

Author
Firehead
Illustrator
YahaKo

8

A WILD
Last BOSS
APPEARED!

Author
Firehead
Illustrator
YahaKo

8

A WILD
Last BOSS
APPEARED!



“Yes... Let
us settle this,
Lufas
Maphaahl!”

“Sorry to
keep you waiting,
Devil King.
I’ve come to settle
what was put on hold
two hundred
years ago.”

**A Wild
Last Boss
Appeared!**
Illustrator: YahaKo





“How
selfish.”

“Come back!
I really hate you,
but the current you
is so boring its
not even worth
fighting!”

Character Introduction

Lufas Maphaahl

The woman who had almost managed to conquer the world and is feared throughout it as the Black-Winged Conqueror. She was sealed thanks to the efforts of a group of heroes, but after 200 years was revived with the memories of her male avatar from another world. After that, she gradually regained her strength and memories while traveling to once again gather her subordinates, the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars. After returning to modern Japan to reunite with Dina, she finally remembered everything.

Dina

The Snake Charmer of the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars. Though she was born as the Goddess's avatar, she sides with Lufas, who has rebelled against the Goddess's scenario. A hard working girl who carried out the plan all by herself during the time between Lufas's sealing and her revival.



♍ Virgo



♋ Karkinos



♊ Castor



♈ Aries



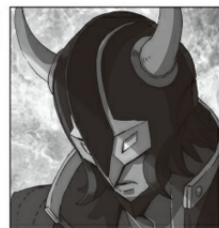
♎ Libra



♌ Leon




♊ Pollux



♉ Taurus

**The Conquering
Twelve Heavenly Stars**



Devilfolk

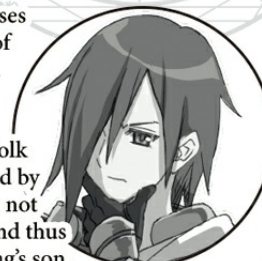
The race created by the Goddess in order to be the “evil” role in Mizgarz’s story.

The Devil King Orm

The leader of the devilfolk as appointed by the Goddess. His real identity is the Ouroboros of the Moon, one of the ouroboroses meant to be agents of divinity on Mizgarz.

Terra

The only devilfolk who was created by the Devil King, not the Goddess, and thus is the Devil King’s son.







Hero

Minamijuuji Sei

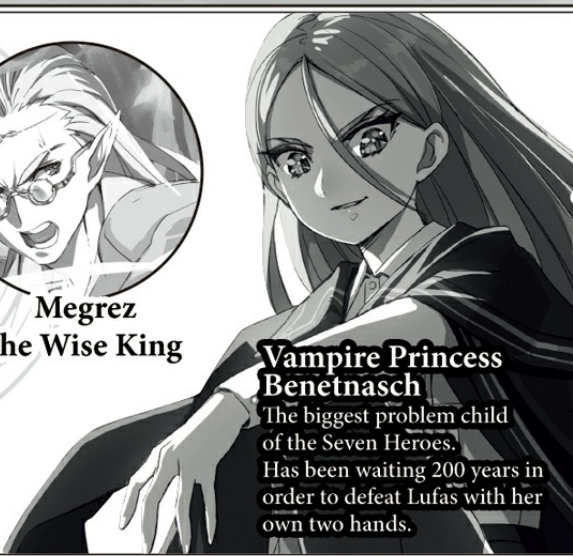
The Hero summoned from modern Japan. Though he is a normal, average young man, he is very earnest and has a strong sense of justice.



Merak the Sky King



Megrez the Wise King

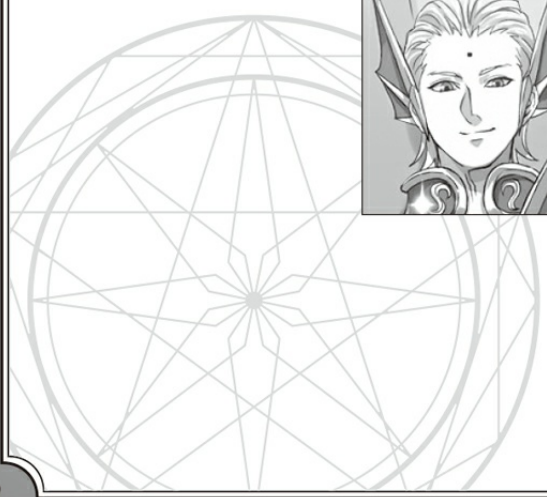



Vampire Princess Benetnasch

The biggest problem child of the Seven Heroes. Has been waiting 200 years in order to defeat Lufas with her own two hands.


Seven Heroes


The group of people who once freed the world from Lufas’s control. Deceased members include: Alioth the Sword King, Mizar the Blacksmithing King, Dubhe the Beast King, and Phecda the Adventuring King.







Pisces







Aigokeros







Scorpius





Aquarius





Sagittarius

STORY RECAP:

I, having possessed my in-game character Lufas Maphaahl, managed to safely retrieve Pollux of the Twins along with my friends. After that, we split up to retrieve the remaining members of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, Aquarius the Water Bearer and Pisces the Fish, as well as find the missing advisor Dina, who had fallen under suspicion as the Goddess Alovenus's avatar.

After leaving the retrieval of the Water Bearer and the Fish to the Twelve Stars, I followed up on a message from Dina relayed to me by the Devil King which said, "I will be waiting at the place we first met, somewhere in your memory," which had me returning to my hometown in modern Japan.

There, I reunited with Dina, also named Ophicus the Snake Charmer of the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars. After hearing what she had to say, I remembered everything.

I remembered I had saved Dina, who was the Goddess's avatar, and welcomed her to my side. I also remembered that, two hundred years ago, I'd been put into checkmate by the heroes, who were under the Goddess's control. I'd chosen to lose on purpose. Then, I'd had Dina stir up all the various factions, setting up the revival of Lufas Maphaahl two hundred years later all by herself.

"I" was never possessing Lufas Maphaahl. Dina had simply overlaid "my" memories onto her master, Lufas, upon her arrival. She'd deceived me for my own sake. I had always been me, Lufas Maphaahl.

Having regained all my strength along with my memories, I knew that the Goddess would most likely move to end Mizgarz itself. However, I will end her scenario before that happens!

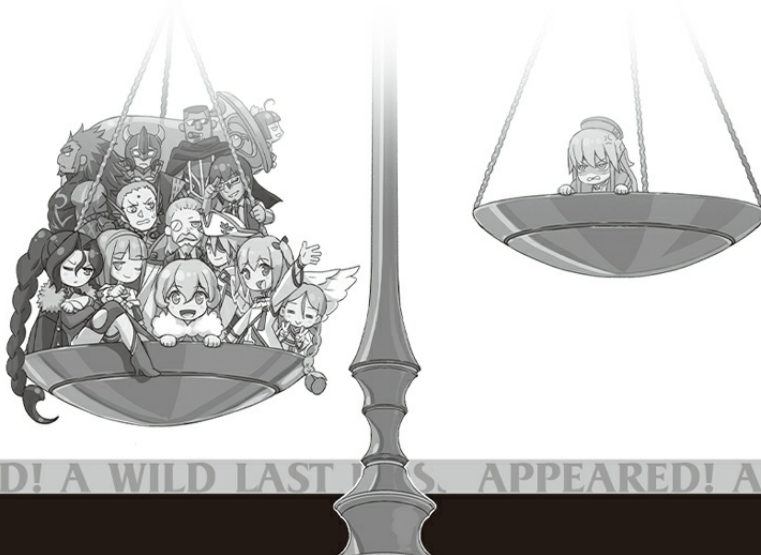


Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Main Story](#)

[The Melancholy of the Vampire Princess](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Bonus Short Story](#)

[Bonus Textless Cover](#)

[About J-Novel Club](#)

[Copyright](#)

1

It was a strange place. Everything was pure white as far as the eye could see. Neither sky nor ground existed. If you were to enclose someone in nothing but blank canvas, what they saw might be similar to this, so it followed that this was a place that was essentially blank, an untouched area where neither sky nor sea nor ground nor even space was set in stone.

In this place, a single person—a woman—was sitting on a throne, her face scrunched up.

“This is not good.”

She was beautiful. Her blue hair shone unnaturally, not to mention the fact that it changed from blue to gold around the base of her neck. She was looking at a board, on top of which pieces made to resemble Lufas and the others were placed like pieces in a game. The state of the board reflected the current state of Mizgarz, and it told her that the situation was moving in a direction unfavorable to her.

Lufas’s team was split into three, each one working on retrieving one of the remaining Stars. The trio of Aries, Karkinos, and Scorpius had taken their subordinates, Fenix and Hydras, to retrieve Aquarius the Water Bearer and admirably succeeded in their task. Aigokeros, Libra, and Sagittarius had gone to Pisces the Fish, and though they met with some trouble, they still succeeded in meeting up. With that, all the area Pisces had ruled over was now owned by Lufas, and the number of her available pieces exceeded the woman’s.

Just what is that foolish son of mine doing...? The woman sighed. Even though I went and gave him the role of “the Goddess’s son...” In the end, he’s just a prototype I made before the ouroboroses... I shouldn’t have expected anything of him.

Lufas and Benetnasch were missing. They’d left, chasing after Dina, who’d disappeared somewhere. Lastly, Pollux, Virgo, and the devilfolk’s Prince Terra, along with his aide Luna, had started to search for a way for the devilfolk to be

reborn as a different species, of all things.

What a ridiculous turn of events. The devilfolk are needed as Mizgarz's "evil." Who even benefits from the villains changing sides to good? There'll be no happy ending if the villain doesn't stay a villain to the very end as they lose.

The woman honestly believed this. That was exactly why she'd sent out one of her few precious pieces—Sol, one of the ouroboroses' avatars—to the front lines with a side mission of stirring up the ouroboroses, but unfortunately, he had been chased off.

"This really isn't good... At this rate, I'll be finished." The woman heaved a soft sigh.

The problem wasn't just Lufas's forces. The hero, Sei, who was originally supposed to have been this world's protagonist and defeat Lufas to save the world, was now moving to end the game entirely. At the moment, he was making contact with those of the Seven Heroes who had already fulfilled their role—Megrez, Merak, and Mizar—stirring them into action. *Not good. This is seriously not good. The script that I've worked so hard to write will be ruined.*

The woman paused as she considered her next move. "For now, let's have the older heroes retire. Your roles are all over, so please stop trying to come back to the stage," the woman said, sounding annoyed as she placed the piece representing Sol close to Sei and his group.

She could simply upend the entire board and end the game at any time, but if possible, she wanted to win the game and achieve satisfaction. That was why she—the Goddess Alovenus—continued to roll her last four pieces, the ouroboroses, around in her palm as she thought for a while.

It surely won't be long until I have to put these pieces on the board.

* *

The three heroes would become allies. There was most likely nothing more reassuring than that. This was a ray of hope the weak boy had found only because he had tried to do what he could instead of just wallowing in his weakness. He'd managed to accomplish something that anyone could have done but no one had. However, as with all things, sudden disaster always

strikes when everything seems to be going well.

A clap resounded just as the heroes offered to help the summoned hero, as if the person had been waiting for the best time.

“Just wonderful. You tried to do what you could without giving in to your weakness, and now you’ve managed to get these heroes here to act. I’m honestly impressed. Allow me to praise you, O weak hero.”

Before Sei and the others could even react to the voice, Megrez fired off a magic spell with zero hesitation. The spell took the form of a bullet as it traveled towards the speaker before bursting, covering the walls of the house with ice. Megrez most likely chose ice magic after judging that using a bullet of water, or a similar element, would pierce through the walls of the house and end up affecting other residents. That quick decision-making and reaction speed was certainly worthy of a hero. Even after long years spent in retirement, there was still a world of difference between Megrez and Sei and his group.

However, the voice’s owner was not to be found within that ice, as it once again sounded from the other side of the room. “Good reaction time. I’m a little surprised.”

Leaning against the wall was an unfamiliar white-haired man, and unlike what he’d said, he didn’t seem surprised at all. From the color of his skin and eyes, he was most likely a devilfolk. However, if he was one of the devilfolk, he would be no match for the members of the Seven Heroes, even if he was one of the Seven Luminaries. Though they were weakened, they were still heroes, after all. They weren’t weak enough to lose against the likes of the Luminaries, though that only applied to normal members of the Seven Luminaries.

“Who are you?”

“My name is Sol. I am one of the Seven Luminaries, Sol of Heaven. Well, at this point, it’s not like the Seven Luminaries mean anything anymore.”

The Seven Luminaries. Just hearing that title caused all the members of Sei’s party to draw their weapons at once.

Out of all of them, Sargess immediately pressed the attack. The spider-person exhibited agility worthy of his kind as he ran along the wall and assaulted Sol

from behind. His weapon flashed at Sol's unprotected neck, the devilfolk not even seeming to try to dodge. Sol stuck the edge of his hand in the path of Sargess's sharp blade, stopping it in its tracks without shedding even a little blood. The spider-person was left in shocked silence.

Acting like he'd just been bit by a bug, Sol swatted Sargess down. "You've been lax in your pest control. There are spiders in this house."

He moved as if he was simply getting rid of an annoying pest, but with the absolutely crushing level disparity came a lethal blow. Sargess broke through the wall as he was sent flying, and he continued on through several more houses, disappearing past a cloud of dust.

Next, Gantz and Jean both charged in from the front, swinging their weapons and causing a shock wave with them as the epicenter. As always, Sol didn't dodge; he didn't even defend himself. Gantz's ax hit Sol's head, while Jean's sword impacted against his stomach. However, Sol didn't budge an inch. It was as if they'd struck a lump of steel; there was no damage.

"GRROOOAAAARRRR!" Friedrich howled, grabbing Gantz and Jean by the napes of their necks and flinging them backwards.

At the same time, Sol's knifehand strike passed by right in front of the pair's noses, causing a shock wave that destroyed the ceiling. If Sol's attack had hit, the two of them would have been bisected just then. Before Sol could pull back to neutral from his attack, Friedrich jumped forward—before predictive visions of his own death caused him to jump back again.

"I see. It seems your instinct's the only thing that's good about you. Looks like you instinctively realized that you'd have died if you'd just gone one more step forward."

In a rare turn of events, it seemed that Friedrich's cowardice had paid dividends. Thanks to his great play, there had yet to be any casualties. However, the most important word in that sentence was *yet*. If Sol had wanted to, he could have massacred the entire hero's party in an instant.

Mizar's golem jumped at Sol from behind, but in the end, it was just a hastily made remote-control golem. On top of that, it had been made by Blutgang's dwarves, so its level wasn't even 100. Of course it wasn't. Even if Mizar's

personality was alive and well, it was still just the core of the gigantic golem that was Blutgang. He wasn't the past Mizar, who had been called the Blacksmithing King. Naturally, he didn't possess any Alchemy skill, so outside of those golems he'd made that still existed, any new golems would have to be made by currently living dwarves. Once again, it was only a matter of course that the golems would be low level, and a single light blow from Sol would be enough to send an arm flying.

Though Sei and the others were shocked at Sol's power, Sol would be the next one to be taken by surprise. While he was distracted with Mizar, a new golem had manifested, growing straight through the ceiling before circling around behind Sol.

"Wha—?!"

"Intruder detected. Removing!"

A large, iron fist collided with Sol's back, sending him flying wholesale. Sol went straight through the wall, generating loud sounds and once again making casualties out of several more civilian houses. Luckily, no actual people were hurt, though there was great property damage. The golem was capable of calculating and avoiding something of that level during its attacks.

Jean immediately reacted to the sudden appearance of the large golem. "H- Hey, that golem is..."

Yes, he knew the golem. He'd seen its over-ten-meter-tall form before. The golem had a shining, silver, cylindrical body topped with what looked like a knight's helmet for a head, and it saw out of a monoeye. Both of its arms were unnaturally large, and they ended in literal iron fists. What would've been its leg parts were instead just a skirt, and it was somehow floating in the air. Its name was Gatekeeper. It was the steel guardian that had once guarded the Grave of the Black-Winged King for hundreds of years, right up until its destruction.

"Ha ha ha!" Mizar laughed, gloating. "Surprised? I repaired it back when I was making the Astraia with Lufas, just in case something like this happened!"

"You... I knew you had something waiting up on the roof. Never thought it would be this though..." said Megrez.

“Be honest, Mizar,” Merak said. “You only wanted to say that ‘just in case’ line, right?”

However, even though Megrez and Merak were both running their mouths, their expressions were calm, and their actions were precise and correct. They were already moving on, making their next move.

On Megrez’s signal, the lake water surrounding Svel gathered together, transforming into a huge dragon made of water. It was the nation’s guardian deity, Levia, who had even managed to defend against Aries. On top of that, Merak had already cast a heaven-art, buffing both the Gatekeeper and Levia.

Using the water that made up its body, which gave it freedom of shape, Levia sprouted tentacles and used them to grab the hero’s party as well as the Seven Heroes, placing them upon its back. Then, the guardian deity left the capital at high speeds, trying to get away as fast as possible.

Sol, who had been sent flying by the Gatekeeper, had ended up in a mountainous area outside of the capital, but he stood up as if nothing had happened and crossed his arms, waiting for the arrival of Megrez and the others. The Gatekeeper had used that attack to get Sol out of the city so as to protect the citizens, but it seemed as if Sol knew that as well.

“Watch out, Megrez. He’s really strong for a self-proclaimed Seven Luminary.”

“I know.”

The Gatekeeper was level 600. One of the Seven Luminaries, who were only level 300, should have taken great damage from all of its attacks, let alone a surprise one. However, Sol had sustained no such damage. He was the very picture of ease. Of course, there was the possibility that he was just putting up a front, but Megrez and the others’ instincts, honed through the experience of many battles, told them that this wasn’t the case. Sol wasn’t bluffing. He had seriously not been affected.

“Hmm, yes... The Seven Heroes, huh? Looks like I’ll be able to have more fun than I thought.”

Even in front of this difference in numbers, Sol’s fearless demeanor didn’t change. There were the three members of the Seven Heroes, the eight

members of the hero's party, the Gatekeeper, and Levia. In terms of pure numbers, it would be thirteen versus one, but in what world would a hornet be scared of a mere thirteen honeybees? To Sol, this was still the sort of fight where it would only be natural to win. It was something that he *might* be able to enjoy, if he held back.

Levia was the strongest of the bunch, but even then, the guardian deity had only been able to somehow push back Aries thanks to the elemental type matchup, and Aries was among the weakest of the Twelve Heavenly Stars. In this fight, with a new inherent relationship between these forces, it would make sense to say that it was impossible to defeat Sol.

“Heavy Rain!”

Megrez finished his spell in an instant, filling the sky with a gigantic magic circle. From the magic circle came a multitude of water bullets so numerous that it was impossible to dodge. As its name implied, Heavy Rain rained down so many water bullets that it was no longer a shower of bullets and more like a solid wall of water.

Megrez, who had grasped the level and speed difference of his enemy by now, realized that normal attacks that only hit one target would not get the job done here, and so he'd decided on an area attack that wouldn't leave any room to escape. Of course, such an attack would also sweep up his allies as well, but all the attacks coming towards them were blocked by Levia, who used its body as a shield. Water-aligned attacks held no meaning to Levia, whose body was made of water. If it were real water, in fact, it would actually have healed it.

“Hnngh...”

While defending against the endlessly falling bullets of water with his arms, Sol groaned slightly. Seeing that opening, the Gatekeeper struck out with its arm, and the giant fist went flying while spinning towards Sol. On top of that, Levia transformed its body, launching a blade of water like a whip towards Sol at the same speed as the fist. The blade of water blocked the raining water bullets as it went, supporting the iron fist. Then, the fist impacted against Sol at the same time the blade of water slashed at his arm.

“That *was* a good attack, but...”

Sol's arm wasn't wounded. There was a slight bruise, but none of his blood had been spilled. However, Megrez and the other two didn't spend any time wavering over every little thing. Instead, they swiftly moved on to the next attack.

Merak concentrated as the rocks around him floated into the air and launched towards Sol all at once. It was the Psychokinesis skill of the Esper class, one of the few classes able to turn the MND stat, which was normally used for support and defense, into an attack stat.

The heaven-winged weren't able to use magic. If a heaven-winged were to mix frontline and backline classes into a balanced build, like Lufas, they'd be able to shine as a support-capable frontliner. However, if they were to instead specialize in backline classes, like Merak, their options would, unfortunately, be very limited. Speaking in extremes, elves were far more powerful backliners, as they were a species able to use both magic and heaven-arts. And of course they were. It was obvious which one was more valuable between a backliner who could use both and a backliner who could only use heaven-arts.

However, there *were* classes that the heaven-winged, with their high MND stat, could use to attack with, and one of those was the Esper class. Unlike other classes, the Esper class relied almost entirely on MND for their attack skills. In other words, it offered one of the precious few ways for a support-focused build to attack, and there were many heaven-winged who took this class.

Rocks continued to fly at Sol one after the other, but he simply batted them away like annoying pests. However, such action manifested an opening, and Megrez took advantage of it, unleashing a bullet of water. Levia also spawned countless whips from its body to attack Sol.

The Gatekeeper used Levia as a shield to move under the fierce rain of bullets, taking key opportunities to land attacks on Sol with its fists. Their teamwork was a sight to behold, each one covering for the other's openings in a dazzling display that showed they were hardened veterans before they were heroes.

However, Sol's expression hadn't changed throughout this whole sequence.

Eventually, he heaved a small sigh. “This is more fun than I expected... But I hadn’t expected much. In the end, though, I guess this is all I’m gonna get.”

With that, he charged into the rain of water bullets that still continued. There was no room for him to dodge, so that left only one option: *don’t dodge*. Heedless of the direct hits he was taking, Sol ran straight towards the Seven Heroes. He passed by the Gatekeeper, landing on Levia with ease.

In response, Levia sprouted thorns from its head to try to shake off the intruder, but Sol simply avoided those with light steps, invalidating all of Levia’s efforts. Merak stepped in between Megrez and Sol, deploying a defensive shield of wind as he did so. However, Sol didn’t seem fazed at all. He simply rammed a foot down on the shield from above, dispersing the shield that had been conjured by one of the Seven Heroes in a single hit. Though, in this situation, Merak should probably have been lauded for being able to block a single strike even through the level difference.

“Wha—...?!”

Merak froze in shock, but only for a moment. In terms of actual time, it wasn’t even a second; he was frozen for less than a tenth of that. It happened in a true instant. Merak probably would have reformed the shield, given another moment. However, that small opening was fatal.

Before Merak could regroup, Sol threw out a second attack, which buried itself in Merak’s arm. The nasty sound of bones breaking resounded, and Merak fell from on top of Levia. Megrez instantly canceled the Heavy Rain spell without even confirming Merak’s state. He was afraid of hitting Merak with the spell at all. However, that was also a fatal mistake.

Sol closed the distance between them and struck with his fist. Just in time, a wall of water sprouted out of Levia between the two, preventing a direct hit. Though Megrez wasn’t hit directly, Sol still managed to break a rib, filling Megrez’s mouth with fresh blood.

“S-Stop!”

Sei swung Kouen, the sword given to him by Lufas, at Sol. Sadly, however, he was far too powerless. His slash was stopped with just a single fingertip, and he was tossed aside without even a return attack.

Even though they'd felt full of hope at the fact that the remaining Seven Heroes would fight with them just a little while earlier, there was now nothing but despair. No matter how solidly they came together or how strong their convictions were, that wouldn't do anything against overwhelming power. That was just how Mizgarz was—it was the rule of this warped world utterly dominated by strength.

Sol ran with the intention of finishing off Megrez, and he was catching up.

But that was putting the cart before the horse... What happened next was all his own fault. In order to test his strength, he had fought enemies he didn't have to fight and taken unnecessary detours, and now, all that had come back to bite him. Basically, he got what he deserved. To the heroes, however, it was a happy coincidence, and it meant that fate had not yet abandoned them.

Suddenly, Sol was punched from the side and was sent flying. It was unlike when he'd been sent flying by the Gatekeeper before. This one hit squashed his face, and the blood spurting from him formed a parabola as he flew. Even after making contact with the ground, Sol didn't slow down. In fact, he continued ever onwards, even while dragging out a deep furrow in the ground, basically burying himself. Eventually, he ran out of momentum after several kilometers, and he pulled his face out of the dirt, wondering what had just happened.

"Yo, I've been looking fer ya... You white-haired bastard," said the rough voice of a man.

The owner of said voice stood in front of Sol imposingly, his crimson hair waving in the wind as he looked down on the devilfolk. His enraged look truly brought forth the image of a demon. Warped in anger, his exposed fangs looked incredibly daunting. Thick veins were raised out of his log-like arms, and the sheer wrath emanating from him made the air around him waver.

"The Lion King, I see."

Even after having recognized his enemy, Sol still laughed fearlessly.

To him, it was nothing but a disgrace. It didn't matter that he had been holding back, and it didn't matter that he had still been wounded from his fight with the Dragon King. He could feel his guts boiling over the unforgivable fact that he had been bested by a devilfolk. His pride was injured.

I am the strongest. I know it. So, what is this? How did this happen? I not only lost to Lufas, but I even lost against the likes of Aries, and now I failed to measure up to some random devilfolk from who knows where.

Being strong was his pride, as well as his reason for being, which was why he couldn't let things lie like this. Using his reliable sense of smell to track the slightest trace of scent, he sought out to once again stand in front of Sol.

"Stand up. You're not done yet, are you?" provoked Leon.

"Of course not," Sol responded, standing up with a calm and easy expression.

The next moment, however, that expression clouded. As soon as he stood up, Sol's legs shook, threatening to pitch him over. That one blow just now had gone to his legs.

"OOOOOAGGHHH!!!"

Leon threw out his stout arm, punching Sol away, arm and all, as he reacted and tried to block. Sol's arm creaked, once again reminding him of just how dangerous it was to challenge Leon's ridiculous power head-on.

In the last fight, Sol had never once taken a direct hit. He'd managed to dodge or defend against every attack. *I should have confirmed that we were even in terms of pure strength last time, but... I see now. Even if we're even in that regard, there is a difference in toughness. No, I'm going to have to reconsider being even in pure strength. His strength is clearly different from before.*

It was likely that Leon had underestimated Sol before and had been unconsciously holding back, which meant that the punch Sol had felt just now was the Lion King's true strength. Taking such a full-force punch to the head was very damaging. Thanks to that, Sol's legs didn't move the way he wanted them to.

However, Sol had no intention of condemning Leon's ambush. There was no fair or unfair in battle; there was only kill or be killed. Those who whined and

prattled on about fairness and foul play were those who did not understand battle. *This damage is my own fault for letting my guard down on the battlefield. This is a price I must pay.* That was Sol's honest impression.

During his travel after being sent flying, Sol activated heaven-arts at high speed in order to buff himself. Meanwhile, Leon continued his surge of attacks, each blow forcefully shaving away at Sol's vitality through his guard.

These fierce attacks... It's as if the arms that I'm using to guard with are themselves being shaved away... No, wait. They actually are. Every blow Sol suffered had his bones creaking and his skin being gouged.

With Leon's power, there wasn't too much difference between a guarded and an unguarded hit. As long as he made contact, it would hurt. If Leon hit his opponent's arms, their arms would be damaged, robbing them of their attacking ability. If he hit their legs, their legs would be crushed, robbing them of their mobility. Among all the Twelve Heavenly Stars, he was the only one without a unique skill; he had no special abilities. Yet, even without any of that, he was still called the strongest. As for why that was, well, he was just that powerful.

Not yet... Not yet... Just a little more. While trying to withstand the fierce attacks from the monstrous beast that was Leon, Sol continued to buff himself, waiting for his moment to return the pain. *I just need to be patient until I recover from that initial blow, until my legs work again.*

In a fight of this level, where a single second could seem like a minute, the time needed for this seemed impossibly far away. It was a harsh undertaking that seemed like it would go on forever. However, Sol was enjoying his disadvantaged state. He was finding joy in having a hard time. He wasn't a pervert who liked pain; he was just starved for a fight that was actually difficult. Actually, he might still have been a pervert, at least somewhat—a pervert by the name of “battle junkie.”

Three more seconds...

Two seconds...

One second...

A single second is a unit of time that would normally be over quickly. However, that second was enough time for Leon to beat most enemies into an unrecognizable pulp in this case. Even while being exposed to these blows from Leon, Sol never lost his cool as he concentrated on his defense.

Zero!

As soon as Sol recovered and his legs were able to move properly again, he weaved through Leon's fists. Like that, he continued on to slam his enforced fist into Leon's cheek, sending him backwards as well. Though Leon was surprised for an instant, he quickly gathered his strength, however, and planted his feet, stopping himself after a mere five meters. Sol quickly caught up and threw a kick into Leon's face, but Leon, even while taken aback, stuck up his arm, repelling Sol.

Sol spun once in the air, killing most of his momentum. As soon as he landed, he threw out a slew of magic spells. They traded offense and defense. This time, it was Sol's turn to unleash a raging tide of blows, while Leon found himself cornered. However, Leon undid his guard and charged for some reason, taking the full brunt of Sol's magic all the while.

Sol was shocked.

"Your magic's just too soft!"

Leon closed the distance quickly, throwing out a brute-force uppercut. Sol took the blow to his jaw and was thrown, spinning several times before crashing to the ground headfirst.

Leon leapt at Sol, stomping at the devilfolk in an attempt to pile on the damage while he could. Sol managed to avoid the attack by a hair's breadth, as he rolled out of the way just in time, but Leon's stomp gouged out the ground, creating a giant crater.

"Just running around all over the place like a pest..." said Leon. "Fine. Then I'll just have to attack you with something you won't be able to run from. I wasn't going all out before... So this time, I won't hold back."

Leon's hair swayed and his muscles expanded.

Badump. As soon as Sol thought he heard the sound of a quickening

heartbeat resounding in the air, Leon changed. He abandoned his human form, changing into the monstrous Lion King right before Sol's eyes.

Seeing his imposing, monstrous form, Sei and the others swallowed as they stood on top of Levia, while Friedrich trembled as he squatted down on the spot.

"Th-There he is..." Sei muttered nervously.

"He was terrifying as an enemy, but seeing him here as an ally, he's so reliable..." Gantz said, sounding sure of victory even while sweating buckets. "Though, I bet to him, instead of being allies or enemies, we're not even worthy of his attention."

They were simply onlookers during the fight between Leon and Aries, but even then, they felt Leon's strength tingling their skin through the air. In the first place, Leon's strength was proven by the fact that he had taken on several members of the Twelve Heavenly Stars on his own. Even though it was just a coincidence, he could be considered an ally at the moment, though it was more like he was simply the enemy of their enemy. They just couldn't picture Leon losing. However, Megrez and his group still seemed grim, unlike the hero's party, who saw victory on the horizon.

While they were all watching on, the edges of Sol's mouth curved upwards in mirth. In an instant, he surged with an overwhelming wave of divine power. It was a phenomenon that Megrez and his group knew well—it was the manifestation of their past mistake.

"Oh no... At this rate, the Lion King will lose."

Hearing those despairing words from Megrez, Sei's expression clearly spoke of his disbelief. "Huh?!"

He'd seen Leon's strength with his own eyes. Though Leon had lost in the end, he was powerful enough to take on several members of the Twelve Heavenly Stars all at once. Sei just couldn't believe that the Lion King would lose.

"That man named Sol is borrowing the power of the Goddess. Right now, he's like we were two hundred years ago when we fought Lufas."

Leon was the strongest monster. There was no doubt about that. However,

he was simply the peak of the ranking within the boundaries defined by the Goddess. He hadn't gone past that peak, like Lufas or Benetnasch. In the first place, he wasn't even the real pinnacle of strength. There were still the ouroboroses above him, so in actuality, he was far from being the strongest. Therefore, if the Goddess were to grant Sol power that was outside of her predetermined order, it would be as if Leon had never stood a chance.

Leon was strong, without the need for unique skills. He was able to overwhelm others with his pure strength. However, taking that the other way, it also meant that he had no card to play in order to win against those stronger than him—his brand of strength only allowed him to win against those weaker than him.

* *

“Oh yeah, I just remembered something.”

On the deck of the *Argo*, Aries suddenly spoke up as they were on the way to Svel.

Just before, Pollux had said that the Goddess might've been planning to make Sei take the next hero role, which had caused Aries to recall something.

“This was something Dina told me before...”

With that preface, Aries spoke of what Dina had told him when they had been fighting Leon. Rather than Dina seeming to have read the Goddess's mind back then, it was more like she had been speaking from the point of view of the Goddess herself. Now, Aries understood why that had been. She was the Goddess's avatar, so her thought process was as close to the Goddess's as could be. Dina and the Goddess fundamentally shared the same thought patterns.

Of course, there might have been some differences resulting from Dina's environment as she grew up as well as her relationships. In fact, unbeknownst to Aries and the others, that was exactly the case, but even then, there was a fundamental similarity. Dina was fully aware of that, which was why she was able to read the Goddess's thoughts as if they were her own. *If it were me, I would do this next. If it were me, I'd go like that.* Those thoughts directly translated into the Goddess's actions. That was exactly why she was able to foil the Goddess at every turn.

Before, Dina had said this to Aries; “That man isn’t worthy of winning. There are others more worthy, those who don’t shame the name of the hero, brave ones who can be the protagonist of a story... So, speaking in extremes, she won’t mind if Leon loses.”

When Dina had spoken, she’d said that Leon was the type of man the Goddess hated most.

It seemed that the Goddess hated Leon, or rather, she hated foolish, conceited men who thought it was a matter of course to be blessed. This meant, of course, that her preference was the exact opposite. She liked those who didn’t expect to be blessed, those who would try to walk on their own two feet even though they were weak. That was surely the Goddess’s preference, which was probably why Dina had taken the side of the weak Aries.

After hearing that, Virgo brought her hand to her mouth and spoke. “That... Doesn’t that mean Sei...?!”

“Yeah, I think so too. If what Dina said is right, then Sei is exactly the type of person that the Goddess likes.”

* *

“Meaning, the Goddess’s next target is that boy, Sei?”

Benet, Dina, and I were currently at some random diner, having a light meal as we discussed what the Goddess would do next. We’d chased Dina all the way to Earth, and now, we’d achieved our goal and even managed to buy souvenirs from this world while we were at it. At our feet were bags containing a variety of food, daily necessities, and games we’d bought at various stores. By the way, we were currently eating in a certain family restaurant that served Italian food with better quality than what their cheap prices would suggest. I myself frequented this chain quite a... Well, no. It had been my avatar doing the frequenting. I myself had yet to eat here.

It’s just puzzling... I knew my memories as a Japanese person were just something implanted into me and not something I experienced myself, and my memories that had been locked in sealed space had been returned to me. But even then, I couldn’t help but be a little confused. In the end, even though he was my avatar, it wasn’t me myself. At this point, I was now a completely

different person, but we were still similar at our core. This most likely meant that our tastes were the same, and we tended to go to the same stores.

“Yes. If my thinking is correct, that is. As you know, I am already independent from the Goddess, but even then, we are the same at our roots. In other words, my tastes are the Goddess’s tastes, and anything the Goddess hates, I still physically cannot stand. If I were to give an example of that, I suppose you could take Leon and Aries as one. Both the Goddess and I like Aries, but we hate Leon.”

I hesitated before admitting, “Personally, I think that Leon’s selfishness is rather cute, though.”

“Be honest, Miss Lufas. You only think of Leon as a giant cat, don’t you...?”

Apparently, my taste in animals didn’t really match well with the Goddess. *Like, wouldn’t cat lovers get it? Somehow, the more selfish and freewheeling a cat is, the cuter they seem to be. Of course cats are pets, but the cats don’t know that, so a lot of them act as if they’re the master and number one in the relationship.* But that was also cute. To me, Leon was just like those cats. I’ll say this now: the reason why I killed the Dragon King but captured Leon was because I liked cats. *Lions are often called scary, but if you look closely at their faces, they’re pretty cute.*

As an aside, my avatar in Japan also kept a cat. He was named Fahl, and he was a truly cute cat that was just as selfish and willful as you’d expect.

“Well, anyway,” said Dina, “there’s no doubt that Sei is the type of person the Goddess looks for in a hero, and she’s definitely favoring him in some fashion. Though at this point, our paths have diverged quite a bit.”

“What do you mean by that?”

“Well, at first, I was going to try and make him lose the will to fight, so he would retire from the field. That was why I rigged it so that you and Orm would encounter each other and fight in front of him. But unfortunately, that didn’t work.”

Dina was probably referring to when I had first fought the Devil King. True. Now that I thought about it, the whole thing had been admirably orchestrated

by Dina. To the Devil King, that fight had been an opportunity to confirm my revival and to check my strength at that time. To Dina, it had been a chance to break the hero, who could be trouble in the future. These two had been in cahoots from the beginning, and now that I knew about it, the only thing I could think was, *Man, I got got.*

“However, he didn’t break. In fact, using your conversation at the time, he started to search for the truth, and now, he’s choosing to cooperate with you. It was a happy coincidence for me, but for the Goddess, it was an unbelievable mistake.”

While we were talking, a doria was put in front of Benet. She scooped up the food with a spoon, bringing it in front of her eyes so she could observe it well before she spoke up.

“So both of you were wrong in the end. Even though you two have the same roots, you really didn’t have to take over her most useless parts too.”

“I wish you wouldn’t point that out... I’m frustrated at my own carelessness too. This is all the Goddess’s fault.”

Apparently, Dina was rather troubled about her—or rather, her originator’s—careless aspects. *Maybe the Goddess unexpectedly cares too?* I thought about it for a moment. *It seems like she would.* From what I’d felt back when she had possessed Pollux, the Goddess was pretty brittle mentally.

3

Leaving the Goddess’s clumsiness aside, Dina continued her explanation. The subject was just how much the summoned hero Sei was ignoring the scenario. To be honest, I had never thought he’d stray so far from the Goddess’s script either.

“Normally, he would have bemoaned his weakness and sought power long ago. Then, he would have taken the Goddess’s adjustment, and *BAM!*, he’s level 1000. But instead, he simply continued trying to find things he could do, even if he was weak, and made his way just like that. There’s never been a hero like

that, not in all this time. There was never a child who simply continued to try to find a path even though they knew full well they were weak.”

“But those types of people are who you like best, right?”

“Yes, well...”

As we talked, a waiter came out of the kitchen in the back, carrying a tray with pudding and tiramisu on it, and walked towards us. There were a total of three sets of plates, and they were placed in front of us. Dina and I knew what these dishes were, but this was probably unknown territory for Benet. Pudding and tiramisu didn’t exist on the other side.

After spending some time looking curiously at the pudding, Benet eventually scooped some up with her spoon and ate it. When she did, she stiffened up for just a moment before continuing to eat like nothing had happened.

“Did it suit your tastes?”

“It wasn’t bad.”

Benet was curt with her impression of it, but her spoon never stopped moving. It seemed that she liked it. I myself scooped up some tiramisu into my mouth, feeling satisfied after tasting the sweetness.

I knew this already, but there really is a world of difference in food culture between here and over there. If I wanted to eat the same thing over in Mizgarz... Well, tiramisu doesn’t exist over there, of course, but imagine if I had someone make it... Yeah, it would probably cost somewhere in the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of yen over there. Not even nobles or royalty ate stuff like this. And I’m saying this as someone who ruled in the past. There’s no doubt about it. But here, these desserts only cost four hundred yen. They even got as cheap as a hundred yen in convenience stores. I suppose the only sad thing is that I would have liked to have tried this with no prior knowledge of it.

“Still, though, it’s ironic.” Benet, who had at some point downed all of her tiramisu, seemed to sneer as she spoke.

Dina and I both turned to look at her. “What is?”

“Basically, the Goddess likes people who walk on their own two feet.

However, those kinds of people would never move according to some third-rate script. Of course, the stronger the sense of independence a person has, the more they'll reject the Goddess's intervention and view it as unnecessary. As a result, the ones who obey her script will always be those idiots who think it's only natural to be blessed, the kind she hates." Benet paused for a moment. "The only ones who participate in a puppet show are puppets."

Benet's harsh words caused Dina to cover her face as she gave a small laugh. Her expression made it seem like she was pitying someone who wasn't present. However, Dina quickly raised her head again, having returned to her usual smile. That was when more servers came from the kitchen. Apparently Benet had called them.

"I want two more each of the pudding and tiramisu from before. Oh, and a gelato too."

"Understood."

And you only said, "It wasn't bad," Benet... If it was delicious, you can just come out and say it. You're so coy about the strangest things.

"At the moment, the Goddess has almost no pieces left. If you leave out the ouroboroses, which are her last resort, then it's really just Sol, who can barely stand up to you two."

"Sol?"

"The last member of the Seven Luminaries. He's the avatar of the Sun element ouroboros, and unlike me, he's completely on the Goddess's side. Depending on how he moves, Sei might end up strongly wishing for power, and that'll cause him to be brainwashed by the Goddess."

I see. So the Goddess's plan would be to completely turn that kid Sei into the hero and force him to clash with me, huh? Still, he alone wouldn't be a match for me as I was now, but if he were to unite humanity under the name of the hero, then things would turn troublesome. Public opinion was a much more troublesome thing than simple violence. If the people of the world were to wish for my downfall, then Megrez and the others might be forced to fight me. There was nothing more dangerous than a group of people who were convinced they were in the right thanks to mass psychology.

“That’s certainly troublesome...” I said, trailing off. “But more importantly, will you be all right?”

“Probably not. Most likely, the day will soon come when I am moved as one of the Goddess’s pieces. As long as I am her avatar, this is something that’s unavoidable. There’s nothing I can do about it with my own will.” Dina spoke calmly as her eyes met with mine.

Her eyes said that she was already prepared for the end that was probably coming to her. Yes, she knew exactly what would happen to her in the end.

“So, Miss Lufas, please don’t hesitate when the time comes.”

After a moment of silence, I said, “Yeah, you’re right.”

Dina’s words had me also steeling my resolve. Yes, my course of action was already decided. If I wanted to take down the Goddess, then having to face Dina as an enemy was unavoidable, no matter what path we took. The Goddess could control Dina as a pawn and take her hostage. There was no way she wouldn’t use such an easy-to-realize and effective move. That was why I, too, had to resolve myself.

After that, we continued discussing several things before leaving the diner. All that was left was to go to a place with no witnesses so we could go back to the other world. When we returned, it would most likely ring in the start to the final battle.

It seemed that there was still an enemy named Sol, but I wasn’t worried about that. After all, I still had the Twelve Stars waiting for me on the other side. They would surely protect everything while I was gone. However, there was one place I wanted to stop by before all that.

“Dina, can we cross over time for just a little? I’d like to make a detour...”

* *

I paused. “What was that just now? A bug? Get it together, devs.”

I was disappointed. After the huge event the other day, I was about to log in again when the Goddess Alovenus appeared, and I got really excited for the start of a new event. I mean, who wouldn’t? After all, she even said, “I shall

grant you a new role.” But then, the screen just flashed, and nothing happened. *I’m this close to asking for my excitement back. Still... Hmm...*

Now that I thought about it, I didn’t really feel like logging in today. Rather, I was starting to wonder why I was so into this game in the first place. I’d spent so much game time and money in *Exgate Online* because I was so entranced by it, but with a second to think about it, I started to realize that it honestly wasn’t that good a game. I mean, the game balance was totally nonexistent. My friends had also said this game was trash. Back then, I’d gotten all offended and argued back, but now, I kind of felt like they were right.

Well, I guess MMOs are just like that. It happened a lot where, while people were addicted, they didn’t notice, but the second they got some distance from the game, they cooled on it completely.

Let’s see... All I’ve been doing these days is playing way too many games, so let’s do something different today. For now, it might be nice to go walk around the nearby stores and go window-shopping to see if there’re any good games. Wait, but then I’m still just looking for more games.

While feeling a bit fed up with myself, I descended the stairs and opened the door to my house. When I did, my pet cat, Fahl, jumped out of the little crack in the door, running outside.

“Ah, hey!”

I hurried out of the house to chase after Fahl, but unexpectedly, I caught up with him right away. He was rubbing his head up against a blonde bombshell who had probably just happened to be passing by. *Wait, this is impossible. What the hell? How is she so beautiful? Is this CG?* Her golden hair seemed to shine and sparkle in the sunlight, the ends of her hair somehow appearing to change into a scarlet hue. She kind of possibly looked like the character I’d made in *Exgate Online*.

She gently picked up Fahl and walked up to me. “Is this cat th— I mean, yours?”

“Ah, yes. Th-That’s right.”

“I see.”

The beauty handed the cat back to me and continued on her way.



It was hard to describe what I felt back then. I felt a strange sensation that was hard to give an analogy to. Like, it felt kind of like someone you knew was walking next to you... Or like I had known her from before I was even born... It was that kind of feeling. Fahl seemed weirdly restless as well. He kept looking back and forth between the beauty and me, seeming confused.

“Um!”

“Yes?” she asked.

“H-Have we met somewhere...?”

“Ha ha, what? Are you trying to hit on me?”

“Ah, no, that’s not it...”

What was it? *How should I put it?* Even I myself had no idea. I couldn’t explain why I had called back out to that woman.

She turned back around for me, just once. “This is the first time we met, and it will be the last. I’m only here because there was someplace I wanted to visit, so I’ll be leaving soon.” She paused. “We will probably not cross paths again,” she said, and this time, she kept walking away.

Never meet again...? Was what I said that creepy? I thought about it for a moment. *Yeah, I’d bet it was. Of course she’d hate it if some random guy came out of a house she was just passing by and tried the “have we met?” line.*

Satisfied by that line of reasoning, I went to return Fahl inside the house, and in that instant, I saw a black feather falling at the edge of my vision. I reflexively grabbed it, but there was no bird nearby. At the same time, that beauty was nowhere to be seen. It was as if I’d just imagined her.

After a pause, I asked aloud, “Was I dreaming or something?”

Feeling like I’d just been duped by a tanuki, I let the black feather float off in the wind.

“Was that really all right?”

“Yeah...” I said. “Now then, let’s go back to Mizgarz.”

Finally, I concluded my first and last “chance” meeting with “myself.” It was

time to return to my world. From here on out, I would have no idea what kind of life he would lead.

He was no longer my avatar. He was now his own independent human.

* *

“OOOOOOOOAAARRRGGGHHH!!!”

At the same time that roar emerged from Leon’s mouth, a blast of pressurized mana was also unleashed. It changed the face of the planet as it traveled, and it was nearly impossible to avoid unless the person had absolute evasion skills. After all, its range was insane. The roar unleashed by the giant lion expanded as it traveled along its line of fire, basically becoming an inescapable wall as it assaulted Leon’s enemies. The area of effect stretched out to several kilometers wide in an instant, wide enough to not allow any attempts to avoid it.

Well, it would be possible if the person was able to move farther than its width in but a moment, but Sol wasn’t capable of that. He simply crossed his arms and attempted to withstand the attack as the ground around him started to disappear like it was being shaved off the face of the planet. In fact, the kilometer-tall mountain behind him disappeared entirely in the attack. Its power was obvious. However, even if it was able to destroy a mountain, it couldn’t destroy a single strong being. That was just the kind of world this was.

While enjoying the feeling of his arms being covered in burns, Sol grinned widely.

“It does look like a strong attack at first glance. No, it really is strong... But there’s no control behind it. It’s flashy, but the power behind it is too spread out. You won’t be able to beat me with that. It’s like you don’t understand how to fight another strong person.”

“Huh?!”

“I’ll teach you. What you need in a fight between two strong fighters is...”

Sol leapt from where he was to in front of Leon. That simple jump wasn’t to be underestimated. At Sol’s speed, his jump was basically instantaneous movement. By the time you were to register that he’d moved, he would already be where he wanted to be.

“Concentration of power!”

Sol slammed his fist into the tip of Leon’s nose. In concert with that blow was a white flash, after which Leon was sent flying. Sol had fired a spell at the same time as his punch, stacking damage. The attack seemed rather plain, but it dealt more damage than Leon’s roar had earlier.

“Even if it just looks like a simple punch, you can put out a lot of damage by concentrating your power like this. Did Lufas Maphaahl never teach you that?”

Large AoE attacks tended to look strong at first glance. However, their strength was actually dispersed throughout their area of effect, so in fact, they were weaker than normal. Attacks like this were useful for multitudes of enemies, but when facing only one, there was basically no merit to them. At best, using an AoE attack would make it harder to dodge, but there were other ways to ensure that, such as attacking faster than the opponent could dodge.

However, Leon’s life was painted over with responding to confrontation. He was always the challenged, never the challenger. He was forever the ruler, one who was set upon by multitudes. While he was able to mow down the annoying masses, he’d never polished his skills in taking down a single strong enemy, and that would probably never change.

“Hah! So you’re just putting in a touching amount of work like a small fry! If you start off strong, then you don’t need shit like that!”

Leon’s arm slammed down at Sol like he was swatting a mosquito. Sol was easily embedded into the ground as if it were something soft, like tofu, but he just quickly emerged from the ground behind Leon.

Sei, who was watching the fight, retorted to himself, saying, “It’s not a pool, you know...” In a fight between a couple of level 1000 monsters, solid ground could no longer be counted on to be as such, and sure footing would be nowhere to be found.

Before Leon could turn around, Sol kicked him away and sent magic after his flying form. This fight might seem even at first glance, but the balance was steadily crumbling.

From birth, he had never even so much as thought he'd lose. He'd never even had a hard fight; his life was nothing but victory. To Leon, every other living being was a weakling, and while looking at all of them use their skills and whatnot, his only thought was, *I'll never use that. Those're just self-defense techniques for the weak to struggle and try to close the gap in power... Skills aren't worth bothering with.*

People use swords. They don't have sharp fangs or claws, after all; they need swords as a standin to be able to cut apart their enemies. It's not something I need. People wear armor. After all, they need such fakes in order to take attacks for them, since their bodies are so frail. I don't need anything like that. To Leon, weapons were just standins. He only saw the weapons and armor forged from the fangs and bones of monsters as junk made out of inferior, weak species to be used by an even more inferior, weaker species.

Skills are the same. Skills that raise strength, skills that inflate power, skills that increase damage... Are they stupid? All of those are just childish tricks that won't measure up to even one of my attacks.

That was why, to Leon, Lufas was a hard-to-understand being. She was a member of humanity, which was weak. She had no fangs or claws. She should have been but a small blip in existence. Even so, her power easily surpassed his. He had suffered a humiliating loss, and then he was captured. Leon couldn't even count how many times he'd tried to defy her, but each time he was easily dealt with, and she never bothered to deal the finishing blow.

She had said to him, "Is there a pet owner who would seriously get mad at the love bites their cat gives them?"

He thought on that for some time. *She's fucking with me.*

Leon was so frustrated that he never stopped trying. And every time, he lost. After every loss, she would say, "Leon, you're certainly strong. However, all you're doing is swinging wildly. It's a waste of your natural talents. You should learn to be more skillful."

Leon remembered letting his stubbornness get to him and yelling back, “Don’t fuck with me!”

I’m strong. I’m powerful. I don’t need those tricks for the weak!

As Leon raged like that, Lufas warned, “Tricks for the weak, huh? But you see, Leon, if We were to ever meet an enemy that was stronger than us, between you and a weakling with what you call tricks... Take Aries, for example. If We were to pick between him and you, We would pick him every time. We would probably never bring you with us.”

That was a true humiliation. Leon was indirectly told that he was worse than Aries. He was found wanting compared to the weakest monster, of all things.

“You probably won’t understand just from our saying it. Come. We have now lowered our level to 1000 so that you stand a chance. In terms of stats, yours should be higher. However, let us make a prediction... You will still be unable to win.”

She’s looking down on me, Leon thought. So he rose up to Lufas’s provocation, letting his anger take over and guide him to strike. Even now, he clearly remembered where he tried to hit her. After that, the part where his fist was lightly batted downwards and he got his jaw rung was a little fuzzy, but Leon still remembered. However, he had no memory of what happened after that. By the time he’d realized, he was face up to the sky. Judging from the pain he felt all over his body, he had surely been beaten soundly.

He was made to realize the power of those petty tricks of the weak.

* *
* *

What Megrez and the other heroes said had come true.

From Sei and his party’s point of view, the fight between Leon and Sol was like a whole different world. The scale of it was just so different that it was hard to tell who would win. All they could see were the two fighters moving around at ridiculous speeds. However, even they could somehow sense the tides starting to shift and lean in one direction. The tides were shifting, but it wasn’t something so gradual and easy as the words make it seem.

The fight was already a done deal... Leon was only still fighting because his

vitality was extremely high. He had no chance of winning. Sol's punch had Leon's giant body floating in the air for a moment before he got above Leon to kick him back down.

Leon immediately got back up and shot a destructive blast of light from his mouth, but it was easily dodged. The next moment, Sol had grabbed him by the tail and thrown him.

"Lord Megrez, we can't let this go on! We should offer some sort of support..." Gantz suggested, seeing how the match was going.

"Impossible," Megrez said, shooting down the idea. "If you were to try to provide support fire in a fight that fast, you'd be more likely to hit Leon. In fact, if you were to try to help that ball of pride, he might start attacking us instead."

Leon was by no means an ally. He was simply the enemy of an enemy. If they were to rush to help him, he might decide to erase them first. Even if they wanted to intervene, they couldn't.

While they were talking, the fight continued on. Finally, Leon had fallen to the ground.

"It's the end, Lion King. It was pretty fun."

Sol accelerated, intending to deal the finishing blow. His aim was Leon's neck. No matter how much vitality the Lion King had, he wouldn't survive without his head. Sol concentrated all his mana into his hand and swung it down in a knifehand strike. However, a small shadow fell from the sky to intervene, catching Sol's strike between both hands. Rainbow-colored hair swayed in the wind, and beautiful, effeminate looks showed strong resolve as Aries looked straight at Sol.

"You're...Aries of the Twelve Heavenly Stars?!"

Sol was surprised by the sudden entrance, and Aries took advantage of that to get in a kick wreathed in flame.

"Yaaarrgghh!"

Sol quickly flipped in midair and regained his footing, but then Aries unleashed his magic. The flames he shot from his hands changed direction in

midair, flanking around Sol's sides. Then, Aries shot out more flame, using the impulse from that to accelerate and land a kick.

Sol managed to react in time and put up a guard, but Aries's attack was not a light one. The impact sent Sol into a rapid descent, and he crashed into the ground. But even then, he didn't stop. Sol was pushed farther and farther while gouging out the earth. He crashed into a mountain and effectively dug a hole into it, and came out the other side, still flying. However, Sol was the avatar of an ouroboros. That alone wouldn't sink him.

With just his leg muscles, Sol forced himself to stop, just in time to intercept Aries, who came charging in from the front. But right then, Sol felt a chill in his spine, so he jumped away. As soon as he did so, a gigantic goat demon wielding a scythe popped up out of the ground, surprising Sol.

"So he dodged..." said Aigokeros. "He's got good instincts."

"Aigokeros?!"

"Not just him," Karkinos said.

Sol wasn't safe where he dodged to either. As he spoke, Karkinos slammed a kick into Sol's cheek, bouncing him away. As Sol flew, he was caught by a flexible weapon made to resemble a scorpion's tail. Scorpius used her full might to slam Sol into the ground, where Aquarius was waiting in her jar.

"Absolute Zero!"

A chill measuring at absolute zero, which could freeze any and all things, blasted towards Sol, who should probably be praised for not dying right then and there. Though he forced his way out of the prison of cold and jumped away, he was still not safe. As if he'd been waiting for Sol to do just that, Aries punched Sol away. The one who chased after Sol was the argonautai helmsman, Aviol the Keel, though he was just bones, so it was a wonder why he was a heroic spirit. He opened his mouth and gathered as much mana as he could in it. Then, he unleashed it.

The mana, compacted down to its limits, traveled in a line of destructive light, swallowing Sol. The torrent of destruction never stopped, simply continuing onwards while carving a furrow in the land until it went straight into the void,

coincidentally impacting the moon and creating a giant mushroom cloud. Even then, Aviol didn't stop. He fired, fired, fired, and fired some more. Concentrated mana continued to leap out of Aviol's mouth, raising a smoke cloud that reached up to the heavens.

However, Sol was still alive and kicking. His arms were crossed together, his entire body smoking as he stood, but it wasn't over yet.

Pisces laughed as he grabbed Sol by the head from behind. "Kneel, scum."

Sol had his head slammed into the dirt. *Your head is too high. Know your place! You are in front of the child of divinity! Such a child cannot be compared to a mere offshoot of an ouroboros.* Pisces's haughty attitude seemed to say just that, and he did, in fact, have strength befitting his attitude.

Though he was on the ground, Sol was still able to quickly get free of Pisces and take some distance.

What Sol saw next was utterly disheartening. The *Argo* floated in the air, and multitudes of heroic spirits were looking down on him. Meanwhile, all the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars were on the ground, except the Ox and the Scales. *I can't see the fairy twins, but... Well, they're probably just inside the Argo,* Sol thought. *There's no way the ship is here without them. The Devil King's son, Terra, is also ready with his sword. I'm surrounded.*

It was obvious he had no chance; there was no way. However, Sol never lost his fearless smile. He still had cards to play. He was still confident that he could at least run away. If he wasn't, then he wouldn't have lured them in.

"I see... I did lure you all here, but I never thought all of you would come. Heh heh heh... This is actually really convenient for me."

I've succeeded in getting them to come. So "that" should take care of the rest. It would have been fine if Sol had just hurried and beat a retreat. With that, he started to speak to his compatriot who wasn't here—Dina—inside his mind.

I've done my duty. Hurry and open up an Exgate, and let me escape.

However, Sol's words were met with silence. There was no reply at all, not even the slightest hint of a response.

This can't be. There's no way!

The avatar of the Goddess and the avatars of the ouroboroses—there should have been an unbreakable connection between these two existences. In the first place, she was the Goddess's on-the-ground representative, as well as the switch with the authority to activate all the ouroboroses in an emergency, signaling the end of the world. In other words, she was their weapon of last resort. There was no way Sol, an avatar of an ouroboros, would be unable to contact her, which meant that she was purposefully ignoring his telepathic message.

There was a very long pause. *I see. So that's how it is.* Sol almost couldn't stop himself from laughing. *Ah, so that's it. That's how it is! Or rather, that's how it was.*

Now that I think about it, it's obvious. Now that I've noticed it, everything is simple. It was stranger of me to think that I was the only one who awakened his own personality. She's long since stopped being a puppet. With that, everything fits. No wonder everything just happened to work out for Lufas and her group. No wonder she managed to gather all the Twelve Stars, and things have developed into such a troublesome state. How amusing!

Sol realized there was no chance of him being saved, so he understood that he would die here. However, he felt no anger, and he held no grudge. In fact, he wanted to praise her for being able to fool him this long. He wanted to say, "Well done!" Sol liked strong people. Whether that was physical strength or ingeniousness, he just couldn't help liking those who exceeded his expectations.

I mean, it's boring, right? Having everything go the way the gods or their agents want. So why not laugh? Instead of being angry at having been tricked, I laugh at myself for failing. Let's praise her for her craftiness in being able to lure me into this death trap, for things to not be going according to plan, and for deviating from this script... What an amusing third-rate play!

"Fine, Dina. Let me perish here. But not everything will go as you've planned." Sol paused. "I'll be taking some with me. I'll make as many of them accompany me to Hel as I can."

There is no more retreat. The only way is forward. That's just fine with me. The

Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars are worthy final opponents.

However, Leon stood alone in front of Sol, who was gearing himself up. Leon had returned to human form, and he'd just shoved Virgo, who was trying to heal him, away.

"Don't do anything unnecessary, trash. This one's my prey," said Leon.

"Huh? You sure sing a lot for someone who just lost," Scorpius retorted.

There was a moment of silence before Leon let out an annoyed, "Tsk! Well, it's not like I can deny that... I guess I can't win like this."

Unexpectedly, Leon meekly agreed to Scorpius's mocking. He cracked his neck and spat out the blood in his mouth. Then, he heaved a sigh and scratched at his head. "There's nothing else for it... I hate that it looks like I'm submitting to Lufas, but I guess I should use some tricks..."

Leon approached Sol with no guard up, his hands at his sides. While feeling some disquiet at that, Sol stepped forward, aiming a jab at Leon's jaw. Leon easily parried the blow, though, and swiftly countered with an elbow to Sol's jaw.

Sol, his head rattled, fell on his behind, and Leon looked down at him.

"Hey, was that just..." Aries asked, shocked by what he saw.

"Yeah, it was a skill. 'Technical Guard.'" Aigokeros paused, then launched into a calm commentary. "It blocks the opponent's attack, a skill to lighten damage. Our master taught it to me, but this is the first time I'm seeing it."

It was a defensive skill, one which Leon had never shown before now. Then, when Sol got up and threw out another punch, Leon used the dodging skill "Detect" to avoid it. Detect was a skill that raised the user's evasion, so this was also unlike Leon.

Sol, open after his attack, was then met with the two-hit skill "Double Blow" to his gut, sending him flying. Leon's attack was also rather careful and measured. Unlike his usual style of just swinging with as much power as he could muster, the attack was compact and concise.

"So Leon is actually capable of fighting like that..." Aries said, surprised.

“He’s always been gifted at fighting. Even without any unique skill, he’s strong as long as he’s serious about it...” Scorpius responded, bored. “Pisses me off, though.”

Leon didn’t need any fancy skills. Well, that was in the past though. Up until now, all he’d done was rely on his huge stats to attack with. In other words, he only used normal attacks. He did use some skills, like his roar, but even then, those were just beginner skills with a wide area of effect. Yes, he was plenty strong, even without skills. Enough to stand as the strongest within the Twelve Heavenly Stars, at least.

As for how he would perform when using skills to their fullest... Well, that was about to be proven now. However, he had yet to use any of his skills, because he’d never thought he’d lose, even if he didn’t use the skills taught to him by Lufas. *Skills are just touching tricks for the weak.* He’d probably felt pride as he spat that out. Now, though, Leon was unleashing all he had, because he admitted that he would lose to Sol as he was.

“Interesting... Yeah! That’s how it’s gotta be! Now this fight’s worth it!” Sol clenched his fists and shouted happily before he dashed at Leon.

Leon dashed towards Sol in turn, and the two’s fists clashed in the middle. However, it was no simple clash. That moment, many skills were activated at once, and several feints were thrown. Their fists and legs crossed at speeds too fast for the eye to catch, and the sounds of their clashing couldn’t keep up. Unlike the flashy fight before, this one was comparatively tame. Well, whether that applied to a fight where the aftershocks could send the surroundings flying was debatable, but the scale was certainly smaller than before.

However, the power behind each exchange was several times more intense than before. There was no useless spreading of power; everything was concentrated at one point. Their abilities were on par with each other’s. Though with the Goddess’s influence, Sol was still a little above. However, he had already taken damage, and Leon had an incredible amount of vitality.

Sol’s fist crunched into Leon’s gut, and the sounds of bones snapping were audible. Leon’s fist slammed into Sol, and with his jawbone broken, he could no longer clench his teeth. Both their fists clashed, breaking hand bones before

also exchanging kicks and breaking legs as well.

“OOOOOAAARRRGHH!!!” Leon howled.

I am the strongest! I cannot lose! I have no time to be tripping up here. I have a wall I have to surpass! It was a howl from the soul, screaming that he couldn't afford to lose to someone like Sol.

“WWAAAAAAGGHHH!!!” Sol also howled.

That's right. This is what I've been looking for this whole time. There's nothing fun about a world where everything goes to plan. I wanted something unexpected to happen.

Sol's howl was a joyous one, expressing his happiness at finding a fight worth having against a worthy enemy in this miniature garden of the Goddess.

The two were basically even, so the fight would be decided by the strength of their spirits. It was a fight between someone with their eyes on the future and who desired victory, and one who was simply satisfied in the fight. That difference showed itself in the weight of the fighter's fists.

The fight only lasted tens of seconds though. In their subjective perspective, the fierce battle would have lasted several hours. Eventually, the one who reached the end of his rope and fell was the white-haired man.

At the same time in Helheim, the heroic spirits who should have been accompanying Libra had fallen. They were covered in wounds, and particles of light were disappearing. Only Libra and Taurus were left standing, and they were pointing their weapons at one another.

5

While lying on the ground looking up at the sky, Sol felt refreshed.

That was a good fight. I put everything on the line and lost. Sol felt no desire to make excuses, like how he had been outnumbered or how he had been previously injured. In the end, a loss was a loss. To him, it was his fault for getting put in that situation in the first place.

Battles weren't affairs where you faced each other and had a signal to start. There were things like making sure you were in the best condition or creating favorable surroundings, tactics, and strategies. All of that was also part of the battle. Sol had fallen for their plan, and he had lost with his foolishness fully exposed. That was all.

Sol, the loser, laughed heartily. "Heh... Heh heh heh heh heh... He HA HA HA HA HA!"

That got on Leon's nerves, so he growled irritably. "What's so funny?"

I just can't stand this guy's attitude. He glared at Sol as if to say, *If you still have some sort of trump card, hurry up and show it!*

"It's just funny. The Goddess's scenario, painstakingly built up over tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of years was so simply torn down in just two hundred. It's so funny. I just can't stop myself."

"That's all?"

"That's all," Sol said. After a moment, he added, "Ah, I see. Did you think I had something left? If you did, you don't have to worry. I don't. It's truly your win. Even if you just leave me here, I'll disappear soon."

Hearing what Sol said, Virgo hurried over. There wasn't really any special reason for it. She didn't make any calculations, like speculating that he would feel some sort of gratitude for being healed. If she were capable of something like that, she wouldn't have run over in the first place. In other words, Virgo's body just moved on its own. That was a testament to her kindness as well as her foolishness.

Sol grabbed Virgo's hands as she placed them over him, rejecting her healing.

"Don't, kind girl. That may normally be a virtue, but in a battle, it is a weakness. If I were to take you hostage in this situation, it would be your fault the tables turned, you know? There are those who can't be saved by kindness alone, as well as wretches who wouldn't be embarrassed to take advantage of it. Keep that in a corner of your mind from now on," Sol said before taking hold of one of Virgo's shoulders and pushing her away.

Virgo must not have been convinced though, since she started to try to argue

with him desperately. “Don’t be like that! You... You’re... You’re not that kind of person, right?! Just now, you...”

“No, I am the Goddess’s puppet to my core. I awakened an ego, but I couldn’t separate myself, like Pollux or Orm could. Even if you heal me here, I will surely come back as your enemy.” Sol was quiet for a moment. “Do it. The finisher is the right of the winner, as well as a duty.”

“You don’t have to tell me,” said Leon.

Virgo was about to continue arguing, but Aries stopped her. Then, Leon stepped forward. He raised his fist and put enough strength in it that the veins in his arms popped up.

“Lastly, allow me to give you all a hint as a sign of respect for your victory. When I die, the Goddess will basically have no pieces left. She doesn’t have absolutely no pieces, but nothing that would be able to win against you all. Do you know what that means?”

“Nope.”

While giving a strained laugh at Leon’s curt answer, Sol thought of the last puppet other than him. What he’d said just now was not the truth. The Goddess still had two pieces to play. One was Dina, who could be controlled regardless of her own will. The other was...

Still, since there were only two, they would truly be outnumbered. In order to make up for that, the Goddess would undoubtedly wake up the ouroboroses.

“I’m saying it will start. Your blow here will be the trigger to the end of the world.”

“Izzat so.”

Heedless of Sol’s words, Leon swung. There was a loud sound, and Karkinos suddenly took on his gigantic form and jumped in front of everyone. There were several seconds of raging, storm-like winds resulting from the pressure of Leon’s fist. Eventually, that died down, revealing several cracks in the earth that stretched off to the horizon.

Sol was no longer there. All that remained to attest to his existence were

some faintly glowing particles, and those would soon be gone as well.

The silence stretched before Virgo asked, “Why?”

To cheer up the saddened Virgo, Scorpius patted her head. “Who knows. Men are stupid beings. If it were me, I’d stubbornly try to survive by any means possible,” she muttered, exasperated.

With that, the Goddess’s last piece that could oppose the Twelve Heavenly Stars had disappeared. Anyone could predict what would happen next. It would start. That was what Sol had said. There was no need to say what. Now that Sol, the last piece, was gone, the Goddess would only have one recourse—just one—and the time to use it was fast approaching. The end of the world would soon be upon them.

“Well now, this is no time to take it easy, is it? I’m going to head back to Blutgang as fast as possible. I think I’ll be able to barely make it if I go now. Megrez, I’m going to make use of that mana engine you invented,” said Mizar.

“Yeah, I need to act now as well. Now it’s a race against time.”

Sei and his party had no idea what anyone else was talking about, but it was obvious everyone was on the same page. The reason why the Seven Heroes had gathered in the first place might have been to discuss it, so Sei made sure not to question anything. More importantly, there was something he needed to do. There was something his party could do.

“Lord Megrez, I... I’d like to go back to Laevateinn. I don’t think someone like me would be useful in a fight, but I can at least spread the word that Lufas isn’t an enemy,” said Sei.

“So that’s your answer?” Megrez asked.

“Yes.”

“Good then. If that’s the case, allow me to send you to Laevateinn myself.”

What Sei was about to try to do would probably be a small thing compared to what was to come. However, he was also the only one who could do those small things. Even if Megrez and the other heroes were to say that Lufas was not an enemy, it wouldn’t be convincing. Likewise, nobody would believe it if

Lufas herself were to come out and say that she was not an enemy. But with Sei—the person who had no connection to the events two hundred years ago and who had been able to come this far on his own two feet—the people might listen. Sei wouldn't be able to do anything in the fight itself. However, he could become a bridge between Lufas and the people at large.

“If that is what Sir Sei has decided... All right. I have also made up my mind. O Wise King, please send me to Draupnir. I will convince Emperor Beahr,” said Petto.

“Grrraawwlll!”

“Oh, Friedrich! You want to come too?”

Following Sei, both Petto and Friedrich chose to stand with Lufas. Neither Gantz nor Jean seemed to have any objection either, as they silently nodded.

However, among all that, Merak remained still, staring straight at Virgo. He seemed like he saw a ghost, and his lips were quivering.

“White wings... That face... The color of her hair... Impossible.” Merak paused before stuttering, “H-Hey, you... Sorry, um... I know it's rude, but do you have parents, or maybe adoptive ones?”

“Huh? Umm... No, I've never met my parents. Apparently, I was abandoned in the forest when I was a baby, and my gran picked me up.”

“N-No way...”

Merak's eyes went wide in true heartfelt shock as he continued to stare at Virgo. His expression seemed to show joy as well as sadness; it was a complicated look.

Meanwhile, Parthenos muttered, “Hmm... As I thought...”

“Huh? What's going on, gran?” asked Virgo.

“It's simple. That Sky King there... Most likely, he's your real father.”

Everyone froze. Even Mizar, who was about to return to Blutgang, and Megrez, who was about to turn back to Svel, stopped in their tracks. That was just how much of an impact what was just said had.

“WHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAT?!”

Virgo’s shout reverberated throughout the heavens.

* * *

Turning back time a little, Libra, who had descended to the underground world of Helheim, had managed to reach Taurus along with her three heroic spirit escorts without much trouble. There, she saw the head of a sleeping ouroboros along with Taurus, who was stationed quietly in front of it.

“It has been a while... Though not really. More like, it has been since the other day, Taurus.”

Taurus paused before answering with a simple, “Indeed.”

“You know why I am here, correct? I am here to bring you back.”

There was no need for long conversations between these two. Libra spoke concisely, and Taurus replied with a single word. If someone who didn’t understand what was going on were to see this, they would probably have no idea what the pair were talking about.

Taurus slowly stood up and quietly took a stance, fists clenched. “I will go after finishing this errand.”

As Taurus spoke, light started to gather in front of him. That light was coming from the Ouroboros of Earth, and it coalesced into the shape of a human. Just like the Fire and Sun ouroboroses, it was creating an avatar. This wasn’t especially strange. Every ouroboros, other than the already-awakened Moon ouroboros, would create avatars and send them out, so there was no reason that only the Ouroboros of Earth would be left out of this.

The manifested avatar was level 1000. In terms of combat capability, it was equal to Sol, a transcendent being capable of taking on any and all living things by itself.

“Aldebaran!”

It was dealt with in just a single blow. Taurus’s steely fist swung forth, and the sound of something breaking resounded as the newly born avatar returned to motes of light and disappeared.

Though they were called avatars, they were the product of a skill in the end, so they were completely helpless in the face of Aldebaran, a skill that forcefully ended other skills. The problem was so instantly solved it kind of made a mockery of all of Leon and the others' troubles, but this was just a simple matter of matchups. Since the avatar's entire existence was thanks to a skill, Taurus was uniquely situated to deal with them.

"Well done. As expected, Taurus."

Taurus said nothing in reply.

"Now, let us go. Everyone is waiting."

"No, not yet," Taurus said, before taking a jab at Libra.

Libra reacted in time, dodging the attack, and the swing hit nothing but air. However, it was obvious that the punch had not been pulled. Taurus had seriously meant to end Libra.

"What are you doing, Taurus?"

"There is no need for me to give you my reasoning, because you know why already."

"What nonsense."

Libra readied her weapons as she faced down Taurus with an icy expression. If her opponent was willing to kill, she would respond in kind.

"Either way, if you are going to try to kill me, allow me to respond in kind. I will be interrogating you after rendering you immobile... It is recommended you talk before that changes to torture."

Taurus considered things for a moment, then said, "I see. So you have no self-awareness. Either that, or maybe you've destroyed your own memories, thus deceiving even yourself?"

Having had something pointed out by Taurus, Libra stopped for a moment. "The damaged data?"

Yes... The damaged data... It's been there ever since I met Lufas, but I still don't know what's been lost; I haven't repaired it at all. Rather, why haven't I even tried to repair it after all this time? Libra stopped her train of thought,

trying to come up with an answer. *Wait, that's not what's important now. At any rate, I have to take down this crazed bull first. Or, I could just put him down once and for all. Wouldn't that actually be better? It would benefit my master.*

"Please stop, you two! How could two of the Twelve Heavenly Stars be fighting one another?!"

"He's right! Please, let's all calm down and talk this out!"

This totally unexpected situation had the heroic spirits panicking, but still, the two of them didn't stop.

While creating some distance, Libra launched a hail of bullets, but Taurus paid those bullets no heed as he advanced. However, Libra had the advantage in mobility. She skillfully danced around him, never allowing him to get closer.

The threat Taurus posed came entirely from his overwhelming destructive power, and that could not be brought to bear unless he managed to get within close range. He had no way of attacking at long range. Anyone with that information would find defeating him easy. All they had to do was hit him from far away.

No self-awareness? I'm being tricked? What nonsense... Memory manipulation doesn't work on a golem like me. You're the suspicious one, Taurus.

Libra's cannon fire hit Taurus, forcing him backwards. It would be difficult to fully exhaust his vitality, but it would just be simple grunt work in a fight that was basically already decided. All Libra had to do was continue shooting away at him while not allowing him to come close, and once he was within the health range for it, use Brachium to finish it all.

True, my memories are damaged, but... Yes, it's probably about time to repair them. I'm sure that as soon as I do, I will uncover Dina's true identity, as well as the reason for Taurus's actions.

Libra hadn't noticed just how strange her thoughts were at this point in time. *About time to repair...* Taking that the other way, it also meant that she could have repaired her memories at any time, but she hadn't. Why hadn't she done such a thing? That was what she should have considered first. However, Libra

had been unable to do so. She had been unable because she was a golem, and because she was sure that not doing so would benefit her master, even though she had no reason to think that.

As soon as she recognized something as the right course of action, her thoughts would go no further. Once she had her answer, she would stop. That was the sad difference between people and golems. *Repairing damaged data...* Without any basis for it, Libra had decided now was the time to repair the damaged data, so she did so. There was no reason for it, but also no doubt. After all, she was correct in the end. Libra's true nature was that of a tool. Her raison d'être was to be of use to her master and to remove anything harmful to her master. So, Libra did not doubt.

And—

“Ah, I remember now.”

The puppet...

“I see, Taurus. You've been right this entire time. As I thought, I've been acting for my master...”

...sneered in derision.

“The great Alovenus.”

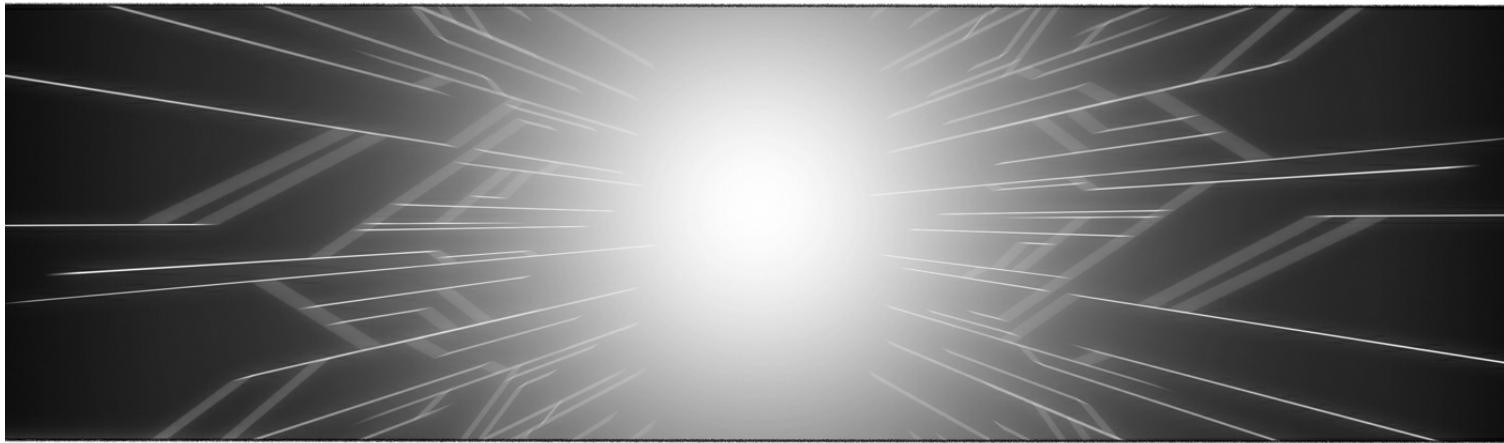
Libra revealed an expression she'd never shown anyone before, and the light of Brachium burned Taurus along with the heroic spirits.

6

Everything had started over two hundred years ago when Lufas Maphaahl invaded the Goddess's sanctuary and seized the Scales of Selection. The Scales of Selection was originally the guardian of the Goddess's sanctuary, so its original master was Alovenus. After Lufas took it, it was remade into a new golem named Libra. However, when the Scales was taken, it already had a mission given to it. That mission was to observe Lufas Maphaahl, as well as to make her forces crumble from the inside.

Indeed, there were actually two spies in the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars. One was Dina, the Goddess's avatar. The other was an emotionless puppet, Libra, whose original mission had never been lost, even after having been remade by Mizar. And of course it hadn't. After all, when Mizar had returned from the sanctuary, he too had been under the Goddess's spell. He had purposefully left that part in.

This fact was unknown to Mizar's copy. The one who had actually made Libra was the original Mizar, while the copy only watched. Because the copy believed that Mizar was like itself, it never expected that the original Mizar would ever do something so foolish. So, what was completed was, on the surface, the most loyal member of the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars, one who was also an unwavering steel maid.



She would never waver, never. After all, she was a doll with no emotions. That was why Libra had never wavered on anything from the start. She simply continued to emotionlessly carry out her first order from her true master. She never changed in two hundred years. The reason why she spent her time protecting the King's Grave was to not allow humanity to get their hands on powerful weapons. The reason why she killed all intruders was to lower the overall strength of humanity.

After meeting Lufas, she damaged a part of her memories in order to deceive herself, so she could play the perfect, loyal subordinate. This was all possible because she was a golem. Even then, she never forgot her purpose, however. No matter what, Libra would always attempt to carry out her mission, and she never questioned her own inconsistencies. After all, she was sure she was correct. She killed Jupiter so Lufas would not learn anything extraneous that would be disadvantageous for her. She also interfered when the Devil King seemed about to reveal what shouldn't be revealed.

However, not everything had gone well for Libra. One of the two spies—Dina, who should have been the Goddess's avatar—was moving very suspiciously. At first glance, she seemed to be moving along with the Goddess's scenario, but as a result, she was making the scenario collapse. Dina riled up Mars and Aries, who then returned to Lufas. Scorpius and Aigokeros were the same. If events were traced back, it seemed as if they had returned due to Dina's arrangements. It almost seemed deliberate that she'd misspoken in Gjallarhorn, and it had been revealed early that she was a spy for the devilfolk.

What is she doing? Seriously, what? Libra caught on to Dina's suspiciousness early on. She suspected Dina's betrayal even before she realized she did. It was the same during Lufas and the Devil King's conversation. Dina's timing when cutting in was awfully late.

Now that Libra thought about it, it could have been that Dina was only making an appeal that she was still on the Goddess's side because she was being watched. That was why Libra had recommended that Lufas investigate Dina many times. Libra had thought that everything would come to light once Lufas started to doubt Dina and interrogated or possibly tortured her.

However, Lufas had started to doubt Dina but never actually went farther than that, preferring instead to let her do as she pleased. Libra couldn't figure out what was going on. It was as if Lufas was certain that Dina was an ally. *What happened? Did they have some sort of secret conversation while I wasn't looking? No, there was no evidence of that. I haven't picked up any voices indicating that.*

Rather, Libra was the one who had made a mistake first. When Dina had been revealed as a spy for the devilfolk, Libra was forced to act as if she didn't know about it. Yes, Libra had heard that conversation. There was no way she wouldn't have when she was able to hear voices from far farther away. However, since they were both on the same side—the Goddess's—there was no way Libra could expose Dina. As a result, there was now an unnatural wrinkle. Libra had to pretend as if she'd never heard that conversation.

Later, once she started to really suspect Dina, Libra thought about revealing that she'd heard their conversation, but there was no point then. Lufas was letting Dina do as she pleased with full knowledge. If Libra were to reveal the fact that she'd overheard, then all Dina would have had to do was tell Lufas that Libra had lied, and that would've been an opportunity for the light of suspicion to shine on Libra.

But now, the time for pretending is over. Dina can no longer be relied upon. Luckily, Taurus and I are the only two present. There will be no witnesses, so I'll kill Taurus and make it like he was killed by the Earth ouroboros's avatar. Then, I'll finish the others off one by one.

With that decided, Libra pointed her cannon barrel at Taurus, who was unsteady on his feet.

“Goodbye, Taurus...”

Taurus didn't reply, instead staring at Libra with worry.

Starting off with one... With this, the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars will never be complete.

However, that was when Libra heard an unexpected voice.

“Did you really think everything would go smoothly for you?”

Libra quickly turned and found the figure of the Queen of Fairies, whom all the heroic spirits followed. Next to her, her older brother stood waiting.

Pollux stared coldly at Libra. “You finally showed your true colors, Libra. I had a sneaking suspicion when you said that you would go to Helheim by yourself, but...”

Libra simply stood quietly. *I was found out?* Though Libra’s expression didn’t change, she still felt some surprise. However, her barrel never stopped pointing at Taurus even as she studied Pollux, trying to predict her next move.

After a moment, Libra asked, “When did you realize?”

“Almost from the start,” Pollux replied.

“From the start?”

“Yes. More specifically, from about when you left the Goddess’s avatar alone.”

“You too, Libra! How did things become like this with you around?!”

“I am filled with regret deeper than the tallest mountains.”

“That just means you aren’t reflecting at all, doesn’t it?! That’s the opposite of deep!”

“We will soon be exiting the atmosphere.”

“You piece of junk!”

That was the conversation that Libra remembered.

Yes, that was a mistake. Her making a silly response had not been the mistake. Her mistake was one realized in hindsight. It was the fact that she’d continued to let Dina run free. This could also be said to have been Dina’s fault. By drawing all the suspicion onto her, she had managed to even drag Libra’s suspiciousness into the light by association.

“Even if you can deceive Lufas, that won’t work on me. You better not think that you can just get things to slide with some light banter like that. It’s not like you to leave a person who is clearly suspicious alone like that... In fact, it’s impossible. But you... You left the self-titled advisor and the Goddess’s avatar to

swim freely.”

Libra made no reply.

“So there’s only one possibility. You were an accomplice.” Pollux paused. “I wished I was just looking too far into things though.”

Pollux crossed her arms. As if responding to her heightening aggression, the heroic spirits around her advanced in unison. Castor also readied his weapon, and Taurus slowly raised his ax.

To the front, heroic spirits, and to the back, a bull. Libra was cornered, having been perfectly caught in a pincer. If she had Brachium, she could have swept them all up, but she’d already used it just a little while ago. In other words, she was in checkmate; she had no way to escape. At least, that was what one would normally think.

“I see...” said Libra. “I underestimated you. Allow me to quietly withdraw here.”

“Do you really think you can?”

“Pollux, you may be clever, but in the end, your inability to fight at all is a weakness. Because of that, your point of view is bound to that of a normal person’s.”

“What?”

Libra spoke in a ridiculing fashion before flying straight up, as if the ceiling didn’t matter. Though, in fact, it didn’t matter. To Libra, walls, ceilings, and floors were all just things that could be broken though at any point in time, much like a spoon to jelly.

Just imagine: a prisoner is in their cell, only the cell is made of jelly. No matter how it might seem that the prisoner is trapped, it’s not much of an enclosure if the prison is made of jelly. Yes, one may be surrounded by walls and ceilings, but the person is not really enclosed if those walls and ceilings are too brittle to hold up. In other words, though it may have looked like Libra was enclosed from all sides, only her front and back were really closed off. Libra’s up, down, left, and right—the “net” surrounding her—was full of holes, and she was actually able to escape in any number of directions.

“Stop right there!” Pollux shouted, alarmed.

She hoped to stop Libra as she continued to bore through the ceiling, but Pollux was stopped by falling rubble. Castor deflected the falling objects, but the collapse didn’t stop there.

“We need to leave too!”

If it were only Castor and the heroic spirits there, they could have ignored the collapse and similarly busted through the ceiling in pursuit. Taurus would likely have been buried alive, but even if he was weakened, he wasn’t the type of man who would die from just that. They could have simply returned later to dig him back up with no problems.

However, Pollux was different. She would easily be killed by this, so Castor and the others had no other choice but to escape and protect Pollux.

“Sorry, brother. I keep holding you back...”

“Don’t worry about it.”

Castor was holding Pollux close while the other heroic spirits carried Taurus. Like that, they left Helheim, having been unable to capture the scales of betrayal.

* *
* *

“This is as far as I go. Please return to Mizgarz without me.”

With our business on Earth done, we were on the path back to Mizgarz. In the space between the two worlds, Dina suddenly stopped. I’d already seen this coming, so I wasn’t going to raise any doubts at this stage.

“If I return to Mizgarz, I’ll be immediately taken over by the Goddess and forced to awaken the ouroboroses. So... I’m done here.”

I was quiet for a moment, then said, “Sorry for putting so much on you.”

“Seriously.” Dina gave a somewhat-troubled-seeming laugh as she looked up at me. However, she showed no sign of blaming me at all. “But this is all something I chose. Not as a representative of the Goddess, but as Dina. Before I met you, I was just a puppet... You made me a person, so I don’t regret any of it. But... This is as far as I can serve you...”

With that, Dina gave a smile. She knew what fate awaited her past this point, as well as how that would end. As the Goddess's avatar, she was bound to the Goddess with a strength incomparable to that between Pollux and the Goddess. If the Goddess felt like it, she could overwrite Dina's consciousness at any time and control her. No item or skill could stop it. Even skill-sealing equipment would likely have no meaning, so there were only two solutions to this.

The first was to murder Dina.

"Miss Lufas, if I disappear here, you will be able to buy time until another avatar is born. This is goodbye."

For a long while, I had no words with which to reply to her.

This had been Dina's plan from the start. She would disrupt the Goddess's scenario as much as possible before finally disappearing. By doing that, the scenario would completely fall apart, and I would be able to act freely until the next avatar was born. It would undoubtedly be the best move to make; there could be none better. However...

"'When the time comes, don't hesitate...' I believe that's what you said."

"Yes."

"I understand. I won't hesitate... Yes, I've already decided. I will beat the Goddess down and save you."

I purposefully chose the better option instead of the best one. *The best move? Like I need something like that. I am a fool who has used raw might to force my selfishness upon others. Making smart moves has never been my style. I've been picking a fight with divinity all this time anyway, so I might as well at least save one of my loyal retainers while I'm at it.*

"It was a promise, remember? That if you were to gain the Goddess's ire, I would protect you with all my might."

After hearing my answer, Dina couldn't help but laugh. Tears shined at the corners of her eyes, and for a moment, she was silent. "You really are a fool."

"You knew that already, didn't you?"

"No, I didn't. I never thought you'd be this big of one."

“I see.”

Dina closed her eyes and took something out of a pocket. It was a shining key, one which had unfathomable power.

“The Key to Reach the Heavens... Or in other words, GM authority. I’m giving it to you. The ‘setting’ is already obsolete, so please use it when the time comes.”

“Didn’t Castor have it?”

“That one’s a fake. The one who was watching me... Well, there’s no point in hiding it now, so I’ll just say it. Orm was playing the jester in order to feed Libra fake information, so of course, the key Orm has now is a fake. Rather, isn’t a flying ship filled to the brim with heroic spirits just like yelling out to the world, ‘I have it, so please take it from me?’ I wouldn’t do something stupid like that.”

I was no longer at a point to be surprised at the name that came out of Dina’s mouth. In fact, my suspicions were only confirmed. *I mean, of course she is. She didn’t come flying when she should have heard that Dina was a devilfolk spy, after all.*

Now that I thought about it, the fact that Jupiter disappeared immediately after being killed by Libra was also proof that she was on the Goddess’s side. Even after death, the devilfolk’s bodies would stay around for a while... There was no doubt about that, since, a long time ago, I’d beheaded many devilfolk and put their heads on stakes. However, Jupiter’s body disappeared on the spot after having been killed by Libra. This would be impossible if not for the Goddess’s power.

The reason why Dina’s actions had been so inefficient was also because the Goddess had been watching her all this time through Libra’s eyes. That was why it was necessary for her to continue to play the Goddess’s puppet, who had pretended to be Lufas’s subordinate but was actually a devilfolk spy. *I really did push an incredibly hard job on her. I honestly feel bad.* Truly, only Dina would have been able to see this through, and I wouldn’t have been able to ask anyone else anyway.

“As they say, it’s darkest under the lighthouse... I don’t think the Goddess ever suspected that I would have it, out of all people. Also, the ‘Ark’ is

completed. I collected the best of Mizgarz's alchemists and modern Japan's scientists to create it, so I'm very proud of it."

"Well done, managing that by yourself."

"Hee hee... Actually, I wasn't alone. I founded a company, you see... To tell you the truth, my employees are all from Mizgarz. Also, they're all people long considered dead on the other side. Scorpius did good work."

Dina's words reminded me of a certain group, or rather race, of people. There was only one such category that was treated as dead on the other side that Scorpius was involved in—the country that Phecda had founded and Scorpius had destroyed. *I see... Now that she mentions it, I did find it strange.*

It was strange that Dina would just let a country be decimated like that while she was with the devilfolk in a position of power. However, if it wasn't that she had been unable to control Scorpius but rather that she'd figured Scorpius into her plans... Of course, there was no mistake on Scorpius's part. There was no doubt that she'd confirmed their deaths.

However, Dina was able to resurrect those who had only been dead for a short time, not to mention the fact that she could control time itself. So, such a thing was indeed possible.

"Dead on the other side... Scorpius... I see. Well done on all of it."

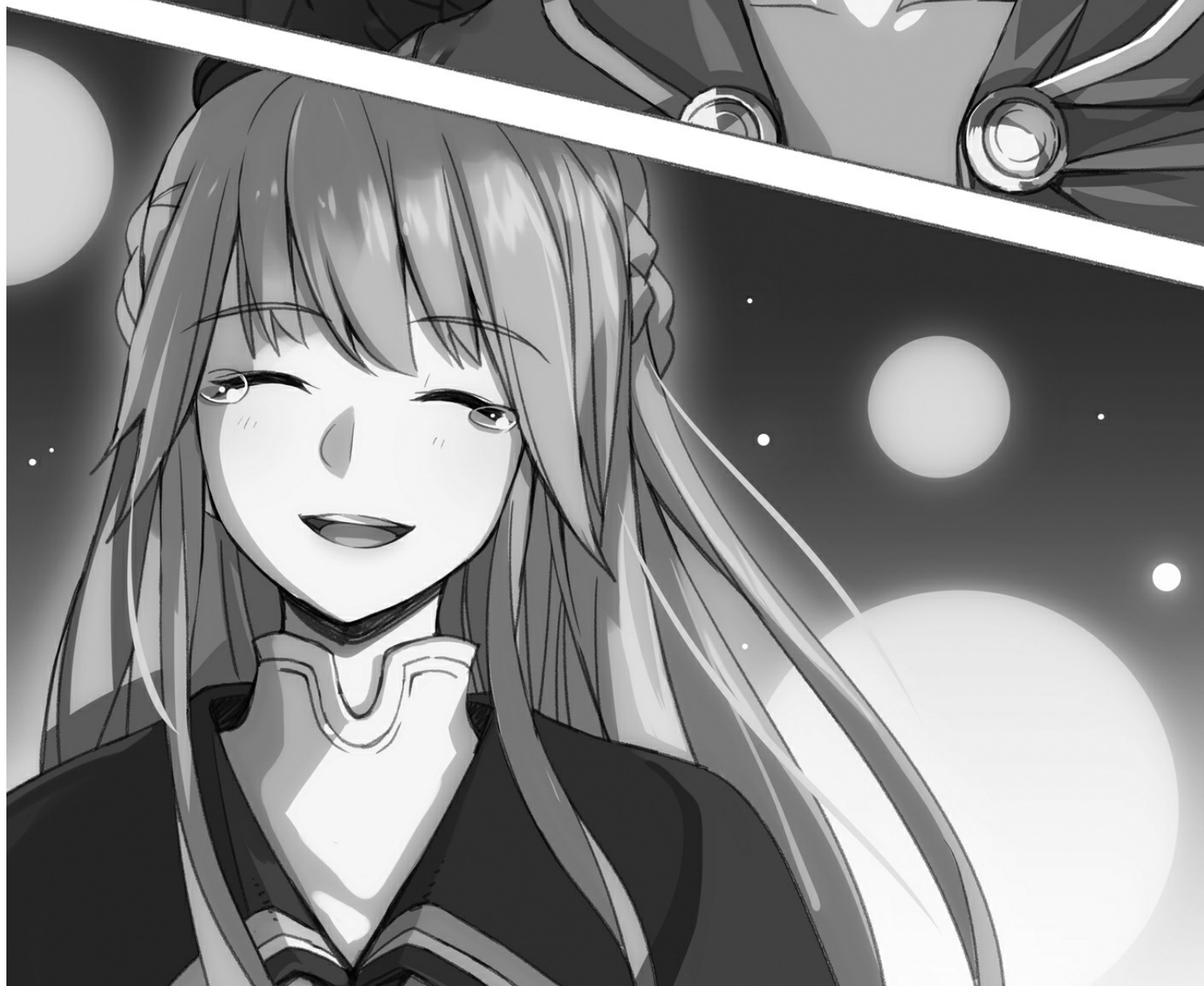
Dina truly had continued to deceive anyone and everyone for the past two hundred years. There was no way I could allow this turn of events, where it seemed like she would be disposed of as soon as she had finished her role. She worked more than hard enough. She saved me, so now, it was my turn to save her.

"I'll seal myself up now, but even then, I will probably be found by the Goddess soon enough. Still, it should buy you some time."

"Sure. Rest well here. From here on out, it is my fight. I've got the baton."

Dina was quiet for a long moment before saying, "I believe in you."

"Yeah, do that," I said confidently, almost talking to myself, as I stroked Dina's head.



As soon as I turned my back to her, I felt Dina stopping her own time.

It probably won't even take a day for the Goddess to find her...

I'm going to have to prepare in the meanwhile. If I don't, I won't be able to make this a good fight, after all. But before that, there's something I need to settle. I paused, thinking. I've kept you waiting, Orm. I'm coming back now. Let's just see who's worthy of challenging the Goddess.

7

After shutting himself in his room, he could feel himself naturally sinking deeper and deeper into thought as the time he spent not speaking to anyone lengthened. During that time, Orm was calculating. He was always posing questions and then answering them.

What is this world? Who am I?

This world is... Right, this world is the Goddess's miniature garden, a toy chest that she made herself, and I am stage dressing created by her for the sole purpose of spreading despair throughout the stories she writes. I never had any objection to that nor any doubts because an omniscient, omnipotent being decided it, so it must be so. I never doubted that her way was the right way.

If it was decided by divinity, then it is already divine providence. Those who question it are always mistaken. Carnivores attack, kill, and eat herbivores, but that is not evil. They have to do so to live. It's not something someone decided to do just because. That is what providence is, and that is what the decisions of divinity mean. When was it, I wonder? When did I start acting as evil under her orders? It has to have been at least hundreds of thousands of years ago.

Orm's role was to spread despair to the people as the scenario dictated. He had to put fear in them. In the end, he would face the brave heroes who challenged him and pretend to have lost while wounding them fatally before leaving the stage. It was a simple task. There was no living thing in existence that could match up to Orm, who was an ouroboros, in the first place. If he

were to fight seriously, he would easily defeat the heroes.

A certain hero had claimed that, for the sake of those he loved, he couldn't lose. Another hero had howled that he was fighting for the people's peace. Each and every hero that had challenged Orm had their own convictions and beliefs, which they talked of in loud voices as he listened while feeling nothing. Orm couldn't understand what they were talking about.

Actually, he did understand the literal meaning of their words, but he couldn't understand why that motivated them so fiercely. *Loved ones? Something more important than oneself? Family? What are all those...? Just what is it about them? I don't understand. The Goddess hasn't told me about them.*

So, Orm fulfilled his duty, which had been given to him by his role, and ended them. He killed them while utterly ignorant of how brave and precious their existences were.

When was it, I wonder? When did I start to get interested?

The Fairy Princess Pollux, the one who had been given the opposite role of Orm, was able to understand the hearts of the heroes. Exactly because she understood, her heart was crying out in pain. Orm didn't understand it. He didn't get why the Fairy Princess was grieving so.

Does she know? Does she know why those hailed as heroes throw away their short lives to stand against me? Just what is it that drives them so? I'm sure she knows, but I don't. I have never felt any guilt about it. But... When I see the tears in her eyes, I get the feeling that what I am doing is horribly wrong. If I were human, if I were one of those people called heroes, would I understand the reason for her tears? I wonder when it was that I started to hate being a puppet. The story keeps repeating. The star actors may change, but the story never does.

Now that Orm thought about it, that may have been his first rebellious act towards the Goddess. It was just a small bit of self-satisfaction that could in no way be called rebellion. Orm just thought that if he were to create someone to be the puppet in his place, he might feel better. Unlike the other ouroboroses, Orm was always active, so he had no need for an avatar. However, he was able to create a clone of himself using the same basic process. But by the time Orm noticed, what he'd created had taken on a shape far removed from his original

goal. It was so far removed, in fact, it could be said to be the exact opposite. What he had created took the form of the heroes that Orm so wanted to know the feelings of. It looked like a human. *If I were a human hero, then I might look like this.* As if reflecting that imagination, Orm's unseemingly clone was born, and Orm named him Terra.

"The world is afraid," Orm muttered quietly as he sat on his throne.

Saturnus gave a puzzled response. "What?"

There was no way she would understand if he just started talking about the world or something out of nowhere. It was only natural. But to Orm, there was no need to bother explaining. *Even if I don't explain, she'll understand soon,* he thought. *Look, she's right there. She's returned from the other world, from passing through space itself, to regain her true memories. The true monster, who has wrestled the Goddess's laws into submission with her sheer will, is coming.*

"It is the return of the king."

Just as Orm spoke, the world shuddered. It was very similar to the heaven-winged racial skill, Pressure, but its range and strength were of an entirely different dimension. Saturnus was completely unable to stand; the only movement she was capable of was the rattling of her teeth. The world itself rumbled in fear at the king's return. This was no hallucination. Just from her return, Mizgarz's rotation speed slowed a little, and several abnormal weather patterns, like hurricanes, whipped up on the dark continent. As if being drawn in, the moon sank a little closer to Mizgarz, and the oceans rose in response. With how much Lufas had grown, her very existence was power itself at this point.

Lufas didn't wield power; she *was* power. It was as if the world—rather, the entirety of space itself—bowed to her. Such was the absolute weight of her very existence, as well as her intimidating pressure. Distance made no difference; it was possible to sense her just with instinct. Surpassing a time of two hundred years, Lufas Maphaahl had truly returned.

Orm felt this more than anyone as he rose from his throne.

"Y-You're going to fight?"

Saturnus looked up at Orm like he was something completely incomprehensible, though it was true that she couldn't understand him. Any person with a normal sense of things would understand just how meaningless what Orm was about to do was. After all, why not just leave her alone? Why not just let the two monsters, Lufas and Alovenus, destroy each other? There was basically no merit for Orm to go out of his way to fight Lufas.

"Please don't, My Lord. There's no point!"

* *

Passing through the gap in space-time, Benet and I once again touched Mizgarz ground. Even with Dina sealed in that gap under her own will, it would probably still take less than just a day for things to kick off, probably not even ten hours. I had no time left. If I missed this chance, the showdown between Orm and I would have to be pushed back even further. Either that or there might never be a chance for our final confrontation. Now was the time for me to head for that end-all fight that I hadn't been able to attend two hundred years ago, though there would probably be those who would think that I shouldn't do it *because* I was so pressed for time.

Both the Devil King and I had set defeating the Goddess as our goal, so there would surely be those who believed that we should have joined hands instead of fighting each other. They would be right. In truth, that would be the correct move. So, the answer to the question of whether or not what I was about to do was pointless would be a resounding yes. The answer to whether or not it would be inefficient would also play out similarly.

Using an Exgate, I retrieved my equipment and transmuted a station for myself to change in before I went in and did so quickly. It basically took me only an instant. In fact, I might not have needed the changing station.

"So you're going to fight the Devil King now?" Benet asked.

"Yeah. I've kept him waiting a long time, after all. You can feel it too, can't you? His will to fight, I mean."

"I can, but I don't think there'd be much point in doing so right now."

"You're right..." I admitted, pausing. "It's certainly not the smart move. But..."

* *

“It isn’t about logic.”

Orm didn’t have an answer that would satisfy Saturnus. After all, she was right. There was no meaning to this fight. Well, there was for Orm, but from an outside viewpoint, it shouldn’t have much priority.

This fight was clearly not something that should be done now. Dina had disappeared from Mizgarz, and Lufas had returned. If Lufas had erased Dina, then *that time* would not come for a while. For it to come, the Goddess’s next avatar would have to be born first, so it would have to be postponed until then.

However, Orm could somehow tell that Lufas had not killed Dina, so the Twilight of the Gods would come soon. The end of times was already upon them. The Goddess would find Dina and control her. Once that happened, there was no stopping it. Everything would head for the final stage. There was no more room for doubt. Mizgarz would end today. With that realization, it should have been clear just how useless fighting Lufas right now was.

Any smart person would probably consider the situation, what they should do now, and what could be done later. They would calm themselves and look at the big picture. *Ah, yes, that would be correct. Totally correct.* However, Orm chose to make this mistake.

* *

“I can’t move forward while leaving things smoldering like this. Orm can’t either.”

I couldn’t challenge the Goddess with baggage still left in my heart. Now that I had my memories back, I was filled with this feeling. My fight with Orm had been going on for two hundred years, and it had yet to end. I just wouldn’t be able to go into the final fight in such a half-finished situation. There were two people with the right to challenge her in the first place, and it would be weird for them both to move on without settling things with each other, wouldn’t it?

“You understand my feelings, don’t you, Benet?”

There was silence, then a “Hmph.” Benet sullenly turned away.

I was sure that she understood how Orm and I felt, because she'd been doing the exact same thing, wishing to settle the score with me for two hundred years.

What I was about to do was all about my own ego. I was just going to clean up some baggage, some lingering regrets. That was it, just a boring errand. But to me, it was pretty important. Also, I just couldn't leave him alone in the end, because this fight would be one with the right to challenge the Goddess on the line.

A clever person would probably say that there didn't have to only be one person with that right. A good person would say that it would be fine to share that right. A kind person would suggest working together. All of them would be correct, meaning I would be wrong. But even knowing that, I had no intention of being correct. In the end, I was a fool making a foolish choice. I knew that. The paths I always chose were never clever, good, or kind.

* *

"It's just my stubbornness... That's all it is," Orm said, smiling quietly.

He knew he was wrong, but he was going to commit to that mistake.

Determined, Orm strode past Saturnus, his mantle swaying. Saturnus reflexively grabbed a corner of that mantle, but she quickly gasped, coming to her senses and letting go. Not even Saturnus herself could correctly recognize all the emotions swirling within her at that moment. Rather, she didn't want to know, because she knew the emotion would be far too disrespectful. So, Saturnus simply put on a mask, pretending to just be a loyal retainer. However, she was unable to contain all the overflowing emotions within her, and she made an entreating outburst. "Make sure...you come back alive...please. We need you...!"

"Of course. That's the plan. I am not going to go into the fight intending to die."

Orm kept his back facing Saturnus, so she couldn't see the smile which the emotions she showed had brought to his face.

"The devilfolk are puppets..." Dina may have said that, but maybe they

shouldn't all be written off. True, they're just fakes whose bodies and very lives were given by the Goddess, but they have their own hearts. That was true of Terra, Luna, and Mercurius.

Orm felt guilty about what he'd done to Mercurius. The poor devilfolk had been convinced that Orm had the key, but what he was holding was a fake. Even if it had been real, though, it was unlikely that Orm would have been able to make the devilfolk real flesh and blood. Only those connected to the Goddess could pull out its true power, meaning that it was only possible for Dina, her avatar, or Parthenos, the guardian of her sanctuary. However, Dina couldn't risk exposing her betrayal to the Goddess, and Parthenos had always been the enemy of the devilfolk. In other words, Mercurius never had a chance.

In the end, they're all just puppets that can be turned into nothing but game pieces at the Goddess's whim. It doesn't matter if they die meaningless deaths. That was what Orm always thought. However... It might have been possible for not just Mercurius, but all the devilfolk who had died up until now, like Pluto and Jupiter, to have lived a different life.

Mars would... Well, who cares about him, I guess.

At any rate, there was only one—just one way to change the fate of the devilfolk. That was to force the Goddess, who had written this scenario, to change it. She would have to change the villains—the devilfolk—into something completely different. That was the only way. And while there was only a tiny chance of it—less than one in ten thousand—the only one who could accomplish this was Lufas Maphaahl.

However, if Lufas Maphaahl were to be allowed to do as she pleased, there was the chance that the world would simply come to know fear of a different flavor: hers. So there was no way Orm could avoid this fight.

Lufas Maphaahl should never have disappeared from this world, but she also can't be allowed to run free. So, I will be the one to control her... I am an ouroboros. I cannot fight the Goddess directly. Even if I tried, this body would refuse to listen, since I was born as her agent. But if I defeat Lufas and can have her execute my will...

At this point, Lufas has completed her revival. Given that, I'll probably stand

less than a ten percent chance of winning... But there would have been no point in defeating an incomplete Lufas to make her obey me either. I had to wait until now for the completely incomparable, truly strongest being to return. I think this is the first time since I was born that I've been the one challenging someone. Maybe those heroes who came to me in the past felt like this.

While remembering the past, Orm took to the skies. The scenery passed by in a flash, and he arrived at a lone, deserted island as if led there. The island was about forty percent the size of humanity's current territory. However, because of the fact that this area was prone to natural disasters, neither the humans nor the devilfolk had staked a claim on it. It was the perfect place to fight.

Right when Orm landed, the Black-Winged King descended opposite him. Her expression was filled to overflowing with confidence, and she was completely different to when Orm had seen her last. Whether he liked it or not, Orm was forced to realize it. *I see. The time has finally come. Right now, I am undoubtedly facing the Star that Invites Death.*

"I've kept you waiting, Devil King. There's no need for any useless conversation now. It's time to settle a two-hundred-year-long dispute."

Lufas had on a gentle, seemingly peaceful smile as she lowered her arms. She took no stance and put up no guard. Her natural pose was her stance, as well as a show of her composure.

"Yes... Let us settle things, Lufas Maphaahl!"

Just as Lufas said, there's no need for extraneous conversation. Only strength will speak in this place.

Both of them had agreed that the next time they met would be the signal for battle, so the starting gong had already rung.

Orm disappeared as he unleashed his right fist with all his might. In response, Lufas stuck out her index finger. The finger and Orm's fist collided, and in an instant, the island around them was changed into a wasteland as the ocean was bounced outwards and came flooding back.

“WOOOAAAAAGGGHHHH!!!”

STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE, STRIKE!

Orm lowered his stance, firmly planting himself on the ground as he threw out punch after punch while shouting at full volume. Each and every strike was deadly. As the word implied, each one was capable of causing death in a single blow. If even one of these extremely powerful blows landed, even a dragon would be blown apart.

These weren't simply normal attacks; each punch was packed to the gills with skills—those that increased stats, those that accelerated damage, those that pierced defenses, and those that countered other skills. They were by no means average punches. The blows that Orm put out measured in at a speed of six hundred million kilometers per hour, which was over Mach five hundred thousand. These measured numbers were so ridiculously large that this was now in the territory of a child's play fight, but the reality was that this was just how fast this fight was happening. Not to mention, Orm was throwing out these blows like they were raindrops in a storm. Once again, none of his punches were weak; no living thing would survive them. But if that was the case, just what was the woman in front of him? Was she not a living thing? That might have been true. At the very least, she had surpassed the Goddess's definition of the word.

“Whew...”

I can't hit her!

Lufas had yet to even twitch away from her natural stance. From a third-party standpoint, it would look like Orm was just one-sidedly attacking while Lufas simply stood there. Of course, there was no way a normal person's point of view could even register Orm attacking at the speeds he was moving, so this theoretical third person would have to somehow be at a level high enough to be able to see them, which would be at least level 500. At that level, the person would be able to at least somehow understand that Orm was mounting some sort of awesome offensive.

Lufas's hair swayed, and the ground behind her was disappearing without anyone touching it, as if it were made of jelly and had been scooped away. Seeing that, any bystanders would be able to connect these aftereffects to Orm attacking, thus coming to understand that, though they were unable to see it, he was the one on the offense. However, Lufas, who wasn't moving, had yet to suffer even a single scratch, and her composed smile had yet to fade.

To spoil things early, she wasn't actually completely motionless. She was both dodging and blocking. She was even parrying. It was just that the speed at which she was doing such things was so quick that it looked like she wasn't moving at all.

"I see you're a slow starter. Or maybe you're just trying a wait-and-see strategy?"

Lufas smiled as she brought her right hand in front of Orm's forehead. Then, she used her middle finger to flick at his brow. In modern parlance, it would be a forehead flick. With just that, Orm's body instantly disappeared from the face of Mizgarz, and a nearby loitering asteroid crumbled to space dust. At basically the same time, a crater appeared on the face of the planet past the asteroid, and Orm's point of view changed from the familiar Mizgarz to an infinitely stretching space. Shocked, he desperately tried to catch up with what had happened. *I was...sent flying? This far, with just that one attack?!*

While Orm was busy with his shock, he received a telepathic link that didn't need to go through air.

"What's wrong? This is basically just a greeting, you know?"

When Orm hurriedly stood up, he saw Lufas standing calmly on this weightless world, having caught up at some point before Orm was able to notice.

This was common sense that anyone would know and thus doesn't really need to be repeated here, but space was an environment that wasn't survivable for living things. As a species that made its home at a higher altitude than others, the heaven-winged tended to have large lung capacities that made it harder to fall to oxygen deficiency. They were able to survive on less oxygen than other races and hold more air in their lungs, but that by no means meant

that they were able to survive without any oxygen at all. However, Lufas had approached Orm at this place while utterly calm, as if there was nothing wrong with their surroundings other than the fact that it was dark.

She's not breathing, because there's no air around, but... What a monster. I probably shouldn't hope that she suffocates here. Orm wouldn't have been surprised in the slightest even if she managed to spend an entire twenty-four hours active while not breathing. That was just the type of thing the woman named Lufas was capable of.

After a moment of silence, Orm came out with, "I see. Well done. You're completely different from before."

"If you understand what happened to you, then bring your best, Dragon of the Moon. You'll regret it if you fall without ever having brought out your fullest."

"I suppose I should take you up on your offer then."

Normally, Orm had his power sealed under his own will. He shared this trait with Leon and the other Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, but Orm was on another dimension of scale. His true form was that of an ouroboros, those tasked with representing the Goddess of Creation.

Orm's body lost its previous definition and started to change at absurd speeds. He grew to over 123,000 kilometers long, and his snout alone was larger than the mountain Vanaheim was perched on. Each and every one of his fangs was larger than Leon or the Dragon King, such was the absurdity of his size.

Battles were not just a measure of size, especially in this ridiculous world. Seeing the smaller completely overwhelm the larger was not a rare sight in this world. In fact, that sight happened everywhere. However, there was a limit to that. Being bigger didn't necessarily mean better, but if the scale was too different, then it could never be considered a fight in the first place. This wasn't just the difference between a person and an ant; it was the difference between a person and a microbe, the difference between a person and a god.

MizgarzOrm. This was his true form, that of a dreadful agent of divinity from old myth. His body was completely covered in black scales, each of which was

large enough for Aries to ride on in his monster form, to give some sense of how impossible his scale was.

However, even at that size, Orm never lost sight of Lufas. His shining, golden eyes properly captured the form of Lufas, his small but undoubtedly formidable enemy.

“As expected, just stunning. So that’s your true form.”

“It is.”

Orm opened his mouth, instantly unleashing a beam of destructive light that swallowed everything in sight. It could only be described as the judgment of divinity, something that no living thing could fight against.



The surging light completely erased the comets and asteroids that were in its way, as it continued in a line. There were even chains of delayed blasts as stars exploded after the light passed by.

However, the target of the beam, which had taken the full brunt of it, hadn't disappeared. She was pushed back a mere several hundred kilometers, but her arms were still crossed while looking at Orm with a leisurely expression.

“WWOOOAAAAGGHHH!!!”

Lufas had taken little damage or possibly even no damage at all. However, Orm wasn't shaken; he'd expected this. Orm had already known that she was at least this formidable. In fact, if she were to have fallen from just that attack, he would have felt let down. That was why Orm wasn't all that shaken that his attack hadn't worked.

Instead, he swiftly moved on to his next attack. Every part of his body—like his scales, hands, legs, tails, and horns—all started to glow, and the next moment, he unleashed over a hundred lasers at once. Each and every laser dug into nearby stars and erased the various stone flotsam floating around in space as they raged about at the speed of light.

The lasers changed angles, pointing straight towards Lufas. She started to evade, her arms still crossed in front of her, and all the lasers changed angles to chase her. A chain of explosions were whipped up, sending Lufas flying in the direction of Mars.

Mizgarz's solar system was a mirror version of Earth's, so outside of Mizgarz taking Earth's place, it was all the same. Therefore, there was also a moon and a sun, as well as Mars and Mercury.

Just as Lufas made contact with Mars, Orm once again unleashed a beam of light from his mouth. The beam of light once again swallowed Lufas, but it had already been proven not to work.

How about the secondary effects, though?

The dragon's destructive beam hit Mars's core and caused it to swell, swallowing Lufas up in a gigantic explosion soon after. The final sparkle of a planet's life, while not nearly comparable to a star's supernova, still boasted an

overwhelming amount of power and heat. While using his own body as a shield to protect Mizgarz from any aftereffects, Orm continued to watch the explosion without letting his guard down.

“Losing sight of an enemy in an explosion...” Lufas trailed off. “That was a trope and kind of a losing flag in the battle manga my avatar liked.”

At the same time Orm received that telepathic message, a shock ran through his head. He was attacked by something, and that something managed to break Orm’s scales, which were harder and tougher than anything else in the world, and draw blood. Then, there was another impact. Orm’s body was bounced back like a spring and sent adrift through space.

What...? No, wait, there’s only one person who can do this. That person—Lufas—didn’t even seem that hurt by the explosion of a planet. She seemed mostly unchanged from before as she looked down at Orm.

“So...” Orm said telepathically. “Not even the explosion of a planet works.”

“Don’t be so sad. That attack right now was a pretty good idea. It did actually do damage—not even I could take nothing from that—though that’s all it did. Even if you did that a hundred more times, my life wouldn’t be in danger.”

Orm completely ignored his own form for a moment and thought, *You monster*, from the bottom of his heart.

In front of him, Lufas slowly unfolded her arms and clenched her fists. While she’d been mostly passive up until now, she was finally going to fight for real. Orm was trying to keep his eye on her, but it seemed his wariness was meaningless. Lufas disappeared anyway, and Orm was blown away regardless of the size of his gargantuan body. *What kind of ridiculous monster is she?* Even with his size, which rivaled the stars in the sky, and his toughness, which surpassed them, Orm was easily punched away. From any standpoint, this should have been impossible.

This woman... Can she seriously split a planet in two with just a single punch? Orm took a split second to consider this. *She might. Yeah, she might.* With the difference in their physical strength being as large as it was, Orm’s size was now nothing but a disadvantage.

Just imagine a flying mosquito in the middle of summer, except that instead of it being squished by the swat of a human, it doesn't even budge. Instead, the human who swatted it goes flying. Wouldn't that seem impossible? Would the human have any chance of winning in that situation? This was the same thing. Well, actually, the situation was even more hopeless.

However, Orm had expected this much hardship from the start. He was here having known full well that this might happen.

"Then... How about this?!"

Orm started to orbit his huge body around Lufas. He opened his large mouth and bit onto his own tail, becoming a large, circular snake as he continued to rotate. Eventually, he managed to speed up past the speed of light, and he completely enveloped Lufas. Having passed the speed of light, whatever was on the inside of the encirclement was now cut off in time from the outside, and a second on the outside would be the equivalent to a day, a year, or even a hundred years on the inside. In short, Orm had become a prison of time.

All the time that passed inside would turn its fangs on any occupants, forcing them to deteriorate as if an infinite amount of time had passed. It was similar to the jeweled box from the legend of Urashima Tarou, but it wasn't anything as nice and easy as a fairy tale. The time that was attacking Lufas at the moment easily numbered somewhere in the tens of thousands of years. It was the unique skill "Ouroboros."

I've got her! Orm was sure that even if this wouldn't down Lufas, she would at least take a good amount of damage from it. Even Lufas was still technically a living being. Though her life span might have been long, and she may have been able to expand it with elixirs, it still wasn't infinite. She would surely grow old, and even she wouldn't be unscathed by bathing in these waves of pure time.

Yes, that was the plan... But why...? Why is Lufas just laughing leisurely without any change?!

"That was a good idea and a nice hidden trick. But I, too, am pretty confident in my hidden trick... Sorry, but I've taken the liberty of canceling yours out."

"Canceled out...?! No way. That's impossible... The Goddess didn't make any skill to do that..."

“No. In her foolishness, she did, though she didn’t intend it to be used as such... Her own avatar gave me the skill.”

Having been told that, Orm then realized. The time that should have been accelerating inside Orm’s encirclement wasn’t accelerating. In fact, the time was winding back.

This skill... No way, that’s impossible! This isn’t Lufas’s skill. Dina should be the only one with this skill.

“It’s Yed Posterior. It’s one of Dina’s unique skills that will stop time and then reverse it, eventually returning the target to before it was born.”

Unique skills like that were fundamentally only possessed by one person. That was exactly why they were unique. In other words, this situation was an impossible one, an action completely outside logic.

Orm was able to ignore levels and see his opponent’s stats regardless, a version of Observing Eye only allowed for agents of the Goddess, and he used it on Lufas. Then, he understood... *This is it.* In the entry of Lufas’s classes, there was a strange one that shouldn’t have been there, named “Archenemy.” By Orm’s reckoning, this was the cause.

Right, that shouldn’t actually be a class. At the very least, the Goddess never made such a class. So who did?

Of course... Lufas made a class that fit her by herself and gained it. She most likely bent reality using the Key. Then, when she leveled up, she chose the skills of her retainers. That’s the only possibility I can think of. Orm had managed to deduce the reason, but that realization only came with more despair.

Oh no... She’s... She’s able to use all of the Twelve Stars’ skills?!

“Are you really okay with being this close to me for so long?” Lufas paused. “I’ll burn you, you know.”

As Lufas spoke, her body sprouted rainbow-colored fire. Just by touching her, the subject would continuously take percentile damage based on their maximum HP. It was the god-killing flame, Mesarthim. The heat spread out with Lufas as the epicenter, burning Orm’s scales mercilessly. It didn’t matter how tough Orm was; that wouldn’t make a difference. The heat of this flame would

strengthen infinitely based on the opponent's power.

Unable to stand the heat, Orm loosened up for a moment. In that moment, Lufas sprang out and punched Orm with all her might. With just a little trick, the kind which would be performed on the street, he wouldn't be able to surpass Lufas, who was despair itself.

* *

"Father! Father!"

Within his dazed consciousness, Orm remembered Terra as a child. At first, he'd planned for Terra to be a puppet, to be his replacement. He only saw the child as a stand-in to console in order to dodge his feelings of wretchedness. Of course, there would be no deep feelings in that relationship, and Orm shouldn't have had feelings for his clone. At least, that was what he thought.

When was it, I wonder? he thought after a moment of pondering. *When did I start to feel joy at calling him my son? When did I start to treasure that child's smile?* By the time he'd noticed, Terra stopped being a consoling puppet and became something irreplaceable.

Orm was an ouroboros meant to be an agent of the Goddess. Ouroboroses were perfect beings, as close as could be to immortality. They might be able to be killed by others, but the Goddess was basically the only one capable of that. So Orm the ouroboros needed no partner, and he didn't feel the need to breed either. He was perfect by himself, so there was no point in leaving behind descendants.

Naturally, ever since he was born he'd never experienced the feeling of being a parent. This was a first for him. For the first time, he felt at peace just by having someone nearby. Now, he felt that he understood the feelings of all the heroes who had challenged him in order to protect something.

Since when did I become this weak? Lufas Maphaahl is fearsome. I'm scared, so scared I can't help it. For the longest time, I thought death was just a single end. I didn't care if I died at any time. Even so, now that I'm facing it, I'm so pathetically afraid. No, I don't want to die! I still want to live! Not yet... I haven't finished watching my child grow yet. What will happen if I die? What if this fearsome star of death encounters my son? No, that can't happen. That's the

only thing that must never happen.

I can't afford to die yet. I can't die and leave my child alone. I still remember the heartfelt relief I experienced when Lufas disappeared. But that relief was quickly replaced with the next source of despair. The Goddess gave an order... She said that it was time to end this story.

That meant it was time for the end of the devilfolk. The evil Devil King would be defeated by the heroes, but that also meant that those under him would be culled without exceptions, and that included Terra.

No, I won't let it. This might just be another scenario to the Goddess, but to me, there's an irreplaceable treasure.

By the time he'd noticed, Orm had ignored the script and sent the heroes packing.

9

Orm had sent the heroes packing after taking a piece of their bodies and even cursing them to lose half their power, but even then, he had no peace of heart. He couldn't help but worry.

Ignoring the Goddess's scenario was tantamount to rebelling against her. He managed to make a plausible excuse for it, but the Goddess most likely hadn't believed him. As proof, there were two members among the new group that his son had founded, the Seven Luminaries, who were clearly spies for the Goddess. One of them was even the Goddess's avatar.

Though Orm managed to delay the destruction of the devilfolk, it was in no way a permanent solution. The devilfolk were still the evil meant to be destroyed at some point in the Goddess's scenario. As long as this fundamental fact wasn't changed, their future would also remain the same. However, Orm had no means of doing so. It wasn't a problem of power. Even if all the other ouroboroses were to help him face down the Goddess, he couldn't go further than that. The role of the ouroboroses was to manage the world as representatives of the Goddess. They hadn't been made with the ability to fight

her. This was a matter of pure instinct, without the interference of emotion or reason. He would never be able to go against her.

Lufas was the only one able to actually fight the Goddess. Benetnasch would also not be a bad choice, but she had no interest in the Goddess in the first place, so she probably wouldn't bother. The best-case scenario would be for Lufas and Benetnasch to join hands and challenge the Goddess along with the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars and for Lufas to not destroy the devilfolk after that. However, that was unlikely. It was hard to believe that Lufas would just let the devilfolk live, despising them as much as she did. She would most likely point her hostility their way before fighting the Goddess.

In order to overturn the Goddess's scenario, Lufas was necessary. However, Lufas was the manifestation of all the devilfolk's fears. She was their Star of Death.

What should I do? What...?

I can put a curse on her and force her to obey me with the lifting of the curse as a condition... The result of Orm's pondering led him to something that was neither skillful nor even really a plan, but it was the only path he could think of. If he were to defeat Lufas and place the same curse on her that he used on the Seven Heroes, then she would have to swallow his demands. If her power were to be halved before her fight with the Goddess, that would probably be unrecoverable. Therefore, if he managed to curse her, he could use the temporary lifting of the curse as a condition to make her swallow his demands and form a united front against the Goddess. After that, if he could somehow deal with her after she was exhausted from fighting the Goddess...

Orm paused. "Though these are all just armchair theories now. Lufas is no longer here."

After she disappeared, Orm had finally realized it. Lufas Maphaahl was the only one capable of opposing the Goddess. She was the only one able to overturn her scenario. However, it was now all too late. Lufas had disappeared, and now there was no one left to challenge divinity.

That was when one more rebellious soul appeared before Orm, who was just about to give up, with a deal for the devil.

“That’s not necessarily true.”

Orm was so surprised, he couldn’t form a response.

After being called out to, Orm finally realized that, at some point, the Goddess’s avatar had snuck into the room. He couldn’t tell how long she’d been here. She shut off her presence with such skill that not even the Devil King noticed her. It was as if she’d completely blended into the background.

While shuddering on the inside, Orm cloaked himself in calm.

“I apologize, but for the past couple years, I’ve taken the liberty of observing you, and I am certain now. Yes, you’ve betrayed the Goddess. I also know that your report was a lie.”

Orm silently gathered mana in his hand. Now that he had been found out, there was no choice but to bury her. However, if he were to kill the Goddess’s avatar, that would cement him as a rebel and a traitor.

He considered his options silently. *I’m finished. No matter how I struggle, it’s all too late now. Not to mention, there’s another spy. Even if I killed her here, the other one would notice the discrepancy.*

As Orm was drowning in internal conflict, the Goddess’s avatar brought to him an impossible suggestion. “Won’t you join me?”

“What...?”

“I’ve also betrayed the Goddess. I am one who wishes for an end to this boring story.”

It was an impossible coincidence. After all, she was the avatar of the Goddess, which meant she was supposed to have the Goddess’s memories and personality. Normally, it would be unthinkable that she would rebel against the Goddess. After all, that would be like the Goddess betraying herself.

“You... Aren’t you Alovenus?”

“I have three names. One is Venus of the Seven Luminaries. Another: Ophiuchus of the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars. And then there’s the name my parents gave me: Dina.” She paused. “None of those seem to be Alovenus.”

“Are you seriously telling me that the Goddess’s avatar has betrayed the Goddess?”

“Do you not believe me?”

“You’re right. I don’t. But I have no choice other than to bet on that being the truth, I suppose.” Orm paused, considering the offer. “Fine. I accept your invitation.”

The snake long enough to surround the world accepted the invitation of the snake charmer. *Fine. I don’t know her goal here, but I’ll allow her to use me. Either way, I have no other choice.*

Like that, the two of them joined hands, and Dina concealed the fact that Orm had betrayed the Goddess from everyone. She’d also predicted that Lufas would return in roughly two hundred years, though she never revealed the full scope of her plan, and she continued to skillfully manipulate the devilfolk in that time so that they wouldn’t destroy humanity.

Now I can’t be thankful enough to her. She hadn’t helped him out of the goodness of her heart, but as a result, Orm had managed to buy two hundred years.

“Orm hasn’t betrayed us,” Dina, the Goddess’s avatar, had said. “He really was just scared at the sudden, unprecedented invasion of heroes and accidentally became serious.” By continuing to define Orm as white but almost gray, the Goddess never moved to purge him, and thus, Orm and Terra continued to live. It was all thanks to Dina.

All Orm needed to do now was fight Lufas directly, win, and put a curse on her. However, the barrier to achieving that was far too high. Even so, Orm couldn’t afford to lose this fight. He just couldn’t.

* *

Orm strained with pure will and managed to keep himself conscious after the blow, allowing him to swallow Lufas in another beam of destructive light. *Now I understand painfully well how all those heroes who challenged me and sacrificed their lives felt. I know how noble they were.*

I remember long ago, when one of them claimed that he could become as

strong as necessary to protect those he loved. He was totally right. For him, I can become infinitely strong. Long ago, a man howled at me, saying that he didn't care what happened to him as long as those he cared for were happy. I agree now, hero. You were correct, and I was wrong...! I don't think I'll go to the same place as him when I die, but even so, if I meet him, then I will apologize. So for now—just for now—please lend me your strength!

“Oh...?”

While taking Orm's attack, Lufas noticed that he'd changed. Everything was different, from the strength of his attacks to his speed, and even the strength of will behind all of that. *I remember this feeling. He's walking the path that Benetnasch and I once went down.*

“Interesting. So you're going to try and surpass your limits?”

Lufas took the full brunt of Orm's charge, and she was pushed back towards the sun by his formidable mass. Of course, if he were to go all the way there, Orm wouldn't emerge unscathed either. The center of the sun was actually around fifteen million degrees Celsius. There wasn't a material in the universe that could withstand that.

Orm's scales burned, and he felt like he was about to faint from the heat. The reason he was able to withstand it was because of the thought of his loved one. Because he'd learned how to care for someone else.

“So your plan is to sacrifice yourself? Your resolve is good. True, even though I am Sun-aligned, the heat of the actual sun will hurt me. It is, in fact, hot, and if you were to ask me if I would find it hard to bear, I would have to say yes. But... That doesn't mean I *can't* bear it, you realize?”

Lufas smiled ferociously before grabbing one of the scales on Orm's head and throwing him even farther into the sun's core. Orm's face burned, and meanwhile, Lufas escaped the core.

Of course, that wasn't the end of it. Using the celestial bodies in the area, Lufas activated her alchemy skill. “Transmute—One-Eyed Hero.”

Out of the bodies, a gigantic old man was birthed. His hair was long, and his wide-brimmed hat was pulled over his eyes, making it impossible to see his

face. He wore a black robe, and he was missing one eye, so there was only a single eye shining mysteriously out at the universe. He rode an eight-legged horse and was even larger than an ouroboros, proven by how easily he grabbed Orm.

Orm, who was large enough to surround a planet, had his head and tail grabbed as the old man tried to pull him apart, and the Devil King let out a wordless scream.

If the enemy was gigantic, then just prepare something even larger. It was a simple but effective move.

Orm's body creaked in strain, and little by little he started to split apart.

S-So strong... Too strong...! How did I seriously believe I could defeat this monster? Did... Did all you heroes seriously dare to take on such a hopeless battle?! The gap in power between Lufas and Orm directly reflected the gap between Orm and the heroes from ages past. They had never given up. Though Orm had faintly suspected this difference in strength, he had still taken on the fight. They'd lost their arms; they'd lost their legs, and still their wills had never broken. They had faced Orm with the pure shine of their souls.

I... I won't lose... If I lose, I won't be able to face those I've killed! Orm howled and wrung out strength from his body past his limits. Orm sundered one of the gigantic elder's arms, wrapped himself around his neck, and squeezed tight.

While watching the manifestation of a deity return to being an asteroid, Lufas's cheeks loosened. *As I thought. He's starting to surpass his limits... I don't know what kind of change of heart he went through, but this is quite the leap in ability.*

Once again, Orm unleashed a beam of destructive light from his mouth, but this time, it was even stronger. Lufas felt the force of it even through her guard, and it shaved away at the celestial bodies caught in its path.

Orm then layered on a breath attack with his full might behind it, launching Lufas far away in an instant. Though Lufas managed to deflect the attack with a single arm, she lost sight of Orm right after she had done so. *I lost sight of such a huge body?*

Lufas was only confused for a moment. However, Orm, now back in human form, had hit her with an ax kick by the time she'd noticed. She managed to react in time and block, but they were in space where there was no way for Lufas to brace herself. She was comically blown away, and Orm chased after her, once again assuming his dragon form. Then, he roared at Lufas before returning to human form, circling around her to kick her back upwards and changing into a dragon to bite into her. It was a tempestuous combo, making use of Orm's human form, which was originally there to seal his power.

“WOOOOOOAAAAAAAARRGGGGHHH!!!”

Then he finally surpassed his limits.

Orm's level rose past the limits defined by the Goddess, and he settled at the same level as Benetnasch: level 1500. Of course, this was no normal level 1500. Orm already exhibited more power than Benetnasch at level 1000, and now, he had surpassed his limits. His strength was literally unknown now. Not even Alovenus would have expected this.

With increased strength and speed, Orm became light as he showered Lufas with blows in both human and dragon form. He used any and all skills he possessed in order to corner the strongest being alive. *I can win. No, I have to win, no matter what.* The back of Orm's mind was filled with thoughts of his son's happy future. That was all. For that, he would have to overcome this hurdle of despair.

“I will deem you a worthy enemy.” At the same time Orm heard this telepathic message from Lufas, who had yet to lose her composure, a tremendous force assaulted his cheek.

His fangs snapped and his scales were smashed and scattered. Orm barely managed to keep his consciousness as Lufas quietly drifted towards him, somehow emitting an even stronger sense of intimidating pressure.

“That was awe-inspiring, Orm. I apologize for the fact that I thought I would be able to claim victory over a man like you with only fifty percent of my strength.”

Orm was shocked into silence until he finally managed to get out a “What?”

“Now, I am at seventy percent. From here on out, I will be fighting you at the same level I used to fight Benet.”

Just as Orm heard that, Lufas became wreathed in rainbow-colored fire. She’d used Mesarthim earlier, but unlike before, it wasn’t just momentary flares of flame. She was now permanently covered in it. On top of that, she used Parthenos’s skill to instantly cast several buffing heaven-arts on herself.

Orm had only managed to close the gap in strength for a moment. Right afterwards, Lufas peeled ahead once again.

Despair wasn’t something that could just be overcome. That was exactly why it was called despair.

10

Monster, Bogeyman, Conqueror, and Star of Death.

In the past, the entire world had been in fear of this woman, and she was referred to by many names. However, Orm now realized that all of them were insufficient. Those titles did not satisfactorily describe how over-the-top Lufas was. She was even more over-the-top than what everyone else would describe as over-the-top.

This is... Yes, this is pure hopelessness. She is the concept of despair made manifest. I’ve crunched her between these jaws that can chew through planets. I’ve swallowed her up in roaring blasts that can erase stars. I blew up a planet on her, trapped her in a prison of time, and even pushed her into the Sun. Any normal thing would have died. There’s no way all of that would have failed to do her in, but here she is, just fine. It’s as if she’s taken no damage at all. And at the end of it all, she wasn’t even taking it seriously this entire time. She isn’t even using a weapon yet.

There was a brief pause in Orm’s musings. *What the hell am I even supposed to do? What options do I even have against such hopelessness? How can I defeat her?*

Orm had used so much strength already that he was now unable to maintain his dragon form, so he was forced to revert to human shape. Though his true body was that of a dragon, Orm's human mode had the role of keeping his energy usage down. Now that his life was truly in danger, Orm's survival instincts kicked in and changed him back to human in order to keep his expenditure down and raise his chances of living through this ordeal. However, this instinct was a huge drawback in the middle of a battle.

Lufas grabbed Orm's head, proceeding to fly off into space at a speed faster than light. She left the solar system to fling Orm into a planet that was likely several times larger than Mizgarz. The planet didn't manage to withstand Orm's momentum, however, and it was run through with cracks. Then, it was destroyed. That one impact was unmanageable for the planet, and it exploded.

In the midst of that blastwave of heat, Lufas grabbed Orm and once again flew off. This time, she threw Orm with all her might into the Sun. Orm passed through those hellish flames and came out the other side, where he was once again caught by Lufas, who had circled around. She did so as easily as taking a small detour. Everything that had just happened was simply too absurd. The sun was by no means small.

Lufas continued, showering Orm with a flurry of punches. Orm desperately attempted to dodge, but they were thrown out at a speed that was impossible for him to deal with. Each punch surpassed the speed of light itself, basically landing instantly. There was effectively no time lag between the attack being launched and it hitting its mark. It was as if the laws of cause and effect in this universe had been reversed—Lufas had left light so far behind that the result of her hitting her target would happen before the actual action. It was an impossible task to try to evade her attacks.

It could be said that Orm had done admirably to get this far. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that it was amazing that he'd fought up until this point, but he'd gone too far. He'd gotten Lufas Maphaahl in the mood. The moment Lufas recognized a person as a worthy enemy was the moment the fight ended, and the one-sided trampling began. Now that it'd come to this, Orm had no more moves. He would only be allowed to be forced into submission with no resistance.

Orm's head was grabbed, and his face smashed into Lufas's knee before she then took hold of his neck and shoved high quantities of mana directly into him. Orm's entire body was cooked and beaten until he found himself unable to even move by the time Lufas decided to fly back to Mizgarz with Orm still in her grip.

Just before entering the stratosphere, she slowed down, and in the end, she stuck a perfect landing on the same isolated island they started on. Except, that island was broken.

Lufas paused. "Oh no. I didn't hold back enough."

While feeling some guilt at having accidentally broken an unsuspecting, innocent island, Lufas used alchemy to rebuild it. Since she didn't remember exactly how it looked before, the island took on a slightly different shape. Once she was done, she finally let go of Orm, who was now at death's door.

"I really should have warmed up a little before fighting. I'm finding it hard to judge my own strength since I got all my power back at once."

I still don't have good enough discipline. With that thought, Lufas looked up.

In doing so, she spotted the *Argo*, which had probably come rushing over after noticing their fight. Benetnasch was sitting on a railing of the boat with her arms crossed unhappily. *Wow, they got here fast.* Lufas fought back a chuckle. It had only been around twenty seconds since she'd met up with Orm, after all. Discounting the time they'd used up talking, their fight might not have even exceeded two seconds.

Yes, the entire fight had only taken around a second. The both of them had compressed their internal time down several levels of magnitude and, given that they were fighting in accelerated time, their fight only took but a moment in reality. It was almost as if they had been fighting in frozen time, given that they'd fought faster than light. In fact, Orm should probably have been praised for fighting so well. At the very least, Lufas's initial predictions had her defeating Orm within half a second.

The Twelve Stars jumped off the ship and ran towards Lufas. At the same time, Terra ran and inserted himself between Orm and Lufas.

“Are you all right, Miss Lufas?”

“I am. More importantly, heal the Devil King,” Lufas said, as she looked around at her surroundings and realized that Virgo wasn’t present.

* *

In the end, I managed to finish my fight with the Devil King successfully, and I felt a small sense of relief inside. Given how much I’d injured him, it was hard to call this a good ending, but at least I hadn’t killed him. *Still... Yeah, the Devil King was more formidable than I thought.* That wasn’t some sort of backhanded insult; I truly thought that. *It might sound like conceit, since I’m saying it about myself, but honestly, nothing on Mizgarz would be able to defeat me one-on-one, and the ouroboroses are no exception.*

Though he hadn’t made me go all out, he had managed to force me to go to seventy percent of my strength. He should be proud of that. If my full strength was one hundred, then my strength when I was still half-asleep, when I’d first returned to this world, was around twenty-four. Even when using Alkaid, I had only ever got up to around thirty-six. Even at my weakest, I was at least as strong as Leon. That comparison should make it clearer just how strong seventy percent of my power was, and the Devil King had managed to draw that out of me. The fight itself was my overwhelming victory, but Orm fought bravely.

“You won’t kill my father?”

“The old me might have, but as I am now, my back isn’t as pressed up against the wall as back then. There’s no need for me to beat a dead horse.”

When I answered Terra’s question, the rest of the Twelve Stars all looked shocked. Out of them, Aries was the one to take the spot of representative and asked me, “Um... Miss Lufas... The way you refer to yourself...”

“Yeah, I went back to before. Is it weird?”

“Ah, no... That’s not it! Just... It’s so nostalgic...”

To Aries, who had known me back when I was an adventurer, my returning to using “I” probably didn’t feel strange. Though he seemed a little surprised, he was looking at me with a nostalgic expression. On the other hand, all the members who only knew me as a conqueror were looking confused.

Specifically, that included Scorpius, Aigokeros, Pollux, Castor... Well, basically everyone else other than Karkinos. In the first place, the only ones who had known me since my adventuring days were Aries, Taurus, and Karkinos. Though I now looked back on it fondly, I originally hadn't wanted to capture Karkinos at all. He had just happened to get in the way when I'd attempted to capture a different monster, so I had accidentally ended up capturing him.

"By the way, where's Virgo?"

"She's... Um, right now she's with Parthenos, talking to Merak."

"Merak?"

Virgo and Merak... Well, it wasn't a completely unthinkable pair. They were both heaven-winged, and Virgo hadn't yet had a chance to talk to others of her race. Though there had been heaven-winged amongst the participants in the event in Draupnir, she had only seen them from afar at best. And given who I was, I was less a full heaven-winged and more like a bugged new race that happened to have split off. *If I were to pick a new name to look cool, it'd be... Let's see... The jet-winged?* I kind of felt that being the only member of a race was cool, but all that really meant was that I was a loner.

"For now, let us exchange information. I want to know what happened while I was gone."

After confirming that Pollux agreed to my proposal, I faced the fallen Orm. Since Virgo wasn't present, there was no other choice. Out of my subordinates, only Virgo and Dina were good at healing magic, but neither of them were present. Pisces, Sagittarius, and Castor could, in fact, use healing magic, but it was only at the level of first aid. Therefore, it was up to me to do it.

That was the conclusion I'd reached, but Terra stood in the way, protecting Orm. *No, I wasn't actually going to try to finish him off... Well, given how I was two hundred years ago, I guess I can't fault him for being wary.* I had only realized this after gaining an objective perspective, but the old me was truly horrible. If a devilfolk had so much as brushed past my peripheral vision, I'd have dashed over to put an end to them.

Well, first, I guess I need to get Terra to move.

As I was about to act on that thought, Orm, on the brink of death, somehow managed to stand and place himself in front of Terra. *This guy... He shouldn't even be conscious.*

After a moment, Orm managed to get out, "Don't... Touch... Terra..."

Orm was muttering, but what I clearly heard was undoubtedly love for his son.



Having heard that, everything finally fell into place. *As I thought.* I finally realized why Orm had decided to betray the Goddess. It wasn't anything huge; he was just another father who wanted to protect his son. Just like any father found throughout the world, that was enough reason to rebel against the Goddess. *What a huge difference from my father... Seriously, I'm about to be jealous of Terra.*

Terra himself looked disbelievingly at Orm after hearing that.

"It seems this is the answer, Terra. It looks like the reason why he rejected the Goddess's scenario was for you."

"Fa...ther..."

"Right then. Step aside before it's too late."

I moved Terra back and put my hands on Orm. Then, I used healing heaven-arts as I talked to him. *It's Orm, so he should regain consciousness.*

"Orm, I understand why you challenged me. You are an ouroboros. Even if you were to attempt to fight the Goddess, your body would not allow you to. And that doesn't just apply to the Goddess, but also to her kin. That was why you wanted me as a sword to point at her, correct?"

The reason why Orm challenged me, and also why he purposefully waited for me to regain my power, was all because he wanted my strength. Orm could never actually fight the Goddess. This wasn't a question of his strength but of his instincts as an ouroboros. That was why he needed a weapon to oppose the Goddess with.

However, the sword that had returned to him was rusted over, and though it was more useful than any old blunt piece of junk, it wouldn't be enough for the Goddess. That was why he'd had to wait for the sword to regain its former glory before challenging it with all his being. That was about how it went.

Rather than bravery, it was more like recklessness. Knowing my original strength, he should have also known that a single ouroboros wouldn't be able to win against me, but even then, he still went through with it. That just showed how much he wanted his son to live.

“I’ve waged this fight for the same reason. Become my sword, Devil King Orm. I desire your strength in my fight against the Goddess.”

There was no skill or spell to free Orm from the restraints put on him by the Goddess. However, it was possible to place another restraint over the Goddess’s, thus canceling both out. If my control of Orm was to overcome his instincts, then it probably wouldn’t be impossible for him to fight the Goddess and her pawns.

“If I become your weapon, will I be able to fight?” asked Orm.

“I can’t make any promises, but the chances aren’t zero. At the very least, it’s far more realistic a plan than your defeating me.”

Orm paused, considering my words. “I see. Then do it.” Orm showed a faint smile and closed his eyes, making a show of nonresistance.

Now that it was over, I realized that it was a simple battle. All it was was a fight to see who would join who. Either way, the fact that we would join hands to oppose the Goddess wouldn’t change. This was just a childish fight to determine who would be on top. That was the true reason for this fight where several planets and stars were sacrificed, though Orm had probably imagined that I would slaughter all of the devilfolk if I were to win.

Still, a win was a win. As the victor, I didn’t hesitate to claim my prize and use my skill.

“Capture!”

Using my skill as a Monster Tamer, I captured Orm. This was likely the only way for Orm to be able to fight the Goddess. I would control him with my own constraints overlapping the ones the Goddess had placed on him. With that, my order to fight the Goddess would compete with his instincts to not do so, and if my control on him was stronger, then Orm should be able to fight off his instincts.

It needn’t be said, but this was a very brute-force method. If I were to liken it to something... *Let’s see...* Imagine a person who’s so sleepy they can’t help it. That’s when their boss comes in, yells at them not to sleep, and just grabs their head and forces them to stand up. What I was trying to do was similar to that.

That being said, if I were to have lost, I'd probably have been captured myself, so I wasn't going to accept any complaints.

"They say that the Snake Charmer constellation used to be one with the Serpent constellation. There's no spare seat on the Thirteen Heavenly Stars, but allow me to welcome you as part of the Snake Charmer seat. I will now give you a name. Your constellation will be...Serpens. You are one half of the Snake Charmer of the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars, Serpens the Snake."

I gave Orm his title and forcefully shoved him into the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars.

I could have just given him some other appropriate-sounding name, but it'd be weird if there was another member who was stronger than the Thirteen Stars. Therefore, it was probably better to add him to the Thirteen Stars, even if it was a little forced. *With this, there are now fifteen members of the Thirteen Stars... Well, whatever. That's fine.* I had always been rather laissez-faire about things.

11

That part of Merak's past was something he could never regret enough. He'd betrayed his friend and returned a world that was about to be united to turmoil and chaos. *Why did I do that? Why didn't I think it through more? I don't even understand myself. I just find it impossible to get my own thoughts and pretty much everything else about myself at that time.*

In order to atone, Merak went to fight the Devil King. However, he was miserably defeated and forced to spend several days in bed unconscious. However, misfortune comes in threes.

After Merak was defeated, the devilfolk saw this as a chance and went on the attack. By the time he'd woken up, everything was already over. Many lives had been lost, though his country had barely managed to fend off their attackers. The losses that were hardest on Merak were the death of his wife and the fact that his daughter had gone missing.

They were not a couple born out of love; it had been an arranged marriage by their parents between two famous heaven-winged families. Even so, they were family, and it was only after she was gone that Merak realized the significance of his wife in his life.

However, reality was cruel. His wife's body was found days later, far away at the foot of Vanaheim along with those of her bodyguards. It was most likely that they had been killed while trying to flee. On top of that, they had yet to find the body of his daughter.

Merak had lost everything important to him at once and was stricken by despair. His beloved daughter, who had gone missing, had pink hair and a face much like her mother's while also having Merak's pure-white wings.

"You're... My father?" Virgo asked.

"That would be the case. Of course, it's not like I have the right to be called that by you."

They were in Megrez's villa, which was half-destroyed. Merak was acting calm on the surface, but he was perpetually looking down at the ground. He knew that if he were to raise his head and get a look at Virgo, he would want to embrace her with his dirtied hands. Merak could tell that he was only one step away from his will breaking down and the dam holding back his tears bursting open. *I have no right to call myself a father and no right to embrace her.*

Even so, Merak was truly grateful. *She lived...* Just that was enough to send Merak over the moon.

"Lady Parthenos... I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Truly... I don't know how I can thank you enough."

Parthenos folded her arms together and replied to Merak's thanks curtly. "Say your thanks in front of your wife's grave. I didn't do anything. By my reckoning, she realized that she wouldn't be able to escape, so she hid Virgo and chose to become a decoy. It was just a coincidence that I managed to find her."

It seemed that Merak knew of Parthenos because of her former post as the guardian of the sanctuary and paid due respect for that, but to Parthenos, the Seven Heroes were not people she even remotely liked. Being thanked by one

of them would only trouble her for a response.

“How about talking to Virgo instead of little old me? You’ve finally reunited, after all.”

“Y-Yeah, you’re right... I know that, but... I have no idea what to even say at this point. It’s all too late...”

Merak was so happy about this turn of events that he almost thought this was all a dream. If it was, he wished to never wake. However, Merak was also lost for words. He felt like no matter what he tried to say, it would only sound horribly cheap, and as soon as the thought of making his daughter feel bad came to mind, no words would come out of his mouth.

Merak certainly had things to say—a lot of things. *I wanted to see you. I’m so glad you’re alive. You look just like your mother. You’ve gotten so pretty. Are you happy? How has life been up until now? I hope nothing bad’s happened to you. Was your life hard?* But before any of that could come out of his mouth, Merak’s emotions would speak to him. *Do you really deserve to say that to her? Do you really think you can act like a father this late in the game?* With those thoughts, there was no way Merak could bring himself to speak.

“Um, father... I’m not sure what I should say, but... I think... I’m glad that I met you here.”

With just that, the dam holding back Merak’s tears burst.



I'm also glad I met you. Though he wanted to tell her this, he couldn't form words very well through his tears.

Seeing his state, Virgo smiled and patted his shoulder.

It was quiet for a moment before Parthenos said, "You're kind of a loser, aren't you?"

"You have failed to read the room, so you will be removed."

Parthenos yelped in surprise. The Gatekeeper, which had been on standby in the room this entire time, grabbed Parthenos by the collar after she managed to go too far after not reading the room. Parthenos was lifted by the nape as if she were a cat and brought outside by the golem, which could unexpectedly do what Parthenos had failed to do.

* * *

With Orm now on our side, we boarded the *Argo* and made for Svel at full speed.

Leon had defeated that Sol character, and though Taurus had been seriously wounded, Pollux and Castor had managed to retrieve him. Other than that, while I was gone Parthenos had been resurrected as a heroic spirit, Virgo had awakened, and the boy Sei and his merry band had decided to return to Laevateinn and Draupnir to try to convince their rulers that I wasn't an enemy. It seemed a lot had happened.

With things settled between Orm and me, the only problems were now Libra, Dina, and the other ouroboroses. It seemed the Goddess was already searching for Dina, so in the meantime, I had to finish my task, that task being evacuating the residents of this world.

Soon, Mizgarz would be destroyed. This was already a foregone conclusion. As long as the Goddess didn't have a sudden change of heart, this would definitely come to pass, and it was because I knew of this two hundred years ago that I had been forced to decide to lose the fight. Even if I won, the Goddess would simply activate the ouroboroses and everything would die. There would be no meaning in such a victory. But this time, things were different. We'd been preparing for two hundred years. Things would go differently this time. Well,

that preparation had mostly been done by Dina instead of me. The seals on the ouroboroses were insurance to make sure they didn't move until now, and they were no longer needed.

The *Argo* reached the airspace above Svel, and we leapt from the ship all together, landing on the grounds of Megrez's half-destroyed mansion. The insides of the house had been cleaned up somewhat, and Virgo and Merak were talking about something while facing each other across a table. For some reason, Merak seemed overcome with emotion, as he was producing a river of tears. It was a little creepy. The hero's party was outside, and for some reason, Parthenos was in the hands of the Gatekeeper, who was holding her up like a cat. *What is she playing at?*

"How are you doing, Gatekeeper?" I asked.

"Well, Lady Lufas," the Gatekeeper responded.

"Good. By the way, what did Parthenos do?"

"I judged her to be in the way of their family reunion, so I removed her."

"I see."

"Can you say something to this lunk, Miss Lufas?" asked Parthenos. "This is no way to treat the dead."

"It shouldn't be a problem for a dead person as lively as you."

Neither Megrez nor Mizar were present, so they'd probably already started acting. They weren't the types to lose sight of what must be done in front of the destruction of the world. *Merak should also be acting, but... Well, I'll overlook that.*

"So we made it."

"Huh?" Sei replied questioningly to my personal mutterings.

It seemed that he had yet to experience any interference from the Goddess. If Dina was to be believed, the other side would surely take action at some point, but at any rate, he still seemed fine at the moment. Personally, it would be best for me if she would try something while I was around. If I was around, most things could be dealt with.

Anyway, the fact that he wouldn't oppose me even though he was the hero was a much happier stroke of luck than even he surely thought. If things went as Dina and I had expected, he should have had his heart and will broken long ago. Either that, or he should have become a pawn of the Goddess completely. The fact that that hadn't happened gave us an extra card to play while also taking one away from the Goddess. On this board state, this was something both crucial and insignificant. If I were to liken it to shogi, it was like one of the pieces the Goddess would surely have made use of had suddenly disappeared from the board.

All that's left on her side of the board now is the king, the ouroboroses protecting the king, and two each of the gold and silver generals. Something like that. Wait, she took Libra from me and is about to take Dina... They'd be a rook and a bishop, I think? They'll probably appear on her side eventually. So currently, things are a little on my side, I think.

"Sei, there's something I want to entrust you to do. Will you accept?" I asked.

"S-Sure..." Sei said. "If it's something someone like me can do."

"Only you can accomplish this."

It was convenient for me that the boy Sei was on my side. According to what I heard, he had gone to Laevateinn to convince the king there that I wasn't an enemy. With that, dealing with the populace might go better than expected. It would be impossible for me. I was still looked at as the symbol of fear throughout the world, so I would surely be met with resistance. Orm was also out of the question; he would have it worse than I would. Leon would also be completely useless on that front, while Benet would only hold sway with the people of Mjolnir. There were also the remnants of the Seven Heroes, but thanks to their loss two hundred years ago, they also had detractors. So, there needed to be a unifying presence that was none of these, and the symbol that was the hero would be perfect.

"From here on out, the Goddess will resort to the ouroboroses, and Mizgarz will be destroyed. Before that happens, I want to force as many living things as possible onto an ark, and I need you to calm the people who will surely be confused and persuade them to stay. Of course, I won't tell you to do this

alone. I plan to have Megrez and the others help you too.”

If the world ends, so do its people. If that happened, any victory I could have could no longer be called a victory. That was why I had prepared an ark to evacuate as many living beings as possible. Unfortunately, though, there was no time to convince everyone to evacuate separately, so this would basically be forced onto them. I would be throwing them into the ark without their consent. Of course, if I did that there would be mass confusion, not to mention rebellion probably. However, if I appeared to handle this rebellion myself, it would only make things worse. I could force them into compliance using threats and Pressure, but if I did that, then I would just be returning to who I had been two hundred years ago. Politics relying on fear and power would always invite insurrection. The past me did not understand that.

That was why the title of hero was so precious. Sei didn’t have to participate in the fight. He had his own role exactly because he didn’t participate in any useless fighting.

“Um, but someone like me would...” Sei trailed off. “I’m weak, and I don’t have the awesome majesty that you do, Lufas...”

“You are better because you are weak. In the past, I tried to control everything through power, but all that did was create fear, and I failed.”

The past me was weak, someone who was oppressed. I hated that, so I sought power. I greedily coveted strength. I made my way through several battlefields, killing, killing, and killing some more. The past me should have had feelings of wanting to protect the weak, at least at first. I was enthusiastic about saving those who were kind but powerless, like my mother. Then I became strong, and then even stronger. At some point, I lost the ability to understand the hearts of the weak. I didn’t gain power; I ran away to power.

“You understand the hearts of the weak because you are weak. You are the right person for this.”

I patted him on the shoulder, and at the same time, a small light suddenly and quickly enveloped him.

“U-Ummm...” Sei stuttered. “What was that just now?”

“Just a little charm. To make sure no one tries to stop you from convincing people, you see. Don’t worry. It won’t harm you in any way, and I’ll make sure to get rid of it later.”

“G-Got it...”

Sei never ran towards power. If it was him, he probably wouldn’t lose sight of who he was no matter what the Goddess did. It was just as Benet said. Those who could walk on their own two feet would never become the Goddess’s puppet.

Also, the exchange of violence that would be coming was not an appropriate battleground for him. The base fighting was our place to shine, mine and the Goddess’s. Basically, this was a fight between Alovenus and me. I didn’t like her story, and she didn’t like me. We were yelling that as we tried to get rid of the other side’s abilities. That was all.

That was the meaning of base, of a low-level fight. It was no different from a childish temper tantrum. The only problem was that these children were stronger than anyone. So, you see? We had to settle things. We had to figure out who was on top. *Now then, it’s about time to start this base, childish fight at the highest levels in the universe.*

“Storm of Winter.”

I activated my skill and enveloped all of Mizgarz in whipping winds. At the same time, I opened up an Exgate. I summoned something from the crack in space-time.

What I summoned was an absolutely enormous ship, one that was so absurdly big that it far surpassed even Blutgang. It was what Dina and her conspirators had been working on for two hundred years, a shelter to help people survive the Twilight of the Gods. It was easily over several hundred kilometers in size. At that size, it was no longer a simple ship; it was a space battleship. Surrounding it in the air were the sacred beasts who had once protected the halfling country: Seiryuu, Suzaku, Byakko, and Genbu.

“That’s huge. So that’s why you faked your death two hundred years ago.”

“Hey, wait a second...” Scorpius said. “Why are they all there? I should have

killed them...”

The Ark, which suddenly appeared, had not only the boy Sei but also the likes of Benet and Scorpius dumbfounded. I could also hear the stirring voices of the people in town. Still, the people of Svel had already heard what Megrez had to say, so they were calm.

I manipulated the wind, and starting with the nearby city of Svel, I lifted each country out of the surrounding ground entirely. I covered them in shields and carried them directly into the Ark, which was already ready and waiting for these new additions, with open passages all over the place.

After Svel came Laevateinn’s capital, then the other territories starting with Laegjarn. Then came Gjallarhorn and Nectar. Nectar was a little far, but the fact that its people were concentrated into a small area was very convenient. Maybe Dina had figured that into her plans as well. I lifted the entirety of the underwater kingdom of Skíðblaðnir along with the surrounding ocean, as well as the entire territory of Draupnir. I did my best not to shake them as much as possible, so I hoped they would forgive me for a few broken pieces of furniture. *I’ll pay you all back later.*

“Wai— Lufas! Just what is that?!”

“I told you already, didn’t I? Mizgarz will be destroyed soon, so I can’t allow the people to stay on this planet any longer. I will be evacuating as many as possible with my power.”

Yes, this planet would soon become a battlefield between the ouroboroses and the Goddess and us, so it was better for this place to be emptied. If there were those left who would die just from being caught up in the aftermath, I wouldn’t be able to go all out. Not to mention the fact that this planet would likely become one of pure death in the near future.

Now then, Alovenus... There’s no need to hold back now, is there? You can feel free to come at me any time when you’re ready.

There, in Mizgarz's sky, over the ground which Lufas had torn up in several places, Dina floated as she looked down with an expression like she was seeing trash. There was no light in her eyes; she seemed like nothing more than an exquisite doll. Next to her was Libra, a companion in being the Goddess's puppet, who was waiting for her true master's orders.

"My word... You really don't hold back, do you, Lufas?"

The voice issuing from Dina's mouth was hers, but the words weren't. Dina's body was talking, but the will behind it wasn't Dina's. Someone else was using her body to talk through—that being the Goddess.

"Well, it's fine. I should be happy that you put in the effort to save the organisms here. Honestly, I was thinking I'd have to bring in more of them from Earth, and that would be a hassle."

Dina was speaking in her voice, with her face, but it wasn't actually Dina anymore. She was filled with unprecedented might. The surging divine power coming off her in waves made the very air shiver. Her strength most likely rivaled Lufas's.

"I have few pieces left available to me..." She paused. "And Lufas might even be able to defeat these dragons of mine."

Libra considered this for a moment. "Given her strength, that's probably what will happen. You may be the great Alovenus, but your body is a borrowed one... There will be no guarantee of your victory."

"But the ending only starts after defeating the ouroboroses. The finisher will have to be done by the hero."

Lufas would surely defeat the ouroboroses. Though she might have to make some sacrifices, Lufas would win in the end. This was something everyone who had come this far knew. That being said, it wasn't known how many losses Lufas's side would suffer, but of course, it would be best for the Goddess if Lufas lost all of them other than herself. Rather, given the power of the ouroboroses, this is what should happen. However, even with all that, Lufas would most likely win. Even if she were to be left alone at the end, she would win.

However, not even Lufas would have expected that the ouroboroses were only the opening act. In the end, the hero always wins. That was the one rule all stories should follow. So, Lufas would meet her end at the hands of an insignificant, weak hero.

“Of course, the chance that she somehow exceeds my expectations is not zero.”

After a moment’s pause, Libra spoke up, “Query: then why do you look like you’re having so much fun?”

“Hmm. I wonder. Maybe it’s because I myself also want to see what lies beyond this story.” Dina—or rather, the Goddess who was using her body—burst into derisive laughter. “What will happen on the off chance she manages to defeat the ouroboroses as well as the hero? Though they are mighty, the ouroboroses are, in the end, simply tools I’d prepared so as to not destroy this fragile universe. The hero is the same. Even if Lufas manages to claim victory over all, she will not be able to reach me. That is something even Lufas should know.”

Libra considered the Goddess’s words before saying, “But if she manages to take down the ouroboroses, the hero, and the rest of us here, then you will have no more pieces to play. In that sense, this place will have been freed from your influence, would it not?”

“You do have a point. However, that’s not necessarily the case. That person will do something that I would never expect... That’s the feeling I have.” Dina’s expression never changed, but her voice was dyed with expectation, and it seemed like she was having fun from the way she spoke.

In the end, this was just a game to the Goddess. She’d be frustrated and unhappy if she lost, but that was all. There would be no actual harm to the Goddess. That was why she was so calm. She was able to laugh like that because she knew that she would be the one to win in the end. Sure, she’d be frustrated if she lost this particular round, but if she wanted to, the Goddess could simply destroy this universe, this game, at any time.

“Then let us start the end of this world.”

With that, the Goddess activated her skill to awaken the ouroboroses.

The world shook. The ground cracked, wind raged about, and the weather changed erratically.

The first dragon to show himself was the embodiment of light. The Sun ouroboros, which had been sleeping in the mountains of Vanaheim, opened his eyes and freed his gigantic form from the earth. His body, which seemed to go on forever, ascended through the heavens and wrapped around Mizgarz. His size, which even the word absurd could not fully express, meant that he was surely noticed by Lufas and the others. At this scale, he could no longer be called a proper living organism. Everyone except Lufas and Orm broke out into a cold sweat. Even Benetnasch couldn't help beading up, even though she was outwardly calm.

The white dragon, with near-divine light shining off of his scales, raised a howl that shook the world even harder.

The next to appear was the avatar of Fire. The dragon with crimson scales flew up out of a volcano with an explosion and intersected with the path of the Sun ouroboros. With his appearance alone, the land boiled, and the fauna that Lufas could not retrieve burned to cinders. It was almost as if the entire world had suddenly turned into a desert, just from the appearance of the Ouroboros of Fire.

Adding on to this, a gigantic tree appeared, piercing through the sky. Wreathed in lightning, it was so big not even the heat from the Ouroboros of Fire could burn it. It was a world tree that held sovereignty over all plants.

On the opposite side, a dragon that seemed like the earth itself made his presence known, looking like a dragon covered in rocks.

There were only four of these ouroboroses, but they were each manifestations of supernatural nature. They were the agents of the Goddess, boasting the largest bodies, the strongest scales, and the most power in the world. These four beings, said to only appear during the end of the world, descended, each emitting a roar that resounded out even through space.

That roar said to the world, *Take this to heart, humans. Your age has now ended.*

Though they didn't use human tongue, their deadly will was transmitted

throughout the entire world.

* *

“Okay, everyone. I will handle Dina and Libra myself, so that means I’ll also be counting on all of you to handle the ouroboroses.”

As they were able to see the ouroboroses for themselves, the members of the Twelve Stars all assumed tense expressions when they heard what Lufas had to say.

With her power, Lufas would have been able to take on several ouroboroses at the same time and still be at the advantage. However, she had said that she would not be taking part in this particular battle. This wasn’t her underestimating the enemy. In fact, it was the opposite. Lufas had judged that if she didn’t commit her forces like this, she wouldn’t be able to win against the possessed Dina.

There had been cases of the Goddess possessing others before. However, things were different this time. She was possessing her avatar, so her combat capabilities were even higher than the ouroboroses’. Also, Dina had already reported to Lufas what her fighting stats would be. Her HP would be 999,900,000,000. This was Alovenus’s HP in the game. The game’s Alovenus was the incarnation of the devs, their avatar, which meant Dina had been behind it. Naturally, that had some implications as to her strength when the Goddess was possessing her. That was what she had been trying to tell Lufas.

Orm was the first to respond to Lufas’s orders, which could have been seen as madness. “Fine. I’ll take on the Ouroboros of Heaven.”

If the other side had ouroboroses, then they just had to respond in kind. Orm was both arbitrator and destroyer, hailing from the same origin as the enemy did. Orm leapt into the air, instantly becoming a dragon covered in black scales. Then, he turned towards the enemy he had declared he would take on.

Benetnasch was the next to step forward.

“Then I’ll take the Fire one. Let’s see just how strong these ouroboroses or whatever are.”

True, the ouroboroses were at the apex of the world’s pecking order.

However, if they were the apex, Lufas's group was filled with oddities that didn't fit into any established order. They'd moved past the rules set by the Goddess.

Benetnasch flashed a smile filled with confidence, but then, someone interrupted her.

"Wait."

Benetnasch paused. "Oh, it's just you, Fairy Princess."

"It's not like I've revised my opinion on any of them..." Pollux hesitated. "But this *is* an emergency. If you're going anyway, take them with you."

Pollux seemed rather dissatisfied as she spoke, but she activated her skill anyway. A light immediately shone down from above, giving form to four men. They were all faces that Benetnasch knew well: the Sword King Alioth, the Beast King Dubhe, the Adventurer King Phecda, and the Blacksmithing King Mizar. They were all hated enemies from two hundred years in the past who had already been revived once when Pollux had been controlled by the Goddess. Now, they'd been called upon once again.

"Pollux, you..." Castor trailed off.

"Don't say any more, please, my brother. I still haven't revised my opinion."

Pollux's skill allowed her to summon heroic spirits of those she recognized as such. In other words, she wasn't able to call upon those whom she didn't think of as heroes. That was why Pollux hadn't previously been able to call upon the Seven Heroes. That also meant that the fact that she was now able to imply that she'd changed her mind about them. She'd come to learn of their pasts, their circumstances, and after having seen Merak with Virgo, she had also come to learn of their struggles and pain. She'd probably started to think, *Forgiving them by now should be all right*. Though Pollux should have realized this about herself, she was also probably very conflicted about this. That was why she was unable to honestly admit that, instead opting to simply summon them, then proceed to turn her back.

"I'm here too! Looks like we've all managed to meet up for the final feast!"

On top of that, Blutgang came soaring in from the sky before landing nearby.

A voice boomed from the mobile capital's speakers as it transformed into its giant golem form. "Your mana engine's working wonders, Megrez! Blutgang can fly now!"

"Oh, my Blutgang is flying!" exclaimed Mizar.

"Whaat?!" the golem Mizar exclaimed. "Why am I there?!"

"Hey, me! I'm back from Valhalla to atone for my past sins!"

Here and now, the Seven Heroes had surprisingly all reunited. Though there was now an extra Mizar, that didn't change anything.

Benetnasch heaved a sigh, her arms still crossed, but the corners of her mouth were loose. *Looks like they're themselves this time, at least.* Then, Lufas took a small bottle from a pocket and threw it towards Megrez and Merak.

"This is..."

"Use it," Lufas said. "It's an elixir. We are heading into the final battle. It wouldn't do to have the two of you at half power."

There was a pause before they said, "Thank you."

After drinking the elixir given to him by Lufas, Megrez stood from his wheelchair. At the same time, Merak also regrew his wing, and Taurus stepped closer.

"Are your wounds all right now, Taurus?"

"Yes, I will be fine. My friend has finally regained her sense of self... This is no time for me to be resting."

With just that, Taurus passed by Lufas. There was no need for extraneous conversation. *My friend has returned and is going to fight, so I am going to join the battlefield as well. And if my friend will let the past be water under the bridge, so shall I.* This was, as it had always been, the form Taurus's friendship and loyalty to Lufas took.

"Clench your teeth," said Taurus.

Megrez paused, then acquiesced. "Okay."

"Do it," Merak said.

“Aldebaran!”

Taurus’s fist collided mercilessly with Megrez and Merak, who were blown backwards and flung to the ground. With this, the past was now the past. At the very least, Taurus was not going to drag this on any further.

Merak and Megrez both got up with swelling faces, but their expressions seemed refreshed.

“The curses placed on the two of you have been lifted,” said Taurus. “Do with that as you please.”

“Thank you very much,” Megrez expressed to Taurus, who had already turned his back to them, before waving his arm.

When he did so, Levia approached, allowing Megrez to jump on top. Merak flapped his once-again complete set of wings while Alioth also got on top of Levia.

“We’ll bear the burden of this fight with you, Benetnasch,” said Dubhe.

“Let’s fight together!” exclaimed Phecda.

Dubhe and Phecda appeared in their prime as they stuck out their hands towards Benetnasch, who scoffed but put her hand on top of theirs anyway. Mizar also laid his hand on top, after which Merak descended and joined in. Lastly, Megrez jumped off of Levia to also throw his hand in. Alioth tried to descend as well, but when he did, Levia raised its head for some reason and wouldn’t let him off.

“Don’t drag me down,” Benetnasch said haughtily, but the others’ replies sounded full of confidence.

“Of course we won’t,” said Megrez. “You know how strong we are, don’t you?”

“Leave your back to us,” Merak said.

“Let’s go on a rampage together like old times, Benet!” Mizar exclaimed.

They all knew one another’s strengths, and though it angered her, Benetnasch knew they would help. *Fine then. Just come if you all want to, and use your strength to your heart’s content.* Though Benet never said it out loud, she

consented to them following along while feeling strangely nostalgic.

“Hey, wait a second!” Alioth called out. “Why am I the odd one out?! I’m coming down now, so wait for me! You guys, don’t break the circle! I’m not down yet!”

“All right, let’s go, everyone. First, we need to show ourselves to the people in the Ark and calm them down along with Sei. We can just leave Alioth alone.”

“MEGREEEEEEEZ!”

The Seven Heroes, Blutgang, and Levia all flew off together towards the Ark.



I can probably leave all of that to them... Lufas firmly believed this, as memories from the past brought an unbidden laugh to her lips. *It might be nice to go drinking with them again after this fight is over.*

Lufas deployed an Exgate to retrieve two swords from Maphaahl Tower, which she then promptly threw towards Levia—or rather Alioth, who was on top of Levia—who was near the Ark.

“It’s a farewell gift. Take it!” Lufas called.

“Sorry,” said Alioth, “and thanks!”

When summoned, members of the argonautai appeared with the weapons they had in life, which were manifested by the mana used to summon them. In the end, however, they were just recreations, not the real thing. *We’re about to step into the final battle. It wouldn’t do for the Sword King to not have a fitting weapon to his name. Well, that would also be within Alioth’s character, but this will be his first battle with him fully revived. I’d like for him to contribute something.* With that thought, Lufas did not hold back and freely gave from her collection, all because she believed that Alioth would be able to make full use of what she gave him.

“I’ll go for the Ouroboros of Wood. I have a score to settle,” Pollux said.

“If Pollux is going then so am I,” Castor declared.

The fairy twins, Pollux and Castor, both volunteered to fight the Ouroboros of Wood. To them, the Ouroboros of Wood was their originator and their parent. Neither of them would allow this fight to go to someone else, which showed in the strength and conviction of their gazes.

“Pollux.”

Lufas tossed a single ring to her. It was the divine artifact Chronos that had basically fallen into Lufas’s lap before. This was a relic that slowed down the time of the user’s surroundings to achieve what amounted to stopping time, but in exchange, the user would take a recoil effect equivalent to the time difference experienced this way. It was a flawed product. However, Pollux was a fairy princess who had existed for hundreds of thousands of years without particularly aging, so she would be able to take this recoil without much

consequence. She had no actual life span as a fairy in the first place. In other words, she could use the ring as if there were no risk at all.

On top of that, Lufas had adjusted the ring a little. Before, the ring would affect the entire world with the slowing debuff, but if it did that, it would affect Lufas's friends negatively too. So she omitted that feature and set it so that the ring would instead only raise the wearer's speed.

"Take it. From now on, we will all be fighting in compressed time. If you don't have that, you won't be able to keep up," Lufas explained.

"You're right..." Pollux trailed off. "Thank you. I'll use it carefully."

Pollux's physical stats were no different from those of an average warrior, which meant she would not be able to keep up with the battle that was about to happen at all. That didn't just mean she wouldn't be able to keep up in the sense of being able to contribute to the fight; she wouldn't even be able to see the fight happening. As she was, it would be entirely possible for people to have died before she would resummon heroic spirits. In order for her to be able to participate in the upcoming battle, the ring would be indispensable for her.

If Pollux was going to take on the Wood ouroboros, then someone would be needed to face the Earth ouroboros. Leon and Aries were the first to volunteer for that.

"Then I'll take the Ouroboros of Earth. I'll kill that bastard who thinks he's stronger than me," Leon said.

"I..." Aries paused. "Then I'll go with the Ouroboros of Earth too."

"Then M E will join the fight with the Ouroboros of Wood. Pollux will need a wall," said Karkinos.

"Virgo, we're going with the Ouroboros of Earth," said Parthenos. "Aries aside, I can see our loss on the horizon with this idiot lion charging in without any healing."

"O-Okay, gran," Virgo agreed.

"Who're you calling an idiot lion?!" yelled Leon.

"We have a bad affinity with the Ouroboros of Earth, so We shall join the

Wood team,” said Pisces.

“Me too,” Aigokeros said.

Following them, Karkinos, Pisces, and Aigokeros all joined up on the Wood ouroboros, while Virgo and Parthenos volunteered to fight the Ouroboros of Earth.

“I’ll join the fight with the Ouroboros of Wood,” said Sagittarius. “They’ll probably need a supporter.”

“I’m going to destroy the Ouroboros of Earth,” Taurus said.

“Our affinity isn’t the best...” Aquarius hesitated. “But I should at least be able to play support. I’ll go with the Earth team.”

Lastly, Sagittarius joined the Wood team while Taurus and Aquarius chose the Earth ouroboros. The teams had been formed without any input from Lufas.

The argonautai also split up according to their own decisions, forming four teams that would be going to help different fronts. Upon closer inspection, Lufas noticed that Fenix and Hydras were also present, though they should have been left at the seal. Apparently, they’d hurried and chased after the ouroboros after he had woken up.

“I will go with my father. Luna, return to the ship,” said Terra.

Luna was shocked. “Sir Terra, I too—”

“No. This time, the battle will be too harsh for you.”

It looked like Terra intended to join Orm. Terra aside though, Luna would be completely useless in this fight, and Terra wouldn’t have the leeway to protect her this time either. Luna probably knew that herself, but even if she did, it was hard for her to stay somewhere safe while Terra went off into dangerous territory alone.

Terra embraced Luna tightly as he whispered to her, “Don’t worry. I’ll definitely be back... I won’t leave you alone.”

Luna paused for a moment, then said, “It’s a promise.”

“Yeah, it’s a promise. Also... There’s something I want to tell you after this is

over.”

“Hey, stop that! You’re raising a huge death flag doing that,” Lufas boorishly chimed in to the hugging couple.

There weren’t many who would actually return after hugging their loved one and promising such before a final battle. Most times they died. It seemed like Pollux had a bad feeling about something, as she was silent for some time. She didn’t quite understand the concept of a death flag, but even so, she had experience sending many heroes off to their deaths. She probably instinctively felt that people like that tended to die. That was why she silently summoned a single heroic spirit and assigned him to Terra.

The spirit’s name was Pegasus, and it was one of the monsters that Lufas had raised. It wasn’t powerful enough to be one of the Twelve Stars, but it possessed high combat power and the ability to fly. It could even break through the planet’s atmosphere and then reenter it on its own. What was especially noteworthy was its unique ability to protect its rider, even from the perils of the vacuum of space. It paled in direct combat capability to the Twelve Stars, but it was more than worthy of being hailed as the best mount.

“Terra, take that pegasus with you,” Pollux told him.

“Hmm? But is its strength not precious to you...?”

“I have other heroic spirits. More importantly, I can feel something dangerous about you.” After a pause, Pollux continued. “You’re going to return, aren’t you? Then take that child with you. It will surely be of use.”

After some thought, Terra decided to follow Pollux’s suggestion. “Sorry. I owe you.”

Pegasus flew off after Terra got on, and as she saw him off, Lufas suddenly met eyes with Scorpius, who had stayed behind. Lufas considered her for a moment, then asked, “You’re not leaving?”

“My battlefield lies wherever you are,” said Scorpius.

Lufas said nothing in reply, remaining silent for a long while. *It’s the final battle, and yet, she never changes, does she?* Feeling faintly impressed, Lufas decided to let it go as she looked up at the sky. *Now all that’s left is to believe*

that all of my friends will return safely.

13

The entirety of Mizgarz was experiencing abnormal weather patterns. The massive forms of the ouroboroses covered the sky, making it seem as if they'd eaten the sun and the moon. The earth split, entire oceans dried up, and mountains fell. Lightning fell without pause, and an out-of-season blizzard blew all over the world. It was truly the end of days. Divinity and monsters were waging all-out war, and the world was in its twilight age, with all sorts of life disappearing from its face.

This was the day the world would end.

“Oohhh... It's Fimbulwinter... It's the end of the world!”

In the Ark, people were crowded into churches to pray. However, there was no meaning to their actions. After all, they were praying to the enemy. The priests shouted in a panic, and the Ark was filled with a dark mood.

Sei was also in the Ark, clutching his head. He was currently in the center of the Ark, in the main control room. There were also several halflings inside working diligently, and the situation of the entirety of the Ark's innards was being broadcast to the room, thanks to modern Japan's camera technology.

Sei stood in a section of that room along with the rulers of each country and the other heroes, surrounded by cameras as if he were just about to go live. *What the hell am I supposed to even do?* Lufas had told him that she wanted him to calm and persuade the people.

After a moment of contemplation, Sei said, “No, this has got to be impossible. Who the hell would feel even an ounce of relief from the words of someone like me?”

“What a pathetic little brat you are. I have no idea why Maphaahl rates you so highly,” Benetnasch said, harshly criticizing Sei, who was in the middle of a crisis of confidence, as she looked around at the halflings.

“That’s what I want to know too...” Sei admitted.

Once Benetnasch had glanced at them, the halflings seemed to have understood something and flipped a switch, triggering images to appear over each city’s airspace. Though it was strange to say that about air in a ship, this one was big enough to basically contain an entire world in it, so it was fairly close to an artificial planet. So, going back to the use of airspace, these gigantic screens reflected the scene the cameras were pointing at—Benetnasch and the others.

After confirming they were broadcasting, Benetnasch took up a mic and started to speak.

“Can you all hear me, citizens of Mizgarz? I am the ruler of Mjolnir, Benetnasch. There’s no time, so I’ll start from the ending. Right now, all of you are not on Mizgarz, but a gigantic ark...basically a huge ship. All of humanity’s territories have been relocated onto this ark wholesale along with parts of Mizgarz’s surface. And about Mizgarz: the ouroboroses have started to move, and so, the world is ending.”

The absurd truth that came out of Benetnasch’s mouth had people in a tizzy. In a word, it was hard to believe. After all, from their perspective, there had simply been a moment of strong wind, after which everything looked as usual. Yes, the innards of the Ark were, as far as regular people were concerned, basically the same as Mizgarz in respect to their towns and the ground around them. Thanks to Lufas’s overwhelmingly powerful but still-precise skills, humanity’s territories had basically been directly moved into the Ark with no damage or change at all. Even then, it was painfully obvious that something had happened, however. The people could also sense that, whatever it was, it was something that they couldn’t even fathom.

“But there is nothing any of you need to do. Just shut up, and live your lives as usual. That’s all.”

With that, Benetnasch stopped talking. Still, that should have been considered quite the effort for her. However, Benetnasch had unfortunately been born strong. She didn’t understand the plight of the weak. Though she had gotten a taste of what it was like to be the relatively weaker one, thanks to

gaining a rival in Lufas, that didn't change her fundamental bearing as a strong being. If there was an enemy, she would defeat them. If there was trouble, she would smash through it. There was never a single thought in her head of fear so crippling it could make her ball up. There was no way for Benetnasch to understand the fear and unease the people felt right now.

"You can't just say that!" Sei exclaimed. "Who would feel at ease with just that?!"

"Huh? That's more than enough, isn't it?" asked Benet.

"Not at all! There are so many better ways of putting it!"

Benetnasch paused before saying, "Then you do it. I'm going on ahead." Seeming fed up with it all as she spoke, Benetnasch simply left the Ark.

After seeing her off, Megrez gave a strained laugh. Now I get it. No wonder Lufas put Sei here. Calming people needs to be done by someone on the same level as them, someone who's also weak. In other words, he's the perfect person for the job. Not to mention that Benetnasch should have at least calmed the people of Mjolnir.

Now then. It's our turn next. Megrez and the other Seven Heroes showed themselves on air. This should be the most effective first move. The sight of those who should be dead, like Alioth and Dubhe, should give the people strength.

"What's up, you fools in Laevateinn! Do you know who I am? I'm the founder, Alioth."

"And I bear the burden of being the founder of Draupnir, Dubhe. Well, rather than founded, it was more like a bunch of beastfolk just gathered around and made a country on their own with me as the emperor though..."

"You seriously gonna say that now?!"

"I'm Phecda. My country was destroyed a while ago, though... Anyway, it looks like my citizens built this ark, so I guess there's really no need for me to calm them down."

"Merak here. To all my people: I would appreciate it if you calmed down and

listened for now.”

Each of the heroes spoke in order to bring relief to the people of their country. Then, all eyes turned to Sei.

Though it was just a small thought, Mizar didn't speak. After all, he knew his people were actually burning with the fires of excitement at this event, and they had all chosen to remain in Blutgang to take part in the final fight. Dwarves were very bold, as it turned out.

“Right now, Mizgarz is being assaulted by terrifying monsters...” Megrez said, pausing. “The ouroboroses. In order to confront this unprecedented terror, we have formed an alliance with Lufas Maphaahl and the Devil King. Now, allow me to introduce the young leader who made this alliance happen... He answered a summons from another world to appear here... The hero, Sei!”

Megrez smoothly made an incredible introduction that had Sei's eyes widening to their limits.

Wait a second, aren't I being treated like some incredibly important person? I'm pretty sure they just made it seem like I'm some amazing leader who brought the Seven Heroes, Lufas, the demihuman alliance, and the devilfolk all together...

Sei looked at Megrez accusingly, but the elf simply smiled back. The nonsense that Megrez had spouted was supremely effective. The fact was that Lufas and the devilfolk, who had been synonymous with fear itself to the people in the ark, now shone in their hearts just as strongly as the light of hope as they carved the name of the hero who made this all possible into their hearts. The more cornered a person was, the more they wanted to cling to hope, and the more they needed an idol. What appeared before them was a hero's name and the information of a great alliance, which shot through their hearts like an electric shock of hope.

“The hero... The hero, Sei!”

“Oh, thank you, hero!”

“Hero! Oh, hero!”

From there, several voices cried out in the respective capitals and townships.

Those voices were of the ranger squad who had been traveling with Sei and his party until they'd met up with Lufas and gotten their hands on faster means of travel in the form of Tanaka or Suzuki, after which the ranger squad had been left behind. With their great work ethic, they spread out throughout the territories in order to steer the audience.

A cheer was raised for the hero in various towns and capitals, and the Ark was filled with expectations for Sei. On the other side, the hero himself, Sei, found himself with no other choice but to laugh.

Sei hesitated, then stuttered, "Uhhh... Umm... Nice to meet you, everyone. My name is Sei. I'm kind of the hero."

Sei took up the mic with a stiff expression and started off with a self-introduction. Apparently, his misfortunes would continue yet.

* *

The ouroboros representing mighty Earth howled before he moved out to bring the hammer of justice down on the fools who would defy divinity. However, he was suddenly stopped as he noticed something small right beneath his eyes. With Leon at the front, Aries, Taurus, Virgo, Parthenos, Aquarius, and Ganymedes—along with the three winged knights, Fenix, and Hydras, who had hurried to catch up—gathered to face down the ouroboros.

Those who could assume a giant form had already done so, thus showing their will to fight. Taurus had also assumed his minotaur form, with its bull upper half and human lower half, and he had an ax in hand. Leon and the others were normally described as being large enough to reach the heavens. However, they now looked small as they challenged this ascendant dragon.

"Tiny beings... You intend to fight me? Such impertinence!" The Ouroboros of Earth spoke as if he were growling.

Though all he did was talk, it was enough to make the ground rumble and whip up storms. The ouroboroses were manifestations of greater nature. No matter how small their actions, each one would become a disaster. Speaking would lead to storms. Taking a breath would cause typhoons. Movement would stir earthquakes and tsunamis. If the group facing this primal force weren't who they were, they probably wouldn't even be able to stand.

“I will flatten you in an instant...”

The Earth ouroboros’s eyes glinted as space distorted.

At the same time, Parthenos shouted, “He’s coming! Block it, Virgo!”

“Y-Yes! Vindemiatrix!”

“Ten Thousand Times Gravity.”

The ouroboros’s gathered mana became a wave of pure gravity, which spread out with the caster as its epicenter. The ground instantly caved in as if it had simply disappeared, and the shape of the entire planet changed. However, Virgo had barely managed to cast her mana dispersal in time, leaving only the space around the group untouched, as if it were an isolated plateau on a steep cliff.

Aries, not understanding what had just happened, was steeped in confusion and dismay. “Th-The ground disappeared?!”

“No, it’s not gone. It was just crushed,” Aquarius calmly explained.

However, her expression was also grim. Though they had predicted this difference in power, they couldn’t help but tremble seeing this otherworldly power used in front of them. *The attack just now was probably not even close to his best. It was most likely something like a probing jab with the relative power of a light slap. For even that to be so strong... I see. No wonder they’re representatives of the Goddess. Their scale is just different.*

“Hmph. Though it was a spread-out attack, you still managed to defend against it... Then how about I make it one hundred thousand next?”

The ouroboros opened his mouth and gathered pure gravity within it. It was going to be a bullet of pure gravity of such strength that it could crush the entire planet, and the ouroboros was going to use it on them. Faced with the ominous rumbling of this attack, there were no words that needed to be said. The group scattered. Parthenos and Virgo had been riding on top of Aries, so they only had to let themselves be carried.

“Terra Graviton.”

The ouroboros unleashed the ball of gravity, which approached Leon and the

others as it shaved a furrow into the ground. If it were to hit them directly, they would not be able to withstand it, so everyone evaded the attack before going on the offensive.

The first to do so was Leon. The Lion King kicked the air and rushed at the Earth ouroboros with fangs bared.

The ouroboros paused. "Revolution Force."

The instant Leon tried to approach, though, he bounced off as if he had been bodily pushed away, surprising the Lion King. The dragon was protected by a repulsive force that not even Leon was able to break through easily, meaning no one could approach to attack. However, none of that mattered to Taurus as long as it was a skill.

"Move. I'll take care of it," Taurus said.

Having received Virgo's buffs, Taurus's speed was raised to the limit as he jumped out in front of Leon. Then, Taurus swung his gigantic ax, and the next moment, there was a sound of something breaking as the force barrier disappeared. Taking advantage of that opening, Aries, Aquarius, Fenix, and Hydras all simultaneously launched their attacks.

"Mesarthim Version Three!"

"Absolute Zero!"

"Oceanus!"

"Prometheus!"

Four torrents of power impacted the ouroboros and exploded. The Earth ouroboros took the attack disinterestedly, but when he saw that several of the scales he prided himself on were burnt, his eyes narrowed. An ouroboros's scales were not something that could easily be burnt or shattered. In fact, Prometheus, Oceanus, and Absolute Zero combined only managed to break one scale. However, Mesarthim alone had managed to burn away several scales.

The Earth ouroboros took this in, finally saying, "I see. It seems one of you is a threat. Then allow me to crush you first."

The Ouroboros of Earth faced Aries, opened his mouth, and shot a cannonball

of gravity without even taking any time to charge. Virgo reacted just in time, using Vindemiatrix to try to cancel out the attack, but the amount of mana concentrated within the gravity ball was too much. Of course, Vindemiatrix managed to take most of its power away, about ninety percent of it, in fact. However, assuming that attack had the power of one hundred thousand times gravity, even taking away ninety thousand times gravity would leave ten thousand times gravity to attack with.

Aries reacted by using his body as a shield, so Virgo and Parthenos wouldn't be affected, but that meant he took the full brunt of the gravity attack. *I can take this much...* Aries thought, before the Earth ouroboros once again opened his mouth. *Two attacks at once?! That's way too fast!* Covering for Virgo had come back to bite him. From this position, the gravity attack would land before Virgo would be able to come forward and disperse the mana.

The ouroboros was planning to squish all three of them at once.

However, Leon resolutely stepped in just in time. "You bastard! Don't you dare ignore me!"

"I haven't been."

Just as Leon jumped at the ouroboros, he turned to face Leon. Leon's eyes went wide with surprise at the speed at which he changed targets as the space in his vision started to blur and waver under his control. Right afterwards, Leon felt an impact. Pure gravity powerful enough to collapse stars burst against Leon, and he was flung into the sky.

The damage ceiling for a single attack was 99,999. Given that, it was impossible to defeat Leon in a single hit—or it should have been. However, this gravity wave did not dissipate after hitting Leon. Instead, it continued to deal damage without disappearing. While technically being a single attack, it would continue to deal damage as long as one didn't get out of its gravity field, and it had enough power hidden within it to take Leon's HP down to zero in but a moment.

The pain rendered Leon unable to act for a moment, until he yelled out, "Goddammiiiiittttt!"

Leon somehow managed to fight his way out of the enhanced gravity and was

unceremoniously dumped out onto the ground. There were no Observing Eye users around, but if there had been, they'd be able to see that the attack just now put Leon down to 50,000 HP, which was within range of an instant kill. Even without that skill, it was obvious to see that he had taken serious damage. Such a sight had the entire group sink into silence, in which the Earth ouroboros's voice seemed all the larger.

"I can assume you had some confidence in your ability. You thought you could win with enough numbers, didn't you? How laughable! So you assumed we, who represent divinity, were so weak?! You shouldn't underestimate us so much."

No one could argue against that voice, which seemed to make the entire area somehow heavier. Not to mention, Virgo couldn't stop trembling. She was haunted by the fear that came with facing down the absolute might of an ouroboros. Such fear was slowly taking over the party.

14

"Everyone, gather up! We won't stand a chance if you all fight separately!" Aquarius shouted to everyone. "Ganymedes, put me on top of the sheep! Taroose, you come too!"

"It's Taurus," Taurus responded promptly, getting on top of Aries.

Then, Ganymedes jumped onto Aries while holding Aquarius, with the three winged knights following soon after. Fenix and Hydras were a bit too large to get on top, so they simply formed up on Aries's sides, glaring at the ouroboros who was looking down on them.

"Listen well, everyone. It's upsetting, but that bastard is on a whole different level. We won't be able to win fighting separately like this. Luckily though, we have a way to fight him. Missy, your Vindemiatrix is—"

"Giga-Graviton Rapid Fire!"

Aquarius attempted to lay out a strategy for everyone, but the ouroboros

wasn't kind enough to let them carry out a strategy meeting in the middle of a battle. With no hesitation, the dragon rapidly fired bullets of gravity, which Aries desperately tried to avoid. Each bullet was not as powerful as the Terra Graviton that had nearly killed Leon. However, there were many more of them in exchange. The bullets of gravity rained down like machine-gun fire, gouging out pieces of ground and changing the shape of the planet strangely. It was as if a child were scooping out mud balls from the planet from above with a spoon.

Even though the bullets were weaker, they were still a threat to Aries and the others. Now that Lufas had fully regained her power, everyone's level was 1000. Naturally, their defensive stats and HP were also raised. Even so, they would most likely be rendered immobile after taking just three bullets.

"Asshole! At least wait until we're done strategizing!" Aquarius fiercely heckled the Earth ouroboros, but it didn't seem to have any effect.

"Why would I?" the ouroboros asked.

Aquarius gave a small click of her tongue before continuing on with what she had been saying. "Anyway, Missy here can at least cancel out that thing's attacks, and my skill can allow us to dodge everything but those that hit an area. Tarius is the only one who can pierce through its defenses, and this here sheep's fire can damage it."

"It's Taurus. Learn it already."

"I'm on evasion, and the Missy's on defense. Meanwhile, Tarou and the sheep will go on the attack. Grilled chicken and the blue snake can just concentrate on support."

"I'm a phoenix!"

"I'm a water dragon!"

Taurus paused a moment before saying, "There's no point in saying anything anymore..."

Aquarius was actually trying to seriously give out instructions, but unfortunately, it just didn't seem as serious as she meant it to be with her inability to remember names.

Even so, the instructions themselves were on point. As long as they were all on Aries, they could keep defense and evasion to a minimum. Attacks flying at Aries would be sent aside by Aquarius's skill, and anything that would hit anyway would be canceled out by Virgo. The ouroboros's defenses would be broken down by Taurus, and Aries's fire would apply damage. Fenix and Hydras, along with the three winged knights, would focus on supporting the others' efforts, and they would be doing their job if the ouroboros were to be distracted even a little. Trying to defeat an opponent that could down Leon in a single attack separately would be impossible. They stood no chance unless they came together as one.

"Let's go... Sadachbia! Get in there, sheep!"

With the absolute evasion buff from Aquarius, Aries started running through the air, flames sprouting from his hooves. In response, the ouroboros opened his mouth and spat out gravity bullet after gravity bullet. However, each and every one of those slipped past Aries without even grazing him. By the time the ouroboros had realized that this was the effect of a skill, Aries was already in front of him, with Taurus swinging his ax down on the ouroboros's head.

The strike of Aldebaran once again shattered the repulsive barrier, allowing Aries's fire to hit. Then Aries slipped past and away before turning around and once again charging.

"You impudent..." the Earth ouroboros muttered somewhat irritably, as he once again launched gravity bullets out of his mouth.

Unlike before, these bullets started to absorb objects in the surroundings. The bullets from before had basically been pure gravitic pressure—in other words, compressed gravity meant to squash enemies. On the other hand, what the ouroboros just shot was gravitational pull. These bullets pulled in and crushed things in the surroundings, and they were unavoidable, meaning this was an absolute-accuracy skill.

"Did you think an absolute-accuracy skill could pull one over on me?!" Aquarius shouted. "Don't think so! Skill: Albali!"

Ganymedes took a stance with the pitcher, and the girl coming out of it retreated inside. At the same time, Aquarius started sucking in the

gravitational-pull bullets towards her before swallowing them all, ignoring the size difference. Then, she reflected them back. The bullets of gravitational pull were unexpectedly shot straight back at the ouroboros, stopping his movements momentarily.

In that moment, Aries charged in, once again unleashing his god-killing flames. The ouroboros gasped in surprise.

“Did you think absorption was something unique to you? Ha! Too naive!”

The Ouroboros of Earth didn’t reply, instead opting to release a wave of gravity that spread all around him. It was an attack that couldn’t be avoided, couldn’t be absorbed, and couldn’t be reflected. However, it was instead erased by Virgo’s skill, allowing Aries to run through a small gap where the wave had disappeared.

Taurus once again destroyed the repulsive barrier, allowing Aries to burn the ouroboros, after which the remaining fighters all piled on.

“Now, aim for where the scales are burned!” ordered Aquarius.

“Understood!” said Fenix. “Let’s go, Hydras!”

“You got it!”

Having received orders to attack from Aquarius, Fenix and Hydras opened their mouths. They proceeded to rapidly fire bullets of fire and water from their mouths, concentrating on the area where Aries had burned off the ouroboros’s scales. Then the three winged knights—Pavo, Apse, and Korbus—jumped into the mix, aiming slashes at the ouroboros’s eyes in order to steal its sight. When it came to beings as strong as an ouroboros, even their eyes would be unbelievably tough, but even then, it was possible to block their sight for a few moments.

Meanwhile, Aries had approached Leon, allowing Virgo to apply healing to him. The wave of gravity the ouroboros had just unleashed had unfortunately brought Leon to the brink of death, but now he would most likely be able to rejoin the fight.

However, the Ouroboros of Earth had yet to feel even a little shaken. Of course not. He had yet to become serious in this fight, but he would now.

“Fine. Time to start putting my back into it.”

With that, the Earth ouroboros sucked Aries towards himself. Though Aries managed to dig his heels into the ground, he was being slowly pulled in. Fenix and Hydras were also trying not to get sucked in, and Virgo was holding on to Parthenos while desperately trying not to let either of them fall off Aries.

However, a meteor appeared in empty space and fell on them as if to sneer at such efforts. The Earth ouroboros itself had become a well of gravity, calling down meteors from space.

“Oh crap! Dodge, sheep!”

Aries desperately ran, dodging the falling meteors. One after the other, the meteorites struck Mizgarz, raising pillars of fire all over the place. Clods of dirt that were thrown up into the air started to fall down again like rain, and it seemed like the entirety of Mizgarz had become enveloped in magma.

Just like that, Mizgarz was no longer inhabitable.

Aries had managed to evade all the incoming meteors without dropping his speed, but then, a shadow fell on a large area of Mizgarz. Everyone’s face paled. It was a meteor that measured several kilometers in diameter. All the other ones up until now had only been up to several tens of meters in diameter at the most, and even those held enough destructive power in them to decimate scores of square kilometers. This time, though, the scale was through the roof. If something like that impacted Mizgarz, the planet itself might break.

D-Damn it all... In the midst of this tough situation, Aries caught on to something. *The ouroboroses—no, the Goddess herself—never cared about any damage to the planet.*

Up until now, Aries had held a faint hope that this wasn’t the case. It was a faint, shameful piece of hope that they might be concerned for the state of the planet and be unable to go all out. Except Aries now knew that they held no such emotions. That was why Lufas had evacuated as many living things as possible. It had been a forced move, but she was correct.

“SH-SHOOT IT DOOOOOOOWWWNNNN!” Aquarius’s command was almost a cry, and it echoed throughout the area as any who could attack the falling rock

did so.

Aries had his hands full with dodging, but Aquarius, who was on top of him, was free to attack. The three winged knights also took flight at the same time to slash at the incoming meteor, while Fenix, Hydras, and Leon all looked up.

“Tch! Hydras!”

“I know!”

Fenix and Hydras launched the most powerful streams of fire and water from their mouths they could in an attempt to intercept the meteor. Those torrents mixed in with the spell Aquarius had cast and Leon’s roar, impacting the giant meteor that was falling and breaking it to pieces, which made it seem like the very sky was crashing down on them. The broken meteor became countless smaller fragments and rained down, forcing Fenix, among others, to shoot down any coming at them. They weren’t able to intercept everything, but any amount they did manage to remove lessened Aries’s group’s burden.

“Graviton Wave.”

The Earth ouroboros determined this to be an eyesore, however. After a moment, he opened his mouth to give form to an invisible bombardment of force that could be described as a wave of gravity, which swiped past Fenix. When the wave passed, there was no one in front of Fenix. Hydras, who had been there just a moment ago, was gone without a trace. This disappearance was so sudden it was almost uneventful—Hydras probably hadn’t even realized what had happened.

“H-Hydras...? H-Hey, where did you go...? Hydras...?”

Fenix was in shock, calling out to his partner of many squabbles who had so suddenly disappeared. However, he only lost himself for a moment. In the next instant, it all turned into a burning rage.

After a pause, Fenix screamed, “YOOOOUUUUUU FUUUUUUCCCCCKKK!!! YOU! IT WAS YOU!”

“Calm down, you piece of grilled chicken!” Aquarius said. “You’re playing directly into his hand!”

Fenix had become totally enveloped in fire, and he charged at the Earth ouroboros, heedless of Aquarius's warnings. There was no way such a simple head-on attack would work against the Ouroboros of Earth, though, and the charge ended with only a single crack in one of its scales.

The Earth ouroboros's counterattack erased Fenix's entire right side. The phoenix still tried to move while spitting furious obscenities, but the second attack put an end to that, as Fenix was completely gone. Though it was said phoenixes couldn't die, not even a phoenix could survive being completely disintegrated.

"Fenix! Hydras!" called Aries.

"There's no time to grieve, sheep! My skill can't keep up," admitted Aquarius. "Focus on dodging!"

Aries ran through the sky, still desperately weaving his way through the storm of meteorites. Normally, dodging this storm would be easy, but right now, the Earth ouroboros was drawing everything towards him. Aries was unable to move with even a tenth of his normal agility.

Aquarius was also not just giving out orders. She was casting her absolute evasion skill over and over; that was how they were barely keeping up the status quo. The meteorites were coming down in such quick succession that the skill's buff would disappear almost immediately. Aquarius couldn't keep up. Aries's dulled movements were fatal to the Twelve Stars but a perfect chance for the enemy.

The three winged knights disappeared, unable to continuously dodge the rain of meteorites, further reducing their numbers.

The Earth ouroboros opened his mouth, aimed at Aries— Then, a spray of blood.

* *

In a different area from Aries and his group, Pollux's group was also having a hard fight as they faced the Ouroboros of Wood. In Pollux's camp were the aforementioned fairy twins, Aigokeros, Pisces, Karkinos, and Sagittarius. They also had the backup of the *Argo* and the heroic spirits available for Pollux to call

on.

Even then, the battle was not looking good for them. In fact, they were clearly backed into a corner. On top of the ouroboros's defenses being far too strong for them, he would immediately heal any damage done. The ouroboroses were beings who watched over the balance of the world, so it only followed that the world would take their side. Thanks to that ability, Pollux was able to enjoy infinite SP.

Logically, Pollux's originator would also boast such an ability, and any amount of damage dealt that wasn't high enough might as well not have existed at all. Getting that damage in was already hard enough, but even after all that, the damage would just disappear. Put lightly, it was basically cheating.

"This is terrible... Who could have known that the Wood ouroboros, who was our creator, was this..." Pollux bit her lip in frustration.

She'd been prepared for a hard fight; she knew there was no way it would be easy. However, there was still something she'd failed to predict. *Yeah, I know. Who would even have been able to predict something like this? Who could have known that our originator, the Ouroboros of Wood, would be this...*

"Hueeee hue hue hue hue hue! This is fun! Look, look! What's wrong? Done already? You're all rather dull for ones who challenged me so energetically. How pathetic. See here, you can all feel free to attack me some more, you know? I won't hit back, I swear. Look! Don't you want to just punch this old man's face? Hmm? Right here!"

"THIS MUCH OF AN IRRITATING OLD ASSHOLE!" Pollux finished after a pause.

"Hue hue hue hue hue. Aw, you look so annoyed! I bet it must suck to be you!"

The Ouroboros of Wood happened to have a personality completely at odds with what Pollux had imagined. Since he was supposed to be a representative of divinity, she'd expected him to be more replete with dignity, sterner than he really was. *True, it was all just my imagination. I admit that I was pushing my own selfish imagination onto him. But even setting that aside, couldn't this thing's personality have been even a little better?*

As if to cut her thoughts off (well, he actually did cut her thoughts off), the Wood ouroboros shook its head side to side and stuck out its tongue. Even putting it mildly, this action was irritating.

“Fine, have it your way! Come, spirits. Concentrate fire!” Pollux shouted angrily as she summoned even more heroic spirits.

If we're faced with the highest quality, we can just use the most numbers!

Countless heroic spirits flew in front of her, all activating their skills at once. There were enough of them to blot out the sky, as lights of all different colors flashed through the air and hit the Wood ouroboros, but it didn't stop there. The *Argo* fired its cannons as Sagittarius, Aigokeros, Pisces, and Castor all cast magic as well. Meanwhile, the crab, who couldn't use magic, clacked his scissors menacingly. This was the final battle, but as always, he was rather useless.

A pillar of fire rose up high enough to pierce the heavens, and a landmass the size of Africa, in modern Earth terms, was erased from the face of the planet. However, once everything cleared up, it was clear to see that the Wood ouroboros was unchanged.

“How fun! That was a great massage, wasn't it? Here, can you do my back next? I just woke up, so I'm stiff all over...” He was quiet for a moment. “Ah, wait, was that supposed to be an attack just now? Sorry, that must have been insulting to you!”

Pollux let out a wordless scream of frustration, and because of all the irritation, she felt her expression warp into something that shouldn't have been shown to anyone. She proceeded to summon even more heroic spirits in an attempt to use the power of numbers to take down the Wood ouroboros, making them fire their skills rapidly. However, she was assaulted by an unprecedented sense of lethargy at that moment, and she dropped to her knees on the *Argo*.

Unable to process what had happened for a while, Pollux let a “Huh?” finally leak out.

She was able to use her hands to catch herself, so she wouldn't fall completely, but she couldn't put much strength into her arms either. *My arms are shaking. I can't stand up. My vision is getting blurry, and I'm sweating hard.*

What... What happened? Pollux was unable to understand what just happened to her, and she simply wallowed in confusion while listing the various symptoms she was feeling.

Sensing her abnormal state, Castor rushed over to check her for wounds, but there were none to be found. She also hadn't been poisoned. Neither of them could think of a cause for this, so the Wood ouroboros kindly gave them an answer.

"Hmm, that was faster than I expected. Well, you did a good job."

"Wh-What...did you do?" Pollux asked.

"I didn't do anything. You just used too much of your power and fell on your own. Basically, you're out of SP."

Out of SP. Something that would definitely happen at least once to those who spent their lives in combat, and it was something that, up until now, Pollux had never needed to worry about. As the fairy princess and as the avatar of an ouroboros, the world backed her up, giving her infinite SP, so she'd never had her SP run dry. It was impossible.

"I-I ran out of SP...? No..."

"Looks like you've finally realized. That's right. You had infinite SP, because you were my avatar... But now, you've made an enemy of me. You are no longer being supported by the world."

Surprised, Pollux was unable to form a response.

"Though I'm somewhat in the same boat now. With the world like this, any support it can give is...limited."

As payment for its being such a strong ability, Argonautai required a terribly inefficient amount of SP. The reason why Pollux had been able to use it in such a cavalier manner up until now was thanks to her unlimited fuel. However, that was now stripped away from her, and if she continued to use it without thought, she would be drained dry.

If only I'd given it even a little bit of thought, I would have seen this coming. I should have seen this coming. Pollux cursed her own carelessness, ashamed at

having it rear its head during this final battle.

Given her mental state, the Wood ouroboros chose to speak kindly to her instead of trying to deal another emotional blow. “This is far enough, isn’t it? Haven’t you seen the difference in our power?”

Pollux raised her head and glared firmly at the Wood ouroboros. An ouroboros wasn’t something you could do something about just by glaring at it, but she wanted to at least show that her will was not broken. *Yeah, I understand the difference. What of it? Are you asking us to give up and die quietly?*

However, what came out of the Wood ouroboros’s mouth next was utterly unexpected by Pollux.

“You can still make it if you start now. Stop fighting and beg the Goddess for forgiveness. If you do, I’m sure she will. I’ll come apologize with you... My child, why don’t you stop this late rebellious phase already?”

It was as if the ouroboros was talking to a particularly stubborn child. Rather, it was as if the ouroboros was scolding one. The Wood ouroboros even managed to sound kind as he made that declaration to Pollux.

15

“Of all the things you could say at this point... I refuse, of course. Why would I bother coming all this way against you if I were to just bow out here?!”

Pollux spurned the Wood ouroboros’s offer, taking out a small bottle from her pocket. It was an SP recovery item that she’d never thought she’d use named “Mana Drink F.”

There were three types of these potions, so named from least to most effective: Mana Drink, Mana Drink S, and Mana Drink F. The strongest version had the effect of fully recovering the imbiber’s SP, and Pollux had always kept one on her for emergencies. The fact that the final battle was when an SP recovery item finally made its appearance should show just how much SP Lufas

and her associates had. Though to Pollux, this insurance potion was more for others than herself, so she'd never thought she would have to drink it.

Having downed the drink in one gulp, Pollux stood up. She'd recovered her SP, but that didn't stop the argonautai from being incredibly SP inefficient. If she tried to summon even ten heroic spirits, she would instantly run dry. It wasn't as if they didn't have the recovery items to compensate. In fact, their stores were bursting at the seams. Maphaahl Tower, which, even at the end of the world, still stood tall, was packed full of items. The *Argo* was also stocked with HP and status recovery items in preparation for the final fight. However, no one had expected Pollux to need SP recovery items. As long as she didn't die, she could summon heroic spirits infinitely, who came with full HP and SP every time they were resummoned. None of anyone's plans for battle had included having to recover Pollux's SP. After all, she hadn't needed any up until now. The fact that Pollux still carried one in spite of all this was a testament to her prudence. Her personality had finally borne fruit, but there would be no next time.

The situation was overwhelmingly dire. Still, they weren't allowed to just give up.

"I want to deceive the world no longer. I don't want to constantly betray people. I'm done with sending beloved children to their deaths over and over. Even if there's a slim chance of winning, I will continue to fight."

"I understand how you feel. The Goddess has forced you into a difficult role, but even so..." The Wood ouroboros snorted. Such a simple action was enough to whip up typhoon-speed winds, which shaved away at the face of the earth. "Even so, you need to stop. There is nothing but death past this fight. No one can defeat the Goddess."

Pollux said nothing in reply.

"This is the final line. There is no need to continue a fight that you know ends in death."

After hearing what the Wood ouroboros had to say, Pollux closed her eyes. The first thing she thought of was the sight of the backs of all the heroes who had gone off to their deaths, believing in hope. They were all people who'd

been sent there by her. Up until now, she'd sent so many to their deaths, and now, it was Pollux's turn. *What goes around comes around...* With that thought, Pollux couldn't suppress a laugh.

"What a foolish question. All this time, I've done nothing but send people to their deaths like this. So when the time comes for me, why should I be the one to run? Don't joke with me. If I were to pull out here, I wouldn't be able to face all those children in the afterlife!"

"Even if you know you cannot win?"

Seeing Pollux look straight at him with determined eyes, the Wood ouroboros could only look back at her with pity. However, his sight was quickly cut off by the appearance of a goat demon.

Aigokeros crossed his arms together as he floated in front of the Wood ouroboros. "Hey... I've been listening in on your little conversation, and you're being quite rude to our lord, aren't you? No one can defeat the Goddess, you say...? You make me laugh! Let me tell you this. Our lord can win against anyone and everyone! And as a loyal warrior, I will likewise not be defeated by any of the Goddess's lackeys!"

Aigokeros's eyes glinted as the sky was covered in dark clouds. Then, he spread his arms wide and shouted out loud. "Gather unto me, dark power!"

All the mana in Mizgarz responded to Aigokeros's summons, swirling around him in a whirlpool. Aigokeros synchronized with that enormous amount of mana and rebuilt his body to a size that equaled that of the ouroboroses. Having grown to pierce through the stratosphere in an instant, the demon lord finally showed his full form as he grabbed the Wood ouroboros's head.

Not even the Wood ouroboros could hide his surprise at seeing this form, the smile stiffening on his face. Unlike Leon or the Dragon King, Aigokeros was never something that the Goddess had meant to give birth to. Just like Lufas, he was a giant error that had been born unexpectedly. That was why not even an ouroboros understood the full scope of his powers.

"Amazing... So there are things to be grateful for in this long life."

"Playtime is over. Sink into despair, plaything of divinity."

Aigokeros slammed the Wood ouroboros's head into the ground with all his strength. That one attack split Mizgarz's ground, as a crack that almost divided the planet in two was formed. Aigokeros then lifted the ouroboros back up to punch him away with a tightly clenched fist.

Seeing the ouroboros being flung away, Aigokeros gave chase. Grabbing a nearby moon with both hands, he slammed it down onto the Wood ouroboros's head. Twice, then three times—the moon collapsed and disintegrated under the rough treatment of the demon lord before Aigokeros opened his mouth and a black ball of light concentrated within it. It was the same black light that had sent the aberrant god to a faraway planet.

In response, the Wood ouroboros charged his own beam of lightning, and they both unleashed their attacks at the same time.



The two energies clashed, and about a third of Mizgarz was reduced to dust as it lost its spherical shape.

Aigokeros was the one who lost the clash. Thanks to the ouroboros's roar, he was instantly blasted back to Mercury, where he changed the face of the planet. However, Aigokeros stood back up, overflowing with bloodlust as he grabbed Mercury and turned around on the spot.

Though the planet paled in size to Mizgarz, it was still undoubtedly a planet, and it was flung at the Ouroboros of Wood. Furthermore, Aigokeros shot out repeated casts of Deneb Algedi. He destroyed the core of Mercury, causing it to explode and envelop the Wood ouroboros. However, the dragon emerged from the flames of that explosion and wrapped around Aigokeros.

Not one to lose, the goat demon grabbed the Wood ouroboros's mouth and tried to pry it open so that the dragon would split in two. The Wood ouroboros tried to counter by rapid-firing beams of light from his mouth, and Aigokeros's entire head disappeared.

No living thing could survive losing its head, but Aigokeros was a demon. More than half of his body was made of mana, so common sense didn't apply. His head instantly came back, and this time, Aigokeros shot his own beam of destructive light at point-blank distance to burn the head of the Wood ouroboros.

The dragon's scales were burnt, and his face collapsed. However, that too was temporary, as the Wood ouroboros regenerated in the next moment.

“SSSHHHHAAAAHHHHHH!!!”

“GRRWWOOOOOOOOUGH!!!”

Both the Ouroboros of Wood and the demon lord screamed and clashed once again.

At first glance, the fight may have seemed even. However, seeing the amount of damage dealt, it was clear who had the upper hand. Aigokeros could not win against the Wood ouroboros. At best, he could only put up a good fight. In fact, it should be considered amazing that he could put up such a good fight on his own.

The Wood ouroboros's fangs sunk into the goat demon's arm as a strike of his tail impacted Aigokeros's chest. Finally, Aigokeros, with his body half-destroyed, fell to Mizgarz.

* *

The silver light flew in all directions. It rained blows down on the blazing body of the Fire ouroboros, after which it withdrew before a counterblow could come.

It was the Vampire Princess Benetnasch, fighting the Fire ouroboros. She forced the laws of inertia to quit as she completely changed direction several times, taking impossible courses of movement to continue to attack the Fire ouroboros. She was fighting the embodiment of fire. His internal temperature numbered in the tens of thousands of degrees Celsius.

Any normal living thing wouldn't even be able to approach before being burned to death, but Benetnasch was not normal. Ignoring the burns on her fists, she continued to slam in attacks at such speed she was overwhelming the superregeneration afforded to the ouroboros by the world.

Mizgarz itself had already lost its original planet shape, and now, most of the surface was sunk under magma. There was only a small area kept safe, thanks to a shield erected by Lufas. Given a few minutes, Mizgarz would probably explode, and the entire world would be gone. However, Benetnasch just treated that magma as solid footing as she continued her one-sided fight against the Fire ouroboros.

"Haaaaaggghhh!"

With a loud shout, she kicked up the Fire ouroboros's jaw. Because of the size difference between the two combatants, it seemed like the Fire ouroboros simply looked up of his own accord. It was an absurd sight.

Though the dragon opened his mouth and spat out flames, Benetnasch was no longer there. This time, she came from the side with a kick, sending the Fire ouroboros into the sea of magma.

"Lunatic Rain."

Benetnasch shot a silver-colored ball into the sky. The ball scattered in the air,

becoming countless raindrops of light as it fell to the ground. Each drop of light held enough destructive potential to wipe out the entirety of humanity's territory, and there were several thousand of them. The spell pierced into the magma all at once, chasing after the Fire ouroboros.

Eventually, the spell ended, but nothing came out of the magma. Benetnasch knew that the Ouroboros of Fire wouldn't be done in by that attack just then, so she crossed her arms and made a small click of her tongue. *Tsk! My spell's power was nowhere near what it should have been. That dumbass goat. He gathered too much mana.*

There needed to be mana in order to use magic. However, Aigokeros was using all of Mizgarz's mana at the moment, so the mana in the area was nearly dry. Thanks to that, Benetnasch's spells didn't have the power behind them that she wanted. In other words, Benetnasch's trump card, the Maiden Who Shoots a Silver Arrow, was not going to have much effect.

Even without magic though, Benetnasch was plenty threatening. Not being able to use magic in no way weakened her. *Hmph... Well, whatever. All I have to do then is bring this into close combat.*

Just as she was considering going in after her enemy, the Fire ouroboros finally popped his face out of the magma. *As I thought. The damage was light.* Benetnasch's attack speed slightly beat out the dragon's recovery speed, but either way, it looked like she would have to prepare for a long fight.

The Fire ouroboros quietly looked down upon Benetnasch, then it spoke. "Wonderful. To think there was someone who could touch me. Never before have I felt this kind of pain."

What spilled from the ouroboros's mouth was not curses or hatred but honest praise. He narrowed his eyes as if being affected by the heat—well, he actually *was* affected by the heat—but he also raised his voice in delight.

"This feeling that pierces throughout my body... Oh, what a sweet sensation! I now understand what love feels like!"

Benetnasch paused. "What?"

"Oh, my small but strong and beautiful princess! I have fallen for you! My long

and boring life has all been for this moment! Your silver hair, white skin, crimson eyes... Ohhh, all of it is just lovely! So this is love! L O V E! I am overjoyed! OOOOHHHHHH! Let my feelings reach you, Vampire Princess! Marry me, princess!”

For a long while, Benetnasch remained silent.

“Ah, I see. You’re shy! I love that part of you too. It’s fine. I am a gentleman. I won’t treat you roughly. Don’t worry about the size difference. I’ll do my best to achieve a human transformation, so just wait for me, my sweet honey bunny.”

“Oh, whoops,” the Ouroboros of Fire quickly continued. “I’ve gone and revealed that I’m a virgin. That’s not true. I’m not actually a virgin. True, I’ve never had intercourse, but I’m a perfect being and an agent of the Goddess, so it just wasn’t necessary. That’s why human definitions of virgin don’t apply to me. Don’t misunderstand, please! Right, I’ve heard that persistent men are unpopular. Let’s take things through the proper order. First, we should go on a date. Yeah, a date! Mizgarz is about to be destroyed, so I’ll show you around Mars.”

The ouroboros looked towards the place the planet should have been and was shocked silent for a long moment. “MARS IS GOOONNEEEEEEE?! WHO THE HELL BROKE MARS?! What the hell kind of prank is this, to have my first idea for a date already gone?! Dammit! No, wait. It’s fine. How about space? Yeah, let me invite you to the sea of stars. Don’t worry. I’ll say it again: I am a gentleman, not some beast who will force intercourse on unwilling women. We can start off with getting to know each other better. It’ll be fine. I’m confident in my looks. I can make you notice me. And after about a year of dating, I can present you with a ring. I’ll collect diamonds from throughout space to give you a supersized engagement ring the size of a planet. How does that sound? Aren’t I generous? Where should we build our home, I wonder? Right, there’s another universe other than this one. It’s the ‘first’ universe, where the laws of physics rule, and there’s no magic. There’s a planet there named Earth where the culture is quite advanced, and it seems they have a lot of good food and entertainment. We can build our house there. Doesn’t that sound like a good idea? How many children should we have? Oh, of course, I don’t plan to make you push yourself. I want kids, but if you don’t, I can drop the idea. Also—”

Heedless of Benetnasch's reaction, the Ouroboros of Fire simply put his own feelings first as he talked nearly endlessly. There was no longer a shred of dignity or majesty left to his name. In fact, the ouroboros was, quite honestly, creepy.

Benetnasch had now completely lost the desire to fight and was instead filled with exasperation and disgust as she looked at the Fire ouroboros as if he were utter filth. Lufas and Scorpius, who had been waiting for Dina a little ways away, also heard this confession and were extremely creeped out as well.

After a moment, Lufas said, "Ouroboroses are very different from what I imagined. I figured they would all have much more dignity than that..."

"Wow, that's such cringe... Seriously cringe... He's talking like a machine gun and ignoring her while putting his virginity on full display. How creepy can you even get? The fact that that thing is the peak of our Fire element makes me so sad and disgusted. Don't you think so too, Lady Lufas?" Scorpius spoke with true contempt, but all that did was remind Lufas of all the dangerous lines Scorpius had said over the years and her borderline stalker behavior. For some reason, she also thought of Mars, who she'd once sent flying.

After contemplating this for some time, Lufas said, "No. Somehow, it makes a lot of sense to me."

The ouroboroses were manifestations of transcendent nature and were symbols of their respective elements. *So if the Ouroboros of Fire is like that... I see. Strangely enough, I now totally understand why there are so many people like that with the Fire element. The only spot of relief in the Fire element is Aries. It's a wonder how he managed to turn out all right. Well, it's also like him to get obsessive about something and charge straight in or go berserk. In that sense, he's very much Fire-aligned.*

Lufas paused. *I really hope the Sun ouroboros is decent...* Lufas looked up into the heavens and prayed from the bottom of her heart that the ouroboros that symbolized her element, the Sun, wasn't such a gigantic weirdo. *Now that I think about it though, I'd be praying to that useless Goddess. Yeah, this might be a lost cause.*

Benetnasch's response to the Fire ouroboros's passionate but deeply disturbing confession was a kick. She kicked the ouroboros, who was looming like a literal mountain, in the side of his face before getting around to his other side to kick him again. As one might expect when the target was of an ouroboros's size, it was impossible for Benetnasch to send him flying with one blow. At best, she could send him reeling heavily. However, the ouroboros was definitely taking damage, and each new blow from Benetnasch backed the Fire ouroboros further into a corner.

With Benetnasch's level of power and speed, the size difference was no longer a handicap. In fact, Benetnasch was far too small a target from the ouroboros's perspective, and he was having trouble finding his mark.

However, the Fire ouroboros wouldn't just let this fight end one-sidedly. In response to Benetnasch's speed, he swiftly manipulated his gigantic body to surround Benetnasch.

"This is..."

As if he was curling into a ball, the Fire ouroboros completely closed Benetnasch in. If the opponent was too fast, then the counter was simple: just shut them inside. Of course, with the Fire ouroboros's size, the space within his bodily enclosure was also abnormally large. In Earth terms, Japan would fully fit inside. However, the size wasn't a problem; there was meaning in her being enclosed at all. The Fire ouroboros's body temperature now numbered in the tens of thousands of degrees Celsius, and he could will himself to get hotter.

Basically, the interior was now an inescapable prison of flame. Given Benetnasch's regeneration ability, she wouldn't be cooked that quickly, but it was a fact that her ability to regenerate was being overwhelmed. As it stood, she would be pushed to the brink of death and captured. Not even Benetnasch was able to resist this heat, and her consciousness started to get hazy as she began dripping uncomfortably with sweat.

"Hmph. So you're planning to steam me to death? Don't underestimate me!"

Benetnasch took to the sky, punching the Fire ouroboros with all her might. Being unable to escape applied to both parties. The Fire ouroboros's attack wouldn't allow him to evade Benetnasch's attacks.

At the speed of light, Benetnasch unleashed a storm of blows that gouged into the Fire ouroboros, the impact of which caused blood to fill his mouth. However, Benetnasch was still the one at a disadvantage. Being constantly exposed to such heat, she was eating up her stamina at a prodigious rate, and she likely wasn't able to bring out her full ability either. It wasn't as if she had no chance, but even so, this wasn't a contest of wills she wanted to take on.

What both parties had failed to account for was the fact that this wasn't a one-on-one fight.

"FIIIIIRREEEEEEEE!"

Several hundred guided missiles flew at the Fire ouroboros, impacting the dragon all at once and exploding. Each missile had enough firepower in it to change scores of kilometers of land into scorched earth and would completely erase most living things. The missiles that missed spawned several mushroom clouds, and the giant golem Blutgang followed up its attack by performing a tackle at maximum combat speed.

While doubling as a country's capital, the golem could also transform into a metal giant of over 1100 meters, and it currently had a fist clenched, which it used to throw a punch. The Fire ouroboros was hit, which was enough support to allow Benetnasch to escape. However, it wasn't over yet. Three mass-produced Libras and the Gatekeeper sortied from the golem Blutgang's ports, and they showered the dragon in weapons fire.

"You tiny nobodies! Don't get in the way of my romance!"

The Fire ouroboros opened his mouth and unleashed his flames at Blutgang. The flames, which reached a temperature of over two million degrees Celsius, were hotter than the Sun's corona, hot enough to melt any worldly metal. However, the cone of fire was split in half before it could reach Blutgang.

"You can't call something one-sided like that a romance!"

After showing that he could split an ouroboros's fire in two, Alioth next split

apart his scales. The Sword King was using Lifthrasir, which had previously been used by Lufas in her fight with Benetnasch. Following up on that, a hand large enough to even grab something as large as an ouroboros sprouted from the magma to punch the dragon in its jaw.

“Ha ha! Now this! This feeling is nostalgic!”

Mizar stood straight with his arms crossed on top of Blutgang as he laughed heartily and used the arms he’d transmuted to hold the Fire ouroboros down. That was when the guardian deity Levia flew in, tackling the Fire ouroboros.

“Psycho Compression!”

“Apsaras!”

Merak raised his hands and stopped the Fire ouroboros for a moment, allowing Megrez to bring forth a swan of water to hit it with. The Seven Heroes weren’t done yet either. Dubhe leapt from the top of Levia’s head, throwing out his fist backed by everything he could muster. Doing so caused a pressure wave to come from his fist, which took the form of a ferocious bear’s face before it burst against the Fire ouroboros’s face.

Next, a rain of arrows so thick it blotted out the sky rained down to further chase down the dragon. The arrow rain unleashed by Phecda was concentrated to a single point, and all the arrows swarmed the Fire ouroboros, carving out countless tiny holes in its body. While they were just small holes to an ouroboros, they were still big enough for a person to fit inside.

Benetnasch, who had managed to escape from the Fire ouroboros’s burning hell, flew out of the stratosphere. Once she was out, she concentrated mana into the palm of her hand. Mizgarz’s mana had run dry thanks to a certain idiotic goat. However, Benetnasch had seen the truth of the world before this fight. Space itself was a spell of the Goddess. Everything was made of mana, so there was mana to use—an infinite amount, ripe for the gathering.

“Maiden Who Shoots a Silver Arrow!”

Benetnasch’s silver arrow stabbed through the Fire ouroboros’s body and burst. The Fire ouroboros’s body was halved before it was torn apart and fell.

Two monsters swam through the sea of stars. One was black and the other white. The two dragons who reigned over the elements of light and dark entwined and bit at each other as a fierce battle developed between the two. The flashes of light they emitted from their mouths traveled far into the distance before exploding, and each swing of their tails swiped away countless asteroids.

While clashing, the two of them swam around Saturn. Both of them were going all out, throwing out skills that could destroy planets at each other over and over.

“My lunar brother... You foolish man. You have betrayed the divine... To think you would become our enemy...”

“Yes, I may have, Ouroboros of the Sun, but I do not regret it.”

“It’s Heaven now. Please, use it with fondness.”

The Sun—nay, the Heaven ouroboros—corrected Orm, giving a new name in response. In truth, the Ouroboros of the Sun was correct, but just like his avatar, he strangely seemed to have a strong preference.

Orm shot a destructive beam from his mouth, completely uncaring of his opponent’s whims, and the white dragon returned the attack in kind, canceling each other out. For a moment, everything was perfectly in balance, but then the black and white beams burst, resulting in a flash observable from Mizgarz. Blastwaves from the explosion raged about, and around twenty percent of Saturn’s rings were erased from existence. However, the two beings who had brought this about were still perfectly healthy.

They glared at each other, waiting to see how the other would act.

“Well, whatever. In truth, it doesn’t matter to me whether or not you have any regrets. I can’t even begin to care. There’s only one thing that’s important. You’ve betrayed us and are standing in front of me... That’s all that matters.”

“So you find me that unforgivable?” Orm spoke as if trying to reason with his opponent.

However, that only elicited scornful laughter from the Ouroboros of Heaven. “Ke ke ke keh!” The dragon paused, then admitted, “No. In fact, it’s the

opposite.”

“The...opposite?”

“Exactly. I’m grateful you betrayed us. Well done for standing in front of me. For so long, I’ve thought that this world was utterly boring and small. No, that’s not all. I could have simply endured that much. But what I couldn’t stand, you see, was the fact that there were so many strong opponents nearby that I couldn’t fight!”

With that, the Ouroboros of Heaven started to shine. That shine soon resolved into multiple lasers coming from all over his body which attacked the surroundings indiscriminately. But Orm simply charged through that curtain of fire, clashing head-on with the Ouroboros of Heaven.

“Good. Hurt me! Make me feel that I’m alive! I’ve wished for this for so long—to be able to fight the others! Kill and be killed, eat and be eaten... Ah, how I’ve dreamed of the supreme bliss that would come from being able to do that...” The Ouroboros of Heaven spoke rapturously, expressing his true emotions as he used his tail in an attempt to choke Orm.

Meanwhile, Orm did the same, using his tail to squeeze his enemy’s neck.

Both of them were even in terms of strength. Actually, Orm may have been stronger due to the fact that he had managed to temporarily surpass the limit during his fight with Lufas. Even so, the scales of victory were ever so slowly starting to lean in the Ouroboros of Heaven’s favor.

In the end, Orm was an ouroboros. His power was limited by the very fact that he was opposing the Goddess. He was unable to fight with his full strength. While Orm had barely gained the ability to fight, thanks to being placed under Lufas’s control, his instincts were still putting up an intense fight which had turned into a harsh handicap.

“A life consisting only of slumber with no pain... An invincible life with no rivals... Ah, how worthless ouroboroses are. So boring, so miserable... It was as if I’d been dead all this time. So I thank you, Ouroboros of the Moon, my brother. I have lived for just this moment. This is the time I have longed for my entire life. I see now. This is pain, as well as joy... Ahh... So this is what it means to be alive!”

The Ouroboros of Heaven welcomed even pain as a sweet sensation, the edges of his mouth loosening with joy. *Now then, let's fight, and let's kill, my brother. Let us enjoy this supreme moment named battle!*

The Ouroboros of Heaven gave a shout, but that was when some sort of light shined in the corner of his vision. In the next moment, a blue slash hit the dragon's eye directly. It would regenerate, but even so, the fact that he had lost an eye was big. Having had his enjoyable fight interrupted, the Ouroboros of Heaven angrily glared at the direction where the attack had come from, his remaining eye filled with bloodlust. There, he saw a white-winged horse and Terra riding on top of it.

Of course, it was not actually a horse. It was a member of the argonautai, summoned from the afterlife by Pollux. In the past, it had been strong enough to be in the next class down from the Twelve Stars, and its name was lined up along the likes of Fenix and Hydras. It was the divine steed Pegasus. Its level was 800, the same as the Twelve Stars, though now that Lufas had broken past the world's limits again, it was back to 1000. It had a unique skill that allowed it to protect its rider from any environment, allowing whoever was mounted on it to travel safely anywhere. Of course, that "anywhere" also included space.

"Father, I'm here to help!"

Since Terra hadn't obtained the Esper or Psychicer classes, he normally wouldn't be able to converse in space like Lufas or the ouroboroses could. However, thanks to the Pegasus, his voice could reach Orm.

Terra swung his blade, sending a slash carving into the Ouroboros of Heaven. From the ouroboros's perspective, it was but a scratch. Even so, the slight pain could affect concentration.

"How annoying!"

The Ouroboros of Heaven shot a beam of destructive light from his mouth. As soon as he did, the Pegasus disappeared and instantly reappeared on the other side of the ouroboros.

Pegasus was not a member of the Twelve Stars, but that didn't mean it was inferior to them at all. In terms of speed, the only one who could surpass it was Sagittarius. Pegasus could reach sublight speed, though only for a moment.

Even for an ouroboros, trying to hit it would be a hard task.

“The clone of the Moon ouroboros, huh...? A gnat like you shouldn’t dare interrupt this joyous moment of mine!”

The Ouroboros of Heaven once again unleashed a torrent of destruction from his mouth. Pegasus swiftly avoided the attack, but this time, the enemy ouroboros moved his head in chase. By doing so, the beam moved with him, and stars that were in the way were swept aside and exploded.

The Ouroboros of Heaven was fully intent on continuing to shoot until he hit in a spectacularly brute-force method. Even the swift Pegasus would likely find it hard to avoid for long enough. However, Orm flew into a rage after seeing his child in danger, and he hit the Ouroboros of Heaven with his own black light of destruction.

In that instant, the Ouroboros of Heaven’s tail loosened, and Orm was free to bite into his opponent’s neck. Though he was trying to bite through the universe’s toughest scales, Orm’s fangs were able to pierce through as a member of the same race.

The Ouroboros of Heaven wasn’t going to go down so easily though, and he also chomped onto the base of Orm’s neck. The two of them fell into Saturn while still attempting to eat each other. They both dove into the gases of the planet at the same time, but Orm managed to get his head out a little faster, allowing him to charge at the Ouroboros of Heaven.

He went for a tackle, a primitive method of attack where he used his entire body to slam into his enemy’s. But with an ouroboros’s giant body and the speed Orm was capable of, the attack would carry absurd destructive power with it. The two ouroboroses became comets as they flew through space, smashing through asteroids and other debris in their way as they fell back to Mizgarz into a sea of magma. The impact collapsed Mizgarz even further, but to the two combatants, the magma was only as dangerous as lukewarm water.

They continued their fight in the magma before once again bursting out of the blazing sea at the same time.

“Hahhhh... Hahhhh...”

“Hmph... Looks like you’re exhausted. Of course you are. You no longer have the protection of the world. Thanks to that, I have infinite strength, but you no longer have that luxury... Your strength is limited, and that doesn’t just go for SP. Your HP recovery speed is also far behind mine. If possible, I’d have liked to fight you at your best, but that’s just how fights are.” The Ouroboros of Heaven paused. “This is my victory, brother.”

Even on their own, the ouroboroses boasted more than enough regenerative ability. However, the Ouroboros of Heaven also had the support of the world. The eye that had been destroyed earlier was already back, while Orm had yet to fully recover from his wounds. This wasn’t all just because of backup from the world. Orm’s body was also rejecting this fight, so his regenerative ability was lowered. This difference was far too significant, even though they were both ouroboroses.

“It was fun, brother... I will show you my respect and gratitude for this by ending your suffering.”

Intending to finish Orm, the Ouroboros of Heaven opened his mouth. However, that was when several flashes flew in, bursting against the side of the enemy ouroboros’s face. The attacks were strong enough to erase entire cities, but they were weak—too weak. They were completely useless.

In this fight at the ultimate level that could see entire stars destroyed, an attack that could only destroy a city could no longer be considered effective. This wasn’t a question of strong or weak. It wasn’t even really an attack. There wasn’t even a scratch on the Ouroboros of Heaven, as it only felt something lightly brush its cheek. In human terms, it was as if a ball of cotton had brushed up against one’s cheek. However, it probably still felt unpleasant.

The Ouroboros of Heaven turned menacingly to glare at the small, weak things who were the culprits. There, it saw the armies of the devilfolk, numerous enough to blot out the sky.

After a moment to assess, Saturnus commented, “Oh boy, that didn’t do anything. That *was* supposed to be our strongest combined attack though.”

“It really is impossible, Lady Saturnus! Let’s just run! We can’t win against that thing!”

At the head of the army was Saturnus, one of the Seven Luminaries of the devilfolk. She crossed her arms under her bountiful chest, supporting it as her mouth formed into a loose smile. However, she didn't have nearly as much leeway as she made it seem. In fact, it was the opposite. The difference in power was just so large there was nothing else but to laugh.

"Run? Where? There's nowhere safe left in this world," said Saturnus.

"B-But..."

"Prepare yourself. Now that it's come to this, we have no other path but to ensure the Devil King's victory. We either don't fight and disappear, or we fight and die."

Saturnus's eyes narrowed as she thought of those who had disappeared before her. They had in no way been good people. In fact, they had probably been out-and-out villains, and a lot of them had probably gotten what they deserved. She wasn't sympathizing or pitying them at all, but even then... Yes, even then, they had still been alive. They had their own wills and their own hearts, and they had lived. In no way had they been puppets. That was why Saturnus laughed boldly.

"Let's show them how stubborn we can be... Especially that Goddess with an even worse personality than mine. If we were to just disappear here, that would truly make us puppets, wouldn't it? So let's at least go out with a bang!"

Saturnus gathered what little mana she could in her palm. She didn't expect to do any damage, nor did she even dream she could win. She was sure that in a few seconds, a counterattack would wipe them all from the face of the universe. Regardless, sitting and waiting for the end of the world didn't sit right with her.

"Don't any of you bother with attacking skills or magic. It won't work anyway. Focus on healing and buffs on the Devil King while debuffing the enemy. Show that, even as small fry, we have our own way of fighting!"

Responding to Saturnus's orders, the devilfolk executed their support for the Devil King in unison.

Individually, there wasn't much effect. Put bluntly, they were small fry. But

still, with several thousand—no, tens of thousands—of them, the effect would combine into something great. Though a single healing spell wouldn't fully heal Orm, thousands would. Though they used skills that would lower defense no matter the difference in levels, each one could only lower the stat by one point, given an ouroboros's defense. But with sheer numbers, they might be able to take down the enemy's defense by hundreds. With a difference that large, it would be possible for the Devil King to make a comeback. That was what Saturnus and her army were betting on, what they were forced to bet on.

After a moment, the Ouroboros of Heaven said, "You pieces of trash... Don't get in my way!"

However, they were facing the Ouroboros of Heaven. He could decimate the devilfolk in an instant if he wanted to. There was no need for a beam, just a forceful breath would do. Their struggle while being so weak must have angered the Ouroboros of Heaven. The devilfolk were so weak their attacks couldn't even be considered as such. There was such a difference in strength that they couldn't even put up a fight, but just the fact that beings so insignificant dared to interrupt him was unforgivable.

The Ouroboros of Heaven opened his mouth and mercilessly gathered light of incredible power.

Ah, nope. This is impossible. We're dead. Seriously dead. Well, at least it'll probably be so quick I won't even have time to feel pain. With her arms still crossed and mouth still smiling, Saturnus couldn't help but sweat. *I won't do something as shameful as beg for my life in fear. If I'm going to die anyway, I might as well do it proudly. I'll die fighting to the end, sending a message. That's what we all came here to do in the first place, after all.*

The Ouroboros of Heaven unleashed— Nothing, as that was when Aigokeros fell from above, flattening the Ouroboros of Heaven under him. Having had his mouth forced closed, the blast the Ouroboros of Heaven had been charging burst inside his mouth, dealing massive damage.

“YOU’RE IN THE WAAAAAYYYY!” Aigokeros shouted as he grabbed the Ouroboros of Heaven and swung him around.

It was, honestly, an absurd excuse. After all, Aigokeros had been the one who had fallen in on their fight, so he would naturally be the one at fault. In other words, his line just now was something the Ouroboros of Heaven should have said. However, such things did not apply in this battle. Common sense and logic had no place here.

Common sense had long been constrained from all sides and was no longer able to do anything at all. After all, this was Fimbulwinter. In the end, this fight was taking place between two forces full of ridiculousness and absurdity for the title of most senseless. Put simply, it was a tug-of-war between egos. Stripped down to basics, both sides were saying, “I am strong. I am right. I don’t like that other person, so die.”

Saturnus, who was, comparatively, full of common sense, was totally put off by Aigokeros’s actions.

“No way...” she muttered to herself.

“You... FuckfuckFUCKFUCK! Why is everyone and everything getting in the way of my fight with the Ouroboros of the Moon?!”

Of course, the one most angry about all this was the Ouroboros of Heaven himself. Giving in to anger, he bared his fangs at Aigokeros and bit off a chunk.

Not one to lose, Aigokeros grabbed onto the Ouroboros of Heaven and tried to peel the dragon off, but that was when countless flashing lights burst against the Ouroboros of Heaven, forcing him off anyway. It wasn’t something weak enough to not even be considered an attack, like those the devilfolk army would muster. It was a concentrated barrage from the argonautai.

“Hey, Aigokeros! What do you think you’re doing?! Our enemy’s the Wood one!” Pollux shouted.

The Wood ouroboros played along. “She’s right, you know. I’m right here!” he said, rebuking Aigokeros as he lined up with the *Argo*.

It closed the distance so naturally that Pollux was shocked, so the Wood ouroboros simply backed off again while chuckling mirthfully.

“Fighting two is basically the same as fighting one. Either way, they are both my master’s enemies. I will bury them both at once! Come at me!”

“WE’RE TAKING THEM ON SEPARATELY BECAUSE THAT’S GOING TO BE HARD! YOU *IDIOT!*” Pollux screamed while on the verge of tears.

However, she quickly managed to gather herself and started analyzing the situation. *I know full well that I’m completely useless in this fight. I can just barely see what’s happening, thanks to the ring I got from Lufas, and due to that, I can yell at Aigokeros. So I should think about what I can do... I can no longer even summon enough spirits, so my only weapon left is my mind and the experience I’ve gathered from living so fruitlessly long.*

Fighting them one-on-one was the strategy, because if they managed to team up, things would get even harder. *Even so, the current situation is still disappointing, especially for Orm. At first, he seemed to be the one with the best chance out of all of us, being an ouroboros himself, but it turned out to be the exact opposite. He’s the one at the biggest disadvantage here. Even though he’s fighting someone the same as him, his instincts are shackling him. It looks like Terra and the other devilfolk are here, but unfortunately, they won’t be nearly enough to turn the tide of this battle. Meaning, if we leave Orm to his own devices, he will lose. Naturally, that also means that the Ouroboros of Heaven will be free to intervene in some other battle, which will snowball.*

Of course, Pollux didn’t believe that Aigokeros had thought that far ahead, but either way, she couldn’t definitively say he was wrong.

“Fine,” she admitted a moment later. “A combined melee is unavoidable at this point anyway. We’ll form a combined front with Orm and take on both the Ouroboros of Heaven and Wood at the same time!”

Pollux raised her hand and concentrated her will. She could summon another ten heroic spirits at most. In other words, she could no longer rely on the weight of numbers to win the day, and she couldn’t afford to summon just anyone. However, even Lufas’s former subjects were lacking in this fight and would easily be erased. *So who do I call? Aeneas? Uranus? Some other hero? No, none of them. They’ll still not be enough. If I don’t call someone stronger, they won’t even be able to fight.*

So... There's only one option, or rather, one body. He won't listen to me, but that probably won't matter. Given his personality, he'll just fight the ouroboroses on his own, as long as he doesn't see Lufas. The real problem is whether I can call him in the first place.

Pollux had never once thought of her potential subject as a hero. However, now wasn't the time to assume it to be impossible. The word "can't" wouldn't work here; Pollux had to do it. *If it's impossible, then I just have to make it possible. If I couldn't do it before, I'll just have to do it now. Lufas broke out of her own shell, and that led to this battlefield. I saw Virgo's growth myself. I can also somehow tell that even Orm is breaking out of his limits, so I should also be able to do something like this!*

"The Fairy Princess does not recognize you but orders you nonetheless... Descend from Valhalla and become mine sword, you, the King of All Dragons With Ten Heads!"

"Pollux, what...?!"

"Descend, Ladon!"

As Pollux shouted, a thunderous roar filled the area. Using her skill in a way it clearly was not meant to be used put a large burden on Pollux's body, causing pain to run throughout her system. Argonautai was a skill meant for summoning heroes. It could not target those she didn't recognize as such. Pollux absolutely did not think of Ladon as a hero, and she probably never would. Still, she brute forced her way into summoning him. She went far past just pushing herself. Still, she achieved the impossible and summoned him.

The crashing lightning gradually took shape, and eventually, a dragon with ten heads took shape within the light, manifesting with a roar. Ladon used all of his ten heads to look upon the battlefield.

The Ouroboros of Heaven spoke mockingly. "Hmph. Of all the things to call on... The head fake of all the terribly made imitations of us? Did you seriously think you could challenge me with that piece of trash? Heh heh heh... Your lack of skill is showing, Fairy Princess. I suppose you're just a mere inferior piece of the Wood ouroboros in the end. I mean, Dragon King? It's an impressive name for sure, but being the king of such trash only makes you filthy too. Know your

place.”

Pollux simply laughed fearlessly in response to the Ouroboros of Heaven’s ridicule. *As I thought... I know his personality now after hearing what he said after being thrown around by Aigokeros. That ouroboros is the type to respect those of the same rank in strength, but he looks down on anyone lower.* Therefore, Pollux had predicted that if she were to call upon Ladon, the Ouroboros of Heaven would surely say exactly what it had said. That had been her aim.

All ten of Ladon’s heads turned to look at the Ouroboros of Heaven at once, filled with rage.

“Were you the one who just mocked me?” the rightmost head, representing all ten, said after some silence.

Unlike how he had been summoned before, Ladon was in full control of himself this time. Pollux had summoned him in his prime, before he had been killed by Lufas. Because of that, it would have been terrible if Ladon were to become an enemy, but it looked like that wouldn’t be a problem.

“So what, you defect junk pile? You angry because I said the truth? Don’t make me laugh. Don’t resent me because I called you what you are: trash. I’ll bust a gut.”

“You’re dead!”

Ladon bared his bloodlust at the Ouroboros of Heaven before charging him.

Just as planned. Even the feared Dragon King wouldn’t be able to match an ouroboros on his own, but he was still about as powerful as Leon. He wouldn’t go down easily.

Meanwhile, the *Argo* moved close to Orm so they could speak.

“Orm, we’re going to form a united front here. Lend a hand,” said Pollux.

“Fair enough. Allow me to support you however I can.”

Pollux nodded, and reflecting her will, Castor took command. The twins, having the same originator, were able to somewhat understand each other without the need to use words. Castor was able to relay that will to all the

argonautai, and the army of heroic spirits moved to carry that out as if they were a single living being.

The one Castor pointed at was the Ouroboros of Wood. The plan was most likely to focus on the Wood ouroboros first before turning to defeat the Ouroboros of Heaven.

In the face of such an obvious plan, the edges of the Wood ouroboros's mouth loosened before it swiped its tail at Orm, who was most likely to be the first to attack. It was a direct hit, but Orm wasn't fazed, and the feeling of it hitting him was somehow strange. When the Wood ouroboros looked closer, it noticed that there was some sort of crab in between its tail and Orm.

"Acubens!"

"Nwarrggh!!!"

Using the opponent's power, Karkinos unleashed his counter skill, forcing the Wood ouroboros to bend backwards. At the same time, Castor shifted his hand to point at the Ouroboros of Heaven, and everyone turned to face the new target at once.

"O-Oh no!"

"Everyone, fire!"

Along with Castor's shout, Orm and Aigokeros both unleashed powerful beams out of their mouths. Sagittarius used Al Nassr as well, while Pisces also shot some sort of flash of light from his mouth. A wave of slashing energy shot out of the anchor Castor swung down, while the rest of the crew aboard the *Argo* also used their own skills to attack. Furthermore, all of the *Argo's* weapon ports opened fire in a concentrated bombardment, all of which hit the Ouroboros of Heaven.

While being exposed to enormous torrents of energy, the Ouroboros of Heaven managed to keep his footing with great difficulty, but the attack wasn't over yet. Ten identical flashes of light flew out of all of Ladon's heads, but the attacks all converged on one point instead of hitting his enemy. Did Ladon cancel out his own attack on purpose? Was it a mistake? No, neither of those were true.

The flashes combined together at that point and grew bigger, turning into a gigantic fireball with flashes of lightning running through it. The ball continued on, growing ever bigger as the world itself shook in resonance with this portent of doom.

There was silence, then Ladon said, "Die."

The energy, which had grown to its limits, was unleashed. It mixed with all the rest of the attacks the Ouroboros of Heaven was enduring, and for a moment, everything was quiet.

"Oh crap. Get down!"

Castor quickly covered Pollux as everyone took a defensive stance. Immediately afterwards, a huge explosion that threatened to burn away both heaven and earth alike ripped a chunk of Mizgarz apart and raised a pillar of fire into the sky. While almost carried off by the blast wave and resultant gale-force winds, Pollux relayed their next steps to her brother, who then relayed it to everyone else.

"Pisces... No, Eros! Use your unique skill!"

"Why did you correct yourself?!"

Having received orders from Castor, Pisces activated his skill, even while complaining. His body then converted into mana that entered the Wood ouroboros's body as if it were being sucked in by something.

Those who had at least started off in the Goddess's camp had all received a part of her power in the form of a unique skill, like Parthenos's Vindemiatrix or Pollux's Argonautai, for example. Dina's ability to manipulate others' perception was probably the most extreme example of this.

Pisces, as the Goddess's child, was no exception to this. His unique skill was named Alrescha. Its effect allowed him to possess a target and control them, just like how the Goddess had possessed and controlled so many before. Using knowledge gained from the other side, as Lufas would put it, it was the ability to control the other's avatar. In game terms, it would be like hacking into someone else's account. It truly was an unfair ability only allowed because he was the child of divinity. In fact, it was just unfair.

Using this power, Pisces may have also been able to do something about the aberrant god by himself, but he had been extremely put off by the Wicked God's unsightly appearance, so he never did so. But now, Pisces was possessing the Ouroboros of Wood. Though not even Pisces would be able to move the ouroboros exactly as he wanted, he could at least stiffen and slow down the Wood ouroboros, and that was enough. With Pisces obstructing him from within and shifting his attacks even slightly to the side, their chances of winning were increased by more than enough.

"Oho. So you're going to try to obstruct me, huh?" the Ouroboros of Wood asked. "How interesting!"

"Gwarrrgghh... How strong...is this thing...?! Even with us possessing him, it's as if he's still fully in control..." Pisces said.

Both Pisces's and the Wood ouroboros's voices came out of the Wood ouroboros's mouth. Both consciousnesses existed at once, but control of the body was still firmly in the Wood ouroboros's grip. It would have been great if Pisces was able to fully wrest control from the Wood ouroboros, but of course, it would not be that easy.

"Karkinos!"

"O K!"

Next, Castor gave his order to Karkinos, who swiftly rounded behind the Ouroboros of Heaven. Since he was normally nothing but a shield, Karkinos being ordered to get behind someone raised some flags with the Wood ouroboros, but he was also equally interested to see what his children would do next.

"What are you all planning...?"

There's my possession by Pisces, and now that movement from Karkinos. Now then, what does it all mean? the Ouroboros of Wood pondered. *Normally, all this would just lead to a loss in their ability to fight, especially since Pisces would never be able to fully control me. However, that just means that they're clearly planning something. Let's play it carefully here. No big moves. Just make some light jabs and see what comes.*

Unfortunately, the other ouroboros chose this moment to appear from the smoke to shout at the Wood ouroboros in anger.

“What are you doing, Wood?! Hurry up and finish these interlopers! Leaving these weaklings on the battlefield is such an eyesore that I’m going blind!”

“Now, now, just wait, my brother of Heaven. These ones are trying to do something. Why can’t you attack a little more carefully?”

“It doesn’t matter! We’re ouroboroses. Just crush their measly, useless little plans under your full might!”

After a beat of silence, the Ouroboros of Wood said, “Whatever happens, it’s not on me.”

The Ouroboros of Heaven opened his mouth, and a white light converged inside of it. The Wood ouroboros did the same, and the flash of lightning shined from inside of his mouth. The two ouroboroses were planning a simultaneous breath attack. If they hit, it would mean complete decimation of all of Pollux’s forces.

Orm reacted, opening his own mouth and aiming to cancel out the attack. Furthermore, the Dragon King shot his own breath from all ten heads at the Ouroboros of Heaven. Likewise, Aigokeros produced a black-colored light from his hands. Unfortunately, Orm could not fully cancel out the attack by himself in his weakened state. Only by combining with the Dragon King and Aigokeros’s attacks could they finally stop their doom.

But before everything went off, Castor gave voice to more orders, ones very unexpected for their recipient, Pisces.

“Now, Pisces! Amplify the power of the breath!”

The Wood ouroboros was taken by surprise.

Pisces was able to possess a target and rob them of control over their body. And just like how the Goddess could strengthen those she possessed, Pisces could also add his own power to those under his possession. As for why he was ordered to strengthen the Wood ouroboros, however... The answer to that soon revealed itself, though those orders confused the likes of Terra and Orm.

The Wood ouroboros's breath missed the *Argo* and seemed to head for the Ouroboros of Heaven. Rather, the attack went for Karkinos, who had circled behind him. That was the reason why Karkinos had moved there, so that he could redirect an enemy's attack towards him and increase its accuracy.

It was his skill *Asellus Borealis*. However, he did not teleport the attack to instantly hit, like *Sagittarius*'s arrow; it simply bent the attack towards Karkinos. It was a somewhat-shabby skill that would fail if there was any obstacle between the attack and Karkinos, and anyone who knew of this weakness would find it easy to block this. Yes. If there were to be an obstacle in the way of this skill, the redirected attack would hit the obstacle instead. In other words, friendly fire.

“GWOOOOAAARRRRGGGHHH?!”

Orm, Aigokeros, and the Dragon King together managed to cancel out the Ouroboros of Heaven's attack, while the Wood ouroboros's breath hit a friendly instead.

Of course, Orm was not one to let the chance this opened up go. He bared his fangs and chomped into the Ouroboros of Heaven's neck, eliciting a spray of blood. On the other side, Terra unleashed the strongest attack he could muster, and the attacks from the parent-and-child pair nearly beheaded the Ouroboros of Heaven. The fact that the Ouroboros of Heaven was still alive, even though his head was basically only attached by a piece of skin at this point, was a testament to the strength of his species.

Even so, it was over. Aigokeros made a finishing attack on the ouroboros, using brute force to tear the head the rest of the way off. The snapping sound of an ouroboros's bones shattering rang throughout the area, and his head finally came off. Pollux reflexively averted her eyes from the ghastly scene, but the Ouroboros of Heaven's absurd vitality allowed him to make one last attack from the grave.

“Not yet! I'm still alive! My fight is not oveeerrrr!”

Even as just a head, the Ouroboros of Heaven was still able to use his breath attack. Pollux and her party would not be able to cancel this one out. This time, they were just in a bad position.

Orm and Aigokeros had approached close to the Ouroboros of Heaven to kill him, but he was pointing his mouth at the *Argo*. From where they were, the Ouroboros of Heaven would unleash his breath before the two of them could return in front of the *Argo* to make their interception.

The argonautai on board reacted by putting shields up, but as for how much of an effect that would actually have... Though the shields might soften the blow somewhat, it seemed like the *Argo* would unfortunately not be able to escape being sunk, and that though the others may not die, Pollux definitely would.

“DIIIEEEEEEEEEEE!”

The Ouroboros of Heaven unleashed his final breath attack. The beam traveled faster than light, erasing half the Dragon King’s body before closing in on the *Argo* next. But before it hit, the breath was blocked. The shield of the Twelve Heavenly Stars just barely managed to squeak in between the attack, which was then deflected by Karkinos.

However, not even Karkinos could remain unhurt after taking a breath attack from an ouroboros, not even if he was currently back to level 1000, thanks to Lufas. Nor considering the fact that the Ouroboros of Heaven was on his last legs. Nor even factoring in the shield put up by the argonautai. An ouroboros’s breath could sunder planets; it was not weak.

Karkinos’s shell liquefied and shattered, and along with that, his HP fell to dangerous levels. However, he had a skill that increased in the threat it posed the more damage he took.

“Acubens!”

After cutting through the Ouroboros of Heaven’s breath, Karkinos charged. His scissors were worn, ragged, and cracked. Even still though, he continued on to stab his counter into the Ouroboros of Heaven’s forehead. With that, the fight was over. The Ouroboros of Heaven did not possess the power to bounce back after having his own power reflected onto him on top of being reduced to just a head.

“I-I...lost...?” he whispered to himself in shock and disbelief after a moment of quiet. “To these tiny things from the surface...?”

For a while, he seemed absentminded, but eventually, he seemed to have understood everything and laughed.

“Heh... Heh ha ha... Heh HA HA HA HA HA HA! Well done! Well done, small ones! I see. I praise you all. It seems I was the one who was wrong. Of course I’d lose after underestimating a strong enemy like that! But hear this: even with my defeat, the battle still rages. To her, us ouroboroses are nothing but pawns in the end! I will enjoy seeing how you all deal with this insurmountable difference in power from the afterlife!”

With those last words, the Ouroboros of Heaven accepted death.

The reason for his defeat was taking everyone other than the Moon ouroboros lightly and underestimating them as weak. *I should have welcomed them to the fight. I should have been overjoyed. What a fool I was, to have missed that there were so many formidable enemies around! If I had to list a regret... If I could only have used magic...* thought the Ouroboros of Heaven.

Not being able to use magic because of Aigokeros was basically like losing a weapon to the ouroboroses. However, the Ouroboros of Heaven recognized that this had also been thanks to the efforts of the enemy.

“Thank you for the good fight... Don’t lose now, small ones.”

As the Ouroboros of Heaven paid his respects to those who had defeated him, Karkinos’s blade ripped him apart.

“Goodbye, Ouroboros of Heaven.”

He scattered. The Ouroboros of Heaven, who had been the binding force among the ouroboroses, shattered and disappeared along with a blinding light and a sound loud enough to pierce eardrums.

“Hmm, so that was the peak of the Sun element... He seemed quite frank in his last moments, right before he died.”

Lufas watched the Ouroboros of Heaven’s death with her arms folded together as she thought about his personality. *Well, he’s at least better than the Fire ouroboros. But he still fought and lost, thanks to his overconfidence and pride, before finally respecting his enemies, leaving behind some last words, and disappearing... I somehow get the feeling that I’ve seen this pattern before.*

Where was it...?

Lufas spent quite some time in silent contemplation. “Oh, it was me,” she said.

I see. I really am aligned with the Sun element. Lufas felt strangely satisfied with that.

18

The Fire ouroboros’s tail was ripped off and thrown away, landing between the Earth ouroboros and Aries. There was a spray of blood, and for a moment, both sides had their vision blocked.

Aries was the one to regain himself first after this unexpected turn of events. He’d believed in his friends’ victory, and that was why he never lost heart. On the other hand, the Earth ouroboros hadn’t expected something like this at all. He never in a million years would have thought that the Ouroboros of Fire, one of his brothers, would take such a wound and have a part of his body sent flying like that. It was exactly because they had been born so strong that there was a blank in their thought processes. Because the Wood ouroboros had thought this was impossible, being confronted with it delivered a shock that was all the greater.

Flames shot out from Aries’s mouth, burning the Earth ouroboros’s body. The Earth ouroboros shot out some gravity bullets, though he was a little late, and they were dispersed by Virgo’s skill without ever reaching Aries.

“The Fire ouroboros... Was he really defeated? I can’t feel the Ouroboros of Heaven’s presence either. For something like this to happen...” The Ouroboros of Earth’s voice trembled.

The truth was hard to believe. In front of the impossible knowledge that they, the supposedly invincible ouroboroses, were being backed into a corner, the Earth ouroboros fell into a state of shock. However, he was involved in this as well. After all, he too had yet to deal with the enemies in front of him.

I have to admit it... These small enemies are strong. But that's exactly why they must be destroyed. They are dangerous.

“Dangerous... All of you are dangerous. You are all foreign objects that threaten the Goddess’s miniature garden... There is no need to hold back anymore. I will, with my full power, make you disappear, along with the rest of this solar system!”

The Earth ouroboros shed his remaining naivete and howled before leaping into space. Seeing that, Aquarius quickly predicted what he was trying to do, and her face paled. *Oh crap... We can't let him do as he pleases!*

“Crap! Chase after him! We can't let him do what he's planning!” Aquarius called out.

“Huh?”

“He just said it! If we leave him alone, he'll seriously destroy the entire solar system! The Earth ouroboros can do that!”

Aquarius had originally been a tool of the Goddess, so she had general knowledge on all of the ouroboroses, which was also why she understood better than anyone just how much danger they were in. The Earth ouroboros could control gravity. The extreme end of that ability was a black hole.

The Earth ouroboros was about to create a black hole and drag everyone to the event horizon to die. That was why he needed to be stopped before he could activate his ability. Once it was activated, it would be too late. But he was too far to stop too. If the Earth ouroboros had been near Mizgarz, they still might have been able to interfere, but the ouroboros had taken that into account and moved all the way to the edge of the solar system. He had traveled at an insane speed, but it wasn't impossible for his gigantic body.

If, for example, there was a human the size of a galaxy, then any normal movement that person would make would naturally be done at the speed of light because of their body size. The distance from Mizgarz to the edge of the solar system was actually twenty-eight billion kilometers. To a normal human, that was far too large a distance. However, such a distance was very traversable with an ouroboros's large body, and that wasn't even considering the fact that ouroboroses could move at a speed unthinkable for their size. Basically,

stopping the Earth ouroboros would be all but impossible.

“B-But we’d have to go to space! Sure, we might be fine for a little bit, but...”
Aries answered, showing his slight departure from common sense.

This caused Virgo to get flustered and panicky. “I won’t be fine! I’ll die!”

In the end, they were all living creatures. It might have been a little silly to only have that come into play now when they were fighting a battle on such an absurd scale, but that didn’t make it untrue. If Sagittarius were here, he might have been able to do something with his heaven-arts, but he was currently in combat with the Wood ouroboros. They couldn’t count on his help.

Far off into the reaches of space, the Earth ouroboros was already biting his own tail and spinning. Aquarius sensed this, which was reflected in the distress present in her voice when, after some hesitation, she said, “It’s no good. We won’t make it!”

It was the unique skill Ouroboros.

All five ouroboroses had a trump card with the name Ouroboros, and their effects all differed depending on their alignment. The effect of the skill the Earth ouroboros was activating was very simple. It caused the user to become a well of gravity, drawing in and absorbing anything and everything before exiling them into an inescapable singularity. It was an unstoppable extermination skill.

The well of gravity that could consume the entire solar system first swallowed up Neptune, erasing it. Next was Uranus, and after that, Saturn was sucked in. The planets collapsed inside the gravity well, becoming dust and disappearing.

The Earth ouroboros did not seem to be joking. He really meant to destroy everything. One after the other, planets were pulled in and disappeared, and many stellar bodies were lost. Not even light could escape from the depths of the event horizon. Lufas may have been able to escape by simply going faster than light, but such a feat would be impossible for anyone else.

Jupiter disappeared, as did the remains of Mars, and finally, it was Mizgarz’s turn. With this, the distance to the Earth ouroboros, which had been a problem, was now solved. Although, that was probably not much solace in the face of what was happening.

“Wh-What do we do, Aquarius?! Isn’t there some way out of this?! Like absolute evasion maybe?!”

“Don’t be silly. As long as the black hole exists, the attack exists as well. Evading only once or twice wouldn’t even extend our lives by a tenth of a second.” Aquarius paused. “But while it is a black hole, it’s also the Earth ouroboros. If we can finish him off before Mizgarz is gone, then we might be able to stop it...”

Even as she said it, Aquarius had already figured that such a feat would be impossible. *It’s impossible... That thing’s HP is still in the millions... There’s no way we’d be able to one-shot it. If we could at least give the Earth ouroboros a heavy enough blow to stop his rotation, then we could interrupt his skill at least, but that would probably be difficult too... He wouldn’t even flinch from being hit with Mesarthim.*

What to do? What can we do? Should we just accept the shame it would bring and ask Lufas for help? But she’s probably not so free as to be able to do that easily, which was why she asked us to take care of the ouroboroses in the first place. No, wait. At this point, there’s no other way...

Aquarius was desperately spinning the gears in her head, trying to find a solution, when Taurus quietly announced to her, “Aquarius, shoot me.”

“Wha—?!”

“I can break that,” said Taurus.

“W-Wait a second. That’s crazy! Sure, you might be able to break it if everything goes well, but you’ll die too!”

The Earth ouroboros, now a black hole, was putting out enough gravity to suck in and utterly destroy anything and everything. The black hole was even able to bring in stars from far outside the solar system, which showed how powerful it was. Tens of thousands of times Mizgarz’s gravity? Hundreds of millions of times? Trillions? More than that? There was no doubt that the scale was large enough to only be able to make general estimations, but either way, it would most likely be impossible to be unscathed after getting too close. And trying to get close enough to hit the ouroboros with a fist or an ax? That was basically suicide.

However, there was no trace of fear on Taurus's face, just the knowledge that he was the only one capable of solving this.

"If I die, then that just means I only amounted to so much... Don't mind me. Let us all do what we can in the moment."

Aquarius pondered this before saying, "Don't come back to haunt me, even if you die."

Understanding the strength of Taurus's resolution, Aquarius retreated back inside her jar. At the same time, Taurus jumped inside the jar as well, while Ganymedes steadied his aim. It was a surreal and silly sight, but the people themselves were deadly serious.

Along with the sound of an explosion, Taurus was launched out of the mouth of the jar. He busted through the atmosphere and flew into space, which was lacking many more stars and planets than before. Passing by the remains of destroyed planets, Taurus flew in front of the Earth ouroboros.

What I have in my hand was wrought by friendship and resolve. I am here to cut open the path to victory for my friend. Two hundred years ago, I was unable to make good on this oath. But now, things are different. Now is the time to fulfill my promise!

Taurus raised his ax and fearlessly swung it down at the Earth ouroboros. Then, his skill of destruction, Aldebaran, smashed the black hole in one hit, forcefully canceling it.

* *

"It seems Her Majesty had a secret love child."

"I heard that his head is that of a bull's. Isn't he a half-beastfolk? But Her Majesty denied that, didn't she? Even though he obviously is one."

"But it seems that the king laughed and let it go. What a magnanimous man."

"Is he really, though? I heard that he confined his son to the labyrinth. Even if he values his wife, apparently the child is a different matter."

"We shouldn't be talking about this too much. It seems like the king wants to pretend the son doesn't exist."

Ever since birth, he'd been alone.

Taurus—Astelios—was originally the prince of a kingdom. Of course, he was only recognized as a prince while he was in his mother's womb. From the moment he popped out until now, he'd never once been recognized as one. He hadn't even been allowed to introduce himself by name.

The start of it all was not his mother's infidelity but his father's. Minos, Astelios's father and the king, desired the princess from a neighboring country, and he went to church to pray for her day after day. He continued to persistently come to church even on rainy or cloudy days. He wished, he willed, and his desire was so persistent and annoying that the Goddess was finally fed up with it.

A man's passion for the erotic was incredible. The king, enamored by the princess's beauty and voluptuous chest like a cow's, was a great example of this. He was so irritating that the Goddess decided to grant his wish, but she gave a condition.

"When the princess comes to wed you, she will bring a beautiful white bull. If you offer the bull to me, I will listen to your wish this once."

The king, overjoyed, agreed. *I want the queen. I don't care about some bull*, he thought.

However, the king broke his promise. The bull the princess brought with her was so magnificent the king thought it would be a waste to let it go, and so he turned his back on his promise with the Goddess. By doing so, he angered the Goddess, who cursed the king's son with atavism before going to bed in a huff. As a result, Astelios was born. Beastfolk blood that might have snuck in from who knows how long ago had made him half-beastfolk, and the child was made illegitimate and confined.

Nobody saw value in his life. His parents treated him as if he didn't exist. The queen was especially guilty of this, as she truly was deeply disturbed at how something like him had come out of her womb when she'd never cheated on her husband. Even though she had breasts the size of a cow's udders, she didn't know that she had cow beastfolk ancestors. Though the king fiercely regretted turning his back on his promise with the Goddess, he'd still managed to obtain

his primary goal in the queen, so he irresponsibly forgot all about that and played the magnanimous husband who forgave his wife. Of course he was magnanimous; he knew that the fault was his.

Astelios was alone. Being confined to the labyrinth as he was, he normally should have died and become feed for the monsters that were there. At the very least, that was what the king had expected. However, he was still alive. He'd survived the labyrinth. Using the strength he'd been given by the Goddess's curse, he killed monsters, ate their flesh, and sipped on their blood. The labyrinth was a prison where he was trapped with many monsters. He did not spoil for things to fight, and after spending day in and day out fighting, he'd become strong. By the time he'd noticed, he had started to rule over the rest of the labyrinth and was feared all over the world.

"Apparently there's an absurd monster living in that labyrinth."

"Thanks to that cow bastard, no one can get to the treasure in the deepest parts of the labyrinth."

"More adventurers were sent packing. Curse that terrible cow bastard."

"I wonder why he's even alive. He should just die."

"I wonder why that cow won't just fall over dead already..."

He was feared and hated. Nobody needed him, but everyone wanted him gone. Astelios was alone. With nobody by his side, he never had the chance to understand his own heart. The monsters, the people, even his own parents were all his enemies.

I'm sure that I'll someday be killed by someone as well, thanks to that hatred, he had thought, and he'd accepted it. That was why he even felt a sort of relief when adventurers capable of killing him had appeared in front of him.

There was a fierce fight, and he lost. Astelios had accepted death, but an adventurer, a girl with black wings, spoke.

"Hey, why don't you come with me?"

It was the first time anyone had stretched their hand out to him, as well as his first experience with someone who didn't fear him. More than that, he'd never

expected the day to come when someone would need him. When he asked about it, he found out that she was also someone who had received no love from her father. Strangely enough, he had felt a kinship with her as a comrade not blessed with a good father. It might have just been hard for her to ignore someone who was in the same circumstances as herself. Maybe she simply took action because she saw herself in him. Even if any of that was true, he was just happy that someone needed him.

What went through Astelios's mind was thus: *Lufas, you are the only one to pick up this life, which was even thrown away by my parents. You were the only one who needed me, so my life is yours. If I never met you, I would have just died somewhere in the labyrinth anyway... But now, I'm able to participate in this battle with the world on the line for my friend. I have no regrets. I will open the way, so I leave the rest to you.*

My friend... I believe in your victory.

With that last thought, Astelios's consciousness faded to black.

19

"Hey, Libra, I was wrong. I was distracted by the obvious emotions right in front of me, like jealousy and fear, and because of that, I lost sight of my own feelings."

This conversation happened a long time ago. It was the last conversation Libra had with her creator, and a memory that would never be erased.

After losing to the Devil King, Mizar's condition declined day after day until he was on his deathbed, which was when he spoke to Libra.

"You know, I'm sure that I actually knew I was making a mistake. Under all those feelings of duty or fear that were put in me, I know my true feelings were still there somewhere. My own heart rang so many alarm bells in the form of doubt, but I still lost sight of myself. I'm right, and Lufas is wrong... I was possessed by that conviction and betrayed my friend."

Mizar's arms no longer held even a shadow of their former thickness and were now wilted and stick-thin. Also, his arms from the elbow forward were prosthetic. His once-stocky frame was now almost skeletal. There was no vigor in his expression, and his hair had turned a ghostly white. While looking down at him, Libra simply and unemotionally observed the end of her parent.

"Libra, don't become like me. Having a duty is fine, as is having a reason for living... But if you ever start to doubt yourself, take time to really listen to your own heart. Think about it one extra time... What is really right, what path you really want to take... I myself was unable to do that..."

"Sir Mizar, I do not have any heart to listen to."

"No, you do... You surely do. After all, you came to nurse me on my deathbed, even without being ordered to do so. No other golem would do that."

Libra had no words with which to respond.

Mizar raised his shaking hand, using it to grasp Libra's. The hands that had once birthed so many works of art were no longer there. What existed instead were cold, artificial hands the same as Libra's. Without meaning to, Libra held Mizar's hand strongly.

"It's fine, Libra... You are able to choose. Even without something like orders, you can choose a path with your own will... You have a heart, something which no alchemist in Mizgarz...not even Lufas...has been able to make... After all, you are...my...Mizar's...daughter..."

The scales wavered.

Leaning right would be correct, while leaning left would be incorrect. Even so, the scales wavered. All because, at some point, the things weighing down each side had become of equal weight.

The scales wavered.

* *

The battle to decide the fate of the world reached its climax, and now the centerpieces of the conflict—Lufas and the master of the ouroboroses—faced off against each other. Dina and Libra stood in Lufas's way. Both of them had

followed her on her journey until just a little while ago, but now, things were different. Dina was being controlled by the Goddess, and Libra had uncovered the purpose of her existence.

“So you’ve come,” Lufas said coolly, as she looked at the two of them.

Everything’s going as expected. I knew from the beginning that I would eventually be facing these two as enemies, so I’m not surprised; I’m resolved. Libra was originally hers, and if I were to dispute her claim over Libra, the Goddess would have the advantage, so whatever. I won’t do anything so boorish as to ask for Libra back. I just have to take her back by force. It doesn’t matter if I’m fighting the Goddess’s avatar or a puppet or whatever. They’re mine, so I’m coming to get them. I won’t take no for an answer.

Determination strong enough to be violence in itself—that was the place where Lufas was at right now.

“Yes, we have. I’ve gotten bored of just letting you do as you please, so let’s end this.” It was Dina’s form and Dina’s voice, but it was the Goddess who coldly regarded Lufas as she spoke.

Lufas only scoffed back. “You talk like you could have done something about me at any time. We’ve gotten to this point because you couldn’t, right?”

“Yes, I could have. If I felt like it, I could have erased you at any time. I just held back a little too much.”

The expressions of both sides were the picture of calm and relaxed. Neither of them held any doubts about their inevitable victory. They didn’t consider defeat for even a speck of a moment.

Lufas moved her fingers a little, cracking her joints, while the Goddess/Dina clenched her fist and gathered mana. It didn’t matter to her that Aigokeros had sucked up all the mana in the area. Now that Dina was connected with the Goddess, the mana she used came from another space entirely. It was directly shared with her by the Goddess, so she had access to an essentially infinite amount of power.

Libra stepped forward in front of the Goddess/Dina, and Scorpius mirrored her with Lufas.

“Wait just a second there. Did you seriously think a traitor like you could just walk up and fight my lady? I’m good enough for you.”

“Scorpius... I have already grasped all your abilities, movement habits, and weaknesses. You stand no chance. This warning is made with full knowledge that you are now level 1000.”

“Hah! That’s some talk. Then come try me!”

Libra changed one of her arms into a blade and combined with a support golem that looked suspiciously like Astraia, though it wasn’t the original Astraia. The original had been made by Lufas, so in a pinch, it would listen to Lufas and not Libra. That was why there was no way Libra would use Astraia here. What she was using now was most likely something the Goddess had given her.

Unlike the original Astraia, this version’s wings were black, and the weapons that fit over Libra’s shoulders were lasers that fired concentrated mana in a stream. Likewise, the waist weapons were cannons that fired mana as bullets. The design had not a speck of originality to it overall, and it could easily be called a carbon copy of Astraia. Still, it could also be safely assumed that it outstripped the original in terms of ability.

Scorpius also equipped the weapon given to her by Lufas, and the two glared at each other hatefully.

“Hhssssssss!”

Scorpius, not willing to wait for some sort of signal to start, went on the attack. As the flexible weapon patterned after a scorpion’s pincers was thrown at her, Libra took to the sky. Then, she shot two bullets of compressed magic out of her waist cannons, gouging out the earth.

The Goddess/Dina casually flicked away the resultant cloud of dust with a shield while Lufas simply stood with her arms crossed, unmoved.

“Looks like we’ve started. How about we just watch the opening fight for now?”

“Not a bad idea.”

“By the way, there is something I’d like to ask...” The Goddess/Dina paused.

“How do you feel? I want to know what it’s like to have a trusted retainer betray you.”

After a moment, Lufas replied. “Allow me to answer that later.”

As the Goddess/Dina and Lufas talked, the battle between their followers raged on. Scorpius jumped out from the smoke and dust, freely controlling her hair to send it flying at Libra. She, however, deflected it with her blade arm before immediately firing at Scorpius with her right arm, shoulder, and waist armaments, a full volley with nothing held back. The five unleashed beams of light surged forward, but Scorpius moved out of the way as if she’d been pulled bodily. Her weapon was stabbed into the ground, and she’d escaped by retracting it.

As soon as she landed, she once again leapt up to come up on Libra’s back. Scorpius spewed a poisonous breath from her mouth, but it would do nothing to Libra, who was a golem.

Pushing her way through the poison mist, Libra closed in on Scorpius, and blade and hidden weapon clashed in a shower of sparks. As they parted, both combatants disappeared, but Lufas and the Goddess/Dina followed them with their eyes. Two shadows moved at high speeds, and the ground exploded over and over, as if struck by lightning. The two shadows simultaneously moved upwards, creating shock waves in the air before the sounds of their clashing resounded throughout the area.

Libra charged in at maximum speed, and Scorpius faced her head-on as they clashed. Fierce winds raged with the two of them at the center as large chunks of earth were gouged out. The two of them continued to clash, neither side willing to give an inch. As they committed to this contest of strength, their eyes met.

“Libra...” Scorpius said. “I never liked you, but I at least respected the strength of your loyalty to Lufas. So, it’s really disappointing to see you fall to being a puppet of that third-rate Goddess.”

“Third-rate?!” the Goddess/Dina yelled.

“Scorpius... It may be true that Alovenus easily does things only a third-rate Goddess would do. I will not refute that.”

“Please refute it. Come on!” begged the Goddess/Dina.

“But I have always been her tool...” Libra continued. “I did not fall or do anything of the sort. I have always been here on the lowest floor. That’s all.”

“The lowest floor?! Is serving me really that bad?!”

The two weapons clashed and recoiled, but both parties quickly regrouped and moved on to the next attack. Twice. Three times. Four... Each strike had all the wielder’s power behind it, and the slow rate that they were being thrown out at proved how dangerous each attack was. Every time they clashed, storms were whipped up and pieces of earth went flying. If there had still been any settlements nearby, the shock waves resulting from their clashes alone would have flattened them.

“Heh. So what’re you trying to say? That you being all over Miss Lufas like that was just acting?”

“It was not acting. At the very least, I had recognized Miss Lufas as my master at that time.”

“Hah. What an expression to make as you say that all composed.”

“If you’re expecting me to have a change of heart, I will warn you now that it is a waste of time. I have no such thing as feelings.”

Both weapons clashed and slid over each other, and blood started to drip from Scorpius’s cheek. Because they’d traveled and fought together, Libra had had ample opportunity to understand how Scorpius fought. Even if Scorpius had an advantageous attribute matchup, it would be hard to win against Libra, who had ample data to use for their fight.

Libra escaped higher into the sky and disappeared. Right afterwards, guided munitions rained down from the sky. The rounds impacted the ground one after the other, resulting in a continuous chain of explosions, which chased after Scorpius. Amongst that storm of explosions, Lufas easily swatted away any stray rounds that came her way, while the Goddess/Dina blocked stray rounds with a shield without missing a beat.

“I never liked that pretentious side of you!”

Scorpius swung her weapon, making it mow through the sky. She'd succeeded in intercepting all the munitions raining down on her, forcing them to explode in midair. Then, she leapt. In one mighty show of athleticism, Scorpius went above Libra, unleashing a kick at her. However, Libra managed to use her arm to block, so it did no damage. Still, the kick had been strong enough to knock her back down to the ground, though Libra managed to prevent fall damage by reactivating her ability to hover.

Scorpius dodged and parried the mana lasers and magic bullets that Libra sprayed at her before swinging her weapon around. However, Libra dodged every attack Scorpius made by flying through the air, and she managed to stomp on Scorpius's head, forcing her to the ground.

"I see. I never thought of you very fondly either," Libra said coldly.

But then, she suddenly felt a sense that something was out of place. *Fondly...? What does "fondly" mean? There is nothing like that within me. Uncertain things, such as like and dislike, do not move me. What governs my decisions is my reason for existing. That was how I was made, so that is how I am. My will has nothing to do with it, not that I have any such will in the first place.*

But... Right. I don't think I ever had that good an impression of Scorpius. She was always stuck to Lufas like glue, and she monopolized the spot next to Lufas like it was rightfully hers. She tried to sneak into Lufas's bed at night countless times, only to be stopped by me, but she never learned her lesson. Every night, she would try again. Someone like her, I...

Libra considered her next words. *I, what? Was I seriously just about to admit that I "hated" her? Impossible. No such emotion was built into me. Is there some sort of bug in my thought processes...? No, I am operating normally. There is nothing wrong there. Did Miss Lufas do something? No, there is no trace of that.*

"What are you doing, Libra?! Finish it!"

After a moment, Libra said, "Roger that, Lady Alovenus."

Responding to Alovenus's orders, Libra switched weapons.

Scorpius's HP is still over 100,000, thanks to being level 1000 again... Brachium will not be enough to end her. However, if I use Brachium here, I will

instantly gain the advantage, and finishing her off should not be a difficult matter. Brachium should be optimal here. I can weaken her with it and then finish her off at my leisure.

However, the moment Libra tried to activate her skill, she recalled events from two hundred years ago for some reason, as well as her journey from when she reunited with Lufas until now.

Libra hesitated. “Full Burst!”

Libra fired all of her cannons and lasers at the ground in a volley. *No, this isn't it. This is not the optimal choice!*

The storm of cannon fire carved out the earth. As expected, Scorpius dodged, and then her weapon came flying at Libra. She evaded that as well and backed off, creating some more distance. Doing so, however, earned some comments from Lufas.

“What’s wrong, Libra? Why not use Brachium? If it were me, I would use Brachium now to decide the fight.”

This gave Libra pause, and it was a moment before she replied, “You won’t stop me? If I were to use it, I would be almost guaranteed to defeat Scorpius, which would mean her death.”

Lufas replied to Libra’s question with another question. “You want me to stop you?”

What an absurd thing to say, Libra thought. There is no way I would want her to stop me from finishing off an enemy. But, I wonder why...? I can't say no... I am losing sight of myself. Am I broken?

“Libra... Do you know why I have let you go about your business all this time?” asked Lufas.

Libra considered the question. “Because you never noticed... Though that seems like hopeful thinking now.”

“Yes, I noticed long ago. Two hundred years ago, in fact. That was why I never told you the plan when I told Dina. I couldn’t entrust you with the sealing of the ouroboroses.”

“Then why?”

“I wanted you to learn.” Lufas smiled and continued on. “Libra, you are the best golem, but there was still something you were missing.”

“Missing...?”

“Yes. A heart. You were Mizar’s masterpiece, but even with his prodigious skills, he couldn’t give you a heart.”

A heart—something that did not exist for golems. Depending on how a golem was made, it could possess high intelligence. It could achieve the ability to think at high speeds as well. However, such abilities were not a heart, nor were they emotions. Their decisions would always be swayed by whether something was right or wrong, whether it benefitted their master or not, or whether it followed the orders they had been given or not. That was all. There was no room in such decision-making for anything so indefinite as like and dislike or personal taste.

“Libra, your current master is the Goddess. If you desire to continue on with your *raison d’être* as a golem, then you would be correct in continuing to obey the Goddess. But I am going to ask the budding heart within you: I say this to you, Libra, not some puppet.” Lufas paused. “Come back, will you? Your place is here, Libra. I need you.”

“What a foolish thing to say.”

Libra pointed all her weapons at Lufas.

I should just fire—fire and show that we are well and truly on different sides. Simple. But why am I hesitating to do such a simple thing? Wouldn’t a golem not hesitate to shoot? No, if that was the case, that would mean this has all been strange from the start.

Couldn’t I have finished off Taurus if I had actually wanted to? I was interrupted by Pollux and Castor, but even then, I should have been able to deal the finishing blow at least, given my stats. Haven’t there been many occasions where I could have pulled off an assassination? Aries had turned his back to me many times. Just how many times could I have killed him? How many times has Virgo been in front of me unguarded? I even had several chances to be alone with someone else without Lufas present. So why did I do nothing? Libra

considered these questions. *I can't use my lacking that memory as an excuse. Golems always obey their master, so even without that memory, my actions should always have followed my orders.*

Libra's thoughts stalled as one question came to mind. *Why have I been pretending to not notice my order to collapse the enemy's power from the inside?*

Libra thought of Aries's smile as he clearly showed his unguarded self to her because he trusted her. She thought of her days spent journeying after reuniting with Lufas at the grave. She thought of the voices of her comrades and Mizar's regret. All of that combined to give birth to something unknown within Libra.

"Libra... Do you realize what kind of face you're making right now?"

There was a beat of silence before Libra said, "Of course I do. I am sneering at you... Can't you tell?"

Libra was always expressionless when she was with Lufas and the others. Considering this, a sneer could be considered a great improvement on the amount of emotion she showed.

But Scorpius made fun of that with a spitting tone. "Yes, you're right. I'm sure that your expression was something taught to you by the Goddess... But I wonder... That sneer looks even more like a mask to me than how you normally are. It seriously looks as if you've put on a mask with how solidly your expression is locked in place. You look incredibly bored."

Scorpius approached Libra as she had her guard down and grabbed her by the collar. Then, she slammed their foreheads together and made sure their eyes met.

"Come back! I hate you, but the current you is so boring it's not even worth fighting you!"

The Libra Scorpius knew was always expressionless. She was expressionlessly pretentious about insisting that she had no emotions, but for all that, she always occupied a spot right next to Lufas as if to say that it was her special place. She was more insistent about her position than anyone else. Scorpius

was envious of her, and not even Scorpius herself knew how many times that envy grew.

After Scorpius said all that, Libra erased her sneer and looked straight at the woman with an expression like ice. “What selfishness,” Libra said emotionlessly, before slamming the back of her fist into Scorpius’s face to force her away.

With that attack, Scorpius’s HP finally fell below 100,000, and she was now within range to be one-shotted. There was no longer any reason to not use Brachium. *If I shoot, I will definitely put an end to this. There is no other choice but to shoot.*

Libra locked onto Scorpius and closed her eyes.

The scales wavered.

Tilting right—towards the Goddess—would be correct. Tilting left—towards Lufas—would be a mistake. Even so, the scales swayed. At some point, the things weighing down each side had become the same weight. They tilted back and forth, back and forth, back and forth...

Eventually, the scales stopped wavering.

* *

The coordination between the Seven Heroes was still perfect, despite having only just been reunited after two hundred years. There was no hesitation to their movements; they fought as if they’d never broken apart. Benetnasch cut through the front as a vanguard to sow confusion amongst the enemy, after which Dubhe and Alioth followed like a surging wave of offense. In between each beat the front line took, Megrez and Phecda launched supporting fire in both physical and magic flavors while Merak swiftly dealt with enemy attacks. Meanwhile, Mizar looked at the battle as a whole to freely choose between attack and defense.

In the past, they had challenged the Ouroboros of the Moon without Benetnasch and lost. But was that a true loss due to the difference in ability or the result of something else? None of them could confidently say that they hadn’t lost because they wished to lose, because of their self-torturing thoughts and impulses born from the guilt they felt over betraying their friend. There was

no way they could fight with their full concentration hounded by thoughts like that. No matter how seriously they intended to fight, there was no way they could give it their all while a part of them wished for their own defeat as punishment.

But now, things were different. Now they were fighting for their friends. They had come back to the battlefield one more time in order to atone for their past sins, so their morale was at its peak. *Let us now show the ouroboroses the true power of the Seven Heroes.*

“By the way, Mizar, wasn’t there a golem you made in the Twelve Heavenly Stars?” Phecda asked, as the pair provided support from the rear. “Like, isn’t that terrible? We were pretty messed up by the Goddess back then, right?”

“Yeah, it’s not good. I left the Scales’s original purpose within the golem. Her master is still the Goddess,” said Mizar.

“Seriously?!”

It turned out Phecda’s misgivings were correct. The situation wasn’t in the realm of just “not good.” Libra’s betrayal was already a done deal. For some reason, however, Mizar didn’t seem worried. He felt absolutely no fear that something he made would attack his friend.

“Don’t worry about it. On my deathbed, I saw something within Libra. Even though nobody ordered her, she came to nurse me... No simple golem would do that.” Mizar was convinced of what he said, and he spoke with heartfelt pride.

If a golem were to choose something of its own will regardless of its purpose, then it was no longer a tool. It would then be a living being, only with a body made of metal rather than flesh. If that were to be accomplished, then at that moment, Mizar would be cemented as the best golem crafter in Mizgarz. Mizar was waiting hopefully for Libra’s true “completion.” Rather, he believed in it.

“It’ll be fine. She’ll be able to choose... After all, she’s my daughter!”

* *

With her eyes still closed, Libra turned to apologize to her master.

“I am sorry, Lady Alovenus.”

As I thought, I am broken. I understand that now. After all, look how far my scales lean to the left. They should go to the right, but my scales have already stopped moving.

“It seems like I am a failure, a defective product.”

“Huh?”

When I recalled my true master, I once tried to call her that, but for some reason, I quickly corrected myself. Ever since then, I have always called her Lady Alovenus. Even though I was so easily calling Lufas my master, I couldn't with Alovenus. Why was that? Something inside me vehemently refused to say the words.

“I do not know why, but I refuse to call you my master.”

Libra purged the Astraia unit given to her by the Goddess, ridding herself of the connection before pointing her weapons at the Goddess/Dina, and as a sign of defiance, she opened fire on her original master. The Goddess/Dina was enveloped in an explosion with a shocked and dazed expression still on her face as Libra closed her eyes again. Then, she once again erased her memory of the Goddess being her master, this time by her own will, and this time, it would never return.

The scales had tilted in the wrong direction, and they would never waver again. The broken scales would no longer move; they had been tilted by the Scales's own will and now were broken, due to the existence of her heart.

No, they were not broken. Libra had surely just been incomplete until now. No matter how complete it looked to others, the product was not complete as long as the maker did not consider it so. That was why Libra was now, finally, complete. Libra, the Scales of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars had not been a finished golem, but now she was.

Seeing that, Lufas smiled, seemingly satisfied, before speaking to the Goddess, who was still unable to process what had happened. “I believe I have yet to answer your previous question, O Goddess. By the way, there is something I'd like to ask you before I answer. How do you feel right now?”

The Goddess never answered, but her wholeheartedly frustrated look told

Lufas everything.

20

Having achieved complete independence from the Goddess, Libra turned to look at Lufas sheepishly. “Miss Lufas, I...”

In response, Lufas simply patted Libra’s shoulder. “Welcome back.”

After a pause, Libra responded, “Right.”

This much is fine for now. After all, we’re in the middle of battle, and Mizgarz is going to disappear soon. We can take our time to chat after everything is over. Right now is the time to fight. I’m sure that got through to Libra.

Libra looked up and shot down the black Astraia made by the Goddess. Then, she called the original Astraia and docked with it.

“Libra, I am no longer your master, so I will be asking you something, and you may decide with your own will. Please, help Aries and the others. They seem to be having trouble,”

“You do not need to ask. Please, just give me an order. You are my master, Miss Lufas.”

“I see... Then I order you... Libra, the one who holds the Scales seat of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, go defeat my enemies.”

“Yes, my master!”

Libra accepted her orders and took to the sky. Lufas no longer had the right to give Libra orders; that lay with the Goddess. However, that no longer mattered right now. *Just as a person chooses their tool, the tool can choose its owner. So my master is Lufas. There can be no one else,* Libra decided.

I know. I am defective, she thought. I am aware that I am a failed product. But somehow my thoughts are clearer than ever, and I feel so mysteriously light. It would be clear to anyone else that they had been cleared of all doubts, but such things were a first for Libra. So, she had no words to describe how she was

feeling.

“Libra, take them too!”

As Lufas spoke, three golems flew out of Blutgang, which was fighting the Fire ouroboros. It was Tanaka, Suzuki, and the Gatekeeper. The three golems changed forms in midair, separating into parts and reforming into a completely different shape. By the time Libra descended, they had already become something hard to describe. Just going by the silhouette, it would be two plates on top of a pedestal—exactly like a set of scales. The plates of the scales were facing backwards and turned into vernier thrusters, and two cannon barrels poked out of the front. There was a red-and-blue gem embedded on either side, but neither were lit up at the moment. It was far from a refined form. In fact, the look of it could be described as boorish, due to the incessant pursuit of function. Put in other words, it was a powder keg in the shape of a set of scales.

It shot itself into Libra’s back and docked with her. There were open joints in the barrels because they were meant to fit Libra’s arms inside, so Libra did not hesitate to do so. *Can I...call that a combination?* Lufas wondered. There was too big a size difference between the two, and at this point, it was more like Libra had been implanted in between the scales’ cannons rather than combined with them. Or maybe it could be better described as Libra wearing a powder keg on her back. Either way, it was a form lacking any resemblance of grace.

After seeing it, Scorpius even muttered out loud, “Wow, so lame...” reinforcing that it couldn’t be called cool, even in the most lenient of cases.

However, Lufas nodded for some reason, satisfied. *No matter where or when, there is always a sense of romance when it comes to bare-bones gigantic weaponry.*

“All righty then... Let’s get going, Libra!”

Scorpius leapt up and got on top of the now fully equipped Libra. Once she was on top, Libra activated the vernier thrusters and took off. Her speed was incomparable to before. With almost lethal acceleration, Libra traveled straight out of the atmosphere into space.

“How dare you stop me...”

In space, the Earth ouroboros was just about to unleash his breath attack, dealing the finishing blow to Taurus. But, having noticed that, Libra readied all her weapons and fired them in a single concentrated volley. Multiple flashes of light and guided munitions crashed and burst against the side of the Earth ouroboros's face, creating a chain of explosions. At the same time, Scorpius jumped off of Libra and retrieved Taurus. She extended her weapon towards Aries, who was on the ground, and used the force from it retracting again to return to the planet. Libra continued on, circling the Earth ouroboros at high speeds as she bombarded him, trying to confuse the ouroboros with her rotation.

"Insolence!"

The Earth ouroboros unleashed his breath in an attempt to bring Libra down instantly. However, Libra dodged the destructive beam of light, which could only travel straight, and she continued on as if taking a lap around the ouroboros's surroundings as she closed in enough to be able to jab her barrel at the Earth ouroboros's snout. Then, she fired.

"FULL BURST!"

The Earth ouroboros's face came under a concentrated burst of fire, clouding his vision. On top of that, Libra activated her left scale. When she raised her left arm up, the left barrel her arm was fitted in was raised as well, and a gigantic blade of light erupted from the opening in the barrel. It clearly exhibited more than double the power Libra's blade normally held already, but it didn't stop there. The blue gem attached to the left side of the powder keg on her back glowed.

"Weapon support activated. Zuben Es Chamali: Output at five hundred percent," the Gatekeeper's voice said.

The blade of light coming out of the left barrel grew even larger. The blade, which had grown to a size that looked completely unfitting to Libra's stature and seemed able to cut even the moon in twain, was swung downwards, cutting through the countless debris floating around in space before making contact with the Earth ouroboros's face.

Sparks flew, and the ouroboros's unmatched scales were burnt away as the

blade scored a deep wound. Following up on that, Libra stuck out her right arm, to which the cannon attached to it followed suit. Light concentrated in the barrel opening, and this time, the red gem on the right side of the powder keg on her back lit up.

“Weapon support activated. Zuben El Genubi: Output at five hundred percent.”

The sound of it charging its energy was almost like electronic static, and the charge status display mounted on the side of the barrel instantly filled up to full.

What was being used to attack wasn't Libra's energy. A small amount of the mana used to make up this universe was being taken in and repurposed in order to allow for an attack that surpassed Libra's limits. A brilliant shine, strong enough to rob someone's field of view—enough to turn any normal person blind—flashed as an overwhelming torrent of energy stronger than an ouroboros's breath was unleashed from the barrel to impact the Earth ouroboros.

As Libra fired, she was forced to fire her vernier thrusters at full blast so as not to be flung away by the recoil of her weapon, and she was barely able to stay where she was. The barrel, which had been instantly heated up to its limits by the attack, started smoking as it cooled down again. However, Libra did not take the time to bask in the effects of her attack as she suddenly took a steep dive.

The destructive flash of energy pushed the ouroboros back to Mizgarz. That and the dragon fell down like meteors, and because of the friction of reentry, the Earth ouroboros was engulfed in fire. Libra passed by next to the Earth ouroboros while engulfed in fire herself because of the friction, landing next to Aries.

“Libra!” Aries yelled, surprised.

“You...” said Aquarius, suspicious of the sudden interference of Libra, who'd betrayed them—or rather, who had always been on the side of the Goddess.

In response, Libra refused to lock eyes with either of them, instead preferring to speak as normal after a moment of hesitation. “I will not make any excuses. If you cannot trust me, then you are welcome to attack me from behind at any

time. That is all I can say at the moment.”

Libra was not thinking that they would never actually attack her. In fact, she considered it far more likely that someone like Leon would just go, “Then die,” and proceed to attack, but she was prepared to welcome that and not dodge out of the way. *I won't tell them to trust me. It would make more sense not to.*

However, after hearing Libra say that, Aries replied happily, “Welcome back...Libra.”

Libra was silent for a long while. “It's good to be back, is what I would say, but I do not have the right. If I am able to earn everyone's forgiveness after this fight, I will say it once again,” said Libra before she charged at the Earth ouroboros.

At that moment, Aries and the others saw something amazing. The corners of Libra's mouth were tilted up into a smile.

“Huh? Did she...just smile? Am I seeing things? Did that golem really smile?”

“No, Aquarius. I saw that too,” said Aries.

They had been together for over two hundred years, but no one had ever seen Libra smile. Of course they hadn't. She was supposed to have no emotions, and no emotions meant no facial expressions. That was why she never smiled, laughed, got mad, or grieved. This was the difference between Aquarius and Libra, though they were in the same category as objects. Aquarius had always had emotions, and she expressed those through her manifestation. However, Libra did not have those, and she was always positioned a little behind Lufas with her expressionless face. That was the image of her that was stuck in everyone's memory. Just the fact that she had shown a peek of a small smile was a large enough event to send the Twelve Stars reeling in disbelief.

“She's changed, you know. In the end, we buried the hatchet...” said Scorpius. “But that's exactly why I can't stand her.”

Scorpius spoke cynically, but the corners of her mouth were also loose. Then, she jumped down from her position above Aries, was enveloped in light, and was replaced by a gigantic scorpion the next moment.

“Now then, we're heading out! Let's hurry up and string up that giant thing by

its innards so we can go back to Miss Lufas!” Scorpius shouted before spewing her poison breath at the Earth ouroboros.

Of course, it would have no effect. The Earth ouroboros’s superior immune system made it so any poison would instantly be decomposed and neutralized. However, Scorpius was not called the Queen of Poison for nothing. If no current poison would work on him, then she just had to make a new one now. She could just mix around all the poisonous substances housed in her body to concoct something that would even work on an ouroboros.

The newly synthesized poison broke through the ouroboros’s stubborn resistances, but it only managed to take effect for a moment. The Earth ouroboros wasn’t even poisoned for a full second, but in a fight of this level, that was enough. Having been sprayed in the eyes by Scorpius’s deadly poison, the Earth ouroboros was blinded. He immediately regenerated and regained that eyesight, of course, but that split second where he was unable to see was a perfect opportunity.

Guns sprouted from every spare centimeter of free space on the powder keg that Libra was wearing, and they all took to the sky. If she were to be compared to anything, she would be made up of guns that were only a barrel. The guns weren’t made to be operated by human hands at all, as there was no grip and no trigger. All of the weapons were independently functioning gun-shaped golems, and they were capable of being operated remotely by Libra, who served as their brain. By firing in all 360 degrees at once, a net of inescapable gunfire was made, and the guns were able to dodge the ouroboros’s counterattacks by moving on their own. This was the endpoint of alchemy, the ultimate independent, fully functioning weapon.

Wait, was this supposed to be a fantasy?

“Let’s go! Absolute Zero!”

“Mesarthim!”

“Go to hell, you piece of shiiiiit!”

Aquarius, Aries, and Leon’s simultaneous attacks merged before hitting the Earth ouroboros. The ouroboros’s scales were torn off and flung aside as he let out a scream of humiliation and anguish.

“YOOUUU RUUNNTSSS! GET CRUSHED LIKE THE FLEAS YOU ARE!”

The Earth ouroboros attempted to throw out a wave of gravity in all directions centered on himself. However, nothing happened. The ouroboros could no longer use magic that needed him to move the mana in the area. As long as Aigokeros was gigantified, that option would be sealed. The Earth ouroboros knew that, but he seemed to be very much cornered, so he'd most likely failed to recall that knowledge. This showed in the clear impatience growing on his face.

“Then take this!”

The Earth ouroboros changed to shooting out bullets of gravity, which didn't need surrounding mana and could be formed within his body. However, Aries and the others were not so weak as to be hit by attacks thrown out in desperation. All of them swiftly evaded, and Aries, Leon, Scorpius, and Libra attacked simultaneously, aiming for the small opening such an attack left. The ouroboros's repulsive barrier was still somehow working, but they were able to force damage through that anyway.

Oh no... M-My gravity bullets aren't working. The bullets won't do anything to them. I should get close and fight in melee... Wait, I would need to dispel my barrier for that... Not happening. Th-Then, since it's come to this...!

Having lost all of his attack options, the Earth ouroboros prepared his last resort. He once again left Mizgarz and flew some distance away. Once again, he transformed into a black hole, but this time, he was planning to absorb and destroy everything. However, things were different now. The Earth ouroboros had forgotten Libra's presence.

Libra flew off, chasing after the ouroboros, and she managed to pass through the Earth ouroboros's sight just as he was about to bite his own tail. A moment later, the tail the Earth ouroboros was about to bite detached as if on a delay and floated off into space. The ouroboros had dispelled his repulsive barrier in order to bite onto his own tail, and Libra had aimed for that opening.

The ouroboros's reasoning for getting so far away from Migarz to activate his skill before was a complete mystery. It would seem that it was to prevent it from being interrupted like it just had been, but then, he just tried to activate

his skill while being relatively nearby to Mizgarz. That was exactly why he had gotten hit and interrupted.

Ouroboroses were perfect beings, so there was no single existence capable of defeating them. They'd never once had a hard fight. That was the exact reason for their current brittleness. The ouroboroses were not used to adversity. Things would be different if the Earth ouroboros wished for such adversity, as the Ouroboros of Heaven had, but he didn't.

"O— O...O-OOOAAARRRGGGHHH!!!"

After raising a cry where not even he could tell whether it was out of fear or rage, the Earth ouroboros opened his huge mouth and closed in on Libra. Unafraid, Libra entered into the ouroboros's mouth. After infiltrating the ouroboros's body, she released all her guns from the golem on her back. Lock-on markers popped up all over Libra's vision, indicating target locks on all of the Earth ouroboros's organs, before words popped up signifying that multi-lock-on had been achieved.

"Release all weapons!" Libra shouted. "Multi-Lock-On!"

"Lock-on complete!" said the Gatekeeper.

"Fire!"

Being too large could also be a disadvantage. Because the Earth ouroboros was so big, it was possible for him to make the massive mistake that was swallowing the most dangerous weapon in the world. With Libra as the origin point, masses of destructive beams, guided munitions, bombs, railgun fire, magic weapon fire, and mana bullets were shot out to destroy innards and bones with pinpoint accuracy.

"Fire!"

It was like an entire war was going on inside the ouroboros's body. While traveling from the dragon's throat to his tail, Libra never stopped firing and sowing destruction within the Earth ouroboros's innards. Even though the ouroboroses boasted unbeatable toughness, not even they were as durable from the inside. Still, this was like torture. Right now, the Earth ouroboros was seeing hell. The foreign object that passed through the ouroboros's throat,

managing to get inside, laid fiery waste to his gullet, destroyed his stomach, and scored countless wounds on his bowels.

“Fire! Fire! Fire!”

Having reached the ouroboros’s tail all the way from his mouth, Libra should have finally exited the ouroboros’s body after having laid waste to it—except she actually hadn’t. Instead, Libra proceeded to retrace her steps from there. Once again, she passed through all the places she’d already strafed while once again sowing destruction. By doing this, Libra was aiming for a single, clear destination. The Earth ouroboros must have figured this out as well, as he raised a shout that almost sounded like a scream.

“Stop! STOOOOOPPPP!”

Libra was aiming for the brain.

While burning away the Earth ouroboros at a rate that his regeneration could not keep up with, Libra reached the dragon’s throat and continued on through before changing direction. She stuck her blade of light up into his cranium, attempting to sever it. However, her blade did not pass through. Of course, the ouroboros’s skull, which housed his most important organ, would have extraordinary hardness. The skull was, in fact, harder than the ouroboros’s scales, and in numbers, it boasted a defense of over 50,000. It was a number no normal method of attack could break through.

However, that just meant that Libra had to change her methods. Such defenses were meaningless in the face of the skill she was about to activate. Its damage was locked at the maximum, and it would hit all targets. Libra had already locked on to not just the ouroboros’s brain but its other parts as well, treating them as separate targets.

“Proceed to final attack mode! Releasing limiters!”

“Limiter release confirmed!” said the Gatekeeper.

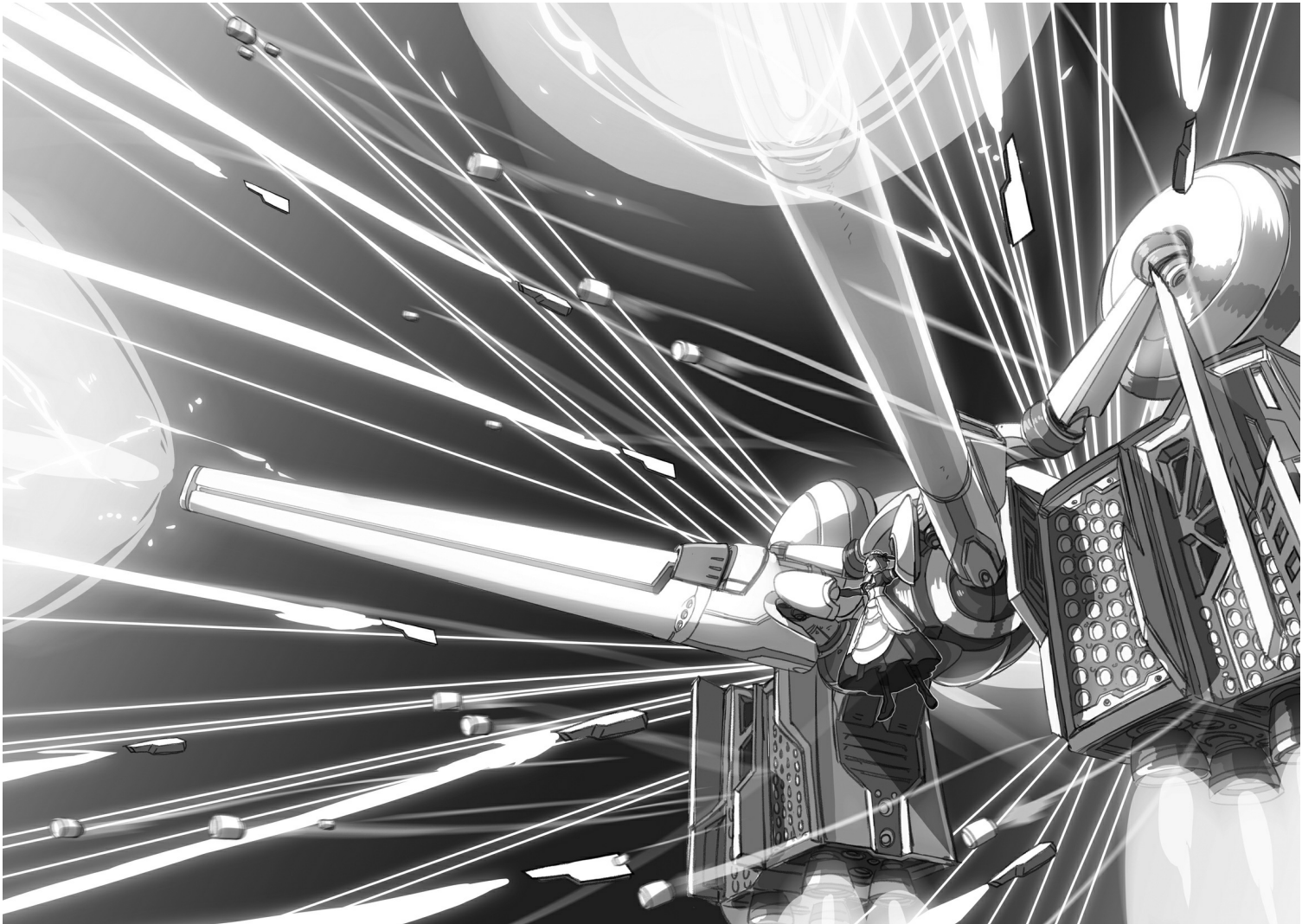
The gems placed on either side of the scales on Libra’s back both lit up at once, and her body glowed an incandescent white. The attack she was about to unleash would be one unique to her. Libra did not know this, but there had been an era on Earth where the gods had watched over people that was

referred to as the Golden Age. However, the Goddess of Justice Astraea had eventually given up hope on humanity, and heralded the end of the age where humans and gods lived in harmony. Once shifted, the scales would not turn back. The scales of justice pulled divinity away from humanity, and this meant that the age where divinity controlled humanity was at an end.

This, likewise, was an attack that would decide the fate of the world.

“Output at one thousand percent!”

“Skill Select... Brachium Overflow!”



A wave of destruction swirled around inside the Earth ouroboros's head. Fundamentally, this use of Brachium was no different from the others, except for the clear difference in strength. The attack broke through the damage ceiling set by the Goddess. The ouroboros's brain cells were forcefully swirled around, crushed, and destroyed. He could no longer even scream. All he could do was foam at the mouth, showing the whites of his eyes.

Just like that, the Earth ouroboros stopped moving as Libra flew out of his mouth and gained more and more altitude. Once she decided she was high enough, she took a sudden dive. Having enlarged her blade of light, she continued to accelerate until just before she swung her blade downward, severing the Earth ouroboros's head.

“O— Oh...”

Unable to even form words anymore, the Earth ouroboros uttered a final groan filled with humiliation and anguish before turning into particles of light, which burst and scattered with a loud sound. For a short moment, the scattered particles of light illuminated the blackness of space in a wondrous scene, but Libra was utterly unmoved.

It was the end of an ouroboros, one of the Goddess's agents. After having made sure of its end, Libra muttered softly, “Mission complete... Returning to base.”

The place for me to return to is not by the Goddess's side. It is with the comrades whom I have chosen.

The defective product that had strayed from the will of its master returned to its friends, the people who would welcome her back even despite such shortcomings.

The Melancholy of the Vampire Princess

The calendar year on Mizgarz was called the Mizgarz Calendar, or MC for short. It did not actually count all the years Mizgarz had existed, but instead only started when humanity came together and started an era where they lived in joint harmony. Because of that, the Mizgarz Calendar was actually somewhat of a misnomer, and some brought up the desire to abolish it, all the more so because there were a small number of beings who had, in fact, existed for tens of thousands of years. Even setting aside the entire history of Mizgarz, the history of humanity was much longer than the existence of the Mizgarz Calendar, but it was a clear fact that the calendar was useful when discussing such things.

This even held true for Benetnasch, who would also have had great trouble remembering her birth year without it. Six hundred years ago, during the year 2400 MC, a calamitous child was born in the vampire kingdom Blikjandaböl, located on Éljúðnir, one of the four great continents of Mizgarz. She was royalty, counting the true ancestor and originator of all vampires, Vlad, as one of her direct forebears. Benetnasch was born between the head of the family and one of his many concubines. However, among her many half-siblings, her standing was far from the best. Still, she was undoubtedly royalty at least and was in the line for succession. Unfortunately, her mother was not that favored by her father, and so it would be faster to reach where she was in line by counting from the bottom rather than the top.

While she wasn't abused, she also wasn't loved. The environment she was born into was all too common for nobility and royalty, though still unfortunate. Still, Benetnasch was not disappointed. Rather, she did not care one bit about her parents or her siblings. After all, she never even saw them as the same species as herself.

"Too thin."

That was what Benetnasch had felt ever since she was developed enough to

understand what was happening around her. To her, everybody but her had one thing in common, regardless of race. *Their magic is so thin, as is their existence. It's as if they're not there at all, at least in terms of strength.*

Not even Benetnasch's parents were exceptions. *Am I really their child? Wasn't I born to someone else?* Everyone told her that she was actually their child, but Benetnasch couldn't bring herself to believe them. For example, pretend there are two monkeys in front of you. Would you accept them as your parents? No, you wouldn't. After all, they are of a completely different species. Benetnasch, at least, couldn't help but feel like every other vampire was the same, a completely different species. *Am I just being conceited? Is this feeling that I am somehow special just born from some sort of childish sense of self-worth? How nice it would be if that were true...*

Members of vampire royalty were taught how to fight once they reached a certain age. Vampires were apex predators and hunters. That was why their rulers could not be weak; a certain amount of strength was needed for the position. Because of that, Benetnasch was going to be made to gain battle experience with monsters while learning how to hunt. That being the case, Benetnasch experienced her first joint hunt with her siblings at the age of ten.

The vampires' country, like others, was situated in a place where monsters abounded once you left the city protected by walls and soldiers. While looking across the vast wildland that stretched off into the horizon, Benetnasch thought of something completely incongruous to the current mood.

"Hey, old-timer..." Benetnasch called out to her elder, who had served her family since ancient times.

"Yes? What is it, young miss?"

Her other siblings were all either filled with nerves, enthusiasm, or hesitation at their first hunt. Either way, they were a ways away from their normal states. Among them, only Benetnasch was calm, as if she were simply out taking a walk.

"If I remember correctly, you told me a story about my father before, didn't you? About how he once killed a hundred monsters in a single hunting trip, wasn't it?"

“I did. He truly looked like a king at that time. Your father was young then, and he stood on the bodies of a hundred monsters, dominating them as one of the strong.”

“I see.”

Benetnasch sunk into thought. Since this was to be her first hunt, she didn't know the difference in strength between her and monsters, so she didn't know exactly how great of an achievement that was. *But for now, let's try shooting for that number*, she thought. *Still, at least I know now. This strange feeling, the one that tells me that I am different from everybody else... It's not just me being conceited.*

Benetnasch leapt into action just as the signal to start sounded, and she headed in a vague direction where she felt there were monsterlike presences. Normally, she would be accompanied by a knight, so as to prevent fatalities among the royalty, but the knight that was assigned to Benetnasch was not fast enough to keep up with her. *That's disappointing... So they're already unable to keep up after just a little bit of running?* This was the first time Benetnasch had run with anything resembling her full speed, and she was utterly disappointed by the fact that she was able to so easily leave an adult behind. *Hmm... As I thought. Maybe I really am different. Am I the strange one?*

Benetnasch forced those doubts deep down, as she had already encountered her first monster. It was a wyvern that was covered in scales, and it was easily five times Benetnasch's size. It had sharp fangs, vicious claws, and a large enough body that she nearly had to look straight up at it. All of those were oppressively intimidating, and anyone would be fearful at first glance.

However, Benetnasch was not afraid. She felt that the monster was no threat to her, surprising even herself. *Maybe I'm just missing a sense of danger and fear...* Benetnasch considered this silently. *If that's the case, then everything would just be me thinking too much into it.*

As the wyvern roared, it swung down its claws.

See, it's coming for me. Its arm alone is longer than I am tall, and it's being swung towards me as it roars. I should be scared, shouldn't I? This is a scary situation. But still... Why?

Benetnasch paused, thinking. *Why does it just look like the noble but useless last struggle of a small animal?*

Again, Benetnasch fell silent before musing, “So taking care of a hundred of something like this is considered amazing, huh...?”

Right at the moment, it seemed as if the wyvern’s claws would hit Benetnasch in the head. She used her small hand to grab the wyvern’s arm before then anchoring her other hand on the wyvern’s belly and proceeding to easily rip its arm off. Benetnasch ignored the screaming wyvern as she focused on its wound, where she saw the faint light of mana.

I see. So this is it. If I absorb this along with its blood, I can take in its strength. Having understood this, Benetnasch bit into the arm she’d ripped off, sucking in its blood along with its mana. It was the first time she’d sucked a monster’s blood, but surprisingly, she found herself not averse to it.

Just this isn’t enough for me to understand. I guess I’ll hunt a little more... After relieving the poor wyvern of its head, Benetnasch started looking for her next prey as she drank her first victim’s blood dry. All the while, she held onto the faint hope that somewhere along the way, she would hit a wall.

“Hey, you told me that my father once killed a hundred monsters in a session, and you called him strong, didn’t you?”

It was an unbelievable sight.

The man who Benetnasch had called an old-timer was named Roy. He had upheld his vow of loyalty since ancient times, when the true ancestors had been present, and had watched over many kings throughout history. All the kings he’d seen, including Benetnasch’s father, had been proper, strong rulers who had not shamed their ancestors, or at least, they should have been. However, he now felt that common sense of his that had been built up over the years collapsing inside of him.

It wasn’t just him. All the knights who had accompanied them as well as the other succession candidates—well, the former candidates—were, likewise, all struck speechless at the sight. Not even the king, who had finished his work early so as to be able to see the brave fighting figures of his children, as well as all his concubines were lost for words.

“Hey, Roy... Is this really a special accomplishment? Or were the ones I killed just too weak?”

The next ruler of the vampires sat under the shining moonlight. Her silver hair gently swayed in the wind as she looked down on everything with her youthful but beautiful face. There wasn't even a hint of a hard fight anywhere on her. She was sitting on a mountain of corpses that didn't just number a hundred, but easily double that.

“Hey, Roy... Tell me, how do I look from your point of view?”

In pure numbers, she was more than twice as strong as her father. However, that accomplishment of the current king had been done when he was a fully grown adult. He hadn't even been close to a young ten-year-old child. So what was Benetnasch? At a mere ten years old, she was already showing enough strength to leave the king in the dust. There were no other words but “prodigy.”

At this point, Roy could no longer consider Benetnasch as the same species as everyone else. *Why have I not noticed up until now? She's just of a higher rank than all of us are. To her, we're all naught but monkeys who failed to evolve.*

By the time he'd noticed, Roy had already fallen to his knees, and everyone else present had followed suit. Nobody thought what they were doing was strange. After all, she was their ruler, and they were but her humble servants. It was clear to their instincts; because they were vampires, who were sensitive to mana, they could understand this.

This person is different.

Everyone could feel this, right down to their bones. That was why it wasn't just her siblings, but the current king, queen, and the king's concubines who kneeled. There was no hesitation. Seeing them, the young lady who was a monster herself had her eyes waver out of loneliness for a moment, but no one noticed.

“You are a ruler, a born one...” said the king. “Please forgive me for being so blind that I could not see it until now.”

Benetnasch hesitated before asking, “Calling me, the daughter of a concubine, a ruler with the king right there? Is that really all right, father?”

“No... Not at all... All right? I could never have opinions on something so rude. You are a ruler appointed by the heavens themselves. I am just a father who was given the role through luck...”

Benetnasch managed to squeeze the phrase “I see” out before she looked up to the moon. With that, it had been made clear to her. All too clear. *As I thought. I’m strange. It wasn’t just childish conceit; I really am a different species.*

Her father’s eyes would no longer reflect the form of his daughter. He’d never loved her anyway and had originally only thought of her as one of his many children, but even then, he still at least thought of her as his child. *But now he doesn’t even think of me as his child... I can feel more love from him than before, but it’s the distant kind of love given to a ruler, not something to give to one’s child. Not even my mother thinks of me as her child now. She probably just thinks of me as a true king gifted from the heavens, one who just luckily happened to use her womb...*

Benetnasch was silent for a long while. “I...see...” she eventually let out.

A born ruler. An insurmountable difference decided from birth. A predetermined status...

Having processed and recognized all that about herself, the feeling that welled up in Benetnasch’s heart was not happiness but a huge, empty vacantness. A feeling of solitude as if she’d been thrown into this world all by her lonesome took over her heart. *I’m sure no one understands this loneliness. No one will understand this emptiness.*

My father is not my father, and my mother is not my mother. I cannot even call those of the supposed same race as me as such. I am a unique, new race...
Benetnasch was sure that fit her to a T.

That day, Benetnasch became alone at the young age of ten. Though she’d gained loving subjects—her parents among them—and she still had her siblings, all of them were simply her subjects in the end, and she was still alone. Even her family bowed to her, showing their subservience and worshiping her on their own.

There was no room for an equal relationship. Benetnasch had been forcefully

placed at the top of a pyramid she did not want to be on. No one even tried to be her equal...

* *

Around four hundred years had passed. At this point, the continent of Éljúðnir, once considered a paradise for monsters, had become the safest continent in the world. The reason? Benetnasch had erased them all.

Looking for enemies, she'd continued to kill monsters. She'd continued to fight, hoping to find an equal. However, the more she fought and the more she killed, the more the gap between her and others widened, and the more alone she became. At some point, the title of the world's strongest was hers to do with as she pleased, and not only was it said amongst people that it would be impossible to equal her, even dragons started to avoid her. She had no equal, much less a better. Others simply walked down the path she had opened while giving thanks and singing her praises. To the world, Benetnasch had no siblings. In fact, even the existence of her parents was called into question, and people had started to think that she had no family at all. However, that wasn't true.

With her butt planted firmly in her throne, Benetnasch looked down at the kneeling masses arrayed before her. *I believe the one standing closest to me and the throne but refusing to break his respectful bow is supposed to be my older brother? And the head maid who takes care of me so diligently should be my mother? There should also be many of my sisters among the masses of other maids as well. The man kneeling ahead of all the other ones should be the previous king as well as my father too.*

Aah... What a dull, worthless life. Benetnasch's ice-cold gaze swept past the crowd in front of her once more as she fought back a sigh. *Unable to find a goal or even a reason to live, accomplishing everything so easily and not experiencing the slightest bit of trouble... It's as if I'm a golem given the role of being a ruler. I'm dead, even though I'm alive...* Benetnasch was utterly bored of her own life. That was why that meeting was heavensent to her.

It happened one day out of the blue. An invader had appeared in her land, a place even dragons and the devilfolk avoided. She was a heaven-winged girl with flowing golden locks and black wings. She also came by herself. She didn't

bring any comrades, led no armies, and had given Benetnasch a declaration of war all by herself.

Of course, Benetnasch just thought of her as a simple idiot at first. Even after hearing the report, she couldn't work up any interest. However, she came to understand that her decision was a mistake when the girl barged into the castle by herself a scant few minutes later.

Benetnasch was sure she would never forget the shock she felt at that time. In this world that was devoid of color, where everything felt thin and worthless, she was the only one who was different. Not just the mana cloaking her, but the entire feeling of her existence was clearly different from the rest of the world in Benetnasch's eyes. That day, Benetnasch had met someone who was not just a member of the swirling, uncountable masses for the first time.

By the time she'd noticed, she'd already stood up from her throne and was staring at the girl, fixated. The emotion she felt at that point might honestly have been love at first sight.

"You're the Vampire Princess Benetnasch, are you not? First, allow us to apologize for our rude entrance."

"You're..." Benetnasch paused. "Right, you're the girl who defeated the dragon king. I see. I guess rumors turn out to be true sometimes. I thought it was all just exaggeration, but it looks like I was wrong."

Benetnasch had known about the heaven-winged girl who'd defeated the Dragon King, but she hadn't cared. She'd figured that it was either all a huge embellishment or the Dragon King had just been that weak. However, she now regretted that and wished that she'd looked deeper into it. If she had, she would have met the precious monster in front of her sooner.

The black-winged angel spent some time looking Benetnasch over, but she kept her mouth shut, probably because she couldn't find anything to say.

It took Benetnasch a while as well before she asked, "What? Why are you being so quiet?"

"Oh, sorry... There's a lot We should say, but We were just so moved. The Vampire Princess, the strongest in the world... You were one of our goals, and

someone We admired. After seeing you face-to-face, We weren't sure what We should say anymore."

"I see. It's an honor."

No one had ever told Benetnasch they admired her, and likewise, it was the first time anyone had said that she was their goal. Admiration meant that the object was an ideal, something the admirer held a strong longing for. However, Benetnasch could count those who admired her—someone who had far surpassed a simple ideal—on a single hand, and there were even less people who made her a goal. Also, this was the first time she'd been honestly happy that someone had valued her as such.

"Then there's no need for words. There's something much faster than such things."

However, as Benetnasch was at the moment, even that praise was vexingly slow. *No, exchanging words itself isn't vexing. It's that there's something else we should be doing with this time.* So, Benetnasch flared her magic power and tossed her outer layer of clothing as she stepped forward.

"You came to fight, didn't you? Then let's!"

Benetnasch acted calm, but she was actually about to explode. *It's like I'm a monkey in heat, she thought, self-deprecating. Or maybe like I'm a virgin in front of a naked woman for the first time... Either way, I can't hold back anymore. I want to make this happen even one second faster!*

I never dared to hope for this until now... A gift that I could never even think of in my wildest dreams came rushing to me! If this is a dream, I hope I never wake up.

With that wish, Benetnasch laughed grandly. In response, the black-winged girl also smiled.

"We see. It's as you say. Words aren't needed."

"Yeah. Let's do this."

Even though this was their first meeting, the two women acted like they'd finally seen a lover they'd been separated from for years as they jumped at

each other almost wordlessly. Of course, this wasn't for anything so sweet as a lover's tryst. They were starting a fight to the death.

Well, it might have actually been a tryst, since longing desperately for a strong opponent was similar to love. Like separated lovers who would go for a hug before exchanging any words or a reuniting couple's silent kiss, the two of them slammed their fists into each other's cheeks with all their might, as if they were sending a message.

Benetnasch was shocked. "You're good!"

Even while still flying backwards from the wind pressure given off by Lufas's fist, Benetnasch stuck her feet out into the ground to stop herself. Then, she laughed while spitting out blood.

That hit just now busted my skull, didn't it? I can see a broken fang rolling around on the floor.

While regenerating the damage at unbelievable speeds, Benetnasch's heart was filled with joy. In one hit, she'd understood. *She's stronger than me, overwhelmingly so.* That was why Benetnasch was so happy. *Finally... For the first time since I was born, I've finally found something to aim for.*

Without waiting for the damage she'd taken to fully heal, Benetnasch once again dashed off.

I don't care about the future. I just want to extend this happiness by even one more second!

* *

Benetnasch's life changed once she'd met the black-winged girl, Lufas Maphaahl. She'd started to think that this dull, pale world wasn't so bad. Benetnasch had also met a bunch of people who had been raised by Lufas's unique ability into something like pale imitations of her, and it was enough that Benetnasch thought that it would be all right to align herself with them.

Benetnasch's fight with Lufas had ended with her loss. To the rest of the world, it seemed like the fight had ended in a draw, and their respective nations merged, but that was just something Lufas had cooked up with Benetnasch's influence in mind. In actuality, it was a complete loss that was simply dressed

up as a draw and an absorption made to seem like unification. The vampire's country, Blikjandaböl, which had persisted since the age of the true ancestors, thus ended, and Benetnasch agreed to join Lufas and lend her might to Lufas's goals on the condition that they would have a rematch.

This isn't bad, Benetnasch thought. She had people she respected standing by her side and a clear goal in the form of Lufas. Her days spent like that were much more fulfilling than before, when she had been like a living corpse.

However, it would all come crashing down due to the worst possible betrayal. Her companions whom she respected—who in later years would become known as six of the Seven Heroes—betrayed Lufas and struck her down. The worst thing was that they'd interrupted Benetnasch's longed-for rematch to do it. As a result, Lufas was brought low because of the wounds Benetnasch had inflicted in their rematch. *What would it be other than a total disgrace?* Then, as if to twist the knife, Benetnasch was somehow treated as a companion to those traitors and lauded as one of the Seven Heroes. One of the Seven Heroes who defeated Lufas Maphaahl—that title was something that made Benetnasch want to puke.

Just like that, the funnest times in Benetnasch's life had ended. The colors of her world faded once more, and she gradually lost interest in everything. As for the others of the Seven Heroes, even they started to look like part of the faceless, worthless masses to her.

"Benetnasch, I'm begging you..." said Alioth. "Help us. We need your power to defeat the Devil King."

Benetnasch simply remained silent.

A few days had passed since that terrible betrayal. Alioth and the rest of his group had visited Benetnasch in her castle to petition for her help. While sitting on her throne, Benetnasch looked down at the six people who she had once recognized as her equals with ice-cold eyes.

"Go away."

That was all Benetnasch had to say. That wasn't something anyone should say to their friends, but Benetnasch no longer recognized them as such. Even this audience with her was something they weren't allowed to cut in line for, so

they had been forced to wait three days until after all the other nobles had had their turn. In other words, they'd fallen low enough to be grouped along with all those Benetnasch cared nothing about.

"W-Wait, please! You know that the Devil King is preparing to attack now that Lufas is gone, don't you? If we don't defeat him now, then the world will—"

"You're right. All the days of peace, order, and safety from monsters and devilfolk that Maphaahl had worked hard to build until now have all been ruined. Now the world has returned to a hell where people are trampled over by those monsters and devilfolk, just like it was before Lufas Maphaahl."

"If you know already, then—"

"It's all thanks to you."

Those words from Benetnasch were enough to make Alioth stop in his tracks, and not just him either. None of the six of them could say anything.

"You all ended it yourselves. You struck a faithful friend in the back and erased her without a thought for what comes afterwards. You even ruined my rematch with her... And you're asking for my help on top of that?"

"Well, that's..."

Benetnasch said nothing in reply.

"That's... None of us get it..." admitted Alioth. "Back then, we really did think it was the right thing to do... But now that we think back on it, we must have gone crazy or something. We were wrong, and we know it. As for why we did that... Why we thought that Lufas must be defeated, no matter what... Truthfully, I don't even understand my—"

Benetnasch's fist thrust into Alioth's face. It was a full-force blow; Benetnasch had struck him without holding back, thinking that she wouldn't care if he died. If the one receiving it hadn't been Alioth, who was level 1000, there would have been nothing above the base of his neck right now.

Benetnasch no longer had any interest in listening to the rest of it.

I thought that he might have said something even a little worthwhile, but crying about his regrets at this point? It's not even worth listening to. Don't

understand? You trampled all over my wishes for something of that level? You were wrong? That's the worst thing you could have said! It doesn't matter who or where or when. You people are the only ones who should never say that! If the ones who defeated Lufas were to say that it was a mistake, then that would make Lufas a fool who was defeated by mistake. That would be the most disrespectful thing possible.

That was why Benetnasch would not listen to any more of their drivel. After punching Alioth flying, Benetnasch sat back down on her throne and looked down at the group.

"I'm disappointed in all of you... Get out of here. I will not say it a third time."

"Benetnasch...!"

"Or..."

Benetnasch's crimson eyes glowed. Magic power overflowed from her entire body, and she broke through the level 1000 limit. She was now in the world past level 1000, a place only Lufas and Benetnasch had ever been able to reach. With that much power, it would be possible for her to take on the rest of the Seven Heroes all at once. It was exactly because she was so powerful that she was necessary for the fight against the Devil King and why Alioth and the others had come for her help.

"Do you want to make me into your enemy along with the Devil King?"

Those words made Alioth and the others recoil from her before they all left silently. They'd sensed that if they were to continue to try to reason with her, she would attack them in that instant.

While watching the pathetic forms of their backs, Benetnasch clicked her tongue. *If it were Lufas... If it were Lufas Maphaahl, she would have knocked me out and dragged me to the fight, even if she had to fight me a little first. But the men who defeated her are like this? Where's their drive? Their spirit? Are those really the backs of the men who I once respected?*

"Roy, don't let them through next time. If they send any letters, just burn them without opening them."

"Yes, Your Majesty. As you will."

After that, about another two hundred years had passed.

To Benetnasch, those two hundred years were terribly boring. Fairly large incidents happened, such as the members of the Seven Heroes—other than herself—losing to the Devil King and humanity’s territories shrinking considerably, but none of that mattered to Benetnasch. To her, it was just worthless trouble that only affected worthless people.

However, she still held a slight sliver—the tiniest slice—of hope. It happened around 150 years ago. Just once, the Devil King had come to mess with her. At that time, he’d said something strange.

“Lufas will return in 150 years,” was it?

Benetnasch hadn’t truly believed in it, but there was nothing else to put her hopes in, so she held on to that small sliver as she waited.

If that was a lie, then I’ll just erase the Devil King. With those thoughts swirling around in her mind, Benetnasch let the days flow past her, but one day, she finally found out that what the Devil King had said had not been a lie.

“Lady Benetnasch! There’s been a huge incident!”

As always, Benetnasch had spent her day in boredom. That was when one of her retainers burst into the room in a panic. Thinking that some small fry, like one of the devilfolk’s Seven Luminaries, had invaded, Benetnasch turned her gaze to meet her subject’s, uninterested. However, what she’d heard next completely broke all sense of calmness in her.

“The country of Laevateinn tried and failed to summon a hero... There have been reports that the Black-Winged Conqueror, Lufas Maphaahl, has been revived... Eep?!”

After hearing the report, Benetnasch reflexively bolted upright. She was so surprised that she accidentally let out a burst of magic power, needlessly scaring her retainer. However, she didn’t care about any of that. More important to Benetnasch was the good news that had just reached her ears.

After taking a moment to process, she exclaimed, “So she’s here...!”

Naturally, the corners of her mouth slid upwards. The pale world immediately started to regain its color, and her heart was filled with joy.

“You made me wait too long, idiot.”

I can't stop smiling. I'm shaking too. I can't help it. I'm so happy. I can even tell my knees are shaking too.

This was the prequel to Lufas Maphaahl's story. As well as the story of the girl who, more than anyone in the world, waited in anticipation for Lufas's return.

Afterword

Thank you very much for picking up volume 8 of *A Wild Last Boss Appeared!* I am the author, Firehead. How was the volume this time?

This is all about what comes before the very last battle, and they've all made quite a show, so it'd be great if all of you liked it. But would it surprise you to know that, in RPG terms, things haven't actually inflated that wildly?

Take, for example, the seventh work in a certain famous series of RPGs. The final boss in that work plotted behind the scenes to drop a meteor on Earth, but in the final battle, he suddenly pulled out an attack that could wipe out the entire solar system like it was nothing. Not to mention that the protagonist's party easily withstood such an attack. In the eighth game, a giant sword of light big enough to bisect the planet was created and swung down, and they also shot down giant beam attacks from space at their enemies. RPGs are just the sorts of things that sometimes grow to an incredible scale.

In a certain famous game where robots fight each other, each time a unit attacks, the game plays an animation where many planets are razed, or sometimes even entire galaxies are erased. Of course, it's usually all just there to add enjoyment, and no matter how many stars or planets are destroyed, it won't affect the actual story. Even though the units on the protagonist's side would also have destroyed the Earth several times over, they get away scot-free.

The story replaces all that extra flashiness with completely serious writing. So, all that's happened here is stuff that any RPG does. It's all fine. There's still room to go even bigger. Don't worry.

This time, the main enemies rampaging around were the ouroboroses, and as I expected, the biggest problem I had while I was writing them was that they'd become a little too big in the end. The protagonist's side had a bunch of monsters already, so I wanted the enemies to have even bigger ones. Such a simple idea translated into these joke-like sizes, and as I was writing this

volume, I even worried about whether or not Aries and the others would even be able to see an ouroboros properly, since the size difference was so big. However, if I ended up making them half-baked enemies, then it would weaken the sense that they were formidable forces, so I ended up just accepting them as they were initially written.

Their biggest skills all had the same name, but each one had a different effect. The thing all the skills had in common was that they required the ouroboros to bite onto their tail and start spinning. Seeing it in action would be kind of comical. The Moon ouroboros, Orm, could reverse the time of the victims trapped within him, and his skill is fundamentally unblockable, though Lufas did manage to defend against it. The Earth ouroboros was able to become a black hole and suck everything in. In terms of scale, his is probably the biggest.

These were the only two who showed their skills in the main volume, but I have, in fact, fully noted the other three's skills in order to complete world-building. The Ouroboros of Heaven's skill turns him into a sun to burn everything away, and if he'd ever used it, even his allies would have taken a huge amount of damage, though they might not have lost their lives. The Ouroboros of Fire overlaps a bit with the Ouroboros of Heaven, and he would use his long body to trap his victims inside and start spinning, creating an ultrahigh-temperature incinerator. In the main volume, he successfully trapped Benetnasch inside and was about to activate the skill, but before he could, Alioth and his group interfered. In the end, the Fire ouroboros was unable to use his skill. Lastly, the Wood ouroboros's ability is to ball up and grow life all over his body, becoming a new planet himself. This skill is completely useless in battle.

The ouroboroses' stats are all basically the same, but if I had to rank them by strength, it would be Earth > Heaven = Moon > Fire > Wood, taking their unique abilities into account

The Earth ouroboros was kind of the most plain in character, but he was actually the strongest. He ended up being beaten black-and-blue by Libra and had the most gruesome death, but even so, he was the strongest. He's able to manipulate gravitic pressure, attraction, and repulsion in all directions around him, which he can use to form gravity bullets and waves. He can even turn

himself into a black hole. There's no way he's weak. However, he's still plain, the most plain among all the ouroboroses. That was why he lost to Libra. So we can say here that the reason for his loss was because, meta-wise, his character was so thin.

Now, the fight with the ouroboroses is basically over, and finally, the only enemy left is Alovenus herself. Of course, the creator of the world and leader of the five ouroboroses is the strongest in this world with a completely broken sense of power balance. Though she has no majesty befitting a goddess or the feeling of a strong character, I can promise you that I've made her so crazy powerful you won't be able to keep up.

So, this next volume will be the last in this long story that you have been keeping up with. In truth, it was supposed to end with this volume 8, but the book had become something so thick it was hard to read. We instead decided to split the book and make volume 9 the last one. However, I also have to revise volume 9 quite a bit to fit that, so I still feel a little depressed.

Also, volume 3 of the comic version of this series is supposed to go on sale before volume 8. Hazuki-sensei's beautiful illustrations depict Lufas and the others going wild this time as well, so please check that out too. The comics have gotten into the Gjallarhorn arc, so you can see the vistas of the town of Gjallarhorn recreated here, even the parts that were kind of hard to describe in prose. The battle scenes are also quite impactful, so I can confidently recommend this volume to all of you.

Huh? Of course you'd be able to confidently recommend it with such a talented artist drawing volumes that would put your original novels to shame, you say? Ah— Ah— I can't heeaarr yooouuuu...

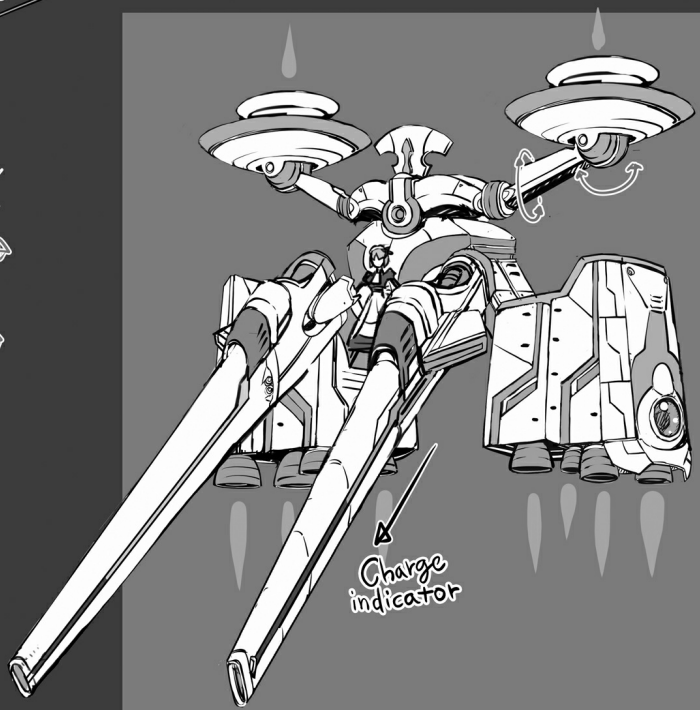
Well then, let us meet again in the final volume.

-Firehead



It's a full armor combined(?) Libra!
I had a lot of fun designing this.

Yahako



A Wild Boss Last Appeared!

Congratulations
on the release
of volume 8!

The comic version is
currently in serialization with
Comic Earthstar!

Volumes 1-3
are currently
on sale as well!

by 葉月翼



Bonus Short Story

Lord☆of☆Air

Pisces the Fish, one of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, was a child of divinity whose original name was Eros. Though he was called a child of divinity, he was not born of Alovenus's womb. He was simply a magic spell with a will made by her, which was why he called himself her child. Others may then think, *Then, wouldn't all the devilfolk also be her children?* But that mustn't be said out loud. Everybody wants to be thought of as special, after all.

Eros was a prototype for the ouroboroses, who would become the arbitrators of the world, and he was originally in line to be given the role of ruler over nature on Mizgarz. However, Eros turned out to be rather wild and unruly, hating being tied down by others, and he abandoned the position granted to him to escape into the ocean. After that, he did as he pleased, creating his own underwater kingdom and making beautiful women wait upon him. He spent every day drinking and enjoying music, basically enjoying his life to the fullest.

I am the child of the Goddess. That makes me greater than everyone else in the world, which allows me to do anything I like. He believed this from the bottom of his heart, and he gradually warped into the picture of a terrible person.

He eventually entered the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars because Lufas had started to take her conquering game to a serious level. At the time, he'd gotten quite full of himself, and he truly believed that he was the strongest and best in the world.

If he had just thought about it for a moment, there was no way he should have been so full of confidence in this unprecedentedly chaotic age of Mizgarz's history with so many level 1000s all over the place, such as the Devil King, the ouroboroses, the Dragon King, the Lion King, the Vampire Princess, the Seven Heroes, the Fairy Princess, or any of the other Twelve Heavenly Stars. However,

just as his presenting himself as the child of the Goddess of Creation implied, he'd inherited all her strangest traits. In other words, he was a big enough idiot to make any trained medical professional simply throw their hands up into the air and give up. So, when he went up to the surface to try and conquer those whom he considered fools and were too full of themselves, his words came flying right back at him.

The result was obvious. However, summarizing it in one line would be too sad, so a cut-down version of the battle scene is as follows:

“Activating a skill that unlocks at level 1000: Hamal! This will kill the enemy!”

Aries attacks! Eros takes 99999 damage!

“Nwaarrgghh!”

“Using the sure-hit, unavoidable, unblockable skill Brachium to kill the enemy!”

Libra attacks! Eros takes 99999 damage!

“Gyaaarrgghh!”

“Take this: Deneb Algedi, a unique skill that won't allow healing! You're dead!”

Aigokeros attacks! Eros takes 50000 damage! Eros has become unable to heal!

“I'll kill you with this permanent, untreatable poison skill: Shaula!”

Scorpius attacks! Eros is now poisoned permanently!

“Using Argonautai to summon a horde of heroic spirits! They'll take care of the enemy!”

Heroic spirit attacks! Heroic spirit attacks! Heroic spirit attacks! War is all about numbers!

“Argghhhh!”

“A normal punch from someone who's broken the level limit and is level 4200! Die!”

Lufas attacks! Eros takes 999999999 damage!

“Gffwoooaarrrrgghh!”

Please stop already! Eros has 0 HP!

Anyway, that was how it went. It was a fairly terrible showing.

Without any room to shine, Eros was beaten up handily, completely overkilled, and then captured on top of that. There was no great backdrop or deep lore behind Pisces the Fish’s joining; he simply picked a fight with Lufas and was beaten up for it before being captured. However, this was par for the course. Of course something like this would happen if someone picked a fight with Lufas when her forces were well rounded. Given the circumstances, it was probably also only natural that he received less love and attention from Lufas compared to, say, Aries.

So Eros, having been captured, was given one of the empty seats of the Twelve Stars, as it turned out that he was actually quite capable, and he pledged loyalty to Lufas. This loyalty was something unthinkable for Pisces as he had been previously, but he himself had no qualms about it. In the end, he’d fallen in love with her looks, as well as the sheer scale of her existence, as she was able to trample all over divine providence to break the level limit. *She’s stolen something unprecedented—not only my land but my heart as well.*

However, while it was great that Eros—or rather, Pisces—had joined the Twelve Stars, he had no time to shine, unfortunately. If he’d at least joined during Lufas’s adventuring days, then he could have swept the battlefield. Now that she’d already become a conquering ruler, however, he’d have almost no room to take the stage, even if he joined a battle. As a result, his presence in the group became ever thinner, and Lufas was sealed before he could ever try to improve his standing.

Still, Pisces had a prediction.

I know Lufas will come back, and when that happens, that will be when I will finally shine in her eyes! I have the ability. In fact, I know I’m stronger than the likes of Aries. I am an all-rounder who can fight both physically and magically, and I also have a powerful unique ability. On top of all that, she’ll also receive this entire underwater kingdom since I’m aligned with her.

There was no way Lufas wouldn’t want what Pisces had to offer, so once she

had been revived, he expected himself to be the first one whom Lufas came for.

My springtime has come. Two hundred years ago, I was as air, but I will be the next protagonist. Pisces fervently believed this. He had not yet come to know that he would also be left for the endgame two hundred years later, and he would once again be as air.





Sign up for our mailing list at J-Novel Club to hear about new releases!

[Newsletter](#)

And you can read the latest chapters (like Vol. 9 of this series!) by becoming a J-Novel Club Member:

[J-Novel Club Membership](#)

Copyright

A Wild Last Boss Appeared! Volume 8

by Firehead

Translated by Kevin Chen Edited by Kathleen Townsend

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Copyright © 2018 Firehead / YahaKo Illustrations by YahaKo

All rights reserved.

Original Japanese edition published in 2018 by Earth Star Entertainment This English edition is published by arrangement with Earth Star Entertainment, Tokyo English translation © 2022 J-Novel Club LLC

All rights reserved. In accordance with the U.S. Copyright Act of 1976, the scanning, uploading, and electronic sharing of any part of this book without the permission of the publisher is unlawful piracy and theft of the author's intellectual property.

J-Novel Club LLC

j-novel.club

The publisher is not responsible for websites (or their content) that are not owned by the publisher.

Ebook edition 1.0: April 2022