was a wasted effort, though, because the words he had most wanted to say, yet was most scared to, were forcing their way out.

"S-since we had the good fortune to run into each other . . . I-I was hoping . . . that perhaps we could engage in some swordplay? I have always h-hoped that I could duel with you."

"Sure." Mifuyu answered so quickly, Bunzaemon wasn't sure he heard her right. "R-really? No lie?"

"Yeah."

Seeing how ecstatic Bunzaemon was made Mifuyu smile. Nonetheless, something was troubling her deep in her heart.

*Hmm? Come to think of it, she thought to herself, I have this nagging feeling that I'm forgetting something. What is it?*



*Huff, huff, huff . . .*

The shadowy figure pressed its palm against the wound it had received by the blow from the back of Tachi's blade. It desperately tried to calm its body, to regain control of its lungs.

*Huff—pheuuwww.*

It cautiously looked around the surrounding area.

Finally, certain that there was no one in pursuit, it began to settle down. It slackened its pace and walked more leisurely through the woods in search of its next prey.

*My throat . . . my throat is so dry . . . yet again. I need blood . . . fresh, warm blood.*



ABNORMAL SITUATION IN PROGRESS.

danger level: 1.5

In an empty room, a computer terminal whirled to life, displaying an incoming text mail message being typed in at another location. At the relay station, the typist wiped the sweat from her brow.

MUST STOP this change from happening or  
something terrible will occur.



At the same time, Yuki discovered there was a new threat to the Association, and not one that they were prepared for. Give him a ghost or a ghoul any day, just not the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee!

Taro Ryugasaki didn't like having to lie, and it showed. "So, anyway, I'll be pleased to share your company if you'll allow it," he said, wiping a large amount of sweat from the back of his neck.

"Just what are you trying to pull?!" Yuki asked him brusquely. "What's the catch?"

"Oh, no, no." Taro laughed nervously. "It's not like that. I haven't got an ulterior motive or anything. I just wanted to assemble some detailed data for our review. It's about time your Association received more attention, and I thought the most advantageous way to do that would be to accompany you on some activities."

They were standing in the hallway outside the Visual Viewing Center in the High School Division Campus Building. Yuki had gone there in search of some visual props, and that's when he had bumped into Taro. Since he had become Chairman, Yuki shared an unsavory and sadly inseparable relationship with the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee. It was like a bad stain that he could not remove from his favorite cashmere sweater.

"A-anyway," Taro continued, "I'm doing this on orders from the Committee Chairman. You can decline if you like, but I can almost guarantee it will mean an automatic refusal when it comes time to hand out Club certifications."

It was that threat that would seal the deal.

Up until this point, the actions of the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association had never been given any public acknowledgment, even though they had begun to develop a select constituency.

Their notoriety almost seemed like a mark against them where the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee was concerned. Perhaps it was a boon that the Committee had granted the Association a special chance to have their activities put up for review. And there were worse reviewers they could have been given than Taro Ryugasaki, Yuki supposed.

So, when presented with a memo backing Taro's explanation of the aforementioned terms, Yuki had no choice but to accept the offer.

That didn't mean he had to like it.

Yuki's feminine beauty would surpass most women's, but when he scowled at his new foe, the femininity drained away and his look was most unpleasant.

Putting the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee with the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association was like putting pepper on ice cream. It was as wrong as could be.

The tension wasn't about the numerous times that the Association had been denied Club status. It had gone beyond that. For some reason, the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee Chairman, Miharu Takanashi, had developed an unholy disdain for the Association. Yuki flattered himself that it really was jealousy. Miharu couldn't take the fact that there was a Chairman more gorgeous than she, and as a result, the harpy took every opportunity to pit her organization against his.

For instance, whenever the Association was just about to break a case, the Committee took direct measures to interfere, usually getting the Security Committee involved. Like when they barred the Research Association from Genbu Park where Zetton had been living.

So, was it any wonder that Yuki harbored a strong distrust toward this new agent of Miharu's? Could he trust the handshake that would affirm this current offer? Clearly that was too much to ask!

"All right," he said. "I'll agree . . . *for now*."

He wasn't going to keep his doubts to himself.

"Well, then," Taro smiled through his sweat, "we couldn't be happier."

"Given that we're all working toward the next All-School Cultural Fair," Yuki said, "if you're going to join us as a member, then we expect you to help out."

"Yes, of course."

"Okay then, I have a job for you," Yuki said, fighting to stifle his devilish grin, which still managed to sneak through somehow.

Yuki opened the door to the Visual Viewing Center. "Right now, we're doing research on vampires. And so, we're collecting comparative data on fictional vampires, including celluloid versions."

The pair proceeded through a door marked: Video Data Room. It smelled of chemicals, almost like a beauty salon when someone gets a perm.

"If we just wanted to compile a list of the movies, that would be easy enough to do at one of our classroom terminals since the database is built into everyone's desks. This, however, is the only place we can view the actual films."

As with most things pertaining to art or information, CLAMP School's Visual Viewing Center contained a film collection that far outstripped the rest of the academic world. It contained millions of movies, ranging from educational documentaries to instructional films to pure entertainment pictures. Any of those films could be accessed and viewed on special video monitors in the Video Data Room.

Taro had never been there before (it's possible to spend a lifetime at CLAMP School and still not see it all), and he was impressed. *Wow*, he said to himself. *I guess they aren't named the Research Association for nothing. Who knew they took such a normal approach to their abnormal study topics?*

Fwump.

"Huh?"

Yuki dropped a mountain of files and photocopies on the table in front of Taro.

"So, anyway," the Chairman said, "here's a list we made ahead of time. It's all the movies we could find that have vampires in them. I want you to watch all of them and take detailed notes on what special characteristics each vampire has and what differentiates the main players from the others in cinematic vampire lore."

"What?" Taro was taken aback. "This whole list? There has to be at least three hundred flicks!"

And that was just a quick estimate.

"Well, yeah," Yuki answered nonchalantly. "Taking in every piece of information is what research is all about! It doesn't matter how small the role, or even if the character only has one line of dialogue. As long as a vampire appears in the movie, you have to check it out and summarize what you see."

"Only after we've compiled all the data and look at the grand total can we have an understanding of the common perception of vampires as it pertains to cinematic references!"

And so saying, Yuki pushed a pile of blank paper and various writing implements toward Taro.

"Now, stop wasting time and get to work. You'll be fine! While you do have to look through everything, there are a few tricks you can use. Like fast-forwarding or starting at the end and seeing if it sums itself up. I'll help you get started, show you the ropes."

*This looks like it's going to be a tough job, Taro thought to himself. What have you gotten me into, Miharu-senpai?*

XOXO

"Okay, Sakiko-chan, see you soon!"

"Good-bye!"

A group of kindergartners, dressed in the same uniform and wearing the same-shaped name badges, waved farewell to each other.



"See you tomorrow!"

Sakiko's good mood was evident in the volume of her voice and in how vigorously she waved her hand. Though, at just a quick glance, it looked like the end of any normal kindergarten day. There was no reason to think Sakiko was any different than any of the other students.

Except she was.

While everyone else filed toward the school gates, where the bus waited for them, Sakiko broke from the pack and walked in the opposite direction. Sakiko's father was the owner of a very large area of forest on a mountain, and they lived in the suburban Tokyo region that was in the western part of the city, a place called S City West, Hoshinosuka Village. The bus didn't service students that far out, so Sakiko went to and from school in a helicopter.

But if you thought she was heading for the heliport, you'd be wrong. These days, she lingered at school before returning home.

She was going to the park once again, for another study session with Koji.

Seeing all of this, two of her fellow kindergartners couldn't help but gossip about their friend.

"Sakiko-chan sure has changed," one of them said.

"You can say that again," the other replied.

These two had given Sakiko a friendly sendoff just moments before, but sometimes a friendly face can show its other side with immeasurable speed.

"She used to be the quietest girl in class, and nobody hardly noticed her at all."

"Yeah, and now she's always happy and smiling. It's kind of annoying."

"She's not as frumpy as she used to be either. She somehow became one of the prettiest girls in class."

"Totally!"

The two leaned in toward one another as their voices dropped to a whisper.

"Maybe it's a boy."

"Oh, that has to be it!"

They shared a wicked grin.

"That little scam artist."

"What a flirt!"

Laughing, they headed to the bus hand in hand, the beautiful blue sky of CLAMP School providing an ironic backdrop to their green jealousy.

"I wish I could have a nice boyfriend," one of them revealed.

"Me, too. I feel like my youth is wasting away."

"I guess we should be happy for Sakiko."

"Yeah, learn from her rather than be nasty."

"Yeah."

And just as quickly as their mood had turned evil, they surrendered to Sakiko's infectious good mood and thought only positive thoughts the rest of the way home.



*Huff, huff . . .*

The heavy breathing echoed through the deepest part of the kindergarten forest once again. He was back.

*Blood . . . I need more now—precious blood . . .*

Insatiable hunger and thirst attacked every fiber of his being and showed no mercy. The pain had rendered his flesh the palest white, and his hollowed eyes glowed with the rage of a wild beast.

Most of his faculties for some reason had failed him, but with what little mental powers he could still muster, the boy tried to fight his urges.

It was no good.

*I want blood! A virgin's fresh, fresh blood!*

Sakiko sat alone on the usual park bench. *Is Koji-san going to be late today, too?* she wondered. *I suppose I can't expect him to drop everything for me. The Research Association is important to him and keeps him very busy.*

She glanced at the notebook on her lap and began to slowly flip through the pages. They were covered with large letters, all in red ink. As she read, her cheeks began to flush.

She was reading the notes from the previous study session.

The hard stuff at school: It isn't too late to start learning at the pace expected of you. It's okay to learn certain subjects when you get to the grade where they're supposed to teach it. You don't always have to be ahead.

Koji's teaching method was so gentle. He explained everything with a great seriousness, but still wasn't afraid to smile. It was almost like knowledge made him happy.

More important than trying to accelerate your learning schedule, the thing you need to do right now is build a strong and fit body, so you are prepared for the years of growth and study that are ahead of you. If you give too much time to studying, you may not have enough time for your exercise regimen. You need to strike a balance.

No matter how smart you are, with the limitation of today's science, your intelligence still can't replace a physically fit body or compensate for being ill-equipped to go to outer space. It's not an easy thing to withstand the powerful g-forces that push at a spaceship as it

breaks through the outer atmosphere of Earth. It's been compared to getting hit with several times your body weight in one big blow. If you don't work out, your bones and insides will get smooshed.



She remembered this part. Koji had glanced down at his notes before continuing. "So, I think it's most important that you begin some basic training," he had said. "After all, there are things that you can do only when you're a child. Before you become a teenager, you should already be eating well, getting a good night's rest every night, and exercising. Starting now will only make it easier later.

"Oh, and of course, when it comes to exercising and building bodies, I am something of an expert. I'll do my best to teach you things that won't be too hard on you! Just leave it to me!"

Koji had thumped his chest proudly.

But it made him cough. Sakiko had tried so hard not to laugh when it happened, because he was being really sincere. Now that she was alone with the memory, though, she indulged herself with a warm giggle. She thought of him fondly. *Koji-san is always trying his best at everything he does. I really could learn a thing or two from him.*

Unconsciously, she squeezed the notebook to her chest. Not really thinking about it, she moved one of her hands from her notebook and placed it against her cheek. The skin was warm.

She was feeling quite content and didn't really notice the rustling in the foliage behind her.

The sound continued, though, and eventually invaded Sakiko's reverie. She found it odd that the grass and the bushes would be making such a noise, as there was no wind to speak of. She turned around to see what it could be, but there was nothing in view from where the sound was coming.

When it came down to it, Sakiko always went to the park because it was probably the most peaceful place on the entire campus. Its woods were deep and large, the trees extending back farther than the eye could follow. That's what made this current disruption so disconcerting.

*Nobody's . . . there?*

She felt completely and utterly alone.

It felt like the pleasant park air had all been sucked out, only to be replaced by a creepy, tense silence.

CRACK.

Something or someone had stepped on and broken a branch. It sounded like an explosion, the way the noise thundered out of the forest at her.

"Koji-san?" she asked, standing up. She began to walk in the direction of the noise.

The darkness came out to meet her, like a living thing that wanted to say hello. The sun was disappearing on the horizon, and the shadows seemed to be growing before her eyes. The whole scene made her shudder.

Sakiko thought of Alice and how she had followed the rabbit down the hole in the storybook. The rabbit beckoned her to go deeper, to head farther inside.

*Whoosh!*

There was a gust of wind, and a black figure appeared behind her.

Before she could react, she felt a sting as two tiny needles slid into her neck.

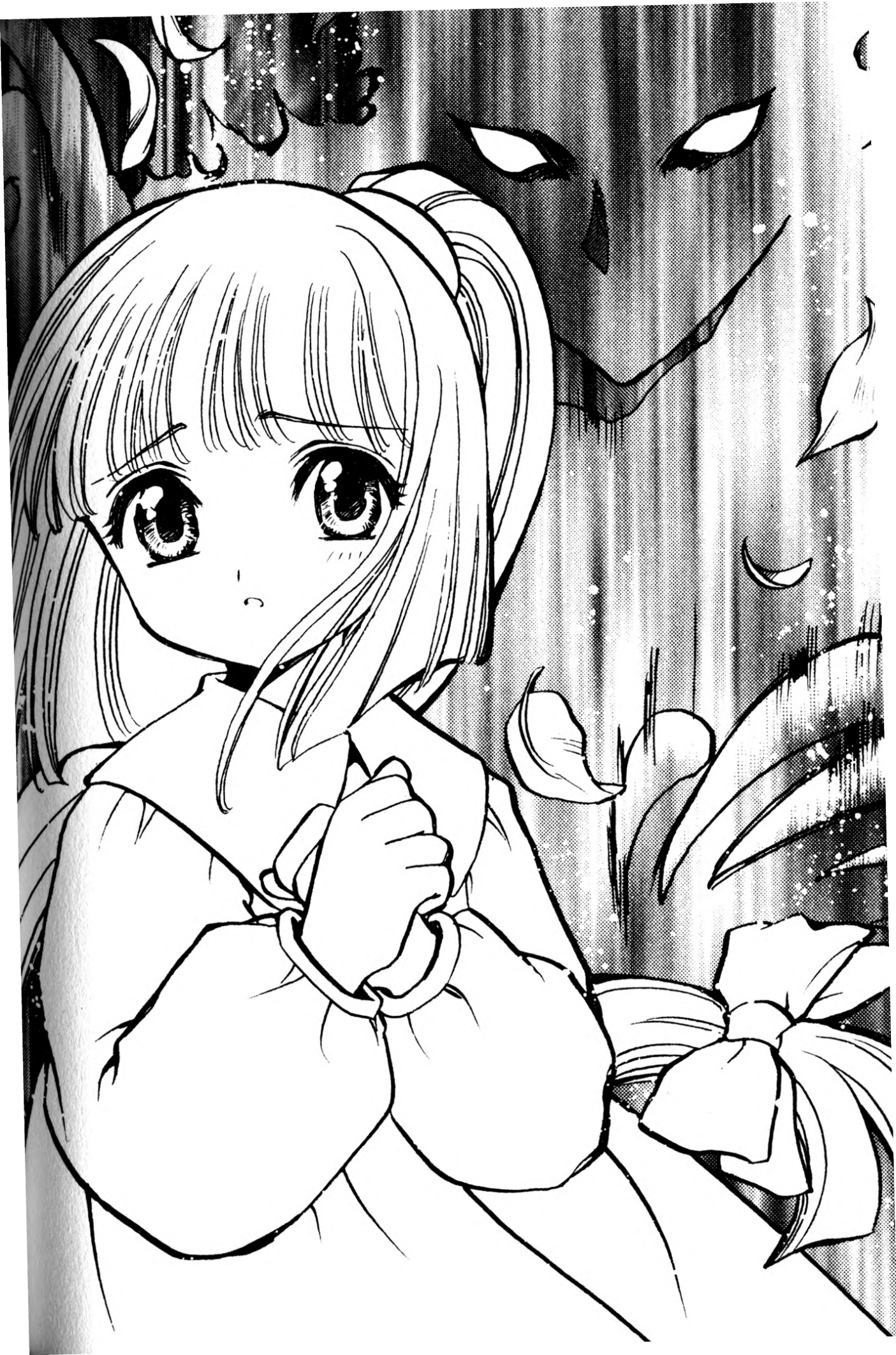


“Aghhhh!” Koji groaned. “I’m late! I’m late! I have to hurry!”

He was running above the ground, panicked, jumping from tree to tree, trying to get from the High School Division to the Kindergarten area as fast as he could.

“No matter how forgiving a sweet girl like Sakiko-san might be, I can’t expect her to wait for me for more than half an hour! She’s bound to get fed up and go home!”

Disregarding the fact that he might slip and fall, that the branches might break beneath him, Koji leapt from limb to limb with furious speed, like a small animal high-tailing it from a predator’s jaws. He covered two





kilometers, though, in a matter of minutes. He emerged on the road within sight of the bench and gave one last burst of speed, a final spurt toward his destination.

"The bench!"

He skidded to a halt at their usual meeting place, feeling like he had left his breath several paces behind him.

"Huh?" he asked.

The white bench was there, where it always was. But Sakiko wasn't. The darling young girl wasn't waiting for him. She was nowhere to be seen.

"*Gahhhh!*" he groaned. "She must have gotten angry and bailed on me!"

*(For anyone who may have been watching, it was easy to see that this cool kid was rapidly losing his composure.)*

Koji once more examined the bench where Sakiko should have been, and for the first time, he noticed it wasn't empty. Something was there.

It was her pink notebook and pencil case. He stepped closer, picked it up. Her name was written across the cover, eight familiar *hiragana* characters: Sakiko Hoshinosuka.

"This is her notebook all right . . . but if it's still here, then where is she?"

Koji looked all around—to his right, his left, behind him.

The silent, still air stabbed at his ears.

"I have a bad feeling about this," he whispered to himself. He tucked the notebook under his arm and began to study the landscape more carefully.

From behind the bench, he heard a faint rustling. Koji stood as still as he could, trying to hear every nuance of the sound that was available.

Nothing.

And then . . .

*Something, he thought, something definitely moved just now.*

Koji shifted sideways into the shadows, rendering his presence undetectable. The art of hiding was one he had learned quite well. He would become indistinguishable from the very air that surrounded him.

As he did, the world also opened up to him. He sensed somebody beyond him, someone deep in the woods. He slowly began to move toward it.

Through the bushes, through the shrubs and the falling autumn leaves, he saw her.

He had found Sakiko.

She was on the ground. She'd fallen.

A dark figure, cloaked in night and shade, was kneeling beside her. His face was low, near her neck.

He was a boy. He had an icy countenance that didn't look quite as human as it should have. And he was wearing a blue blazer.

Koji couldn't believe what he was seeing, but the scene was to become even more shocking. Because right then, from Sakiko's neck—

A trickle of blood.

*"Aaaagggghhhh!"*

As he screamed, Koji rushed forward.

"Let go of Sakiko-chan!" he demanded.

The dark boy leapt backward, getting out of Koji's way a split second before they collided. Sakiko's head fell to the ground with a thud.

"Sakiko-chan!" Koji exclaimed.

Her eyes began to flutter. She coughed and drew in air. Koji leaned in close to her. She was regaining consciousness. The jolt from when the dark boy had dropped her head must have knocked her out of her stupor.

"Koji . . . san," she gasped.

Her breath was fading again. It was taking all of her strength just to speak.

"Sakiko-chan!" Koji cried. "Hold on, Sakiko-chan!"

"Don't move her head," the dark boy warned him.

"What? You—!" Koji jumped to his feet and spun to face the boy, grabbing a shuriken from inside his shirt. "What did you do to her, you monster?"

Koji held himself back. He knew that if he released his throwing star, he would surely kill the boy. It upset him to want to throw it, but that was the way he felt. From

what he could tell, this freak had nearly killed Sakiko-chan, and now Koji wanted to do the same to him.

"I-I didn't do anything," the boy protested. "I got this weird sensation that something was wrong, and when I got here, she was lying on the ground like that."

The boy's voice was calm, completely free of anxiety, almost soothing.

"You expect me to believe you?" Koji asked.

The boy didn't answer. He stared at Koji for a second, then turned on the balls of his feet and walked away.

"Hold it!" Koji shouted. "You can't just leave! I'm not letting you!"

"Don't worry about me, worry about her! If you call an ambulance, they can still do something for her." He was correct, but even so, it didn't seem right for him just to leave. Koji was unsure of what he should do.

Making his decision, Koji scooped up Sakiko's limp body, taking special care not to move her head. As fast as he could, without making a sound to wake her or jostle her too much, he ran toward the Campus General Hospital at the center of campus.

The boy had disappeared somewhere behind him. Koji had no idea where.



“Her condition was extremely dangerous,” the female doctor told him in even tones. “The poor girl had lost almost six percent of her blood.”

“H-how is Sakiko-chan doing now, though?” Koji asked, frightened of the possible answer.

“Don’t worry. She’s out of danger.”

The entire room breathed a sigh of relief.

Several of Sakiko’s friends had gathered, having heard the news of what had happened.

Koji’s eyes filled with tears. “Thank goodness,” he said. “Thank goodness she’s safe.”

“What a relief,” another boy said.

“I’m so glad,” a girl chimed in.

The students who were waiting had been on pins and needles in anticipation of the news, and the joy they felt at its arrival was unparalleled. Some of them were emergency rescue workers assigned to the Campus General Hospital, and they were the ones who had let the other kids know what had occurred over near the Kindergarten Dorms.

XOXO

At CLAMP School, there were several medical care facilities to service the students. The Campus General Hospital was the largest of them all, and it employed doctors and emergency medical personnel in various

divisions twenty-four hours a day, in several shifts. The staff was prepared to deal with any illness or situation that might arise. In addition, in the interest of preserving health and wellness, there were seven Campus Athletic Gyms decked out with hot spring baths, as well as Campus Convalescent Care Centers for long-term treatment.

It was at times like this that Koji realized how fortunate it was that he was attending CLAMP School.



“Anyhow,” the doctor continued, “we replaced the lost blood through a transfusion. There aren’t any open wounds that we need to worry about, and it’s simply a matter of hydrating her and giving her a little nutrition, and your friend’s strength will return in no time.”

The doctor looked over Sakiko’s chart to make sure she hadn’t missed anything. She sounded pleased to be delivering at least *some* good news.

“There is one thing that concerns me, however,” she said.

Koji’s heart leapt into his throat. “What? I—is it serious?”

“Yes,” the doctor said, lowering her voice. She paused, considering her words. “The wound on her neck—we believe that it was the source of the bleeding. We also think it is causing her to run a slight

fever, and we're not sure exactly why. At present I don't believe it will be a long-lasting condition, but it's better to be safe than sorry. I'd like to disinfect the injury and run some tests."

"A fever?" Koji felt his spine knot up. "I-is it possible that when this person attacked her, when he took her blood, he infected her with some kind of virus?"

Just saying the words made Koji feel sick.

"Until I run my tests, I really can't say for certain."

Koji had seen the wound on Sakiko's neck. It was odd that they considered it a single injury, as it really was two. There were two tiny holes, as if she had been stabbed with a two-pronged needle.

*Or as if she had been bitten by a vampire, Koji told himself. He shook his head, trying to shake the thought from his mind. No, no, you need to look at this realistically if you're going to help her. Anyway, I've contacted Sakiko-chan's homeroom teacher and I called her parents, so she'll have some adult help soon enough. I need to contact my senpais at the Research Association and tell them that I can't be part of the Cultural Fair until this is over.*

Koji had made his decision. He was going to remain by Sakiko's side until she had regained her health.



Abnormal Situation in Progress.

Danger level: 1.5

This development was input into the computer terminal with dispassionate efficiency. Contrary to the businesslike nature of her action, the typist's face betrayed deep troubles.

The Angel is approaching . . .  
We have to act fast or the Plan  
will be put in jeopardy.

Her finger clicked on the final key—

Enter

—the message was sent, and the woman left the computer lab.



“Hmm? What’s that?”

Takayuki stopped in his tracks. He was walking toward the High School Dormitory, on the way back from the Association’s meeting. He was carrying a fantastic load of vampire reference material.

Something seemed off to him. There was a feeling in the air that wasn’t normal.



The wind drifted through the campus. It carried with it the smell of autumn—sap and dying leaves. The breeze shook the tree branches near him.

That's when Takayuki noticed *it*.

He readjusted his stack, lest it fall over due to absentmindedness, and approached this thing he'd spotted. It was lying lifelessly on the ground.

As he got closer, Takayuki saw that it was a piece of clothing. Judging by the size and location, it most likely belonged to someone in the High School Division. That barely narrowed down its potential source pool, though. It was a white button-down shirt, and every student probably had at least one of those.

Then he noticed a potentially massive clue: a splotch of blood, front and center.

*What is this?* he wondered. *Did someone get hurt here?*

Takayuki set his files down on the ground. He was careful not to touch the shirt as he knelt down beside it, looking it over as thoroughly as possible. Given how the sunlight glistened off of it, he deduced that the blood was still fresh. Also, if one considered the splatter pattern, it was obvious that the blood had not fallen on the shirt naturally or dripped onto the fabric directly from the source. Rather, it appeared as if the blood had been wiped off something else.

That left several questions: Whose shirt was it? Whose blood? And how did it get here?

Takayuki looked around the area for any further clues. It was in an open space between the road and the forest. Although it was noon, shadows from the trees and from the nearby school buildings made this spot appear dark, like it was a small slice of night that existed in a world next to the one that housed CLAMP School.

Then he saw something else lying there on the ground. It looked like a red bag, half transparent, with a label stuck to it, as well as a biohazard symbol.

*Is that one of those plastic bags they use to transport fluids?* he asked himself.

Just then, a cloud moved over the sun, removing the last bits of light that had made it into the clearing, making it impossible for Takayuki to see. He moved closer to the bag, stepping carefully. If this was a crime scene, he didn't want to disrupt the evidence. If his own clothes got snagged on any branches, he might leave behind fibers and create red herrings that would confuse investigators.

The closer he got to the bag, the more intense the darkness seemed to get. There was no turning back, though, no matter how ominous the scene felt. He crouched down and took a closer look at the bag. Stenciled on it in plain block letters were the words: PRESERVED BLOOD. Beneath that: CLAMP School Campus General Hospital.

So, it had once held blood, but now it was deflated and empty.

There was a jagged hole, the spot where the bag had been torn open. "Is that . . . a bite mark?" he said out loud.

There was a noise behind him; it startled him. Takayuki jumped up and looked back behind him.

It had come from the bushes. It was an indistinct rustling. It could be a bird or a bunny, or it could be whatever had made this mess.

"Is there somebody in there?" he called out. He walked closer and tried to peer between the trees.

*Whoomph!*

Something slammed into him, and Takayuki cried out as he felt a jab at his stomach. He winced in pain. He was panicking and trying to retreat, but the sleeve of his school uniform got caught on a tree branch. "Aghhhh!" he screamed.

A frail, bone-white hand reached out from the leaves. It looked sickly and barely human. The hand ripped through the branches, knocking them aside and breaking them from the trees. Following behind it, a face emerged.

Strangely, given the deathly appearance of the hand, the face appeared to be human—except there was no spark of light in its hollow eyes, and the thin body that bore it was covered in tiny wrinkles, as if it had soaked in a bathtub for thousands of years.

The hand was now on Takayuki's forearm, and he felt the sharpness of its brittle fingernails. They protruded from the fingers as if they were separate appendages that had merely been glued on top of the digits. Or maybe they were like a wild animal's claws and only came out when they were needed.

"What—what *are* you?!" Takayuki shrieked. He was struggling to get out of its grip, but even as he shook off the decaying hand, his sleeve was still stuck to the tree. He could not move.

"Uggggh!"

The creature jumped from the woods and landed on Takayuki, knocking him to the ground. As decrepit as it looked, it was heavy and rendered him immobile.

"No!" Takayuki screamed. "No!"

He shut his eyes, but he could still sense the long claws hovering right in front of his face.

"Aghhhh!" The claws pulled back.

It was the creature who screamed this time. Takayuki opened his eyes and saw it stumbling around the clearing, holding its bony hand to its face, struggling with something he couldn't see.

"What—what's going on?"

The clouds had parted, and suddenly the obscured ground had become illuminated with the sun's golden glow. The whole clearing was bathed in glorious white light.

The creature let out a frightened, pained howl. There were several successive cracks, like twigs being snapped. Or was it bones?

Takayuki's attacker regained enough composure to run from the spot and disappear again into the dark forest.

Takayuki tried to crawl away, but his sleeve was still caught on the branch. As he unhooked it, he couldn't help but laugh a little. *Normal reaction*, he thought, slightly embarrassed by his reflexive chuckle. *Macabre humor in the face of such a close call!*

*(Ah, Takayuki, always so analytical.)*

XOXO

Mifuyu had been swinging her wooden practice sword around, but she suddenly brought it to a rest. "Oh that's right," she said, like she had just remembered something.

"Is something bothering you, Mifuyu-dono?" Bunzaemon asked. He was also carrying a wooden sword and was outfitted in *kendo* practice gear. He was in proper fighting stance, ready for a match.

"Oh, it's nothing, Bunzaemon-kun."

They were in the Elementary School Division Special Training Gym. The karate *dojo* had been built for

the young children who had chosen to enter the intensive martial arts program at CLAMP School. This special mini-*Budokan* was erected next to the main sports gym specifically to give them their own space to pursue this special course.

The Elementary School Division got out of class every day by 3 P.M., and usually club activities were wrapped up around the same time. By evening, the gyms in this part of the campus were empty. Mifuyu knew to take advantage of this, and so when she and Bunzaemon agreed to duel, she knew that they could do it here without any interruption.

"It's just," Mifuyu continued, "I hadn't really thought about it at the time, but who were you chasing after, anyway? You didn't come here to fight the second subway monster. That took you by surprise as much as it did us. It had to be something else."

"Huh?" Bunzaemon was taken aback by the sudden, offhand question. Once his memory caught up, though, he had no problem answering it. "Oh, you're talking about my opponent, aren't you?"

Bunzaemon mimed sheathing his wooden sword, as was proper, and assumed the appropriate *seiza* sitting position. Mifuyu did the same. As a skilled warrior, she knew it was bad form to maintain a battle stance, that she should take this more peaceful position instead.

When they had met earlier that day, Bunzaemon had been chasing someone through the forest. He was in such a fevered state of battle, he had nearly attacked Mifuyu, accidentally thinking she was this elusive enemy. Given the bad situation they had barely averted, Mifuyu hadn't thought to ask for details at the time. She was too happy about avoiding a fight and seeing her friend after such a long absence.

"He must have been quite an adversary to compel you to draw your sword," Mifuyu said.

"Oh, most definitely," Bunzaemon replied. "He attacked me without warning, vaulting out of the bushes, and before I had time to consider what I was doing, I had already unsheathed Tachi."

The boy's distinctive mouth sagged even farther at the corners. He folded his arms, closed his eyes, and ruminated on what had happened.

"My specialty is exorcising spirits. Even if I were to be ambushed by a ghost, it's rare that it would cause me to draw my sword. I never like having Tachi out when facing a regular person. It's the one rule that is put upon me for carrying such a weapon at my young age. The thing was, my assailant emitted a strange *ki*. His life force was not of this earth. He wasn't quite human. I think it was that element that put me on edge. It created an elevated sense of danger, and I drew Tachi out of reflex."

"Whoa," was all Mifuyu could muster.

"I had no intention of cutting him down, though. You can be sure of that. I only got my sword out as a precaution, and I still had enough of my wits about me to turn the blade backward, so that if it were necessary to strike him, I would do so only with the blunt edge of my sword."

As he continued, a cloud seemed to settle over Bunzaemon's face. "However," he said, "my opponent was not being as cautious. He parried my sword with his bare hand!"

"What?" Mifuyu exclaimed. "No way!"

"It's true. This person stopped Tachi with his hand. Even with the blade turned backward for safety, such an action would wound a normal person something horrible. But he did it, and he only made a slightly pained sound. I felt the vibration of the contact travel down Tachi's blade, like it had hit something hard, maybe his bones. Whatever it was, however much or little it hurt, all I can guess is that the creature saw that this was a battle he could not win, and he ran off.

"I shouted after him, 'Wait!' I wanted to see who this was, to confirm the identity of this person who would both assault me unprovoked and try to fend off a sword with his hands. That's why I chased after him. Unfortunately, I let him get away. I am ashamed to admit it, but since you already know that part of the story, it's not like I can hide it."



Bunzaemon cast his eyes downward with a look of regret.

"Whoever it was," he said, "his skin was at least as hard as steel, hard enough so that it could not be penetrated by a sword. An expert martial artist can train himself to the extreme, so that his body is as hard as a rock, but from what I saw of the way my attacker moved, he wasn't trained at all. He was acting on pure animal instinct.

"He was also wearing a school uniform, so I'm positive that he is a student at CLAMP School. But what of this other element I sensed in his ki? This inhuman factor? Could he be part beast? Don't they check for such things before you can get in here? I wish I could have had more time to figure it out."

A heavy air of silence fell over the dojo. Mifuyu had been listening intensely to her friend's tale, but she had no idea what to say to him. Was there really such a monster at CLAMP School? They had returned that one creature to its home in Central Park, and the creature from Genbu Park had flown into space, so it couldn't have been them.

"By the way," Mifuyu said, finally breaking the immense quiet, "I was also thinking of asking you, Bunzaemon-kun . . ."

"What is it?" he asked, leaning forward.

"Why are you at CLAMP School this time? If it isn't the subway monster, and it isn't the thing—that feral boy—you were chasing, then what brought you here?"

"Huh?" His pupils contracted to little more than barely visible dots.

"Well, Bunzaemon-kun, your job is to get rid of unwanted spirits, right? So, does that mean there's a specter somewhere on campus haunting CLAMP School? You keep avoiding the question."

"Uh, well, no, it's not that exactly . . ."

Bunzaemon's face was burning red with embarrassment. Although he had come to the school to confirm a menacing premonition, he was too bashful to admit that he had taken the task so that he could see Mifuyu as well. He wasn't even supposed to have been on the High School part of the campus (he was only in kindergarten himself), but he had wandered over there in the hopes that he might bump into her. Any other reasons for being in the vicinity were secondary to his crush.

"I . . ." He paused, unsure if it was right for him to not be more open. But did she really need to know the other stuff? "I sensed a bad omen in the stars."

"A bad omen?"

"Y-yes."

Bunzaemon hoped the description of the heavens he had seen two days earlier would be enough to distract Mifuyu from any other, more personal, concerns. He described how one dot of radiance had dropped away from the others, a portent of badness to come.

"Interesting. Does that mean that it was moving in an unnatural direction?"

"Something like that. It may have been just a shooting star. Without a big telescope, I was mainly going with my gut feeling. In any case, when I saw it, I sensed a terribly bad omen, worse than any I have ever felt before."

"Then you mean—"

"*Senpai!*"

They heard the shouts before they could see their source.

"Senpai! Mifuyu-senpai!"

It was a familiar voice, and it was coming from the direction of the dojo's entrance.

"I've been looking everywhere for you!"

"Oh! Rion-chan!"

Rion had burst through the doors and was running toward Mifuyu, but as soon as she heard her name, she stopped in her tracks and bowed politely. Mifuyu's mood immediately brightened upon seeing her. She stayed seated but abandoned her formal pose, twirling on her backside to face her friend and wave. "I can't believe you found us!" she said. "What made you think we might be here?"

"I was asking around, and someone said they saw you come in," Rion said, crossing the large dojo floor.

Mifuyu thought she must have been looking exceptionally hard, as her young friend was completely

out of breath. "Did something happen?" Mifuyu asked, suddenly realizing that Rion's reason for searching might have been serious. Her smile faded.

"Yes, it's terrible. Sakiko-chan is—"

"Sakiko-chan?"

In a flash, Mifuyu grabbed her wooden sword and leapt to her feet. "You can tell me on the way."



Back at the Campus General Hospital, a student wearing a nurse's uniform entered the off-duty doctor's room and immediately went to the female doctor who had admitted Sakiko.

"Sensei," she said, "it's about the condition of the patient in Room 703."

"Has it changed?" the doctor asked, concerned.

"Well, it's nothing life threatening, but he's experiencing symptoms similar to sleepwalking. He's completely asleep, but his body is remaining active, as if he were merely sedated.

"In other words, he sometimes gets out of bed and behaves in a peculiar manner, inconsistent with that of someone in a regular slumber."

"Uh, okay."

The doctor tapped some keys on her computer and called up the record for the patient in Room 703.

"This is the member of the Security Committee who came in yesterday, then? He had two puncture marks on his neck, just like that little girl that was brought in tonight."

"What should we do?" the student nurse asked nervously.

"Let's see . . ." The doctor pondered the situation. "Have hospital security move some cameras into the room and put them on motion sensors. We'll assign someone to watch the monitor—we'll put two of you on it in twelve-hour shifts. That way, we can have a record of what's going on, just in case. It would be unfortunate if something happened to a patient while he was supposed to be getting some rehabilitative rest."

"Yes, Doctor."

The nurse left the room and went back to the nurse's station. Her case of nerves had cleared up, and she was barking out the doctor's orders to the other students. "Have cameras moved to Room 703, and assign two orderlies to monitor the patient. They'll work in twelve-hour shifts."

"Yes, ma'am." The other students snapped to and hurriedly carried out the orders.

"Switch the microphone on. I'm going to call in all the off-duty orderlies over the emergency channel."

"The cameras are in the monitor room and can be switched from constant surveillance to motion sensors."

"The room's life-signs monitor and brainwave device are both operating properly."

*Wait, something strange was going on . . .*

A wave of tension rippled through the room. One of the students had her head cocked inquisitively, and she was examining a clipboard in her hands. "No matter how many times I count," she said, "that number comes up short."

"What is it?" one of the other students asked. They had all noticed that she was concerned, but no one wanted to proceed until they knew exactly what the problem was.

"Well, you see," she said, with an anxious expression, "some of the blood bags have gone missing."

"You mean the ones stored in the emergency room locker?"

"Yes, I just went to check, but—" She paused, looking one last time at her supplies checklist. "There were definitely two there yesterday that aren't there now, and there's no record of anyone using them. I wonder where they went?"



Koji stirred in his sleep, emitting a small moan, "Mmmm . . . mmmm . . ."

He was seated in a chair at the edge of Sakiko's bed.

The room was filled with the smell of freshly laundered sheets, and he had borrowed a comforter that was so soft, it was penetrating his sleeping brain.

“Oh . . . no . . .”

Koji awoke with a start, raising his head off the arm that he had been using as a pillow, and had now gone dead from his weight. “When did I doze off?” he mumbled to no one in particular.

Koji rubbed his eyes and looked around the room. There was a faint blue glow coming from the fluorescent lights outside the room. It was daylight outside, he knew, but the thick curtains shut out any autumn sunlight that might find its way inside. It was also deathly quiet in the room.

*(Kind of an unfortunate choice of world choice, I know.)*

And there before his eyes lay the silently sleeping young girl, a CLAMP School Snow White, still and motionless, as if dead.

*Sakiko-chan sure sleeps softly*, he thought to himself.

Koji gently raised himself off the chair, careful not to make any noise and disturb his princess. Her hand looked like a tiny maple leaf, with the IV tube that ran from it acting as a stem, taking nourishment from its host tree. The hand rested on the bed, completely still, the fingers half open.

Yawning ever so slightly, Koji stretched his arms. He heard several vertebrae snap into place. But as he came out of the stretch, he suddenly felt dejected. *If only I had arrived on time*, he scolded himself, shutting his eyes in regret. *Damn! I promise I'll find who did this and make him pay! I won't let him get away with hurting you!*

"Koji-san?"

Koji opened his eyes with a start.

Sakiko had awakened.

"Sakiko-chan! You're up!"

"Uh-huh." She nodded, but otherwise remained exactly where she was when he closed his eyes.

"Oh, Sakiko-chan, I'm so sorry. I was late, and this happened to you."

"It's okay. I'm all right." Sakiko's voice was quiet, still a little weak, a sharp contrast to Koji, who was excited and eager to express his repentance. "After all, Koji-san, I knew—I believed that you would come."

She smiled. It seemed like a tremendous gesture to him, since it must have taken a tremendous effort. "Sakiko-chan," he whispered, squeezing her hand tightly. "You need to rest and get better. I'll be here the whole time, I'm not going anywhere. If there's anything you want, all you have to do is ask."

Her fingers were cold, but he felt a warm feeling fill his body like lava fills a volcano's basin. *Is this what it felt like to care for someone this much?*



Sakiko's smile widened. Joy returned to her cheeks.

"Really? You'll do anything for me?"

"Of course," Koji answered with conviction. "A true man never breaks his promise!"

"I'm so happy . . . then there is one thing . . ."

"Anything. Just name it."

"I want . . ."

"Yes?"

"I want . . . blood."

"What?"

Koji couldn't comprehend her words. Or, more accurately, he comprehended them, but he wondered whether or not she did.

Because she couldn't have said *blood* on purpose, could she? Maybe she had heard the doctor mention the blood loss. That was probably it.

He didn't move, figuring he'd let the moment pass and this silly thought would go away.

Sakiko slowly raised Koji's hand toward her mouth. She opened her mouth, just a tiny crack at first.

Inside, beyond her precious lips, were two sharp, needlelike incisors, the fresh wounds still visible in her gums where they had broken through.

Koji wanted to leap back, he was so shocked by what he was seeing, but he found he could not. "S-Sakiko-chan!"

"*Itadaki . . . masu.* Let me eat."

There was a vacant glimmer in her eyes. Sakiko peeled her lips all the way back, letting her new fangs show completely, and bit deep into Koji's wrist.

At first, it felt like it was happening to somebody else, but then the sharp pain hit the center of his nervous system and shot through his body, jolting him all at once.

He wanted to flee, but Sakiko's grip was so strong, he couldn't. It was like she had found the pressure point to lock his entire body down.

Fresh blood sprayed from his veins and splashed across Sakiko's face.

"Ahh, ahhhh! S-Sakiko-chan!"

"Delicious," she said, between gulps of blood. She was taking in the crimson liquid by the mouthful, and each swallow brought more ecstasy to her eyes—those soulless eyes that stared at her victim as if she had never met him before.

The blood overflowed, and a thick line of it dribbled down her chin, forming a pool of red on the clean white sheets.

Agggggggghhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!



This time Koji woke up for real.

"Uh, uh . . . huh?"

He anxiously looked to each side of him, looked around the room. He wasn't in Sakiko's bedroom at all, but in the waiting room of the Campus General Hospital where he had conferred with her doctor. Although Sakiko's condition had stabilized, her body had not recovered after the blood transfusion, and so the doctor declined Koji's request to stay by her bedside. He wasn't going to leave, though, so he had gotten as comfortable as he could in the main area.

Koji wiped the sweat from his forehead. *It was just a bad dream.*

He thanked his lucky stars that it was all in his head and stood up. The air in the waiting room was chilly, so it was a little ironic that he was covered in more sweat than if it had been a hot July day.

*That was the worst dream ever*, he thought. He got out his handkerchief and started wiping the perspiration from the back of his neck. *I'm shaking all over. I can't even laugh out of relief that it's not true. I mean, I sort of believe in vampires, and I've seen plenty of strange stuff, but bloodsuckers can't just show up anywhere, can they? Don't they need treacherous mountains and ancient castles and graveyards and that kind of thing? I mean, there's no way they could exist in a haven of modern technology like CLAMP School, could they? Man, I'm thinking about it way too much. That dream really did my head in!*

"Hey, Koji!"

He turned to the sound of his name. "Huh?" he said dumbly.

A new group of students was coming through the front entrance, lead by three of his Association cohorts: Takayuki, Rion, and Mifuyu. They all looked extremely concerned.

"Is it true?" Takayuki asked. There was more worry in his face than Koji had seen in the entire time he'd known the older boy. "Was Sakiko-chan really attacked by some vicious beast?"

"Yes, it's true," Koji answered weakly. "It's relatively okay now, though. She's out of danger. It's just that her body lost six percent of its blood. The doctor said it was as if she had it sucked out of her."

Takayuki's face went white as chalk.

"Where is she?" Rion asked. "Is she sleeping?"

Koji nodded and pointed down the hall toward her room. "She's in 701."

Just as he did, several well-built men filed past them.

"Wait," Koji said. "Who are they?"

"Don't worry, I called them," Takayuki said. "They're with the Security Committee. I had a little incident, so I went to file a report with them. They told me about all the other recent attacks, including an assault against one of their squad members. He's here, too."

"Bunzaemon-kun was attacked, too!" Mifuyu interjected, as if someone had just pinched her awake. "Did you know that?"

“Bunzaemon-kun?” Koji didn’t connect the name at first, but then he realized who it was. “You mean that kindergarten exorcist? That kid?”

“Exactly.”

“What do you guys think it means?” Rion asked.

“I’m not sure exactly, but if he was attacked by the same monster as Takayuki-kun and the others, then we have to assume it could happen again,” Mifuyu deduced.

“Oh my God!” Koji blurted out. “Then my dream may have been right after all! Could there be some kind of vampiric fiend prowling around campus?”

“Now, let’s not jump to conclusions,” a frightened Rion cautioned.

But it was too late for her warnings. A cloud of anxiety had descended on all of them. It was broken only by shouting from down the hall.

“Hey, what are you—?! W-what?!”

Followed by a loud crash.

“S-stop that!”

And then a scream.

And the sound of something being slammed against a wall. Thwack.

Instinctively, Mifuyu reached for the sword on her back, only slightly faster than Koji could pull out one of his shuriken. Rion moved close to Takayuki, and all of them moved toward the hall entrance, looking toward the source of the racket.

A tiny scream rang out, echoing like a bell.  
“Eeeee!”

Down at the end of the hallway, a small crowd of nursing students was cowering in fear.

Frightened by the hollow eyes.

Scared by the pale skin.

Horrified by the long, sharp claws dangling from the ends of skeletal fingers, the labored breathing creating the rhythm of a death rattle.

“It’s him!” Mifuyu shouted.

“The one who attacked Senpai and Bunzaemon?” Rion asked.

Without thinking, both Mifuyu and Koji moved to get between Rion and harm’s way.

Takayuki had broken out in a cold sweat. “No,” he said. “The one who attacked me, he was less human, if that’s even possible!”

“Sir!” a security guard was screaming. “Please, sir! Let’s all just calm down, and you go back to your room! We can fix thi—gwahhhh!”

With a swipe of its bony paw, the creature sent the guard flying backward down the hall, slamming him into a wall. Before they knew it, two of his fellow officers were also down, lying in a heap on the floor.

“He’s so powerful!” Koji gasped.

“Watch out,” Mifuyu warned. “According to Bunzaemon-kun, this guy’s skin is as hard as steel.”

With only a look passing between them, the two warriors of the group simultaneously jumped into the fray. They moved into the corridor and assumed combat stances.

“W-wait—!” One of the Security Committee members who had been felled was raising a shaky hand in protest. “H-he’s one of us.”

“What?” Koji looked at the guard, and then to the room the monster had emerged from. Room 703. Its door had been ripped off one of its hinges. “Then, that was the Security Committee officer, the one that came in before Sakiko-chan, but with the same bite marks?”

Mifuyu’s expression became pained as the reality of it sank in. If it was true, if this fanged thug was one of her fellow students, she couldn’t cut him down with her sword, Kotetsu. She would have to use less deadly tactics. A normal person could be knocked out by a *mine-uchi*, a blow administered with the back of the sword; however, would such an attack work against someone who was no longer human, who had been transformed into some kind of monster?

“W-what should we do, Mifuyu-senpai?”

She weighed her options. She knew Koji and the others relied on her tactical skills.

Should they go forward?

Should they retreat?

Did it matter? Either way, the outcome appeared grim. The only obvious goal was to get people out of harm's way. If whatever battle plan they chose was going to end up bad anyway, then they had to go with the least bad option, the one with the least amount of casualties.

Once Mifuyu realized that, her choice seemed clear—except the monster was involved in another set of plans.

*"Ngh . . . gwaaaaahhhh!"*

Its scream sent chills through her. Something had lashed itself around its neck, and the creature was thrashing around, trying to free itself, trying to breathe.

*"Ngh . . . fhhhhhh—"*

The vampire's eyes rolled back in its head as it began to succumb to the lack of oxygen. It was losing consciousness.

"What's going on?" Takayuki asked.

But before anyone could answer, the creature crumpled to the floor with a thud.

"What was that?" Mifuyu whispered.

"Senpai!" Rion rushed forward, pointing. "Look!"

They all turned to see what Rion was pointing at.

Or rather, who.

A mysterious boy had come into the hospital. He was wearing a blue blazer, and he took in the scene with frosty eyes.

"You!" Koji cried, rushing forward with a surge of hatred.



Rion, on the other hand, squealed with a mixture of surprise and joy. "Kei-san!"

Koji stopped in his tracks. "What?" he asked, confused. He looked at the boy, who calmly stepped forward, and then at Rion, who was clapping her hands in delight. "D-do you know this guy?"

Mifuyu was crouched down, checking the condition of the fallen fiend. "Kei-kun, what did you do?"

"Don't worry," Kei said coolly. "I just put him to sleep with some tranquilizers. I injected them with my wires." He patted his wrist, indicating the high-tech wire gadgetry beneath his sleeve, his main weapon for use in fights and other espionage scenarios.

The hospital staff came rushing up the stairs.

"What happened?"

"Is everyone all right?"

Takayuki breathed a sigh of relief. He removed his glasses and began to clean them.

Then, as if the place wasn't confusing and crowded enough . . .

"Mifuyu-dono! I brought Yuki-dono!"

"Egads! What's going on? What happened here?!"

Bunzaemon and Yuki came hurtling out of the elevator.

Kei smiled and looked around. "Well, it appears the last of the cast has arrived."

XOXO

As soon as everything had calmed down, the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association retreated to a corner of the Campus General Hospital lobby. They all had some explaining to do, but everyone was particularly interested in hearing Kei's side of things.

"So, Kei-kun, you knew that something unusual was happening around here, so you came to help, right?" Rion said.

"Correct," Kei replied. "Those men in black have returned to CLAMP School. I go where they go, as you know, and I was ordered to investigate."

His speech was efficient. Kei didn't like to waste words.

"Well, Kei-kun is an agent of the Japanese government, after all," Mifuyu said absentmindedly.

Rion shot her friend a dirty look. "Senpai, *shhhh!*"

Kei smirked.

Koji raised his hand. He was still perplexed. "Wait just a minute. Rion-senpai and Mifuyu-senpai—and I'm sure Takayuki-senpai—know you already, but I've only just met you today, Kei-san. Who exactly are these men in black you're talking about?"

"I'm sorry, Koji," Rion apologized. "I didn't consider how weird it would be to have just met him for the first time like that."

"Well, it wasn't exactly the first time," Koji said, glancing toward Kei.

“The apologies are all mine,” Kei smiled. “I was not at liberty to reveal my identity during our previous encounter. Although, since you are in league with these two, I kind of assumed you already had heard everything about me. I hope you know now that it wasn’t I who attacked your friend.”



The story of how the girls had met Kei was simple. About a month prior, a mysterious ghost had begun haunting CLAMP School. Rion and Mifuyu had witnessed its shenanigans and were trying to put the spirit to rest. It was during the summer-long schoolwide treasure hunt, which they were supposed to be participating in as a team. The case took precedence, however, and their investigation led them to discover that this poltergeist had somehow been generated via a mechanical device. They tracked the device down, only to become entangled in an ongoing battle between an international secret society and a government agent—the men in black and Kei. The skirmish culminated in a clash of epic proportions that threatened to level the campus.





"Are you telling me that these bad guys are back at CLAMP School?"

"It would appear so," Kei said matter-of-factly. "Although CLAMP School is a well-recognized public institution, it is, in fact, a conglomerate. Several companies and corporations banded together to create the campus as a form of amusement, something to appease the Director's sense of community responsibility. He wanted to run a school to distract himself from the less exciting side of business, and he was willing to pump his own funds into it. He deliberately isolated the campus from the rest of Japanese society, and its very isolation became the reason for its success. The sense of good will and human warmth that fuels this place makes it seem like a whole other world.

"However, if you look at it from another perspective, to the outside world, CLAMP School represents an oasis unaffected by their petty squabbles and inconsequential concerns. You kids are immune to the stress of modern life. CLAMP School is an isolated, independent society, and that's exactly why the men in black have set their sights on you."

*(No one spoke, but someone—and I'm not telling who—  
could be heard swallowing nervously.)*

"If this international criminal organization could infiltrate your system and set up shop, they would have a haven where they could hide from whatever civil organization might be pursuing them. They could rob a bank and come here, and the police would never find them. At the same time, they could use your facilities to experiment with all sorts of nefarious inventions that could aid their evil doings. And who would ever notice? Not even Interpol or the U.S. Secret Service would consider looking for a criminal at CLAMP School, and your administrators would never in their wildest dreams imagine that a conspiracy with global implications would be launched from within its walls.

"Still, there are those who entered into this venture with open eyes, and they put security measures in place to prevent just these kinds of misdeeds. In fact, it's kind of ironic when you consider what a bastion of freedom CLAMP School has become, since the security system that protects this place is second to none in efficacy. It's first-class, skillwise, putting even international forces to shame.

"Yet, no defense is perfect. It doesn't matter how highly refined a program is, there is always a chink in the armor. I guarantee you there will always be a weak link somewhere along the chain, and usually in the most unexpected place."

Takayuki knew Kei was right. The incidents with the subway cars were perfect examples.

You see, although the CLAMP School subway was operated by a computer program that prevented students from riding it more than twice a day, the kids had figured out that if they lent one person enough IDs, he or she could stay on the train all day. There was always a way around the rules, and just as Kei had said, it was impossible for there to be a perfect system. Nothing in this world was free from chaos.

"Last time I was here," Kei continued, "these two girls proved to be the unpredictable element that the men in black hadn't counted on. Once Rion and Mifuyu were involved, they triggered a chain of events that resulted in the destruction of the bad guys' supposedly foolproof plans. Unfortunately, with all the data they now have on this new X factor, they probably regrouped and redeveloped their game plan. I severely doubt the men in black will be thwarted so easily this time around."

"Uh, I understand the concept behind these bad guys," Bunzaemon said slowly. He had quietly listened to everything Kei had to say and was only now comfortable interrupting. "But do you really think they're capable of manipulating CLAMP School like that? It seems kind of far-fetched."

It was a simple question and probably more relevant than any other. All eyes fell on Kei. He took little time in formulating his answer. "They are," he said plainly. "As we speak, they are spreading malevolence across this campus like a virus. And I'm not speaking in metaphor."

This time, instead of a nervous gulp, a scream was about to be released into the air.

*(And I'm not going to tell you who this one was, either.  
You'll just make fun, and that's not nice.)*

"A malevolent virus?" Rion asked.

"Precisely," Kei said, his eyes narrowing. "An artificially created biological weapon. They've already set it loose, and you've only just begun to see the results of its rampage."



Over in the University Division's Biology Laboratory, the Professor was staring at a transparent lab cage. He was a tall, thin man, and his white coat covered most of his length. His hair was as disheveled as his glasses were thick. He was surrounded by a gaggle of female students, and they were monitoring a single rat that was hooked up to an assortment of wires and tubes inside the cage.

"All right, good. Now, record the changes."

"Yes, Professor."

One of the students stepped forward. "Professor, what kind of experiment is this? You were injecting some kind of liquid into the rat just a moment ago. What was it?" she asked, the glee in her voice undisguised.



It was Miharu Takanashi.

The man whom the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association referred to as simply "the Professor," more as a name and less as the formal title used by his other students, answered without looking away from the glass cage. "Just watch. You'll see something very interesting, and then it will be clear to you."

*Although, the Professor thought to himself, Kei-kun only asked me to extract and examine the liquid, so I don't actually know what's about to happen myself.*

One minute passed.

Two minutes.

"Life signs are diminishing. It could croak on us," Miharu whispered softly, watching the stats on the monitor decline.

The rat twitched.

"Professor!" another student exclaimed.

"Yes?"

Something was going on inside the cage. The rat spasmed again and started to move. The tubes began to stretch, the wires began to tangle. The right side of the rodent twitched, then the left, then its whole body.

"P-professor!"

The transformation that was taking place in the rat was dramatically grotesque. Its front teeth grew, protruding at twice their normal length. The claws on its front feet followed suit, elongating and forming sharp points.

As this was happening, the rodent's eyes went dull and its whole body tensed, as if it were ready to attack. There was an aggressive scent in the air.

"Oh . . ."

"Hmm . . ."

*Thwack.* The rat kicked with its bottom feet, striking the cage wall. *Thwump!*

Anyone who had walked into the lab at that second would have had a hard time believing that moments before, the rat had been just a couple of breaths away from of its own death. Now it was full of angry energy. It sat up and began to rumble like a volcano about to erupt. It used its whole body to pull at its restraints, until it had stretched them so far it was slamming against the walls of the cage with its whole being. The thrusts were so forceful that it looked like the rat could burst through at any moment.

"I see," the Professor sighed, coming to a realization he was reluctant to share. "Interesting."

He began jotting down in his lab report what he saw.

XOXO

"A vampire virus?!"

Yuki repeated the words, wanting to make sure he had heard them correctly.

"I'm afraid so." Kei practically spat his response. There wasn't the slightest cloud over his expression, he was deadly serious.

"So, you're saying that it's a virus that transforms humans into . . . creatures of the night?" Rion still couldn't believe it.

"Not necessarily all humans," Kei said, showing a little more graciousness to Rion than he had to her Chairman. "No one knows where it came from, but those who fall victim to it first experience a severe drop in their pulse rate, and then their blood flow slows down. Finally all bodily electrical functions grind to a halt."

"If they die, why don't you just say they die?" Mifuyu said, annoyed by the fancy explanations being used to make the obvious more pretty.

"Because it's not entirely true. While yes, most humans will die at this point, a very select few will adapt to the changes in their body and experience an energy *conversion* that will allow them to continue to survive. These persons are no longer able to produce the fuel they need to live on their own, and they have to start taking the energy that others produce. To put it in simpler terms, they drink other people's blood. Blood is the fuel they need for their survival. Not unlike vampires of ancient legend."

Everyone listening to Kei's story felt their blood run cold.

*(I suppose it was just a way for the blood to remind its owners that it existed and should not be given up to the vampires without a fight.)*

Sure, it was fun for them to look at bloodsuckers as part of a research project, but none of them had really wanted to find out that vampires truly existed.

“As best as we can figure,” Kei continued, “someone or some group found a naturally existing vampire and extracted a sample from it. Once they had isolated the thing that set this parasite’s blood apart from regular blood, they cultivated that element and the virus was born. We have yet to determine who would have the skill to pull this off, or why they would give their discovery to the men in black. We haven’t even ruled out the possibility that the bad guys got hold of it through less-than-scrupulous means and that the person who made the virus was killed. And who knows what kind of twist the black organization itself has put on the formula to enhance its capacity for destruction. To be honest, I thought someone was playing a hoax on us until I came to CLAMP School and saw the results with my own eyes.”

“What happens if someone is infected with the virus?” Takayuki feared the answer to his question. He didn’t want to know if he had walked away from his

scuffle with the vampire with the illness that drove his assailant.

"First, there is physical transformation." Kei was careful to keep his voice even, since he knew the facts were scary enough without him dramatizing them. "Muscle power is extremely enhanced, and the skin hardens. The infected individual becomes psychologically aggressive and, for all intents and purposes, goes mad. That would be the stage the Security Committee guard is at and would explain the psychotic behavior we just witnessed.

"Finally, the process completes itself when the victim, looking to replace the energy that has been stolen from him, goes out in search of blood, to steal energy from someone else."

"Th-then you mean—" Koji looked as if he were about to cry. "Is Sakiko-chan going to become like that, too?"

Kei went silent. That was all the answer Koji needed. "Oh, no . . . no, no, no!" he cried. "Isn't there a way to save her? D-don't you have a cure? Poor Sakiko-chan—this is too cruel! Please tell me you know how to turn her back into a regular person!"

The room seemed to darken to match everyone's mood.

"Well, it's just a theory," Kei said, measuring his words heavily, "but we can try exposing her to the sun. Humans receive energy from solar rays to support their immune systems. We haven't really been able to test it

fully yet, but from what we can tell, there is an antibody that is produced only upon exposure to the sun that is capable of attacking the vampire virus. In addition, the virus is vulnerable to the sun's UV radiation, which has a kind of disinfectant quality—even the tiniest amount will cause a severe reaction in the viral cells. Prolonged exposure, we believe, will result in the decimation of the majority of the diseased cells. The main question is what kind of shape the infected person's body will be in when the virus is beaten. It's the best thing we have right now, though. There is no other recovery option."

That was all Koji needed to hear. He broke through the group and began to sprint toward the stairs.

Kei yelled sharply after him. "Wait!"

Koji stopped reluctantly. "Why should I?" he bawled impatiently. "Why won't you let me save her?"

Kei took a step toward him, holding out his hand, trying to calm the young boy. "If the infection has advanced at all, this method will cause her a significant amount of pain. In order to withstand the loss of cellular material, the patient requires a good deal of strength and enough energy in reserve to carry her through recovery. If your friend experiences even the smallest sign of an abnormal reaction, we have to cancel the treatment immediately and retreat with her into darkness."

"All right!" Koji nodded.

"It's not all right. Once we put her in the shadows," Kei warned, "she may never come back out."

"I understand," Koji said, "but what choice do we have?"

Koji disappeared up the stairs.

Mifuyu began to go after him. "I'm not just going to sit here," she said. "I'm going to help Koji and Sakiko."

Kei put his hand on her shoulder and stopped her. "Please," he said. "I need you all to help me with another matter."

"Oh, yeah?" Yuki laughed. He crossed his eyes and stuck out his tongue. "Is that an order from the Japanese government?"

"No." Kei smiled. "But it is a request from a representative of the Japanese government. I'm sorry, kids, but duty calls."



The night.

Darkness.

CLAMP School was enveloped in a silence as deep as the pitch black sky.

Within the darkness, a shadow—slightly less black than the night that it traveled through—was running across the lawn toward the hospital entrance.

"Ngh," it groaned. "Aghhhh."

Its groans segued into a growl. It hit the road and continued to run, a solitary and ferocious figure.

The day's foot traffic ended with the onset of dusk. Everyone had returned to their homes and dorms to do homework, watch TV, and play video games. The shadow's hunger pains and unquenchable thirst were all that was keeping it going now. It had to find nourishment.

It had to find blood.

It would die unless it could drink its fill.

This was the critical imperative of the inhuman beast. This alone kept it searching, even when it might have been easier to lie down and die.

Once it reached the forest, it turned. Its destination was now visible to its lifeless eyes.

*"Nghh . . . aghhhhhh!"*

The shadow ran faster.

The red lights of the emergency room sign beckoned to the shadow through the dark veil of night. It was like a crimson ray of hope, mirroring the color of its desire. It salivated at the thought of the bags of blood and the tasty prepackaged meals that had fed it once before. It knew exactly where to look—down in the storage lockers reserved for the emergency room.

The doors opened with an audible creak.

The power having been out, made the automatic doors nearly impossible to open for anyone with just average strength. The shadow, however, breezed through



effortlessly and without even bothering to check if the coast was clear. It bounded inside without restraint.

The shadow advanced through the emergency room without hesitation, almost like it knew the place and all its obstacles. It turned a corner into a corridor that, during the day, would normally be packed with people. The halls were empty now, and it proceeded without question, descending the deserted stairs.

The shadow crept through the entryway into the underground parking lot. Several ambulances were parked nearby, their engines cold. It moved past them, traversing the dank chamber, pitch black except for the green emergency lamps. As the sickly olive glow brought its features to life, the fact that it had lost much of its humanity was all the more apparent.

The shadow's footsteps echoed through the cavernous lot and then died away after the shadow took its last step.

It had arrived at the door to its destination: the Emergency Room Supply Closet.

The door handle whined as the creature bent it. Then, as the door was yanked off the jamb, it warped and twisted like Japanese candy.

*"Nghaghhhh!"* it cried, triumphant.

There was a crash as the door frame splintered and the hinges and their screws clattered to the cement floor.

"Stop where you are!" a voice bellowed out of the darkness.

It was immediately followed by light, white and intense, filling the entire space as if it were the middle of the day. Long lights tracked along the ceiling of the lot, and they hummed to life. The vampire found itself suddenly blinded, its eyes unable to adjust so quickly. Now that the vampire was revealed, the boy it once had been also became more apparent, though the tattered CLAMP School uniform was the only real clue that it hadn't always been a monster.

"We've finally got you cornered, you undead dirtbag!"

Koji's fingers were on the light switch, and the satisfaction in his voice shone brighter than the iridescent bulbs.

"I bear no grudge against the person you used to be, but I will take my revenge against what you've become, for trying to make Sakiko part of your unholy number!"

He pulled several shuriken from the pocket of his shorts. His eyes glinted several degrees hotter than their usual intensity. And before he realized what he was doing, Koji growled, "*Grrrrrr.*"

Perhaps sensing that Koji's threat was real, the creature appeared to shrink back. It ran from the scene, attempting to beat a retreat.

"That's it! You're dead!" Koji shouted.

*Thwip! Thwip! Thwip!*

Koji's arm jerked three times. There was a flash of metal in the air, bright sparks homing in on the darkness.

“Gwaaaahhhh!” the vampire cried as it attempted to leap out of the way of Koji’s weapons.

CLING! CLANG!

One shuriken embedded itself into the stone wall; another cracked the concrete floor. The third hung from the ceiling above.

They had all hit their target, make no mistake. The problem was, despite their lethal nature, the throwing stars could inflict no damage on a fiend with skin stronger than they were.

“*Waaaaaaghh!*” A guttural cry of victory.

The vampire was feeling pretty confident now, and it continued its retreat down the opposite corridor. It had underestimated its hunter, though. The first three stars were merely warning shots, a statement of intent. Koji was giving the vampire due notice that he *would* find a way to destroy it.

“You’re not getting away that easily!” Koji said, launching another attack, throwing shuriken after shuriken with relentless fervor.

The metal stars whizzing around it took the vampire by surprise. Had it been thinking more clearly, it would have realized that its attacker, Koji, was himself an excellent source of blood, and it would have rushed forward and not tried to get away. Fear had taken it over completely, however, and it was fleeing at full speed.

It turned a corner, expecting to find the stairwell to the first floor. The beast stopped short.

“Gwahhhh?”

The path to the stairs was gone.

“Ngh . . . gaahh?”

Fireproof shutters had been put into place and were now blocking the vampire’s way.

There was another corridor in the other direction, but it was a longer way out. Faced with no other option, though, the vampire took it.

Only, it found two other shadows obstructing its path: two figures, backlit and in silhouette. The larger of the two was wearing a skirt, and even in shadow, the vampire could see the smaller one was wearing shorts. They both had swords strapped to their backs, which they drew simultaneously, moving with fearsome speed. They held their blades out in front of them and stood prepared for combat.

“Didn’t you hear our friend? You’re *not* getting away.”

“Take the left!” the girl screamed, her voice high-pitched but confident. “Let’s go, Bunzaemon-kun!”

“Roger that, Mifuyu-dono!” the boy replied, a prepubescent crack in his response.

Bathed in light, the two looked like heavenly avengers as they sprang forth, unleashing their furious power. Their attack was as intense as the glow that gave them their fearsome appearance.

And, of course, the careful viewer would have noticed that they had both turned their swords so the backs of the blades were facing out.

With near-simultaneous flashes of sparks, the swordsmen struck powerful blows against their quarry. The vampire, in turn, blocked the hits with its arm, which was nearly as hard as a tank, deflecting the blows with a loud clang.

Mifuyu erupted with a defiant “*Sei!*” battle cry as she and her cohort unleashed a second coordinated blow.

“We’re not done yet!” she shouted.

A third blow was struck.

A fourth.

The vampire was starting to feel the pain. The constant attack was too much even for it, and it howled from the sting of their swords. Unable to withstand it any longer, the fiend changed directions yet again.

“We keep telling you,” Mifuyu hissed through gritted teeth, “you’re not getting away!”

The vampire was in full flight mode now. Obeying the fear signals pulsing through its feral brain, it frantically searched for a way out. All it could see was the way it had come, through the underground garage, which was still too large for them to cover completely.

“*Ngh . . . aaaaoooooggghhhh!*” it cried, bounding away from its attackers, hoping an escape lay ahead.

Only, the vampire found another powerful sword waiting for it, stopping it from fleeing.

“Gwahh?!”

“He’s here!”

“Just as we planned!”

There was a loud click and suddenly *every* light in the parking garage was on, making the underground unit brighter than even before. This was followed by the sound of several squeaking wheels, and before the vampire could get its bearings, three powerful fire hoses hit it with intense blasts of water from three different directions. Its body buckled under the overpowering rush.

Manning the hoses were Yuki, Takayuki, and a surprise guest—Taro!

Only Taro had some doubts. *Why am I doing this?* he asked himself. He wasn’t even quite clear on what was happening, but he had obviously embedded himself in the Association beyond anyone’s anticipation. Miharuru would be pleased.

Yuki looked at the other guys. “Are you sure this is going to work?!” he asked them.

“If this really is a vampire,” Taro answered with only mild conviction, “it’s going to be scared to go near the water stream! At least, I think!”

They all had to yell to be heard over the sound of the gushing water. The Security Committee members knew how to work the hoses, and they had ratcheted up the water pressure to several times stronger than what was normally necessary.

“There were several movie scenes that suggested this,” Taro went on. “At least, the ones I was able to get through! It’s a matter of rolling the dice, I guess, since there is no way to test out our theories except in the heat of battle!”

The guys steeled themselves, digging in their heels and keeping the streams on the vampire. They all kept Kei’s request in mind: capture and contain the infected student, in hopes they could study and cure the vampire virus that had deformed him.

The lamps in the parking lot were equipped with bulbs that emitted UV rays, which would startle the vampire, leading it into the largest open space in the parking garage. The hoses would then hold the vampire in place long enough to knock it out of commission.

There was a slick sound of the water being sliced, as nearly invisible wires shot through the streams. They circled the vampire, wrapping around its neck.

“This is as far as you go,” Kei said, tugging the wires so they tightened. The wires were part of the complex weapons system that Kei operated from small rigs inside his jacket sleeves.

All of the strength drained from the creature’s body. They had worn it down. The vampire fell to its knees.

“Kei-san!” Rion shouted.

“Don’t worry,” Kei assured everyone. “I only injected the poor soul with a muscle relaxant. He’s alive and unhurt.”

Kei moved over and stood next to Rion, who had been waiting in the side shadows with him. He gave her a reassuring giggle. "But more important—"

Faster than most eyes could follow, Kei's right arm suddenly shot to the side.

*(I'd almost swear there was a mini sonic boom,  
it was so fast!)*

One of his wires whizzed to life, disappearing behind a support column. There was a yelp of pain.

A struggling figure, holding her neck, emerged from the shadow of the column. "Ohhhh," she groaned.

"Sensei!" Rion gasped.

"Eyes are everywhere," Kei said.

"What?" Yuki asked, shocked.

Koji, Mifuyu, and Bunzaemon rushed into the space, bearing their weapons. They couldn't believe their eyes. Koji was more surprised than any of them.

Kei tugged lightly on his wire, drawing the hidden person out into the light.

It was Sakiko's doctor. She had been hiding in the background, watching it all.

"But why, Sensei?" Rion asked.

"This woman is an accomplice of our enemy," Kei responded. "She is, if you will, a 'woman in black.' She's one of their sleeper agents who has infiltrated your school."



“That’s impossible!” Koji exclaimed.

And really, Koji was just saying what they were all thinking.

Kei explained, “During the day, the orderlies had been talking about the blood packs that had gone missing from the Emergency Room Supply Closet. Most students aren’t allowed in that room, but I bet you can guess who has full access. And besides, I had always suspected that some of the less academic facilities would be a common entry point for the evildoers, and a hospital puts them in a unique position to do damage. It’s one of the few places where they could advance their research and perform experiments with diseases and viruses without anyone being suspicious.”

“I see.” Takayuki nodded. “So that’s why you went through the trouble of laying such an elaborate trap . . .”

“ . . . and why you chose here,” Yuki added, finishing his associate’s thought.

“Exactly,” Kei smirked, “I could help contain the vampire virus and strike a blow against the men in black’s overall scheme all at the same time. When I began my investigation into some of the possible channels they might take into the campus, I realized that there were several unusual cases of faculty being transferred to CLAMP School in the past few months. That included at least one doctor moving into the Campus General Hospital, and that doctor would be *her*.”



"So, they aren't just sneaking in underground," Rion said, "but the men in black are making their way into our school by legitimate means, as well."

"If someone were on the inside pulling the strings," Takayuki chimed in, "then no matter how tight the security, it wouldn't be hard for them to find a hole in the fence to let their partners in crime through."

"She must have been awfully concerned about her prize experiment," Yuki said, "if she was willing to risk her neck by coming out here to check on it."

"You have no idea what you're talking about," the doctor spat. She stopped struggling and crumpled to the ground, sitting in front of Kei. She shook her head. "I was only worried about how much you might have found out about this mission. I didn't unleash the virus and I didn't even believe that vampires existed at CLAMP School until those two infected patients were brought in for treatment. And I could only guess at the existence of this third one, since someone out there had to be doing the biting."

Then the doctor laughed. "But you're all still more in the dark than you realize. I'll tell you this one for free: the virus has already spread to other parts of CLAMP School. It's on its way to taking you over!"

"What?!" Koji shouted. "What are you saying?"

Most everyone's jaw had dropped, nearly smashing on the concrete floor. Kei alone kept his composure. "So, it's a full-fledged biohazard now."

"You got it, tough guy," the doctor announced. There was a hint of malice in her tone, and a tremor of a giggle, but her voice betrayed mainly defeat and resignation. "It was just a simple mistake. One of the lab animals got loose from its cage and accidentally destroyed a case containing the virus. We hurried to recover it and thought we had, but it was too late."

"Damn you!" Koji yelled out angrily. "Because of you, Sakiko-chan was hurt!"

Koji started to rush forward, ready to attack the doctor, but Kei raised his hand to halt him. "But you stayed here?" he asked. "Why?"

"Because it was my duty," she said, "and like I told you, I didn't believe there was an outbreak, that there were any vampires. It was my job to report what had happened back to the organization and hold fast my position. I was certain I hadn't been exposed, so I wouldn't make a change myself. It's a weak virus, vulnerable to sunlight and natural airborne agents that exist everywhere. Even if it manages to enter the body through air or water, sucked in through the throat or settling in the lungs or going into the digestive tract, traveling through the stomach and intestines, its growth capabilities aren't enough to survive the body's immune system. The only guaranteed way to infect a victim is to inject the virus directly into the body through the bloodstream, without exposing it to the air. Even the

slightest contact with the atmosphere beyond a closed syringe is supposed to kill it—or so we thought.”

The doctor looked at the poor student, the original anomaly that kick-started the outbreak of the virus, whom they had all teamed up to take down. “That boy there,” she said, “that’s the anomaly, the rare case among rare cases. Something must have been wrong with his immune system or genetic code to make him particularly susceptible to vampirism.”

“Thank goodness,” Mifuyu sighed, rubbing her chest. “That means it’s not spreading and we can all stop worrying.”

“N-no, you don’t understand.” The doctor’s voice was trembling. “The organization has a secret weapon, one that can accelerate the growth potential of the vampire virus, strengthen it. That weapon’s been fired and it’s heading this way. It should hit CLAMP School airspace any minute.”

The kids in the parking lot felt the life drain right out of them.

“We men in black, after digging into the secret code of the vampire virus, have developed the machine it needs to take over. Watch the skies, because they spell your doom.” The doctor laughed from deep in her cold heart, but her arrogance made her blind to the fury that was pointed her way.

*“Nghaaaaaaaaaaghhhhhh!”*

Everything changed in the blink of an eye.

The vampire had been injected with so many muscle relaxants, it shouldn't have been able to move. Perhaps Kei had underestimated the added strength the virus would give it, and the drugs weren't strong enough. Perhaps the creature had a hidden reserve of energy that was part of the virus' self-defense system. Whatever it was, the vampire was on its feet and had leapt to the group from behind.

Unluckily for Taro, he was standing at the rear of the pack, a barrier between the bloodthirsty demon and the doctor whose words were enraging it. The vampire was on the boy, sinking its fangs deep into the neck of the spy from the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee, the first brick in the human wall it had to tear down. Taro shrieked in agony. "Gwaaaaaahhhhhh!"

"Oh, no!" Rion screamed.

"Taro-kun!" Yuki couldn't believe what he was seeing.

Blood was splattering everywhere.



Elsewhere, thoughts were forming in the consciousness of a mysterious being.

*Friend.*

He was suddenly remembering.

*Yes, that's right . . . my friend is there.*

In his mind, the image of a well-known, immense school campus materialized before him.

*That's where I'll go.*

The choice was obvious.

*I'll go to the school, and I'll be just like my friend. I'll copy my friend, and then my friend and I can play together always.*

In an effort to hurry to CLAMP School, the mysterious being increased its speed.

## **The Angel, Presently About to Descend (Part 2)**

"Rion-san, are you all right? Are you cold?"

"I-I'm fine. But what about you, Koizumi-san? Don't I . . . I mean . . . aren't I heavy?"

"Oh, don't worry about me. You're very light, Rion-san, and I do have the added strength of being a ghost. I don't tire out as easily as when I was alive."

As usual, Koizumi spoke in a relaxed tone of voice, unfazed by the fact that she was carrying a young lady through a crisis situation.

Or that the two of them were flying across the vast expanse of outer space.



"Code Name: Archangel," the female doctor had said. "That's what we called it. The trumpeting angel who signifies the beginning of Armageddon."



“That has got to be the worst name I’ve ever heard,” Takayuki said, the spite in his voice coming through loud and clear.

“Maybe so,” the doctor conceded, “but it’s entirely appropriate. After all, the Archangel’s mission is to destabilize the physical condition of people and animals infected with the vampire virus, and to accelerate the growth of the virus. You might as well face it: metaphorically speaking, this thing is the devil sent here to eradicate all humanity and leave demons in its place.”

*(Which means the name is kind of ironic,  
if you want to be a clever fellow about it.)*

They had moved their prisoner to the High School Division Safety Room. After the vampire bit Taro, they had taken him upstairs from the underground parking lot to the hospital itself. After checking him in, they moved the operation to a safer location.

The report from the hospital, thankfully, was that Taro’s wounds were not life threatening, and they were sterilizing the infected area with UV rays and prescribing an extended stay at the hospital facilities where he could undergo continued sunbathing treatments. It looked like their newest comrade in the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association was going to escape the curse.

(Remember, even though we know that Taro Ryugasaki  
is a spy for the Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee,  
the Association doesn't.)

"It's well known that by getting some sunlight, we create natural reactions in our bodies, usually bolstering the immune system. Well, the Archangel's mission is to cause the opposite effect—to create a situation that makes the vampire virus strong, improving it so that it can beat your natural defenses.

"The sun's rays contain many specialized wavelengths of light, and the Archangel can emit a specific pattern of light as well. Its pattern strikes the brain cells of humans and animals exposed to it, weakening their immune systems and creating antibodies that will support the vampire virus. It's an internal process, accelerating the growth of the illness."

"Uh, but . . ." Mifuyu held her head in her hands. "Are you seriously telling us that if this thing shoots its vampire beam at the earth, then *everyone* will become a creature of the night?"

"Well, if you want to express it the way a child would, then yes." The doctor smiled. "Of course, it would be necessary to spread the virus *before* firing the beam. Which takes us back to what I said earlier, that the lifespan of the vampire virus is frustratingly short. It's

going to be extremely difficult to time the two events, to spread the illness when it's most beneficial to take advantage of the Archangel's strike offensive. It requires a precise schedule."

Kei stepped forward and looked her hard in the face. "Then what kind of schedule are we on if you have the Archangel heading to CLAMP School right now?"

"How should *I* know?" the doctor said, slamming her hand on the table. She stood up. "I contacted headquarters, and they said the Archangel changed its trajectory entirely on its own. It's out of control and no one knows why! Our remote controls are not working at all. The devil refuses to return our calls!"

Clearly upset during her sudden outburst, the doctor took a deep breath and sat down before continuing. "The agents at headquarters were saying that they suspected there might have been a defect in the newly installed artificial intelligence system. We're all a victim of a bug in the programming, a most unfortunate circumstance! The out-of-control Archangel is on its way to your school right now, right after the virus has started to spread! I wish this were a dream, and I wish to God I could wake up!"

"Oh, knock it off!" Kei's eyes narrowed to angry slits. "Because of your selfish plot, thousands of people, perhaps millions, are going to turn into vampires. You have no right to feel sorry for yourself!"

"I-I don't want to become a vampire," Yuki murmured, shaking. "Drinking blood is so *not* very glamorous. It's not a fair trade-off for—"

Yuki stopped himself. He knew that since vampires are basically "the dead," they do not age and can often live forever without changing their present state and condition. This would come in handy for a girl concerned with her looks, but if the price is a hunger for human flesh and killing other people in order to live, the price was too high. Eternal youth wasn't worth it. Yuki knew it from the bottom of his heart

The doctor harrumphed and looked away from her interrogators. "If you don't like it, then I don't know why you're wasting your time bothering me. We're all in the same boat. As long as I'm at CLAMP School, I'm under the same threat, and you don't see me panicking, do you?"

"In any case, that's everything I know. If we don't stop the Archangel, this place will become a living hell—and when that's going to happen, God only knows."

*xoxo*

*(Did I happen to mention that later,  
when Rion and Koizumi are in space,  
Rion is blindfolded?)*

*Because that is important,  
since it causes her much confusion.  
You should also know that Koizumi  
is wearing a space suit like the ones  
CLAMP School astronauts wear.)*

"Wh-where is the rendezvous point?" Rion asked.

Koizumi rustled through her apron pocket. "Well, let's see . . . wait just a moment. According to the transceiver that Takayuki-sama gave me—err—apparently we're there now."

"Oh, really?" Rion asked.

Although Rion was securely tied to the ghost maid, they were hovering several hundred kilometers in the air, and that's scary by any count, even when you can't see where you are and don't know where you're going. Takayuki had suggested the blindfold because he thought it would be better if she didn't look until they were at their destination.

Imagining what it must have looked like out there in space, she thought the older boy was clearly on to something.

"Hey! I see it, I see it! Hooray!" Koizumi was waving her hands happily.

"Uh, Koizumi-san, in space we can't hear each other's voices."

Rion timidly pointed to her ears.

"Oh, that's right! I guess we should cut this jibber-jabber and get on with it."

"Thank you. Good idea."

Rion wished for nothing more than for this horrifying experience to end as soon as possible. Good thing she didn't know about the full-capability solitary vessel that they were searching for.



The plan started to go into action mere moments after they finished questioning the doctor.

"If she's to be believed, we need to find the Archangel and board the vessel without delay," Kei said. He had weighed the possibilities, and this one made the most sense to him.

"What?" Rion asked with surprise. "B-but how are we going to get to it? I mean, it's out there in orbit or something, right?"

"That may be true, but there is still no other solution that will work." Kei looked down rather than at his frightened friend. "There's no way of controlling it from the ground, she already told us that. Considering the danger of mechanical malfunction, we can't just launch some careless attack against it. If the preservation of peace is our top priority, we don't want to get other nations

involved. Which means we have to take care of business all on our own.”

“But how do we get inside?” Takayuki asked. “That’s presuming we can even *find* it out there.”

They had finally found a question Kei didn’t have an answer to.

But coincidentally, just at that moment, another man with a lot of answers arrived. The Professor came running into the room. “Everyone!” he blurted out. “Doesn’t CLAMP School boast a Space Flight Research Division as part of its University Program? I seem to recall them being exceptionally proud of their advanced model space shuttle.”

“Oh, Professor!” Yuki smiled. “Long time no see.”

The Professor was a fan of the Association in general, and Yuki in particular, and had helped them out on several occasions, sharing his knowledge and relaying helpful advice.

“Really?” Kei asked. “You have something like that here on campus? Why doesn’t your government know about this?”

“When it comes to CLAMP School, my dear boy, you should simply assume we have *everything*.”

The Professor grinned at the stupefied secret agent.



Without making the slightest sound, the hatch door opened.

“Excuse meeeee! Hellooo?”

Although no one answered her, Koizumi would not discard her manners. As she entered the space shuttle, she bowed in greeting.

The door closed behind them.

For a moment, they thought that was it, that they were trapped, that this was as far as they could go, but then, right across from where they stood . . . another door slid open.

“It’s okay now, Rion-san,” Koizumi said. “You can remove your blindfold.”

Without saying a word, Rion reached back and untied the cloth. She found herself in a large, white, round room.

“Wow,” she whispered.

Rion tried to plant her feet and catch her balance, but she discovered that she was floating in the air instead. The skirt of her school uniform bobbed up and down with the rhythm of her body.

An intercom crackled to life. “I’m going to rotate the hull to generate a simulated gravity,” a filtered voice told them. “Wait just a minute.”

The walls surrounding them slowly began to move. As they did, Rion and the ghost maid gradually moved toward the ground. But even after their feet were firmly on the floor, Rion felt strange. It was a feeling akin to



alighting from a particularly hair-raising ride at an amusement park. You get off, and your body hasn't quite caught up to its restored surroundings. The floating sensation lingers.



The Satellite Monitoring Room in the University Division of CLAMP School campus erupted in excited activity. "Target has been acquired! We have established the location of the Archangel!"

As the discovery was announced, an enormous screen lit up, revealing a gigantic mechanical object surfing through outer space. It had taken them less than twenty-four hours from discovering the plan to spread the virus to tracking down its instrument of death. The Professor had gotten them access to the University Space Flight Research Division.

While preparations for the launch that would send the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association after the Archangel continued among the technicians, the entire group concerned itself with watching their quarry's movements and learning all they could about it. They were aided in doing so by a space-viewing satellite that the CLAMP School Science Division had already put into orbit.

"The Archangel," Mifuyu muttered.

"It's some kind of monster machine," Bunzaemon interjected, finishing off her thought, if maybe a little too honestly.

Bunzaemon was right. It was more monster than angel, no matter how you looked at it. It had a solid shape and appeared to be dense and hard. Several metallic appendages snaked out from its body. There was nothing resembling wings, but there were several sets of antennae, as well as a creepy opening that resembled a spider's jaws, from which it looked like some kind of weapon could be fired.

"The object is an artificial satellite," Kei theorized, "whose body measures a diameter of two hundred meters, with its length measuring in excess of four hundred meters. I would guess that much of its interior is hollow."

"Which means that there should be plenty of space for a person to get inside," Takayuki said, picking up the ball.

"That's right. We get a team inside and they can reprogram the computer's system."

"It sounds dangerous."

"Dangerous—or impossible," Yuki said, echoing the warning of the female doctor.

*Getting inside is a ridiculous notion, she had said. Even if you get out there, the Archangel is one big defense mechanism. It's programmed to attack anything that gets near it. To fly to it*

*without some idea of how to get inside is ludicrous. You might as well just put yourselves in a coffin and shoot it out into the ocean, let yourselves sink to your deaths.*

It wasn't a promising assessment.

"So, are we still leaving it to chance that we'll find a doorway in?" Yuki asked. "If we go near it, what's going to stop it from making us go kaboom? Let's be serious here."

Just then, one of the University students who had been monitoring the satellite feed shouted, "Hey! Check it out!"

"What is it?" Kei asked.

"It's a transmission from the Archangel!"

"What?"

Everyone moved in closer and stopped chattering. No one would have ever dreamed that the uninhabited Archangel would send them a message.

"... friend ..." it crackled, "... are you a friend?"

Everyone was flabbergasted. Who would have expected such an innocent, childlike query?

"I ... want to be just like you ... I'm going to the school ... to be just like you."

There was a more sinister ring to it now. The innocence had given way to a hint of aggression."

"I want to play with you."

XOXO

The door to the shuttle's piloting control room opened, and there waiting for Rion and Koizumi, much to their relief, was Kei!

"Good work, team," he said, showing them a flash of his perfect teeth. "I never thought I'd see the day when somebody could travel to outer space in the bodies they were born with."

Rion felt a little twitch in her shoulder. Was it nerves? She shrugged it off. "Um, kinda," she said. "I guess I should call Yuki-senpai in now, huh?"

"Please do so," Kei agreed.

She removed a bundle of cards from her skirt pocket. Her hand was trembling. She separated once of them from the deck, closed her eyes, and began chanting.

There was a small *poof* of mystical energy, and then an exclamation of surprise. "*Waaaaghhhh!*"

The card in Rion's hand vanished, and suddenly Yuki appeared in its place, standing directly in front of her. He was dressed head-to-toe in his CLAMP School uniform.

"Whoa, cool," he laughed. "Is this what the inside of a high-tech space shuttle looks like?"

"Yes," Koizumi answered, beaming with pride and excitement.

"I'm impressed."

Kei was also impressed, but he tried not to show it the way Yuki did.

The card Rion had pulled from her spell-casting deck was called a switching card. Normally, this magical card is used to produce a *kagemusha*, or shadow warrior, who could be sent into harm's way instead of the *actual* person.

However, by placing a person's soul within the card, Rion, by way of a very high-level spell, was able to produce a simulated body of a person in a place far removed from where the person's real body was. By using this method, a person could maintain normal, everyday life functions while operating in a situation that was normally life threatening—such as breathing in a vacuum.

Of course, the Rion here now, the one who had ridden through space on Koizumi's back, was a simulated self that she had created with a few well-placed spell cards. With her unreal body, she didn't have to worry about things like a lack of oxygen or the crushing pressure of a space vacuum. Her real body was currently taking a heavy, rejuvenating nap in a private room in CLAMP School. And now the real Yuki had joined Rion there, coinciding with his doppelganger joining hers in space.

Kei wasn't interested in pondering how fantastic this all was. Not when there was business to do. "Okay," he said. "All right then, Koizumi-kun, sorry we can't sit around and chat and catch up on gossip

with the Chairman, but I need you to go inside the internal chambers of the Archangel. Be careful not to break your psychic link with Rion-kun, either. We'll need it."

"Yes, sir." In the same time it took Koizumi to respond, she had already passed through the walls of the vessel and was back out in the vacuum of outer space, commingling with the stars.

"A ghost maid," Kei joked, breaking his normally serious demeanor. "I wish I could have one of those."

Sadly, there was no one else in the control room to appreciate his rare moment of humor.



It was the Professor who came up with the outlandish suggestion that became their key to penetrating the Archangel. In short detail, this was the plan:

First, Rion and Yuki would fly up into space with Kei.

Next, Koizumi would enter the internal chambers of the Archangel and transmit images from there to Yuki through her psychic link with Rion. (This was a method employed by Rion in the infamous Tatazumu Mononoke incident.)

Using these images as a map, Yuki would visualize a jumping point and would teleport himself to that site, taking Kei with him.

Unfortunately, while perfect in concept, this was going to prove problematic in execution.

For starters, the possibility that Rion's and Yuki's bodies would not be able to withstand the physical trauma of the shuttle's launch.

Second, there was no guarantee that, after the plan was carried out, the return to Earth could be executed safely. The shuttle still hadn't been field-tested, and there wasn't really any guarantee it could survive a possible battle with the Archangel, much less reentry into the earth's atmosphere.

Third and finally, Yuki was adamantly against any kind of travel that might cause motion sickness. He said he never looked good in green.

Rion was the one who solved the problems, getting the idea from her grandmother, a master spell-caster. The solution was the switching-card technique, and it would kill all three birds with one stone. Only Kei would be needed to fly the shuttle, and since he was a government agent, danger was part of his job description anyway.

Yuki reluctantly agreed, but only as long as Rion could promise his fake body would be wearing something *fabulous*.

Thus, the unprecedented plan to infiltrate an enemy spacecraft was hatched.



Sakiko couldn't believe her ears when she heard the news. "Really?" she asked, mustering up the best smile she could in her weakened state. Her bed was bathed in the warm glow of the sun, giving her an almost otherworldly look. "You're going to go to the moon and stuff like that?"

Koji laughed. "No, not the moon. And it's not really like we're going to be out there, really, when you think about it."

He returned her smile with the biggest and brightest he could give.

"That's sounds so clever," Sakiko said. "I'll just be stuck in bed here. My doctor says I can't do anything but rest until my strength returns."

"You're so young, though, and you were in such great shape, it should take you no time at all."

Koji prayed with all of his heart that he was right.

"Be careful," she told him, her voice growing tinier with the effort of activity. "If I lose you, Koji-san, I'll . . ."

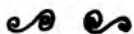
Her voice trailed off. Koji flicked her nose playfully. "What? Were you going to say something?"

Sakiko grinned and shook her head from side to side. "No. But, hey, Koji-san . . . if you run into Zetton on your adventure, tell him I said, 'Please come back to Earth.' Will you do that for me?"

"Of course! I'd be excited to see the big lug myself!"



Both of them looked at the sky and imagined all the places that existed beyond what they could see, all the wonders waiting to be discovered, and said no more.



Koizumi was making her first report, "I see it," she told Rion psychically. "There are so many machines, unlike anything I've ever seen . . . Okay, I'm inside."

Rion related the ghost's findings to Kei. "All right, then," he said. "I'm going after her."

Kei put on his space helmet and checked his suit's systems.

"You ready?"

Yuki nodded, but his face had an uncomfortable expression. He grabbed tightly onto Kei's spacesuit. "I'm warning you now," Yuki said, "it's really exhausting for me to travel with luggage as big as you. You're going to owe me big-time for this teleport."

"Roger that. I promise to do whatever I can."

"I'll hold you to it. Okay, Rion, hook me up with a visual."

"Yes, sir," Rion chirped. She whipped out a card that would allow her to picture what Koizumi was seeing in her own mind. From there, she would imprint the image onto the card.

She approached the boys. Rion stared into Kei's eyes.

In their downtime before they had launched into space, while the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association set up camp at the Space Flight Research Division, Rion had approached Kei privately. He was taking it easy in a spare room, mentally preparing for what was to come. "I was thinking about some things you said before," she told him. "Last time we met, you told Mifuyu-senpai and me that you were born before World War II."

Kei silently nodded.

"Well, the thing is . . . no matter how I look at it . . . well, you're *young*. You look about the same age as I do." Rion gulped. "I may be way off base here, and I'm sorry if I am, just tell me . . . but Kei-san . . . are you . . . do you have the vampire virus?"

Kei didn't blink. He didn't so much as lift an eyebrow.

"Yuki-senpai told me that vampires have an extreme addiction to blood, possibly extending beyond their need to survive, but it's their trade-off for looking forever young, for not aging beyond the day they first switched over from being human. So, it made me think . . . and well, I was wondering . . . is that the reason you still look so young . . . is because you're . . .?"

"And what if I was?"

Kei was staring at her intently, and it made Rion tremble with nerves.

“What if I was?” he repeated.

“Uh, well . . . um . . .” Rion stiffened her spine before answering. “I was thinking . . . maybe I could somehow help you, with my spells and stuff.”

She didn’t know if he understood what she meant, but she had lost the courage to say more. Kei stood up and moved across the room to her in one fluid motion. “Rion-kun, if I asked you to let me drink your blood . . . what would you say?”

Kei towered over her. His shadow covered her whole body.

“Uhh . . .”

Rion’s legs were shaking. Her lips couldn’t remember how to form words.

Slowly, Kei lowered his face closer to Rion’s neck.

Rion squeezed her eyes shut as tight as they would go and waited for him to bite into her.

Except he just laughed.

“I’m only kidding. Get real!” Kei lightly tapped Rion on the head with his knuckles, and she opened her eyes.

But when she did, Kei had already left the room, moving with a cat-like swiftness. Rion stayed frozen where she was. When she couldn’t hold herself any longer, she buried her face in her hands and quietly began to cry.



And that was why she was looking into Kei's eyes now. But was it to show him that she trusted him before they embarked on the next dangerous portion of their mission, or was it to try to discern if the boy leading them was really human?

Remembering what she was there to do, Rion turned to Yuki. She closed her eyes tight, and without looking, slapped the image card onto Yuki's body.

*(Little did Rion know, but at the time she had her confrontation with Kei, she wasn't as alone as she had felt. Mifuyu had been outside the room, ready to draw Kotetsu at the slightest hint of trouble. She waited out there until Rion had stopped crying, just to be sure that her friend was okay. She felt that was better than going in, which might have caused the younger girl embarrassment. Mifuyu cared for Rion too much to do that.)*



Through the vast quiet of space, two figures approached the Archangel via a means of travel invisible to any satellite camera.

Yuki was out of breath, and sweat was pouring from his brow. "Okay, Rion-chan, we're here," he said. "You can let go now."

Yuki had made his second jump from their shuttle to the enemy craft, this time carrying Rion. She was clutching him with fear, and was embarrassed as she slid down off his back.

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Chairman!"

Koizumi greeted them pleasantly. "Good work, sir!"

Since Yuki had first come to the Archangel, Kei had been checking out the ship's layout. He swung a mini-flashlight around the darkness.

Once she had settled down, Rion began chanting. It echoed through the empty room, and three separate *poofs* played counter-rhythm to her voice. There were now three more people with them, but their faces were obscured in the blackness.

"It's dark in here," one of them said. It sounded like an older male. "I hope we can find the computer."

"In any case, we just have to make sure this thing doesn't get near CLAMP School, right?" another, younger male responded.

"Uh-huh," the first voice said.

*(Of course, while I try to be all mysterious with this story, you all know who it is I'm talking about.)*

Takayuki, Koji, and Mifuyu had all had their surrogate bodies transported to the Archangel! Once Rion had arrived there—something she couldn't do

without Yuki's help—she was able to summon the rest of the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association to the ship as well.

As you also know by now, when it comes time to take action, the members of the Association are far more ready than most will give them credit for. There was no hesitation on the part of the new arrivals. They were in action mode, at the ready for whatever might come their way.

Kei called to them. "This way! There's a maintenance corridor."

The group followed the sound of his voice, advancing down the mysterious hallway. All five of them looked like one unit, dressed as they were in their CLAMP School uniforms. Koizumi, the ghost maid, still had her space suit on.

*(Though, necessary for a spirit? I doubt it!)*

She was ahead of the rest of the group and had nearly caught up with Kei.

The seven of them gathered at the entrance to a large hall.

Compared to the vast quiet of the universe outside, the spaceship was abuzz with noise. The echoes of their footsteps trailed off behind them, while in front of them was a host of machines, lights flickering on and off, diodes beeping, and gears grinding. The sudden explosion of stimuli made their heads spin.

Kei pointed to a control panel near the front. "This should be it."

Before anyone could progress, though, Mifuyu raised her hand, freezing everyone in their tracks. She looked around like a fierce jungle cat who'd caught the scent of prey on the wind.

"What is it, Senpai?" Koji whispered.

"I'm not sure," she said. "I sensed something moving." Her eyes were still scanning the area.

And then, a large clacking noise started to stand out from the din of the machines. Mifuyu had brought Bunzaemon's sword, Tachi, with her, and she had it in her left hand. She was startled to discover that the clack was coming from it. The sword vibrated in her grip, as if trying to warn her of something.

She only had an instant to react. "Kei-kun, watch out!" she screamed.

But it was too late. Kei's body was lifted high into the air.

*(Okay, let's pause again for a second. I'm sorry that I jumped ahead in the story to the good stuff, but I am sure you can understand why.*

*You've been patient, and I appreciate that.*

*A bunch of you are now probably asking why Mifuyu had Bunzaemon's sword with her, and why the little guy wasn't there himself. Let me tell you...)*



Just before they left, Bunzaemon went to Mifuyu and held out Tachi for her to take. "Mifuyu-dono, I would be honored if you would take my blade into battle."

Mifuyu thought there must be some mistake. "I don't understand. Tachi is your most precious possession. It's like a part of you, Bunzaemon-kun!"

Bunzaemon shook his head.

"You must be prepared to face a horrible enemy, Mifuyu-dono. You heard the transmission just now. This threat, it's like the things we've seen before. Spirits and monsters who come to CLAMP School and try to be human. The results could be deadly."

"Yes, I know."

"The only way to deal with these threats is to use Tachi. It has the power to cut down anything paranormal. I know I can't go with you on this mission, that I need to stay behind to maintain a last line of defense if any otherworldly powers break through, but I can send you with a small piece of my power. So, Mifuyu-dono, please take Tachi, and strike this evil down in my place!"

Mifuyu took a firm hold of Bunzaemon's sword. "Okay, my friend. I'll do it."

This is how, on the Archangel, Mifuyu came to have Tachi in her left hand, and her own mighty weapon, the sword Kotetsu, in her right.

And now she was prepared to use them.



Kei was under attack. He'd been thrust into the air. In response, Mifuyu belted out a *ki-ai* yell, a martial arts scream used by competitors to pump themselves up before a match. She brandished both swords, moving with lightning quickness as the machines ignited the battle.

Kei had been grabbed by a mechanical tentacle, part of the Archangel's defense system. Now all the machines were unleashing themselves on the students, expelling cords, tubes, and shrapnel with deadly force. Using both blades, Mifuyu moved in a blur of motion, dispelling the mechanical attack with frenzied efficiency.

Most of the other kids had taken cover, but Rion had become paralyzed with fear. Seeing this, Koji jumped from his crouching position. "Rion-senpai!" he bellowed, throwing his body in front of her and becoming a human shield. He threw his arms around her and pulled her to the ground.

"Koji-kun!" Mifuyu called, knocking away more of the machine vomit. "Are you all right?"

"I'm fine, I'm fine! We need to get Kei-san out of there!"

"Forget about me," Kei yelled back. He was struggling with cords that were tossing him about in the

air, trying to wrap around his body and squeeze the life out of him. His own wire weapons were shooting every which way, striking with tight precision and slicing as many of the cords as he could manage, hoping to kill them faster than they could replicate themselves. "You have to get Takayuki-kun to the computer! He needs to shut it down! *Hurry!*"

"Okay!" Koji replied.

"You, too, Mifuyu-kun! This is a top priority!"

"Understood."

As if sensing what was happening, the monitor above the central control panel flickered to life.

*Who . . . are you?* the machine asked.

Mifuyu shot a look at Takayuki. "Did the machine just talk to me?"

*Who . . . are you? Are you . . . my friend?*

"Look! A little kid!" Yuki said.

Sure enough, the image of a five-year-old boy appeared on the monitor. He looked scared, and more than a little sad.

"Don't let it fool you!" Kei demanded, still flailing in the air. "Hurry and shut this monster down!"

Kei's voice was all the reminder they needed. Mifuyu fell back and linked up with Takayuki. "Are you ready?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"Then stay behind me, and let's go!"

Under a barrage of mechanical fire, the pair started to rush toward the control panel.

“Whoa!”

“Huh? Hey!”

Mifuyu and Takayuki both lost their balance and started to fall—but instead of hitting the ground, they both found themselves hovering in midair. Looking back over her shoulder, Mifuyu saw the other Association members were now also rising up off the floor.

XOXO

If they had been at the front of the ship, they would have seen that the edge of the Japanese islands was now becoming visible just beyond the horizon.

The Archangel continued a course straight for Tokyo Bay, practically a beeline for CLAMP School.

“Mifuyu-dono . . .” Bunzaemon whispered.

“Koji-kun . . .” Sakiko prayed.

Though the two kindergartners were at different parts of the school, they each had the same thoughts, the same concerns to offer up to the heavens.



“Ngh!”

Kei's space suit was creaking from the stress the tentacles placed on it. He wasn't positive, but he was pretty sure he could hear the sound of air leaking. Kei resigned himself to the idea that he could die right there.

“What are you doing?”

There was a poof of air behind him, and a soft voice both male and female at the same time.

Yuki had teleported into a space in midair at the same approximate location as Kei. He grabbed Kei's shoulder to keep from falling, knowing he had only a second to do it. “I've got you!”

*Poof.*

As soon as he had felt Yuki's fingers on his back, Kei found himself at the rear of the hall.

“That's twice you owe me now!” Yuki laughed. “Is it your goal to wear me out? Jeez!”

Kei smiled. “You got it. Twice it is!”

“Rion-saaaan!” Koji called. “It's dangerous over there! Get to safety!”

“Koji, we need you!” Takayuki yelled. “Can you get the cover off this control panel?”

“No problem!”

Floating in zero gravity, with help from Mifuyu and Koizumi, Koji and Takayuki were working fast to dismantle the computer.

*Why . . . are you doing this? Aren't you . . . my friend?*

The little boy in the monitor looked like he was getting closer to breaking into tears with each successive word. An organism was starting to emerge from the video image, something resembling a mass of light. It was leaving the boy and coming through the screen in a shower of sparks.

"A ghost!" Mifuyu struck at the light with Tachi, and the blow caused it to break apart. The light scattered like frightened fireflies.

The poltergeist's death-scream rang through the room, penetrating everyone's ears. At the same time, the floor of the Archangel began to rock wildly.

"Oh, no!" Takayuki groaned. "We've lost power. We're going to crash!"

"But we've destroyed the computer!" Koji yelled, his voice full of pride. "Our mission is a success!"

"All right, Rion-kun!" Kei said. "Break everyone's body-switching spell. We're heading back to Earth!"

"What? B-but what about you, Kei-san?" Rion asked.

"Oh, you don't need to worry about me." Kei smiled with confidence. "I always make it back!"

Seeing his face, Rion decided she believed him. So, she began to chant her reverse spell.



The ground was rushing into view.

The Archangel, no longer able to fly, was dropping quickly in an irreversible nosedive.

Thankfully, it was now empty, except for Kei, who stood all alone. He tried to maintain his balance, but the ship was buckling from the pressure of its fall. He made his way to the control panel that Takayuki and Koji had demolished and pried open a large box-like object next to it. He peered inside. It stored what looked like a western-style coffin.

"I knew it," he said out loud. Inside of the coffin, a young boy was lying prone. His body was connected to an assortment of tubes and cables. Tiny fangs peeked out from behind his cold lips. He was also wearing a uniform from CLAMP School.

"They were using a vampire child to fly their death ship. They plugged him in and made him the organic energy source for its drive computer."

The child's cry for a friend was not just some madness being spewed by a machine who had found consciousness, but a true plea from the bottom of one boy's soul. When the poor kid had been transformed into a creature of the night wasn't clear, but his being a student was another dastardly piece of the hateful campaign to hurt Japan's most progressive school.

Kei smirked with self-scorn. "Vampires are fated to suffer persecution at the hands of humans. And since it

looks like I won't be making it back to the shuttle, I guess the child and I are going down with the ship together."

"Are you still hanging around here?"

Yuki suddenly popped his head out of the darkness. Kei nearly leaped backward. "What are you doing here?! Didn't Rion take you back to Earth?"

"Sure, but a girl gets around, you know," Yuki grinned at him. "Who were you talking to, anyway?"

"What are you doing here?"

Yuki grabbed Kei by the sleeve. "You don't think I'd let you die without collecting on those three favors you owe me!"

"Three? I thought it was two!"

"Yeah, add this to the list, tough guy."

The two of them disappeared from the deck of the Archangel.



At that moment, back at CLAMP School, two women were sitting having tea and engaging in a pleasant conversation.

"So, it's finally over," one of them said.

"It would appear so," the other replied.

"You have a good eye for talent. They're such good kids."



“Yes.” Perhaps because she was embarrassed at receiving praise, the other woman lowered her eyes. “This school will be visited by other calamities in the near future; I have foreseen it in my readings. But as long as those children are here, as long as they continue to produce successors, CLAMP School will always manage to stay out of danger.”

“Oh, well, that’s certainly a comfort.” She hid her mouth with a Japanese paper fan, but it could not hide the beauty of her voice. “I hope you’ll continue to watch over your young charges from afar, Kakyoin-san.”

XOXO

Miharu Takanashi was freaking out. Her eyes looked even larger than usual behind the thick lenses of her glasses. “Whaaaaat?! That can’t be true, Professor!”

“Oh, but it is. I’ve already finished sending the application to the High School Division student body.”

“No! N-no, say it isn’t so! You can’t really, Professor. A man of your respect, you’re really going to become an advisor to the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association?”

Five days had passed since the virus was stopped, and a lot can happen in five days. The Professor, who was always the Association’s number one fan (especially Yuki’s), was now an even bigger fan. They had saved

humanity, after all, and so being their academic advisor felt like the least he could do.

"It's true. You can't deny, they're sure a lot fun. There's no other club where so many fantastical things happen on a near daily basis. And after all, I *am* a physics professor. It's almost my calling for me to observe such a wide variety of phenomena and analyze the data."

The Professor laughed, and for the first time, Miharu wondered if he was saying this knowing that she was the Chairman of the CLAMP School Lifestyle-Monitoring Committee. Did he know how much she hated the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association, and was he purposely needling her? Could she still block them from becoming an official Club now that they had an endorsement?

It appeared that Miharu's dilemma was not going to be resolved any time soon.



The Supernatural Phenomena Research Association resumed having its meetings at the usual place. Everyone attended except for Yuki, and the other four were left to entertain themselves without their Chairman—since they knew he likely wouldn't appear anytime soon.

"Koji, have you heard from Yuki?" Takayuki asked.

“Yeah, and it seems like he’s still a ways off from a full recovery.”

“Well, it’s only natural,” Rion gently interjected. “After all, he teleported over ten times from a height of twenty thousand meters!”

It was true. Yuki had a long way to go to bring Kei back down to the ground. Once he was out of the plummeting spaceship, he had to contend with the distance between the craft and the ground, and he had to do so while carrying Kei. In order to break their fall, he converted the energy from the drop into teleportation energy, which started to work as the equivalent of brakes. He took pieces of the fall, little by little, until he reached the ground.

And so, although they both suffered only minor wounds upon landing, Yuki experienced a complete brain shut down. He was rushed to the Campus General Hospital. He had never pushed his powers to that extent before.

Kei had come to see everyone on the day he was supposed to leave the campus. He had stuck around to complete some paperwork and make sure that both CLAMP School and the Japanese government knew where the situation stood—and that included a mountain of follow-up paperwork to go with the first mountain of paperwork. They’d form a mountain range of pulp and ink!

"Let me know as soon as Yuki wakes up," he told them. "I have to repay him, not only as an agent of Japan, but for myself as well."

"What are you going to do now, Kei-san?" Rion asked him.

He mulled over her question, and after a short pause, answered, "Government agents never get time off. At least not without taking particularly drastic measures to get out of our duty. So what *will* I do? I'm not sure. Perhaps I can apply for some kind of leave of absence and enroll in CLAMP School's Middle School Division as a regular citizen."

"Huh?"

Kei flashed Rion a quick smile before turning and walking away. He kept going, without looking back.

"What did he mean?" she murmured to herself.

"Hey, Rion-chan, why're your eyes so droopy?" Mifuyu asked her. "You going to fall asleep or something?"

"What? Oh, no. No!" Rion's flustered denial was undercut by the blush that burned in her cheeks. "Uh, by the way, Senpai, what ever happened to Bunzaemon-kun after he gave you Tachi?"

Mifuyu smiled. "Well, you see, Bunzaemon-kun, he prides himself on his sense of duty. He said another incident with an evil ghost has popped up, and he's already off handling that."

“I see.”

“He’s so young,” Takayuki said, “and he has a tough job. It’s hard not to have respect for the kid.”

“Hey, everyone!” A little girl in a kindergarten uniform bounded energetically up the stairs. She carried several small boxes with her. “Sorry to keep you all waiting. Today’s lunch is *onigiri* and *maku no uchi bento*!”

Koji suddenly straightened up in his chair. “Sakiko-chan! Hello! You really shouldn’t go to all this trouble for us.”

“Oh, not at all. I need you and the other members of the Association to keep working hard. I plan to cheer you on until the end of time!”

“Yeah, so don’t be such a killjoy, Koji,” Mifuyu laughed.

Takayuki took one of the box lunches. “I’m glad to see you’re recovering so well,” the older student said. “You have so much energy, it’s like you’re the same old Sakiko-chan.”

Truth be told, she was *better* than the same old Sakiko-chan. Perhaps as a side effect of the vampire virus, once she had recovered from it, Sakiko developed strong physical strength and a strong immune system. The doctors thought it might be due to the daily exposure to sunlight, as her body had learned to make more defensive cells. Compared to when Sakiko first met everyone in the Association, she had loads more energy. Before she had

been a battery that could power a radio, but now she could charge up a truck!

*At this rate, Koji thought, she'll be more than physically fit enough to be an astronaut. Oh, I'm so happy for you, Sakiko-chan!*

And, I suppose it could be said that in direct relation to Sakiko's newfound energy, Koji was more full of the joy of life—and love for a girl—than he had ever been.



Meanwhile, at the Campus General Hospital, Taro Ryugasaki was still recovering from the vampire attack. *Mm . . . ngh . . . Chairman Miharū*, he agonized, though the images he saw of her were only in his mind. *I'm so sorry I couldn't complete my special assignment to spy on the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association . . .*

Orderlies passed by at regular intervals, carrying rumors with them.

"You know that patient in Room 703? The one who was infected by that weird illness? He's going to be released soon!"

"That's good. Because I'd rather he creep out people outside of here, and leave me alone. He's weird!"

As the orderlies walked on, carrying their feelings of dread with them, they passed by another room, which

housed another victim of the whole vampire incident. But this one inspired only gleeful thoughts. This patient was a cute blond who suffered from an entirely different ailment, one caused peripherally by the Dracula curse, and who agonized over different issues.

*Mm . . . nghhh . . . I have to get ready for our presentation at the Cultural Fair! We won't make it in time . . . and we have to be recognized as a Club this time without fail . . . ngggghhh . . .*

At his bedside, keeping a constant vigil, was a young woman in a maid's uniform. She smiled at the orderlies as they passed and peeled her charge an apple.

And Yuki really shouldn't worry so much. While the day the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association receives Club status may still be a little while off, a bright future is definitely in sight!

## Epilogue

Um . . . where am I?

I remember hurrying down the street just a moment ago . . . but then, I don't know.

From the looks of it, I've wandered into a rather strange place. To my left and right, everything is bright white. I feel like I'm on some mountaintop covered in fog.

Wait, I think I see someone. Yeah, there's a person over there.

He's saying something: "Hey there, Bunzaemon-kun."

*Say what? Does he know me? He's coming this way, waving at me. He appears friendly enough. I guess I might as well see what he wants. He's about to speak again. You can tell by the way he sets his jaw a certain way, like he's winding it up to talk.*

"Hello, pleased to meet you, though actually, it's the second time we've met. The first time was in *Shosetsu Asuka* magazine, in the RPG replay! You know, the section where they give the play-by-play commentary on



role-playing games. I bet you didn't realize, but your appearance in this fancy novel-type thing is a remake of that article!"

*A novel? Is that what this is?*

"That's right. To begin with, the members of the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association were game characters that were created as doubles for the CLAMP senseis. Mifuyu is Igarashi, Takayuki is Ohkawa, Rion is Nekoi, Koji is Mokona, and of course, Yuki is Ozaki Takeshi-sensei. You're a guest character in the story, and you're based on no one in particular. You, my friend, are a person of fictitious origins!"

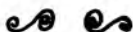
*I see. So, the reason I didn't get to do much is because I wasn't a big part of the game. My player wasn't important enough?*

"You ended up having to share space with Kei-kun, who showed up in the middle of the story to steal your thunder. But let's be real, you're still better off than most. I was playing Taro Ryugasaki, the one new character, and he ended up getting sidelined in the middle of all the action. Nasty things, those vampire bites. Then again, it's no surprise. He seemed like a pretty unlucky fellow right from the get-go—to get such a crummy undercover assignment and all.

*Wow. That's a sad story. I'm getting, like, all misty.*

"Well, anyway, this little tale has pretty much wrapped up. I won't be seeing you for a while, so I

thought I'd have you make a special appearance in the epilogue. That's why it looks so sparse around here, it's kind of an extra. But still, it's great to have some company!"



And so, Part One of the saga of the Supernatural Phenomena Research Association has come to a close. Time flies by so quickly, and now that I think about it, five years have passed since I first met with the CLAMP senseis and started up this project (me, the normal narrator, and not Bunzaemon-kun). During that time, what started as a game replay story ended up being transformed into a series of novels that have been released steadily over the last three years (or one year, if you're among our new American readers). So, of course, I have aged a bit since I began. I look much more like an author now! So it goes, I suppose.

CLAMP School is such a unique world, seemingly separated from the ebb and flow, the time and tide of the rest of the universe. It was always very hard work trying to dream up ideas for my readers. I go back and forth on how I feel about it, but it would be a lie if I denied how fun it is. I'm always terrified and worried that I might be wrecking the image of CLAMP School, or that I'm destroying the my readers visions . . . well, okay, I don't

really worry about that. Actually, just about every time, I simply write stories that reflect my tastes and whims. So, as a writer, I'm very satisfied with how the series has turned out. On the other hand, I wonder if maybe I should apologize to my readers for getting a bit too complicated at times (ha ha). Some of these stories are told in interesting ways, aren't they? So, anyway, I really am a nervous nellie (I mean it this time).

Well, thanks to that, I suppose, I've still got plenty of seeds for story ideas germinating in my head. You have not seen the last of our five adventurers—Yuki, Takayuki, Rion, Mifuyu, and Koji—or all of their friends. I have a seemingly endless supply of crazy ideas to get them tangled up in. The poor dears! Then again, for the characters to go off on their own and find trouble to get into, that really is the most ideal situation for a writer to end up in.

I'd like to give thanks to CLAMP's Ohkawa-sensei, who strongly pushed for getting these stories turned into novels. I'll admit, I protested at first. "A novel?! No way! I can't write something that big! It's too hard!" Ohkawa-sensei stuck with it, and supported and prodded me to get it done.

To my editor (at the time), Aoki-san, who gave me this opportunity to write, and to the editor assigned after that, Tanaka-san, who became my victim number one, who patiently waited for me to submit my manuscripts,

which were always late: more thanks. Gratitude as well to victim number two, the next editor, Yano-san, and victim number three, editor Okayama-san. Many, many thanks.

Also, a shout-out to my many colleagues in the game-designing world, who supported me from behind the scenes, even when they were teasing me.

Finally, to the readers who read this book (and all my other books) all the way to the end, I'd like to unleash a great big "thank you!"

So, *thank you!*

*xoxo*

"By the way, Bunzaemon-kun, where are you going next?"

*Me? I will journey to wherever evil ghosts may appear. Bad spirits better run when they see me coming. What about you, sir?*

"Me? Well, I'm a bit concerned about Kei's situation, so I thought I'd check up on him and see where things are."

*Ah, very good. Well, then, until we meet again, somewhere under this big sky.*

"Take care! It's been a pleasure writing you!"

On a certain day in April, 2000

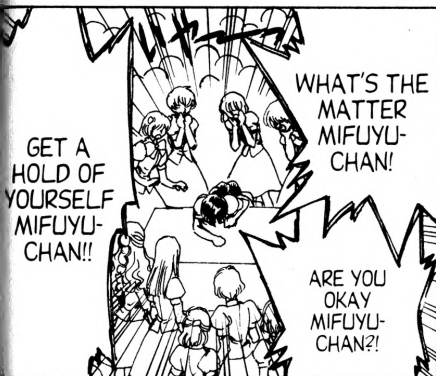
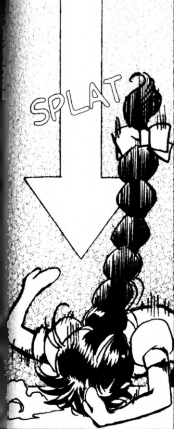
CLAMP School TRPG Club: Supervising Advisor "The Professor," Tomiyuki Matsumoto

# CLAMP SCHOOL PARANORMAL INVESTIGATORS

This is CLAMP School Supernatural Phenomena Research Association

\* Illustrations from the comic CLAMP (pp. 191-198)





GET A  
HOLD OF  
YOURSELF  
MIFUYU-  
CHAN!!

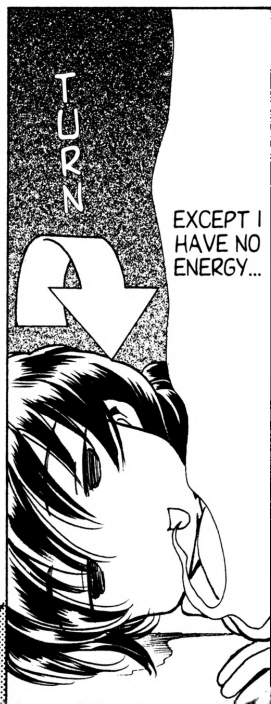
WHAT'S THE  
MATTER  
MIFUYU-  
CHAN!

ARE YOU  
OKAY  
MIFUYU-  
CHAN?!



I ate my  
bento  
during  
second  
period...

I'M SO  
HUNGRY...



TURN

EXCEPT I  
HAVE NO  
ENERGY...



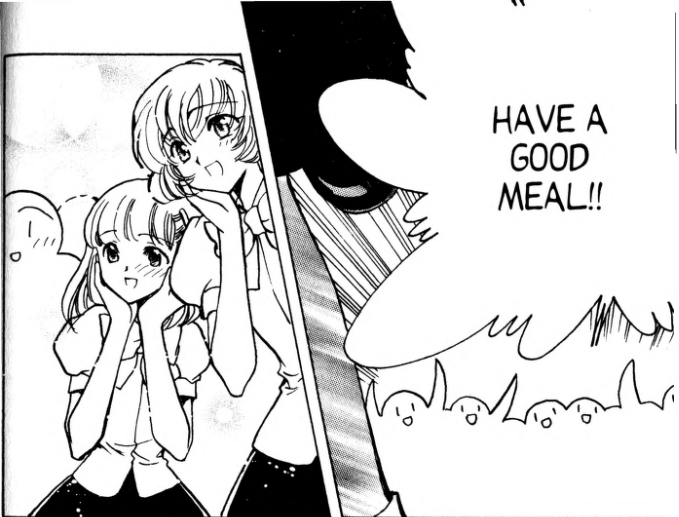
UM...  
...IF YOU  
LIKE,  
YOU CAN  
HAVE  
MINE.



THANK  
YOU!



OKAY THEN!  
I'VE NOW  
GOT THE  
ENERGY I  
NEED TO EAT  
LUNCH!



HAVE A  
GOOD  
MEAL!!



MIFUYU-  
CHAN IS SO  
WONDERFUL.

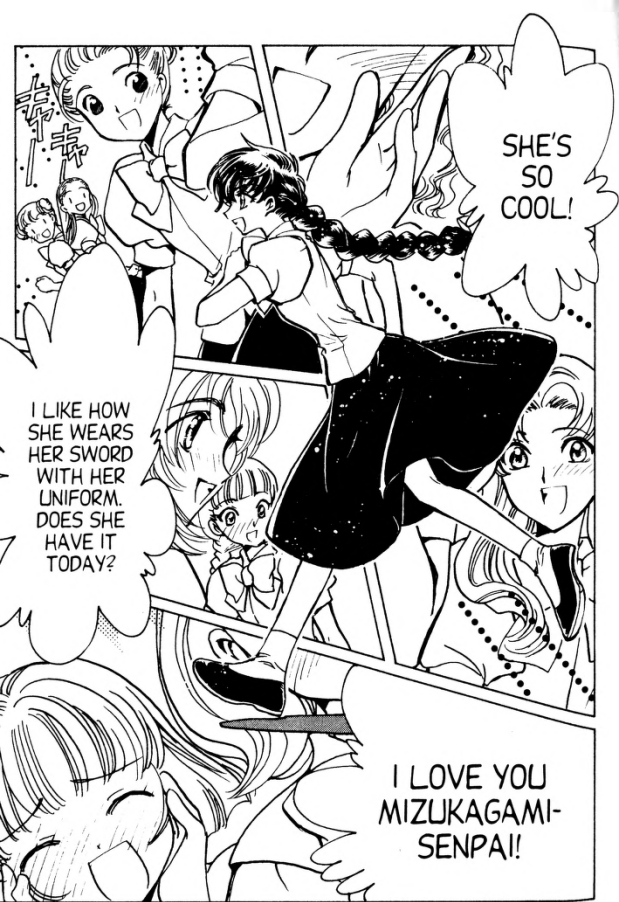


IT'S  
MIZUKAGAMI-  
SENPAI!!

MIFUYU  
SENPAI!!





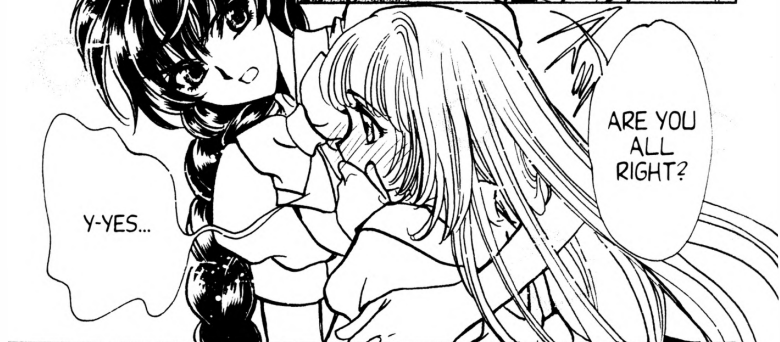


SHE'S  
SO  
COOL!

I LIKE HOW  
SHE WEARS  
HER SWORD  
WITH HER  
UNIFORM.  
DOES SHE  
HAVE IT  
TODAY?

I LOVE YOU  
MIZUKAGAMI-  
SENPAI!





B-BUT...

HAVE THIS!

I CAN GET ANOTHER!

Oba-chan, can I get the A-special?

Hamburger please!

Can I get a katsu sandwich?

SHE'S SO AMAZING...

I'M SO HUNGRY, I CAN'T MOVE.

AND SO, MIFUYU GAINED YET ANOTHER FEMALE FAN.

THE

END