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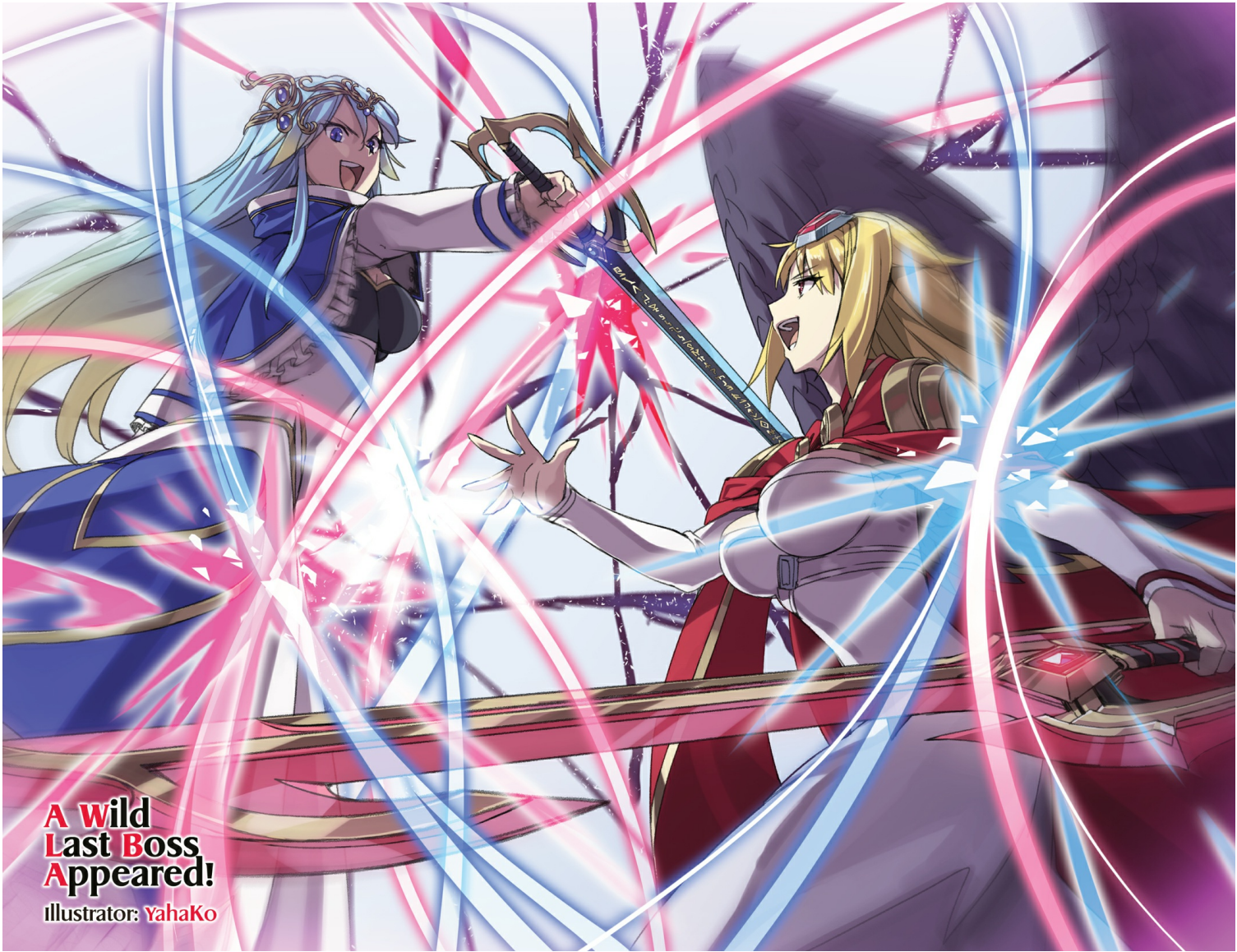
A WILD
Last BOSS
APPEARED!



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**A Wild
Last Boss
Appeared!**

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“And to our
permanent
parting.”

“To our past
together.”

We toast.



Character Introduction

Alovenus

The Goddess who created Mizgarz. Wants her people to be happy. Her feelings were too strong though, and she ended up giving birth to a warped world where she forces her people to act out one scenario over and over.

Lufas Maphaahl

A strong woman who nearly conquered the world and is feared as the Black-Winged Conqueror. She was sealed by the Seven Heroes, but 200 years later, she was revived with the memories of her male avatar from another world. Since then, she's gone on a journey to gather her subordinates, the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, while regaining her memories and power. She reunited with Dina in modern Japan and finally recovered her memories and abilities in full.



♍ Virgo



♋ Karkinos



♊ Castor



♈ Aries



♎ Libra



♌ Leon



♊ Pollux



♉ Taurus

The Conquering
Twelve Heavenly Stars



Devilfolk

Created by the Goddess to play the role of “evil” in Mizgarz.

The Devil King Orm

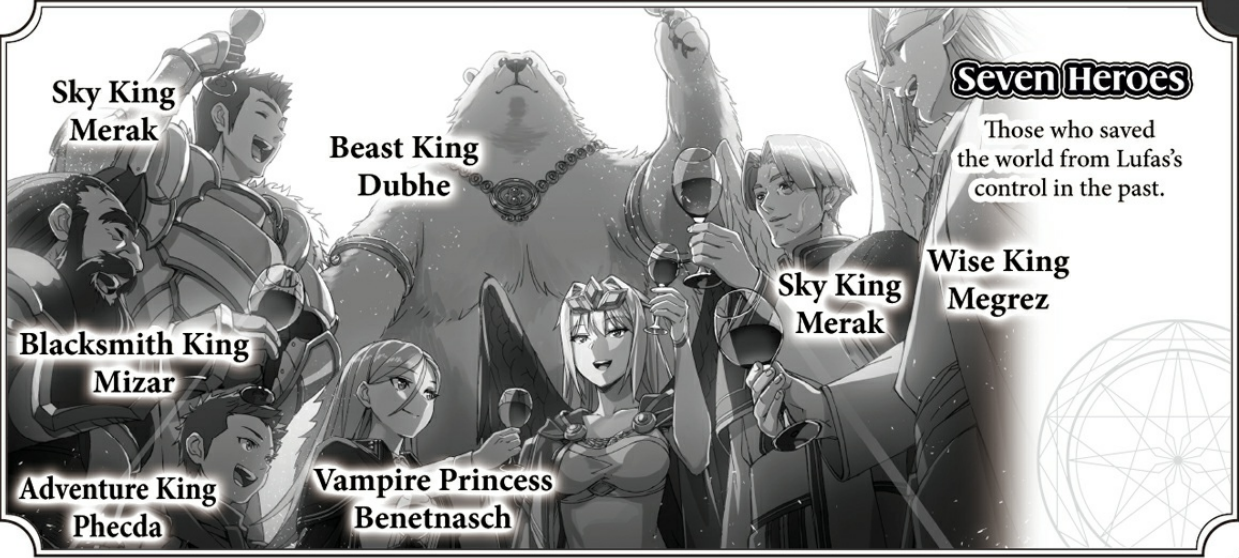
The leader of the devilfolk, called the Devil King. He’s also the Ouroboros of the Moon, an agent of the Goddess and one of five of his kind. After a showdown with Lufas, he became one of her Stars.



Hero

Minamijuuji Sei

A Hero summoned from modern Japan. He is a perfectly average young man, except for his seriousness and strong sense of justice.



Seven Heroes

Those who saved the world from Lufas’s control in the past.

Sky King Merak

Beast King Dubhe

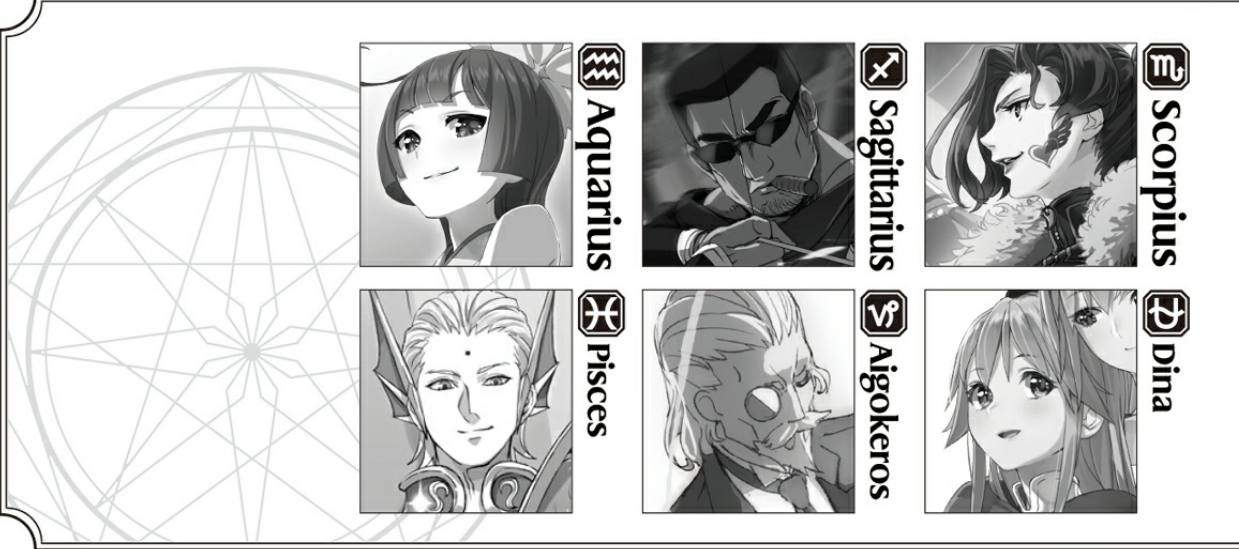
Blacksmith King Mizar


Adventure King Phecda

Vampire Princess Benetnasch


Sky King Merak

Wise King Megrez






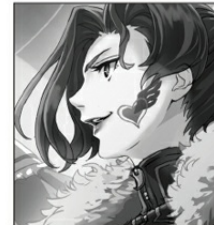
Aquarius




Sagittarius




Scorpius



Pisces



Aigokeros



Dina

STORY RECAP:

Thanks to the efforts of Dina, my advisor, I finally completed my true awakening as Lufas and returned to Mizgarz to end the Goddess Alovenus's scenario.

On the other side, the Goddess decided to reset the world, as her scenario had gone off the rails. Meaning, she awakened the four sleeping ouroboroses.

All those who lived on Mizgarz—including the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, the Seven Heroes, and the devilfolk themselves—banded together to combat with this threat. However, the overwhelming size and power the ouroboroses wielded forced us into a corner.

Meanwhile, I was facing off against Dina, who was being controlled by the Goddess, and a certain familiar golem...

I had already known that I would be going up against the two of them eventually, so I never bothered to say anything like, "Give her back." Instead, I decided to simply take what I wanted by force.

However, Libra wavered when put between her original master and me, who she had been through many hardships as well as good times with. Though she was a golem and shouldn't have had a heart to begin with, Libra continued to waver like a set of unbalanced scales until her scales eventually settled on me. This marked her first decision made on her own, as someone who had broken out of her previous shell of just being a puppet who only obeyed orders. Having affirmed herself, Libra reinforced my beleaguered comrades, helping them push the ouroboroses back.

After that, the Goddess had finally lost all her pawns. It was time for her to take action herself at last...





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“Looks like the time has come for this to end,” I said to Dina as I watched the four battles that were in the midst of ending.

The Earth and Heaven ouroboroses had died. The Fire ouroboros was only half-dead, but there was no way Benet and her group would lose now. At this point, Benet would win even if she was alone. Meanwhile, the Wood ouroboros faced both Orm and Pollux simultaneously, and Aries’s group was already on the way, so it was only a matter of time before that battle was over as well.

However, the Goddess/Dina’s expression was, of course, as calm as ever. After all, her most important pawn was still standing, perfectly fine.

Actually, I bet she’d still be calm even if I did defeat Dina. In the end, this entire universe is nothing but a game to her, something to be frustrated over if you lose and maybe something you’d get so mad over you’d never play again. But that’s all. In a game, it didn’t matter how many of your characters were killed. It wouldn’t hurt you in real life at all.

That was why I needed to destroy this universe—this game—once in order to get on the same level as the Goddess. If I didn’t, I’d never be able to have a proper fight with her. In fact, I’d never be able to even meet her. This also meant that I couldn’t afford to stumble here, at this stage, of course. After all, I had yet to even reach Alovenus.

“Totally unreliable, all of them. However, all of that ends here. Not even you can win against me.”

“You’re wrong. That’s Dina’s body. *You aren’t even standing on the battlefield yet,*” I said.

“I see. You have a point. But this will be more than enough for you.”

As she spoke, the aura of pressure that the Goddess/Dina gave off increased in strength. *She’s attacking!* I could tell this from the stirrings of the mana from beyond this planet, which wasn’t on so small a scale as that which had been

contained on Mizgarz. She was gathering the mana that comprised this universe itself. Indeed, this entire universe was nothing but a magic spell of hers, so there was an infinite amount of mana around.

“Now come, you, the ruler of the skies up above! You are the thunder that will break apart the stars. Keraunios!”

The sky split, allowing lightning to fall. At this point, a lightning strike was like child’s play, but of course, this was no normal lightning. There was no way to know exactly how strong the current or voltage of the lightning was, but I could easily tell that whatever those measurements were, they would normally be impossible. Just as the Goddess had said, the lightning destroyed stars and planets; it was clearly powerful enough to erase planets entirely.

I raised my hand above my head to intercept the falling lightning with a shield. The atmosphere was acting as a sort of insulator against electricity, but that was, of course, easily broken through. Nothing like that could stop this, no matter if it was rubber, pure water, or the atmosphere. Whether it be reason, providence, common sense, logic, theorems, or law, all of it was, unfortunately, powerless. None of it meant anything. However, if the other side was coming with pure power, so would I.

I raised the strength of my shield, defending the common-sense-ignoring lightning by further ignoring any common sense. The lightning scattered across the sky, and a few moments later, some stars could be seen being burnt away. However, Mizgarz still existed.

“Slice into her, Winter of Swords!”

This time, I was on the attack. This was a full skill activation, unlike that version I’d used against Benet while half-asleep. Countless blades sprouted from beneath the Goddess/Dina’s feet, piercing up into the sky.

The Goddess/Dina simply flew higher with that smile still on her face, but I merely swung my arm as if to follow her movement. When I did so, the blades moved, chasing the Goddess/Dina. However, she slipped through the veritable cage of blades without a scratch, all while looking as if she were dancing, before escaping ever higher. I also took flight, chasing after the fleeing Goddess/Dina and reaching her in the sky.

“You, the avatar of destruction, one with a thousand names... The ultimate destruction of all things... Mahakala!”

Fire spread from the Goddess/Dina in all directions. Sensing the unavoidable death those flames brought, I didn’t hesitate to pull back, though it was a little cowardly. I was immediately proved right. The blades I’d transmuted were destroyed without question, and after seeing them turn to charcoal, it was obvious that the fire wasn’t just dealing damage with heat.

“Assured destruction, huh?”

“No. Instant death, whether it be living or not.”

After hearing the Goddess/Dina’s answer, I muttered an “I see” to myself.

It most likely pierced through resistances as well, as if it was only natural. *I see. A terrifying skill. As long as it hits, that is.* But aside from the effect of it, the fire itself wasn’t much. At the very least, it was nothing compared to the heat of the sun; it was a weak fire that could go out with a slight breeze.

I threw out a light punch, and the wind from it blew away the fire as it headed for the Goddess/Dina.

“Aldebaran!”

My fist buried itself in the Goddess/Dina’s gut, sending her flying. *Sorry, Dina. I’ll heal you up later, so forgive me.*

An attack just like that had gotten Pollux to come to her senses. Aldebaran was able to destroy and nullify any and all abilities. However, the Goddess was still inside Dina’s body. Well, that was only natural. After all, it wasn’t as if the Goddess were using some sort of skill to possess Dina. She was simply using someone who had been born as her avatar from the start. No power or ability was at work there. According to what Dina had said, the Goddess would use a unique skill when possessing her, but it was a onetime deal that did not need continuous usage.

The Goddess/Dina scolded me, saying, “That won’t work,” before moving on to her next skill. “You, the queen of the afterlife, god who births gods. Come, Izanami!”

Heeding the Goddess/Dina's call, the mana in the surroundings clumped together to form a human figure at once. A somewhat Japanese-looking pair, one male and one female, pincered me, their weapons at the ready.

That's rather lukewarm. What's going on? Does she want me to kill them? She should already know that mere numbers aren't enough to get one over on me. Well, let's just take care of this with a skill. I decided on the one used by the divine gate guardian to eliminate all those who were unworthy—the Scales of Selection.

“Brachium!”

A light of extreme destruction swirled around me, turning the manifested figures into nothing but dust.

Brachium was a skill that dealt damage fixed at the damage ceiling. Right now, my damage ceiling was 999,999,999. Basically, a billion. I mowed down everything around me, including the Goddess/Dina, who was near enough to get caught up in it. Still, it was only a mere one-thousandth of her total HP. *I shouldn't really be talking, but her stats are ridiculous.* There was no other way to describe them.

“First was the Greek pantheon, then the Indian. And now it's Japanese? Seriously, pick a lane. All you're using are pantheons from the other side,” I said.

“Oh, I forgot that you know them too. Yes, you're exactly correct. The other side is filled with so many stories. It's never-ending fun. It's surprising how free and unlimited the human capacity for imagination is,” the Goddess/Dina said, happy. Spreading her arms out as she spoke, she seemed exactly like a child bragging about her toys, and I got the feeling that I was seeing a chink in her mad simplemindedness.

“What pantheon would you like next?” the Goddess/Dina asked. “I can do Egyptian, Chinese, Babylonian, Norse... You can name whichever one you like. I don't mind. Or maybe you would prefer fictional gods from manga or novels?”

“Oh? That's some talk. So what you're saying is that, if you feel like it, you can use not only mythic pantheons but even fictional deities from the other side?”

“I won’t claim that I can summon all of them, but yes, pretty much anything a person could imagine.”

After hearing the Goddess/Dina’s answer, one of the questions I’d held for a long time was cleared up. *In the end, she’s just aping them... And given the sorry state of that previous one, there’s no doubt. She’s...*

“A power you can’t reproduce... Would that be the power to create life?” I asked with conviction.

The expression on the Goddess/Dina’s face froze. That reaction told me that I had said the one thing she didn’t want to hear.

“That seems to be the limit of just aping powers. You’ve stood out enough that it’s far too easy to understand what you can’t do. This world itself is already something made from a warped, patched-together version of myths from the other side, but the living things are especially bad. There’s nothing here that is totally original. Though there are some species that have evolved along their own lines, their roots are still traceable back to Earth.”

For example, there were monsters that resembled dogs and ones that resembled cats as well. There were reptilian demihumans and bug monsters too. Not to mention fishlike peoples in the ocean, and the heaven-winged, who resembled birds.

“Like.” “Resembled.” “Basically the same.” Those words could be applied to all the living things in this world. You didn’t say that dogs “resembled dogs,” nor did you do the same for cats. After all, they were all the originals of their kind. If I were to bring over a biologist from Earth who knew every single species on the planet, he would surely at least recognize everything in this world. Why? Because they’d been stolen.

“Pretty much anything a person could imagine? That’s not true. It’s more like you can only do what people can imagine, right? You do not have the power to truly bring about the unknown, the unprecedented.”

Mizgarz’s roots were firmly planted in Earth. It could be that she did actually have the power to create the unknown; she just had no imagination. Because the source of all her ideas and imagination was Earth, everything she put forth would resemble something from Earth in some way. All of that led me to one

conclusion. Though I wasn't absolutely sure, and this was just a theory, my heart was screaming that this was the truth. The fact that she had titled herself the creator but could not create life was strange.

"Alovenus, you are not the creator. You existed as something else before you became a god... Am I wrong?"

The Goddess/Dina was silent for a moment. "That's an interesting idea. I see, I see... That's not a bad development. So behind me, there would be a true god of creation who was the real puppet master... Hee hee... Is that what you wanted to say?"

The Goddess/Dina tried to confuse me with an incredible statement, but that wouldn't work. There was no doubt that she was the mastermind of all this, as well as the one at the pinnacle of this universe. There was no one behind her and no existence higher than hers.

"Of course not. Are you stupid?"

"Wha—?!"

"Alovenus, I believe that you were not originally a god. You are simply someone who left their original world for some purpose and became a god."

Yes, now that we'd come this far, there was only one answer. There was the twisted form that Mizgarz took, the living beings that made it up, the patchwork nature of its mythology, the copying of not just the other side's food culture, but culture in general, and most importantly, the fact that Alovenus hadn't laid a finger on Earth even though she was going so wild over here. It was as if there was something inviolably sacred about Earth. She hadn't even been able to realize that Dina had hidden herself on Earth. Alovenus viewed Earth as special. That was also why she always chose the main characters for her stories from Earth. She would pull in young men who were in no way suited for fighting and give them favorable treatment. Why was that? It was obvious.

"Yes. You are an earthling, Alovenus. You are not omnipotent or omniscient. You aren't even a true god. You're simply a third-rate scriptwriter touting herself as one. That is your true identity."

Surely she was as close to immortal as could be. She didn't age, and she'd

been alive almost forever by this point, after all. She also had an overwhelming amount of power, enough to destroy this universe she'd built. Given that, it would be appropriate to call her a god. At the very least, she had enough power to be one. At her roots, she was no different from me, however. For something divine, she was far too human and made too many mistakes.

After I pointed out her true identity, the Goddess/Dina's heart went blank for an instant. She'd probably never expected anyone to guess right. Of course she wouldn't. After all, I was purely Mizgarz-born. Normally, there was no way I would have any knowledge of the other side, and because of that, I wouldn't have been able to arrive at this answer.

After some time of dazed silence, she eventually came out with a dry laugh. "Heh... Heh heh heh... Heh heh heh heh heh heh... How long has it been since anyone last called me human? I faintly remember something hundreds of millions of years ago... It has quite the nostalgic ring to it. It's true. There was a time when I was called that, long ago." She paused, thinking. "Though even I myself can't remember how long ago that was."

With that, the Goddess/Dina wiped the smile off her face as she looked at me. It was not playful like before. For the first time, she looked upon me as an enemy.

"The game ends here. You crossed a line you shouldn't have." The Goddess/Dina was quiet for a moment. "Let us end this. I will at least allow it to happen at the hands of the hero."

The Goddess/Dina waved her arm. When she did so, the mana that had made up the ouroboroses quickly gathered at a single point. The mana's destination was the Ark, or rather, a single young man inside it. She even forcefully stole the mana that Aigokeros had gathered to himself. Everything was flowing into Sei as experience. It was likely that the Fire and Wood ouroboroses would eventually also become experience. Only Orm, who was under my control, barely managed to escape this fate. Even so, that kid should have gained enough strength to fight me.

"You're right. The curtain will soon fall by the hero's hand."

I agreed with the Goddess as I too looked over to the Ark, though both the

Goddess and I meant something entirely different when we said it was the end.

Alovenus, you still don't understand. That boy is not the protagonist. He is someone who can try to find the right path, even if he has to give up the position of the protagonist to do it. The end is coming. It's the curtain call on this terrible play. And that is when there will be a brawl behind the stage, where the audience can't see.

2

When the Goddess wanted to grant someone strength, she first got them to fixate on strength. By doing that, they easily accepted their new power and would not hesitate to use it.

To clarify, the Goddess was able to control a target even if she didn't do so directly. It was not impossible for her to turn someone into a puppet even if they refused her. Only by having a will on par with Benetnasch's would someone be able to repel the Goddess's control. In other words, she could take control of Sei whenever she wanted.

So why hadn't she? The reason was simple. Because it would be a weak move if she did. No matter how much a puppet's stats were raised, something that wasn't making decisions under its own will would be full of openings and would not add much to a battle. Because the existence that was the Goddess was so large, she was unable to notice small happenings from small people in their small world.

For example, imagine a game where one is god, and an incredibly tiny snake cut in front of a character. There would be no way for the player to realize that, however, because the characters would be too small. In terms of battle, this would be life-threatening. It wouldn't be going too far to say that the player would be completely defenseless. If the difference in their strengths was so large that the other side's attacks wouldn't work in the first place, then things might be fine, but unfortunately, the opponent was Lufas Maphaahl. A hero with that many openings would not even be close to a match for her.

That was why, when the Goddess had controlled Alioth and the others before, she'd made sure to leave their consciousnesses intact. She'd made Pollux into a complete puppet, but that had been a special instance. Pollux herself was weak anyway, so it didn't matter much how many openings she had. Those who did the fighting were the argonautai. That was why, when awakening a hero, the Goddess made sure to follow the steps to make them realize their powerlessness and lead them to desire strength before granting it to them.

However, that plan would all come crumbling down thanks to the betrayal of just one person. All because of the runaway, Dina, who was supposed to be a part of the Goddess.

It should have been accurate to say that Dina was basically another Alovenus with a copied-over personality and memories. There was no reason to expect a betrayal. However, she had been the cause of everything. Lufas was supposed to have been given a false personality, but all that had done was give Lufas back her body along with knowledge of the other side. All the members of the Twelve Stars, who had been purposefully separated, had gathered once again under Lufas, and instead, the devilfolk were weakened. In addition, she had even managed to have Libra make a mistake by purposefully acting carelessly.

Finally, the hero had been ignored constantly, leading to how he was now. An understanding had been brokered between the hero and Lufas, and now they both stood against the Goddess as enemies. This was something that was never supposed to have happened. If the protagonist didn't confront the final boss, there was no story. Even worse than that would be teaming up with the final boss, saying, "The writer pisses me off, so let's beat her together."

However, all that ended here. Now that the Goddess herself had taken action, the story would be forced to progress. The Goddess/Dina took up a smile, sure of her victory, as she activated her thought manipulation skill. Lufas, likewise sure of her victory, never lost her smile as she stood by and let her opponent act.

The both of them had played their hands, so all that was left was to see whose hand was superior. However, they both shared one thing in common: no matter who came out on top, the hero would be the one to close the curtain.

* *

Sei was confused. He was sure that he had just been in the Ark, trying to calm the people who were inside. He remembered that much. It was debatable whether that actually counted as calming them, but we can just call it that for now.

However, he was now looking at the outside. He was now outside the Ark, watching Virgo as she fought desperately. She was facing the Wood ouroboros, an unprecedented monster that could destroy planets and one strong enough that Virgo would not be able to remain untouched against it. Sei was simply watching, unable to do anything. After all, Virgo was strong while he was weak. He was liable to die just from being outside the Ark, let alone while helping in a fight.

The planet had already lost its original shape, was swallowed by magma, and was suffering countless meteor impacts from the sky. Mountains were pulverized, the land split, the oceans boiled away, and the earthquakes never stopped as many other natural disasters frequently popped up all over. The world was truly ending. This was a time only talked of in myths.

Sei would be lying if he tried to claim he didn't feel miserable. Rather, he always felt miserable due to his inevitable sense of inferiority. It was embarrassing for him to be so weak even though he held the title of hero. To Sei, the feeling of powerlessness was a nosy neighbor he couldn't escape from. Ever since he had witnessed Lufas after coming to this world, that neighbor was constantly posing as his best friend, arm wrapped around his shoulders. On top of all that, this annoying neighbor had been getting bigger and bigger this entire time. Sei had felt especially powerless in Laegjarn, during his fight with Debris.

In a sense, though, he'd managed to give up and accept the difference between himself and Lufas and her group. *They're all walking disasters in human form, so it's only natural to be weaker than them*, he thought. *You have to run from falling meteors. There's no way to win against fighter craft loaded with nuclear missiles. Anybody would surrender when faced with an entire army. None of that is an embarrassment. If a huge monster jumped out of the screen in a movie and started to attack, would anyone actually pick up a sword and fight if they were told to?*

However, there had been one time when that wasn't the case. Sei had fought an enemy he could have defeated but still lost. More than that, he had been taken as a hostage and ended up being a burden to Virgo. In the end, Lufas had intervened, and it had all ended well, but Sei had never cursed his own powerlessness more than at that moment. Before he'd noticed, Sei found himself alone, balled up, surrounded by darkness. A sense of powerlessness shaped like Sei himself started to talk to him.

"I'm so weak. I can't do anything, let alone protect something. What kind of hero even am I? Seriously, it's laughable."

Yeah, you're right. I'm a pathetic, useless hero. A laughingstock.

As if to pile onto this, another sense of powerlessness, this time shaped like Debris, lay his arm across Sei's shoulders.

"Aren't you jealous of those strong people? Aren't you envious? I also can't help but think, *If only I had power.*"

"Shut up!" Sei muttered aloud as he weakly waved his hand, trying to swat it away.

However, that didn't make the sense of powerlessness go away. Sei's feelings of inferiority wouldn't disappear. In fact, those miserable feelings now became Mars, someone Sei didn't recognize, and he promptly started to bounce around in front of Sei mockingly.

"Hey, hey, how do you feel now? How does being a hero who can't do anything feel?"

Wait, who the hell are you? Sei stood up to punch the unfamiliar person in the face before promptly curling back up again.

Light suddenly fell in front of Sei. When he looked up, he found a holy-looking maiden smiling down upon him, who kindly held out her hand as she spoke.

"It will be fine, Sei the Hero. You are not weak. Your power is simply sleeping inside you. Now, take my hand. There is no longer any need for those feelings of powerlessness, inferiority, and pitifulness. You will fly to the battlefield and save everyone."

In that instant, scenes of him after becoming powerful played in Sei's head like a movie. Using the power that suddenly welled up from within, Sei became unstoppable as he leapt into action, and even if he was experiencing trouble, he would simply awaken a hitherto-sleeping power to make a comeback. Then, he would pile great achievement upon great achievement, gain the affection of many cute girls for no reason, and fall into a tug-of-war between them before being able to react.

It was a story with many common developments. *Very common developments. I'd be lying if I said I didn't want that. If I were at least useful, that would be infinitely better than my current state. I've always wondered why I was called to a world like this... I won't say that I haven't imagined a world where I was strong and could make great contributions... Even so...*

After a moment, Sei said, "I see. So you're the Goddess Alovenus."

This weakness is also a part of me, Minamijuuji Sei. No matter how many bitter experiences that fact gives me, I'll just have to swallow them all. Even if we try to avert our eyes, reality does not just go away. And humans cannot run from reality.

"I'm sure I would become strong if I were to take your hand. But, I would lose something precious in exchange. Am I right?"

The Goddess remained silent for a moment. "You do not wish for power?"

"I do. Agh, dammit... I really, really do. I'd pay an arm and a leg for it."

Sei was not like Benetnasch. The Vampire Princess was strong, strong enough to not need the Goddess's help, strong enough to take pride in it. Though they both craved power, their cravings were of opposite natures. Benetnasch had never felt any inferiority until she met Lufas. She'd never felt powerless once in her life. *I am strong, and Maphaahl is stronger, since she can defeat me. So I will use my strength and multiply it*, was how Benetnasch thought. It was simple, and because of that, it was strong. There was no brittleness to it of the sort that weak beings like Sei would have. She'd thrown all that away while she had been in her mother's womb.

However, Sei was different. He was not strong, and he was also terribly delicate. If Benetnasch's heart was like a several-meters-thick superalloy plate,

then Sei's heart was like aluminum foil. It could fold and bend any number of times, and the creases would remain no matter what. It was different from Benetnasch's heart, which would never bend in the first place. However, Sei was still able to softly refuse the Goddess's hand with his heavily creased heart.

"I...don't need it. I'm weak, and honestly just pitiful, but there is something I can do because of that. I... I will not point my gun at the wrong person. I refuse to."

I want power. I really want it. I want it so much I could cry. Actually, I'm still kind of wavering about it. Part of me wants to take back what I said and ask for it, but that can't happen. If I did that, then I would no longer be myself. If I were to betray my own heart for power, I would be the same as an uncontrollable gun. It doesn't matter how powerful a gun is. If it shoots people it shouldn't, then it's worthless.

The Goddess was quiet for a moment. "Hee hee hee hee hee."

Seeing Sei's attitude, the Goddess tossed aside her affectionate smile for one that had her mouth curving like a crescent moon. Then, she started clapping as if praising Sei before she grabbed his jaw.

"I see, I see! As expected of a hero. What a wonderful mindset. I praise you for the strength of your conviction! Yes, I don't hate that kind of attitude, not at all. In fact, I find it wonderful that you're trying to walk on your own two feet, but that's exactly why it's so pitiful... Ah, what a poor child you are. Even though your convictions are so strong, your abilities do not match. That is so extremely unfortunate."

The Goddess didn't listen to one word of what Sei had to say. Instead, she just continued the conversation on her own. She didn't do this out of hate for Sei; she wasn't even mad that she had been refused. In fact, it was the opposite. From the bottom of her heart, she thought, *Ah, what a wonderful child just brimming with bravery! Yes, this is how people have to be! They should walk on their own feet instead of chasing after some wish or clinging to divinity. That is the strength of humanity, as well as its beauty.*

However, that was exactly why she couldn't help but pity Sei. Even though people like him were the most worthy of power, they would always end up

refusing it. *He deserves to be saved. He should be saved! He needs to be saved, needs to be!*

“Be at ease. I will not abandon you. You deserve happiness. Feel free to be a little more selfish. I will forgive you. Allow me to save you from your powerlessness.”

The Goddess was attempting to be a forceful savior. She would not listen to those she was saving; she saved them because she herself wanted to. *He’s wonderful. Truly wonderful, without exaggeration. He deserves happiness. I will make him happy.*

That was the moment Sei realized something. Up until now, he’d thought of the Goddess Alovenus as a villain who was playing around with the world as she pleased. *I was wrong... This goddess... This way-too-awful goddess is just way, way off base.*

“Even if you do not desire it, I will bestow power upon you. Do not worry. When you next awake, it will all be over.”

She was no longer even pretending to listen to what Sei wanted. A puppet with no will would not be much in battle, but that was only if there wasn’t an overwhelming stat difference. Now, however, things would be different. After absorbing not just the ouroboroses but a part of the universe as experience, Sei would become basically invincible. He would be strong enough to defeat Lufas.

In order to force her aid on him, the Goddess lifted Sei’s jaw.

“Heed my order. Refuse her with your own will.”

That was when another power that was already inside Sei intervened, and he shook off the Goddess’s hand.

Sei turned around only to find Lufas there. This was Sei’s inner psyche, though, so there was no way Lufas should have been there. However, she had already worked her control inside Sei. Of course, it wasn’t to actually control him. She had done so in order to protect him from those who would control him regardless of his will.

“Wha—?! L-Lufas?! Why are you here...?” the Goddess asked.

“Hmph. I figured you’d do something like this, Alovenus. It seems you really did try to force power on him... But it’s too bad, isn’t it?”

“Wai— Wait a second! It can’t be... Did you do *that* without his permission?”

Lufas had acted just before Sei had gotten on the Ark. When she’d patted him on the shoulder, she’d activated a skill as a good-luck charm. The skill’s name was Capture. It was one of the basic skills of the Monster Tamer, one that captured the target and put it under the user’s control. However, as one might have been able to tell from how it worked on Parthenos, the target didn’t necessarily have to be a monster. If the user wanted, they could capture humans, or anything else, for that matter.

“This kid, Sei, is already spoken for. As long as you don’t defeat me, you can’t touch him.”

“You fiend!”

The Goddess conveniently ignored her own actions as her shout echoed through the world of Sei’s inner psyche. At the same time, all the experience, or mana, that was flooding towards Sei lost its destination. The hero himself had rejected the script, so this was no longer a story. At this point, the Goddess’s scenario had completely collapsed.

“Why...?”

Alovenus clenched her fists as she looked at Sei. *I don’t get it. I just don’t. Why won’t he accept the power? There’re no demerits to it at all! It’s free. There are no catches. I was just going to give him cheat powers that would allow him to defeat anything in this world! I told him I was going to save him. I said I was going to make things easy. So why was I rejected? Didn’t he admit that he actually wanted it deep down? Didn’t he say that he hated his weakness? So why not just take it? That would solve all his problems. Why would he meaninglessly take the hard, painful choice?*

“Why?! I was trying to save you! It’s hard and painful, isn’t it? Didn’t you want to change your current self?! Then why won’t you take the power?! What’s wrong with jumping on this new power without any thought and using it as your own with pride?!”

Sei considered his response for a moment, then said, “I’m happy that you’d go so far for someone like me, but I don’t need it. If I took it, I would no longer be myself, after all.”

Sei got up weakly before he looked the Goddess straight in the eyes. His eyes were not filled with conviction. Sei wavered a lot, and he was weak as well. He was just a frail boy who, even now, seemed like he was about to collapse. Even so, he was trying to walk on his own, and that was what made him human. Humans didn’t need anything silly like cheats or hacks. Humans were perfectly capable of moving forward without them.

“If I were to take your power, I would then be moving as you desire. If I did that, I would just be a puppet. Even if I did gain power here and now... If you just gave that power to a puppet with no will or ego... Between me and that puppet, what would be the difference?”

“Well, that’s...”

The Goddess couldn’t answer the question. Rather, she knew the answer. However, she couldn’t say it.

There was none. There was no difference.

If Sei had accepted the Goddess’s boon and moved as her script required, then he would just be a puppet. Put bluntly, anyone could fulfill that role. It didn’t need to be Minamijuuji Sei. It could even have been a simple mannequin with no mind at all. However, admitting that would mean shining a light on the Goddess’s own contradictions. It would reveal the fact that she wasn’t saving humans; she just wanted to feel like she was.

Having been confronted with this truth, it was as if everything the Goddess had done up until now was being rejected. In other words, it was a complete and utter defeat, even without a fight.

“Just give it up, Alovenus. It’s your loss.” Lufas seemed as proud as if it were her own accomplishment as she patted Sei’s head. Alovenus had yet to be taken down. She had yet to even be challenged to a real fight. However, she’d just lost to Minamijuuji Sei, even without such things. “This kid Sei and you are just different.”

“I... Are you saying that I am somehow...less than this powerless boy?”

“Lesser or greater is of no matter at your level. As I said, you’re just different. You aren’t even standing on the same stage as this kid.”

Lufas’s thoughts were thus: Imagine a stage. If two men fought on this stage, you would think that the winner was strong. However, if one of them ignored the rules and took to the stage wearing full armor and armed to the teeth with guns and blades, would you still think they were strong? No, you wouldn’t. That person would just be a cheater and a coward. You would consider them weaker than weak, a person who ran away from a fair fight.

“In my opinion, if there were a power in this world that would make anyone the strongest and undefeatable, and if there were someone who could use that power without shame, then that person would be the weakest in the world, one who was unable to actually fight anyone, someone who was just hopelessly weak. Wouldn’t you think so?”

After a moment of silence, Alovenus responded. “What are you trying to say?”

“It’s simple. You have not been saving people. You took people who would have been able to walk on their own, gave them power, and robbed them of that ability. You made them weak.”

“You...*of all people*...are going to say that...?”

“I can say it because I am me. After all, I did that myself in the past,” Lufas admitted.

Two hundred years ago, Lufas had clung to power. She had drowned in it. Using power strong enough to let no one close, she had taken control of the world and filled it with fear. That was exactly why she’d lost and had been sealed. Lufas had not been the strongest being in the world. She may have been the most powerful, but she had also been the weakest. As she was now, she could honestly admit that.

“Do you think so too...? Do you also think that what I was doing was not saving them...?”

There was a moment of silence. Then, Sei said, “I think that you truly are kind.

You truly wanted to save them; at least, that's what I think. But you're too powerful. You can't even understand what it means to be saved. I mean, you've never once been saved yourself, after all. And no one's ever been around to correct you either."

The Goddess was not some sort of villain. She was just deeply mistaken. So why was she mistaken? When had she become mistaken? Why had no one corrected her? All that was proof that she had never once been saved by someone else.

"You are the one that needs saving first, Goddess Alovenus!"

"Grk... Urggh...!"

Alovenus's expression warped and twisted as she looked at Sei. She couldn't understand him. He was the most worthy of being saved; he was a pure human who should have been saved first and foremost. Even so, the boy had just rejected her and told her that she was the one who needed saving.

Just what have I been doing, then? Is he seriously saying that I've spent all this time, this eternity, simply going around in circles fruitlessly? I won't accept it. It's not true!

With that, Alovenus disappeared completely from the world of Sei's inner psyche. For her, this had been an undisguisable, inexcusable rout.

3

"Hmm, seems to me that this is the end," the Wood ouroboros muttered to himself in the midst of battle, seeming to have given up.

He had not yet been defeated. Though he was a little disadvantaged, there was still room for a comeback. However, he still looked up to the sky, seeming to have realized his own end. He could tell that the gigantic amount of mana that had made up the Ouroboroses of Heaven and Earth had moved somewhere. The Fire ouroboros, who was already pretty much dead anyway, had started to turn into particles as well. The Wood ouroboros figured it was

only a matter of time for him.

“What?” asked Pollux.

“The curtains have closed...” the Ouroboros of Wood said. “The curtains on this story of ours, that is.”

The end was here. It was the end of the world, as well as the destruction of the story that lay beyond that. The time had finally come. After so many ridiculous events, the plot had gone so far off the rails that it could no longer be considered a story. All that was left was for her to tear the script apart.

Though he was loath to end this encounter with his children, the Wood ouroboros still had one last job to complete before he disappeared. He looked at Pollux and Castor. Then, a faint light emitted from the ouroboros’s eye, which entered the twins’ bodies.

“Th-This is...?” Castor asked, trailing off.

“I-I can feel the power...” Pollux paused. “I’m overflowing with strength!”

Pollux’s SP was infinite once again, and her stats had gone up as well. On top of that, there was now something in her skill column that she’d never seen before—the skills of the ouroboroses, the arbitrators of the world, had been added to her list. At the same time, the Wood ouroboros’s body weakened, and he started to dissolve into particles of light.

“Wh-What did you do?!”

“I transferred as much of my power and authority as an ouroboros as I could to you two before severing our connection. With this, you two are no longer my avatars... Even if I disappear, I will not take you two with me.”

The Wood ouroboros’s mouth twisted upwards as he grinned at them.

Seeing that, Pollux realized something. *As I thought. He alone was somehow strange from the start...* He alone had never wanted to kill Pollux and the others. He had simply been messing around with them. In the end, all he’d done was tease and play around with his children. If it hadn’t been for that, the *Argo* would have been long sunk. In actuality, there had been many chances for the Wood ouroboros to have done so. To him, Pollux’s rebellion and everything else

had been akin to young children play-fighting with sticks. It was something to smile warmly at, not kill over.

“Don’t you mess with me!” yelled Pollux. “We’re your enemies! Why did you...?!”

“Because I was happy. The two of you, who should have just been my clones, started to hold your own thoughts and opinions, and in the end, you chose a different path from me... That made me so happy, and seeing all that was so much fun...”

Ever since Pollux’s birth, the Wood ouroboros had been watching over her. Even through his slumber, he could feel her pain and anguish, and now, she stood in front of him as an enemy. She had chosen her future with her own will. As a parent, there was no way that wouldn’t fill him with joy.

“The Goddess’s story has ended, so from now on, the story is all yours.” The Wood ouroboros paused. “Sorry for never doing anything befitting of a parent. Live well, you two.”

“This isn’t a joke! What are you even saying this late in the game?! If you say that... I... I... I never... You...”

I never even got to call you father.

Pollux didn’t know if those words had gotten through to the Wood ouroboros or not. Her enemy and parent turned into particles of light and disappeared fully, vanishing in front of Pollux and the others anticlimactically. All that was left were his last words.

“How amusing...”

After watching him fully disappear, Pollux fell to her knees.

“What the hell. That’s so one-sided...” she eventually said. “If that’s how you felt, why didn’t you just say so in the beginning?! Why did you have to suddenly start sounding like a good person at the end...? How am I even supposed to react?!”

“He probably didn’t want to have his determination waver. I...kind of understand how the Wood ouroboros, our father, thought,” Castor admitted.

“Brother...”

“Men are just selfish creatures.”

Castor rested his hand on his little sister’s head, stroking her hair in an attempt to console her.

With this, all the ouroboroses were done for. The Fire ouroboros was the last one left, screaming, “Nooo! I don’t wanna disappeaaaaarr!” in an unsightly fit as he turned into light. However, he was quickly dealt the finishing blow by Benetnasch.

Mizgarz was dying, the ouroboroses had disappeared, and the story was no more. All that was left was a brawl that would be a part of no story. The last rites were up to the Goddess and the Black-Winged Conqueror.

As Castor kindly comforted his crying little sister, he quietly looked towards the direction in which his master probably was.

* *

Kill stealing is one way of grieving in MMOs that is viewed as an active problem. The act of kill stealing specifically refers to when a third party suddenly swoops in to finish off a weakened enemy, thus taking the experience, materials, and money dropped by defeating it. Of course, doing so is considered extremely rude and not something good people should do.

That was what I had just done. I’d changed the directionality of the experience, or mana, that was trying to flow into the kid, Sei. Since he had refused what had originally been intended for him, there was no one who had a claim over the mana. Therefore, I activated Aigokeros’s skill, and all the experience flooded into me.

“A— Whoa, whoa, whoa... Level 4300... 4600... 4800... 5000... I-It’s still going up... How far are you planning to go?!”

Given that this was experience from the ouroboroses, which were agents of divinity, the amount was on an entirely different scale from normal monsters. Not to mention, there were four of them. The Wood ouroboros was weirdly light on mana for some reason, but my level still shot up like a rocket. *No, wait a second.* It seemed the Fire ouroboros’s experience hadn’t come to me, so I

only had three ouroboroses' worth, but... *Well, whatever.* Even then, my level reached 5100. I'd gotten a big boost, and it was still going up.

Now then, how will you respond, Goddess? You won't be able to deal with me while in Dina's body anymore. You get it now, don't you? The only way to stop me is to fight me yourself.

"Exgate."

As a finishing touch, I activated Exgate, setting the entire world as the target. This world was already done for. It would soon disappear, so before that happened, I had to evacuate all the living things left here to the other side for a while. I was pretty sure that after all this, no one would insist on staying.

As expected, I succeeded in sending them off, only leaving a small number of people still with me. From what I could sense, those who had stayed behind were Benetnasch and Orm. Oh, and the Twelve Heavenly Stars and Terra.

Benet and Orm flew through the air before landing next to me, and a little bit behind them came the Twelve Stars. For some reason, Benetnasch was now level 2700. *So it was you who took the Fire ouroboros's experience! I suppose I should have expected it. As I thought... She also has the right to challenge the Goddess.*

Orm was level 1500. It seemed he had also grasped how to break through the limits of the world.

"It seems I'm not alone, Alovenus."

"Grrr... Anyone and everyone is just ignoring the rules I set..."

I reached into a pocket and touched the Key to Reach the Heavens. It was about time for it to take the stage. *I'm going to use it, Dina. The final hand that you prepared, that is. With this, I'll put the king in check.*

For a long while, the Goddess said nothing. "Yes, fine. I get it. I get it already..." the Goddess/Dina muttered before heaving a sigh, seeming to have given up.

Then, she looked back up, staring at me with a bored look. At this point, she was out of pieces. We had crushed every single move she could make, so now,

things were at an end. Having lost all chances of winning, she had no choice but to flip over the board.

The ground crumbled away, and finally, Mizgarz was no more.

It exploded.

Our mother planet no longer existed, but in the midst of the explosion, we still faced off against each other, unmoved. Sagittarius reacted by putting up a shield, creating a membrane bubble of air so that no one suffocated.

“This universe was a failure. To be honest, I find tossing away something I’ve taken so much time to raise like this hard to swallow, but there’s nothing for it. I’ll just have to take another couple hundred million years to build up another one.”

The Goddess/Dina was no longer smiling. Instead, she just seemed endlessly tired and apathetic. The curtains had closed, and now the stage would disappear. I was sure that she had put no thought towards what was next. Of course she hadn’t; she didn’t expect anyone to survive the destruction of the universe, and she was right in that expectation.

“End the World,” the Goddess/Dina muttered.

The universe started to contract. The stars and planets all began flying at us at once, or rather, they’d been pulled towards us, as the universe itself was getting smaller.

However, I did not move. Similarly, neither Benet nor Orm even twitched. Though I hadn’t told them anything, they’d probably figured that I had some sort of solution to this. If that was the case, I had to live up to their expectations.

“That reminds me. You wanted me to return this, didn’t you? That’s fine. I don’t need it anymore. Here you go. Please, share your fate with this universe.”

After spitting out those last words, Dina fell as if her strings had been cut. I caught her and immediately activated heaven-arts. Not even she would be able to survive if left alone in space, after all. As the shrinking that heralded the end of the universe continued, I lightly slapped Dina’s cheek, having finally gotten her back.

After a moment she murmured, “Mnwha? Ah, Miss Lufas.”

“So you’re awake, you sleepyhead.”

“That’s... Ah, right. So you did it.”

Even while still groggy from her slumber, Dina managed to look around and figure out what was going on. She was right. Everything had gone well so far. From here, Benet, Orm, and I would be strutting our stuff. Unfortunately, all the others without the right to challenge could not participate.

I took out the Key to Reach the Heavens and activated it. When I did so, the ownership of the universe shifted to me. This universe had already been tossed aside, so it was free for me—the one with the key—to claim, though I still wasn’t able to stop its destruction, of course.

“U-Um, Miss Lufas! We’re totally calm, but what should we do about this? I-It’s all happening so fast!”

“Calm down, Aries. The universe is just going to end a little,” I said.

“Whaaaaa?!”

I laughed and activated a skill, one of Aigokeros’s. This universe was the magic of the Goddess, and now that she’d abandoned it, it was mine. So naturally, it was within my right to absorb all of it.

“Gather to me, Goddess’s power!”

This universe was a magic spell, and spells were made of mana. Mana was a piece of the Goddess’s power, as well as experience itself. This all made a certain thing possible. I would fuse myself with the universe and reach the realm of divinity.

Yes, this was my final move. The plan was to absorb the universe the Goddess had left behind, reach the same domain as her, punch her, and send her flying. Also, I wasn’t the only one absorbing the universe. Thanks to the effects of Sagittarius’s skill Ascella, Benet and Orm were sharing in the experience.

This was the right to challenge. Those still fettered by the limits of the world would never move beyond level 1000, no matter how much experience they took in. That was why being able to break through that limit was a prerequisite.

“Well done up to this point, my Twelve Stars. From here on out, we will be going without you. Please, believe in our victory and wait for us.”

I activated Exgate, the other side of which connected to the Ark, and created an escape route for them. From here on, the only ones to move forward would be Benet, Orm, and I. However, Aigokeros and Pisces protested vehemently at this.

“No, my lord! We will accompany you to the end! Please, use us!” said Aigokeros.

“We are of the same opinion! As it is, We will just be the same barely there Pisces as always!”

I paused. “That was...heartfelt, wasn’t it?”

“Of course it was!” yelled Pisces.

Aigokeros and Pisces were rather unique among the Twelve Stars. The two of them had not broken through the limit. However, they had the ability to come with me to the final battle. Aigokeros became pure mana and fused with me. On top of that, Pisces activated his skill and possessed me. Probably due to Aigokeros’s influence, I sprouted another pair of wings that resembled his and, strangely, had become much more ominous.

“Miss Lufas, I...”

Aries also tried to join, but I pushed him away.

“No. Don’t come.”

Unfortunately, it would be impossible for him. At only level 1000, he wouldn’t even be able to look at the Goddess, who could destroy universes just by existing. He would be rendered nonexistent in an instant. Regrettably, the world beyond this one would only be for those with the right to challenge. However, I may have been a bit harsh with my choice of words. I stroked Aries’s hair and smiled at him, trying to give him peace of mind.

“It’ll be fine. This time, I’ll make sure to come back. I won’t leave you all like I did before.”

“It’s a promise, okay?! Make sure you come back!” Scorpius said, clinging on

to what I had said for dear life.

Libra picked Scorpius up by the nape and dragged her towards the gate.

“Hey, come on! What do you think you’re doing, Libra?!”

“We are in the way, so I have judged that it is best for us to make a quick exit. Good luck, master.”

Libra and Scorpius were the first to disappear through the gate. The next to evacuate were Pollux and her group, still on the *Argo*. Then, after exchanging some words with his father, Terra flew towards the gate as well, and he was soon followed by the other members of the Twelve Stars, one by one. Finally, Dina was the only one left.

“Miss Lufas... I believe in you. I believe you’ll come back to us!”

“Yeah, I’ll be back soon. Wait for me.”

After receiving my promise, Dina left this universe. Now, it was just Benet, Orm, and I. We had also nearly finished absorbing the universe. *Our levels are... No, I guess numbers like that don’t mean anything anymore.* At this point, levels would not be a good indicator of anything.

“Now, let’s go! First, we start off with a light greeting; then we smash her in the face!”

“Sounds good. Make sure you sync up with me, Maphaahl.”

In order to signal the start of battle, I fired off a spell first.

“Prophet Who Nocks the Golden Bow.”

It was the strongest buff the Sun attribute had. On top of that, Benet followed up with Maiden Who Shoots a Silver Arrow, and there wasn’t only one arrow. Orm also cast the spell.

Now then, Goddess. Are you ready? You are no longer a player who just manipulates the game from safety. It’s time for the behind-the-scenes brawl.

“Fire!”

On my signal, two silver arrows flew off, literally piercing through space. The wall between dimensions broke, and a hole formed. We flew towards the hole,

and all together, we escaped this universe. Then, we came upon a pure-white world that seemed to stretch on into infinity. Finally, we came face-to-face with the Goddess, who stood there dazed and in disbelief.

4

This is a story from long, long ago, so long that the person it is about doesn't even remember. In this story, no one was at fault, but no one was in the right either. She was just too powerful, unfortunately. That was really it.

Ever since she was born, or possibly even before that, she was too powerful. She herself knew that something was gravely off with herself. There was no fantasy in the world, just days of never-ending, unmerciful reality. People had no superpowers, and they could not use magic. Those who claimed they could on television were just those good at faking it. Fortune-tellers and prophets were all simply people extrapolating from the past to guess at the future, and none of them could actually do what they claimed. That was why they would strut around like a peacock reminding everyone of their achievement whenever they managed to be right, but when they were wrong, they would craftily pretend that they didn't remember ever making any such prediction.

People could not fly through the air, nor could they live without air. People could not produce fire from their hands either, nor could they combat aging. That was why all of that was confined to the realms of fantasy and fiction, only to be told of in fairy tales. All of this was simply a fleeting dream that could only exist in fiction, or it should have been.

She alone was different. In this world with no dreams and no fantasy, she alone had dreams; she alone was fantastic. She could use magic, and she had superpowers. She could fly through the air, survive being in space, produce fire from her hands, and if she wanted, she could stop growing at any time. She could even become younger at will. She had once tried burning herself to ash as an experiment, but even then, she'd never lost consciousness. All that had happened was that she'd lost her body. With her consciousness still remaining, she could get her body back in an instant if she wanted. Even life and death

bent to her will.

Not even she herself knew why someone like her was able to be born. In fact, there was probably no reasoning behind it. After all, would anyone be able to answer if someone asked them if there was a reason the universe itself existed? No, surely not. There would probably be some scholars or religious figures who would try to answer the question with some convoluted logic, but without any proof, it would still be the same as if they hadn't answered at all.

There are always things that people cannot explain, as well as some things that will probably go unexplained forever, such as how the universe was created. If asked, the majority would probably answer with the big bang, but that invited the next question. Then what caused the big bang to occur? At this point, most would become unable to answer, but a minority of smart people would probably attempt to reason through an answer. They might say that something happened, or that there was some kind of coincidence, or maybe that some kind of component clicked into place. However, that would then invite another question. Where did such a thing come from?

By repeating this cycle, the conclusion that the beginning was nothing would eventually be reached. However, reaching that conclusion would erase all meaning. If there was nothing, then there would be no coincidence or component, and there would be no universe. Wouldn't the nothingness simply continue for eternity? After going that far, most likely no one would have a rebuttal, since this would be reaching into the area of philosophy.

Ultimately, there would always be unexplainable things if one inquired far enough, and she was probably one of them. She was something that could not be explained by reason. In fact, there might have been no specific reason behind her at all. She was born from a completely failed place where human intellect could not reach and illogicality and inconsistency ruled. She may have been born because humans imagined God, or maybe humans were born because she had imagined them. She may have come from the universe itself, or it was possible that the universe came from her. Not even she herself knew which had come first. After all, she currently stood in a place where a sense of time could not take hold. She both felt that she could have been alive before the universe had existed and that she could have come after the universe had

ended.

What kind of thing am I? Why was I born? Why do I exist? Not even she could answer those questions.

In the end, it was probably all a coincidence, just like the universe that had sprung from nothing. Just like how a green planet called Earth happened to have been formed, and how life happened to have been born on it. Just like how fire and water existed and how time had begun as well. Just as how all things were born or formed, she was surely born as the concept of herself.

In other words, she herself was some sort of phenomenon, something that had even less of a chance of happening than the universe, a singularity that was able to be born and walk around on Earth. The biggest glitch ever to spring from the world.

She might have been the manifestation of all the unrealistic things that had been unnecessary when reality itself had been created. Maybe all the concepts and notions that had not been created in the world had taken human form and been born as her. This coincidence was basically impossible. It was as if someone had scattered computer parts all throughout the ocean, and they somehow came together and were assembled into a complete PC. There was an almost zero percent chance of it happening. However, she was born from such a happenstance. The impossible became possible.

Humans are beings who march towards death from the moment they are born. They lived with the fear of death their entire lives. However, she did not understand such things, and so she pitied humanity. No matter how much humans fantasized, they could never escape the cage that is reality. The only time they were allowed to dream was in their sleep.

How pitiful humans are, she thought.

At the same time, she grew angry. *Why does God not save these poor people? Look at how hard they're praying; it's almost comical. They're all wishing not to die. Why doesn't God reach out a hand to save them? Why, why, why?* Her questions were never-ending. *Why is the world filled with so much suffering? Why do people make so many mistakes? Why do they kill and hate each other? People are scared, so they take up weapons. Though they seek peace, they*

cannot put down their weapons for fear of being attacked by others with weapons.

As long as the concept of conflict exists in people's hearts, then fear will not disappear either. If someone didn't have any means to protect themselves, they would just be killed, so peace and weapons go hand in hand. Deadly weapons and peace... Though those two things are antitheses and will never mix, they've become synonymous. Just like that, people accrue weapons, gradually become stronger, and most likely they eventually fall, burned by the weapons that made them too strong.

People recognize the inevitability of this future, at least somewhat. That is why there are so many postwar, postapocalyptic novels and stories in general. However, they still are unable to let go. If they do, they will be destroyed by others who haven't, after all. There would be no protecting themselves. So, wouldn't this be the point where God should step in? If a child picks up a toy that would hurt them, is it not the job of the parent to take the toy away? However, God is doing nothing.

These poor, unstable creatures need strict guidance! But no matter how they pray or wail, God pretends not to see. No, he surely isn't even looking. She paused. If God really exists, then he is heartless.

At some point, she started to think like that. After years, decades, centuries of living amongst people, the dissatisfaction she had towards whoever had made this world grew ever stronger each time she came to know of the suffering that she was divorced from.

Living things die. They leave behind children as proof they were alive, and they continue to pass the baton to the next generation. The reason living things exist is in order to leave behind children. They lived in order to leave behind proof of their life. That was probably a necessary evolution in order to survive. It had to be done in order to allow creatures to adapt to their surroundings and maintain diversity. By having generations quickly change out, resources were not wasted.

There were many other reasons why this was done, and she understood that. However, she still felt it cruel. Because they were gifted with knowledge,

humans all died while crying about not wanting to die. The will of this world was for everything that lived to die. There was no salvation; from birth, the world itself told them to die, to not survive. Why was the world made this beautiful but also this cruel?

At some point, she went out on a journey to save people. From the sick to the wounded to the suffering, she reached out the hand of salvation to all those she laid eyes on, continuing to pick them up. She was called a savior, a saint, and a goddess. She saved, and she saved, and she saved, but it was hopeless. There was no end. After all, people were made to die. In the end, it was as if she'd never saved them at all.

Because the world had been made this way, she was not solving the underlying problem. In order to save this world—in order to free everybody from their suffering—she had to flip the world over completely. That was why she decided to change the foundations.

Reaching the place was easy; she simply flew through the sky and space so fast that light was not even close to catching up, until she reached the end of the universe. It was impossible for a human-sized lump of matter to surpass the speed of light. Even if it did happen, it would be disastrous. However, none of that mattered to her. After all, she was a singularity. She was unbound by the laws of this universe, and she contained multitudes of different laws and providences within her. She simply rewrote the common sense of the universe, applied what laws were convenient to her, and forced them into place.

Normally, cooling water would turn it into ice. However, if she said that the water would become fire instead, cooling water would then produce fire. Why? Who knows? She was able to do it, and that was that. The question of why never entered her mind at all.

“I can do it.”

That was the truth, and that was all that mattered.

If someone saw the entirety of space at once, they would see that it resembled a brain, and that outside of that, there was nothing. There was just white that seemed to stretch on forever, and there was no god to be found. It was just endless nothingness.

“Ah... As I thought. There is no god.”

She was disappointed at that. The salvation that humanity believed in didn't exist. There was no fantasy, and there was no dream. All there was was merciless nothingness.

I see. No wonder no one can be saved. No wonder no one stretched a hand out, no matter how people prayed. I mean, there's no one here. But from now on, things will be different. I can save them. I can stretch my hand out. If there is no god, then I will become god. If they pray, then I can be like the gods from their dreamed-up myths, living beside them and listening to their wishes. After all, I can do anything.

“Okay, it's time to change things. I will save them. It's the end of this world with no god. From now on, I will love all of you. I will save all of you. From this moment, the true world begins.”

She laughed and was innocently happy.

From now on, I'll be god. I can save everyone. I can make them happy. It'll be fine. I will never abandon humanity. I will definitely make them all happy. I will save them!

A prisonlike world with no special powers is just boring, so let me split off another world. I'll use a piece of my power—mana—to make a universe, populate it with stars and planets, and invite everyone there. People will be able to fly through the air and use magic, and I'll even let them have ESP. I won't put any fetters on evolution. If they don't want to die, then they can live for thousands or tens of thousands of years if they like. I'll even let them be immortal!

That's right. It will be sad if they just disappear after death, so I'll just create souls. That way, they can be reborn as many times as they like. I'll also prepare a place—Valhalla, I'll call it—to accept people after death and allow them to be reborn. I'll trap all the bad concepts, like violence, life spans, hating others, and bringing people down, in bad mana, and separate that to make a wonderful world where everyone can live in peace.

Everything started with a wonderful idea. She simply had a pure desire to make people as happy as possible. However, her ideals weakened at some

point, buried under vast years of time. She forgot what she'd set out to do. All that remained was the desire to make people happy, but it had been bent and twisted. Finally, all that was left was rampant goodwill left beyond the edges of space, continuing to comically dance alone forever and ever without forgetting the ideal of making people happy but making grave mistakes on how to go about it.

5

When had it all started? Not even she could remember at this point. She just barely remembered that she used to be a person, but that fact had been erased from history the moment she became divine. She was the only one who knew that she used to be human, and there wasn't even proof of that. It was so long ago that, as for what kind of twists and turns had led up to her current state, not even she remembered, but there was no doubt that she'd rewritten existing space and become a god in the end.

After that, the first thing she did after becoming god was to create an entirely new universe. Next, she created a planet with a suitable environment for creatures to live in before trying her hand at creating life. However, this was where she stumbled. She housed enough destructive power to make short work of the universe itself, but she had no ability to create life.

Why? Because to her, life was far too fragile. It was far more transient than what she was able to handle. The act of composing a life was so complicated, like a puzzle that needed to be completed to move forward. However, even touching one of the parts of the puzzle was hard for her. As she was, even if she wanted to create life, she would come out of the endeavor with nothing. With no other choice, she decided to move the living things she wanted from her former world to the one she'd made—named Mizgarz—little by little, and have them propagate and flourish in the new environment.

Time passed, and when species with similar intellect and forms to humans on Earth eventually sprouted forth, she was so happy she danced a little jig. She loved humanity. If they wanted something, she answered, and if they wished

for something, she gave it to them. That never changed, even after someone ate the forbidden fruit filled with evil concepts that she'd forbidden them from ever touching.

I love you all. I want you to be happy. I will surely lead you to happiness! With that wish, she granted humanity everything they wished for.

But... Why? I wonder why? The more I give, the more I fulfill their wishes...

Humanity's standard level of happiness and fulfillment continued to go up, and the higher it went, the less they were able to feel happy.

* *

This was the Endpoint, a place outside of the universe Alovenus had named. It was the final point of everything, as well as the beginning. All worlds and all timelines connected to this place.

Universes here were something like programs installed on a computer. There was a lot of saved data, each datum being a separate parallel world. Once someone left a universe, they would find countless more universes, or programs, all collated within folders. However, if they then looked past those folders, they would find that the folders were themselves contained in more folders. Past that, many more like them would be found if someone were to leave the computer itself.

The place Alovenus ruled over was something like this. Everything connected to this space, a world only for Alovenus that no one else should have been able to enter.

Lufas and the other two's vision was smothered in white that seemed to go on forever. There was no point in wondering how far the place stretched, for it stretched on endlessly. This place was quite literally infinite. In opposition to the never-ending white, there were black points in several places, each of which was a universe.

Mizgarz itself was only a small part of one of these universes. It was nothing more than a small planet, existing quietly amongst many other planets inside a single galaxy amidst clusters of other galaxies.

This was the definition of completely altered scales. It didn't matter how

monstrous Lufas and her group was; that only applied to their small celestial body. Those accolades held no power this far away. At least, that was what Alovenus had thought. That was why she was currently the most shocked she'd ever been, so much so that her body physically shivered. Not only had her sanctuary been invaded, there were three of them. They were all arrayed before her, looking very determined. There was no concept of size in this space, as once Lufas and the other two had crossed through the universe itself, they had become equal to Alovenus. They, who should have been nothing but specks in a vast universe, had undoubtedly come as true enemies.

“So you're Alovenus... It's our first time meeting like this, isn't it?”

On the other hand, not even Lufas could hide her nerves at finally meeting the Goddess and basking in her sheer presence.

In pure looks, she was the spitting image of Dina. She had the exact same face, but her hair color was different. Instead, her hair gradually shifted to gold, starting around the nape of her neck. Even then, their looks were basically the same. She wore a white dress with a blue cape draped over it and was haloed by light.



As for her stats, Lufas tried looking at them but quickly realized it was pointless. Her stats screen did come up. It did. However, there was just a continuous string of nines, stretching all the way through this infinite space. Just a single glance was enough for Lufas to realize how useless it was trying to calculate Alovenus's abilities. *For now, it should be enough to just think that she has stats so astronomically high you'd only ever see them in star charts.*

"I'm surprised. I never thought you'd be able to come here."

"I'm sure you didn't."

Though Lufas acted calm, internally she was thinking that she was the one who was astounded. *I figured she'd be different... I thought I understood that she would be in a whole other dimension, but...* Her thoughts stalled momentarily. *Now that we're here, I can only be in awe of how huge she is. So each one of those tiny black things in here—every single last one of them—is a universe? Now this is what you call inflation.* Finally, Lufas had reached the highest point.

"Am I right in assuming the reason you're here is to request a change to the script?"

"If you know that much already, then this will be quick. Even if you say no, we'll just force you to rewrite it."

In response, Alovenus asked if her script was really wrong. "Is it really that bad to have a common enemy for all humanity to rally against?"

Of course the world might have seemed harsh to those living in it. Alovenus knew that much, at least. *However, that harshness is perfect. The pain is a good thing. Why? Because that's what humanity actually needs.*

"Not even I would make the world like this on a sudden whim. At first, I thought that saving people and giving them everything they needed was the path to happiness."

Alovenus closed her eyes sadly as she spoke of the past. *Yes... I used to believe that continuing to save people, to give them what they desired, would bring about happiness. But I was wrong. If all you do is fulfill people, their sense of happiness and fulfillment will go numb. In a world with nothing but peace,*

people will be unable to recognize that peace for what it is.

For example, pretend there was a cake that needed to be given to two children who were having a birthday. One was poor, so poor that they had never once celebrated their birthday and struggled to have enough to eat day-to-day. The other was wealthy, able to eat as much cake as they wanted, and for every birthday, that child received an extra large birthday cake. Imagine that both of these children received the same cake. Only one of them would feel great happiness. *What a delicious cake*, the first child would say. *This is the first time I've ever gotten a birthday cake!* However, the other one would express nothing but anger. *Are you kidding me? It's my birthday! What's up with this tiny cake?*

Isn't it strange? Though they had been given a cake of the same size and flavor, the poor child would feel lucky while the rich child would feel unlucky.

Why does something like this happen? Because of the average level of happiness. The poor child's average level is low, so a small cake seems like the gift of a lifetime. Meanwhile, the rich child's average level is high, and they no longer feel happiness over something like a small cake. For that child, happiness has become such a given thing that they are unable to recognize their good fortune. Yes, the happiness people feel is not on an empirical scale. It varies greatly depending on the surroundings and circumstances.

"It's no good to simply give people happiness. If all they experience is peace, they'll just rot."

Back when Alovenus had done nothing but save people, the world was nothing short of a paradise. There was no starvation and no pain. Everything was dealt with by the Goddess, and not even the concept of a life span existed. Humanity was divorced from sickness and death, and they were able to receive anything they wanted. They were swaddled in the Goddess's love in a world with no war and no wealth disparity. It truly was a divine Eden, one that idealists dreamt of but was impossible in reality, the picture of a golden age.

Alovenus truly had once managed to realize what most people imagined heaven to be like. However, there was no limit to human greed. They took as much as they could, and the more she gave, the more their average level of

happiness went up.

It's only natural to be given things. It's only natural to be saved. Once those thoughts took hold of people, their happiness became too commonplace, and they were unable to recognize their fortune. They simply accepted the Goddess's gifts while being unable to feel joy, and if even the littlest thing did not go their way, they became unhappy. It was a world where no one had to do anything, because even if they didn't, the Goddess would take care of it. They didn't walk by themselves, because if they wished for it, the Goddess whisked them anywhere. They didn't stand, because there was no need to. Neither would they lift things nor even eat on their own. They simply existed in this paradise with no hardship, and because everything was granted to them, they did nothing. Humans could just lie down on some soft patch of grass or even a bed gifted to them by the Goddess.

Seeing humanity like that, Alovenus lamented everything. *No, this isn't how things should be. This isn't the world I wanted to make. I didn't want to make people like this. Those people... They were trying their best to live in such a painful world. They tried their best, but even then, they weren't saved. They were so pitiful that I wanted to save them myself. I just wanted to make those people happy, but this... This is just... Aren't they just puppets?*

Alovenus didn't understand. *I'm not wrong. I've been doing the right thing this entire time! But then, why...? Why has humanity degraded this much? Why are their hearts so frozen?*

At that point, she looked over at her original world in order to grab a breather. There, she saw something unbelievable—a single child struggling through poverty, feeling massively happy over eating a chunk of hard bread that couldn't be described as delicious even out of pure flattery. Alovenus's people would not even look at such food. They consumed much better bread as if it was their birthright, sometimes even throwing pieces away after just a single bite. However, none of those people felt happiness doing so. After all, it had all become natural to them.

Citizens of countries at war felt happiness over only some small moments of peace. This was something completely foreign to the Goddess's people. That sight was the most overwhelming to Alovenus.

“It seems you’ve all gotten the wrong idea,” the Goddess said. “I don’t actually want to make people unhappy. In fact, it’s the opposite... I am trying to lead them to happiness. I *want* them to be happy.”

I was wrong. Alovenus had realized her mistake, and she understood that what humanity needed was not peace and pure happiness. *Ah, right. It’s so obvious. Sugar is sweet, but anybody would come to hate sugar if they had candy covered in it every day. It’s so delectable because of its scarcity. Sweet things taste best after eating something spicy, but if someone has only ever eaten sweet things, then they probably don’t even think that they’re sweet anymore. Happiness is just like that. There needs to be a difference for people to feel it. If someone is experiencing rock bottom, then even the smallest things will fill them with happiness.*

I can make people happy! At the very least, I can make things much better than this rotten paradise. They think nothing, do nothing; they only sit still and wait for things to be given to them. How is that happiness? How is that human? People are human because they stand up to adversity and advance on their own feet. That is what makes humanity beautiful. Yes. It is people I want to make happy, not puppets.

“That can’t be... So you are saying that everything you have forced onto the world was done for the sake of humanity, Goddess?!” Orm, who’d had the longest relationship with the Goddess out of those there, raised his voice in anger. “That this was all done with goodwill instead of malice...? That you only released such misfortune into the world in order to make humanity happy?! Such a reason was why I was forced onto the path of a jester for so long?!”

This isn’t funny... What the hell?! I don’t intend to play the victim here. I lent a hand to the Goddess’s script, after all, and I made many suffer. I won’t cover that up. But that reason... To think it was for such a ridiculous reason! Pollux’s tears and all the lives of the heroes I’d killed were all for this...?

Orm was silent for some time. “This... All those people I killed...! I... I... All those noble lives, just for this? Their futures, I...”

“You should not grieve, Ouroboros of the Moon. They were happy. It was a lie, but the fact that they were able to exchange their lives for peace

undoubtedly gave them serenity and fulfillment.”

“STOP FUCKING WITH MEEEEEE!”

Orm flew into a rage, swinging at Alovenus.

This happened precisely because he’d continued killing so many for so long. All their futures, their happy moments, had been stolen by him for such a worthless reason. More than anyone else, the one Orm couldn’t forgive the most was himself; he’d never even asked the Goddess why he was doing such things.

Now, he’d broken through the limits of his level, and Orm swung his fist at the Goddess with newfound strength that was enough to destroy clusters of galaxies at once. His fist surpassed the speed of light, and its destructive power was impossible to calculate. At this point, it would be downplaying the level of his attack to simply call it a “blow”; it was the very concept of pure destruction made manifest.

Such an attack headed for the Goddess, but it seemed far too easy for her to stop, as she simply deployed an invisible wall.

“You are currently wracked by grief, Ouroboros of the Moon. You are tortured by the weight of your sins...” the Goddess said, pausing. “But worry not. If you are suffering, that means you cannot go lower. From here on out, you can become happy. Now, rejoice!”

“YOOOOOOUUUU...!”

“I will never abandon my subjects. I wish for people’s happiness from the bottom of my heart, so...”

Alovenus smiled and held her hand towards Orm.

Lufas and Benetnasch reacted simultaneously, launching spells from their palms. However, the three of them were all transported to some sort of space right next to a group of stars several thousands of times bigger than the Sun.

“For tomorrow’s happiness that will surely come. Fall to despair, world!”

It was a hypernova. Explosions large enough to engulf the entire universe in flame occurred one after the other, with the three of them at the epicenter.

After passing through the Exgate, the Ark arrived in orbit behind the moon. Aigokeros had destroyed the moon, but this was a different one, the moon of another world—that of Earth.

While watching the blue planet from inside the Ark, Virgo leaked out a sound that was neither admiration nor joy.

“So all that’s left is to believe and wait, huh? To think we’d be considered too weak for the finale,” Castor muttered to himself self-deprecatingly as he clenched his fists.

The frustration he felt was shared amongst all the members of the Twelve Heavenly Stars who had been left behind, as well as Terra. They had planned to fight their way through, no matter what battles they were faced with. They would have even been fine with dying. However, this battle was now at a level where they were unable to even stand on the battlefield, so they had been forced to sit and wait. Leon was probably twice as frustrated as the others, since he had always been so proud of his strength.

“Dina, how do you think this fight is going to go?” Libra asked, attracting everyone’s gazes. “You are the only one who truly knows how powerful the Goddess is.”

The only one here who truly knew the Goddess was her avatar, Dina, and though she seemed uncomfortable, Dina still relayed what she knew.

“If... If I were to try to write down the Goddess’s stats here and now, there would be a swath of small nines stretching off to the end of space until it wrapped back around here. That is how unmeasurable her power is.”

“Meaning?”

“Normally, it would be utterly impossible to win. That is why she is a god,” Dina declared.

Scorpius grabbed her collar with enough strength to strangle Dina, but Libra quickly stepped in to free her.

“Don’t you dare! There’s no way Miss Lufas will lose!”

“That was why I said ‘normally,’ meaning the methods that Miss Lufas used were not normal,” Dina muttered after a moment, as she fixed her collar.

Scorpius could not be reasoned with while she was worked up, so Libra handed her over to Leon, who restrained Scorpius, a reluctant look on his face.

“She took in the power of the universe, which was the Goddess’s spell, allowing her to reach the same place as the Goddess... That was the plan that we thought of. The Goddess does not have any weaknesses or easily understood methods of beating her. There isn’t even any well-crafted gimmick to allow her to be defeated... The only way is to forcefully and crudely overpower her.”

How much better would things have been if there was an easily understood weak point, like some sort of object that would greatly weaken the Goddess if destroyed? Or a convenient item that would suppress her abilities? Or some sort of skill that would be very effective at specifically killing the Goddess for some reason? Or a sword that was hilariously super-effective on the Goddess? If there was anything like that, their chances of winning would have gone up an untold amount, but there wasn’t. None of those existed.

The Goddess was not completely flawless. She was, in fact, somewhat dim-witted and full of openings. It was not hard to trick her. However, that did not stop her from being the absolute strongest, a being standing above all others who was so strong that any weaknesses like those were insignificant in comparison.

“Th-Then Miss Lufas can win!” Aries piped up hopefully.

Dina delivered the merciless truth after a moment of silence. “Assuming everything goes well, I would say that her chances of winning are about one in a thousand.”

The Goddess was not that easily beaten. That was exactly why Lufas had been able to create bugs in the system, become the world’s bug herself, and forcefully bust through it in order to grab the right to challenge the Goddess. However, obtaining that right did not mean victory. Lufas would learn the true fear of divinity after coming to stand on the field of battle against the divine.

“Even then, I believe. She has always surpassed my expectations, so the best I can do is welcome her back when she returns.”

And if Lufas loses, I can follow after her.

It was with that level of determination that Dina had fought on by her lonesome for two hundred years, doing everything she could. She'd passed the baton already, so there was nothing left to do but wait for Lufas's victory, with everything on the line.

If she loses, then I will go down with her. That's not a problem. I wished for all of that; it's something I've accepted on my own. Even if I am unable to accompany her, my fate is tied to Lufas's.

* *

“Blow it away, Scales of Selection. Brachium!”

Lufas intercepted the explosive flames of the hypernova with a destructive torrent of light. At this point, the very concept of time no longer existed, so Brachium's once-per-day limit could basically be ignored. Lufas had set not only the galaxy but the entire galactic cluster as the target of her swirling destructive light.

If the enemy was going to destroy stars as an attack, then all she needed to do was wipe out all the stars in the area. An eye for an eye and brute force for brute force. Lufas had no intention of doing something so boring as to use giant-killing tricks. This was a fight with the fate of the world on the line, a fight of pure destruction versus pure destruction. They would find out who was on top and force the other to obey.

There was only one strategy for Lufas to take. In fact, it wasn't even a strategy. Beat them head-on! That was the only way.

When Lufas canceled out Alovenus's attack, Benetnasch and Orm both launched themselves forward, pummeling the Goddess with a string of blows. Their speed was already infinite, and because their attacks landed the instant they were launched, there was no evasion. However, they were stopped by an invisible wall in front of the Goddess.

As if I care. It's too much work to think of a way around it. There wouldn't be

any weak points anyway. There's no point in even thinking about it. The only way is to push straight through. Their only choice was to destroy it head-on. Why would there be any other solution in this ultimate battle?

“HAAAAAAAGGGHHH!!!”

“OOOOAAARRRGGGGHHH!!!”

Benetnasch and Orm's attacks rained down forcefully on the invisible wall. These attacks, which surpassed the speed of light, had also attained infinite mass, so these shock waves shook space itself. However, that didn't matter. At this point, neither side cared about incidental casualties.

Orm transformed into a dragon and unleashed a beam. It hit. The torrent of light raged onwards, instantly reaching the ends of space and extinguishing all the stars, planets, and even galaxies in its path. However, the Goddess was unscathed. There wasn't even a scratch.

“Maiden Who Shoots a Silver Arrow!”

Benetnasch unleashed the most powerful Moon element spell, and a silver arrow surged towards the Goddess. The sheer size of it was awe-inspiring. The arrow was larger than entire planets, and it barreled towards the Goddess. Just having the arrow pass nearby caused countless entire galaxies to disappear, but it never reached the Goddess. A smile still on her face, the Goddess had stopped the arrow with nothing but a single finger, and a single breath erased it as if she were blowing out a candle.

Lufas raised her hands, activating the strongest secret art of alchemy in exchange for most of the universe.

“Come, you who destroys the source... Transmute! Sneering Slaughterer!”

What manifested from beyond the void was a black dragon so large that calling it gigantic didn't even come close to cutting it. Compared to the sheer scale of its body, even the ouroboroses were like microbes. Its undulating body seemed large enough to be able to swallow this universe in its entirety. Its glare alone caused stars to turn to dust, and a single breath could blow away multitudes of galaxies. It came from the core of the universe, a monster among monsters said to be forever eating the world tree.

Now it faced the Goddess, raising a roar that reverberated through the vastness of space.

“RROOOOOOOAAAAARRRR!!!”

This roar alone caused cracks to appear in the universe, and the remaining few celestial bodies were all broken down to particles and destroyed. The dragon was so big it exhibited its own form of supergravity, and just its presence warped space destructively. It was a true calamity; the mere fact that it existed put the universe in danger. It was a beast of pure ruin.

However, Alovenus just giggled when she saw it.

“How cute.”

With a light smack, it was deleted.

The end of such a monster was disappointing and far too short. Its overbearing presence vanished as if it had never existed at all; Lufas’s biggest skill had been dealt with as if it were trash. Seeing this, even Lufas was struck mute for a moment.

“Hee hee. You really are strong...” the Goddess said, pausing. “But something like that loses all meaning if I raise it up a stage.”

Trying to hold a conversation while moving at a speed faster than light, causing everything to freeze, was a strange thing. Sound itself was basically frozen as well at this point, after all. However, one of the participants was the Goddess, who could bend anything and everything to her will. Therefore, bending laws like this was no problem for her, allowing such a paradox to act as if it weren’t one at all.

Speaking in the middle of the vacuum of space was strange in the first place. Common sense did not apply here. Rather, at this point, not even a shred of common sense existed anymore.

Everything from this point on was and would be supernatural. However, there was still one thing that would be unchanged: the stronger one would prevail. Only this undeniable rule would never change, no matter where or when.

“Tch! Burn her to cinders, god-killing flame. Hamal!”

Lufas spewed Aries's fire from her palm, which halved the target's HP. It didn't matter how big the number was, it would all be treated the same with this skill. It didn't matter how large, immeasurable, or unimaginably incalculable the number was; it would be halved.

From there, Lufas also activated Ex-Coalesce, combining the fire with Aigokeros's Deneb Algedi to make the damage unrecoverable. The resultant black flames that would burn away gods swallowed Alovenus, but she was unmoved.

"Heh heh. I added another ten digits to my HP when I was hit, so your flames barely did anything to me," said Alovenus.

"Quick Raid!"

Benetnasch jumped in from the side, twirling to gain speed and unleashing a flurry of attacks. *Faster, faster, faster! I'm already on the far end of infinity in terms of speed. There isn't anything higher. But I don't care! If what I'm doing isn't working, then I just have to keep breaking limits! Surpass infinity to an even further infinity! I'll keep busting through these walls, surpassing my past self! That's the only solution!*

"There is no limit to the strength that people can imagine," said Alovenus. "For example, take two different stories, and compare the strength of their two main characters. The character from the first story is strong enough to destroy the universe, but the character from the second story says that a universe is just a small cell in a part of an even larger megaverse."

As Alovenus spoke, the universe started to shrink. It got smaller and smaller, and eventually, it was as small as it could get, small enough for Lufas and the other two to see the entirety of the universe at once. They were being shown that the universe was but a microcosm of something larger. Beyond that, there was an even larger space.

Unwilling to listen to the Goddess's leisurely lecture, Lufas threw out an attack overlaid with Scorpius's skill, a poison that would never disappear, while Orm used his breath attack. However, the Goddess didn't stop.

"But this is where a third story comes in, and they claim that even the second story's universe is but a small cell of an even bigger one."

Once again, the universe shrunk. Thus, she once again showed them the sheer scale of things, where two nested universes were once again nested in a larger one.

“Even if there was someone labeled as the strongest among these characters in a setting this overwhelming, things would be flipped upside down by nothing but one word from the author, or in other words, God. That being that there was an even stronger character able to defeat the first character with but one punch. Just like that, another powerhouse would appear. Then that fourth powerhouse gets treated like a child by a fifth, who is then unable to react to the speed at which a sixth fights. Then the sixth character gets killed a hundred times over by a single forehead flick from a seventh, who can’t even lift a finger against an eighth, who equals a ninth in strength. Then, even if there were a hundred of the ninth character they would get trampled over by a tenth, who can be erased in a single breath by an eleventh... Hee hee hee. Doesn’t that sound rather common in fiction?”

Light gathered in Alovenus’s hand. It was no normal light; it contained countless universes and held the power to destroy hundreds, thousands, or even billions of worlds. This was the dimension of gods; the scale of it all was just different.

“This is all just the product of childish arguments,” Alovenus continued. “I’m sure your avatar did it as well when he was young, Lufas. Imagine two young children. One pretends to attack with some sort of awesome beam, but the other defends against it with an equally awesome barrier. Then the first child claims that their beam can easily break through any barrier, causing the second child to insist that their barrier is an invincible one still capable of blocking it. That just causes the child on the offensive to get angry and stubborn, and they continue to selfishly insist that their beam can break the barrier, no matter how invincible it is. Then, the second child tries to insist that their barrier will never break, no matter what... There is no end to this.”

Alovenus giggled again, showing her absolute confidence in her victory, her power. *I cannot lose. There’s no reason I would. Even if there were, I could just go above it. I can make as many settings where I am the strongest as I please. Reason is nothing. Providence is nothing.*

“I’ll start by telling you this: my power is endless. I can layer setting upon setting. For example, even if you all managed to obtain some sort of ability or power to defeat me, I would be able to answer it by saying, ‘Those abilities and powers will not work on me. I am strong enough to defeat you all with a single one of my fingers.’ Do you think it childish? Well, that’s because it is. I won’t deny it. But things like this are far more powerful than pretentious, unmoving settings that go on forever.”

Alovenus’s power spiked, causing a universe-sized explosion. Lufas and the other two defended against it with all their might, either erasing the explosion or absorbing it as their own power.

However, that was when Alovenus flew at them, flinging the three of them away at the same time. They all quickly regained their footing and went on the offensive, but their attacks were easily evaded. These were attacks that should have left behind the process of having to hit, because they came with infinite speed.

“Infinite speed? Yes, that’s amazing. So I’ll respond with, ‘To me, infinite speed is the same as one speed. I am still a hundred times faster,’” said the Goddess. “If you boast infinite attack strength, then I’ll respond, ‘There is another infinity behind that, which makes your infinity look like a one.’ If you manage to surpass that, then I will just add another layer on top. If you continue to get stronger infinitely, then I will just get stronger at a thousand times that speed.”

“Now, what will you do next?” she continued. “Use some sort of instant death power where you just have to look at the target? Use an ability to steal your opponent’s powers? Make use of some sort of special attribute that always makes you stronger than your opponent? Turn back time altogether and make it so this never happened? Use some amazing power to go to a higher world in order to rip up your opponent’s settings? Activate something that will nullify all abilities? Erect an invincible barrier that will reflect any and every attack at twice the strength? Manipulate the very concept of victory in order to make yourself always win, ignoring everything else? Cheat and implant the concept of defeat onto your opponent so that they will always lose? Make use of a pure and simple power that will pierce through everything to always kill the target? I

don't care what you do. Please, come at me until you're satisfied. None of it will do anything, anyway."

Alovenus declared that all forms of resistance were futile as she scornfully laughed.

Then, a big bang erupted with her as the epicenter. It didn't just happen once. Over and over, universes were born violently enough to one-sidedly erase everything before them. More universes were born outside of those universes, and more outside of those. This was repeated maybe a hundred times. At that point, Lufas and her two companions were so small they seemed like insignificant garbage before Alovenus trashed all the newly born universes at once.

"Apocalypse Times One Hundred."

Countless worlds were simultaneously destroyed.

The scale of everything was so big that this basically did nothing. Alovenus herself most likely wasn't thinking too deeply about things. Her power was so overwhelming that everything up until now seemed like child's play. This was why she was said to be omniscient and omnipotent. Of course, she was neither.

However, Alovenus did possess enough simplistic strength to kill anyone who was. She was incredibly immature, incredibly childish—but that was what made her the strongest.

Facing that threat, Lufas and the others were forced into an unimaginably hard fight.

7

After Alovenus went on the attack, Lufas and her group were forced into a purely defensive battle. However, no defenses worked, and their healing couldn't keep up. Any attack they launched was meaningless, and as hard as they might try to use their skills, they were all nullified. Lufas's group had powered up a phenomenal amount since the start of the battle, but even then,

they couldn't manage. Alovenus was just too ridiculous.

Alovenus spawned a universe outside the universe and another universe beyond that. Each universe was but a single cell of another one, which was in turn just another cell. After a dizzying hundred repetitions of this, a supergiant universe was born.

All of this was used by Alovenus as a consumable bomb. After starting a hundred big bangs, she destroyed it all with a big crunch. It was just way too much—way, way too much.

The scale of the fight was now so inflated it was becoming stale. What she was doing was just like selfish children arguing, saying, “Mine is way better than yours!” She was just making things bigger for the sake of it. She was using this childish non-logic as a brute-force response to everything, blowing all her problems away. All powers, speed, skills, everything was meaningless in front of what she was doing.

However, Lufas laughed in the midst of this rough situation. *I see. She certainly is the strongest. She's incredible, but Alovenus is wrong about one thing. One simple, silly thing—but that thing will prove to be the most important truth here.*

She doesn't know that I too am a childish sore loser!

“Alovenus...” Lufas said, trailing off.

“Hmm? What is it? Are you conceding already?”

“No, no. You were just going on for so long about your strength, so allow me to answer that with something of my own.”

The corners of Lufas's mouth lifted upwards in a fierce smile.

She's working on a much larger scale, but we're both standing on the same stage. We're both fighting as gods who have surpassed their worlds.

Then... Right. This is all just a competition of will. It's because I keep thinking useless thoughts like, “I'm at the limit of my strength,” or wondering how strong I really am, that I get caught up like this. What's important here is just forcing things to be the way I like it. There doesn't need to be any reason or logic behind

that. Those are just useless.

“You may be strong, but I’m stronger!”

As she spoke, Lufas’s power soared, surpassing the setting that Alovenus had laid down.

Supergiant universe? Who the hell cares. Infinite stats? That doesn’t matter. You can overwrite anything? So what? “I am stronger than all of that.” This simple line will counter everything.

Oddly enough, Alovenus was right. At this level, the concept of strength no longer exists. Concepts, providence, laws, and limits—all of these are decided by gods, so it follows that none of them exist in their dominion. We would have had to create them on our own.

What I have to do is paint over this pure-white canvas of a space and insist that I’m right. Alovenus could do it, so we can do it too! We came from the world that Alovenus made, after all, so normal laws don’t apply to us! Now that I think about it, that’s probably why the laws of physics didn’t apply to us at all. Of course we would be able to do things that would normally be unthinkable. We inherited Alovenus’s power.

There’s no doubt that Alovenus is the strongest. That’s why the only thing that can defeat her is her own power. So from now on, it’s a match of will and strength, one where the opponent says they’re strong, and I say I’m stronger. This will just be a childish argument where we repeat that over and over. This is God’s territory, so I can do it. I can do anything!

Lufas’s stats instantly switched to display infinity signs in every slot, and then those infinity signs started multiplying endlessly.

At this rate, simple physical force would solve everything. Lufas’s existence itself caused the supergiant universe currently around them to shatter into particles and disappear.

Lufas punched.

Pure, distilled violence assaulted Alovenus, and the invisible wall protecting her broke, and she was sent flying. It was a Powerful Punch That Can Shatter Any Barrier that broke Alovenus’s Amazing Barrier That Can Block Any Attack.

The wind pressure from her attack continued onwards seemingly forever, destroying everything in front of it and even claiming one of Alovenus's arms.

"Ah, as I thought. You really have risen up to my level. Yes, I did faintly notice that things might turn out like this."

Alovenus instantly undid the damage to herself with a smile that made it seem like she was crying and laughing at the same time.

I never thought anyone would be able to reach here. I thought that no one would ever stand equal with me. I figured that all I'd ever do is play with puppets, moving small people as I pleased, and that I would be alone here forever. So... Why? Why was someone who was only supposed to be a puppet able to come this far?

"Seriously, nothing ever goes my way. I wanted to make thoughtless puppets, but they turned out the exact opposite. Nothing ever happens the way I plan it. You're all completely right. I'm just a deity who can't do anything right."

"Are you sure?" Lufas questioned.

Alovenus couldn't respond.

"Are you really sure that you never did anything right?" Lufas asked, certain of the answer.

Alovenus's expression froze.

There was something that Lufas had always wondered. *Is Alovenus really just the careless, unthinking Goddess that we assume she is?* She was too careless, too immature, too thoughtless. Thanks to that, Lufas and her group had been able to carry out their plan properly and deceive Alovenus.

But maybe that was all because some part of her wanted this?

"That's not it. Your wish isn't something like that. What reason is there to use such roundabout methods to try and make me a puppet? No matter whom you ask, they'd say you made a mistake. What you actually want is the opposite, Alovenus. Your ability to force everything to be the way you want it, and the fact that you are alone, isolated by your power, causes you pain. You can't grasp a sense of reality. You don't feel alive. To you, there is only one true

person alive in this place. It's as if you've shut yourself up in a room, playing with dolls by yourself while being hounded by a sense of loneliness. That's why you wanted someone to notice you and rise up against you. You wanted me to exist."

Alovenus felt as if something had stabbed her in the chest. However, that was just a feeling; nothing had actually stabbed her. In the first place, she was immortal. She'd created a setting where she couldn't be killed by anything. Even if she was struck by some supposedly god-killing weapon, she would be left without a scratch. She wouldn't even feel any pain. *So then... What is this pain? Why...do I feel so fulfilled?*

"You wanted someone who wouldn't move just as you wanted them to, right? You wanted something to leave your hands and move on their own, didn't you? You didn't want to be omnipotent. You wanted at least one thing that your power could not do anything about. You wanted someone at your side who would not simply move as you wanted." Lufas paused. "Well, be happy, Alovenus. Your dreams have come true. The despicable demon of your dreams who will oppose you is right here. The one you've always wished for is in front of your very eyes."

"Ahhh..." When she finally made a sound, Alovenus's voice was shaky, and she covered her face in her hands.

Ah, that's right. I remember now. This pain; this feeling. It's been such a long time since I've felt this. I've forgotten what it was like. How many millions or billions of years has it been...? Maybe tens of billions? I've forgotten.

This is... Right. It's delight.

I've been lonely. Ever since I was born, I was far too different from others, and I was completely separated from any and all laws. I was unable to stand on the same ground as others. While everyone else does their best just to live, I am the only one not truly alive. That was why I wanted to save them. I wanted to bring them all up as close to my level as possible.

That was what she truly wanted, but the height she wanted to bring people up to was just too great. When she had become a god, that distance only became worse, and her ever-increasing power drove her further and further

into loneliness.

Though there were others who could speak and communicate their will, she herself was unable to join them. It was as if she were looking at characters displayed on the other side of a monitor, and when she tore her eyes away, she was reminded that there was no one there but her.

She was jealous of those small people. That was why she at least wanted to be involved in their stories, and she attempted to influence the world with a script. Desiring the satisfaction that came from granting their happiness, she continued a cycle of mistaken salvation.

However, all of it was just an act of consolation. None of it filled her heart. In truth, she'd always wanted someone who would stand right in front of her and defy her, just like what was happening right now. *So that was the reason I ended up placing the forbidden fruit tree in a location they could reach, even though I'd told them so many times that picking the fruit was forbidden.*

Yeah, it's obvious to me now. I never wanted faithful puppets. I wanted someone who would walk on their own, think on their own, and show that they were their own person, even if they had to betray me... I wanted someone to chase after me—me, who became too strong and climbed so high that I could never go back—no matter what methods they had to choose.

I wanted someone to tell me that I wasn't alone...

"Come, poor girl who's been trapped in a prison by the name of omnipotence," said Lufas. "You no longer have to save anyone. It's your turn to be saved by me."

For a moment, Alovenus was quiet, then she started laughing. "A... Ah ha ha... Ah ha ha ha ha..."

Laughter could be heard from Alovenus, even though her hands were still covering her face. Though it sounded like laughter, it also resembled crying... It was probably the first time in her life she'd ever had a happy cry.

"AH HA HA HA HA HA HA! AAAAH HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!!!"

Eventually, the Goddess lost control of her emotions, and she descended into a long bout of uncontrollable laughter that echoed through space and time. Just

the sound of her laughter was able to put cracks in space-time as well. A parallel world somewhere was totally destroyed along with the dinosaurs in it, who were unaware of the reason for their death. A spacefaring civilization that had sprouted from Earth in a different timeline and had even waged interstellar wars was erased with no recourse. The very concept of time was ripped out by its roots, causing Dina and the others, who were awaiting Lufas's return, to stop in their tracks. The aftereffects of the Goddess's laughter alone had erased half of the universes connected to the Endpoint.

Eventually, the Goddess removed her hands from her face and spoke, seeming to have calmed down. "Hee hee hee... That's some talk. Are you sure you can do it? It may sound like boasting, but my temper is a bit...extradimensional."

"I don't mind."

Lufas beckoned Alovenus, prompting Benetnasch, who had been waiting for the conversation to end, to heave an exasperated sigh. Orm let out some strained laughter himself, and the two of them looked at each other and nodded.

"This is it for us then. You can take care of this spoiled child by yourself," said Benet.

"I'd like to say that I feel I could handle the Goddess too..." Orm said, pausing. "But it seems to me that things are reaching a point where we cannot keep up. I'll leave the rest to you."

From here on out, the fight would take place in a realm for gods who could make everything go exactly how they pleased.

Benetnasch and Orm had already been fighting in this Endpoint at a level normal people would consider godlike, and they were holding their own. However, they had realized something after that laugh. The fight up until now—with those big bangs and big crunches and whatnot—had been fought with the Goddess still holding back greatly. She might not have even considered it fighting. From here on out, things would be even harder. The combatants would climb to the summit of infinity, piling infinity after infinity upon each other. It would be a fight without any upper limits.

However, while Benetnasch might attempt to keep up for Lufas, she couldn't work up that much fighting spirit against the Goddess. She knew she would always end up slowing down. In a similar fashion, Orm was unable to believe that he was the absolute strongest, well, *strongly* enough. He knew he would always end up paying attention to any inconsistencies and contradictions, causing shadows of doubt to sprout. He would unmistakably end up dropping out in the middle, and that could not be allowed.

What was needed to win this fight was a selfishness that would not be outdone. They needed to absolutely hate losing. Only those who could truly believe they were the absolute strongest without a shadow of a doubt could stand against the Goddess. That was why, from here on out, only Lufas and Alovenus would take to the battlefield.

Honestly, Benetnasch and Orm were frustrated. They didn't want to be left behind. However, they realized that they would be in the way, so they couldn't, in good conscience, attempt to stop Alovenus.

"I'm bored. I'll be going home first, so I'll be waiting for you."

Benetnasch tried to hide her frustration with harsh words as she patted Lufas on the shoulder. When she did so, she transferred all the mana, or experience, she had within her to Lufas. With that, Benetnasch lost the right to stay in this place and was flung back to where she had come from.

"Sorry about not being able to fight with you to the end," said Orm.

"Don't worry about it."

Orm also transferred all the mana he carried to Lufas before disappearing.

Aigokeros and Pisces said their farewells to their lord and master before disappearing to return to their homeworld.

Now there were only two people left: Lufas and Alovenus. From here on out, it would be a clash of wills to decide who was stronger, so it had to be one-on-one.

If we were to fight three-on-one, Alovenus probably wouldn't accept the result. It'd give her wiggle room to make an excuse. That can't be allowed. She has to completely accept her loss, or this lonely Goddess will never stop.

“Now then, Alovenus. We’re finally alone. No need to hold back...” Lufas paused. “Come at me!”

“Yes... Let’s start this thing!”

Lufas and Alovenus both raised their hands, unleashing manifestations of pure destruction that had no name. There was no more need for skill names. Thinking of them was too much work.

Both combatants wielded infinite power, so they each one-upped their opponent’s infinite power, going ever more infinite as the fight went on. Small attacks, like big bangs and big crunches, were no longer used. They would be useless, after all. With no need for skill names, they clashed with the purest expressions of power.

I’m strong, thought one.

I’m stronger, thought the other.

Then I’m even stronger than that, thought the first.

Lufas continued to get ever faster, continuing to double the speed of light to increase the definition of speed itself without end. However, Alovenus accelerated at a pace that left such definitions behind in the dust. The next moment, Lufas did the same thing back to Alovenus.

If Lufas threw a punch with impossible power behind it, Alovenus would double up on it and punch back, which prompted Lufas to add on another stack and return the favor. If one of them were to state that the other’s infinity was just a one to them, then the other would just come back with an even higher level. The two of them used each other as footstools, trying to set themselves as the absolute powerhouse in the fight.

As this exchange of attack and defense went on, the two of them paid no heed to the heights they were reaching. They weren’t interested.

Another universe was layered on top of the original. Then another was layered on top, then another, then another, then another, and then another. Universes were surpassed and became multiverses, which were then also surpassed. Multi-multiverses were then leapt over until Alovenus surpassed everything that could be perceived!

None of that mattered. At this point, there would be no end to this pattern.

Either way, it was all basically worthless if it didn't leave a lasting effect on the opponent.

"Heh heh heh... Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha!"

Alovenus let out an innocent, childlike laugh before immediately throwing out a nasty, ruthless attack.

The ability to kill anything, piercing through all resistances as long as the attack is in the same space as its target. The ability to reflect any and all attacks. The ability to turn back time, invalidating something's very existence. The ability to always make me win, no matter what. The ability to bestow defeat upon the opponent. The ability to delete anything just by its being in my vision. The ability to cancel out all other abilities.

I destroyed the concept of attacking and sealed off all attacks, and then I did the same for defending as well. Not to mention all of the abilities of countless gods from myths. Even abilities that came straight out of fictitious works. I've used everything I can think of, and still, Lufas hasn't disappeared. She hasn't stopped.

This is so fun!

"That's right... Enjoy it as much as you can, Alovenus. I'll take everything you can throw at me."

Lufas smiled as if she were looking at something cute and lovable, but all the attacks that were being thrown at her were pure overkill.

Arm strength that will allow my punches to pierce through any ability and kill. Leg strength that will allow me to dash through any tricks. Eyesight that will allow me to see through my opponent's next move and her move after that. The grit to bounce back, no matter what is done to me. The control to steal all of my opponent's abilities and turn them back on her. The mental fortitude to declare that I am unaffected, no matter what settings are laid upon me. I'll use everything I have to overcome and surpass everything that is thrown at me, all to chase down Alovenus.

Clash! A universe contained within a dimension was erased, along with all its

parallel universes.

Clash! A greater dimension, made of a nearly unlimited number of dimensions coming together, was unable to resist and was blown away.

Clash! Not even a supergreater dimension, made of countless greater dimensions, was able to withstand the fight as it was smashed apart.

Not yet. I haven't had enough yet. It still won't reach. My opponent in front of me is still fresh as a daisy. There's no damage at all, so I need to go higher. I need to reach greater heights! Until the end of the end of the end!

It was no longer even a fight. It was basically a game, only playable because they were both monsters who lived in an entirely different dimension. They were messing with each other.

The Goddess and her Rebel laughed together from the bottom of their hearts as they clashed, and the aftereffects erased countless worlds.

8

A little before Lufas and Alovenus ended up destroying time itself during their fight, a young man was browsing his favorite website on his computer. His pet cat, Fahl, took up its place at his side, and was regularly getting in his way. Every time the cat did so, it was moved away, but it would quickly come back. *Just what does this cat even want?* he wondered.

The young man had finally tired of the game he'd been hooked on up until now, *Exgate Online*, and now he had too much free time on his hands. Therefore, he'd taken on some job interviews and was currently just waiting on results.

After being interrupted by Fahl for the seventh time, he happened to look outside while moving his pet. Outside, he happened to spy some children walking to elementary school. It was a completely normal scene out of everyday life. There was nothing strange about it, which made the boy think that he'd seen such a scene before. Either that or he'd been in the scene himself in the

past.

Two of the children were playing around as they walked. That was all there was to the scene. There was nothing special about it.

“Gotcha!”

“I’ve got a barrier up! Doesn’t count!”

For reasons unknown, Japanese boys always liked to play with barriers. According to a certain survey, it seemed over ninety-five percent of men had experience doing this. This meant that out of one hundred men, ninety-five of them had taken part in this strange game at least once. The reasons for this were, once again, unknown. The word “barrier” probably resonated with a child’s heart somehow.

The young man was filled with nostalgia, thinking, *I did that too, once.*

Games like this always started with a touch and a barrier in response before gradually devolving into an anything-goes format. It was a pretty common development. There were no clear-cut rules like in hide-and-seek or tag, so all rulings were left to the players—the children—themselves. That was why there was no limit to things, and nothing was against the rules.

“Then here’s a beam!”

“Beam Barrier! Doesn’t work!”

“Barrier-Destroying Weapon!”

“Double-Layered Barrier!”

There was no end. This was just a game of words, and they could layer as many attributes and moves as they wanted. If the kids felt like it, they could bring out invincible barriers, beams that could break those barriers, and more. Even barriers that encompassed all of Earth or all of space could exist. Children were invincible in the world of imagination. They could do anything.

When would a game like this end? Would it just go on forever? No, that would never happen. There is always an end to everything.

The boy looked away from the window as his beloved pet, Fahl, interrupted for the eighth time, leaving the boy scratching his head.

All things must come to an end. However, a cat's ability for interruption was infinite.

* *

How long had the fight been going on at this point? Time no longer existed, so it would probably be accurate to say that not even a second had passed. To Lufas herself, it felt as if she'd been fighting for a couple of hours at this point. Even so, the battle between the Goddess and her Rebel was still completely even.

The battle was now in a temporary stalemate, with the two of them some distance away from one another, content to only glare.

They had a standoff in this pure-white space, but Lufas was the first to make a move. She swung her arm, which held Lifthrasir, a weapon that should have been lent to Alioth.

The universe that contained Mizgarz was already gone, but this sword still existed. Only this sword, which legends said was able to survive even the end of the world, would always exist.

Lufas brought both swords in the set together. By doing so, the swords amazingly changed shape and melded together into a longsword, as if they had been meant to be one sword this entire time.

In response, Alovenus waved her hand, grabbing onto two brightly shining swords and combining them into one, just like Lufas had.

The two of them laughed, identical swords in hand, before quiet swept over the battlefield. Lufas's red cloak swayed, and Alovenus's blue cape fluttered, even though there was no breeze.

They leapt forward and clashed. A blast too violent to merely be called a shock wave was created, and it spread to the ends of this theoretically infinite Endpoint. The wave traveled millions upon trillions of light-years, spreading out seemingly forever. At the center of all this, Lufas and Alovenus clashed swords over and over, flying around in a circle. Things had taken a turn from the over-the-top, flashy fight from earlier, transforming into a relatively tame sword fight.

However, while things looked less flashy, every swing was lethally destructive. Their blades clashed, and many dimensions were destroyed. Their swords once again clashed, and multitudes of timelines were broken and shattered. They exchanged blows that sounded like thunderclaps, and cracks ran throughout the Endpoint. They entered a pushing contest with their swords, and every time one of them got knocked away, they came back the next moment with an all-out attack, sending sparks flying everywhere. At this point, it was unknowable how much damage the aftereffects of their fight were causing. Neither of the combatants cared either.

The two of them locked eyes. Lufas's smile was belligerent and fierce, while Alovenus simply laughed like she was having fun.

"Hah!"

Lufas swung down her sword, and Alovenus evaded by leaping away.

Alovenus flipped her dress around, swinging her sword and sending a flurry of slashes at Lufas. The flying blades of energy would never miss, and they would destroy anything and everything. They slashed through everything, closing the distance until blades once again clashed, creating more shock waves.

At first glance, everything seemed even. In fact, it *was* even. Both sides repeatedly insisted that they were stronger, so no difference could be formed between them. Now that the two of them had reached the heights of power, this fight could not be anything but even. It was an equation so simple even small children could understand it. Infinity was always equal to infinity; there was no other answer. At least, that was how it should have been.

However, Lufas slowly started gaining the advantage in this sword-locked duel, and for the first time, Alovenus seemed somewhat anxious.

This is weird. I shouldn't lose. I shouldn't be being pushed back. I should have been raising my own power in concert with hers!

Of course, Lufas also knew that, so she took that into account and raised her own power to respond to Alovenus's increases as well. That was why they should have been even. *So why am I being pushed back? Why am I losing?*

"Play-fighting between children... That was what you described it as, didn't

you, Alovenus?”

Lufas applied even more power, further pushing Alovenus back. She was doing the same thing as Alovenus, simply layering her own settings and character building over her opponent’s in order to make herself superior. However, Lufas was doing so just slightly faster than her opponent.

Alovenus was raising the speed at which she got stronger. She was raising the scale of her power. However, Lufas was one step ahead. Somehow, she was creating a gap in strength.

How is she doing this?

“By the way, going back to that example you gave of children trying to insist that they’re stronger... Do you know who wins that argument?” asked Lufas.

“There’s never a clear result...” Alovenus trailed off. “Since both sides say the same things, there’s no end to it.”

“You’re wrong. You know, back when my avatar was a child... Well, things ended when the slightly smarter child realized there would be no end to things, so they compromised.”

Yes, this seemingly endless children’s game actually did have a natural end—compromise. The slightly smarter, more grown-up child would realize that this could go on forever, and they would quickly lose motivation and just give up to put an end to things.

What Lufas was implying seemed to have gotten through, and Alovenus’s expression was steeped with further anxiousness.

“Y-You’re saying I’ve compromised...? That I’ve given up?!”

“No, I’m pretty sure you haven’t. You haven’t given up. But your tenacity for victory isn’t enough.”

The gap in their strength widened. Now, Lufas had completely surpassed Alovenus in power, and the sword in Alovenus’s hands started to crack. It didn’t matter how many times Alovenus added the property that the sword would never break; it was just overwritten with the plot point of its breaking. Even if she added a property for the sword to be repaired, it was quickly erased.

“You became satisfied. You felt fulfilled the moment someone appeared to truly oppose you. However, I’m rather selfish myself... I won’t be satisfied unless I win.”

Yeah, there needs to be a clear victor in this fight. There’ll be no draw. I will never allow a result that only recognizes that “someone is better.” There needs to be a clear best. There is only victory.

Lufas’s goals differed from Alovenus’s. While the Goddess only desired someone to push back against her, the Rebel aimed for something beyond that. The exact same thing had happened in the fight between Leon and Sol. This similarity might have been the true bond between master and servant.

Alovenus hated Leon. From her point of view, Leon surely seemed despicable and foolish. However, Lufas thought of Leon quite favorably. She thought that he had hidden potential. At the very least, his desire to win was the greatest among all the Thirteen Heavenly Stars by Lufas’s estimation.

“It’s over, Alovenus. It’s my... No.”

Lufas leapt away and brandished her sword. In that moment, Alovenus saw a multitude of shadows behind her. Among them, she noticed the forms of Benetnasch and Orm, who had withdrawn from the battle. There was also Dina, her avatar, and Libra, who was supposed to be her puppet, as well as the Seven Heroes, the rest of the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars, other heroes from history, the devilfolk, humanity, demihumans, and even monsters and animals. It was the sum of all life that existed on Mizgarz. It was everything that Alovenus had been playing around with all this time.

“It’s *our* victory.”

Lufas’s sword cleaved through Alovenus’s weapon, as well as her body, all in one attack.

The slash Lufas unleashed flew off into the distance, cutting apart everything in its path. The slash, which seemed to threaten to cut apart the Endpoint itself, continued on its path, growing ever bigger until it eventually disappeared.



Of course, such a thing would not kill the Goddess. Rather, nothing could definitely kill Alovenus other than her own suicide. In fact, she might not even die by her own hand. Whether it be something that extinguished the soul entirely, erased all traces of her, or even made it so she had never existed in the first place, as soon as she got tired of not existing, Alovenus would simply make a sudden return, almost like a cockroach.

As Lufas was now, she might have been able to forcefully end Alovenus by overwriting her immortality. She might even have been able to continuously suppress Alovenus's efforts to revive. However, Lufas had no intention of doing so.

In any case, Alovenus herself already knew painfully well that she had been defeated.

For a long moment, Alovenus said nothing, then stuttered, "Huh? Uh? N-No way... I... I just..."

"Yeah. You realize it yourself, don't you? You lost."

With that blow, Alovenus's HP became 0.

It didn't matter that her HP was 0 though. Even if it went into negative numbers or the very concept of HP was erased, Alovenus still would not die. Alovenus could continue fighting if she wanted to. Likewise, if she wanted to stand up, she could.

However, none of that mattered. Alovenus had lost this contest of wills and selfishness. That fact meant that Alovenus now had no chance of winning anymore. Battles in this divine territory meant a contest of imposing one's selfishness. The more selfish one would win, while the one who was satisfied with the status quo would lose.

As of now, the hierarchy between Lufas and Alovenus had been set in stone and would never change. Alovenus could no longer win against Lufas Maphaahl. Never. In other words, it was complete and utter defeat. Alovenus had lost to Minamijuuji Sei mentally and Lufas physically. There could be no excuses for this complete loss.

Faced with that fact, Alovenus felt sapped. Now that she'd accepted her

defeat even once, she could no longer contend against Lufas in a battle like this. It didn't matter how much she tried to insist that she was stronger. The fact that she'd once lost would remain in her heart. That fact would cloud her will and her belief that she was the strongest.

"Ah... Ah ha ha..." Alovenus let out a dry laugh.

What a terrible day. What a terrible, amazing day. I would never have even imagined that someone would come to oppose me, let alone rise above me. I can only be astounded. This woman... This Lufas Maphaahl is an idiot so big that she can surpass gods.

As Alovenus was sunk in thought, Lufas was in front of her, raising her fist in preparation for the final touches on her victory. Then, Lufas brought her fist down on Alovenus's head. The impact raised a great noise akin to an explosion, and a shock wave spread outwards, the last of so many that shock waves themselves might die from overwork.

If the two of them had happened to be on a planet just then, Alovenus would have been pummeled through the ground and out the other side, only to be launched into space. Of course, given the weight of Alovenus's sheer existence, she would be unable to be in a normal universe. This hypothetical would be dependent on them being in a supergiant one able to house her.

In short, that was just how powerful Lufas's swing was.

"Th-That huuurrrtttt?!?!" Alovenus said, shocked.

"Children who've done bad things need to be punished. Jeez..." Lufas trailed off. "Do you know how hard I had to work to get that hit in?"



“As if. For now, uh... Yeah, rewrite that terrible script. A script that no one likes might as well not exist.”

Destroying the Goddess in complete and utter defeat was something that Lufas had considered. In fact, if Alovenus had turned out to be an irredeemably evil scoundrel, then Lufas would have taken that option and completely erased Alovenus with her last attack. In the end, however, Alovenus was not actually evil. Rather, she was a well-meaning goddess who was more passionate than most, just very mistaken and lonely.

Of course, that didn't excuse all the things she'd done. However, Lufas felt that giving her the benefit of the doubt would be all right. With no one next to her, Alovenus was utterly alone. There was no one to rebuke her for her mistakes, and no one to scold her. No one had taught her what she needed to learn, and the Goddess had simply continued to go around in circles, making mistake after mistake without anyone to save her.

That was the difference between Dina and Alovenus. They had the same memories and the same personality, but for some reason, they had turned out totally different. It was because of where they stood. Dina was not alone. She had parents who loved her, and she'd found comrades in Lufas and her group. She had a foundation that allowed her to recognize mistakes and be called out on them.

Alovenus had nothing like that. She was too strong, since she could crush entire universes by accident. That wasn't exactly an excuse, but eliminating her also wouldn't solve anything. In fact, her help would be absolutely necessary to fix and replace everything that had been damaged and lost in the fight. Therefore, she had to take responsibility for all the unhappiness she'd spread and save the victims.

Also, if Alovenus were to be erased, then the devilfolk—who were her spell—would also disappear. If that happened, Lufas wouldn't be able to face Orm.

“Oh, and transfer your authority as the Goddess of Mizgarz to Dina. You should watch and learn as you leave the management of Mizgarz to her for a while.”

After smoothly dumping such an enormous task on someone who wasn't

there and had no way to accept or object, Lufas waved her arm and returned all the dimensions, timelines, and everything else that had been destroyed in the fight. She wasn't quite sure whether simply "returning" lost timelines would work, but in the end, it did. It seemed that the saying "anything goes" truly applied.

"You help too."

Lufas grabbed Alovenus, who was still in a daze, by the nape of her neck and dragged her along.

"Huh? Wai—"

And that concluded the two-hundred-year-long game between the Goddess and her Rebel. It ended in checkmate after all the Goddess's pieces had been wiped off the board or stolen. Though the Goddess had flipped over the board, the floor had been flipped over on the Goddess, and in the end, she had been punished. The world had been freed from her script. From here on out, any scripts would be written by the people themselves.

As Lufas thought of the future, she suddenly laughed.

Finally, with the battle at the Endpoint finished, Lufas returned all the mana she'd absorbed to the universe and went back to all of the people who were waiting for her, to the world in which she belonged.

When they saw her, all her loyal retainers cheered, and her former friends reveled in her victory. Benetnasch had her arms crossed, seemingly bored, but the corners of her lips were loose. Meanwhile, Orm simply nodded, satisfied.

Among all that, the girl with the same face as the Goddess beamed with a full-faced smile as she spoke the scheduled line, though there were a thousand emotions behind those words.

"Welcome back, Miss Lufas."

"Yeah. Good to be back."

The Twilight of the Gods had reached its end.

Dawn broke on the land of Mizgarz once again; the Twilight of the Gods was over.

I looked over the scenery I'd now gotten used to from the deck of the *Argo*, and my eyes narrowed. Though Mizgarz had once disappeared, along with the universe it was in, it was as if the whole thing had never happened. Nothing had changed from yesterday. After that fight with Alovenus, I had repaired time and space with her help, returning things to the same state as before the twilight happened.

But wouldn't you then think, *If she could do all that, why didn't Alovenus just delete you?*

Honestly, I wondered that myself. The reason behind that turned out to be both simple and silly.

The Goddess being too strong turned out to be a curse, as she was absolutely worthless at holding back.

No, wait. Now that I think about it, there were definitely signs.

Because her existence was so all-encompassing, she was basically unable to interfere with Mizgarz at all. That was the proof. If Alovenus were to try to wind things back, she'd accidentally go all the way back before Mizgarz was even created, or worse, before the big bang. If not for that, Alovenus would have rewound time the moment she found a bug like me in the system. It was an unexpected weakness for a Goddess touted as omnipotent. She was great at the large-scale, but it seemed that also meant she was bad at going small-scale and making fine adjustments.

In the Goddess's own terms, "It's kind of like trying to rewind a movie only a few seconds, but you mistake a button and end up going all the way back to the beginning." It wasn't a very good analogy.

Also, while I was reconstructing the universe, I returned all the mana I'd absorbed, so I was now back to my former strength. I'd already experienced the feeling of being that strong, though, so if the Goddess were to do something

stupid again, I was confident I could go back to punch her a bit.

“So it’s over?” Dina, who was standing beside me, asked.

“Yeah,” I answered.

Though few words were exchanged, they were filled with a lot of sentiment.

Over... Yeah, it finally is. All we did was make the Goddess lay down her script. That’s all. But the process to make that happen was so long.

Now, Mizgarz is no longer in her hands. There will be no guidance from the Goddess from here on out. Even if there were, it wouldn’t be useful, so we’ll just have to find our way ourselves.

“Miss Lufaaassss! I believed in yooouuuuu!”

Scorpius spread her arms wide as she jumped at me, but she never reached her destination. Libra immediately grabbed her head firmly, stopping her.

“Raagghh! What do you think you’re doing, you piece of junk?!”

“I am suppressing a pervert who is trying to approach my master,” said Libra. “I am doing nothing wrong.”

“Just how am I a pervert?! I’ll turn you into scrap!”

“Things will only take longer with you around, so I will send you back to the moon first.”

“Yooouuuuu!”

Libra’s arm separated at the elbow, and the forearm flew off into the sky still holding Scorpius. As Libra herself said, it was headed for the moon.

At first glance, the moon looked the same as usual, but I’d actually made some adjustments as I was putting things back to normal. I’d moved Maphaahl Tower to the dark side of the moon. Why did I do something like that? Because I planned to live on the moon from now on.

I was still considered the symbol of fear throughout Mizgarz in the end. I’d destroyed this world once already. No matter how I tried to smooth that over, I couldn’t avoid being feared by others. That was why I would withdraw from the world at large and try making a country on the moon while living a laid-back life.

While I was adjusting the moon during my reconstruction efforts, I'd tweaked it so that the environment would be survivable for living things. It still looked the same from Mizgarz, but that was just the effect of magic. There were already oceans and other proofs of nature on it. Other than that, though, it was still fresh, virgin ground, and I would have to get to work building towns and the like from now on.

Of course, if I were to openly declare myself as its ruler, people would only come to fear the moon as a symbol of ill omen, so I simply made it common knowledge that the Goddess lived on the moon as I made Dina a new Goddess. In short, she now had the alias of Goddess of the Moon. *She just keeps getting more titles, doesn't she?*

"And whose fault is that?" Dina retorted.

"I know. It's mine," I casually responded as I looked down at the earth.

We'd already dropped people off of the Ark, which was now hidden on the dark side of the moon.

The view was as peaceful as usual, but there was something that was different: they no longer feared the devilfolk. Obviously, the devilfolk couldn't remain on Mizgarz. They'd been the enemy of humanity for too long, so they had all been moved to the moon. From their point of view, they probably didn't like the idea of living with me, the very symbol of all their fears, but it'd be best if they just considered this comeuppance for all the things they'd done up until now.

"But are you sure about this?" asked Libra. "If you act now, you will surely be able to achieve world conquest again, master."

"True. Such a thing would be easy... But the reason I even wanted to do so in the first place was to allow weak people to be able to live in peace without having to fear the devilfolk. Now, all the devilfolk have been moved here, so my goals have all been reached," I answered with a hand wave, dismissing her concerns.

At this point, I didn't want control of the world. I had no reason for it. My last job for the outside world would be to take in those who would only cause sparks of conflict if left on Mizgarz, like the devilfolk.

Of course, I didn't only bring the devilfolk to the moon. There were also the demihuman villages and the small number of monsters who were over level 300 and clearly too dangerous for these times. The only things like that I left on Mizgarz were Pisces, who would take charge of protecting the waters from now on, and his underwater kingdom.

"Also, it seems that I'm not well suited to governing. At best, I can just use my power to force my way through... My method of leadership was to use power and violence to rule through fear instead of reason. I would just be a conqueror and a tyrant like that. I would never be thought of as a wise and benevolent ruler. Rulers like me would be in high demand during times of upheaval, but Mizgarz should no longer need those. Most importantly, I already disappeared from that stage once. I don't want to come back to that as if I couldn't let the title go." Lufas paused. "It's time to let things be decided by those living in the present."

Though I said I would rule, I would probably be rather useless as a king in times of peace. Invasion, suppression, and wreaking havoc by standing on the front lines myself were the things I was good at, and all of them were just different applications of force in the end. I think I'd be a great king in wartime. In times where victory was everything, no one other than the Goddess could outvalue me.

However, expanding territory during wartime and governing during peacetime were two completely different problems. By my estimation, I wouldn't even compare to the likes of Megrez in terms of governing ability. Being called a conqueror sounds cool, but in the end, the ones who get called that are just the unstable rulers who can only show their stuff with an enemy around. Killing my enemies until there were no more of them and creating a peace beyond those mountains of bodies and rivers of blood was the only thing I could do.

So what about after all the fighting? In a world without enemies, what happens to an incompetent king? Should I find a new enemy? Continuing to make enemies like that by saying, "I don't like X or Y," would only result in my finding myself alone.

Now, because of all I'd been through, I could definitely say this: it was a good

thing I had lost to Alioth and the others. If I hadn't, I probably would have become a second Alovenus by now.

A peaceful world had no need of me as a king. In fact, it would be actively bad. That was the conclusion I'd reached after leaving this world once and gaining knowledge from Earth.

"By the way, Miss Lufas, what do you plan to do with the devilfolk?" Dina questioned.

"Ah, them... Well, apparently, there really is no way to transform them from a magic spell into true living beings. I mean, if she could have done that in the first place, the Goddess would never have gone through the trouble of bringing in subjects from Earth."

In response to Dina's question, I answered with a harsh bit of news for the devilfolk. As expected, they would not be able to become truly alive. It once seemed like it might have been possible, but given that the Goddess Alovenus couldn't find a way, it could be considered basically impossible at this point.

However, this was something I'd predicted would happen. Alovenus had gone through the trouble of bringing in organisms from Earth instead of making them herself, after all. If she could have used magic to make true life, then there would have been no need for her to do this, and Mizgarz would have had a much wider variety of creatures.

But bad news wasn't all I had.

"There was no method to transform the devilfolk from a magic spell to true life... But, that's not the end of it. It would be easy to change the nature of the magic."

"Nature?"

"Yes. Originally, the devilfolk were an attack spell fired at humanity..." Lufas trailed off. "But I had Alovenus change the nature of the spell, and now they've lost the instinct driving them to attack people. It seems that the devilfolk also have a pseudosoul, so apparently, it is possible for them to install that into a baby yet to be born and create avatars that way."

To be honest, I was a little surprised at that. I would never have expected

Alovenus to prepare such an emergency measure.

When I'd asked for more detail, I found out that it wasn't actually meant to be used as such. Alovenus just figured it would be too much trouble to have to create them again, so she prepared a way to repurpose them beforehand. She'd made it to give herself a shortcut, treating the devilfolk as something akin to recyclable plastic.

After that line of questioning, Alovenus had seemed surprised as she asked me, "Huh? You didn't realize this? I believe I should have summoned a devilfolk named Mars to fight you when I possessed Pollux before..."

Now that I think about it, she's right.

Argonautai was a skill that needed a soul to summon, and it was true that Pollux had indeed once summoned that weirdo Mars. *I didn't pay much attention back then. I see though. That was my mistake.* I never thought that an answer would have already been shown to me back then.

So, of the devilfolk, Mercurius, who had died in Draupnir, had already been summoned back as a heroic spirit and was currently speaking to Terra. However, while there were those who would come back, there were also those who wouldn't.

I stopped looking out at the morning view and returned my gaze to the deck of the *Argo*. There stood Alioth, Dubhe, Phecda, and Mizar. A little farther away stood Benetnasch, Megrez, and Merak—the living members—watching over us. Just by seeing this, I understood their decision.

For a moment, I was quiet. "You're all leaving, aren't you?"

"Yeah," said Alioth. "We talked about it, and in the end, it didn't feel right to cling to the living world like this."

"We're just bear shadows of the pawst who should already be gone. We decided to bear ourselves graciously and leave," said Dubhe.

"Hey, Dubhe, your tic."

"Whoops. I medvedev'ed a mistake. There's no need to mind it. It doesn't warrant such a big re-arctos."

“You’re doing this on purpose, aren’t you?”

Alioth and Dubhe acting as a comedic duo like that was a nostalgic sight. They said that even death couldn’t cure idiots, and it seemed that the adage was true. Somehow, that made me strangely happy, and I couldn’t help but laugh.

“Our adventure is already over,” stated Phecda, seeming calm. “We don’t want to get in the way of the younger generation.”

“If I stayed, there’d be two of me, so going back to my grave would be best,” Mizar said, making it seem as if he were doing something as casual as going home.

What an impatient bunch, I thought. Nothing bad would happen if they decided to enjoy life a little while longer, given that they were already back and everything, and if something bad did happen, I could just complain to the Goddess. But it was their decision, and also probably their way of making things right, so I decided to see them off instead of throwing a fit about it. *It’s going to feel a little lonely around here though.*

“I managed to see you make it through to the end, after all. I don’t have any lingering attachments left,” said Alioth.

“I got to fight with you as a friend again at the end. That’s more than enough for me,” Mizar admitted.

Alioth and Mizar spoke as if a great weight had been lifted off of them. *They must have really regretted that silly mistake from the past all this time.* Since I’d kind of driven them to it, their regret seemed kind of misplaced, but it was great that they seemed satisfied.

“I...see... Then, at the very least, have a drink with me before you go,” I said.

I snapped my fingers, and Libra swiftly handed everyone a glass and poured wine into them. One of her arms should have been on the moon with Scorpius, but for some reason, she currently had both attached at the moment. I spied a mass-produced Libra a little farther away who was missing an arm and staring accusingly at Libra and instantly realized that she’d probably seized it. *Make sure you return it later.*

Anyway, this is going to be the last toast I’ll raise with them.

The Seven Heroes all clinked their glasses against mine when I raised it, reminding me of all the time we'd spent together as if it were yesterday.

I wonder how long it's been since the last time I looked upon all seven of them as we shared drinks together and felt so at peace. In truth, I want to talk with them a little longer, but dragging things out will only make it worse, won't it?

I was quiet, then said, "Well then. Alioth, Dubhe, Phecda, and Mizar, we will probably never meet again."

This would be our final farewell. I knew that this universe had an afterlife, but it would be a long time before I went there. I was sure that by the time it happened, Alioth and the others would no longer be around. They would probably have reincarnated already and be living their new lives.

Souls had a cycle to them. I didn't know how it was on Earth, but that was how things were on Mizgarz. Thinking about it, this was only natural. The Goddess was lazy enough to try to repurpose the devilfolk. There was no way she would go through the trouble of creating new souls. That useless Goddess had even been reusing souls this entire time to populate Mizgarz. *Give your shortcuts a rest!*

So of course, they would no longer be Alioth, or anyone else I knew, once they were reincarnated. In other words, even if we did meet again in another life, we would not recognize each other.

"To our past together."

"And to our permanent parting."

We toasted.

With that, I downed all the wine in my glass in one gulp.

Long conversations were unnecessary when reminiscing about the past. One glass was enough. This last toast, washing away all the bad blood between us, was more than enough... I was content.

I swallowed down all the swirling memories in my mind along with my wine, and then Alioth, Mizar, Phecda, and Dubhe left.

A lot happened, but I can still say this about all of you. I'm glad I met you all.

I'm glad I was able to meet you and go on adventures with you. I think that from the bottom of my heart. It feels kind of strange to be saying this to people who are already dead, but... Safe journey to you.

10

"I see... So you really are going to go back."

We were on Mizgarz, the morning sun shining down on us. We'd landed the *Argo* on solid ground, and the hero's party and Virgo, who had an inscrutable expression on her face, were currently disembarked.

Sei stood in front of all of them. Now that the Goddess's script was no more, heroes weren't required anymore. This world no longer needed tales like that. All there should be were people building their own futures with their own wills—not stories but reality. So, there was no reason for him to stay in this world. He had his own life on Earth and dreams he wanted to fulfill.

"Yeah. The other world really does suit me better," said Sei.

It wasn't as if he had no ties to this world. If he were to be honest to himself, there were things he wanted to say to the girl in front of him. However, their life spans were just too different. As a heaven-winged, Virgo would go on to live hundreds, even thousands of years. On the other hand, Sei would only live to be a little past eighty at best. Even if he were to just announce his feelings under the assumption he would get turned down, Virgo would be the one getting hurt on the off chance she said yes. Therefore, Sei decided the best thing for him to do was keep his unfulfillable feelings locked up inside him. Though in his mind, the chances were much higher that he would just be rejected anyway.

"The problem is your strength though. You might look weak compared to Lufas and others like her, but if you went back to Earth as is..."

Sei was currently level 55. This was thanks to the effect of a small amount of mana—well, what Lufas considered a small amount, anyway—Lufas had neglected to collect when claiming the Goddess's planned gift to Sei of the ouroboroses' mana.

Of course, to Lufas and her peers, that amount of mana would make no difference, being barely perceptible. However, the same would not fly on Earth. Where on Earth would you find a person able to run faster than a cheetah or a student with more sheer strength than a bear? Even his stamina and vitality were far removed from human levels at this point.

If, for example, some criminal were to try to stab Sei with a kitchen knife, his skin wouldn't even be pierced so long as he concentrated on his defense. Even if he were shot, basically all that would happen was that it would hurt. That was how superhuman he was. The people he was comparing himself to were just too far beyond that. Sei was already well past the line of being superhuman. If he felt like it, he could sweep the gold medals at the Olympics many times over. It wouldn't be tough to take the top spot in the world in combat sports either. He might even be able to take top spot in all of them and start an invincible dynasty.

If I were to go back to Earth with this power... Should that really be allowed?

"It shouldn't be a problem. This was the strength you built up yourself in this world. There's no need to be ashamed of it. Take it as a gift for your deeds," Lufas said, seeming to not care about Sei's worries.

"Um... Are you sure?" asked Sei.

"Don't worry about it. If you had power, you would never abuse it. Right?"

Lufas hadn't said this thoughtlessly. She'd said all that because she was speaking about Sei. If it were someone like Debris instead, Lufas would have simply ignored his wishes and returned him to level 1, by force if she had to. She had declared that it would be fine because Sei was the one with the power.

From start to finish, he had never taken the easy way out. He was a hero who never stopped searching for the correct path. He could be trusted and sent home as he was.

"Not to mention, didn't you want to be a police officer?" asked Lufas. "That power would be useful to you then. Might as well have the strength to arrest violent criminals, right? Just go be the best policeman there is."

"Ha ha ha... After a fight like that, there's no way I could call myself the

strongest.”

Sei laughed reservedly as he looked over to his friends whom he’d traveled with all this time. There were Gantz, Jean, Friedrich, the female knight gorilla, Kross, Petto, and Sargess, not to mention the dog monster at his feet. All of them seemed somewhat sad and lonely after realizing they were about to part. There were also the three adventurers—Richard, Nick, and Shuu—as well as Alfie and the ranger squad.

Now that I think about it, this is a pretty diverse group that doesn’t seem much like a hero’s party. I remember I thought it was some sort of prank when we first met, but now that it’s all over, all I have are good memories.

Yeah, good memories... Probably... Should be.

“Well then... Everyone, thank you all so much for everything.”

“Yeah. Be well on the other side,” Jean said.

Jean immediately laid his hand on top of Sei’s when he offered it. The others placed their hands on top of Jean’s as well. Virgo was the last to put her hand in, and for just a moment, she locked eyes with Sei.

“Sei... Take care of yourself, okay? I...” Virgo hesitated. “I won’t forget you.”

“Yeah, I will. I...won’t forget you either,” Sei replied.

The two of them seemed loath to separate their hands. Seeing this scene, Lufas snapped her fingers, and a crack in space appeared in front of Sei. It was a gate leading to Earth, though it was no simple gate. It also led to the past, thanks to a combination of Lufas’s and Dina’s skills. Sei would be dropped off in Japan in 2015—in other words, the time right after he had been summoned. Though Sei had only spent less than a year in this world, he would regain that year in youth as well when he went back. At his age, several months was a long time, after all.

“Once you pass through that gate, you will go back to the days before coming to this world. You’ll also be where you were when you were summoned, so don’t worry about being suddenly dropped off in some foreign country,” Lufas explained.

“Sorry for relying on you for so much.”

“Don’t worry about it. You ended up involved in all this because of us in the first place, so sending you back safely is the least I can do.”

Sei chuckled a little after hearing what Lufas had to say, before he turned to face the gate. However, he turned back to look at Virgo just once, reluctant, before he seemed to have gathered his resolve and ran into the gate. This was probably his first love as well as his first heartbreak, and while Sei faintly realized this, Virgo had most likely gone through this parting with no knowledge of her feelings.

Watching the two of them, Dina whispered, “He was a good kid,” in a low voice.

“Yeah. He was useless in a fight, but...” Lufas paused. “He was a true hero, unlike me, who can only solve things with violence.”

What Minamijuuji Sei had accomplished was small but very, very important. Though he didn’t have the power of Lufas or the Thirteen Heavenly Stars, things would not have gone this well if not for his choices. He almost assuredly had no idea of this, but every one of his decisions from start to finish had been the opposite of what the Goddess had wanted. Even Lufas and Benetnasch had had times where they had acted as the Goddess wished, so comparatively, he had done amazingly well.

“You don’t seriously intend to allow this love to just fizzle out like this, do you?” Dina asked.

“It all depends on that kid. If he continues to think of Virgo on the other side, and if Virgo realizes her feelings on her own...then we could consider bringing him back here after death as one of the argonautai. But I have no intention of pushing them one way or the other. It’s completely up to them,” explained Lufas.

Now that they’d come this far, no one wanted a bad ending for anyone. No one would benefit from it. So, if the two of them still felt for each other even after their paths split, then Lufas planned to bend the rules of the world a little to help them out. The one thing she didn’t want was for Virgo to cry, so if she wanted, then Lufas could send her to Japan, or she could simply return Sei to

Mizgarz after his death. Lufas planned on respecting their will, of course, so it was all up to the people in question in the end.

“Well, let’s just wait and see for now,” said Lufas. “What will those two youngsters come up with?”

“You talk as if you’re old,” Dina said.

“I am way older than they are. How many hundreds of years do you think I’ve been alive?”

“But Miss Lufas, you would only be sixteen or seventeen in human years if you factor in the fact that you were sealed outside of time for a lot of that.”

“Huh?” Lufas asked, after a moment of stunned silence.

The heaven-winged grew up fast but aged slowly. They reached their late teens, where they had the most energy and strength of their lives, very quickly. After that, they almost never changed, so it was very hard to tell what age they were from their appearance.

All this time, Lufas had calculated her own age as being around her early twenties in human years, but taking away the time she had been sealed, she was quite young. Lufas herself seemed very surprised upon hearing this, showing the strange sight of her counting with her fingers as she tried to calculate her age.

* *

“Nooo!” Pisces wailed. “Why must We remain on Mizgarz?! This’ll mean We’ve been practically nonexistent until the very end!”

“Honestly, all I can say is that you just joined too late...” Sagittarius explained.

“You basically only ever show up right before the final battle,” said Aigokeros.

“That’s just because you all left us for last! We’ve been in the ocean this entire time, so you could have just gotten us first! Also, put on some pants already, you shit horse!”

On the other side of the *Argo*, Pisces, who had become one of the few members of the Thirteen Stars to remain on Mizgarz, was throwing a temper tantrum. Sagittarius and Aigokeros were trying to calm him down, but they

weren't having much success.

However, this had to be done. In the end, Pisces commanded a large area of the ocean and its denizens, thanks to his kingdom, something that none of the other members of the Thirteen Stars had. Having him ignore all this and move to the moon would only inconvenience his subjects, and the moon was a bit too small to move his entire country there. Even when they had been crammed into the Ark, Skíðblaðnir was the only country that seemed terribly cramped.

Orm and Terra, along with the rest of the devilfolk, watched this fit from a little ways away. The fairy siblings, Pollux and Castor, were also nearby.

While watching Pisces wail and scream, Saturnus heaved an exasperated sigh. "The Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars were supposed to be the very definition of fear for us...but looking at them now... They somehow seem like real fools..."

"They actually are a gathering of fools," agreed Pollux. "Though we're the Thirteen Stars now."

The two of them sighed once again. As fellow common-sense-having, responsible individuals, they seemed to get along surprisingly well.

"Well, we're not much different on that front. Aren't I right, certain someone who went flying off the handle and got themselves killed for no reason?" Saturnus said somewhat mockingly after turning around. She was looking directly at Mercurius, who had died in Draupnir.

There was a pause before Mercurius muttered, "Sorry about that."

Though he looked unchanged, he was now a member of the argonautai, a being who was basically the polar opposite of a devilfolk. Pollux had just barely been able to think of Mercurius as a hero after hearing how he had died, so he was able to come back and was thus able to uncomfortably turn away in response to Saturnus.

There were other losses from the devilfolk, like Jupiter, but he had apparently wished to enter the cycle of rebirth. His exact words had been, "I want to begin a new life where I can forget my fear of that golem, Libra."

"By the way... What about Mars?" Saturnus asked.

“Sorry. No matter how I try, I just can’t think of him as a hero,” Pollux replied, apologetic.

Saturnus agreed with Pollux though. *Yeah, it’d be impossible for me too.* Mercurius could be considered a hero, given some changes in perspective, but Mars had been an idiot no matter the point of view. She felt like she could even see Mars’s annoying smile up in the sky as he asked, “When’s my revival?”

Saturnus shot a magic cannonball up at the place she imagined Mars to be to get rid of him.

“No, that’s more than enough,” said Orm. “We owe you one for this.”

“It’s fine. Don’t worry about it. You don’t need to feel indebted to me for that,” Pollux replied.

Though Orm’s words had been gentle, Pollux was cold in return. She wasn’t doing so on purpose, of course. It was just a habit that had formed over their long years of knowing each other.

“Also, if you call that a debt, then I’m way more indebted to you. How many times do you think you’ve helped me feel better whenever I’ve been depressed over all these years?” asked Pollux.

“Hmm... Well, that’s...”

“Actually, I’ve been wondering about this for a while now. Why have you always been so nice to me? We were supposed to be enemies, at least on the surface.”

“That’s... Hmm, I wonder why?” Orm averted his gaze uncomfortably in response to Pollux’s question.

Seeing this, Saturnus came upon the answer faster than Pollux. Rather, she stumbled upon it. *I see, I see. So it’s like that, huh? No wonder our king was always so worried over the Fairy Princess.*

As she realized this, Saturnus was assaulted by a feeling of lethargy.

“Ah, so that’s it. I guess even the Devil King is just a man in the end. Oh my... I never even got to the stage of lost love...”

Though Saturnus had never said it out loud, she had feelings for Orm.

However, such feelings were nothing but rude to the man who was her ruler, so she'd hidden them. That was why she'd never had the opportunity to have her heart broken; she'd never stepped up to the stage in the first place. Even so, this realization still left her shocked.

"Saturnus... You..." Mercurius trailed off.

"Yeah, and? Is that so bad? All this means is that I lost without ever getting in the ring. We've both been saddled with some terrible roles, haven't we? It's great that you got revived, but it's not like you could confess now anyway either. Right?"

Mercurius could say nothing in response. He had unrequited feelings for Luna. She'd never even noticed him though, and now, she and Terra were a couple. There was no chance for him to get between them any longer. The same went for Saturnus. It was all over by the time she'd come around to her own feelings of love. Pollux had yet to realize anything though, so she didn't exactly have no chance at all... Still, there was no need to start this contest between the Fairy Princess and a common devilfolk. Saturnus could see the writing on the wall.

"I'm drinking these feelings away tonight," Saturnus declared. "I know you're free, so join me."

"I shall. I feel like drinking today too," said Mercurius.

The two brokenhearted devilfolk turned around and immediately left.

As an aside, they would marry in a decade, but neither of them knew that at the moment.

11

A year had passed since the battle with the Goddess. This was basically no time at all to Lufas and the others, who could live hundreds, if not thousands, of years. However, that wasn't so for the rest of the world. It had only been a year, but a year was long. Just a single year was enough for the world to change and for people to start moving on.

The role of watching over them and gently guiding them on the correct path had been foisted on the Goddess of the Moon, Dina. In both title and action, she was the acting Goddess as well as the one with the most authority on the moon's surface. She'd never stopped being one of Lufas's subordinates however, so Lufas was actually the one with the highest authority. She was more useless than a cat though, so in the end, Dina was still on top. This was something Lufas herself admitted. While she was great at defeating her enemies and gathering more land and followers, she was not well suited for governing once things were peaceful.

Of course, Lufas's very existence acted as a deterrent, and for now, there was meaning in her just lounging around, relaxing. In that sense, Lufas probably wouldn't leave the top seat for a while.

Also, the Conquering Twelve Heavenly Stars formally welcomed Dina and Orm into their ranks as the dual Snake Charmer seat. Now, they were the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars. Yes, Imperial. Not Conquering. There was no more need to conquer and force people under their thumb.

"Lady Dina, I have gathered the documents for you."

"Thank you very much, Libra. Please leave them over there."

On the second-to-top floor of Maphaahl Tower, which had been moved to the moon, Dina was hard at work. Here, she managed everything from dealing with various troubles on Mizgarz to balancing the ecosystem, deciding the weather, and detecting—and, if possible, stopping—any natural disasters, like earthquakes, that might occur.

If any countries threatened to cause chaos throughout the world, it was possible to cause an earthquake or other such disaster in order to put them in check as well. Luckily, there had yet to be any countries like that. Still, humans were creatures that could grow accustomed to peace. Though they had still been grateful for peace over the course of this meager year, continuing like this for several more years would probably mean there'd be those who would grow...unhealthy ambitions. There were still many nobles who were rotten to the core, like Debris, so Dina's worries never ceased.

"This is hopeless," Dina said.

“That’s why I told you already, Dina. You should just solve all this in a flash with your divine power, and use it to brainwash some new puppets and replace them or something.”

“You’re in the way, Lady Alovenus. Please do not enter my office.”

“So mean!”

Dina treated a girl who looked exactly like her as a nuisance.

Her facial features were basically the same as Dina’s. Only the color of her hair, which turned gold around her nape, was different. Her clothing, unlike Dina’s, was a white dress with a blue cape. She was the Goddess Alovenus, whom Lufas had fought.

Of course, this wasn’t the actual Alovenus. If she were to descend here herself, it would cause the universe to collapse, so this was one of her avatars instead. Unlike Dina’s case, though, it was an avatar made of divine power, as well as something made to be possessed by the Goddess that had no will of its own. In other words, Alovenus was, in fact, here, just in a different body.

It was just a small detail, but Lufas was the one who had created her current avatar. Alovenus herself could not adjust her power well enough, and it seemed any avatar she tried to make this way ended up a strange size. It was no wonder why Alovenus had only ever made naturally birthed avatars.

“You know I’m a goddess, right? I’m your original too! I’m the most important being in all the universes, you know?! You should worship me more, care about me more!”

“Libra, please remove this useless person from the premises,” Dina ordered.

“Understood.”

“Heeyyyy!”

In response to Dina’s command, Libra grabbed Alovenus by the nape of the neck and dragged her out of the office, eventually throwing her outside of Mapphaahl Tower packed into a cardboard box marked with the words “do not pick up.”

It didn’t matter that she had been thrown out of a window several thousand

meters up; she was an avatar of the Goddess. She wouldn't take even 1 damage, and even if the avatar died, it wouldn't affect the true Goddess.

Libra—who had just thrown out the Goddess, and her supposed true master—simply turned right around and returned to the office as if nothing had happened.

“By the way, Libra, have you seen Miss Lufas?” Dina asked. “I haven't been able to find her since this morning.”

“No, I have not.”

“I see. There are a couple things here that I'd like to ask her opinion on...” Dina said, seemingly troubled as she looked out the window of the tower.

Mizgarz is as blue and round as always. I'm sure it'll be that way tomorrow and the day after as well. Not to mention for years, decades, and centuries to come. It'll still stay just as round and blue. The age of strife is over, so there shouldn't be any more conflict that can change the face of the planet.

Both Mizgarz and its moon were swaddled in peace today.

* *

On the surface of Mizgarz, several kings of different countries gathered together in Svel's palace, discussing matters at a round table. There was Laevateinn's Alioth VI; Gjallarhorn's Merak; Draupnir's Emperor Beahr; Blutgang's king accompanied by the Mizar golem; Svel's king accompanied by Megrez as his advisor; Hrotti's king, who now presided over a country making a miraculous recovery; and Mjolnir's ruler, Benetnasch. Also in attendance were Skíðblaðnir's king, Pisces, and Nectar's queen, Aquarius.

They discussed the state of affairs in each of their countries as well as the import and export of each country's local specialties. This was something that would never have happened until recently. This was especially true for Benetnasch's presence, which was something akin to a miracle.

“Then we will donate fifty million el to support Hrotti's restoration. In exchange, they will prioritize us, Mjolnir, when exporting goods.”

“Thank you very much, Vampire Princess.”

“Wait just a second there, Benet. You can’t just monopolize things. Blutgang will also be sending a group of engineers, so send some goods our way as well.”

Benetnasch was usually thought of as a meathead, but she was surprisingly good at administration. If she weren’t, then she wouldn’t have remained the monarch of her country for over two hundred years, unlike a certain muscle-brained conqueror. Unless Lufas specifically was involved, Benetnasch actually tended to be quite calm and intelligent about things.

After that, discussions continued, only ending when the sun began to set.

As soon as the meeting was adjourned, Benetnasch stood up and left. There were no guards with her, even though she was the ruler of a country; nobody would be so reckless as to try to lay a hand on her. She didn’t need guards. Benetnasch by herself was the strongest military force on Mizgarz.

This didn’t apply just to her though. Megrez, Merak, and Pisces had also come without guards. Aquarius had come with Ganymedes, but he was more like her means of transport rather than a guard.

“Hmph... Maphaahl is missing as always, I see,” Benetnasch muttered, dissatisfied.

“Well, she does reside on the moon. She probably won’t stick her neck into Mizgarz’s affairs at this point,” Megrez answered with a slight chuckle.

Merak and the Mizar golem stood nearby, looking up at the moon.

“This situation is also exactly what she wanted, in a sense,” said Merak, stepping in for support. “I believe she said, ‘I will take the reins of the world and make it a peaceful place without devilfolk...’ It’s different from what she’d initially planned, but she did make it happen. Some would say she’s the only one who got exactly what she wanted.”

This only made Benetnasch more upset. “That’s why I don’t like this.”

She always does this... Every single time, she leaves while she’s ahead... And by the time I notice, she’s ahead of me. I really can’t stand that, but it also makes it really worth chasing her... Agh, it’s just too complicated!

“I suppose you could say that everything from here on out is our

responsibility. We fell for the Goddess's plot in the past and messed up the world... We still haven't fully atoned for that," Megrez said, speaking from the heart.

This only caused Benetnasch to become defiant.

"Don't group me in with you, idiot."

She was the only one among the group who hadn't gone berserk or been controlled by the Goddess. *I'm different*. That was what she was asserting. Still, though she had never been controlled, Benetnasch had played a part in Lufas's disappearance. In truth, she couldn't push that hard.

"We made a mistake back then, but Lufas still returned and fixed the world for us. So from now on, our role should be to...choose the right path and lead the world down the road of peace this time... Doubly so in order to honor the wishes of those who've left before us," Megrez said.

Mizar's golem and Merak nodded in response, and though Benetnasch didn't nod along with them, she didn't deny what Megrez said either.

Alioth, Dubhe, Phecda, and Mizar had all already gone, leaving them behind. That meant it was their responsibility as those who remained—or as the clone of Mizar—to fulfill the dreams and goals the others hadn't been able to realize themselves. After all, the remaining Seven Heroes were sure that such was the ideal they had chased after when they had still all been together.

As Benetnasch and the other heroes started to walk away, the phantoms of the departed heroes appeared a little ways away from them for just a moment, seemingly watching over their still-living friends. They looked satisfied after that scene and disappeared along with the wind.

* *

The devilfolk's castle stood somewhat removed from Maphaahl Tower. They had been given about half the moon as territory to build a country and were now living peaceful and fulfilling lives. The devilfolk were no longer hounded by murderous impulses. Though that neither excused their past sins nor served to relieve them of their fear of Lufas, time was slowly healing them of both.

Today, a certain event was taking place inside the castle that was situated in

the middle of their country. For this event, Terra was dressed in a black suit, while Luna was next to him in a pure-white dress. They stood before Aigokeros, who was dressed as a priest and reading aloud from a cheat sheet.

Many people would probably wonder why a celebratory occasion like this was being overseen by the Demon Lord, of all people, dressed as a priest, but Terra and Luna were the ones who had requested this. They didn't need to swear to the deity who had toyed with their lives so much. Such a deity wasn't worth believing in. So instead of swearing before a god, they decided to swear in front of the polar opposite instead—a demon—as a show of their defiance.

“Do you, Terra, take Luna as your lawfully wedded wife, to love and to hold, in sickness and in health, in times poor and plentiful? Do you swear to walk the path of your lives together until death do you part? Do you swear to love her, think of her, and be with her upon the name of god?” asked Aigokeros.

“No, not to any god. I swear to my wife and myself.”

“And do you, Luna, take Terra as your lawfully wedded husband, to love and to hold, in sickness and in health, in times poor and plentiful? Do you swear to walk the path of your lives together until death do you part? Do you swear to love him, think of him, and be with him upon the name of god?”

“No, not to any god. I swear to my husband and myself.”

The devilfolk's wedding ceremony was slightly different than that of humans. They would never swear or pray to any god, only ever swearing love to themselves and their partner. That was probably the most appropriate way to wed for those whose name had the word devil in it.

After hearing their responses, Aigokeros spread his arms out and assumed his original form as the Demon Lord.

“Everyone, do not entreat our god above for the sake of these two. Through their bond of wedlock, they no longer need the help of any god. O Goddess, creator of all that is in this universe, you have created people modeled after yourself and celebrated their love. But that is enough. These two do not need your blessings. Even without you, they will live in love and create a healthy family. Whether in happy times or sad, they will never forget to trust and be grateful for each other. Even without your support, they will work hard, and

continue to love and comfort each other, even when experiencing trouble. They will be blessed with many friends, and because of the fruits brought by marriage, they will grow and lead even more fulfilling lives.”

Aigokeros’s speech denied divinity, saying that they didn’t need help or a script. It asserted that they could walk on their own and asked the Goddess to please not do anything unnecessary.

Having heard this speech from beginning to end, Alovenus’s face was locked in a difficult-to-describe expression, but no one at the ceremony knew that.

“Well then, everyone, all together now: God is dead!”

At Aigokeros’s signal, all the attendees shouted that heretical line in unison. At the same time, the sounds of celebratory clapping resounded as the newlyweds walked down the path of flowers.

Seeing them, Mercurius looked like he was about to die.

“Come on, shape up,” Saturnus said. “Don’t bring the place down after you got invited and everything.”

“Yeah, I know... I know, but...” Mercurius trailed off. “If she’s happy, then I’m happy too... We should celebrate...”

“You know you look like the world’s most unfortunate being right now, right?”

Opposite of those two were Pollux and Orm, who were properly celebrating. Well, Orm actually seemed rather conflicted.

“It really is a terrible feeling, seeing your son surpass you,” Orm admitted.

“Well, there’s nothing you can do about it, right? It’s not like you need anyone, seeing as how you’re a perfect ouroboros and everything. I’m also alone at my age, you know. Aren’t we just fine?”

Ouroboroses and fairies were just a little different from normal living beings. They had absolutely no need for making children or finding companions. In that sense, the devilfolk were the same, but Terra and Luna loved each other even without any of that being part of the equation.

“Well, you are right about that...” Orm admitted. “To tell you the truth

though, I started having a little interest in that sort of thing a couple thousand years ago. Not that the person I have in mind even notices.”

“Really now? So you actually had someone like that. Still though, how dense can they be? Not noticing for thousands of years...?”

“Yeah.”

“Actually, wait a second. There aren’t many who live for thousands of years, are there?” Pollux asked. “As far as I know, I’m the only one who’s known you for that long.”

“You’re right about that.”

“I’m right...? Then who is it? There’s no point in even talking if there’s no one other than me. It’s not like there’s anyone else you could...be...attracted...to...”

After having talked it through, Pollux finally hit upon the answer. She paled instantly before slowly but surely becoming redder and redder.

“So you finally noticed?” Orm asked after a moment of silence. “You really are dense.”

Pollux was unable to respond for a moment. “Huh? What? Me? Seriously, me?”

The Fairy Princess and the Devil King locked eyes.

Having been watching them from his position, Saturnus whispered, “Other people’s misfortune is like honey, but their fortune tastes like dirt. Hey, Mercurius, we’re drinking ourselves under again tonight.”

“I’ll join you until we both go down.”

That day, two new couples were born at the wedding. Or were they?

* * *

“Where are you, Miss Lufaaassss?!”

A black shadow flitted through Maphaahl Tower. The shadow was Scorpius, checking everywhere she thought Lufas might have been.

For some reason, Lufas had been missing since that morning. It wasn’t exactly a problem that she was gone for the day, and there was no one who could stop

her from disappearing. The problem lay with Scorpius. *I need more Lufasium or I'll die!* she thought, fairly serious.

The last place she went was the King Crab Eatery Moon Branch on Maphaahl Tower's first floor, having thoroughly searched the rest of the tower. There she found Aries, Taurus, Parthenos, Castor, Sagittarius, Leon, and Karkinos of the Thirteen Stars gathered round.

"Hey, have any of you seen Miss Lufas?" Scorpius asked.

"No, she hasn't come this way," Aries answered, munching on some crayfish that had been boiled with salt.

There may have been those who wondered whether he should be eating crayfish, seeing as how Aries was a sheep, but he was also a monster. Their worries were unfounded.

"Ah, just where did she go...? I haven't seen her for an entire day... Could something have happened...?!"

Scorpius lamented her situation in a grand, theatrical manner, which only caused Leon to get fed up and finally speak.

"She can take care of herself for a day. Actually, didn't she just leave because you're so persistent and annoying?"

There was basically no need to ever worry that anything had happened to Lufas as nothing existed that could harm her. Even if she ran straight into the sun, she would simply come out the other side just fine. Even germs and bacteria would be almost instantly killed the moment they entered her body. Taking things to extremes, basically the only thing that could kill her was her own life span. However, she could rewind time for herself at any point if she felt like it. In short, there was no need to worry.

"What did you say?! That's cheeky for someone who's only the strongest at making us laugh!"

"Huuuhh?!"

"Oh my, did I touch a nerve? Sorry for speaking the truth!"

"I'll kill you!"

As the two of them argued noisily, Aries simply watched them and thought, *Man, it's peaceful...* While nibbling on some crayfish karaage, he looked out of the eatery on a whim and saw the spider demihuman Sargess, who used to travel with the hero Sei. He was with a lamia, a merman, and a dryad.

"Sir Karkinos, here are the ingredients you've ordered," Sargess said.

"T H A N K S! Now I can expand my menu!"

Sargess handed Karkinos a semitransparent ball so large it needed to be held in both hands. The inside was filled to the brim with extremely sweet, amber-colored nectar.

"What is that, Karkinos?" Parthenos questioned.

"It's nectar made by syrup ants, a monster that mutates from ants. They mainly live in deserts, and their nectar is a delight. I'm currently researching a dessert to be marketed towards women using this," Karkinos answered, happy.

Now that the world was at peace, it was much easier to come by food than before. Karkinos had been hooked on inventing new dishes recently, spending every day examining the dishes that Lufas had brought from the other side. Over this past year, he had succeeded in copying—or rather, developing—many dishes, thus earning him the prestigious title of "the Cooking King." It seemed that his eatery, the King Crab, would occupy the throne of the world's best restaurant for a while.

"Hmm, maybe we should order something too..."

"Ah, then I want something sweet! This place is famous for its desserts, right?"

"I'll take anything with egg in it."

"I want shrimp."

The four demihumans seated themselves at a table and perused the menu. That was when Aigokeros dropped in dressed in priest's clothing, strangely enough, and sat down.

"Ah, welcome back, Aigokeros. How was the wedding ceremony?"

"I really shouldn't be doing things I'm not used to. I went because it was Miss

Lufas's order, but I'd rather not do that again," he said.

Aigokeros took off his outer layer before downing some booze that Karkinos had left in front of him.

A demon dressing as a priest wouldn't even make a good story. Seeing him like that, Castor let out a strained chuckle, but that only caused Aigokeros to throw a bomb at him.

"Oh, by the way, Pollux and the Devil King seemed strange at the ceremony..." Aigokeros said, trailing off. "It was almost as if they were two youngsters who had just started dating. I do not quite understand that emotion, but it seems to me that something happened."

"Launch the *Argo*!" Castor shouted. "Heroic spirits, heed my call and follow after me! Now is the time for a holy war!"

"Castor?!" Aries called out, surprised.

Castor jumped out of his chair and ran outside with his weapon in hand. He was followed by a horde of heroic spirits who'd appeared from nowhere, and it wasn't long before the *Argo* took flight. The fact that Fenix, Hydras, the three knights, and other strong heroic spirits were all there from the start spoke of how serious Castor was.

Of course, the winner would be obvious.

"I'll put money on Castor getting beaten and returning in defeat," said Scorpius.

"Same here," Taurus said.

"This can't even be considered a bet."

With no one willing to put money on Castor, the bet fizzled out. A short distance away from the moon, the fight had already started. Orm, who had assumed his ouroboros form, exchanged magic fire with the *Argo*. Though almost as soon as it had started, the *Argo* was easily shot down. Fights between two beings of appropriate might tended to only last several seconds.

"Men are so stupid."

"They really are."

Scorpius and Parthenos both heaved a sigh and simultaneously downed their drinks.

* *

A year had passed since those dreamlike but undoubtedly real events. Minamijuuji Sei had turned eighteen and spent his days studying in order to fulfill his dreams of becoming a police officer. He wasn't an officer yet though. He wasn't even old enough to take the public servant employment examination he needed to be able to become one. However, he was rather well-known these days.

During the course of the year, he'd ended up solving three cases that he happened to have stumbled upon, which was enough for him to be sent a letter of appreciation from the police.

The first incident had happened when he was walking through town with his friend. A man was assaulting people on the street with a blade while screaming, so Sei stopped him.

The second had happened at night while he was walking his dog. He happened upon a fire and saved a child and an elderly person who'd failed to escape.

The third had happened when he went to the bank in order to withdraw some money. As if some higher power were waiting for just this moment, the bank was occupied by armed robbers, so he knocked them all out and handed them to the police.

I don't know if my luck is good or bad... I'm sure this is what people refer to as the devil's luck.

By some definitions, Minamijuuji Sei attracted trouble. There was no way the world would let his achievements go, and he was forced into giving interviews all while being lauded on television as a super high-schooler. There was even a high-ranking police officer who had given him a push, saying that he should become a policeman in the future.

In any case, his year had been all but average. Given the attention he was getting at a young age, he was a prime target for adulation and applause. At the

same time, he'd become a target of envy from his peers. There were those who thought he'd somehow cheated those results, but in the end, he was simply working under different conditions from everyone else.

There was no need for him to fear the weapons of criminals, and they seemed to be standing still to him. Even though the fire he had jumped into had been hot, it hadn't exactly been unbearable in the end. Sei had actually taken a bullet to the arm during the bank robbery, but all that resulted in was a bruise. All humans felt the need to protect themselves to some extent. However, Sei was the only one who could completely ignore all of that.

When he charged into the fire to save the child, he was praised as a brave young man.

That's wrong, he thought. It just didn't seem much like a threat compared to those fires in the other world that could scorch away the face of the planet.

When he had faced down the bank robbers who had holed up with their guns by himself, he was lauded as a young man with a great sense of justice.

That's wrong, he thought. It's just that guns only look like toys to me. It wasn't like I threw caution to the wind in order to calm them down.

"Something is...wrong," Sei muttered to himself as he walked down the road in his street clothes, holding a shopping bag.

He didn't have school today, so he'd gone out shopping and was just returning. Since he lived with his mother, he always went out grocery shopping like this on days off, so she didn't have to.

Currently, he was worried about the power he'd gained in the other world.

I don't regret what I did. I'm glad I helped someone, I really am. But something is wrong. Was the future I wanted really supposed to be like this? This is basically like I'm the only one constantly up in some safe area as I do things. All my accomplishments are only because of the power I gained on the other side.

So what if I didn't have it? Would I have been able to do the same things without this power? Would I have been able to jump into a raging fire to save a child? Would I have been able to step in front of a bunch of criminals with guns? Aren't I just a shameful person who's cheating by using power he lucked into

while feeling proud of it?

I rejected Alovenus, but in the end, I'm still just taking advantage of this power. It's only the scale that's different. Isn't that something I should be really ashamed of...?

Sei paused. "I wonder what they would say?"

Having power also means having responsibility. Power without responsibility is just a deadly weapon.

On the other side, Sei had never thought much about this power he'd gained without much effort. After all, this much power was almost nothing over there. Compared to the likes of Lufas Maphaahl and Alovenus, Sei was basically just a villager. Both Lufas and Alovenus could have squashed him with barely a thought. That was why he hadn't been able to gain an accurate grip on things and couldn't understand the incredible power he'd returned with.

Sei finally understood after returning, however, and with that understanding came the feeling that he was a huge cheater.

"If it was her..."

Sei thought of a certain pink-haired girl.

I was young back then too. Well, that hasn't actually changed. Now that I think back on it, I probably should have talked more about things. I ran away like I was trying to cut off any lingering attachments, but all I did was not say things that should have been said.

Sei was constantly rolling a certain question around in his mind. *If she saw me like this, what would she say?*

"I think she'd say something like, 'You're worrying as much as always, aren't you?'"

At first, Sei thought he was hearing things. After all, there was no way he should be hearing that voice on Earth. *You're just hearing things*, he told himself. *It's just a convenient figment of your imagination.*

Despite thinking this, he couldn't help but turn around. What he saw was just as he'd hoped... The girl he'd most wanted to see was standing there, still

looking the same as when he'd left.

Seeing Sei stunned, the girl in front of him spoke somehow bashfully, but also like a child who'd had her prank found out.

"I wanted to see you, so I came."

* *

A small village existed on the outskirts of Laevateinn that should have been peaceful, but the world always had those who could not adapt to peace, scoundrels who enjoyed eating the weak. The three dirty, failed adventurers who stopped by the village were just such people. They were not strong, but they acted as such in front of those weaker than them, and this small village had no way to oppose them.

"Ha ha! Hurry up and bring out yer food! All of it!"

"And yer wimmen too! All the young'uns!"

"Ha ha ha ha! I like this place! I think we'll live here for a while. All of you better be grateful!"

The men almost seemed to be straight out of a bad-guy mold, with mohawks and everything, but people this boilerplate were surprisingly few and far between. There were always fools who defied law and order and thought that acting tough was cool, no matter the era. These men were people who had taken this line of thinking to its logical conclusion and gone as low as they could.

Things like this were not uncommon. If there was something rare about this, it would be that on this day, they were fatally unlucky.

"Hey, you there. You all look like you're having great fun. Wanna let me join in?"

"Huh?"

The men heard a young woman's voice, but the moment they turned around, they fell. It was as if a sudden well of gravity had fallen from the heavens. They were completely unable to move.

The men looked up while they lay on the ground and saw a crimson cloak flapping in the wind.

“Agh. Seeing something disgusting on my way back from visiting my mother’s grave is just my luck. Hey, you lot...”

Her almost-shining golden hair turned scarlet halfway down, and her face was almost too perfect. Her eyes were the same shade of fiery scarlet. What drew their eyes the most, though, were her pitch-black wings, the symbol of ill omen.



She was synonymous with fear all throughout Mizgarz, a monster who had once destroyed the world.

Her name: Lufas Maphaahl.

“Wanna die?” Lufas asked.

The men could no longer even speak. They were so scared that they wet their pants. All they could do was continuously leak tears, snot, and drool. Eventually, they passed out from lack of oxygen, causing Lufas to exasperatedly undo her Pressure.

A Wild EX Boss Appeared!

EX — 1

The distinction between the words “youth” and “young man” is fairly blurry. Normally, a person is a youth until fifteen and then is a young man for the latter half of their teens through their early twenties. However, current juvenile laws considered someone a youth until the age of twenty, so as always, the definition is not set in stone. At present, an eighteen-year-old could be called both a youth and a young man, but there was a proposed revision to laws to consider people youths only up until the age of eighteen. If that were to pass, then the definitions would solidify a little.

Right now, a man who was at that somewhat-ambiguous age of being either a youth or a young man was walking through town. He was 170 centimeters tall, which hadn't changed from a year ago, so he probably wouldn't get any taller. He weighed sixty kilograms and was somewhat baby-faced. He had a pretty good-looking, symmetrical face if someone were to look closer, but he wasn't out of the territory of average, and he had an air of a random bystander about him.

However, the young man was a little different from your average person. Because he'd been involved in several incidents in the past year, he had appeared on television, and his grades in PE had also gotten a lot better. He had, in fact, been summoned to another world as a hero before.

In all honesty, that world's power levels were far too inflated, and he hadn't ended up being much of a hero at all. Even so, the abilities and strength he'd gained in that other world were significant, and after returning, it was almost as if he'd discovered that it was nearly too much for one person.

Next to him walked a beautiful young girl with pink hair. Her face was as well ordered as a doll's, and she was almost otherworldly. Her skin was incredibly smooth and white, and her fingers were slender. She wore a one-piece dress that they'd bought at a nearby store, and it really fit her, but she was in no way

planning to be a pirate king.

As a matter of course, she drew stares and was showered in attention as a natural reaction to her beauty, though mysteriously, no one paid any attention to her oddly colored hair. It was strange. Pink hair stood out ridiculously well against the backdrop of Japan. Even outside of Japan, strawberry-blonde hair was rare. Not to mention, her hair wasn't strawberry-blonde at all. It was straight-up pink. That was nowhere close to a blonde that was slightly reddish and could be seen as pink in some lights. However, there were none of the telltale signs of a wig or her hair being dyed. She seemed so impossible it was almost as if a 2D character out of some story or game had jumped out into real life.

The young man's name was Minamijuuji Sei. The young girl's name was Virgo. Sei was a true-blue Japanese person, but he had the unbelievable history of having fought in another world. Meanwhile, Virgo was a visitor from that other world.

At the moment, she wore a bracelet given to her by the master she served that warped others' perceptions of her. To others, she still had pink hair, but they were made to not question it at all.

These two budding youths had taken an interest in one another as they fought together two years ago, and they officially became an item a year later after everything was over. They were currently in the middle of a date, and Virgo was making brave but low-key moves to try to get Sei to hold her hand. Sei, for his part, answered well.



The sight of them unfamiliarly walking together was very innocent and heartwarming but also one that made onlookers wish they'd explode. They were certainly mutually in love.

Virgo was full of resolve, so she would respond if Sei held his hand out to her. In fact, it'd been a year by now, so she wanted him to make a move.

As for Sei, he was a healthy boy. If asked whether he wanted to hold hands or not, he would always answer yes. Though he wanted to act like a gentleman, he was walking next to a beautiful girl he'd fallen for. If he could, he would hug her, lift her up, and whisk her away to a love hotel to make her his right away, of course.

However, he had...misgivings. The two of them had an insurmountable difference in life spans, and no matter how much they loved each other, Sei was fated to die before Virgo. In the first place, Virgo was already one hundred years old, though she outwardly looked like a young girl. She mustn't be considered a cradle-robber in disguise, since from a heaven-winged standpoint, she was very much still young. Dogs would grow old and die in a mere ten years, far faster than their human owners. Similarly, the time over which a human grew old and died was just a "few decades" to Virgo.

That fact bothered Sei. He didn't want to leave her alone after he died. No matter how much he loved her and held her dear, they were still unable to share their entire lives together. That alone was enough to delay Sei's determination. *Can someone like me really make her mine? Isn't there someone much more suited for traveling through life with her?* It was because he liked her so much that he wondered, *Shouldn't I leave her for her own sake?* These days, this was all he thought about.

That was why he could never quite take the next step. They dated, ate together, and played around...but that was all. On top of that, the fact that they were both rather late bloomers just made things worse.

If Virgo had the personality to just push Sei over and take him it would have at least helped things along, but she couldn't bring herself to do that, and of course, neither could Sei. That was why their relationship just dragged on like this, and they continued to waste their precious, limited time.

Eventually, night fell, and they ended the date, unable to move forward once again.

“Um... Then... See you again, Sei.”

“Y-Yeah. Be careful going home,” he said.

“Yeah... Um, Sei?”

“Hmm?”

Virgo paused for some time. “Sorry, it’s nothing. I’m going back, then.”

“Y-Yeah. Got it.”

It seemed that Virgo wanted to say something but couldn’t quite get it out. Even Sei could tell something like that. *She wants our relationship to move forward.*

Normally, this was something Sei should have brought up as the male with those desires, and if Virgo were human—or if Sei were a heaven-winged—then he would already have done so. However, the issue of their life spans was stuck in the back of his mind like a persistent stain. Sei couldn’t help but imagine Virgo living alone after he was gone, and that stopped him cold.

Virgo could somewhat tell that was what Sei was worried about as well. This was why she simply smiled somewhat sadly as she lifted up her bracelet. When she did, a tunnel between worlds—an Exgate—was formed, which Virgo used to return to Mizgarz from Earth.

After Virgo had left, Sei continued to stare at the place where she had been with drooped shoulders.

After some time together, he said, “I’m such a worthless pansy... I know I should say it, but...”

He had to be the one to say it, whether they continued forward or stopped here. Either way, he needed to tell her clearly.

There was no point in continuing to drag out this current situation. Time was limited for them. If they were to continue, then it would be best to get this out of the way as fast as possible so they could enjoy their time together. If they were to stop, then Sei should end it as quickly as possible in order to hurt her

less. Sei was unable to commit to either option though, leading to him being unable to give up this current situation and dragging it on uselessly.

Sei was hit by a bout of self-hatred, causing him to punch at his own head. Of course, doing so didn't improve anything. He only felt even more wretched.

* *

Virgo sighed. "I couldn't say it today either..."

After returning to Mizgarz, Virgo was just as troubled as Sei. She knew why Sei couldn't take the next step in their relationship. He knew about the difference in their life spans and the fact that he would die much earlier than she would. However, Virgo liked Sei in full knowledge of that, and because she knew they only had a short time together, she wanted to make the most of the time they had.

When she first met Sei, he was an unreliable boy. However, as they continued to interact, she realized that he had a very strong core. In terms of strength, Sei was much weaker than Virgo. He was even weaker when compared to Virgo before she had gone on her journey with Lufas, let alone now.

However, Virgo only had a high level. At her core, she was not nearly as strong. She just lived from day to day, swept along by events without any real goals or desires for her future. Though she'd had the ability to fight from the beginning, Virgo had found that she herself was weak, weak enough for her Pressure to have been fought off by demihumans who were of a lower level than her.

However, Sei was different. Though he was weak, he simply accepted his weakness and tried to find something he could do despite that instead of sulking and becoming cynical. Eventually, Virgo started to respect that side of him, and by the time she'd noticed, she was looking towards him whenever they were together.

Lufas had said before that the one who had truly been strong in that battle was Sei. Now, Virgo understood well what Lufas had meant, and that was exactly why she wanted to be with him. Because Sei was too nice for his own good, however, he could never bring himself to say the words. Virgo also wasn't brave enough, so she couldn't confess to him either.

I know I need to change, but I can't. I just don't have the courage to take that first step.

Virgo hated herself so much because of that.

“Huh?” she said after a moment of pause.

Suddenly, Virgo realized something was off. The bracelet that Lufas had made in order to make it possible for her to travel between worlds was supposed to take her to the moon. More specifically, it was locked on to Dina's coordinates on the moon and had apparently been made to send her there every time. This was because the power imbued into the bracelet was Dina's, since the ability to form Exgates and manipulate cognition was all hers.

However, Virgo clearly was not on the moon at the moment. She was in some sort of wilderness.

“Could Dina be near here for some reason?”

If Dina moved, the place Virgo would be sent to would, of course, also follow suit, since the bracelet was locked onto Dina's coordinates.

Virgo, who was level 1000, could fly to the moon herself if she wanted to, but that idea didn't sit too well with her. Lufas, and others like her, would fly through space like it was nothing, but Virgo still felt hesitant about trying that stunt.

For now, let's just try looking for Dina.

With that in mind, Virgo decided to explore the area. After some time spent walking, her bracelet finally reacted, showing her the way. As she followed the direction the bracelet was leading her, Virgo eventually came upon a small cave.

Why is Dina in a place like this...? Virgo wondered, deciding to just enter for the moment. When she did, she found a mysterious figure sitting at the rear end of the cave.

“Um... Dina?”

When Virgo called out to the figure, it suddenly shuddered in surprise. This caused Virgo to take a step back and pause for a moment.

“Who are you? How did you get here? This place should have a barrier

blocking recognition cast on it..." the figure said, cautious.

The voice, which seemed slightly afraid, was not Dina's. It was undoubtedly a man's. It was also clear that this man was what Virgo's bracelet was reacting to. Since the bracelet should have only reacted to Dina, it should have followed that the figure was Dina, but there was no way this person wasn't male.

Is it broken...? Virgo wondered as she glanced back at the man once again.

What Virgo saw when she looked at him was a face that was a work of art, so beautiful and proportional that the word "graceful" could not do it justice. His hair, which was long enough to reach his waist, was a golden color, and his blue eyes shined in the darkness. Though his face looked younger than what was likely his real age, he was beautiful enough to pass for a girl with the right clothes. Even so, he was chiseled and manly in the opposite way to Sei. This man had a high-bridged nose and sharp eyes, but that didn't mean he had a wild air about him, like Leon. Rather, this person seemed quiet and refined. He was so beautiful and his countenance so divine that Virgo thought this was what Lufas would have looked like if she were a man...

However, gloom marred his beauty. The man was obviously weakened, with sunken cheeks and a general layer of grime on him. He wore only rags, making him look much more wretched and dirty compared to his underlying looks.

"Um, are you okay? Are you stranded here...or something...?" Virgo asked.

"Stranded...? I suppose you could say that," he said. "It has been quite a while since I've heard a human voice."

"That's terrible! Then let's get you to a town right away!"

The nearest town was probably still a long ways away, but Virgo could carry him and be there in no time at all. Even if she went slower so as not to put stress on his frame, she was still confident she could find a settlement within a few minutes.

However, the man held out a hand and gently rebuffed Virgo's suggestion.

"Towns are... Towns are no good. I might be found."

"Found? Are you being chased?"

“Yeah, that’s right,” he said. “I’ve been chased for an overwhelmingly long time, during which I have continuously been running and hiding. They might have forgotten about me by now, but if they haven’t and they find me, they’ll dispose of me like a pest.”

The first thought Virgo had was, *Did this person do something bad to deserve getting chased like this?* She couldn’t think of any other reason why he would have been running for so long. That thought must have shown on her face, as the man suddenly laughed.

“You seem to have the wrong idea. I am not a criminal.”

“Ah, sorry! Um...” Virgo trailed off.

“It’s fine. Anyone would think like that after seeing how I look.”

The man smiled as he spoke. It had surely been a long time since he’d spoken to anyone. His face said that he was an intellectual, but it also still held that childlike curiosity hidden within.

“Um... Is there anything that I can do for you?” asked Virgo.

“You’re kind, aren’t you? To say that to someone like me, whom you’ve never met before. Let’s see then... If it’s all right with you, would you share something to eat with me? It has been a long while since I’ve eaten human food. And if you have something to wear, that’d be great as well...”

Saying that, the man produced something from his pocket. It was a coin made out of gold. However, Virgo had never seen the coin before. *What country’s currency is that?*

“I don’t know if this is still in use, but...it is made of gold. I don’t know the current market value of gold either, but if you melt it down and sell it, it should be worth something. If it’s not enough, tell me.”

“No, this should be more than enough... But...which country’s money is this?”

“I wonder...” The man paused. “Sorry, but I can’t remember the name.”

“Hmm... Okay then, I’ll go buy some food and clothes for you with this. Ah, I’ll make sure to return the change to you as well.”

“I don’t mind if you just keep the change.”

“That won’t do! Doing things like that is not good!”

Forcing favors on someone and then taking more than what was needed was not a good thing. When Virgo insisted upon this, the man once again laughed mirthfully.

“Ah, okay, I understand. Then I will gladly take the change later.”

Virgo took the coin of unknown age and providence from the man and was about to leave before she seemed to remember something and turned back. *Oh yeah. I still haven’t heard his name.*

“Excuse me. What’s your name? Mine is Virgo.”

“My name, huh...? I have not spoken it since my name was taken from me...”

What a strange thing to say, Virgo thought. Taken? What does that mean?

However, it seemed to Virgo that he had his own circumstances to consider, and since this was their first meeting, she felt that it might be rude to pry too far. So, Virgo decided not to pry further.

“Sanieve... Yes, my parents called me Sanieve,” the man said as his eyes took on a faraway look, suggesting that he was reminiscing about the past.

That was Virgo’s first time meeting Sanieve, a man with a mysterious air about him.



EX—2

Tens of thousands of years ago, there were two races that were considered people. One was the heaven-winged, who were the first race the Goddess created for this world. Then there was the race derived from the heaven-winged who had descended to the ground and lost their wings in exchange for the adaptability to live in nearly any environment. They were now simply referred to as humans, and they became the basic template from which a race was determined to be a part of humanity or not.

Furthermore, humans spread to caves, forests, and plains—basically every area Mizgarz had to offer—changing and adapting to their environment. That was how the current seven races of humanity were formed. Among them, there were those who desired a peaceful life in a dark land. While they lived in the depths of Mizgarz where the mana was thickest, they mutated greatly, becoming the race closest to monsters amongst humanity. This was the race that would later be called vampires.

Vampires—they were the nobility of the night, who were strong like beastfolk, fast like halflings, able to use magic like elves, tough like dwarves, and with a longer life span than heaven-winged. On top of that, they had strong regenerative powers, and under the benefit of moonlight, they were even stronger.

They were confident that they were the closest race to perfection. This held doubly true for the historic firsts of their species—the originators. The strongest of the originators was a man filled with a vampire's arrogance who called himself a vampire among vampires, a "true ancestor," before traveling forth to attempt world conquest.

He was the most feared vampire in all of history, Vlad the True Ancestor. His power was truly the stuff of nightmares, an embodiment of despair. If he wanted to, he could run ten times the speed of sound, and he was strong enough to crack mountains. His mastery over magic allowed him to instantly erase entire villages, and his overall combat prowess was said to have allowed him to decimate entire large cities in a single night.

However, it is said that the nail that sticks out gets hammered. His greed in

wanting dominance over not just humanity but monsters and fairies as well was his undoing. After challenging the Fairy Princess Pollux, the Symbol of Light, Vlad's armies were overrun by her heroic spirits. As for Vlad himself, he was unable to even lay a hand on the brother, Castor, and his body was split into thirty-six pieces as he tasted total and utter defeat.

Vlad was not dead though. In the end, his self-given title as true ancestor was not just for show. His incredibly stubborn constitution kept him alive even after he was rendered into ashes.

He did not escape with only light damage, of course, so he was forced to spend the next several thousand years on his revival. Even then, he needed an even greater amount of time in order to regain his former strength. Eventually, though, the time to hide in obscurity reached its end, and it was time for Vlad to redouble his efforts towards his goal.

Having regained his former strength—or rather, having regained *more* than his former strength—Vlad awoke from his long slumber, finally completing his revival and fully ready to steep the world in darkness and blood.

“A new age of darkness has come upon us!”

A voice reverberated through the darkness of Helheim, coming from the rubble which remained from the collapse Libra had caused. More specifically, it came from a casket buried within that rubble.

“I have revived!” The voice paused. “Mm? Hmm? What? It won't open...?”

The true ancestor, Vlad, spoke about a time that had already ended over ten thousand years ago. People would remember Lufas Maphaahl, who had only become infamous two hundred years ago, but not even vampires would remember someone from *that* long ago. As a result, the location of the true ancestor's casket had been completely forgotten, causing him to be stuck under this rubble in a strange set of coincidences.

“Krkhh! Aghh! What is on top of my casket?! H-Hey, is there anyone there?! Your true ancestor has revived! Bah... Open up! Open up, I said!”

Finally reaching the limits of his patience, the owner of the voice kicked his casket, forcing the rubble away. The casket's resident walked gracefully out

from among the cloud of dust caused by such a move, brushed himself off, and looked around.

Good. No one was around. It seems there are no witnesses of me in this state.

Though initially relieved, the man eventually slipped into a state of dissatisfaction over the fact that no one was here to celebrate the revival of their great true ancestor.

“What is the meaning of this...? Why is no one here? I should have warned them that I would return after ten thousand years of sleep...”

Vlad had indeed foretold his revival, but not even the ageless vampires could remember something for that long. Given a span of ten thousand years, no one other than those who had been alive at the time would remember anything from that period. Almost all of the vampires who had been alive in that time had become ash long ago. Mizgarz’s vampires did not grow old, but they did have a life span. With that in mind, the fact that this man was still alive after so long hinted that he was indeed worthy of the “true ancestor” title.

“Hmph... The flow of time, I suppose? How impudent. It is just sad that none of the vampires that should worship me are here. It seems the vampires of this era must be taught a lesson as to who their ruler is.”

Vlad’s smile was as haughty as could be expected of a ruler of the night as he disappeared.

If they do not understand the greatness of their true ancestor, then they are not worthy of mercy, even if they are of the same species. No. I, Vlad, am the only real vampire to exist in the first place. Everybody else is just a cheap imitation. To think that these inferior beings would dare forget their true ancestor... They should not complain about being killed.

The first thing Vlad decided to do was find the vampires of the current age, meaning the country of vampires, Mjøltnir. Said country, which was under the effect of a permanent night, was under the control of the Vampire Princess Benetnasch and situated in Mizgarz’s most dangerous area. It mustn’t be brought up that, if she ruled a country, Benetnasch should be a queen and not a princess.

That day, Benetnasch was enjoying a mont blanc that Lufas had brought back from Earth in her room, and thus was in a very good mood. There was no one around, and no need for her to be careful of appearances, so her expression was freer than usual.

Suddenly her window shattered as someone flew in rudely. That in itself was fine; Benetnasch only thought some rat had dropped in. What was unforgivable to her, however, was that because the intruder had come in so roughly, some gunk had gotten on top of her mont blanc, ruining it.

A vein popped at Benetnasch's temple, and her rare loose expression instantly filled with killing intent.

"Hmph. So this is the castle of the current ruler of vampires? It is rather nice, but from now on, it shall be mine," said Vlad.

Benetnasch remained silent.

"Still, to think that a small girl like this is their monarch... Bow, little girl. You are standing too tall. I am the true ancestor..."

Without a word, Benetnasch's fist slammed into the intruder's—Vlad's—face.

It was a heavy hit! Vlad takes 999,999 damage!

Vlad was in a sorry state, as everything from his neck up had been turned into chunks of meat. He had been thrown straight out of another window, breaking it as he was blown outside. He spun through the air, not coming to a stop until he crashed into an island on the other side of Mjolnir's territory.

The headless vampire picked himself up from among the resultant cloud of dust as his head slowly regenerated, silent.

This was thanks to the true ancestor Vlad's unique skill Life Stock. It was a skill that allowed him to store "life," and as long as he had stock left, he would just revive. It was a powerful skill, but he needed to reduce his remaining HP to 1 in order to create a stock, and no methods like items or heaven-arts could do anything about this loss of HP. He could only rely on his regeneration abilities to recover it.

After his loss to the Fairy Princess Pollux, Vlad learned that no small amount

of life stocks would be enough for her. Therefore, he waited ten thousand years to continuously build up stocks. His current amount was 66,666. However, Benetnasch's blow had just expended twenty of his lives.

"Huh?" he said after remaining silent a long while. "What was that...just now...?"

For a while, Vlad was confused, unable to understand what had just happened. Eventually, he came to realize that he had been brutally killed with a single punch, and he slowly spawned a river of sweat.

No. Wait a second. Just wait. Wait. This is weird. I am the king of all vampires, right? I'm the true ancestor! So why was I done in by a single punch from a little girl?

"Rather...what was truly strange...was that damage number...!!!"

Since a single punch rid him of twenty lives, simple math told Vlad that if he were punched 3,334 times, then he would truly die. That was enough to make any normal person think they had some leeway, but Benetnasch would easily be able to hammer out that many blows, so there wasn't actually any leeway at all. Rather, even if there were another two or so digits, Vlad would probably still be killed in around ten seconds.

The Vampire Princess wasn't to be underestimated, given that she was able to keep up with Lufas in terms of speed.

"Heh... Heh heh heh... J-J-J-J-Just what I would expect from a vampire. I-I-I-I seem to have gotten a little rusty, s-so I think I'll let that go."

Even though no one was around to listen, Vlad put on a strong front before leaving the island.

I'm not leaving because I'm afraid if I stay that scary vampire will come. Definitely not. Right. Now that I think about it, there's no need for us to fight as fellow vampires. We're all vampires in the end. We're friends. Nay, family! I am not giving up the fight because I cannot win. I am a very kind and forgiving person, so I am just choosing not to punish a fellow vampire.

Vlad flew towards Alfheim as he fed himself these excuses.

That's right. I should be fighting that hateful Fairy Princess instead. I waited ten thousand years in order to defeat her, after all.

* *

“Huh? What do you think you’re doing, dragging your muddy feet through here? Huh?!”

“If you keep acting cheeky like this, we’ll just have to take you down a peg, trash!”

After entering Alfheim, Vlad was greeted by the Fenix/Hydras pair, a combination famous for being vulgar and uncouth. Though they were a step below the Twelve Stars, they were still level 1000 and undoubtedly of the strongest class of monster. On top of that, Pollux’s heroic spirits continued coming out of the woodwork, multiplying like a swarm, and the quality of those spirits could not be compared to those of the past.

Two hundred years ago, many high-level spirits ended up being produced, thanks to Lufas inflating the levels of many people who then perished in that past fight. Thanks to that, Pollux’s forces had been strengthened many times over.

Level 1000. Level 1000. Level 1000. Level 1000. Everyone was level 1000. It was as if there had been a bargain sale on max-level spirits...

“I’d heard someone had invaded the forest, but...” Pollux paused. “What a nostalgic face you are. I believe it’s been ten thousand years.”

Vlad hesitated before speaking. “Um, Fairy Princess? Isn’t there something strange going on with your army? There are way too many level 1000s...”

“A lot happened... By the way, are you feeling all right? You’re talking strangely.”

“Oh, shut up! Of course that’d happen when I’m surrounded by so many monsters like this!”

Vlad wanted to cry. *What were those ten thousand years even for?! he thought. This is impossible. Totally impossible! Not even a hundred million lives would be enough!*

Each and every heroic spirit was strong enough to kill Vlad several times over, and there was a mountain of them. On top of that, they could be spawned indefinitely as long as Pollux was around. *Stop cheating! No, wait. It's not over yet. Pollux is weak. She still has that flaw.*

As soon as that thought crossed Vlad's mind, Pollux started to faintly glow.

"Um, Pollux?" Vlad asked after a moment's hesitation.

"What is it? It's not like you to sound so meek."

"Is it just me or have you gotten a lot stronger?"

"It's not just you. I've inherited the powers of the Ouroboros of Wood..." She paused. "I am no longer weak."

In the final battle, Pollux had been given the powers of the Ouroboros of Wood. After that, the scuffle between Lufas and Alovenus had been so over-the-top that the phenomenon of inflation itself could have died from overwork, so the power that Pollux had received had been of no use at all. However, Pollux had still gotten stronger.

Yes, Pollux was no longer her own biggest weakness. In fact, she was now the incarnation of the Ouroboros of Wood herself, and she had higher combat potential than the Sword King Alioth.

"Are you prepared?" Pollux asked.

Without a word, Vlad immediately ran away. Others may have cursed him for being a coward, but it was a smart decision. Taking on an impossible fight was not bravery. Sometimes retreating was what took real guts, so he was in no way being cowardly. This was a brave retreat!

"He ran!"

"After him!"

"You bastard. I'll kill you!"

"Hold up!"

The heroic spirits all chased after Vlad with furious looks on their faces.

Vlad ran, his face dripping with tears and snot.

After this, he was killed several times over, reducing his stock of lives by about half before he finally managed to get away.

* *

“What is wrong with this era?”

Vlad’s will was broken, snapped clean, and left in pieces. It wasn’t breaking or almost broken; it was already gone completely. Of course it was. It hadn’t been specifically noted yet, but in the process of running away from Alfheim, he’d been killed more than 33,333 times. Unable to do anything, he had just been beaten on over and over and treated as a weakling as he tried to escape even while being killed. In the end, he’d turned to ash and could do nothing but cry, “WRYYYYY!” as he was thrown flying by wind and scattered into particulates. The fact that the heroic spirits had thought Vlad was dead after that and hadn’t checked further had been his saving grace.

“Could it be that I’m actually just incredibly weak...?” Vlad said weakly as he slumped to the ground, starting to lose all confidence.

In his defense, he wasn’t actually weak. At the very least, he was strong enough to destroy any member of the Seven Luminaries one-on-one, and he could still win against their number even two-on-one. Things would probably be even if he faced three of them at once, though facing four would be a little tough. However, five would be impossible for him. This was because there were two level 1000 cheaters by the names of Dina and Sol among the Seven Luminaries, and if Luna were to get hurt, Terra would act. That meant four would be the limit for Vlad. At best, he would be able to fight well against the weakest four: Mars, Jupiter, Saturnus, and Mercurius.

Ah, yeah. I really am just weak. Let’s just go home.

“N-No, no. I just happened to come upon some truly incredible people. That’s definitely the case. They were this age’s Fairy Princess and the ruler of all vampires... I’m not weak at all. They’re just too strong.”

The fact that he just admitted that they were stronger than him meant that his pride as a powerful person was one step away from being in tatters. However, he still was not yet ready to believe that he himself was weak.

That was when Vlad hit upon the idea to just pick a fight with the first random person he saw in order to regain his confidence. It was a move completely devoid of pride or honor, but he was totally serious about it. Luckily, he was on a well-maintained road that connected cities together, so as long as he waited, someone was sure to come.

Then, after waiting several minutes, his first unwitting victim came. It was a large man absolutely rippling with muscles. His bright red hair swayed in the wind like a lion's mane, and his face screamed brutal violence without a hint of reason. His face was human, at least, but it really just looked like someone had stuffed a ferocious beast into the shape of a human somehow, as his expression was warped in a way that said that he hated the entire world. The man was over two meters tall, with dark, swarthy skin that was stretched so taut trying to contain his muscles that it seemed he might burst. The air around the man was distorted like a mirage from the heat he gave off, and it was clear right from the get-go how dangerous he was.

His name: Leon the Lion King, the problem child of the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars.

Vlad's thoughts stalled for a moment. *Nope!* The vampire hid. He threw away his pride and hid with all his might. *Nope. No way. Totally impossible. He's obviously incomprehensibly strong.*

His judgment was, in fact, correct. Leon was scarily strong, and he was also in a bad mood today. He'd lost the mahjong tournament that had been held on the moon and as a punishment, was forced to wear some clothes Sagittarius used as a disguise to go out and run errands. On top of that, it was a woman's dress.

Imagine a large, extremely muscular man entering a store in a dress. That was the hilarity that was incoming. Thanks to that, Leon's stress meter was maxed out. If there were anyone who would pick a fight with Leon at that moment, then they would most likely have been punched out of all of their lives. Thus Vlad bought his safety in exchange for his pride as he let Leon pass.

Others might have mocked him for being a coward, but he'd simply become smarter in exchange for all of his deaths. His actions should be lauded as those

of someone smart and prudent. Calling him a chicken was completely unwarranted.

After confirming that Leon was gone, Vlad once again looked forward to his next would-be victim. The next person to arrive was a tiger beastfolk. He was just as tall as the previous passerby and also looked obviously strong. Though Vlad couldn't feel the peculiar aura given off by the strong, he was sure that this man was indeed a powerhouse and let him pass as well.

This was a chicken move.

The next one to come was a girl who seemed weak. Her rainbow-colored hair flowed smoothly down her back, and her body was as slender and seemingly fleeting as any other girl's.

Hmm...? She's...a girl...? At any rate, the chicken was sure he could win. *I'll descend upon this unfortunate passing girl and defeat her, proving that I am not weak!* So, he jumped out and blocked the way of the weak-looking sheep.

"Wait right there, young lady! My name is Vlad the True Ancestor! This may be sudden, but I will be taking your blood!" The chicken proudly named himself, and while he was at it, the plan to take some blood popped into his head.

The blood of a beautiful, living girl was a favorite of vampires. That never changed, not even in fantasy worlds. His would-be victim was actually male, though. Rather, he wasn't even human. However, this chicken had no idea about any of this and was sure of his victory.

"Be at ease," he continued. "As long as you don't put up undue resistance, I will not take your life. However, if you attempt to resist me, you should be prepared for death."

As he spoke, the chicken reminisced on the past. *It was better back then. Just mentioning my name like this would put fear in people, and they would quickly offer their blood, just to be saved. But look here. This girl isn't afraid at all. How sad. I'm sure she's so pathetically weak she can't even tell how strong I am, but I suppose I shouldn't blame her. Having too large a gap in strength makes the gap harder to sense. The girl isn't too weak; I'm just too strong.*

As the chicken glowed with pride at that thought, the girl—rather, Aries—

made to hit him lightly.

Aries had figured that he'd just try hitting Vlad for now, since from the way he spoke, he was an enemy. While Aries was rather peaceful as far as the Thirteen Stars went, that didn't mean he was a pacifist. As long as he recognized someone as an enemy, he would naturally attack them. The Thirteen Stars weren't to be underestimated like that.

Thus, the chicken was sent flying.

“AAAaaaaAAaaaAAaaaAAAAHHH!!!”

The chicken screamed as he flew high through the sky, spinning like a boomerang in his travels.

I've been spouting words that would come back to me like a boomerang for a while now. Who knew that I would become a boomerang myself though? Amazing.

Vlad was unlike many people in that he understood what a punch line was. From now on, let's refer to him as the comedian.

“NOOOOOOOOOO!”

The comedian continued on his flight path, managing to crash into Lufas, who was just on her way from the moon to Mizgarz, and he bounced off into the ground.

However, he hadn't stopped yet. As long as he still lived, the comedian would continue to roll. He rolled and rolled, continuing through Mizgarz's soil as if he were tilling a field. Eventually, he stopped after rolling through ten kilometers of earth.

Vlad was speechless. “Huh?” He paused. “What...was that...?”

The comedian cowered. *She's just a thin, frail-looking girl. Why did her punch have all that power?*

With that, his remaining lives decreased even further, and he finally lost all confidence. Well, such a thing as confidence no longer existed. However, he still wanted to think he was better than average.

Huh? Wait. Am I possibly...below average? Am I seriously nothing but small fry

in this day and age?

“U-Ummm... Are you all right?”

An angel—rather, a heaven-winged girl with pink hair—descended before the poor comedian. She crouched down to be at eye level with the comedian, seemingly worried about him.

If this were a romantic comedy, he would be in a position to see her panties, but it seemed she’d casually calculated their relative angles, making it so he was unable to. It was called absolute territory because it could not be observed. Panties that were easily seen had no value.

If it’s this girl...I should be fine, thought the comedian.

Learn your lesson already!

“Thank you, kind girl. By the way, I have a favor to ask of you. Could you try hitting me?”

“H-Huhhh...?”

“I understand your hesitation. However, it is something I need in order to maintain the last shreds of my pride. Being hit by you will not affect me. It’ll be fine. I am strong,” Vlad said. Then he added, “I hope,” under his breath.

Is it really okay to punch someone I’ve just met? thought Virgo. *Actually, I don’t understand why he asked me to do this in the first place.*

“Uh, I think I shouldn’t... Um, I... Well, I shouldn’t say it myself, but...I’m probably pretty strong, I think.”

“Ha ha ha. How reliable! It’ll be fine. Have at me.”

“A-Are you really sure?”

“I will be completely fine!!!”

“Are you really, *really* sure?!”

“Da!!!”

“W-Well then... Rah!”

Virgo’s attempt at a war cry was cute. If transcribed into text, it would

probably warrant a star or heart mark after it. The sound of her making contact was cute too. Once again, it seemed like it would warrant a star or heart mark if transcribed.

The comedian went flying.

“AAAAAaaAAAaaAAaaaaAAAAAAHH!!!”

Once again, he was a boomerang. After meeting with the same consequences once again, he could only laugh. He was a person of deep insight, much more than any common person.

As he soared high into the sky, he actually left Mizgarz’s atmosphere and was only sent back to the ground because he bounced off of Alovenus, who just happened to be descending to Mizgarz as well.

“NOOOOOOOOOOO!”

Spinning like a wheel, he tumbled across the land, only coming to a stop after traveling another ten kilometers. He had not lost any lives. Apparently, she had attached the Blunted-Sword Strike skill to her punch.

While gazing quietly up at the blue sky, the comedian pondered things.

“I see...” Vlad was silent for a long while. “I’m just incredibly weak...”

I never thought I’d be sent flying by a random hit from some girl just passing by. My own weakness surprises even me. Maybe this level of weakness is actually something rare and amazing? If I hit some random monster, they wouldn’t fly so far, which means that I’m just that weak. My strength isn’t even at zero. It’s in the negatives. I am level negative 1000. That’s got to be it, he thought.

At this point, he was broken in a lot of ways.

“No, wait a minute. Maybe... This is just a possibility, but... There is a very low chance of this being true, but maybe all of the people I have met have just been ridiculously strong? Maybe those two girls were actually outstandingly powerful figures in this world, and I just happened to find them. My luck might just have been very bad.”

Having said that, the comedian realized that this line of thinking was very

optimistic and self-serving. It was also actually correct. Nobody would immediately assume they were just unlucky though, so he decided to make the next attempt his last. He would challenge the next person he met and confirm his strength. *If I am once again defeated, then I will just accept my weakness. I could even announce myself as the weakest being in the world. However, if that is not the case...I should at least be able to dream.*

He heard footsteps. *Someone... No, two people are coming this way. From their footsteps, I think they're women.* The comedian slowly got up and looked towards the source of the footsteps.

This will be my last challenge. Please, be weak. Be weak, I'm begging here. Allow me to believe that I'm strong!

"Oh, it's you, the person I bumped into earlier. Were you hurt?"

A wild Lufas Maphaahl appeared!

"Huh? This person... Ah, right. I remember now. He should be the very first vampire. That's nostalgic. It feels like I just randomly found a doll that I'd lost a long time ago."

A wild Alovenus appeared!

Nope.

The comedian, thus renamed to the world's weakest being, instantly understood that he could not win. *Nope. No way. Absolutely impossible. Chance of winning? That concept doesn't even exist in this realm. Even considering fighting them is the height of absurdity.*

Wait, isn't one of them the god of all creation? Isn't that Alovenus?

"You were really rolling back there. Are you hurt?"

"No, I'm fine," said Vlad. "Please, do not mind me. I was just getting too big for my britches. Sorry for being alive."

Lufas paused. "Uh, are you sure you're okay? Did you hit anything you shouldn't have?"

"I'm okay. Super okay. Just the weakest in history. In fact, I have finally understood my station in life after witnessing the truth of the world. I'm very

sorry for ever acting like I was strong.”

“Aren’t you Vlad, the True Ancestor?” Alovenus asked. “What are you doing in a place like this?”

“Vlad the True Ancestor? I don’t recognize that name. What you see before you is simply the world’s weakest living being, an incorrigible small fry, if you will.”

The incorrigible small fry’s spirit was already dust in the wind. There was no recovering it. It would be better to just buy a new one.

His biggest misfortune was probably reviving at the worst time. If he’d come back before Lufas was born, he at least would have constituted a bigger threat than the devilfolk’s Seven Luminaries. It was possible he could have presented a strong threat to Lufas back in her adventurer days and left his name in history, if that had been the case. Either that, or he might even have been able to join the Twelve Stars.

However, he had no way of knowing that. His poor pride was destroyed and scattered to the four winds, and all that was left was a man introducing himself as an incorrigible small fry.

I will never be ambitious again.

Leaving those words behind, he resolved to once again shut himself in his casket. *The outside is scary. There are monsters everywhere, no matter where I go. That small casket, where I won’t meet anyone, is the best.*

That was how a newly emerging threat was dealt with before anyone knew it was even a threat. The danger Vlad the True Ancestor posed was nothing. He was just a poor fool who mistook his timing for revival. The true threat was still waiting with bated breath, unnoticed by anyone.

EX—3

“What was wrong with that person?” Virgo muttered to herself, befuddled, after she sent Vlad flying.

He just appeared all of a sudden and asked me to hit him, so I did, but he went

flying while screaming... I honestly don't know what just happened. I did use Blunted-Sword Strike just in case, so he should be fine...but I'm still a little worried.

Therefore, Virgo attempted to go in the direction she saw Vlad fly and managed to catch a glimpse of him running while crying. She breathed a sigh of relief. For some reason, he was running away from her master, Lufas, and the mastermind and final enemy behind their previous conflict, Alovenus.

"Hmm? If it isn't Virgo. What are you doing in a place like this?"

"I just... Uhhh, came to see an acquaintance..." Virgo trailed off. "What about you, Miss Lufas?"

"Ah, just a bit of treasure hunting," Lufas said, grabbing Alovenus by the head. "I asked this one here whether she had anything else she was hiding, and it turns out there was a huge bomb left over. I'm currently trying to find it."

"A...bomb?" Virgo asked, hesitant.

"Yeah." Lufas let out a small sigh as she smacked Alovenus lightly.

Alovenus may have been this world's creator, but her past actions had been so terrible that nobody present felt any respect for her.

"I'm sure you know that there were only five Ouroboroses, Virgo, but I thought that was a little strange. So I put the screws to her."

"Ah... Now that you mention it, Metal and Water are missing."

"Exactly. According to Alovenus, that's because those are the elements governed by Dina—in other words, her avatar—but Dina's combat ability clearly does not match the ouroboroses. When I asked her why things were balanced like this, she finally revealed that there was a huge bomb left over."

With that, Lufas pushed Alovenus forward. It was most likely a gesture demanding that she take over the explanation.

Alovenus laughed flippantly as she rubbed her abused head.

"It's not that big a deal. I just said that I did make an Ouroboros of Metal and an Ouroboros of Water in the past. There was a lot of trial and error going on back then, and in the end, splitting them up was too much trouble, so I just

made the avatar and the ouroboroses a set.”

“A...set?”

“Yep. Well, put simply, I just made the avatar with the powers of both the Metal and Water ouroboroses. Just consider Dina to have the ability to transform into a two-headed ouroboros. Anyway, I tried making the avatar a male at first, but it didn’t work out. Because the gender was different, he ended up becoming independent of me. He was all full of himself, saying that he was the god of this world while he did as he pleased, so I disposed of him. Then, I proceeded to do things like lowering the avatar’s strength and changing their gender and establishing a life span. All that errata became the current avatar, Dina.” Alovenus paused. “She became independent anyway though.”

That was the reason there were only five ouroboroses. It wasn’t because ones for the elements of Metal and Water didn’t exist; it was because they were failed works. And the reason there was only one avatar in comparison to five ouroboroses was that the avatars always had the power of two ouroboroses.

Having had that explained to her, Virgo paled. *So there’s something with the power of two ouroboroses when it was almost impossible to take on even one, and he has Dina’s powers on top of that? Lufas might not even be able to handle that*, she thought.

“You didn’t actually dispose of him because you couldn’t, right? You beat him down, but he escaped at the last second. You can’t call that ‘disposing of him,’” Lufas said.

“Grk... B-But not only did I beat him up, I also took away most of the mana making up his body along with his title, so he’ll have almost no power left. In fact, I haven’t even felt his presence until just recently. He probably only recently recovered enough to be able to be active again,” said Alovenus.

“And that reason would be...”

“Well, it would be because of all the ouroboroses activating, of course. I think he was influenced by the other ouroboroses into becoming active. His presence was so weak that I hadn’t even noticed at first.”

“You’re just as bad at the small stuff as always. That’s why you get the rug

pulled out from under you.”

“Grrrrr...”

Because Alovenus’s very existence was so large, she was unable to key into the smaller details. That was her weakness. It was because Lufas and Dina were so adept at planning out and taking advantage of those details that they’d won. And it turned out that this Goddess had done the same thing in the past, leaving someone alone who had the ability to defy her. There was the question of how that person had survived Lufas and Alovenus’s fight, but he’d probably just temporarily escaped using an Exgate.

“Still, he’s not someone we need to be that cautious of. He probably only has as much strength as a member of the Seven Luminaries. Less, even. We can just find him and capture him. Whether or not we get rid of him will depend on how he reacts. That’s the plan, anyway. I don’t think it’ll be necessary, but you be careful too,” Lufas warned.

“O-Okay,” Virgo replied.

Lufas walked away, dragging Alovenus along. They probably only understood that he was in the general area and couldn’t pinpoint an exact location. After all, this was the Goddess’s offshoot. He should have been as skilled at hiding as Dina. Now that Lufas and Alovenus had taken action, however, it was only a matter of time until the problem was solved. Though they might face some difficulty, there was most likely no way for their target to escape.

* * *

“My word, what an awful era!”

The incorrigible sluglike small fry—originally Vlad the True Ancestor—shouted aloud when he was alone. He was in the midst of returning to Helheim, where his casket was. However, it was taking some time because he was very paranoid about avoiding everyone, twitching at every sound and hiding at the slightest prompt.

He hadn’t used to be like this. In the past, he’d walked boldly wherever he went while those around him paid attention to his mood and reactions, as they were the ones who had to hide. Vlad used to be the embodiment of fear, but

what he was doing now was just like those cowardly common folk whom he used to see everywhere. That fact was what made him feel the worst.

“Are you...Virgo?”

That was when a voice called out to Vlad. With a twitch, he turned around while trembling in fear, and found a hatefully beautiful man. When the man saw Vlad, his disappointment was obvious.

“That’s no good. How could I...? I was so looking forward to her arrival, I ended up loosening the barrier. I would never have thought it would be for something as uninteresting as this.”

That got on Vlad’s nerves. *Uninteresting?! You would call me, Vlad, once hailed as the True Ancestor of all vampires and who controlled all the land, uninteresting?! How rude!* he thought.

However, he didn’t immediately lash out. After all, his weakness had been thoroughly beaten into him over the course of the day as he was made to accept the strangeness of this era. Instead, he decided to observe first. He needed to see if it was okay to pick a fight with the person in front of him. And the conclusion Vlad reached was, “I’ve got to be able to win against him.”

Learn your lesson already!

However, it was only natural for Vlad to think as such. The man was obviously weakened. His cheeks were sunken, and he was clearly not in the best health. Vlad could see sticklike limbs peeking from the man’s tattered clothes, and from Vlad’s point of view, the man would fall over if he was even breathed on.

I can do this! I can win! thought Vlad.

“Khha ha ha... It seems you don’t know just who I am, brat. That ignorance will cost you.”

After a moment, the man said, “How unsightly.”

“What?”

“I called you unsightly. You just thought, ‘He looks weak. I can win.’ Such a small person who can only throw their weight around against those weaker than them... What would you call them other than unsightly? Know your place,

you philistine who only understands self-protection and cunning calculation. I have no use for those such as you. I am waiting for a precious guest at the moment... Disappear while I am still in a good mood.”

It was a terribly effective berating, and it dealt a critical hit leading to an overkill of Vlad’s tofu-like mental state, rendered that way after all the crushings he’d experienced over the day.

Okay. He’s dead. I’ll kill him before going home, Vlad decided. It’s fine. I can win. I can totally win. There’s no way I would lose against someone who’s half-dead like this. That thought made it obvious that Vlad was a very small person indeed.

“Very well. It seems you have a death wish! I will gladly relieve you of your life’s blood!”

Vlad flapped his mantle and lunged forward at the man’s neck, his mouth open to bite.

He’d used the skill Blood Drain. It was a Grappler-class skill, only available to vampires, that stole the target’s vitality along with their blood. In the past, Vlad had used this skill to suck the life out of many to add it to his own, and another victim was about to be born here and now.

“Kha ha ha... Tremble in fear! Each moment that passes, your life is slipping out of you! No matter how you cry and wail, it is too late for regrets. You will now...now...?”

Vlad should have been overwhelmingly advantaged, but suddenly, he noticed that something was off. *That’s weird. It doesn’t feel like I’m taking his life. It doesn’t look like he’s getting any weaker. In fact, it’s the opposite. His vitality is growing...and mine is... No, I’m losing my stocks?!*

“O-Oh? Ooohhhh?!”

“I told you. Know your place. As if my life would ever be stolen by the likes of you. I was considering letting you go...but it seems people never learn. As always, they are arrogant, ignorant, and just plain ugly. I was happy when I met her, since she made me think that humanity might not be as bad as I thought, but... It seems Virgo is just special.” The man almost spat out those lines as he

grabbed Vlad, who was trying to escape, by the head.

When he did so, he started to drain even more life out of his victim, and fear finally gained control of Vlad's heart.

"However, it seems the amount of mana you possess is worthwhile, at least. This opportunity does not come every day... I shall take it for my own."

With that, the man stole even more of Vlad's lives. Then, after a few minutes, the feared true ancestor of the vampires that had once been rumored to have infinite lives had completely disappeared from this world.

"Are you here, Sanieve?"

"Ah, yes. I've been waiting."

When Virgo came holding clothing and food, the man—Sanieve—greeted her with a smile. Though he was weakened, his looks were still good enough to make most women he smiled at faint. However, Virgo didn't seem especially affected as she moved to place the goods in front of him.

"Sorry. I didn't know what you liked, so I just bought what the store recommended," said Virgo.

"Hmm... Clothing design has not changed much from the past."

Sanieve took the clothes out of the bag and looked them over closely. He still nodded in approval though; it seemed he didn't have much of a preference.

Virgo paused. "Huh? Is it just me or do you look a little better than before?"

"Oh, I found a bat in the cave by coincidence and just finished eating it."

"Huh? I-Is that really all right?"

"It was not very delicious, no." Sanieve laughed like he just told a joke.

He seemed moody at first, but he's actually pretty easy to talk to, Virgo thought.

"Still, I can't be greedy. It doesn't matter whether it's a mouse or a frog. if it's edible, I still need to eat," Sanieve explained.

"That sounds harsh."

“It is. By the way, there’s something I’d like to ask... You are of quite the high level, aren’t you? Are there many like you in today’s world?”

He noticed Virgo’s high level. However, it wasn’t that strange an occurrence. The barrier to obtain the skill Observing Eye wasn’t that high, and it was available to everyone. The user would be unable to view accurate stats if the target was of a higher level, but they would still be able to understand that whoever they were looking at was stronger, at least. Virgo was sure that skill was what he’d used.

“No, not that many. According to Miss Lufas, the average has actually gone down by quite a lot.”

“Lufas...? Sorry, but I’ve never heard that name.”

“Is that so? She’s very famous though.”

“I’m unable to learn much about the outside. If possible, would you be willing to tell me what you know?”

After that, Virgo told Sanieve everything she knew. She told him about what had happened two hundred years ago and also about the conflict she had partaken in recently. She left out some details, of course, such as Alovenus coming under Lufas’s command. Still, she told him everything an average person living in Mizgarz would know.

After hearing all that, Sanieve looked surprised. “So something like that happened...? I wondered why everything seemed to be so tumultuous outside.”

“Were you moved to the Ark at that time?”

“Hmm? ...Yeah, I suppose so. I’m sure that’s what happened. I have no idea what occurred, but I’m sure I was on that Ark or whatever it is you called it.”

It wasn’t strange that Sanieve didn’t understand what had happened. Before their fight with the ouroboroses, Lufas had lifted land off of Mizgarz wholesale before carrying it into the Ark as intact as possible. That meant most people hadn’t even noticed they’d been moved into the Ark until it had been explained to them. Sanieve was living in a cave, too, so it was only natural for the only thing he knew to be that there’d been a huge earthquake.

After all this, the two of them shifted subjects all over the place. Every once in a while, Sanieve would tell Virgo something of the past, which impressed her. Eventually, Virgo noticed that time had flown by too fast, and she stood up.

“Okay then. I need to excuse myself here.”

“Ah, it’s already time? Time sure flies when you’re having fun, doesn’t it?” Sanieve smiled somewhat sadly before asking Virgo a question. “Will you...come again? I’d like to continue talking with you.”

“It was fun for me too. I’ll come back soon!” Virgo said with a smile before flapping her wings and flying away.

While watching her fly off, Sanieve quietly smiled.

“Virgo...huh? This is the first time I’ve seen a soul as clear as that,” Sanieve muttered quietly before returning to his cave.

I’ve finally found what I was looking for...

EX—4

After that first day, Virgo regularly visited Sanieve.

When she thought about it, Virgo realized that she didn’t have many friends she could relax around. Sei was more than a friend, and from Virgo’s point of view, the other Thirteen Stars and Lufas were more like superiors. The former hero’s party was also somewhat different from normal friends to her and would be best described as close acquaintances.

By heaven-winged standards, Virgo was still young enough to be called a child. Before she’d left the forest with Lufas, she had no friends, and it had been strange for her to be living in a forest in the first place. She was at the age where she wanted friends, so Virgo quickly became close with Sanieve.

For his part, Sanieve seemed to love Virgo’s visits, and every time she came, he seemed happy to see her.

“And then Aigokeros started eating weeds while still in his human form!” Virgo said.

“Ha ha ha! That must have been a sight! I would have wanted to see that.”

Sanieve was a great listener, and he would respond in just the right way to Virgo's stories with great timing, which just made talking all the more fun for her.

These past few days, the color of Sanieve's skin had started getting better as well, and by now, he had regained all his former beauty. He was also now wearing proper clothing instead of the tattered rags from before. His clothes, which in Earth terms closely resembled a chokha, a set of traditional Georgian clothing, were black with gold threading. Wearing it gave Sanieve a mysterious, noble dignity.

Virgo stopped being too formal when talking to him, and at this point, she totally trusted Sanieve. Their friendly chats had always been calm and amicable from beginning to end, but there had been one time when a disquieting atmosphere was brought about. It happened when Virgo mentioned a particular name.

"You know, Sei is amazing. Level-wise he's very low, but even so, he fights through his terror and always moves straight forward..."

Sanieve paused. "Sei?" he asked. "Sorry, but what is this man to you?"

"Huh? Ummm... He's someone I really admire, and... Ummm..."

It was rare for Virgo to be tongue-tied like she was when Sanieve asked this question. She also averted her eyes, blushing.

Sanieve was not a dense man. That reaction told him exactly what kind of feelings Virgo held for Sei, a man he had never met. Sanieve's face was frighteningly expressionless then, though Virgo didn't see this as she had averted her eyes. However, Sanieve had returned to his usual pleasant smile by the time Virgo had looked back at him.

"I see. By the way, I would like to hear about that moving golem you talked about before."

"Yeah, okay!"

It was an obvious attempt to change the subject. Sanieve's attempt to lead the conversation made it seem like he didn't want to hear Virgo talk about Sei, but Virgo didn't notice this. Eventually, the atmosphere returned to its usual

peacefulness as the two continued to chat.

However, at that moment, a dark sentiment started to grow behind Sanieve's kind eyes.

* *

Several days later, Virgo was once again visiting Sei on Earth. They were walking together through the city, having gone to see a movie, eaten together, and even visited an amusement park. They were ticking all the boxes of a relationship, as the two of them got ever closer. However, neither of them could take the final step.

So, Virgo had decided to work up the courage today. The time they could spend together was not long, so she felt she needed to resolve this as soon as possible. What drove her was both courage and a sense of panic. Virgo was afraid of letting too much time pass.

The particular lighting of the sunset shone on couples, parents with their children, and groups of men who had come to insist that they didn't need love equally, as they had their fun at the amusement park. The park's mascot was wandering around, balloons in hand. None of them felt the same fear as Sei and Virgo. The chance of being separated by death accompanied all couples, but most of them still had basically the same amount of time to live and share with their partner. Virgo felt jealous of those people, and she wanted to become like them. That was why she girded herself today; she needed to be brave.

"Um..."

"Virgo."

As soon as Virgo prepared herself and was about to step forward, Sei spoke. Though he had no intention of doing so, Sei had blunted Virgo's determination. However, it seemed he hadn't noticed.

"I like you," he said, a serious look on his face.

"Huh?!"

The sudden confession with its unexpected timing turned Virgo's face red. The sheer surprise had her heart thumping in her chest as her eyes swam.

He's expecting an answer. Aren't these the words you've been waiting for the whole time?! she thought.

After looking up at Sei expectantly, Virgo finally noticed. Sei looked more serious than usual, and his face was filled with the sorrowful look of someone who was about to say something they didn't want to.

No... He's not going to say the words I've been waiting to hear. It's the opposite... He's going to say the one thing I don't want him to, isn't he?

"But, the time frames that we live in are too different. From your perspective, my life span is even shorter than a dog's, and I'll quickly be gone."

Stop! Virgo wanted to shout. *I don't want to hear that! I know even without you telling me! I'm still here despite all that. Why would you say this?! Virgo wanted to cry out.*

"I...I like you, so I don't want to make you unhappy. I think you'll still look the same as you do now even when I die. Whether or not it's all right for me to take up your time like this has been on my mind all the time recently... So..."

So what? No, I don't want to hear it! If I let him say it, it all ends here!

Before she'd noticed, tears were flowing out of Virgo's eyes. Seeing this surprised Sei.

"N-No... It's not like I started to dislike you or anything, Virgo! I just..."

"Sei, you... Sei, you IDIIIOOOOOOOTT!"

The emotions Virgo was trying to hold back burst forth all at once, taking the form of an insult to Sei. After that outburst, Virgo couldn't stand to be there anymore, so she ran away.

In a panic, Sei tried to chase after her, but because he was such an honest and serious person, he couldn't help but think about unnecessary things.

Wouldn't it be better to not chase after her?

If he gave chase right away, he might have been able to catch her. However, Sei's hesitation was fatal. When she saw him stop, Virgo gave Sei a sad look before disappearing.

All Sei could do was stand there, staring dazedly at the place where she was. He'd never wanted to make her cry. He just wanted her to be happy. That was why Sei had said those things. It was the conclusion of all his worries about the end that would someday come for him and the thought that she would cry at their parting. After seeing her cry like that though, Sei started to feel like he'd made a huge mistake.

"You shouldn't have done that, B O Y."

A voice called out to him, and Sei reflexively turned around to see the costumed mascot.

This amusement park's mascot was named Fire Rabbit and was a delightful bipedal rabbit whose head was constantly on fire. The mascot slowly took off its head, revealing a face that Sei knew well. It was one of the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars, Karkinos the Crab. He was a resident of the same world as Virgo.

"Huh? K-Karkinos? What are you doing here?"

"It's a part-time job. I thought it would be best to actually E X P E R I E N C E this world's culture through a part-time job, so I came here with Miss Lufas's permission," Karkinos said, smiling proudly.

Then his look became serious as he looked Sei in the eye.

"Sei, my B O Y, that confession just now... Let me tell you this as a fellow man: it was B A D. That wasn't what you should have said."

For a while, Sei could say nothing, but he eventually managed to squeeze out an, "I know, but..."

"But? However? Still? Even so? Non, non, non. Those are all just excuses. I know what you want to say: 'But I made that choice for Virgo's happiness. I won't live for very long, so it would be best for her if I let her go. Even through all this, my decision should be correct in the end.'" Karkinos paused. "That's about it, isn't it?"

Karkinos was right about everything. He had seen through everything Sei was thinking. Karkinos was foolish, but he wasn't an idiot.

Crushed by his words, Sei hung his head.

“Listen here, Sei, my B O Y. There’s something you should learn. You’re trying to settle everything by playing the heel. But you see...playing the heel isn’t an excuse. There are many people throughout the world who think that becoming the heel means they can do or say anything. Since they’re being hated for the other’s sake, they think it’s all right to say cruel, hurtful things. H A H A H A! That’s a N I C E J O K E. In my opinion, they’re all misconstrued bastards,” Karkinos said with a shrug, laughing.

Becoming hated for the other person’s sake... I see. Just judging from the words, it’s a wonderful bit of self-sacrifice, but it’s actually narcissism in disguise. Most people who are like that are just drunk on the fact that they’re in the role.

“You didn’t withdraw for Virgo’s sake. You ran because of Virgo.”

“That wasn’t what...!”

“Oh, you’re saying I’m wrong? Then I’d like you to tell me...the appropriate-sounding excuse you’ve prepared to gloss things over and lighten the load on your heart,” said Karkinos.

Sei couldn’t say anything in reply, instead remaining in silent guilt.

Explaining oneself was, in the end, just something done to make oneself look better. At that point, it was just an excuse. No matter how much good logic Sei pulled out, it wouldn’t change the fact that he’d hurt Virgo and made her cry.

Karkinos poked the troubled boy in front of him in the forehead and laughed.

“It’s good that you’ve become honest. This is the starting line. And if there’s a wall you need to overcome, then you can just rely on Miss Lufas or me. Just think simpler.”

“I... You’re right, I need to go apologize to Virgo! I said something terrible...”

“Y E S, that is what you need to do first. Don’t worry. She’ll come back when she calms down. When she does, apologize to her and then give her a H O T confession!”

After hearing Karkinos’s advice, Sei’s heart became a little bit lighter. Though

this place. Such a creepy happenstance would normally be felt. However, Virgo was not in her right state of mind, so she had failed to notice such a simple thing.

“Tears don’t suit your lovely face. If you’d like, you can tell me your worries. Maybe saying them out loud will lighten your burden. I would like to help you,” said Sanieve.

His voice seeped deep into her wounded heart, and it seemed to have a mysterious power that had Virgo feeling relieved.

Normally, Virgo would most likely have realized that something was wrong by now. She would have figured that it was strange to be this relieved to see someone she’d only just met from an unbiased standpoint, and started to question things. However, Virgo was currently incapable of that. She just did as she was told, sinking into the feeling of relief as she spilled all her worries.

Sanieve eventually responded once Virgo stopped talking, seeming to pity her deeply.

“Oh, you poor thing... To think that he never even realized your feelings, noble as they are.”

Sanieve placed his hand upon Virgo’s shoulder to comfort her.

“How deplorable. I’m sure that man doesn’t even realize how lucky he is. If it were me, I’d never make you feel that way,” Sanieve said, heaving a sigh to emphasize his exasperation.

Then, he turned to face Virgo again and brought his face close to hers. “But depending on how you think about it, this may have been a good thing. I understand after hearing your story. That man is not worthy of you.”

“Huh?” Virgo paused. “Sanieve...?”

“Hey, Virgo, what do you think of me? I would be happy if you could see me as a man...”

It was here that Virgo finally noticed something was strange. His speech was as gentle and soft as usual, but something about Sanieve still seemed different, dangerous... Virgo could feel some dark and sinister sentiments behind his

actions. However, even if she wanted to get away for a bit, Sanieve's hand was firmly clasped onto Virgo's shoulder and wouldn't let go.

"Allow me to confess to you. I think of you very favorably. Not in a sense of friendship, but of the kind that is born between a man and a woman. I desire to marry you," Sanieve admitted.

It was a straightforward confession, with no way to misconstrue it. Virgo's face reddened upon hearing this unexpected confession from someone she only thought of as a friend.

I think Sanieve is cool, and he's also very pretty. I'm sure women wouldn't be able to leave him alone. It's also true that he's very gentlemanly and very fun to talk to. But... Even so, Virgo could not forget Minamijuuji Sei.

"U-Um... I'm thankful for your feelings, but I..." Virgo trailed off.

"Is that so...? That's too bad."

Sanieve was visibly disappointed, and it didn't seem like an act. Seeing that, Virgo felt guilty, but what happened the next moment blew all that guilt away.

Virgo had seen Sanieve's face. It was expressionless in a way Virgo had never seen before, but his eyes alone were alight with a passionate fire.

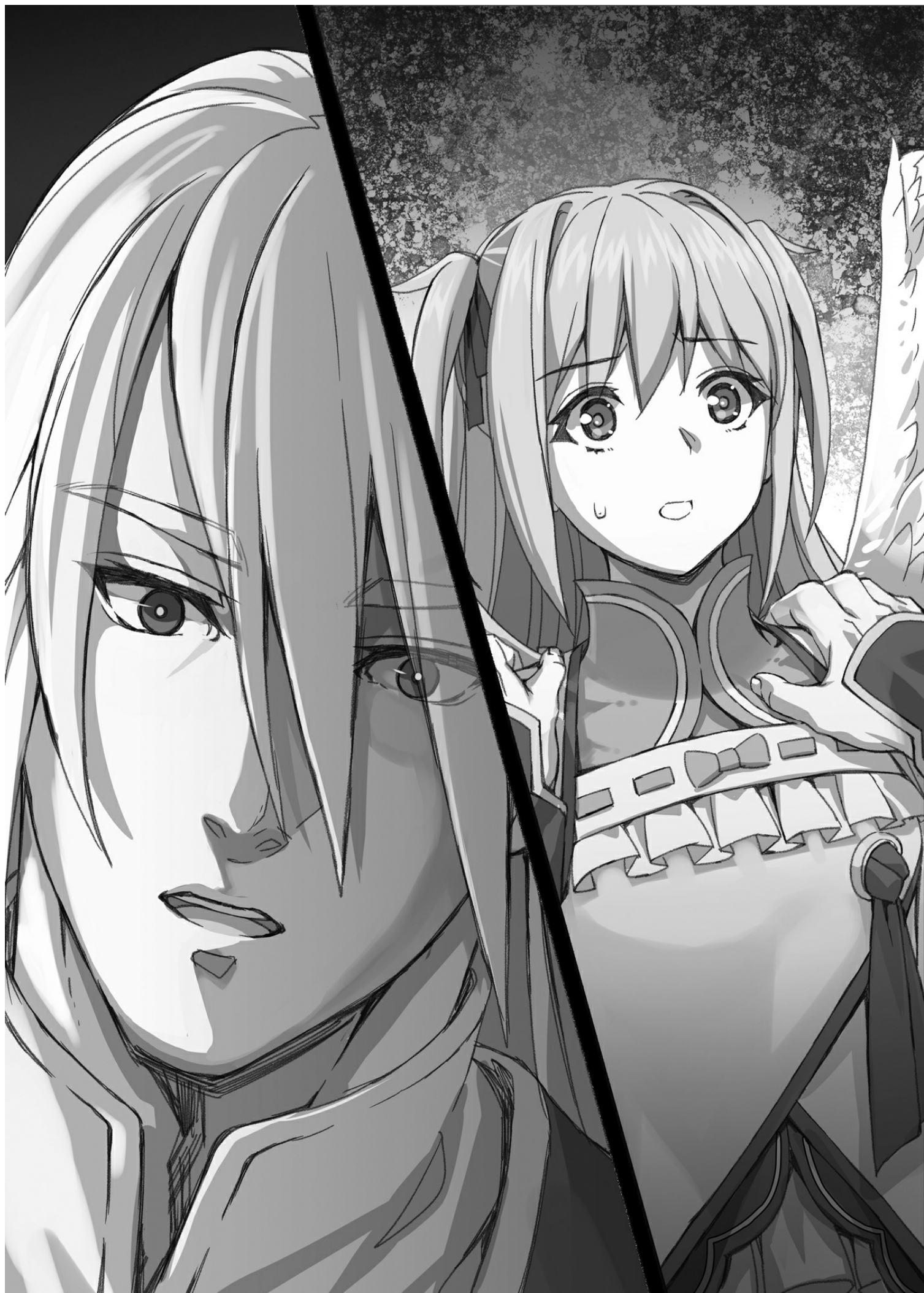
"It truly is disappointing. However, I have infinite time on my side. I intend to wait for you to change your mind, however long that may take."

"S-Sanieve?"

"I will not hand you over to any other man...much less one who made you cry, one without the guts to accept you and your feelings. Yes, I will never let you go. This is the first time I've ever seen someone with as clear a heart and soul as you, as well as the first time I've ever wanted someone. I am sure this is what they call love at first sight."

"H-Hey, you're scaring me, you know...? Let me go..."

"No."



Sanieve held his hand over Virgo, who was assaulted with an intense sleepiness, making her eyelids heavy.

Virgo was, in fact, level 1000, and though she was immature, she was still a member of the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars. It was only natural that she was resistant to status effects, and sleep should not have worked on her. The fact that Sanieve had managed to pierce through those resistances was not normal.

Se...i...

Eventually, Virgo was unable to resist anymore and fell asleep, and Sanieve hugged her limp body close.

EX—5

In the past, the Goddess brought six ouroboroses, powerful dragons, into the world. They were arbitrators made to maintain this world's balance, and each embodied one of the seven elements that existed in the world. The Ouroboros of the Sun, Ouroboros of the Moon, Ouroboros of Fire, Ouroboros of Earth, and Ouroboros of Wood all presided over their respective elements.

Finally, there was the Goddess's avatar, an offshoot of Alovenus born with her memories and a portion of her power in order to be her representative. As the leader of the ouroboroses, the avatar was given the two elements the Goddess preferred the most—the dual elements of Water and Metal. This ouroboros that would be the Goddess's agent was given the name Ouroboros of Heaven in order to signify that it was filled with heavenly will.

Though it was supposed to be something like a clone of the Goddess, the Ouroboros of Heaven was given a male's body to further strengthen it in combat. However, that was most likely when everything started to go wrong. In order to better lead people, he was given the ability to see the color of their souls. Those who were just had souls that shone white, while evil people's souls were stained black. This specific ability was chosen so that he could avoid judging those who were pure and judge those who were evil when no one else would. The mission given to him by the Goddess was to persecute the evil and protect the good.

This was the second mistake. Because of those eyes, he ended up going down the wrong path. *Black, black, black—everyone, everywhere is black.* To him, the least objectionable souls were those of newborn children, who were born gray because of a lack of good or evil in them. As people grew, their souls gradually darkened, getting further and further from the ideal white. There were only a handful of souls that trended towards good. The vast majority were black, and they were both fleeting and weak.

The ouroboros grieved. *Why are humans so wretched? Why do they so easily step onto the path of evil?*

The small section of good people became fodder because of their good nature, forced to suffer misfortune throughout their whole lives before dying without being rewarded for it. Meanwhile, the more skilled the evildoers were at deceiving and using others, the more they were able to heap misfortune on other people while they themselves were able to sip on sweet nectar and be happy. Justice did not win against evil. Whoever won became justice.

The ouroboros was angry. *No, this is not how the world should be.*

Therefore, the ouroboros acted according to his duty and handed down judgment. He went on a rampage, heedless of what the Goddess had said, in an attempt to purge the world of black-souled people and only leave those with pure, white souls. However, if the evil people who comprised ninety-nine percent of the world had to be killed in order to save the just one percent, then the world of humans would no longer be able to function. It was true that those with just souls ought to be commended, but how could society and the whole of the human world be expected to survive if all who were left were babies and saints, who were unable to calculate profit and loss?

The idea that if the world was only full of good people, then everyone would be happy was neither a good nor realistic outlook. In fact, it was only allowed in fairy tales for children. Reality was different. In reality, people who could calculate profit and loss and were able to make the heartless decisions that were sometimes necessary were needed to make the world turn. People were creatures with intelligence, and that came with a certain measure of malignancy. Having intelligence also meant having cunning. If evil were removed from people, then all that would remain were humans without

intelligence, like Adam and Eve. They would no longer really be people. Instead, they'd be more like monkeys.

Of course, that didn't mean the truly incorrigibly evil fiends of the world should be respected. Humanity had its own rules—rules to protect the group, and rules that needed to be respected. These rules were called laws, and they had to be abided by. Those who couldn't do so were free to be judged. All this meant was that those who couldn't follow the rules were unneeded. This followed the rules of nature as well, as even in the animal kingdom, those outliers would be exiled from the group.

From a different perspective, those who could follow the rules were deemed compatible, even if they were evil, and they would never be persecuted for it. If a hypocrite were to keep up their lies all the way to their death, fooling everyone, then they were no different from the real thing. On the other hand, if a person were to break the law and force their sense of justice onto others, then they would be deemed incompatible with society and tried for it, no matter how good their intentions were.

In short, justice in the world of people was one of intelligence and reason. What was considered evil within it was basically just a lack of those qualities.

The Ouroboros of Heaven did not understand that. He, who could see the color of a person's soul, could only display his disgust at those who were evil while prizing those who were good. In a sense, he was pure.

However, being pure was not an excuse. It didn't matter what his motives were. Massacring the vast majority of people would make him a wicked deity rather than an agent of divinity, and his actions would be considered a curse rather than divine judgment. So, it was only natural that he be tried for his actions. Those who greatly deviated from the rules of the group would be eliminated. Not even an ouroboros was an exception.

"That's weird. Why did he fail so badly? Because he was a man? Because I gave him too much power? Or maybe because of his ability to see the color of people's souls? Hmm... Well, whatever. Let's just take this failure as a lesson for the future, and just get rid of him for now. Good work. Now it's time to disappear."

The last thing he'd heard was the Goddess' voice. The infuriatingly carefree notice was one of imminent, inescapable death.

Just as Dina was unable to resist being taken over, he was unable to resist the Goddess's will as her offshoot. As such, the poor ouroboros who idealized humanity too much was erased by the Goddess. Later, his name would be one-sidedly stolen by the Ouroboros of the Sun, who had taken over his position as leader of the ouroboroses.

Later, Alovenus would create Eros as a test attempt at an Ouroboros of Water, but in the end, he was a failure who would escape as well. As a result, the Goddess finally achieved balance by creating an avatar after omitting their role as an Ouroboros, shaving off a lot of power, and making their gender and personality as close to her own as possible. The newest iteration of those avatars was Dina, which meant that even all that didn't stop them from rebelling against her. This Goddess could truly do no right.

However, the Ouroboros of Heaven—rather, the former Ouroboros of Heaven—was not fully dead. He had all his mana taken from him and was destroyed as both the Goddess's offshoot and as an ouroboros. However, his human part was left alive, so he managed to barely survive.

When creating avatars, the Goddess would always birth them from human hosts. He had human parents, just like Dina. He was different from the other ouroboroses, who had been fully formed from nothing. He was birthed as a human in order to better understand his role as a child of divinity, and so he could be closer to humanity as a whole, blending in with them. This, in turn, saved him from a tight spot.

However, even though he'd survived, he lost all his power. On top of that, he would surely be completely erased if he were to ever be found by Alovenus, so he had no choice but to run and hide disgracefully. Unable to go out and interact with the world at large, the only way he was allowed to spend his days was in hiding, scared of the Goddess's wrath.

Normally, this would be the end of it. He would have most likely just spent eternity unable to act, with hiding as his only recourse. At first, unable to fully give up, he had used what little remaining power as the Goddess's avatar he

had left to stop his own time, indefinitely lengthening his life span in a bid to survive. *One day, my chance will come*, he believed. *One day, I will be able to make a comeback.*

However, a hundred years passed. Then a thousand, ten thousand, and eventually resignation took over his heart. *This was all just impossible from the beginning. Even the ouroboroses are basically dust in front of the Goddess. Not just the ouroboroses—even Mizgarz and the rest of the universe are just a speck to her. How am I supposed to win against someone like that? I, who lost all his power as an ouroboros and more?*

This resignation sapped him of all hope, and eventually, he allowed his own time to move again. He had a long life span, but as a living creature with his internal time in motion, he would eventually reach the end of his life span. Either that, or he would starve and die.

Having fully sunk into despair, he sought a peaceful end as a base creature. If he had been left alone, the man would surely have died with no one noticing. The man himself also considered that to be a fine option.

There is no hope in the world of man, no justice, and my very reason for existing was rejected by the Goddess. There is nothing I want, and nothing of beauty exists in the world. So it would be best for me to just disappear like this... he thought.

“Um... Dina?”

That was why the voice he’d heard was like the gospel of happiness come to his side.

Having put up a human-repellent barrier, no one should have been able to get close. However, the girl had a bracelet that would locate an agent of the Goddess and warp her there. The bracelet had led Virgo to him, who possessed the same signature as Dina.

Seeing the girl, the man’s breath caught in his throat. *How beautiful*, he thought. He wasn’t looking at her face or figure. The soul he saw was whiter than any he’d ever seen.

The shock that ran through him was like lightning. For the first time since his

birth, he'd fallen in love with somebody. For the first time, he'd found something or somebody he wanted.

The time spent talking with the girl, Virgo, became an irreplaceable treasure to the man, and every day he waited in anticipation for her arrival. This might even have been the first time he felt that being alive was a good thing, as well as the first time he'd ever felt happiness.

She made him happy, brought joy to his life, and allowed him the experience of having fun. The will to live, which he'd lost, came bubbling back within him. *I want to look at that smile forever*, he thought.

When she joyfully spoke about another man named "Minamijuuji-sei," he finally realized that he was in love with her and realized what jealousy felt like. And yes, when she came to him with tears in her eyes, he realized what anger and hatred felt like.

Ah, I see now. No wonder they're all stained black. The fact that such overflowing, uncontrollable emotion even existed inside of him surprised the man. *I want her to remain smiling forever*, he thought. *I never want to see her cry.*

That was why he couldn't forgive the man who had brought her to tears. Hearing that this man's life span would mean leaving Virgo behind soon made that feeling even worse. Someday, she would again be left crying. Someday, when she lost this man, she would be left wailing in lament.

He paused. *Unforgivable. This mustn't be allowed to happen*, he thought.

That was why the man—Sanieve—resolved the following. *I will protect this girl's smile, even if I have to kidnap her to do it. The world doesn't matter anymore.* He no longer cared what happened to Mizgarz, what the Goddess thought, or anything else. To Sanieve, neither his mission as an ouroboros nor his mission as an agent of divinity was worth thinking about anymore.

I can live for just one person. If I have the strength to protect this girl, that's fine with me.

So, Sanieve put Virgo to sleep, deciding to forcefully take her along with him. *She might resent me for this, but that's fine with me. She might even come to*

hate me, but that too is... No, I don't think I'd like that. Just imagining it has me close to tears. Still, I can do anything for her. I can become a demon for her. I can make the entire world my enemy. I can even face down the Goddess. For this girl's smile, I would happily become hated by everyone else. Yes, let's turn the world into an enemy.

Sanieve looked down at the sleeping girl lovingly. Then, he brought his lips close to hers...

He hesitated. "No, this isn't gentlemanly. It must be mutual."

As if swearing to protect her, he brought his lips to the back of her hand.

After that, he used his powers as an offshoot of the Goddess to read Virgo's memories, taking special care to avoid her more private moments.

As I am now, I can't just take her away. I don't have the power.

According to Virgo, there were many other level 1000 monsters in this age besides her. Sanieve was not so arrogant as to believe that he could escape from them, so he searched through Virgo's memories for something that would allow him to retake his complete form. What he wanted was something akin to a lump of high-purity mana. If Sanieve could get his hands on that, he might even be able to reconstruct his ouroboros body. *But there's no way something like that would just be conveniently...*

"There is one," Sanieve said after a moment's pause.

Sanieve had found high-purity mana just conveniently lying around. This was not just a turn of phrase. The item he was looking for had truly just been dumped on the ground as if it didn't matter. It was on the moon, in the back of a storeroom in Maphaahl Tower.

Knowing an especially dangerous item such as this was treated like trash made Sanieve's head hurt. On the other hand, that also meant that Virgo's master was insane enough to just stuff something like that in the back of a storeroom. Sanieve was lucky that Virgo had remembered it, and he was equally lucky that her master had seemed to have forgotten it.

Sanieve carefully created a crack in space—an Exgate—and shoved his hand through it. *Quickly, before anyone notices but without hurrying.* In basically an

instant, he had taken what he wanted from the storeroom and closed the gate. What he had in his hands was something that Lufas had created some time ago and completely forgotten about—a golden apple.

EX—6

Sanieve was an ouroboros. More specifically, he was an avatar with the powers of an ouroboros. He'd gone against the Goddess's wishes in the past and committed a purge, resulting in Alovenus taking his title and power. Having had his mana taken from him, Sanieve had lost his strength, falling lower than the level of the Seven Luminaries.

There was no way for him to recover from this, and he could do nothing but slowly rot—or that was how it should have been. All this was only because he'd lost his mana. If he were to regain his mana, he could easily recover his power. However, if he were to try to gather enough mana to reconstruct the power of an ouroboros, then even someone as careless as the Goddess would notice the discrepancy, and he would be found. That was why he was stuck. There was truly no recourse.

However, a method for him to regain his former glory did exist through the properties of a golden apple, the forbidden fruit that the Goddess should have stripped humanity of in the past. The fruit, which held a massive amount of mana, allowed Sanieve to quickly revive his body. His powers as an agent of divinity and his strength as an ouroboros returned with every bite.

Even with his strength completely returned, however, there were too many monstrously strong beings in Mizgarz. There were the Devil King, the Goddess's current avatar, the Demon Lord, the Fairy Princess, the King of the Ocean, the Lion King, and the rest of the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars. Not to mention the Wise King, the Sky King, the Vampire Princess, and all the heroes of two hundred years ago. Most of all: the Black-Winged Conqueror.

Sanieve was not so arrogant as to believe that he could take all of them on and win. Not even he, who had the strength of two ouroboroses, could defeat all of those figures head-on. So, Sanieve took Virgo and disappeared from Mizgarz.

That day, Japan—or rather, Earth—was covered in dark clouds. These clouds traversed continents, making it almost look like the stars themselves had started to orbit at great speed as the swirling something blocked out the sunlight, trapping the Earth in darkness. At first, people only thought that today’s weather was terrible. They eventually realized that something abnormal was going on, however, and when the representatives of each country looked at the images relayed to them by their artificial satellites, they collapsed in fear.

There was an insanely large snake—or rather, dragon—swirling around the Earth, covering it. There was no way for them to hide this information, no matter how great each country was at such a thing. This unprecedented news spread throughout the world like lightning, shaking people to their core.

Of course, humanity retaliated against this threat. Armies all over the world mobilized, forming a united front and launching their fighters. They slammed all the firepower they could into the dragon, and they even unsealed their nuclear weapons. However, none of it worked. No matter what they did, the dragon remained, totally unmoved as it ensconced the Earth.

Nobody knew exactly what was going on. The situation far outstripped their comprehension, and to anyone’s knowledge, it was physically impossible for anything this large to exist. Only a small number of people accurately understood the situation.

“What...the hell is that...?”

Sei looked up at the sky, staring dazedly at this impossible situation. He knew what it was; it was an ouroboros, something which he’d seen a year ago in the final fight for Mizgarz. It was also a monster among monsters, one which, even if everything in the world turned upside down, he would still not be able to win against. What confused him was the question of why one was in this dimension, surrounding Earth.

Wasn’t it all supposed to be over? Alovenus, who was the source of it all, had been defeated, and the conflict should have been over. Even then, not even Alovenus would do something like involving Earth in her problems.

“Sei, my B O O O O Y!”

“Karkinos!”

The man from another world ran to Sei, who knew of his circumstances. It seemed Karkinos hadn’t expected this situation either, as his expression betrayed his panic and impatience.

“What is going on?!”

“How should I know?! That’s an ouroboros, isn’t it?!” Sei asked.

“Y E S! But...it is different from the ouroboroses that W E fought...” Karkinos said, trailing off. “In the first place, there’s no way Miss Lufas would allow this.”

The ouroboroses were arbitrators who moved on the Goddess’s orders. However, the Goddess was now under Lufas’s command. There was no way she would allow something as reckless as this. That meant there were only two possibilities left. Either the Goddess had ignored Lufas and gone on another rampage, or this ouroboros had ignored the Goddess. Either way, there could be no worse situation.

If the ouroboros had appeared over Mizgarz, there would have been no problem. Lufas would have quickly suppressed it with ease, and though it may have taken some time to fully resolve the situation, the people of that world were used to such strange occurrences. However, this was Earth, not some fantasy world. The people of this world were not equipped to deal with such a ridiculous situation, nor could they understand and adapt to it. On top of that, no matter what weapons they brought to bear, they would not be able to defeat the ouroboros.

Right now, Karkinos was the only one present who might have been able to deal with the ouroboros, but it would be too hard a prospect on his own.

“At any rate, we should wait and see what happens first,” Karkinos suggested. “Miss Lufas and the others should notice what’s going on soon. If we wait for them to counterattack...”

“That will not be possible,” an unfamiliar male voice said, interrupting.

The owner of the voice boasted clearly unreal beauty, and there was no way he was Japanese. He also held Virgo—who was in a deep sleep—in his arms.

“Virgo!”

The moment he saw that, Sei jumped forth as if someone had lit a fire under him. However, Sei’s hand never reached his target, as he was stopped and repelled by an invisible wall. He was thrown away so powerfully that he crashed into a nearby parked car, toppling it with his momentum. When he finally stopped and managed to get up, Sei was unsteady on his feet.

“So you are Minamijuuji...Sei?”

“Ghh... Th-That’s right. Who are you? What are you planning to do with Virgo?!”

“Hmm...”

Sanieve looked at Sei appraisingly for a moment before sighing in what seemed like utter disappointment.

“The color of your soul is somewhat white...but you are very average. Nothing about you stands out. I cannot understand why you are so beloved by Virgo.”

“Answer my question!” Sei yelled.

“I will not do anything. She is important to me too. I promise I will treat her courteously,” Sanieve said as he stroked Virgo’s hair lovingly. “I only came here to hand you a declaration.”

“What...?”

“I will be taking Virgo. You are not worthy of her.”

What Sanieve said dyed Sei’s expression with anger. Of course it would. Some unknown man had just shown up, holding the girl he loved, and declared that he would be taking her. Even Sei, with his mild and normally peaceful demeanor, would rise to violence over something like that.

“Quite the one-sided conversation for someone who just dropped in out of nowhere. I don’t know you. Just who do you think you are?” Karkinos asked.

“Your level...” Sanieve said after a pause. “I surmise you are one of the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars?”

“Oh? So you’ve heard of M E. But it’s not fair that you know me, and I don’t

know you. Would you do me the favor of introducing yourself?” Karkinos asked, trying to mask it as a joke.

What Karkinos really wanted at the moment was information. Knowing why wouldn't solve anything. What was important was the identity of the man, what powers he had, and what his goal was. The first thing Karkinos needed to do was gather as much of that information as possible.

“My name is Sanieve. In the past, I had the title of the Ouroboros of Heaven.”

“Ouroboros of Heaven...? H A H A H A. N I C E J O K E! M E knew the Ouroboros of Heaven, and he was not you.”

“I suppose you're speaking of the Ouroboros of the Sun? He just happened to be the one who was given leadership of the ouroboroses after my fall. That's all,” explained Sanieve.

That gave Karkinos pause. *Is this man's true body the two-headed ouroboros swirling above?*

Two-headed. Not two ouroboroses, but one with two heads, though it might have been clearer to call it twin-headed. At first, Karkinos thought that there were two ouroboroses up above, but that wasn't the case. It was a single ouroboros with the power of two. This meant that what the man was talking about had some credibility to it.

Now that I think about it, there wasn't much difference between the Ouroboros of the Sun and the rest of the ouroboroses, even though he claimed to be the leader. Actually, wasn't the Ouroboros of Earth stronger? So, what if there is another Ouroboros of Heaven, one who is clearly even stronger than the other ouroboroses?

Supporting this theory was the fact that the group of ouroboroses clearly had two elements missing. It was said that Dina, the Goddess's avatar, filled that hole, but there was clearly a large gap in power between her and the ouroboroses. However, if there had been ouroboroses of Water and Metal long before her time, and those ouroboroses had had a leader, then everything made sense.

“So, what do you want to accomplish, laying your hands on an unrelated

world like this?”

“Mizgarz is already in the Goddess’s hands. It is not a world I can do anything with or affect in any way, so I decided to make this world my new home and become its deity. And I will make Virgo my spouse. She will preside over this world with me as its goddess.”

“Are you sure you can do such a thing?” asked Karkinos. “You don’t understand the current Mizgarz. I believe you’re going to be K I L L E D by Miss Lufas and the other Thirteen Stars right away.”

“I can. That is my ability, after all,” said Sanieve.

All the ouroboroses had a unique skill with the same name but different effects. The skill’s name: Ouroboros. It was the skill that had caused the Thirteen Stars a lot of trouble a while ago. Of course, Sanieve had the same skill.

“Be at ease. My unique ability is not an offensive one. The skill is one meant for protecting the world. By covering the world with my ouroboros’s body made of mana, I can submerge myself and the world with me between dimensions to prevent all aggression. That is the effect of my skill, Ouroboros. Nobody can find a hidden world that is constantly moving, unseen and undetected.”

That’s more troublesome than I could have ever imagined, Karkinos groaned.

Alovenus was on the same side as Lufas, and as long as the Goddess was around, they could deal with most problems. However, the Goddess was neither omnipotent nor omniscient. She had the weakness of being so extradimensionally large in the scale of her existence that she found herself unable to focus on the small details. That was why she had overlooked and fallen to Lufas’s plan, as well as why she had been unable to immediately find Dina when she hid.

Asking Alovenus to find a world that was constantly flowing between dimensions was like asking someone to find a microbe that had jumped into a flowing river. It was possible for her to simply blow the entire river away and kill Sanieve along with everything else, but finding Sanieve alone would be a very tall order.

In the first place, Lufas and the others were in another dimension. Though

they would immediately notice if something was wrong in their world, they weren't constantly monitoring the goings-on of this dimension, so it would probably take quite a while for them to notice any problems here. They would most likely look this way eventually, worried that neither Virgo nor Karkinos had come back for a while, but that could take days.

Still, there was something Karkinos had understood after that exchange. Unlike other ouroboroses, Sanieve's main body was not the dragon up in the sky. His main body was actually the man standing in front of them.

"And..."

Sanieve used another skill. When he did, the people, towns, and the entirety of Japan—or rather, the entirety of Earth—became encapsulated in gold, transforming them into silent and still golden statues. The invasion of gold swallowed the entire world in an instant, after which the only ones left active were Sei and Karkinos.

"This is also my skill, Ouroboros. It identifies the citizens of the world I protect and transforms them into golden statues. People commit sins because they are people, so as long as they are inactive statues, no one will come to harm, and no one will cause harm. Those who became gold will crumble away into the earth after a cycle of this planet (twenty-four hours), and new life will bud from the loam. This planet has been a mite too greedy. I will erase everything, returning things to what it once was, and changing it into a beautiful world for my Goddess and I to reign over."

"Wha...?!"

"However, I will give you a chance. Even if you are rotten, you are the man Virgo chose..." Sanieve admitted. "I would experience some regret if I were to move forward with this course of action without claiming victory over you in some way. That is also the reason why I have told you of my abilities. So, I challenge you to battle. Try to retake Virgo from me in the time it takes for this world to come to ruin."

The outcome of this fight was already set in stone. There was no way for Sei to defeat an ouroboros. True, he'd gotten stronger in Mizgarz, but his strength was still within the reasonable realm of a biological, living being. There was no

way he could fight against an ouroboros, who had far exceeded the territory of a natural creature. The reason why Sanieve had excluded both Sei and Karkinos from his ability was simply that he was confident he could win anyway.

“Well then, Minamijuuji Sei. Spend your last day alive in my jaws, knowing you are not worthy of Virgo.”

In the end, it seemed Sanieve had no intention of participating in an actual contest. He just wanted to torment Sei and make him feel his own powerlessness. *You're a man who can't even rescue Virgo.* Sanieve wanted to shove this point in Sei's face.

After looking down upon and scoffing scornfully at Sei, who was already looking defeated and in despair, Sanieve disappeared.

EX—7

The situation was almost the worst possible. Sanieve's strength was above that of the ouroboroses they'd fought before. Meanwhile, only Sei and Karkinos were present to oppose him. There was no way for them to win.

The time limit for victory was twenty-four hours. Once that passed, the entire world would disappear. The chances of outside reinforcements arriving was basically none. There was even a chance that Lufas and the others hadn't even noticed something was going on. Even if they had, it would be difficult to catch Sanieve, who was continually running through and hiding in different dimensions. If Taurus were here instead of Karkinos, they would have still had a chance. His skill-breaking attack, Aldebaran, could forcefully end Sanieve's skill if it hit. However, Karkinos had no such ability. In short, they had to either stop Sanieve's skill or somehow alert Lufas and the others from the inside and tell them where Sanieve was.

“Now then, what should we do...?”

Karkinos looked up at the sky, troubled. In terms of final outcomes, Sanieve would definitely lose. Lufas and the others would always catch up to him eventually, no matter how he tried to run. It might take a month, or it might take only a week. However, if it took even a day, Earth would be destroyed. In order to prevent that, Sei and Karkinos had to figure out a way to resolve the

situation themselves.

Sanieve wouldn't give them time to think of a plan of action though.

"Sei, my B O Y! Over here!"

Karkinos pulled on Sei's arm.

A bullet pierced through the area Sei had just been occupying right afterwards. When he looked back, he saw that policemen who'd been turned into golden statues were discharging their firearms at him. It wasn't just the police either. Everybody was heading towards Sei and Karkinos with empty looks on their faces.

"This is..." Sei trailed off.

"He most likely has the ability to control those he turns into golden statues, which means O U R enemies are...this entire world!" said Karkinos.

At the moment, the entire world was under Sanieve's control via his skill, meaning everything was moving as he wished.

A fighter jet passed overhead with the explosive sound of a sonic boom, firing its cannons at them, heedless of the fact that they were in an urban area. Sei dodged the fire and slammed a kick into the vehicle. However, nothing happened. Sei's blow, which would normally have effortlessly broken through a fighter's thin shell, was easily turned aside by its surface this time as it settled its sights on him.

Karkinos's scissors followed up in a sweeping slice, though, and the fighter was bisected. A stiff, golden pilot was ejected, falling to the ground with a metallic sound. This would normally have resulted in instant death, but the goldification actually worked in Sei and Karkinos's favor here, as it protected the pilot.

"Sei, my B O Y, where's your weapon?!" asked Karkinos. "You should still have the sword gifted to you by Miss Lufas, right?"

"I left that in my house! You can't just bring a sword around with you in Japan!"

"O H M Y G O D! Seriously?!"

Having landed on the ground, Sei took off running. They were in the middle of a city. Fighting here would cause too much damage.

Hordes of SDF soldiers ran after the two, probably having come from a nearby base. Sei looked for an area where they could safely intercept these enemies, but unlike Mizgarz, Japan was packed full of buildings and civilization. Being able to look around and have no buildings in sight was rare. When it came to cities, such places were basically nonexistent.

“First, let’s figure out what we know. Right now, that ouroboros is swirling over this world, closing it off from the outside. We cannot hope for Miss Lufas and the others to notice if we don’t do something about that.”

Karkinos batted away all the bullets they were taking from SDF machine gunners’ strafing fire, the resultant wind knocking them all down. Following that, an RPG came flying at them, which was promptly kicked off course. In the following opening, Sei jumped in and knocked the offending SDF soldier down.

“But either way, W E do not possess the ability to do anything about that. Still, if his explanation is correct, that is a body created from mana... And if it’s made from mana, we can put a hole in it.”

“I see!” Sei exclaimed. “Virgo’s...”

“That’s right! It would be possible with her Vindemiatrix!”

Virgo’s unique skill, Vindemiatrix, dispersed mana unconditionally, making it an antimagic skill without parallel. There were cases where it would take some time before the mana disappeared, because of the amount being dispersed, but even then, they should be able to put in a small hole through the ouroboros by Karkinos’s estimation.

“Basically, what W E need to do is wake up Virgo.”

“But how?!”

“That’s simple, of course! Since ancient times, a sleeping princess has been woken up by a prince’s kiss. That is what I’ve learned from this world’s culture,” Karkinos said.

“What?!” yelled Sei.

Karkinos's sudden and seemingly baseless suggestion made Sei turn red. *What the hell is this man spouting in such a serious situation?!* However, Karkinos looked surprisingly serious, though he'd said it jokingly.

"Listen here, Sei, my B O Y. Virgo is undoubtedly asleep because of something our enemy's done. However, she has very high resistances. With all the fuss that's going on, she would normally have gotten up long ago. So why is she still asleep? M E thinks that it's because she doesn't want to wake up...wouldn't you say?"

Karkinos ran, speeding through the cityscape faster than Sei's eyes could keep up with, leaving behind silver flashes that each spelled the bisection of a tank or fighter jet. After rendering those gems of modern weapons technology powerless, Karkinos once again returned to Sei's side.

"Virgo doesn't want to face reality. She doesn't want to hear the continuation of what you were about to say before... Those feelings of hers are keeping her asleep, so there is O N L Y O N E solution!"

While Karkinos was talking, he grabbed Sei and one of the SDF officers. He jumped, first from building to building, then gradually onto even taller structures. Karkinos didn't possess the ability to fly. However, his high physical ability allowed him to reach the ouroboros if he made full use of it.

After making a final leap, Karkinos dropped the SDF soldier he'd grabbed when he was about to stall in the air and used him as a footstool for another jump. *This is fine. He's turned to gold, so even if he falls, he won't die... Probably...*

He managed to reach the ouroboros with this second jump, landing on its too-huge mass.

"So you've come," Sanieve said, appearing before them.

Virgo was laid down behind him, breathing gently in her sleep. There was no sign of her waking up on her own.

"But just because you are here does not mean you've won," Sanieve continued. "It is time for you to be forced to acknowledge your own powerlessness."

“Now then... Why don’t we just see about that?!”

Karkinos jumped forward, swiping with his scissor blades. His attack surpassed not only the speed of sound but also the speed of lightning, and Sei couldn’t even see it happen. In the end, however, Karkinos’s role in the Thirteen Stars was as a shield. He was not suited for offense. Although he wasn’t suited for attacking, he was certainly strong, and his attacks were still more than enough to exterminate most enemies despite that disadvantage.

Still, his enemy right now was even stronger than the Thirteen Stars. His blades, which looked like they’d hit square on, only managed to leave behind a small scratch on Sanieve, leaving Karkinos shocked silent.

“This is the skill Muliphen,” Sanieve explained. “Only representatives of the Goddess are allowed to have it. I have just placed a limit upon you.”

Mizgarz was a world bound by gamelike laws imposed by the Goddess. Vitality was represented by an easy-to-understand HP metric, as was the damage inflicted on others. Normally, no such convenient thing existed. Imagine, for example, a random person with 100 HP. If they were to be struck by a baby, they would lose 1 HP. That would mean if they were struck one hundred times by a baby, they would die. In what kind of ridiculous world would that ever happen? However, Mizgarz was just such a world where something like this was made reality, and its people were forced to live under those silly laws.

Finally, the Goddess had given the denizens of the world a “limit wall.” It was a shackle placed upon them so that no matter how strong they got, they would never break the world itself. It also ensured that no matter how powerful they were, they would never deal more than 99,999 damage in a single blow. Because of that, even Leon, who was supposed to boast the most power among all the Thirteen Stars, could not destroy a planet in one attack. In this way, the limit that Sanieve had placed on Karkinos was even lower, limiting the damage Karkinos could do to only four digits—in other words, 9,999 damage.

“Morning Venus,” Sanieve declared, his cold voice announcing the activation of his magic.

As soon as those words came out of his mouth, golden shooting stars fell from a void, colliding with Sanieve’s ouroboros body one after the other. Karkinos

grabbed Sei and proceeded to dodge the falling masses. Meanwhile, Virgo was protected by Sanieve's barrier.

Also, none of the shooting stars even left a scratch on the ouroboros. Of course they didn't. The ouroboros was aligned with the Metal element. What reason would there be for it to take damage from its own element?

"Hermes, Who is Thrice Mighty."

Three magic circles were deployed around Karkinos in an attempt to make escape impossible, and enough water to swallow a city whole crashed down upon Karkinos from those magic circles. Though he managed to react and jumped into the air to escape, it seemed Sanieve had seen that coming, as he was waiting.

"Oceanus."

All the water created by his casting of Hermes, Who is Thrice Mighty converged in Sanieve's hand, changing into a superdense water bullet. Karkinos managed to react to this development as well, covering Sei with his own body. Even so, he could not absorb all the force behind the spell, and they were sent flying. After being slammed into the scales of the ouroboros, they tumbled over onto the same body, which served as their ground.

"Did you seriously think that you could do something about my main body, even if you couldn't affect the ouroboros? Absurd. The likes of you two don't even deserve my powers as an ouroboros."

After a pause, Karkinos laughed. "Heh... Heh heh..."

The situation was overwhelmingly dire. However, Karkinos wore a bold smile as he stood.

"How strange... The strength of your magic isn't nearly as much as I'd suspected, given how much power I can feel from you. In fact, you went through the trouble of recycling the mana you used with your casting of Hermes, Who is Thrice Mighty... That's funny."

Sanieve remained silent.

"Could it be...you don't have enough mana?" asked Karkinos. "Maybe you

have your hands full just maintaining this ouroboros form? After all, this isn't the same universe that the Goddess created. I'm sure you can only benefit from the small pittance flowing over from there."

The universe that the Earth inhabited was the Goddess's home universe. That was why it contained no mana, which was basically her power given form. Some had flowed into the universe thanks to Lufas's and Dina's frequent comings and goings, but that was only a minuscule amount. Just like how the Earth ouroboros had become unable to use magic after Aigokeros had sucked up all the mana for his own use in that past fight, magic was unusable without mana. That was why Sanieve was unable to use truly powerful magic.

"But there's an easy way to fix that. Why not just connect an Exgate to the other side? If you do that, you can obtain as much mana as you please."

"Heh... What an obvious attempt to goad me. If I do that, they'll notice me. Is that your plan? I won't fall for a move as obvious as that."

"Oh my. Too bad."

"Not to mention...magic is not my only method of attack," said Sanieve.

"I figured."

Fighter jets came one after the other from a gap in the ouroboros body that covered Earth. Each one of them shined gold, showing that they were massively strengthened by Sanieve.

Karkinos would most likely not die, even to a nuclear missile. In fact, there would be almost no damage at all. However, things were different if it was powered up by Sanieve. Missiles were continuously fired at Karkinos, who was forced to dodge and run through the firestorm of explosions.

"I'll let you know that I know your plan already. You are distracting me so that Sei can rescue Virgo."

To someone as strong as Sanieve, Sei was not worth paying attention to. He was so weak and frail that it wouldn't be strange if someone like Sanieve had already forgotten him entirely. However, that was only if they were facing someone else. He considered Sei his enemy in love, someone he had to bury in order to make Virgo his. That was why he never ignored Sei nor did he take the

boy lightly. Most importantly, he would never allow Virgo to fall into his hands. That was why he gently picked Virgo up and flew her to the front of the ouroboros's face.

"My weakness is obviously that everything is over if you defeat my main body. However, I will not underestimate you two. So, let's have my weakness disappear here."

This is the worst thing that could happen...! Karkinos thought.

Their one saving grace against the Ouroboros of Heaven was that, unlike other ouroboroses, he had a clear weakness. However, Sanieve knew about that and was about to disappear. He would rid himself of his weakness by hiding inside the ouroboros's body... On top of that, Virgo would be out of reach.

It was already too late because Sanieve had already entered the ouroboros's mouth, which closed tightly afterwards.

"Th-This is...bad... Actually, it's more like we might already be in checkmate."

"Say it isn't so!"

"Oh man. Killing a two-headed ouroboros alone is a little too heavy, even for M E," admitted Karkinos.

Though Karkinos acted like a fool a lot, he was not just a foolish man. He was able to accurately compare the difference in strength between him and his opponent, and he had the brains to be able to calmly think and plan during battle. Now, both Karkinos's brain and all the experience he'd gained up to this point were saying the same thing: *Oh, this just became impossible.*

Sanieve was in hiding, and there was no method they could use to take back Virgo. The ouroboros might spit them out if it was dealt enough damage, but neither of them had the means to do so. On top of that, Karkinos had an extra limit wall placed on him, so he was now unable to do any real damage to the ouroboros at all.

Karkinos paused. *It's checkmate. No matter how much I think about it, it's impossible.*

Now that it'd come to this, Karkinos had silently and emotionlessly accepted this reality, and his mind started to shift into trying to figure out a way for him, Virgo, and Sei to somehow survive. If they were to bide their time, Lufas would eventually notice and come to help. If Karkinos could just protect Sei until that time came, the three of them would at least be safe. Sanieve treated Virgo as if she were very precious, so there was most likely no need to worry about her.

The Earth—I should just give up on that front. It'll be destroyed, but I just can't think of a way to save everything at this point. But I'm sure if I say that to Sei, he won't understand, which means that I'll...have to resort to force. I'm going to force Sei to run and abandon the Earth.

Sei will probably hold a grudge against me if I do this, but that's fine in this situation, he thought. I know I just said that playing the heel is just an empty rationalization the other day, but I seriously can't think of any other way. Right, as long as some unexpected miracle doesn't happen...

“■■■■■■■■■■...”

Something howled.

The ominous sound echoed from the depths of the Earth. Just hearing it threw the spirits of the listener into disarray. It was a dreadfully repulsive noise. The ground shook, as did the air and sea. Then, from the bottom of the ocean, a tentacle suddenly appeared to spear through the body of the ouroboros.

EX—8

He had once lived in the deepest parts of Mizgarz's ocean. In fact, he wasn't even entirely certain whether he could be classified as a biological creature. At the very least, he was strange enough to shake the foundations of common sense on Earth.

In the deepest, darkest depths of the sea, he had carried out his own evolution through the use of mana. His form became so repulsive and fearsome that it eroded the sanity of those who even looked at it. His cry broke the hearts and minds of those who heard it as well. He was a monster that had not been born from the Goddess's will. Though he was more powerful than the Dragon King and surpassed the Lion King, he still managed to live in secret from the Goddess, free from ambition.

Eventually, he clashed with the King of the Ocean, Pisces, who shared the same space as him, and was exiled into space by his compatriot, the Demon Lord Aigokeros—or that was how it should have been, at least. However, he had survived thanks to his near-bottomless vitality, which effectively granted him immortality, and he eventually crossed the barrier between universes and landed on the safe space of Earth.

To him, the Earth was a paradise. Both the waters and the air were polluted, and most importantly, there was no one to threaten him. In opposition to his fearsome appearance, he was a being that lacked ambition and drive, so instead of rampaging around Earth, he simply spent his time peacefully in the ocean.

That was exactly why the wicked god Thulhu, who had crossed over from Mizgarz and made Earth his home, was angry.

“■■■■■■—!!!”

In a sense, it was fortunate that the entire world had been turned to gold. If things were operating as normal, the cry of the wicked god would have turned all of humanity insane with fear and panic.

The angered and frenzied wicked god trod over entire towns, crushed tanks, and swatted away fighters as he looked up at the ouroboros. *Unforgivable! I will never forgive that dragon, coming here to disturb my peace and threatening this nice home of mine!*

The wicked god, who had, in the past, managed to fight evenly with three members of the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars—namely Libra, Aigokeros, and Pisces—struck forth with his many tentacles in an attempt to finish off the ouroboros. Though he was not as strong as the ouroboros, Thulhu was still undoubtedly level 1000.

Sanieve was unable to ignore such a threat, and he made a troubled face inside the ouroboros.

“What...*is* that disgusting thing...?”

He had no clue at all what it could even be. However, it was definitely an enemy. A fearsomely strong enemy, at that.

In order to deal with this new, unexpected variable, Sanieve activated his skill, Muliphen. The skill that imposed a limiting wall on the enemy, weakening them. No matter how strong the target was, they could not resist the laws of the world, and this thing could not resist this skill. Being hit by the skill was like being suddenly affected by a new law of physics created by the Goddess. Cooling water would freeze it, and heating water would boil it. Muliphen was a skill that would apply new laws as steadfast as those. It was an utterly unfair ability only available to agents of the Goddess.

And the wicked god, who had been bound by this unassailable shackle howled, breaking divine providence.

“■■■■■—!”

The skill of agents of the Goddess was broken as if it were glass being shattered, and the wicked god continued to attack as if nothing had happened. *Who cares about divine rules or laws?!*

The wicked god Thulhu was a bug that had sprouted up in a place the Goddess was not paying attention to. No matter how many rules or laws were pushed on him, there was no way he, as a bug, would follow them. He was a bug because he wasn't subject to such things. He had always existed in contradiction to the Goddess's rules, so they would not work. He would not follow them.

Without even understanding what had just happened to him, the wicked god continued to unleash his anger on the ouroboros.

“You damned beast... Die!”

The ouroboros moved. One of the two heads, the metal one, opened its mouth to launch a metal bullet at its enemy. The bullet, which was tipped like a spear, gouged into Thulhu as it passed through the wicked god's body, tearing his body apart and destroying him. His head was gone, chest broken, trunk in pieces, limbs severed, and tentacles sent flying.

That fixes that, Sanieve thought, feeling secure. *That's clearly a lethal blow. There's no saving that thing.*

However, an unbelievable sight unfolded before his eyes the very next

moment. The monster's head, which should have been destroyed, grew into two new heads. The chest instantly returned to normal, and a new lower half sprouted from under the previously destroyed abdomen. The new lower half, which had split off from the original, also grew a multitude of independently moving tentacles from his upper part. The severed limbs all grew back with extra copies as well, and the cut-off pieces all turned into hideous monsters with minds of their own. All the lost tentacles replaced themselves and more as well, while the severed tentacles themselves also turned into monsters.

“■■■■■...”

Having regenerated all the damage he had taken in a flash, Thulhu once again let out an unpleasant cry. When he did so, something strange happened. The world warped around him, twisting around as it started to be painted over into bizarre, impossible-to-understand vistas.

This was Thulhu's special skill. Though he probably didn't even know the name of his unique skill, Thulhu instinctively understood how to use it. The wicked god had once tried to use it in his fight with Aigokeros, but it had been interrupted. His ability— Could it be called an ability? What he was doing was simply increasing the number of bugs.

By twisting the world around him and rewriting it, he could turn everything into a mess. He could reverse fiction and reality and flip common sense and senselessness around. Normality would no longer be normal, and strangeness would only get stranger. This spreading vista was one that would unconditionally displease and cause anxiety in people, one so strange it was unclear whether it was creative or just blasphemous. The definitions of near and far blurred, while solid and liquid states became indistinguishable. What looked red became blue, and what looked blue became green. It was as if a dreamworld where any and all laws no longer applied had been brought into reality as the world was dyed into something else, where nothing could be trusted and everything was incoherent.

“Urgh, ah... Wha...t...is that...?” asked Sei.

“Sei, my B O Y, close your eyes and cover your ears. This isn't a world you should be looking at for too long.”

Karkinos was able to remain sane because of his high mental resistances, but things were tough for Sei. After all, even Karkinos could tell that he would start to go crazy if he were to stay too long. Sanieve also started to leak a cold sweat, seeing this unreasonable scene.

“Stop that, you ugly thing...”

This time, the water half spewed a breath so cold it hit absolute zero. Thulhu’s body instantly froze before shattering into dust.

However, the wicked god was not dead. Each broken piece regenerated at a shocking rate to form countless Thulhus, which all combined to form an even larger Thulhu. By the time anyone had noticed, Thulhu had reached a height of one kilometer, when he hadn’t even been two hundred meters tall before.

“Hmph. You’re just a stubborn beast... Don’t underestimate me!”

Both heads of the ouroboros howled as it moved to end its unforeseen attacker with all its might.

* * *

“This is our chance!”

Karkinos looked at Thulhu’s entrance as a bout of good luck. He honestly had no idea what Thulhu was, but that didn’t change the fact that Thulhu’s entrance was a happy coincidence.

Thanks to the monster being enough trouble to warrant caution and attention, Sanieve had focused all his efforts that way. Karkinos didn’t expect Thulhu to be an ally, of course. In this case, it was hard to say that the enemy of his enemy was a friend. *If something were to happen, that thing could easily attack us*, Karkinos thought. However, this was still a good chance. There was no doubt that the monster was exactly the new, uncertain variable that was needed to flip the board from its unwinnable state.

Karkinos grabbed Sei and ran, aiming for the ouroboros’s mouth. He aimed for the moment when the ouroboros finished its breath attack against Thulhu, which would give him the chance to jump inside of it. Though Karkinos might live, Sei would die when the next breath came. However, there should have been a place in the ouroboros’s body where this breath could not reach. There

was no way Sanieve would've brought Virgo inside if there wasn't.

Karkinos ran, and ran, and ran. He ran as fast and as long as needed until he found it—the one unnatural, branching path in a creature whose innards should have been a single, linear road. Karkinos immediately jumped down this side path and found what he was looking for.

Sanieve stood in a room with a sleeping Virgo in the back. There was a barrier around Virgo, stopping anyone from coming near.

“You...!” Sanieve yelled.

“O K! My hunch was right on the money. M E is doing great today!” Karkinos laughed, letting go of Sei before slashing at Sanieve.

Luckily, Thulhu's erosion of reality had not reached this place. In other words, this place inside the enemy's belly was a safe place to fight.

Sanieve caught Karkinos's slash and returned with a kick to the crab's gut. However, it didn't do anything. Though he could place a limit wall on Karkinos, there was nothing Sanieve could do about the crab's toughness.

Karkinos laughed fearlessly and didn't hesitate to slam in a counterblow.

“Now, Sei my B O Y, it's your turn! Give that sleeping Virgo there a H O T awakening!”

Half of the reason Virgo was sleeping was her own volition. She probably had no realization of this, of course, but her desire to not hear the continuation of what Sei was going to say that day had her unconsciously resisting her awakening. That was why Sei had to be the one to wake her up. No matter how much Karkinos called out to her, nothing would most likely happen.

“You lowly filth! Do you really think you can defeat me?!”

“Non, non, non. That would be impossible,” Karkinos admitted. “The damage that M E can inflict against you would be nothing but scratches. It wouldn't even be a real battle. However, M E was never the one in charge of attacking in the first place.”

Of the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars, Karkinos was never the one meant to attack. He may have had a decent amount of strength, and if he were to attack,

he could take down most enemies. His main specialty was defense, however, and it was only there that he truly shined. Karkinos the Crab of the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars stood out on the battlefield by becoming a shield for his allies and not letting enemies close.

“Did you know? There’s a certain saying in this world...”

Karkinos took Sanieve’s attack head-on while using a skill to attract the ranged attack meant for Sei to himself. Then, he activated his no-miss counter, Acubens. Because the lower limit wall applied to the counter as well, no real damage was done, but it was enough to interfere with Sanieve’s movements.

“Those who try to cheat on and steal someone else’s love...can get pinched by a crab and G O T O H E L L!”

“That’s a lie! No such saying exists!”

Sanieve’s fist and Karkinos’s scissors collided.

“Virgo, listen to me!” Sei called out from outside the barrier.

His face was already a flaming red from the mere thought of what he was about to say. Doing this didn’t mesh with his character. He would normally never shout a confession out loud so hot-bloodedly. However, Sei had to make things right. Up until now, he’d run away from making this confession, putting up masks and using their life span difference as an excuse to run away and pin the blame on Virgo. That was exactly why he’d made Virgo cry that day.

Even though I knew deep down...that Virgo knew everything, and she chose to be with me anyway. Even though I actually knew what she wanted...

Sei was not especially smart or insightful, but he also wasn’t dumb or dense. He had already known about the feelings Virgo had for him, as well as the words he should have said. He’d known, but he’d still run from it because he was scared of all the loneliness he would be pushing on Virgo after his death.

But I won’t run anymore. Sei paused, thinking. *No, that’s not true. I’m actually still on the fence. I’m always just fretting about things and being scared...*

At heart, Sei’s mindset was still that of a normal person, and he didn’t have the decision-making power or mental fortitude of Lufas or Benetnasch. Even so,

he was able to move forward when it counted; that was what it meant to be human. And with this incident, something had been made very clear to him. *Logic and reasoning don't matter here, and I know I'm being selfish, but still... Still, I don't want Virgo to be taken by some other man!*

Sei was a male, and of course, he had a desire to monopolize and the ability to become a wolf. He realized he should have brought that to the forefront. Instead of acting like a gentleman and putting on a herbivore front, he should have put his affections on display, even if he had to go as far as to kidnap Virgo to do so. Virgo was rather passive fundamentally, so he needed to actively attack as the man in order to make up for that.

That was why Sei decided to put aside his shame, even if just for the moment.

"I LOOOOVE YOOOUUUU!" Sei shouted.

Anyone who knew Sei and his personality would wonder if he'd eaten something strange after hearing him scream passionately like that.

"I was running away back then! You were right. I'm a huge idiot! I was just scared... I couldn't help but think that you would eventually become unhappy because of me. I...don't think I wanted to shoulder the blame for that. I didn't want to do something bad. That was why I used our life spans as an excuse, pinned the blame on you, and tried to justify playing the heel to hurt you as a noble act."

Panicked, Sanieve jumped at Sei. However, the shield of the Thirteen Stars was not soft enough to let that happen. Kakinokos cut in front of Sanieve, kicking him away.

They're in a good spot right now. I can't have you interrupting them.

"I...don't live in the same time frame as you do. I'm sure I'll end up leaving you all alone one day. But even so! I want to spend my life with you! I want to dedicate the rest of my life to you! And I would like just a little of your time back, so... COME BACK TO ME VIRGOOOOOO!"

Having said his piece, Sei's face got even redder. It looked like you could boil water on it. Sei trembled greatly as he fervently wished in his heart for Kakinokos not to speak a word of this to anyone. Why would Sei calm down here of all

places? Well, he was just that kind of guy, just a little bit sloppy in everything. However, what he'd just shouted was undoubtedly his true feelings, and they had certainly reached Virgo.

The barrier cracked. The fissure spread and branched off into smaller cracks, making sounds all the way as it fell apart. Then, when the barrier finally came apart fully and scattered, Virgo came flying out of it.



“Sei!”

“Virgo!”

Virgo charged straight into Sei’s arms, and they shared a tight embrace. Seeing that, Sanieve’s expression warped, and Karkinos laughed.

“Now then, Virgo, use your skill!”

“Yes! Vindemiatrix!”

Virgo raised her palm upwards and shot forth a wave that dissipated all mana in its path. It didn’t matter what spell it was; everything would be unquestionably returned to mana and unformed by the skill. It was an unfair ability only given to the guardians of the sanctuary.

This ability opened a small hole in the ouroboros’s body, temporarily breaking the effect of Sanieve’s ouroboros skill, which needed to completely cover the Earth to work. Still, it only stayed that way for a moment. The ouroboros’s body was restored quickly after.

“You...” Sanieve said. “I will not hand her over. I will not give Virgo to the likes of you!”

The ouroboros’s mouth closed, cutting off their escape route. An aura of hatred rose around Sanieve’s entire body, overwhelming Sei and the others.

They had succeeded in reclaiming Virgo, but they were still massively outmatched in combat. There was no way for them to win against Sanieve, who held the power of two ouroboroses and the Goddess’s avatar. In short, it was certain that Sanieve would kill Sei if he put his mind to it, though that might take some time.

“Not yet... It’s not over yet. I can just kill you two and take my Virgo back. Nothing will change! Your actions are all meaningless!” Sanieve howled as he held up his hand towards Sei.

“That’s not true. I managed to find you, so now it’s over, man who was once the Ouroboros of Heaven.”

The voice echoed in everyone’s minds before the entire area was assaulted by a shock wave.

They were inside the body of an ouroboros, so there was no way a shock wave should have reached them. Even so, it felt as if something was pushing down on them from above... An absolute weight that could not be fought against pushed down on Sanieve, stopping him and forcing him into submission.

Sanieve wasn't the only one affected either. The ouroboros outside, the wicked god, and even the Earth itself were the same. They were all made to kneel due to pressure released by someone.

"No way... This is...Pressure? It's a racial skill of the heaven-winged...but, there's no way Pressure able to render me immobile should..."

While Sanieve was in shock over this impossible situation, Karkinos was sure of his victory.

"She's here," Karkinos said after a moment of silence.

The fight was over. It was not ending; it was already done. Why? Because the person who'd used that Pressure was the strongest being in the world. She had no equal and could be resisted by no one. With her arrival, this fight, and the entire game board it was taking place on, had been bashed to pieces. What was happening wasn't something so simple and easy as deciding who won a game. The game itself was broken, and now everyone and everything had been ended prematurely. That was the level of unassailable violence she brought to the table.

Black wings flapped and golden hair swayed in front of the ouroboros. It was the Black-Winged Conqueror, Lufas Maphaahl. She was the one who held authority over both the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars and the Goddess Alovenus, and she had descended from above the ouroboros.

EX—9

The ouroboros's mouth moved and a voice came out.

"I see. So you're Lufas Maphaahl."

Sanieve was able to control the ouroboros as his own body and talk with it. Using its resistance skills, the two-headed ouroboros shook off Lufas's Pressure and glared at her.

The size difference between the two was absolute, and from the ouroboros's perspective, Lufas may as well have been a dust mite. However, the ouroboros was the one being overwhelmed.

Lufas laughed as if the ouroboros wasn't even worth her attention, turning instead to Sei. "It's been a while, Sei. It seems to me you still attract trouble like no one's business. And though I can't see you, I can tell. You've gotten one step closer to being a man, haven't you?"

Once again, Lufas was sending her voice to Sei telepathically. She, of course, knew that Sei was feeling bashful in the ouroboros, which was why she continued to tease him.

"By the way, have you already delivered a confession to Virgo that would pierce her heart?" Lufas asked. "If you have, then I'm sad I missed it. It's too bad that I came so late. Still, that's fine... That manliness of yours is a good thing. It means I can entrust Virgo to you."

"Hey, you..."

Sanieve, angry at being ignored, tried to say something, but he was quickly shut up by a silent kick from Lufas. With that one blow, the ouroboros's jaw was crushed, its fangs snapped, and with a thunderous sound, its eyes popped out and fell to the ground due to the force behind the kick.

Lufas watched, then continued speaking like it was nothing.

"Also, well done, Karkinos. You did well protecting those two until I came."

After hearing Lufas's praise, Karkinos fell to one knee to show his appreciation. They could not physically see each other through the ouroboros, but that didn't matter. Appreciation and thanks were things given from within the heart. Though it couldn't be physically seen, it could still be recognized.

"O Karkinos, my trusted subordinate and the Crab of the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars..." Lufas began. "I am sure you are tired, but this is the last spurt. Things will get shaken, so make sure you protect those two."

The biggest stroke of luck for Lufas was that Karkinos, who specialized in defense, was the one with Sei. With him nearby, she could move without hesitation, assured of the fact that, though the ouroboros would be thrown

around a lot, Karkinos would be able to protect them. So, Lufas finally turned her attention to the ouroboros.

“Now then... Uhh... What was your name again?” she asked.

“The Ouroboros of Heaven, master.”

“Right, right. The Ouroboros of Heaven. You certainly did a number on things here. How dare you. I’m sure you have your excuses, but I’m not such a good person as to just forgive you after you hurt those close to me. Sorry, but you won’t escape with only burns. Be prepared.”

The Thirteen Stars readied for battle, Lufas’s words their signal. Everyone prepared to attack in their own ways. Aigokeros enlarged himself, Libra fully equipped all her weapons, Pollux summoned her heroic spirits, and Aries covered himself in fire. The sight of them looking down on their enemy was absolutely overwhelming.

“DON’T GET IN MY WAAAYYYY! Virgo is... Virgo is...mine...”

Lufas ignored Sanieve’s shout. “All of you, attack,” she ordered.

As soon as she said this, the Thirteen Stars moved to attack the two-headed ouroboros. The first one to get there was Aries, Lufas’s first tamed monster.

“Mesarthim!”

The ouroboros had no method to defend against Aries’s rainbow flames, which burned at a strength according to the target’s vitality. The fire Aries unleashed burned away at the metal ouroboros’s face, causing it to cry out in extreme pain.

Aries was followed up by Libra, the golem.

“Brachium Overflow!”

The skill pierced through resistances and was impossible to dodge. This strike, meant to turn all those who rebelled against god into ash unconditionally, hit both heads of the ouroboros as the torrent overran them.

“Come with me, great wicked god!”

“■■■■■■■!”

“Deneb Algedi!”

Both Aigokeros and Thulhu shot black beams from their mouths. The Demon Lord and the wicked god, the two unexpected coincidences born on Mizgarz, completely overran the ouroboros together. Their techniques did not allow for regeneration nor did they leave room for revival. These two beings, so deeply entrenched in mana, dealt wounds that would not heal quickly, if at all.

The ouroboros opened its mouth in an attempt to return fire, but it was stopped by a chain wrapping around its mouth, forcing it closed. The culprit: Scorpius. The pointed end of the chain stabbed into the ouroboros, injecting poison into the dragon.

“Awwww, why are they getting along...? Come on. I’ve stopped it, so hurry and follow up!”

“Shut it! You don’t need to tell me that!”

Leon took his turn using the small amount of time that Scorpius had bought. He depended solely on his brute strength without relying on any unique skills or other tricks, slamming his fist into the ouroboros and destroying its scales.

“Yoouuu... Don’t underestimate me!”

The two-headed ouroboros tore apart its chains and opened its mouths. Then, each head unleashed a breath that could destroy stars, headed straight for Lufas. One of the breaths was casually swatted away by Lufas, while the other was swallowed by a hole in space that suddenly appeared.

“Nice to meet you, first generation. I know of you because you are the oldest servant of the Goddess, but that makes it all the more disappointing that you would do something like this.”

Dina, the current avatar of the Goddess, had stopped the ouroboros’s second breath. She raised both her arms, activating one of her unique skills as the avatar so as not to prolong the ouroboros’s suffering.

“It is my duty to pass judgment on those who bring harm to the world. Allow me to now fulfill this duty, which I had once abandoned. Come, Mediators of the World!”

The world rumbled. Dina had connected Mizgarz with Earth, creating an extra large gate. From the gate appeared the ouroboroses, all four of them: those of Sun, Fire, Earth, and Wood. Orm also returned to his ouroboros form, meaning the Moon ouroboros also joined the party.

Dina, the Goddess's avatar, had the authority to activate the ouroboroses. This was something Sanieve couldn't do even if he was also an avatar, since the Goddess had turned her back on him. Even though he had the body of a two-headed ouroboros, not even he could take on five ouroboroses at once.

Therefore, Sanieve reacted by applying a limit wall on everybody he could see. However, the Ox wouldn't allow that to stand.

"To try something like that in front of me... Did you really think that would work? Disappear... Aldebaran!"

He unleashed his skill-destroying strike, capable of invalidating the skill of even someone as powerful as the avatar of the Goddess.

Following that, Pollux and Castor raised their hands.

"Now come, my beloved children! Argonautai!"

It wasn't just the heroic spirits that came from Mizgarz to answer the Fairy Princess's call. The *Argo* had come as well. There was now a horde of heroic spirits large enough to blot out the sky. Even Sol, an ouroboros's avatar whom they had once defeated as an enemy, had joined them.

"Okay, have you prepared yourself to fall to hell? That's what you deserve for laying your hands on my cute grandchild. Don't you dare believe that you'll be allowed an easy death."

The one who said that was the previous holder of the Maiden title, Parthenos. She looked down at the ouroboros with anger in her eyes as she held up her weapon, a log that had once been a branch of the Wood ouroboros. As long as she was around, including now, she would continue to cast buffs and support magic on all her allies at absurd speeds, though she would not attack directly. It was thanks to her skill, Zavijava. The more time she was given, the more she would strengthen her allies. Of course, this included the heroic spirits and five ouroboroses as well.

In the past, Parthenos had transferred her power as the guardian to Virgo, withdrawing from the front lines. However, she now had returned to her former glory. If someone were to trace back the lineage of Parthenos's power, they would reach the Goddess Alovenus, and Alovenus was now on Lufas's side. It was an easy thing for the power Parthenos had given away to be restored, which was how the first Maiden had been completely revived.

The five ouroboroses all opened their mouths to charge breath attacks. On top of that, the heroic spirits all readied their weapons, or prepared to chant magic or use skills.

"W-Wait! You're all seriously going to...?! No, if you do that, it won't matter that they've all been turned to gold. The planet itself will...!"

"Ah, no need to worry about that."

If they were to attack with so much power, Earth itself would not escape destruction. However, Lufas was never worried about that. After all, they had the cheater of all cheaters on their side—the Goddess Alovenus.

"It's been a long time, Ouroboros of Heaven. So you really were alive," said Alovuenus.

Sanieve was stunned. "No...way... You..."

"We have only just reunited, so it is too bad that we must already part. However, there is no need to be afraid. You will be tasting more misfortune than you ever have, and that means the birth of more joy down the line. It is because people reach the depths of despair and misfortune that even the smallest of things bring them joy, so I will save you too. Yes, I will never abandon you. Now—fall to despair, Ouroboros of Heaven!"

Alovenus spread her arms showily. At the same time, the world—rather, the entire universe—shook.

Though she was only here through an avatar, with its power carefully controlled, Alovenus was still an absurdly powerful goddess. Therefore, she was able to warp reality as much as she wanted, and she could control logic and reason however she liked. All of creation was nothing more than a set of toys to her, creatures mere dolls, so what she was about to do was put on a one-night

puppet show.

“Now come, you dreamer, you blind and dumb deity, to which everything is just a dream that will disappear upon your awakening. AZATHOTH!!!”

Reality flipped on its head. Black became white and vice versa. Fiction and reality switched places. Even the wicked god’s little world was painted over by the Goddess’s selfish rules in an instant. Reality, dreams, the past, the present, and the future all came under her control. Nothing was impossible.

“I can do it.” Such selfishness was allowed and could reach infinity. It could even invent something above infinity, and that was the type of existence the Goddess Alovenus was.

“With this, everything that happened as well as everything that will happen today will just be a dream. What an old trope, right? Just making everything a dream if some event gets out of hand. So don’t worry. No matter what any of you do, everything will just be a dream. Once dawn breaks, it will all be back to normal.”

Even Lufas had to let out a somewhat strained laugh at that. It was a ridiculous solve and utter nonsense. Everything was as Alovenus desired. That was exactly why she’d never realized any mistakes she’d made, and it was also why she had never improved until Lufas had come to punish her.

“By the way, I do have preferences when it comes to stories. I read a lot of romances, and among all that I’ve read, there’s a certain thing that I will never forgive, and that is the breaking of everything after the happy ending. Wouldn’t you think, ‘What the heck?’ if in some sort of extra or sequel the main heroine was suddenly taken by some other man out of nowhere? I’d think so. I would think, ‘You aren’t wanted.’ What need is there for a love rival after everything’s over? Why couldn’t you just leave that perfect happy ending with the protagonist and main heroine being together alone? Do you understand what I’m talking about?” Alovenus paused. “I’m talking about you, Ouroboros of Heaven. You’re just a foolish puppet acting in a minor role who thinks he’s actually the star. Leave the stage.”

Alovenus raised her hand. At the same time, seven magic circles appeared in the air. Each one represented an element: Fire, Water, Wood, Metal, Earth,

Sun, and Moon. Each circle, which contained one of Mizgarz's seven elements, amplified the magic power inside it and combined together to give rise to the strongest spell containing all the elements.

"Here's a treat for you. I'll show you a special piece of magic. Seven Stars, gather and enclose to give rise to holy land here and now. Bear witness. This is the creation of the seven skies... Mizgarz!"

From the void burst the strongest spells of each of the seven elements all at once. Fire that could burn away stars. A mass of water that could swallow the sun. Lighting that could pierce through dimensions. Gravity that could compact the entire solar system. A silver arrow that could erase multiple stellar bodies. A meteor shower that swallowed everything in sight. And sunlight that destroyed anything and everything.

All of that rained down, changing the face of the planet below and breaking apart the planet as it terminated everything on its way to the ouroboros. However, that wasn't all. The destructive power in each of these spells circulated between them, resonating to bring each of them to new heights of power and birthing something in the space between all of them. That something was a planet very familiar to Lufas and the others, Mizgarz. This newly birthed Mizgarz shined and expanded until it eventually reached a climax and exploded.

Birthing a planet and destroying it as a means to attack an enemy was just too absurd, but that was the way of gods. It was the method chosen by Alovenus, who was both Mizgarz's god of creation and god of destruction.

The Ouroboros of Heaven managed to evade the attack, getting away with just the bare minimum of damage, but even just taking the aftermath of the spell was fatal. The scales on the Metal ouroboros were burned away without exception, and the Water ouroboros's arm was torn off. Even though this would all be a dream in the end, it was still too much.

However, Alovenus was still holding back at this level. Compared to her true body, the form Alovenus was in right now didn't possess even a speck of her real power. It was comparatively really weak, and from Alovenus's perspective, she was holding back extremely hard.

“You went too far, Lady Alovenus,” Dina told her. “Well, thanks to that, things have gotten a lot easier. We need to follow up! Volley fire!”

“We’re going too! Heroic spirits, attack at once!” Pollux ordered.

The five ouroboroses spewed their breaths simultaneously while all the heroic spirits also attacked in unison. Even an ouroboros wouldn’t be able to escape from something of this magnitude unscathed. Their target’s scales were smashed, fangs snapped, and in a flash, the Ouroboros of Heaven became soaked in blood.

“GWAAARRRGGGGHHH!!!” Sanieve screamed, but he still tried to attack in return.

The Water ouroboros’s head unleashed its breath at Dina, but while the breath was on course to hit her, it suddenly veered away into the void.

“You’re far too naive, fool. As long as I’m around, no attack of yours will hit.”

The voice belonged to Aquarius the Water Bearer, whose unique skill, Sadachbia, forced attacks to miss. As long as she was around, nothing but absolute-accuracy attacks would meet their target.

“Let’s go, Pisces,” said Sagittarius.

“Why is it that I have to be teamed up with you at the end...?”

Absolute accuracy was this man’s bread and butter. Sagittarius’s Al Nassr ignored distance to instantly pierce through its target. That alone wasn’t enough attack strength, but Pisces was there to fix that. His unique skill, Alrescha, allowed him to possess and control enemies or possess and strengthen allies.

Pisces looked as if he truly loathed the idea, but he still possessed Sagittarius in order to dwell in his arrow.

“Al Nassr!”

The arrow Sagittarius let fly transformed into a dragon of water to bite into the Metal ouroboros, Sanieve. The Water dragon continued to tear away at the head, finally severing one of the Ouroboros of Heaven’s two. Even so, the ouroboros was still alive...but *she* would be going last.

“As expected of my followers, who fill me with such pride. Well done! I can’t afford to put on a pathetic show like this.”

Lufas laughed boldly as she spread her black wings. She unsealed her power, which she normally kept under wraps in order to not throw the world into chaos, becoming level 5100 in open defiance of the Goddess’s rules. Because she now possessed so much power, the dimension warped around her, causing the scenery to seem squashed. Though Lufas had returned the power she’d gained that could destroy entire universes in the Endpoint, because it would obviously only get in the way during daily life, she’d completely forgotten about the mana she’d taken from the ouroboroses and remained at level 5100.

As an aside, the ouroboroses needed to source the mana for their revival from another universe, because Lufas had taken their mana. Thanks to that, apparently Mizgarz’s universe had gotten slightly closer to a completely unrelated place.

“I was thinking I could just use one good-looking, tastefully selected skill here, but... Sorry. In the end, I’m the best with this,” Lufas said as she clenched her fist and took off.



the strongest attack? Flames that could pierce through defenses? A skill that could mow down everything? Or a spell that could erase stars?

No, none of those were the strongest. None of those compared to Lufas Maphaahl.

“O H M Y G O D!”

Sensing what was about to happen, Karkinos hurriedly grabbed Virgo and Sei and jumped out of the ouroboros’s mouth, running away from the scene. Not even he could defend against Lufas’s attacks. Karkinos jumped inside a defensive barrier that had already been erected by the Thirteen Stars and the heroic spirits, barely managing to achieve safety.

After making sure that happened, Lufas instantly flew off into the distance, securing enough space for her to suddenly accelerate, and then accelerate some more. Lufas flew so fast she’d turned herself into an arrow of light, from which she threw out a simple punch with no tricks behind it. The instant Lufas seemed to have clashed with the ouroboros, she was already through to the other side, and a moment later, the ouroboros’s body broke apart into dust.

From the ouroboros’s perspective, Lufas was small enough to just be a small piece of refuse. Even if she were to go through it, there would only be a small hole left. However, just the shock wave that was an aftereffect of Lufas’s punch was enough to deal all that damage.

The ouroboros’s body was easily destroyed, spreading tiny chunks of meat all throughout space. From there, the shock wave only expanded, causing many celestial bodies to crumble. Even the solar system just vanished. A moment later, the barrier erected by the Thirteen Stars and the heroic spirits cracked. In an instant, that crack grew until the barrier was easily sundered, and the lives of Lufas’s allies were only spared because Alovenus instantly erected another barrier to protect them.

Even then, the world’s collapse was not stopped, and cracks eventually started appearing in space itself until everything crumbled away.

The only thing that was left after all the destruction was a distorted space with several different sceneries mixed together. There was a room that must have been in someone's house, an amusement park, a public park, an eatery, a graveyard, a wasteland, and the abandoned ruins of a mansion. In this space, it was morning, noon, evening, and night all at once. All these times and views that should not have existed together were all squashed and warped due to having been forced together like this.

Sei looked for Virgo within this space, which seemed as if it would drive anyone insane if they stayed in it for too long. In the end, though, it was surprisingly easy for him to find her. As soon as he thought about wanting to see her, Virgo showed up.

“Virgo!”

“Sei! This is...”

The two of them held hands so as not to get separated as they looked around them. There were some places they recognized here and there, but also places they didn't. *Where are we? What kind of world is this?* the two of them thought, but then a voice called out to them from behind.

“This is the realm between dreams and reality. The dream that Alovenus had flipped over was destroyed by Lufas in one hit, and now, everyone is about to wake up.”

It was Sanieve. However, he was covered in wounds, and it seemed like he would collapse at any moment.

Alovenus had said that everything would just be a dream. However, it seemed that the damage that Sanieve had taken was real. This was only natural. If everything really was just going to be settled in a dream, then Sanieve would fully recover once everyone had woken up and just go after them again. That meant this was not a dream for Sanieve alone. His wounds would not heal. They would carry over into the waking world, and he would die. It was a cold declaration of execution by the Goddess. There was no hope for his survival.

However, Sanieve's eyes were still shining and alive, and they were tenaciously locked straight onto Virgo.

“I will soon die...but you... I will take you with me. You are the hope that I have finally found... I will not let you go...”

Even though he was at death’s door, Sanieve had still not given up on Virgo.

Take her with him... So he means to have her join him in death? Not satisfied to die alone, Sanieve was going to try to involve Virgo as well. Sei had no intention of allowing that, and he stepped forward to protect Virgo.

“You’re in the way... Move...” Sanieve ordered.

“No. I won’t.”

“What can someone like you even do?”

There was an insurmountable gap in strength between Sanieve and Sei. Even if Sanieve was about to die, he was still more than able to kill Sei, at least. *I know that, but still. I decided I wouldn’t make her cry ever again. I vowed to protect her. It doesn’t matter how strong the enemy is. If I don’t stand up now, I can’t be called a man.*

That was why Sei clenched his fist and recklessly swung at Sanieve.

“WOOOAAARRGGHHH!”

Sei didn’t actually believe it would do anything. He just wanted to buy as much time as he could for Virgo to run. Even if it was only a second or two, the more time he bought, the more time there was for help to come.

Surprisingly, Sei’s fist—the fist of someone who knew they were powerless—hit Sanieve straight on the face and sent him flying.

“Ghh... Argh...!”

Sei paused. “Huh?”

It did something? Was it just a lucky punch that happened to hit? He considered this for a moment. *No. Even if it was lucky that it hit, there shouldn’t have been any damage. But he’s not acting. My punch worked. It did something.* There was no doubt that Sei’s punch had affected Sanieve, and the one who was most surprised about that was Sei himself.

“Youuu... If this weren’t the dream world, I would never...”

Sanieve slowly stood up, holding the area Sei had punched. Seeing that, Virgo realized something.

“A dream... I see!” Virgo said. “Sei, this is a dream! There’s no relation to your strength in real life!”

“She’s right... Everything depends on the strength of the heart here... Powerful individuals like Virgo and I become weak, while weaklings like you become strong. Of course, I’d be willing to bet that that monster Lufas Maphaahl would just stay a monster...” Sanieve took a step forward and glared at Sei. “With this, we are now even. Or do you still believe you need help? Can you not protect Virgo by yourself?”

Sei didn’t reply. It was a clear provocation; Sanieve’s intent was obvious. If help were to come, or if Virgo were to decide to participate, Sanieve had no hope of winning. That was why he told Sei to come at him alone. There was no need for Sei to take on that challenge, but even if it was obvious, there were times men just had to step up.

“Virgo, get back.”

“Sei...”

“If he’s going to go that far...” Sei trailed off. “Even I have my pride, you know.”

Sei had Virgo step back, allowing him to face Sanieve alone. No matter how soft he seemed, Sei was a man. He wanted to protect Virgo on his own, of course, as well as punch the man who had tried to take Virgo from him.

“Allow me to put you to the test, Minamijuuji Sei!” Sanieve bellowed as a shining sword appeared in his hand.

How is that possible? This asshole... I’m unarmed! Sei complained internally. I need some sort of weapon to fight him with... As soon as he thought this, Sei found himself holding his sword, Kouen. *This really is a dream. Anything goes, huh?*

“OOOOOAARRGGGHHHH!” Sanieve howled, making a swipe with his sword.

Sei reacted, swinging his sword as well. Both blades clashed, sending sparks

flying.

“YOOUUU! IF ONLY YOU DIDN’T EXIST!”

Sanieve’s tenacity was overwhelming. Each one of his sword strikes was heavy, and the toll of blocking them was making Sei’s hands go numb.

However, Sei was the same in his desire to not lose. *If I can’t defeat this man here and now, what right do I have to be next to Virgo? I wouldn’t be able to be proud of myself.* That was why Sei swung with his swords at speeds impossible in real life, pushing Sanieve back.

“Stop being so...selfish!”

“Shut up!”

Their two blades clashed again. Neither side took a step back, both bracing with their legs to root themselves on the spot. However, it seemed like that didn’t matter to Sanieve, as he continued to swing his sword.

“If only you didn’t exist, I would never have had to see that girl cry! I would never have had to think about the future, where you will leave her in tears! Why?! Why are you a human?! Why did you steal her heart, even though you know how short your life span is?!”

Sei couldn’t reply, those words piercing straight through his heart.

“You don’t have the strength to protect her, the life to stay with her, or the guts to accept the courage she had to wring out to stay with you! How could I lose to such a man?!”

Sanieve’s fist caught Sei in the face. The impact and pain shook his vision and forced him to step back. Even so, Sei clenched his teeth and managed to return a punch to Sanieve’s gut.

Shocked, Sanieve was silent for a moment. Then he yelled, “It doesn’t hurt! It doesn’t!”

However, Sanieve immediately came forward with another punch, drawing blood that quickly covered Sei’s face. Then Sanieve followed up with a knee to Sei’s solar plexus before swinging down his sword. Even though Sei managed to block the strike just in time, he was still heavily disadvantaged. Sanieve put his

weight into his sword, trying to forcefully cut Kouen in two.

“Now what? Is that all? Can you not even defeat someone at death’s door, like me?!”

“Sh-Shut it...!”

“Are you going to have someone else protect you every time, just like this?! Are you going to just make her cry again?!”

Originally, the man named Minamijuuji Sei was not possessed of a personality suited for combat. Put nicely, he was kind, but it could also be said that he was just naive. Even though he had a strong sense of justice, he didn’t have the drive to match. He just didn’t have the initiative to make his dreams and wishes a reality at the expense of others. He always ended up being considerate of his opponent and tended to simply take a step back to allow them some leeway. Compromise is a virtue, they say, and they would be right. However, that also depended on the situation. Those who compromised with someone trying to take their girl were just considered cowardly.

Sei’s kindness was what had attracted Virgo, but in order to protect her, Sei couldn’t allow himself to only be kind. If he didn’t learn to follow his desires a little, if he didn’t learn to be even a little more selfish, Sei would never be able to protect anyone.

“I won’t make her cry anymore! I swore that!”

“Then show me! Show me your mettle!”

“I don’t need you to tell me that... I was already going to!”

Sei forced their swords up, breaking their prolonged clash.

In this space, what decides the outcome of our showdown is the strength of our hearts. Our feelings for Virgo specifically will be the critical factor, so I won’t lose. There’s no way I can lose. Even if I’m not as powerful, even if I’m not as beautiful, I’m still confident that my heart will lose to no one.

Such determination hardened Sei’s fist as he slammed a punch into Sanieve’s sword. The sword bit into Sei’s hand, drawing blood, but he didn’t mind. He had decided to stop relying on his sword. Instead, Sei made his feelings for Virgo his

weapon and struck out with his fist as hard as he could.

“DDAAAAARRRAAGGHHHH!!!”

Even though Sanieve’s sword was cutting into Sei’s fist, it didn’t stop until it forced itself into Sanieve’s face, sending the man flying. Sanieve tumbled continuously across the floor until he stopped, spread-eagled. Thinking that he would get up immediately, Sei readied himself. However, Sanieve was making no such moves.

“Hmph, you pass,” Sanieve said after a moment of silence. “I suppose.”

It was an anticlimactic end, but this was a fight of the heart. Things would always be decided in an instant, as soon as someone saw the end coming. Sei’s feelings had overcome Sanieve’s. That was all. As long as this fact remained true, Sanieve would never be able to claim victory over Sei. Power relationships worked here much in the same way as they did in the Endpoint between Lufas and Alovenus after their fight.

“Ah, how regrettable. In the end, I was just a jester to be used as a stalking horse. The Goddess was right. I’m just a foolish puppet who came up to the stage because of a misunderstanding,” Sanieve said quietly, unable to hide the regret seeping through his voice.

In the end, he was a clown, a buffoon full of misunderstandings. Virgo and Sei’s feelings were mutual, and there had been no room for Sanieve to interfere in the first place. All he managed to do was become the villain who had stolen Virgo from under everyone’s noses, and in the end, that had only served to bring the two closer. He lost, just as he was supposed to, and was about to disappear, again, just like he was supposed to... That was all.

“Sanieve...”

“Virgo...? Heh heh. Look at me. I’m just an unsightly loser. I underestimated some weakling who didn’t have the guts to accept your noble feelings and tried to take you by force, but this is all I was able to do in the end... Go ahead and laugh.”

Virgo shook her head after hearing Sanieve’s verbal self-flagellation. Seeing that, Sanieve couldn’t help but smile.

“You won’t even hold a grudge now, huh...? It is as you see, Minamijuuji Sei. This girl is too kind. With no one by her side to protect her, that kindness will hurt her and leave her to be food for villains like me. So... Though I hate to do this, I leave her to you. Use your short life to protect her. Support her. If you don’t... Someday, there will be another misunderstanding idiot like me.”

After a weighty pause, Sei eventually replied. “Yeah. All this made me realize just how much of an idiot I was. I don’t like you, but I’ll remember your words.”

“That’s fine.”

Sanieve closed his eyes, satisfied.

Seeing someone go to sleep in the world of dreams was strange. However, he would no longer surface in the waking world. This was the place Sanieve would meet his end, the place he would sleep forever. However, Sanieve found that he was strangely calm. Though regretful and far from a satisfying ending, this was far better than the death he’d been heading towards before, at least, where all he could have done was run from the Goddess and despair at the state of the world.

While he burned the image of Virgo and Sei together in his mind as the world crumbled—or rather, returned to reality—Sanieve quietly muttered, “I’m in no position to say this but...I wish you a long...and happy...”

Then, the man named Sanieve completely disappeared.

EX—11

Four years had passed since the battle with Sanieve. The events of that day had ended as a dream, just as Alovenus had said they would, and no one but Sei and the other participants remembered any of it. One might think that this in itself might cause an uproar, because everyone had seen the same dream, but dreams only tended to stay in the minds of people who had just woken up. In the end, everybody eventually forgot that they had even seen such a dream, and by the time Sei had woken up, everybody was back to living their normal daily lives, completely unchanged from before. Even Sei himself had wondered whether it had really been a dream or not. Lufas, Virgo, and the others remembered the events of that day, however, and they understood that they

had been both a dream and not a dream.

“I’ll be off then.”

Sei had turned twenty-two and had successfully found employment as a police officer upon entering society, becoming a deputy officer after passing the state employment exam required for general employment. Originally, he never wanted to try to qualify for some elite course and was fine with being a simple policeman, carrying out his duties as one of the police while being helped by his seniors. However, he started to desire higher pay because he wanted to make things as easy as possible for his wife and child.

“Yes. See you later, dear.”

Sei’s wife was there to see him off, looking just as young as when they’d first met—his wife by the name of Virgo. In her arms was their newborn baby, already making sounds.

The couple finally made it to the “goal” all couples had after being pushed forward in their relationship by Sanieve, though rather unintentionally, and now lived together on Earth. Virgo had left the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars and was considered the former Maiden seat. There was no way for someone with a child to be a Maiden, after all.

As an aside, there was no candidate for the third generation of the seat, so in the end, Parthenos had been reinstated for the time being. Parthenos reacted to this news by falling into a slight depression, saying, “So my grandchild’s already got children, and I’m still here without any experience...” As one might expect from someone who was literally a “Maiden” until her death, she was on another level.

“Okay, Akemi, let’s say goodbye to papa.”

“Bwahh!”

Minamijuuji Akemi—the baby girl born to Virgo and Sei. Her name was written with the characters for “bright light” and “water.” She was named after Sanieve. They had taken the first character from the traditional Japanese name for Venus, one of the more famous Metal element spells which was under his purview, as well as the character for water, his other element. By connecting

them together, they got Akemi.

Sanieve had been an enemy, but he was also the one who got Sei to realize his love for Virgo. This was the least they felt they could do for the man who had died while unfulfilled like that, so they entrusted his name to their daughter.

“Sei, just so you know, I’m very happy right now.”

“Yeah... Me too.”

Someday they would be forced to part. Even so, they had decided to hold the short time they had together all the more dear. Sei would walk through life together with Virgo and Akemi, swearing to love them both until the breath of life left his body. Even if Virgo was forever young, even if he had grown old, even then, they would continue through life together. They were sure they would never regret anything, no matter how things ended. That was what the two of them had decided, after all.

Virgo and Sei exchanged a kiss before Sei went off to work.

“Looks like the two of them will be just fine,” Lufas said.

“Seriously. Getting all steamy right from the start of the day...” Dina trailed off.

Lufas and Dina were watching this scene out of a slice-of-life romance from the top of the next building. *Will Virgo really be able to get used to the other world, to Japan? Will those two be all right?* Those worries had driven Lufas to drop in every once in a while to observe them, but it turned out that her worries were unfounded.

“But their trials are just beginning. Sei, kid... Well, I suppose I should stop with that... Sei, from now on you’ll have to protect your family. That’s a far harder task than protecting the world.”

“It is, isn’t it? But those two will be able to overcome any obstacle. I’m sure of it.”

Lufas nodded before turning back to watch Sei. He no longer looked like the unreliable boy she’d first met. Now, he looked like a man who had overcome

many a hardship.

He'll be fine. He's no longer that weak boy who needed protecting. I'm sure he'll manage to protect Virgo and his child from now on in the battlefield of daily life. With that conviction, Lufas flew away.

A single feather from her black wings fell, eventually reaching the ground after brushing past Sei's head. Seeing that, Sei stopped for a moment and looked up at the sky before laughing. The look on his face was powerful and reliable, as if to say, "Leave it to me."



Elemental Meeting

“Well then, let us commence the 75,004th attribute meeting.”

The area was a strange space. There was no sense of reality to it, and everything wavered, as if the entire area were underwater. Not even the scenery itself stayed still. It kept switching around, flowing through different looks as if everything was just a dream.

This begged the question: was this reality? The answer to that was both yes and no.

This place was the world of the mind... It wasn't true reality, but a space that existed within someone's heart. However, the five strange figures gathered here were able to bring their memories of what transpired in this place back to reality. That meant this place could also be said to be reality, since it would have consequences in the real world.

In attendance were the Ouroboros of the Sun (or Heaven), the Ouroboros of the Moon, the Ouroboros of Fire, the Ouroboros of Wood, and the Ouroboros of Earth. Any one of them was large enough to wrap around Mizgarz, but the size of their bodies in reality was not much of a problem here.

Because any action taken by them would mean the end of the world, they were normally asleep. If it weren't for this world, they wouldn't even be able to converse with each other. Of course, the Ouroboros of the Moon alone was able to be active in human form at all times, so these meetings could only happen when he was sleeping.

“Can I go first?”

“Yes, Fire ouroboros. What is it?”

“I've been thinking this for a while now... Aren't this world's elements a little too haphazard? I get me being Fire. Fire's a staple. Earth is clearly the power of the land, so I get that too. Wood is exactly that, the power over trees and whatnot. I think that's fine as well.”

“I can also do wind and lightning though,” said the Ouroboros of Wood.

“What? Isn’t that just way too greedy a skill set?” the Fire ouroboros complained.

“Anyway, as I was saying,” he continued. “What the hell is the Moon element? What kind of energy is Moon? The fact that the moon glows is only because it reflects the sun’s light, so wouldn’t that just be the Sun element? By my estimation, anyway.”

“Well, if it helps, I use things like darkness and space-time,” Orm explained.

“But isn’t that just because those didn’t really fit with any of the other ones?”

What was the Moon element? In truth, not even Orm, the Ouroboros of the Moon who presided over the element, knew. The aspects of darkness and space-time were attributed to the Moon element, but as the Fire ouroboros had said, it felt like those were only there as placeholders. If the light of the moon counted as the Moon element, that would mean the Moon element was at least indirectly the Sun element. What about throwing down moon rocks? Well, that would also be more like the Earth element.

“But if you’re going to go that far, isn’t the Sun element in the same boat?” The Moon ouroboros attempted to change the subject by dissing the Sun element. “I don’t get how it’s different from Fire.”

“True,” agreed the Fire ouroboros, readily jumping on.

To him, the Sun element was also a strange one. *Wouldn’t the light of the sun just be fire?* he’d always thought. However, this was when the Ouroboros of the Sun (self-titled the Ouroboros of Heaven) objected.

“You fools! The Sun is an allegory for heaven. My element is light itself.”

“No, but isn’t your Solar Flare spell just fire? Shouldn’t that one be mine?”

“Well...”

The Sun element made the light of the sun into a spell, but the spell Solar Flare, which Lufas liked to use, was basically just a stupidly huge fireball. Even so, antifire shields or armor didn’t work against it. It was strange.

“Personally, I think of Metal as the strangest and most meaningless element. I

mean, why Metal?” the Earth ouroboros wondered.

“Well, isn’t that...like iron and stuff?” the Wood ouroboros replied, his expression troubled. “You know, that sort of thing.”

“But how is that different from just cutting something with a sword?”

When this just led to further questions, the Ouroboros of Wood was hard pressed for another answer.

None of them were of the Metal element. However, all of them agreed that it was the strangest of the elements. Spells assigned to it ranged from calling down a rain of metal to changing stones into metals like gold, throwing steel swords, and shooting out a clump of gold like a star. From any perspective, none of that was really magic. They were just physical attacks.

“Even though it’s a physical attack when an Alchemist transmutes a sword and sends it flying, it’s magic when a Metal element thing creates a sword to send it flying. Why is that?” the Fire ouroboros questioned, exasperated.

“Hmm... Now that I think about it, this world’s elements really are incredibly strange,” agreed the Moon ouroboros, heaving a sigh.

Then, eventually, they simply came to the same conclusion they always did. In other words...

“Oh well. It’s Alovenus,” all of them said in unison, closing out the meeting.

At the same time, the self-styled omniscient and omnipotent fool who was actually neither of those things sneezed.

Afterword

I-Inflaaaatiiooonnnn?! Well, anyway, this is the last afterword, coming to you from the site of Inflation's sudden death.

Thank you very much for purchasing volume 9 of *A Wild Last Boss Appeared!* I am the author, Firehead. With this volume, the story has finally ended. The fact that this ridiculous and freewheeling series has safely made it to its final volume is all thanks to you readers. Seriously, thank you all so much.

It feels to me as though 2016, when the first volume was published, was just a little while ago. It feels like we've reached this point in the blink of an eye.

The journey, which began with just Lufas and Dina at first, ended with a huge ensemble cast, and now, we've finally passed the goal. From now on, Lufas will also take a rest from journeying and take it easy on the moon.

In the end, the Conquering Thirteen Heavenly Stars became the Imperial Thirteen Heavenly Stars and blew up all the way to fifteen members. With that many characters, there'll naturally be those who got the spotlight more than others, as well as those that I personally like more. I suppose my favorites would be the characters who've been propping up the story from the beginning: Dina, Aries, and Libra. Aigokeros and Karkinos didn't end up very cool, but I did end up liking them in the end as well.

Outside of the Thirteen Stars, I'm a huge fan of Benetnasch. I also liked both the tiger Sword Saint and Sei quite a bit, though they ended up staying weak until the end. At first, Sei was just a victim-role character that I made because I figured there needed to be someone in the opposing hero role since the protagonist was the final boss. He ended up moving in a nice direction, though, and provided a different avenue of strength from Lufas. In my opinion, he was the one who displayed the most decent kind of strength by ignoring the Goddess's Scenario throughout the story and moving on his own to look for the right answer. Thanks to that, he finally managed to get to home base with Virgo. Go explode forever after.

As for the true final boss, Alovenus—the story’s biggest problem child, who rampaged about and made a disaster of things during the last volume—she’ll most likely get mixed reviews. In fact, I think those who hate her will number in the majority. The concept of her character was “a selfish idiot who can do anything.” She was born out of my wondering what would happen if you gave a child who liked make-believe superpower fights invincibility and the power to fulfill any wish. Alovenus fulfilled her role as the strongest character in the series with no problems even after having been created like that, but at the same time, she became the series’s weakest fool as well.

Just as Lufas said during the book proper, Alovenus is so weak she couldn’t bring herself to fight on the same level as her opponent. When thought of like that, she certainly is a cowardly small-fry slug who can’t even fight under equal conditions. It’s like if one of the fighters in a boxing match won by shooting their opponent with a machine gun from a safe distance outside of the ring. There’s no way you would consider them strong. They’d just be a deplorable, pitiful coward.

Alovenus is a fool who didn’t even understand that. She had neither a hint of charisma nor the dignity of a final boss, but Afoolvenus definitely had the strength of one, so she managed to continuously cause problems for everyone in the story. Her mistakes would not stop until she was rejected by Sei and defeated by Lufas.

By the way, I’m willing to bet that everyone is wondering whether Alovenus could have been beaten by methods other than those Lufas had taken during the story, and since this is the final volume anyway, I’ll answer this straight-up. Yes, it’s possible. I’m sure everyone has a cool character they like and want to remain the strongest no matter what the setting, but what Alovenus likes is a protagonist who can walk on their own two feet and cut open a path for themselves. If you were to have Alovenus fight such an attractive protagonist, the childish side of her would wish that the protagonist would never lose, even if she was the opponent. This would infinitely power up said protagonist and make whoever it was stronger than her by default. She’s truly worthy of the name Afoolvenus.

In short, the easiest method to victory is to make her think, “I’d want to lose

to this person.” Lufas didn’t fulfill those conditions, so she brute-forced her way through. On that front, she was a meathead, muscle-brained protagonist all the way to the end.

Now then, this is truly regrettable, as I actually would like to keep going, but I’m running out of character count here, so it’s about time to wrap things up.

To my editor S, who has supported me and this series up until now, YahaKo, who has drawn all the wonderful art for these books, the rest of the editing team, and all of you who have read this far: I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Thank you all so much for everything up until now.

And with this, the light novel version is at an end. The comic version will continue though, so I will pray for the artist, Hadzuki Tsubasa, wishing them even greater success.

Well then, everyone, let us meet again someday, somewhere.

-Firehead

Thank you all for staying with *A Wild Last Boss Appeared!* until the end!
I designed and drew a lot, from Lufas and her group to the world of Mizgarz itself, and it was very fun the whole time. I am honored to have been able to be involved with this series.
My thanks to Sir Firehead who always made things interesting and kept me fired up, to my editor Mr. Saito who supported me on everything, Sir Hadzuki Tsubasa who makes the comic version so exciting, their editor Mr. Takeuchi and the efforts of everyone else involved in this!

YahaKo

Illustrator: YahaKo





A Wild Last Boss Appeared!

Congratulations on completing it!
The comic version is still ongoing,
so please stay tuned.

by: Hadzuki Tsubasa

Bonus Short Story

Two years had passed since that final battle. Sei had turned twenty, changing from an unreliable boy to a man. He was still rather baby-faced compared to his peers, which was one of his worries.

Today, Sei had come to the beach along with Virgo. However, swimming together would be...unfortunately difficult. Virgo was using the stealth bandages that Lufas had once used to hide her wings. If they entered the ocean, they would, of course, be ripped off.

In this world ruled by science rather than fantasy, Virgo stood out like a sore thumb. There was no one around, given the time of day they'd gone to the beach, but it was still impossible to be sure no one was looking.

Even so, they were walking around on the beach like this, enjoying the atmosphere at least. While watching Virgo, Sei hardened his will.

Even Sei's thoughts were momentarily frozen. *Okay. I'm gonna say it. Today, I'm gonna say it.*

Sei had a small box in his pocket, containing a diamond ring he had splurged on. It needn't be said what the ring was for.

Though he'd already confessed to her during that incident, Sei thought it had been the most poorly executed confession possible. He had only done so after being forced to, thanks to the situation that had been brought on by his making her cry as he floundered... It'd been that kind of confession.

Though his feelings were true, Sei still felt the need to affirm them once again and let Virgo know. That was why he'd brought her here, in order to tell her his feelings again.

"Um... Virgo, I have something important I need to tell you. Will you listen?"

After hearing that, Virgo silently smiled. She herself had been waiting for him to say this.

Having understood that, Sei boldly put his hand on Virgo's shoulder.

"I've said this before, but allow me to repeat it. I...I live in a different time frame from you. I'm sure that, someday, I will leave you behind. But, if you're fine with that...fine with me, then..."

As Sei spoke, he reached into his pocket. All he needed to do now was hand her the ring along with his confession.

Right as Sei was about to pull off the confession of his life, the ocean rose up. Wondering what was happening, the two of them turned towards the disturbance, only to find a giant, grotesque monster, with its upper half sticking out of the water.

It was the bringer of madness, the deity from another world, the aberrant wicked god—Thulhu.

He had appeared with the worst possible timing and looked straight at Sei and Virgo as he realized he had made a mistake.

"■■■■■■■■..."

Thulhu gestured with his tentacle as if to say, "Ah, don't worry about me. Just keep going." With that, he returned to the sea. What had he even come to do?

Neither Sei nor Virgo said a word. The mood was spoiled. And it might have just been Sei's imagination, but it looked like the ocean had gotten darker, though it had been sparkling in the evening sunlight just a moment before.

Sei and Virgo glared at the ocean, half in anger and half in exasperation, but fortunately, there was no sign of Thulhu returning.

"Let's go back, Sei," Virgo said, breaking the silence.

Sei was quiet for another moment, before agreeing. "Yeah."

No confession in this ruined mood would be worth anything. Unfortunately, Sei's confession of a lifetime would have to wait for tomorrow.

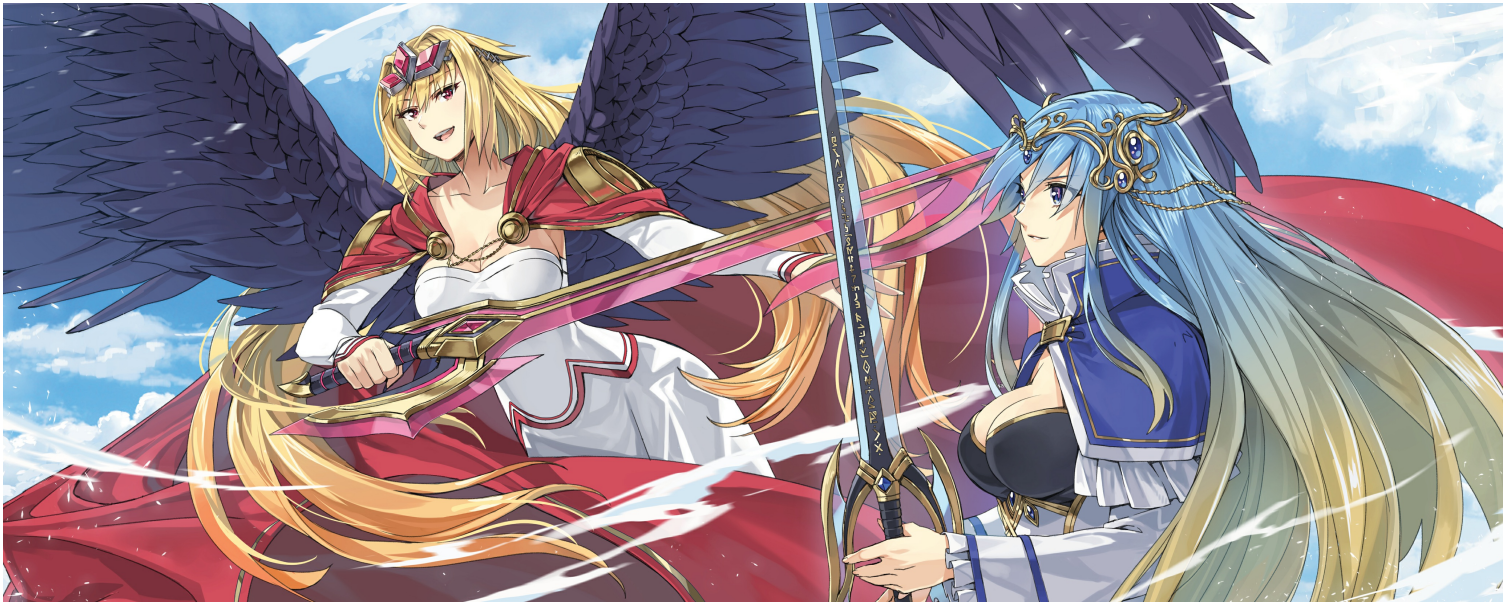


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A Wild Last Boss Appeared! Volume 9

by Firehead

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