

The Irials of Chiyodaku Running the Supreme Court of Another World

with My Sister

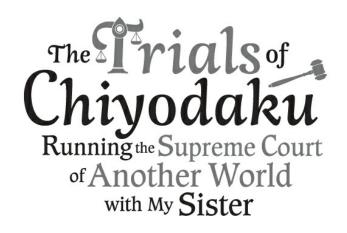


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CHIYODAKUOKOKU JUDGMENT ANE TO ORE TODE ISEKAISAIKOSAIBANSHO Vol. 1

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The Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse, formerly known as the Supreme Court, was packed full.

The otherworldly sunlight streamed in from a huge skylight, which was marred with fire damage.

The half-elf prosecutor, half-fox spirit defense attorney, and the accused old hero stood below.

An animal hybrid prison guard released the old hero's magical restraints.

A moment later, a scorching wind swept through the courtroom—hot enough to singe the hairs on one's body.

A human princess in a pink maid outfit in the front row of the gallery took a direct hit but kept smiling. She appeared to be enjoying herself, wearing a broad smile.

The door in the back of the courtroom opened as though in response to her gaze.

First through the door was a sixteen-year-old Japanese boy.

He wore a black court robe and had an ordinary-looking build and face, but his expression was one of determination. A magical window used for court proceedings floated at his fingertips as he walked to the clerk's desk.

"That's the court assistant, Akuto Satou...," whispered a maid with dog ears.

The next to enter was a Japanese girl who looked to be fifteen years old.

Like the boy, she sported a black court robe. It fit snugly over her body, which had shrunk somewhat from its original size, save for her chest that remained large. Possessed of unyielding resolve, her eyes flashed ferociously as she walked toward the bench imposingly.

"So that's Miss Judge..."

"I heard she's actually around thirty years old!"

"Summoned from Chiyodaku, Japan..."

"A real Japanese person..."

"...An administrator of Japanese law!"

The courtroom buzzed. Spectators of various humanoid species traded whispers.

Citizens from all over the kingdom had come to see this unprecedented trial.

There were 208 seats in the courtroom. The number of people gathered exceeded the seats, so the overflow stood in the remaining space in the room. The kingdom's maids controlled the jostling crowd.

Standing before the old hero, who was about seventy years old, the boy called to him in a loud voice.

"First year of the Chiyoda Era, district court criminal case public hearing number one. The trial for the Hero's Party Homicide Case is now in session. All rise! Bow!"

Those people of the fantasy world who'd gathered in the courtroom did as instructed and returned to their seats.

All but two, anyhow. The judge and the hero glared at each other instead.

The court assistant raised the court record window above his head.

He passed it to his stepsister behind him and looked to her for a moment as if for confirmation.

She nodded silently, as though to say "Leave it to me."

"Judge Tsukasa Wagatsuma. I was growing tired of waiting."

The hero's hoarse voice, roughened by alcohol, reverberated through the room. His eyes, still glistening in his old age, turned toward the bench. "Do you really think you can judge the hero of this kingdom, little girl?"

Drops of his spittle flew forth and formed small balls of flames that fluttered downward.

The tiny fireballs landed on the two lone Japanese people in this otherworld and scorched their hair and clothes.

"Of course. It's why I'm here."

The girl was unshakable, fixing the older man in her dignified gaze.

She raised her right hand above her head.

"I'm the one asking the questions! And don't you spit those filthy fireballs at me!"

Her fist came down like a gavel, and her huge breasts jiggled as a roar echoed through the court.

Judge vs Hero!

The flames of judgment that will change the world have ignited!

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Article I My Sister's Judgments Are Bound Only by the Constitution and Laws of Japan

The story began three days before the trial that changed the world.

"Let's see, Tsukasa's courtroom is...," I whispered to myself while walking down the fifth-floor hallway of a Tokyo district court in the Kasumigaseki district of Chiyodaku.

Come sit in on my trial today! We can go get food after (>_<) I wanna drink!

My stepsister, a judge, sent me that text message earlier.

Most people saw her occupation as a straitlaced one, but her casual way of talking destroyed that image.

She always spoke to me like this. I was her stepbrother, and she had a bit of an obsession with me.

One time, she said to me, "It's important for judges to have an on-off switch. If I don't cut loose whenever I get the chance, the balance will get thrown totally out of whack and kill me."

I guess her occasional irresponsibility was a necessity.

Four o'clock, courtroom 505 was written at the end of her text.

My schedule was wide open since it was summer vacation, so there was no reason not to play along.

I'd walked to the courthouse from home, where I'd been playing video games all day.

This wasn't the first time I'd come to watch one of my sister's trials. They

were very interesting and exciting to watch. I really respected her work, and I always enjoyed getting food with her after.

A few other students had also come to sit in on today's trial. I'd decided to come in my school uniform, so I didn't stand out much.

Here it is.

A sign hung on the door, just like she'd noted in her message.

16:00 ORAL ARGUMENT: CASE CLAIMING DAMAGES FOR BREACH OF MARRIAGE AGREEMENT, JUDGE: TSUKASA WAGATSUMA

I spied my sister's name printed with the case details. Her last name differed from mine. I guess our parents decided it was more convenient not to change any names when they married each other.

It's not four o'clock yet, but the light is on.

The lamp outside the courtroom was typically only lit when a trial was in session.

I peeked through the window on the wooden door to see inside.

"....!"

"....!"

There she was.

I spotted her in the judge's seat of the ordinary courtroom.

She was busy quarreling with a flamboyant woman in garish clothes who had to be in her thirties.

They must have started earlier than the designated time because all necessary parties were already assembled.

When I opened the door to go inside, I saw that the gallery was already nearly full.

After finding an empty seat among the courtroom enthusiasts, I quickly sat down.

"Chief juuudge! Listen to me! I feel like I could just die! He blocked me on

everything!" A sharp, hysterical voice echoed through the courtroom.

It belonged to the flamboyant woman in the plaintiff's seat on the left side of the room.

Over to the right, the defendant's spot was conspicuously empty. The accused and their representing attorney were absent.

"I've heard moooore than enough, including all the details about how you met on a dating app!" Judge Tsukasa Wagatsuma looked fed up as she spoke from the bench.

She was a slender five foot seven and wore a judge's black robe.

At twenty-eight, her body was voluptuous, and her large chest protruded over her crossed arms.

Silky, long black hair flowed from her head.

Long lashes accented her reddish-brown eyes that burned with intellectual passion.

Had she stood in silence, she still would've seemed the image of a goddess from a piece of art.

At the moment, she was busy dealing with the plaintiff while wearing a stern expression.

"And furthermore, you don't say 'chief judge' when there's only one judge."

Some trials could be held with only one judge, but other cases had a few.

Since my sister presided alone this time, calling her "chief" was unnecessary.

"Fine, just 'judge,' then! Please, can't you make him come here?"

"As I told you before, this case does not require the presence of the defendant. I won't summon him."

"But I want to see himmmm! I'm begging you!"

"If begging was all it took, he'd be here already! That he responded only in writing and hasn't appeared in person surely means he doesn't want to see you! The plaintiff needs to understand this, calm down, and stop YELLING!"

Tsukasa's tone got progressively sharper as she chastised the plaintiff.

Her domain would be war if she were a goddess—the kind who enjoyed watching blood spurt from her enemy.

You're yelling, too, Tsukasa..., I thought. Apparently things were going off the rails again today.

"Okay, if he refuses to show, I can still ask him for the money, right?!"

The case contents in civil trials weren't read out to the courtroom, unlike in criminal trials.

So even if you attended the trial, it was hard to understand the exact argument.

Still, I got the vibe that the plaintiff was pushing some kind of unreasonable monetary charge.

"The defendant has written in his statement that he was never married to you."

"B-but I showed evidence that I spent two million yen for him, didn't I?!" the woman sputtered as she argued her case.

Although observing from the gallery, I recognized by the woman's garish makeup that she was trying to look younger than she actually was. Her outfit flaunted her tight, fake-looking breasts.

That...reeks of a lie.

I gauged the plaintiff's responses while watching. My sister's gaze found me in the crowd.

"Indeed, I verified the evidence that you spent two million yen. However!" After a second, she returned her attention to the plaintiff. "Even if you attempt to conceal the name of the hospital, it's clear that the expense went toward cosmetic surgery!"

So they are fake.

"I spent two million yen for him" was vague enough to sound plausible. It may have been possible to claim damages had the two million been for medical expenses from assault or a canceled wedding reception, but...

"There is no law requiring an ex to pay for one's own cosmetic surgery!" Tsukasa cut straight to the point.

The men in the gallery nodded as they watched the exchange between my sister and the plaintiff.

"What could a young person like you understand about my situation, with big ones like that?!" The woman was starting to get carried away in her agitation. "You think you're so hot, looking down on me like that! Screw the court! Nothing but a waste of taxpayer money!"

Snap. I could practically hear a vein in Tsukasa's head popping.

"If you have a problem with it..." The judge stood. Her black robe, signifying the impartiality of her profession, fluttered open to reveal her clothes beneath. She raised her hand high above her head. "...you may appeal your case to the high court!" Her fist came down onto the bench like a gavel.

My sister's huge breasts jiggled as a roar echoed through the court.

"Eek—!" The plaintiff shrank back.

Absolute silence overwhelmed the courtroom for a moment.

"Oral argument concluded. The decision will be delivered after the court's summer recess at 1:15 PM one month from today. We will send you an official copy of the decision so there is no need to come in person. Clerk, please."

The court clerk stopped, awkwardly cowering before the bench to check the schedule on the computer. After hastily writing a note, he answered, "Yes, Your Honor."

Given the mood of the courtroom, you could tell what the decision would be. The claim for damages would definitely be rejected completely.

Judge Tsukasa Wagatsuma, still standing, glared toward the gallery. Her expression softened into a faint smile only I recognized when her eyes found me again. Then she exited the courtroom through the back door.

An unconventional trial, as always... But it was really cool.

The plaintiff was left alone in the court.

"W-waaaah! Waaaaah!"

After some ugly crying, she said, "And after I made my boobs big for him! Dammit!!"

She ran out of the courtroom.



"Ahhhhh! I looooye alcohol!"

Sometime after five, I found myself at a cheap pub in Toranomon with my sister.

Having changed out of her robe and into her regular clothes, Tsukasa was heartily chugging a beer.

"I just wuv an ice-cold beer after work! Tee-hee!"

Her face relaxed and she took on a kind of drunken baby talk.

This was her "off mode." It's how she usually acted when she had alcohol.

"But! But...what I wuv even more is when my Akky hangs out with me after work! So that means I've got two things I wuv all at once! And that makes me sooo happy, I think I'll give you a widdle kiss! Akkyyy!"

"Tsukasa, your mouth is covered in beer foam. Here, have a napkin."

"Tank you! Wipey, wipey... Aw, don't avoid me! I'll just have to get back at you by cleaning your room when you're not looking. I'll find all your porno mags and destroy them!"

"No one uses magazines anymore. And please stop going into my room."

"Hee-hee, so you didn't notice me sleeping next to you last night?"

"What?"

"...Just kidding. Anyway, how's summer vacation going? Are you getting your homework done?"

In an instant, her fawning expression shifted to her best impersonation of a

parental one.

All this, including her teasing, was part of her "off mode."

I bet we looked like quite an odd pair to the people around us.

I met Tsukasa when I was three years old—she was the child of the woman my father got remarried to. As she was twelve years older than me, she'd been fifteen at the time. She'd taken quite a liking to me instantly and had been looking after me and calling me Akky ever since. Even thirteen years later, she still had a brother complex. Presently, our parents were off on an extended vacation for their twelfth wedding anniversary. Tsukasa and I had been living alone for almost a year. We'd grown pretty close as a result.

There's nothing weird about it. Even if she's my stepsister, we're still family. Yep.

"If you have trouble with your homework, I can help!"

She looked at me with her gentle reddish-brown eyes. Her unguarded demeanor was totally unlike how she behaved in court. I was the only person she ever acted this kind to.

"It won't be a problem. The homework is so easy I can play video games while I do it."

"Just like I thought! My little Akky is so good at all sorts of things, unlike me. You always keep a broad outlook and notice all the important details. I think you could do just about anything you set your mind to!"

"I'm just passable at lots of things."

Tsukasa always complimented me excessively, but I knew I didn't deserve it. My skills were broad and shallow. There was nothing I was truly good at.

It's much more amazing when a person completely masters one thing, like she has.

Naturally, I kept that thought to myself for risk of Tsukasa getting more annoyingly carried away with her praise.

"You like those games where odd creatures use weird magic, right?" She gulped down her drink.

"It's not weird. It's fantasy." I sipped from my own cup. I was drinking something nonalcoholic called Hoppy.

"I don't really get it, but...keep at it! You're smarter than me!"

"Should you really say that after graduating from the country's top law school and getting the highest score on the bar exam?"

"Yes! And it's true! Plus, I only do my best when you're in the courtroom!"

"Don't treat me like some kind of lucky charm."

She makes it sound like I have kind a magical effect that improves her judging ability.

Glug! "Aaaaahhhhh! More alcohol, pwease!"

Tsukasa ordered another drink, content to ignore my comment. She undid a button on her blouse that held in her huge F cups and let out a sigh. There was something borderline obscene about her appearance. It drew the gazes of the men around us.



"Tsukasa, you're talking too loud... Some people from your office might be here," I warned.

"Last I checked, there were no Ps or Bs from work around."

"P" meant prosecutor, and "B" meant barrister.

"Work" meant the courthouse.

We often used this code while eating out.

"Oh, you already checked?"

"But if anyone who seems related comes by, let me know. Oh, thank youuu!" She thanked the waiter who brought her cocktail. "A judge is as good as dead if they're not taken seriously, after all."

That had become one of her credos since becoming a judge.

I thought back to the trial I'd watched today. The plaintiff had argued, "What could a young person like you understand about my situation?"

Tsukasa was the youngest person in history to become a judge, and that came with a lot of challenges. She constantly struggled with not being taken seriously. No matter how well she did her job, people looked down on her or refused to listen.

"Man, I really feel like getting drunk today."

Gulp, gulp, gulp!

Her pace was much quicker than usual.

Growing worried, I asked, "Did something happen?"

"This might be the end for me... Damn HR..." Tsukasa slammed down her glass and continued, clearly irritated. "They said they're gonna transfer me to the Ministry of Justice."

"You mean..."

Having a judge in the family made me pay attention to news about the courts. I'd gathered that the general courts were part of the judiciary branch, but the Ministry of Justice was a different department and part of the executive branch

of the government. Exemplary judges were sometimes moved up to the latter.

"Hey, you're moving up in the world. That means people have recognized your talent, right?"

Tsukasa had always been good at classroom learning, maybe because she was descended from a famous scholar. She could read, memorize, and comprehend texts faster than anyone I knew. My comment was meant to be a compliment with that in mind. I thought she'd be great working at one of the national ministries.

"I don't care about moving up, or talent, or any of that!" She shouted right in my face, spraying a bit of her drink at me. "I won't be able to judge actual trials anymore!"

I wiped my face with a damp cloth. And she's off again.

For some reason, Tsukasa nursed a strange obsession with presiding over actual cases in person.

"I swore to you that I'd 'make the world a better place through righteous judgment.' And I remember you told me it was cool."

"When did I say that?"

"When you were three, and I was fifteen."

How could I possibly remember that...? "That was a long time ago," I replied.

"The chief gave me an earful about it," she said with an angry look on her face, gliding past my comment again. By "chief," she meant the judge supervisor.

"He told me, 'Wagatsuma, you need to consider if the convictions you set for yourself in high school are still worthwhile.'"

"That's pretty harsh."

"Whatever... He could make me fifteen again...and I still wouldn't change...hic!"

"Tsukasa... You drank too much."

She wasn't making sense anymore. She was super drunk.

Still...

I agree with Tsukasa, but I do get what the chief meant.

Tsukasa had done nothing but study growing up, as if to reject a normal girl's life.

She'd never gone on a typical outing with a man (besides her brother), much less dated somebody.

As her brother, I couldn't help but worry that her extreme way of life created difficulties in dealing with those around her and gaps in personal experience.

"Excuse me, check, please." I put on a fake smile for the waiter passing by, trying to make it clear I didn't want to trouble anyone. After paying, I cleaned up the table.

Hopefully they won't kick us out for her behavior if I'm polite. I guess I've gotten pretty good at this kind of damage control. What a joke...

Spending so much time with Tsukasa had forced me to pick up a lot of useless skills.

As I moved an empty beer glass to the edge of the table...

"Uuuggghhh... I wanna be...fifteen again..."

...my sleep-talking stepsister grabbed my arm.

"Isn't there a magic spell...that could do that for me?"

I couldn't help but smile a little at this administrator of the law's silly wish.

She must be pretty stressed.

I brushed some of her hair away from her mouth, taking care not to wake her up. "You did good today."

But what if...

An idea flashed through my mind.

"If only there were some fantasy world...," I whispered before sighing.

I'd always loved the idea of other worlds.

If only we could travel to a fun, new world with magic and stuff...

While musing on this idea...

...something that looked like a pink spell circle entered my vision.

The pub walls and table began to blur. I started seeing double.

Maybe my eyes are tired from playing too many video games.

I rubbed my eyes, but when I opened them again, everything had become pink.

"What is this, the blue screen of death, in pink?"

The color had bled into everything. In particular...

"Wha-?! Tsukasa!"

My sister lay face down with her large boobs under her.

"You're glowing pink!"

She was giving off a bright aura like something out of a magical girl transformation scene.

"Wh-wha...?"

Everything was dyed pink.

All I could see was that light rosy color.

Then I heard a voice.

"Make the world a better place through righteous judgment..."

Article II The Order of the Court Must Be Upheld, Even in Other Worlds

A giant set of scales emerged from the pink.

They were a heavenly gold color but tinged with an ominous layer of red rust.

The two hanging pans each looked large enough to hold a person.

They were magically floating in midair.

"What...the heck...?"

The scales appeared from below me and floated upward.

They rose right in front of my eyes, almost grazing my nose.

No, they're not rising... I'm falling.

I then realized I wasn't standing. I kicked my legs, but they found only empty air.

My body was falling slowly.

Some other power besides gravity was controlling my descent.

Where...?

I pulled my eyes from the magical scales already above my head and peered below.

I could see where I was about to land.

The ground was about thirty feet away.

I saw a long, large desk and the silhouettes of two people.

"Let's just pronounce him guilty already..."

"We can't do that..."

I heard them talking.

Are they holding a trial?

As I was observing this, an object giving off a bright pink light appeared from above me and blocked my view.

I stuck out my arms without thinking.

It landed in my arms, and I ended up holding it in a kind of bridal carry.

Somewhere, a voice said, "A person! From the skylight!"

The people below buzzed noisily in surprise, confusion, and curiosity...

I landed with a thud.

"Um, where am I...?" My vision began to clear.

I'd been dropped in a huge, round chamber.

By my guess it was the size of ten classrooms, and its walls looked made of austere gray granite.

"This place looks like...the Supreme Court..."

I had visited it once on a school field trip.

At that time, I only got to sit in the gallery for a minute before we had to leave.

Now I was able to look over most of the room. I seemed to be on the judge's bench.

Am I having some kind of dream based on those memories?

While I stood there dumbfounded and confused, someone spoke to me.

"Wh-who are...?"

I turned around to face the voice. It had come from the judge's seat—from a girl in a pink maid outfit.

"Princess Ecstasia, it's dangerous! Stay back!" cautioned a woman who seemed to be the girl's retainer. She wore glasses and a suit-like outfit and stood to stop the girl. I recognized now that she was the one who'd wished to pronounce someone guilty.

"He could be a trespasser attempting to interfere with the Hero's trial!"

"Hero's trial?" I felt something instinctual spark inside me at this key word. I quickly looked around the courtroom.

And there he was.

An older man lay on his back on a bench set between the witness stand and the gallery.

He was in handcuffs and old leather armor and had a long, shaggy white beard. His face was a drunken red as he snored. Empty bottles and scraps of food were scattered around him as though he'd been here for many weeks, like some kind of drifter.

That guy's a hero? And he's on trial?

I looked around again.

A few spectators watched from the gallery.

Looking up, I saw the ceiling had a large hole burned into it.

Floating there were the giant balance scales that I'd seen while falling.

Some kind of magical VR windows floated around the magical scales. On them were the words: *The Hero's Party Homicide Case*

Court in session

Please be quiet \Leftrightarrow while court is in session \Leftrightarrow .

The pink text floated in the air lightly.

This is what they consider "court in session"?

Honestly, I had no idea what I was looking at.

"Princess Ecstasia, it appears that the summoning spell has failed." Behind me, the retainer-like woman spoke with the girl who seemed to be her master. "Even if the summoning itself was successful, there's no way that we were meant to have a boy and girl like this."

Then I remembered I was carrying something in my arms. It had lost the bright pink sheen covering it. Suddenly, it felt heavy, like whatever magic that

had been carrying it wore off.

And without the pink glow concealing it...

"Huh...?"

...I saw I was holding a beautiful girl with large, attractive eyes and an innocent face.

She wore the same clothes she had at the pub.

"Tsukasa turned back into a teenager?!"

You're kidding, right?

"Right! And there's no way that a real Japanese judge could be such a young girl!"

I felt the person in my arms stir.

The girl, who looked a whole lot like my sister, jumped down from my arms and onto the floor behind the judge's bench.

"Who the hell do you think you are, talking down to me like that?"

She struck an intimidating pose and glared at the retainer ferociously.

Tsukasa had shrunk to about five feet tall, and her unbuttoned blouse threatened to fall off, dangling precariously over her chest.

Her breasts were still almost unfairly huge for her slender body. Her imposing aura despite her small frame made the suited retainer flinch with an "Eek!"

Taking another look, I realized the retainer's ears were long, and they flapped as she cowered.

Maybe she's an elf...or a half-elf.

Following Tsukasa's lead, I got down off the desk and continued to observe our surroundings.

"Oh, I get it. Are we inside one of your dreams, Akky?" She spoke so nonchalantly while looking around. "I mean, look, there's not supposed to be a witness stand in the Grand Bench."

"You noticed that before the giant scales floating in the air? Now I know for

sure you're Tsukasa."

It was definitely her.

"I usually have dreams with you in them when I drink too much. Hic!"

"I'm pretty sure I'm awake, though."

"Well, dream or not, hic! I won't put up with some kid's disrespect!"

"Tsukasa, you realize you've turned into a kid yourself, right?"

Maybe she needed to see it to believe it.

"Hmm...? 'Court in session'... What exactly are you...? Huh?"

At the same time, we both noticed something strange about the judge's bench.

A pink magic circle had been etched into it.

Could this be some kind of summoning magic...that also changed Tsukasa's body?

I was pretty sure I saw something similar in the pub.

"There's graffiti all over the bench... And what's that red ball on top of it?"

Tsukasa pointed to a sphere resting on top of the desk.

"It's the Lie Detector Orb!" The girl in the pink maid outfit peeked out from behind the retainer to deliver her answer. "It turns red in response to falsehoods. But it's been stuck for a while, so we haven't been able to continue the trial!"

"Princess Ecstasia!" the retainer with elf ears chided, shooing the girl back.

So they've been conducting trials with the help of magical devices.

"You don't need a lie-detecting device on the judge's bench," Tsukasa declared. The judge in her had been awoken. "A trial must reflect the truth accurately. Truthfulness as revealed under the law is not something that can be placed in the hands of some lie detector. Modern law doesn't require trial by machinery. The very idea of relying on such equipment is preposterous." She asserted her point eloquently.

Then she set her sights on the deep red orb. "Even if this is just some strange dream..."

She raised her right hand high above her head. "I will not allow such impropriety in the courtroom!!" And brought it down like a gavel.

Crash!

The Lie Detector Orb was smashed to pieces.

"Akky, did you see that? Hic! Wasn't that cool?"

Tsukasa gave me a dazzling smile.

"The royal family's...super-rare, magical nnational treasure...d-destroyed...by some girl who suddenly appeared out of nowhere..." The retainer was agape in disbelief. "Arrest her!"

Before the order finished leaving the half-elf's mouth, a ninja-like figure moved through the room like a shot.

"Eep!"

They knocked Tsukasa down on her behind...

"Tsukasa! Whoa!"

...and did the same to me. I didn't even realize my legs had been swept out from under me until I was lying on the floor.

I was quickly forced into a hands-up position on the courtroom carpet.

While lying on my back, I saw a rope drop from above and bind my lower body. It all struck me as more magic.

"I have judged you to be a danger to the royal family. Thus, I will restrain you."

My wrists were already pinned beneath the ninja woman's peculiar, metallicsoled boot. Her other foot held down Tsukasa's.

The soles of her boots looked specifically designed to restrain people by stepping on them.

The ninja-like woman, upside down from my perspective, held both ends of

the rope and looked down on me.

"Wow, a maid with dog ears... You're like...some kind of different species..."

Her beautiful snow-white skin showed through her uniquely designed and revealing maid attire. Her face resembled a doll's, with blue eyes the color of thin ice. Her head sported thick, fluffy white hair and cute dog ears.

"Princess Ecstasia. What shall I do with them?" She watched us unwaveringly as she spoke. "I could finish them right here and now."

Perhaps the sharp canines in her mouth were for bringing down her prey.

I got the impression that she would easily kill anyone on her master's order.

And it sounded like she was requesting final confirmation to do so right now.

"No! That person is...Miss Judge!"

The girl in pink's reply sounded overly cheerful given our situation.

"Princess Ecstasia, what are you...?" said the retainer.

Rather than explain, the princess marveled at something overhead. "Oh, look, the Rust of Doubt..."

Something about the floating scales was changing.

The ominous rust that had covered them started to glimmer, peel off, and dissipate.

"Princess Ecstasia, the rust on your body..."

The same glimmer was coming from the girl in pink. I craned my neck to see that some of the red rust stuck to the princess's body was also disappearing.

"It's all thanks to Miss Judge for bringing our doubts to justice!"

"Wait, Princess Ecstasia. Teenagers can't become judges in Japan! It's dangerous to trust her! This is all a mistake..."

While I listened to the discussion, my sister seemed to finally sober up.

"Wait, the shards from that broken orb are stinging my hand... Does that mean...this isn't a dream?"

"Uh, excuse me," I said, spotting Tsukasa's bag that had dropped into this

place with us out of the corner of my eye. "My sister is a judge. In the wallet in her bag over there, you'll find her staff ID that proves it. You'll also find proof that she's actually twenty-eight..."

Article III We Pledge to Make the Chiyodaku Kingdom a Place Where All Can Get Along and Have Fun

""""WELCOME TO THE CHIYODAKU KINGDOM, MISS JUDGE!!"""""

About an hour had passed since Tsukasa destroyed a national treasure on the Grand Bench.

Thankfully, things had been cleared up a bit, and my sister and I were given a formal welcome from the people of the kingdom.

We were just outside of the courtroom in a large hall at the center of a structure much like Japan's Supreme Court building.

Some minister types and a few dozen maids were lined up in an orderly fashion along the sides of this impressive, stone-built chamber. All at once, each of them raised their arms into the shape of a Y in greeting.

The girl in the pink maid outfit from earlier stood at the center of this welcoming party.

"I am Princess Ecstasia Itou, the princess of this kingdom!"

She trotted over to stand in before us, her bouncy movements like some kind of dance.

Evidently, this girl was the head of the kingdom.

Her pink maid outfit was the same shape as a princess's gown. On top of her two long, curly pigtails, which were the same color as her clothes, she wore a tiara like true royalty.

"This is my first time meeting real Japanese people! And residents of

Chiyodaku, no less!"

She looked up at me with her extraordinarily sparkly eyes. She seemed to be having a blast, smiling brightly and wide. At around five foot five, she was a head shorter than me, with a petite body and flat chest. I didn't think she could've been older than thirteen or fourteen.

"Everything's all settled, thanks to your explanation, Mr. Akuto! Is it okay if I call you that?"

I guess she'd learned my name and relationship to Tsukasa from the emergency contact info in my sister's wallet.

"Sure, that's fine. Uh, so I should call you...?"

"Please, simply call me Ecstasia! No need to talk all formal."

Her small hands, wrapped in white silk gloves, took mine and bounced them in a handshake. Then she moved her attention from Tsukasa to me.

"And you, Miss Tsukasa, who brought down the gavel. I will call you Miss Judge!"

"By 'Miss Judge,' I think you mean 'Your Honor'..."

"That's one way of putting it! My, my, how young you are!"

"I'm still twenty-eight on the inside; my whole body has suddenly become fifteen years old again...except my chest."

"I see! So you wished to be young again, but you didn't wish for your breast size to be reduced! You sure are endowed with everything I'm not! I love that!"

She started to grope at Tsukasa's chest.

"Don't touch me, Pinky. I'll convict you."

My sister slapped the princess's hand away and glared at her.

"Ooh! Did I just commit sexual harassment? How exciting!"

The princess swooned as she bled from the nose, even though Tsukasa hadn't touched her face. She looked curiously pleased.

"Akky...this really isn't a dream, right?"

"Guess not. It's like they said. We were summoned here."

Showing them Tsukasa's courthouse staff ID had really done the trick.

The elf-eared retainer had groveled and given us a lengthy apology.

Afterward, she said she'd explain about this world, the kingdom, the summoning, and the trial a little later.

I accepted, but I had to do something about Tsukasa first. She was still having a hard time telling if this was a dream. I carried her on my back to a restroom, gave her some water, and tried to sober her up.



We looked in the mirror together and confirmed that her body really had become fifteen again. All except her chest.

I retraced the story of how we got from the pub to here, making sure she hadn't lost any of her memories.

"'Summoning,' you mean like when you call a witness to a trial?"

I also gave her a crash course on the summoning tropes of the fantasy genre.

"Okay, but what's with that girl? Someone like that represents a kingdom? And this place...this is the Supreme Court, right?"

Tsukasa's attitude toward people who weren't me needed a little work.

I thought back to when I first met her. She'd been bullied in school and had a habit of getting nasty with others quickly. Her attitude gradually made her a loner in class. That got me wondering...

"Is there any chance that your mental age has also regressed?" I asked.

"Hmm... Well, I have been feeling pretty hotheaded since getting this body. It's like I've become a slightly different version of myself."

"Maybe you've got a touch of puberty brain?" I suddenly felt a little uneasy about all this.

"Okay, Mr. Akuto and Miss Judge. It's time for your grand tour of our world! Please, follow me!"

The princess called from behind us. She bounced off and her attendants hurried after.

Tsukasa and I followed behind, passing through the glass entrance doors of the Supreme Court building to gaze at an incredible vista.

"A-Akky...past that moat, there...is that ...?"

Any Japanese person would've expected to see the imperial palace. But here, in its place...

"Oh, that? It's my house!" Ecstasia answered.

...stood a ridiculously huge castle.

Outside, it felt like spring or autumn, and a pleasant breeze blew past. The castle, resembling something from medieval Europe, was illuminated by the light of the sunset, which dyed everything in a beautiful crimson.

"Our world is one of those fantasy ones! This is the Chiyodaku Kingdom, which has prospered greatly by copying from Japan's own Chiyodaku! We're basically like another Chiyodaku!"

""Another Chiyodaku...""

Tsukasa and I spoke in chorus, totally dumbfounded.

"Oh! Shirooo! Over here!" the princess called to an approaching car.

"Akky, that's...a Century."

"They even have Japanese cars here?"

"Are you sure this is one of those fantasy worlds you like so much?"

"This one is pretty different from the kind I'm used to. I'm honestly a little confused myself."

The driver stepped out of the car, revealing herself to be the dog-eared ninja maid who'd restrained us earlier.

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Shiro Katou. I apologize for my earlier insolence."

She gave us a neat bow, looking cool and collected.

Her eyeline was about the same height as mine, but considering her metalsoled boots, she had to be a bit shorter.

"Shiro is the Royal Cabinet's best maid. That's why we made her the head maid!"

Noticing that Ecstasia's comment earned confused looks from Tsukasa and me, Shiro added, "Our Royal Cabinet is much like Japan's Cabinet Office."

"Your hair is so fluffy, and you're so cute...," Tsukasa said while gazing at her. "You're the maid in charge? How old are you?"

"I'm fifteen. However, I have been under Princess Ecstasia's employ for close to ten years now."

I looked at the head maid. She really was overwhelmingly cute. Her pale skin, expressionless blue eyes, and servant's clothing gave her a kind of ethereal vibe.

"Is there something wrong?"

She stared at me.

"Um, no... I was just thinking how you must stand out with such white hair, yet you showed up out of nowhere in the courtroom," I replied.

"I am versed in skills of self-concealment and spells that allow me to communicate with others without being seen. When a threat to the royal family presented itself, I hid and prepared to eliminate it without being detected."

She spoke in a monotone voice. Even though she was only a year younger than me, her way of speaking came off as frightening yet dependable. She sounded like a special agent with a license to kill. Then I realized...

Oh yeah, in this world people have "skills" and "spells."

Now, that was something I could understand.

"I've always wanted to have something like that, like in a video game."

The remark was really nothing more than a passing thought.

"What do you think you're saying? It is not so simple to acquire skills and spells."

Shiro was quick to put me in my place, however.

Okay, I guess it's not easy, then. Still, I want them. Anyone who's ever read a fantasy story or played a video game would feel the same. I don't really know what kind I'd want. Honestly, I'd take anything as long as I could use some kind of magic.

That much I knew for certain.

Suddenly, I sensed the words *World Transfer Bonus: Acquisition* light up somewhere deep inside me.

What the heck was that?

"Please, get in," Shiro said, ushering us into the car.

I did as requested, along with Tsukasa and the princess.



"The Chiyodaku Kingdom is a nation about the size of Japan's Kanto region. Chiyodaku is also the name of the capital, and that's where we are right now. It's all part of the larger continent of this fantasy world!"

"Long ago, we came to possess a type of magic that allowed us to bring back things from Japan. That's why our world is simply overflowing with Japanese things!"

"Thanks to items from a far more advanced society, our medieval-level world quickly began to prosper! And that's why we all love Japan so much!"

While in the car, Tsukasa and I listened to the princess's speech as she read off cue cards.

"Everything is so...Japanese." I looked out the car window. The roads, the buildings, the transportation... The world was full of Japanese things.

"So you're admitting to countrywide larceny and fraudulent appropriation of lost articles?" Tsukasa asked.

"The things we bring over stay in their original places in Japan. So there's zero inconvenience to your homeland! All these things are copies. That's why we call it the Copy-Paste Spell. Only the royal family is allowed to use it—and that means me in Chiyodaku. We make sure to keep it under control!"

"A spell, huh? So you don't use swords and stuff often?" I said.

Usually, these kinds of places came with both sword and sorcery elements.

"We use them, but only very rarely! After all, that goes against Japan's Firearm and Sword Possession Control Law. Yay, compliance!"

I didn't even know where to start with that one, but I didn't have a chance to respond anyway. The car was coming to a stop.

"We're heeere!" the princess announced as we pulled up in front of the huge castle.

"It honestly feels kind of weird that your castle is in this spot," I remarked.

"The Copy-Paste Spell can only be used in a clear, empty space. According to our scholars of magic, topographical similarity between the two parallel universes allows for the intercession of objects between worlds...or something like that! As long as there is a clear space, we can copy-paste the object through a geographical link. This castle has been here since long ago, taking up space... If we could only clear the land, we'd be able to copy-paste something in its place."

"I think it looks nice."

"If you say so, Mr. Akuto, then I'll appreciate my house as is!"

We followed the princess and her head maid into the palace. Inside was a bizarre space with irregularly placed staircases extending here and there. Almost as though the building had been added to and remodeled countless times.

"This place is full of building code violations," my sister grumbled.

"Tsukasa, why don't you lay off the legal talk for a while?" I replied.

It's slowing down the exposition.

"Looks like technology advanced pretty suddenly after the last king," I said.

"My father was an extremely gifted mage! Before him, the Copy-Paste Spell was really only for begging Japan for the things we wanted. Once my father implemented the magic spell circle, we became able to copy-paste entire large-scale areas!"

"And where is your father now?"

"He died from exhaustion."

"Oh...I'm sorry. It must have been very hard work for him."

"No, that's not it. He became addicted things called *eroge*. I told him, 'You can only play video games one hour a day!' but he spent every night with them until he pleasured himself to death!"

"..." I had no comment.

"It's been one year since I took the throne. I'm actually the queen, but I like to go by *princess* since I'm still just getting used to the job! Come on, let's go to my room!"

A magical elevator floated down, and the four of us got in.

We rose until we reached the princess's room, a comparatively small chamber at the very top of a tower.

It was all pink and fancy. The sort of thing that might belong to a Di*ney princess.

By contrast, a skyline of Japanese buildings was visible outside the window.

"I wanted to wake up every morning and look out at the sun shining over the beautiful Japanese scenery, so I copy-pasted some stuff like Tokyo Station and the Kasumigaseki area!"

The view from her room was an uncanny match for Tokyo's Chiyodaku. Actually, the Supreme Court building where'd been summoned and the surrounding area looked almost indistinguishable.

However, there were also some fantasy elements mixed into the view.

Namely, there were bird people carrying postal delivery bags—and a few dragons flying across the sky.

Between the buildings to the east, I spotted a great field.

"Please, help yourself! It's made with real copy-paste."

I hadn't realized that Shiro, the head maid, had been preparing a meal for us until she brought it.

She set the tray of food on a low table in the middle of the room.

Tsukasa and I sat on cushions on the floor and started eating the rice balls and miso soup on the tray.

"Thank you...," Tsukasa said. "Mm... This tastes just like homemade."

"I guess I'll have some, too..." I tried a bit, slightly cautious. "Oh, it's delicious." The copy-pasted food was really no different than the real thing.

"Hey, um. Do you think we might be copies, too?" Tsukasa asked.

Now that she mentions it, that is a possibility.

It was a little scary thinking that I might be a duplicate, like something out of a sci-fi movie.

Seeing my sister's uneasiness with the idea, I took the initiative to confirm it myself.

"Um, princess... I don't want to rush things, but could you tell us a little more about the summoning spell you used?"

"Sure thing! The Summoning Spell is a different kind of magic from the Copy-Paste Spell. It brings living things across dimensions from other worlds and can only transport the actual beings themselves!"

"Oh, good." That was a tremendous relief. However, it gave rise to a second question. "Then why did Tsukasa's body get younger?"

"As a show of thanks for coming all the way to the Chiyodaku Kingdom, we added a world transfer bonus to the spell! It gives you whatever traits you wish for!"

Oh yeah, Tsukasa did say "I wanna be fifteen again" right before we were summoned. I guess that's why.

"Tsukasa, it's great that your wish was granted. Maybe now you can start over as a normal girl."

"Oh, Akky... You know I'll always be happy as long as I have you and my trials," she said with a sniffle.

"Glad to hear that hasn't changed."

"Mr. Akuto, what trait were you given?" the princess inquired.

"Hmm... I haven't noticed anything different."

Maybe it was that thing that happened right before I got in the car.

I didn't have any proof yet, so I kept that to myself for now.

"By the way...," I said. "Will we be able to go back to our world?"

"We haven't had a successful summoning in some hundred years, so we don't have any data on that. We drew that spell circle over and over until it finally succeeded, and we're not really sure why one worked over the others, so...this is all new to us, too. Basically, I have no idea if there is a way back to your world!"

That spell circle on the judge's bench did look pretty...messy. Okay, so we don't know if we'll be able to get back to Japan...

My parents' faces flashed in my mind. They were on their honeymoon, so they probably wouldn't worry about us anytime soon. As for my friends at school... They'd probably be fine without me, too.

Honestly, I was getting pretty excited to start enjoying this weird fantasy world I had before me. But how was Tsukasa handling all this?

"Is being unable to return a problem? My spell was set to summon a Japanese person who'd righteously judge a fantasy world. I set it that way because I thought that meant it would bring me a judge who would choose this world over their own."

Hearing the princess's response, Tsukasa looked at me and then to the ground.

"...Even if I do go back, they were planning on transferring me and taking me out of the actual trials. I've got Akky here with me, so maybe it won't be so bad to be a judge in another world...," she muttered.

"Now that you mention it, wasn't the spell set to only summon one person?" I said.

"I set it to summon the necessary number of people," Ecstasia replied. "That surely means you're an instrumental member in carrying out our righteous

judgment!"

"Okay... So maybe I'm supposed to help Tsukasa navigate this world, since she isn't used to all this fantasy stuff."

As usual, the princess in her pink maid outfit looked like she was having a great time. Her smile was practically a sideways D. Sitting on the cushion next to me, she responded, "Hee-hee. It's our first time having real live Japanese people in this world. I'm so happy we got two in one try!"

She leaned her elbow on the table and gazed innocently at us.

"After this whole trial thing settles down, let's hang out and chat over some anime!"

Looking around the princess's room, I realized there were stacks of anime VHS tapes and DVDs all over the place.

And judging by her outfit, I bet she learned Japanese culture entirely from anime.

"Wait a minute, princess. What do you mean, 'trial thing'? We haven't agreed to do anything," I said.

Ecstasia frowned slightly. "But you seemed like you were excited about trials here."

"This is a fantasy kingdom, right? That means we can't use Japanese law—"

"That's no problem!" The princess interjected while flipping through an *Anim*ge* magazine on the table.

"We put Japanese law into effect more than ten years ago. My father took care of all the legislation!"

"If Japanese law is in effect here, then what was with that trial we saw?" Tsukasa pressed. "You were using that weird Lie Detector Orb."

"Y-yes... Well, when the trial starts to get too hard, I..."

"Hard? You were in the judge's seat. Weren't you conducting the trial?"

"Well, I mean...um..."

The princess started to flounder.

"Let's not forget about the ruling monarchy... Is it purely symbolic? What about separation of powers? Do you distinguish between rule of law and rule of the people? How do you select your judges? Do you have prosecutors and lawyers?"

"…"

Something was wrong. The princess's mouth, which was usually open in some form or another, had become like a hyphen, and the sparkles had left her eyes.

"Wait, Tsukasa!" I called. "The princess is..."

Ecstasia had gone still with her magazine in hand and eyes open.

"...sleeping!"

The princess snored peacefully.

"No way!" Tsukasa was at a loss for words and tried to quickly shake the girl awake. "Hey! I was in the middle of saying something!"

"Zzzzz."

It was futile.

"Princess Ecstasia has a habit of falling asleep when something stops being fun for her." Shiro, the head maid, who'd been sitting with us this whole time, explained the situation. "One of the royal family's retainers will fill you in about the trial. She is on her way here now, so please wait a moment."

And so we did, watching the princess sleep with her eyes open.

Then we heard the magical elevator approaching, and its doors opened shortly afterward.

"So sorry to keep you waiting! I was busy cleaning up the courtroom!"

The elf-eared retainer stepped out of the elevator, still wearing her suit-like outfit and glasses.

"Miss Judge, Mr. Akuto... A good morning to you... Eh-heh-heh!" Ecstasia had snapped awake at the sound of her retainer. "Please allow me to properly introduce her. This is the Royal Cabinet's chief vassal and prosecutor."

"Half-elf, family name Saitou, given name Ileana. Pleased to make your

acquaintance." She knelt on the carpet and gave a perfect bow. Her greeting was so excessively Japanese it felt almost ridiculous.

Looking at Ileana again, I realized she was actually really pretty. She was a little taller than me and possessed a model's figure. Her long, flowing blond hair was pulled into a ponytail. A pair of jade-green eyes watched us from behind her glasses.

I guess the common trope for elves to be beautiful is true...

"So you're not a full elf but a half-elf." I accidentally blurted out what I was thinking.

"Hmph! Full elf? Don't lump me in with those common geezers wasting their long lives holed up in the woods. I left my boring hometown behind to come to where the excitement is! Ever since I read that copy of *Record of Lod*ss War* I got from Chiyodaku mail order, I've been totally obsessed with Japanese culture. While serving under the previous king and now Princess Ecstasia, the Japanization of the kingdom..."

Her enthusiasm was off the charts. The veil of her ethereal beauty had been cast off, exposing her as a complete otaku.

Well, that was unexpected...

"Ileana, can you explain to them about our kingdom's trials, pretty please?" Ecstasia requested.

"Oh! Certainly. Ahem. Year after year, as this world began to overflow with all things Japanese, our way of life also took to emulating that of Japan. Accordingly, strange incidents that we'd never seen before began to occur. The previous king decided that it would be best to implement the excellent laws and rules of Japan, having been created by the very same Japanese people who gave us all these excellent marvels."

I guessed Ileana was somewhere in her midtwenties. Perhaps that maturity explained why she outlined things so differently from the princess.

"However, Japanese laws and Japanese rules proved to be too difficult for us, and we were unable to use them well. That said, it was nearly impossible to add laws on top of them. Therefore, while instilling Japanese values and morals in

the people, the Royal Cabinet attempted to earn the trust of the populace and control the kingdom by using the Lie Detector Orb to judge cases that officials were unable to handle themselves.

"I see... And that caused the contradiction that led to your trial's standstill," Tsukasa replied.

When I recalled the scene at the Grand Bench, it all started to make sense.

"You were in the judge's seat, correct?" Tsukasa was adopting her commanding tone again.

Ileana swallowed hard, and her long ears flapped.

"I—I have no excuse... The people of the Chiyodaku Kingdom harbor strong faith for Princess Ecstasia. Therefore, she must hold the sacred artifact, the Shard of Judgment, while I, having passed the bar examination, carry out the substantive part of the trial."

A sacred artifact. The Shard of Judgment...

It sounded like some kind of magical item.

Speaking of magic, that reminded me of the giant floating scales I had seen earlier.

I wondered if they were related in any way.

"What do you mean by 'bar examination'? Do you have a bar examination committee?" Tsukasa was quick to question Ileana on her statements.

"No, we don't. The test was mainly created by using previous years' exam questions and was administered through multiple-choice answer sheets."

"So you can pass simply by memorizing answers. Do you have legal apprenticeships? How are the different legal professions selected?"



"Th-there are no apprenticeships, and the exam is structured so that those who pass can register as attorneys and prosecutors depending on their scores. We planned to have the person with the top score become a judge, but we ran into some issues with that..."

Ileana looked nervous. Her ears were twitching as she answered.

"Tsukasa, isn't it pretty amazing that people in another world are studying Japanese law? Why don't you go a little easier on them?" I said, hoping to cool the conversation.

"Oh... Mr. Akuto, you are too kind! Thank you so very much!"

"Hmm... Maybe, but..." Tsukasa groaned. "You said you're a prosecutor, right?"

"Yes, indeed! And I have this beautiful pin as proof!" Ileana took the pin off her collar and handed it over to Tsukasa. "This signifies the owner as a prosecutor. Its design combines the sun with chrysanthemum petals, which symbolizes my strict duty—as harsh as the blazing summer sun and the autumn frost!"

I was pretty sure I'd seen that same pin on a TV show once.

"With me acting as prosecutor and you as judge, surely our trials and the Judgment Spell will finally know stability!" Just as Ileana was starting to get carried away...

...Click. I could almost hear Tsukasa switch over to "on mode."

"Long ears. Tell me, what do you see before you?"

"I'm...not sure I follow."

"Your attitude has done a total about-face since our time in the courtroom. The only difference is that you saw my courthouse staff ID. You suddenly revere me as a judge despite only being given a superficial piece of information. Seems like you blindly accept anything as long as it's Japanese. Such a shallow way of thinking does not befit your occupation."

"Wha—? Whaaa...?" Ileana started to panic.

"Come on, Tsukasa," I said. "She's your courtroom colleague, can't you try to get alo—?"

"That buddy-buddy attitude between judges and prosecutors is a thing of the past. Nowadays, you risk getting flamed if you post something as innocent as a judge and a prosecutor getting a drink together on social media. Sorry, but I have no plans to make friends in the courtroom." Tsukasa stood as she firmly stated her point. "The proof of a prosecutor isn't the pin. It lies in the righteousness in their heart. It's the conviction to achieve social justice for your kingdom's people day after day."

"Y-yes!! Y-you're exactly right...Miss Jud—"

"Don't grovel! Stand up!" Tsukasa took Ileana's arm.

"Y-yes, ma'am!" The woman stood at attention.

"A judge is not superior to a prosecutor! The prosecution must face the presumption of innocence and persuade the judge otherwise. You must never show such a pitiful attitude to a judge again!"

My sister's vigorous scolding echoed through the little room.

"I-I've never heard anyone...speak so passionately..." Ileana had begun to sob. "No one ever...bothered to...scold me properly!" The half-elf trembled as tears fell from behind her glasses. "I always...worked my hardest for the sake of the kingdom...but I had a feeling...we were getting nowhere...that something was off...," she said between sobs.

"Even if you aren't confident in yourself, you can't pass off your tasks to others. Before you believe in others, you must first believe in yourself. It's okay to make mistakes. You're still young, long ears. Face your cases head-on and use your own intuition, without fear of mistakes. As long as you give it your all, the road will surely open to you," Tsukasa declared.

"I'm so grateful for your guidance... You're right; I'm young—I can still change!"

"Today is a weekday... Is it okay for you to take a day off, prosecutor?"

"If it means proving myself to you, Miss Judge, I'll go out right now and look

for a case to work on!" Ileana dashed away while shouting to rile herself up.

"Wait! Don't forget your pin!" The little thing was still in Tsukasa's hand.

"Please give it back after I've proven myseeelf...!"

Her voice trailed into the distance. In her haste, the prosecutor had already gotten in the magical elevator and was riding away.

"An aloof attitude yet passionate leadership! I'd expect no less from you, Miss Judge. You're like the new hero of our kingdom! I love that!" the princess praised.

"I'm not sure those were the right selections for that dialogue tree...," I muttered. The flow of the conversation didn't match with what I expected from the beginning of a fantasy story.

However, I decided to trust Tsukasa when it came to the legal business.

"Hey, Akky. That might have been enough to ignite her passion, but...I still have some doubts. Do you really think it's okay to enforce modern Japanese laws here?"

I sensed she was torn between wanting to oversee trials and doubting if she really should.

Her reaction makes sense if we consider this place as its own society and not something from a video game. But...

After sitting in the princess's room full of Japanese things, and hearing her side of the story... I couldn't help but take interest in this world. I wanted to do what I could to help its people.

"Usually, in this kind of story, the character who gets summoned to another world plays their part by employing a unique skill..." I tried considering our situation from the perspective of a game. "But I'm not sure if that means it'll be okay for us to hold trials... I can't think of any previous examples like this, so it's hard to decide..."

Using superstrong skills to defeat monsters? That's an easy one. Conducting Japanese-style court trials is another story.

"Princess Ecstasia. I believe our guests are becoming overwhelmed," Shiro

remarked.

"It's getting late, so why don't we take a break and have some relaxation time?" the princess in pink suggested excitedly. "My villa has its own hot spring!"

18

Kerplunk...

A soft sound rang out as a bamboo deer scare—one of those stereotypical things from hot springs—tipped over, bumped against a stone, and spilled out water.

The tone reverberated against the walls of the courthouse and the library buildings of the Supreme Court complex surrounding us.

"I definitely didn't expect there to be a hot spring here."

We'd followed the princess and Shiro to where we'd have our "relaxation time."

By "villa," Ecstasia had meant the Supreme Court buildings.

And the hot spring was an open-air bath situated in the complex's courtyard.

"This place is legit... Stone lanterns, washbasins... It even has that hot spring smell..."

Last time I checked, there was no natural hot spring running under the Supreme Court. This must have been made with another one of this world's techniques.

I washed my body ahead of the others and lowered myself into the hot water up to my shoulders, and let out a sigh.

I felt my warm blood flowing throughout my body as my capillaries dilated

from the heat.

My mind and body relaxed. Turns out being transferred to another world was very exhausting.

I looked up and saw the stars twinkling in the night sky above me.

There were two moons glowing overhead—a reminder that this wasn't my usual world.

"Akky, are you in there?" Tsukasa called to me as she shampooed her hair.

"Ah, please don't move. You'll get it in your eyes."

It sounded like Shiro was washing her hair for her.

"Yeah, I'm here," I answered.

"I am, too!" the princess answered from the changing room, not that anyone asked.

Evidently, removing her pink maid outfit took a while.

This still doesn't feel real...

On my first night in another world, I was bathing with three girls, and it was all because Tsukasa insisted "I want to stay with Akky!"

I was trying really hard not to look in their direction.

"Is there anywhere in particular you would like me to scrub?" Shiro asked my sister.

"No, that's all right... Miss Shiro, you're so good at this. You work like a pro!"

While soaking in the bath, I listened in on the two girls talking behind me.

"Thank you. It is only natural that I would have skills to help guests feel comfortable."

"Nnh... That feels good, right there..." Her voice was seductive.

"This is my first time touching a Japanese person. Your soft, smooth skin is fascinating. And your long black hair, slender body, and large breasts...are all very pretty."

"Nn...really? Your tail is lovely, too, Miss Shiro... It looks just like a

Pomeranian's."

Yeah, a Pomeranian that almost killed us.

My sister was actually really into cute things. It sounded like she was starting to accept the existence of these human-animal fusions.

"You are too kind, to compare me to a pet dog of the Japanese people."

"If you came to Japan, I bet you could be an idol... That reminds me, why is your last name Katou?"

Evidently, Tsukasa couldn't help but inquire.

"I took the name when I first came to this kingdom. Before that, I was just Shiro."

"Does everyone in this kingdom use a Japanese name?"

"No. Japanese names became popular among some groups after the previous king changed his own name to Itou. Many members of the Royal Cabinet have names similar to *Itou*, but they're a small number among the kingdom's overall population."

I was kind of relieved to hear not everyone had pseudo-Japanese names.

"So that's why the prosecutor's name is Saitou," my sister said.

"Ileana's original name was something longer and more elf-like. She changed it after abandoning her life as an elf to serve this kingdom."

"Mm-hmm, elves... Right..." Tsukasa didn't really sound like she was paying attention.

"Shall I massage your neck?"

"Nnh... Ah, that's the spot. That's great. The weight of these things really kills my shoulders. Thank you."

"Just another one of my hospitality skills."

"So have you really been a maid for ten years?"

"Yes. I've been working under Princess Ecstasia since I was very young."

"But you didn't choose that."

"My hometown has produced maids to serve the kingdom for generations. Maids support Chiyodaku. This is simply a result of being born to that clan."

"Then, you have no complaints about it?"

"Out of the question. Princess Ecstasia brought prosperity to this world. There is nothing more fulfilling than being by her side to help and protect her. I love the princess... I shall rinse your hair now."

I heard the sound of water.

Tsukasa had managed to get some information on the relationship between the princess and her attendants.

It actually doesn't sound half bad.

"Thanks for waiting!" Tsukasa entered the bath.

"Whoa, hold o-"

"Hey, did you hear that just now?" Tsukasa whispered. "I'm totally culture shocked. I thought a cute girl like Shiro had been sold into servitude or something." My sister sidled up to me like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Squish.

I felt her chest, like giant, soft marshmallows, press against the left side of my body.

I could make out the distorted outline of her large breasts beneath the surface of the water.

"Ah, get off me!" I twisted my body away.

"What? Why? We always used to take baths together." Tsukasa pouted at me, making no effort to hide her disappointment.

With her wet black hair, long eyelashes, and perfect facial features, she was pretty enough to be an idol herself.

"That was back when I was a little kid!"

Our movements started stirring up ripples as I argued and tried to hide how flustered I was.

My leg slipped against the bottom of the bath, and I fell forward, bringing her down with me...

"Whoa!"

I felt her body sliding against mine...

The sensation of her breasts slipping across my chest...

"Eep! A-Akky...!" The wet lips of a beautiful girl, right before my eyes...

She's your sister she's your sister she's your sister...

I felt the blood flowing hot throughout my body.

"I'm feeling lightheaded, so I'm getting out."

As calmly as possible, I made up an excuse to get out of the bath.

I felt the stare of the dog-eared head maid as I did.

She wore a dark blue one-piece school swimsuit. SHIRO was written on the name tag.

"Wh-what?" I covered my privates with a hand towel as I spoke to her.

"Oh, nothing. I was just observing your cultural practice of nude bonding."

I didn't want to believe that Shiro had calmly observed that scene.

"Shirooo! I'm on my way for the nude bonding, too!" came the princess's innocent voice coming from the entrance.

"Yes, princess," she responded. Turning back to me, Shiro said, "Just so we're clear, if you bring that lusty attitude anywhere near Princess Ecstasia, I'll end you immediately." She delivered the warning entirely without expression.

"I'm leaving, okay?"

"Don't even look at her. Please close your eyes."

"Oh, come on."

What a pain. I didn't even do anything wrong.

"Okay. They're closed."

"This way, please."

I heard the sound of Shiro's bare feet pattering on the ground. She had the ability to conceal her footsteps, so she must have been making noise intentionally to guide me.

I followed her for a short while. Then...

"You may open your eyes."

After getting her permission, I opened my eyes and saw her offering me a bath towel.

Her body was slightly smaller than mine and well toned.

I could discern the outline of her small, moderately sized breasts under the fabric of her swimsuit.

"Um, why are you wearing a school swimsuit?" I asked.

"This is the official uniform of our bath service as designated by Princess Ecstasia." Her gaze shifted toward my bare chest. "I see you are of average build."

"I'm just your average Japanese guy."

Shiro sniffed at my response. With her face still blank, she brought her cute nose up close and smelled me.

"I want to check that you aren't concealing some dangerous power." Her eyes drifted downward. "Could you please remove that hand towel?"

"I-I'm not concealing anything!"

I ran off to the changing room and closed the door with tears in my eyes.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Miss Judge! Want to float in my swim ring with me?"

"This is a bath, not a swimming pool."

"Princess Ecstasia, please allow me to shampoo your hair..."

I listened to the three girls' conversation while donning a robe. Then, totally dejected, I followed a maid back to my room.

This was how the sun set on my first day in this fantasy world.

The next morning, I woke up to the sun shining in my guest room in the castle. Expensive-looking, medieval European—style furniture decorated the room. There was even some kind of taxidermy-unicorn thing.

I double-checked that I was still in a fantasy world.

"...all 'cause...kky...with me...mmph..."

And yes, the girl sleeping with her head on my stomach and drooling was indeed my sister who'd been turned fifteen again.

"I feel...so much better...when he's here..."

She mumbled in her sleep while rubbing my chest, not that there was really anything there to speak of.

Tsukasa had fallen asleep in her bathrobe.

I could've sworn she went to bed in another room. I guess she got lonely...

It wasn't the most comfortable position to be stuck in, but I didn't want to wake her up if I could avoid it.

Undoubtedly, she was exhausted by this unfamiliar fantasy world. She needed to rest.

I let her sleep, trying to stay as still as possible.

"Mr. Akutooo! Time to wake up and smell the nulla poena sine lege!"

The princess had arrived in pink pajamas.

"Oh, and Miss Judge is here, too! What shall we do about today's schedule?"

"Let's see... I think we should get a quick tour of the kingdom," I replied.

"Roger that! In that case, why don't we go for a run around the castle?"

With that...

...Tsukasa and I changed into running clothes provided by Ecstasia.

We did some warm-up stretches in front of the palace, by the north gate.

"Okay! Let's get that mutual jurisdiction!"

The princess took off in her pink athletic attire.

"Are you two familiar with the Imperial Palace Run?"

"Yeah...isn't that what they call the running route around the perimeter of the imperial palace?"

"That's right! It's all the rage to go running around our castle!"

We moved at an easy pace. The fresh breeze and exercise felt good.

Other runners in various colorful exercise outfits greeted us as we passed.

"Princess!"

"It's Princess Ecstasia!"

"Looking cute again today!"

"We're rooting for youuu!"

"Thank you! Love you all! Yay, compliance!"

"The people really seem to adore you," I remarked.

Tsukasa was stuck on something else, however. "Princess, what kind of a greeting was that? 'Yay, compliance'?"

"I'm trying to spread knowledge of Japan's legal terminology to the people through my daily greetings!"

"That explains all the random legalese," I said.

"So you take it upon yourself to instill legal standards in the people... Okay, then." Tsukasa seemed to like that idea.

Head maid Shiro, wearing a white jogging outfit, kept a watchful guard as she ran parallel to us, leading a group of maids in black.

"About those outfits—and those cars... They have a logo on them that looks like some kind of helmet. They're not Japanese-made, are they?" I asked.

"That's the dwarfs' emblem!" the princess explained. "Since the number of

objects we can copy-paste is limited, the dwarf hybrids study what we bring over and do their best to make imitations!"

"What is she talking about?" Tsukasa asked me.

"Well, in fantasy stories, dwarfs are usually skilled at crafting and live underground..." For all my knowledge, I still needed to check if my understanding lined up with how it worked in this world.



"Oh, what good timing! Here's one now. Good morning, Mr. Dwarf! Compliance!"

"Hmm? Oh, it's you, princess. Yer lookin' dazzling t'day as usual."

A small-statured man with sunglasses, a helmet, and a thick beard opened up a manhole cover on the side of the road and crawled out.

"Out for a delivery?"

"Yup, one'a our new knockoffs. In a hurry, though, 'scuse us."

"Pardon the interruption! Keep up the hard work! Go, go, governance!"

The man hurried off, carrying a cardboard box with the dwarf logo on it.

"The technology of our kingdom is supported from the underground, by the dwarfs who came all the way here from the dwarf kingdom!" the princess said cheerily.

"Wow. Now that you mention it, that open-air bath last night was really well-made, too," I replied.

"I'm happy to hear you say that! We've copy-pasted an extensive amount of research materials from the library, and we're working hard to find the best way to combine our native magic and Japan's science into a kind of 'magical science.'"

Tsukasa hummed. "So you're trying to improve your own kingdom's technology without relying too much on copy-pasting." She sounded interested.

I wanted to hear more about hybrids and magical science, but I decided to ask about it later.

"And over there we have the Shrine of the Hero!" Princess Ecstasia pointed to an impressive-looking shrine. "And next—!"

"Wait!" I said. "Tell us more. Is some hero enshrined there?"

"I believe it houses items relating to the Hero's defeat of the Demon King!"

"There's a Demon King? What kind?"

"Well, he's gone now. They say he had the power to create monsters and

make them go berserk, but that was more than fifty years ago... Honestly, all that stuff kinda bores me, so I don't remember the details very well. And the shrine is basically abandoned now anyway."

Her response was curt. There were some older people passing by who gave the pink girl stern looks. There seemed to be some kind of tension there.

"Hero"... Does she mean that old drunk we saw in the courtroom?

I recalled the trial my sister and I were dropped into. That man had the look of someone left behind by the passing of time...a shadow of his former self.

"Akkyyy, I'm tired of running. My chest is too heavy for this."

"If you're interested, why don't you try visiting it later?"

"I think I will." I decided to put off investigating for the moment.

After that, Shiro offered to carry Tsukasa on her back, and we headed southwest.

"And here's the National Diet Library, which houses all of Japan's infinite wisdom. You can read every issue of *Anim*ge* there, too!"

Next, our run brought us past the place where Tsukasa and I had been summoned: the Supreme Court building.

The sign had been altered to read CHIYODAKU KINGDOM COURTHOUSE.

From there, we moved south, then turned eastward.

"Here we have Kasumigaseki, Hibiya, and Marunouchi. I never get tired of looking at Tokyo Station!"

This was the same area that you could see from the window in the princess's room. Physically, it looked a lot like the real Chiyodaku.

"Next, I'll show you around Akihabara!" Ecstasia declared.

"Whoa, you guys even have your own Akihabara?" I couldn't help but sound surprised Another Akihabara in another world. Now that sounded exciting.

"My father and I are big fans! The energy to cast the Copy-Paste Spell is fueled by the user's passion, and this place always gets me fired up! So we were able to copy-paste all sorts of things... Anim*te, Sofm*p, Club S*ga, Torano*na,

figure shops, maid cafés, you name it!"

I blinked, dumbfounded. "Is it just me, or did anyone else just hear a bunch of bleeping?"

We kept on jogging, with the castle at our backs. Soon, medieval European—style brick buildings started cropping up here and there, as though all the modern stuff we'd seen had been an illusion. But beyond that, I spied the Akihabara main street that looked ripped straight from Chiyodaku.

"This is our largest source for the latest Japanese culture and technology! And it's a place where everyone can get along regardless of race!"

The princess happily babbled away, and as we got closer, I started to believe her.

There were humans and other unfamiliar races all hanging out on the street in their favorite cosplays.

The storefronts were decorated with signs advertising idols and *eroge*, along with pictures of the princess and the previous king.

We slowed our run as we approached the main street.

A group of men who'd been waiting for us waved glow sticks and shouted.

"Princessss!"

"You're amazing!"

"Someone posted about a princess sighting on Chiyatter!"

"We came here as fast as we could!" "Love you!"

"So nice to see you all! I hope you're having a good constitutional monarchy today! Sorry I haven't been able to do any copy-pasting in a while, but I've got one for you right now!"

With that, Ecstasia headed into a concrete building on the main street. The empty building had a sign up that read COPY-PASTE COMING SOON.

The princess wiggled her hands and fingers, and they started emitting a pink light. All ten of her fingers moved rapidly as the light became a magical spell circle. Almost instantly, the entire floor was covered in spell circles.

"Here I gooooo!"

A bright pink flash accompanied her cutesy voice. Then...

"The Copy-Paste Spell was a success!"

The space before her blurred for a moment before becoming filled with Japan's newest games and products.

"Akky, was that really magic?" Tsukasa asked me.

"The pink spell circles looked just like the one when we were summoned," I said.

Onlookers cheered at the princess's successful copy-paste.

Ministers and dwarfs wasted no time entering the building.

"Shall we?"

"Let's get t' work."

"Once the investigative research on these items is completed, we'll sell them to the general public on a lottery basis," Shiro explained.

Tsukasa, who was still being carried, got down off Shiro's back to take a look. "So you've got a whole system in place."

The princess busied herself with shaking hands and talking to the crowd. "Let's all do our best to get along—and make this kingdom better and more fun for everyone!"

Turning to my sister, I said, "Hey, Tsukasa... How do you feel about taking up the job of 'Miss Judge' now?"

After seeing the state of this kingdom and its people, I was starting to believe there was no reason not to help them.

"They've developed their society this far through copy-pasting, and their way of life has started to resemble that of Japan... Hmm..."

My sister crossed her arms under her large breasts. Ecstasia came over and shook her hand while mumbling to herself.

Then the princess did the same with me. As she did, I felt something rough

and scratchy.

"Princess...what happened to your hands?"

Her fingers were in bad shape. The skin was peeling, her nails were broken, and both hands were covered in scratches and cuts. Her bloody hands looked like they had been tortured. I only noticed now because she'd taken off the gloves she'd been wearing during our run.

"Oh, this? It's from drawing all those spell circles, trying to work out the Summoning Spell over and over. I must have drawn thousands! But it was all worth it because I got to meet you, Mr. Akuto—and Miss Judge!"

Her smile was the picture of purity as she gave us a double peace sign.

The princess's loud answer hadn't gone unnoticed by the surrounding people.

"That's Miss Judge?"

"That boy and girl?"

"So the summoning finally succeeded."

"Princess, you're a prodigy!"

"Real Japanese people?"

"Now the kingdom can actually have some judicial regulation..."

"Will she become our judge?"

They whispered among themselves while staring at us.

"Tsukasa...," I whispered.

"I'll do it." My sister struck a determined pose. "I'd be a failure of a judge if I turned this down. No, a failure of a human. I'll be your judge."

"M-Miss Judge... I'm so happyyy!" the princess shouted joyfully as she took a small fragment of something from her pocket. "Here you are, the Shard of Judgment."

"What is that thing?"

"It's a sacred artifact that allows the holder to cast the Judgment Spell!"

The Judgment Spell... Was that what we saw at the Grand Bench? I thought

back to the giant set of scales, strange windows, and words floating in the air.

"Let me explain. The Judgment Spell grants its special powers to someone with judicial conviction who can carry out righteous judgment and gain trust. It's actually very easy to use! Let me show you—juh-juh-juh-judgment \$\cdot\!! Display owner window!"

A magical window appeared at her fingertips with a whoosh.

Owner and Consignor, Princess Ecstasia Itou

Consignee, Prosecutor Ileana Saitou

"Whoa... This is the Judgment Spell? It looks like something out of a video game..."

My heart pounded with excitement at the sight of the floating gamelike window, despite its serious, administrative contents.

"I, Ecstasia Itou, hereby entrust, um..."

The princess looked at Tsukasa and me.

"Are we able to share it?" my sister asked.

"I'm going to run the court, too?" I said.

Tsukasa frowned. "I don't think I can operate these weird window things during a trial."

"They're not that weird." Actually, I thought they were pretty cool.

"I'll give it a shot!" The princess started muttering to herself.

Co-owner, Judge Tsukasa Wagatsuma

Co-owner, Court Assistant Akuto Satou

"Hey, you did it!" I had a second look at the window. "Wait, what's this bit that says 'court assistant'?"

"It's a new position we made up! Ileana and I came up with it last night," the princess replied. "Since you're both Japanese people who will 'righteously judge a fantasy world,' and Tsukasa is the judge, this position will cover all other court duties she doesn't handle. We tried to think up a title that captured that."

"There's a position called a judicial assistant in European courts, so I think you picked a good name," Tsukasa remarked.

"I see. Thanks for thinking up a new title for me," I said.

The princess nodded. "Okay, the Shard of Judgment will transfer ownership now."

The small fragment floated over and suspended itself between Tsukasa and me, then it displayed a new window.

Required Quest: Adjudicate a completely new lawsuit as soon as possible "So... we have to complete a quest first," I said.

"There's lots we still don't know about the Shard of Judgment," Ecstasia confessed. "Hmm... I was hoping to ask you to tackle the Hero's trial right away, but I didn't expect this to pop up... Shiro, do you know anything about it?"

"For a required quest to come up now, I suppose it must mean there is a problem with the new owners' qualifications," the head maid answered coolly.

"At the Grand Bench, when I mentioned to the Hero that we expected the ownership of the Shard of Judgment to change, he went off saying things like 'You mean those youngsters who only just came to this world?' 'Some complacent Japanese kids who've never experienced war don't have the guts to judge me.' 'Show me they have real courage, and that this isn't all just some setup.' I guess the shard overheard him. Maybe that's why," Ecstasia explained.

"Hmm... So the shard can even sense its surroundings and react to it," I muttered.

"How dare he underestimate a real judge... I almost forgot about that old drunk..." Tsukasa's fighting spirit had been ignited. I was happy to see my sister raring to go, even if this whole situation was a little unsettling.

"First things first! Focus on completing that quest, pretty please!" the princess said.

"Got it," I answered. It was time to play the game's tutorial.

The princess turned on her heel and started talking to her head maid. "Shiro. From now on, you will be the personal attendant to Miss Judge and Mr. Akuto."

"Princess Ecstasia..." Shiro's pale blue eyes opened wide. "I have only ever worked under you, princess... To serve another would be—"

"I picked you because you're the best, Shiro." The princess put her hands on Shiro's shoulders. "As long as you're with them, I know they'll be safe from danger, and you'll teach them everything they need to know. That's what our kingdom needs right now!"

"...If that is your order, Princess Ecstasia. Understood."

After a few moments, Shiro reassumed her placid expression.

"I am at your service."

She bowed before Tsukasa and me.

"Now that that's settled, I have to prepare for my broadcast. Don't have too much fun without me!" Ecstasia said cheerily.



Princess:

Juh-juh-judgment ☆! Allow me to show you in!



Tsukasa:

...Huh? What is this place? We're trapped!



Akwtos

Don't worry, Tsukasa. It's just magic. You can let go of me.



Princess

This place is a special corner for answering questions about law-related stuff! Miss Judge, can you please get us started?



Tsukasas

Hmm... All right, then. Here's a quiz.

Among courthouse staff, what does the slang J, P, and B stand for?



Princess

Judgment! Pink! Bar exam!



Trukasas

You're close except for "pink"...kind of. J is "judge." P is "prosecutor." And B is "barrister," a kind of lawyer.



lleamas

Okay, taking notes... Where does the word prosecutor come from, anyway?



Tsukasas

It comes from the Latin word *prosequi*, which means "to pursue." A prosecutor acts as the representative of the public interest. According to the Public Prosecutor's Office Act, article VI, prosecutors have the authority to investigate any crime.



11eamas

I see... Fascinating... I think I'm really starting to get interested in prosecuting!



Primeess

Ileana, you've got this prosecutor thing! Go, go, governance!



lleamas

I'm ready for my next case! Come at me with a good one!



Tsukasas

Akky, I think I'm gonna give her some extra tutoring.



Akutos

Go easy on her.

Article IV Opening a Pet Shop in Little Ginza Requires Registration

"Hey, Akky. They call this thing the Shard of Judgment, but I'm pretty sure it's a piece of a courthouse staff pin."

After changing back into our clothes from our original world, we met up with Shiro. While walking down the streets of Chiyodaku, we examined the small fragment that the princess had entrusted to us.

By "courthouse staff pin," Tsukasa meant the special badges worn by judges, court clerks, court secretaries, and so on.

Some years ago, when Tsukasa had just become a judge, she'd proudly shown hers off to me. It was designed in the shape of one of Japan's three imperial regalia, the mirror called *Yata no Kagami*. In the center was the Japanese character for *judge*. The pins for lawyers and prosecutors didn't have any writing on them, so it was pretty distinctive.

If I remember correctly, Yata no Kagami shows up in Japanese myths as a mirror that reflects the truth of reality...or something.

Why would a thing like a courthouse staff pin be in this world? And why can it cast that Judgment Spell?

"Miss Shiro, you called this thing a sacred artifact, right? Could you tell us a little more about that?"

"Certainly. The term refers to tools with divine powers. They have appeared throughout history since ancient times. It's said that they are mainly made from existing objects that have been refined by God, and they're destined to make the world a better place."

"I see... So your God is the kind that bestows tools." My usual image of a fantasy God was one that bestowed a powerful holy sword or something.

"What else can you tell us about God?" Tsukasa asked.

"In ancient times, God defeated the Demon King numerous times upon his emergence and brought prosperity to the world...or so the legends go. However, God hasn't shown themself in hundreds of years. Since the sacred artifacts are able to exert their power autonomously, it is thought that they house God's will in their design. The Shard of Judgment is the most recent artifact. It appeared more than half a century ago. For some reason, it takes the shape of a courthouse pin, and it has been in fragments since it appeared. The reason for that, too, is unfortunately unknown. However, I have heard that there are more fragments in other regions."

"For a fantasy God's will to take the form of a courthouse pin is pretty unconventional. Shouldn't it be a sword or something?" I said.

"Previous sacred artifacts have generally been items of power for defeating the Demon King and his monsters. However, the strength of the Shard of Judgment differs in that it bestows judicial might to the holder, as well as certain risks. A bearer is equivalent to the Supreme Court. While our research on the artifact is ongoing, we know that some of its powers include multiuse windows, advanced calculation abilities, and the power to override any other magic... While it's a rather unorthodox artifact, its powers surely hold an extremely important role now that the Demon King has vanished, the number of violent monsters has declined, and the world has become comparatively more peaceful overall."

"Huh... Okay, well, I guess I'll let Akky hold on to it. I'll just focus on the trial itself. He'll be able to figure out all that magic and multiuse window stuff better than I can." Tsukasa handed me the Shard of Judgment.

"There sure are a lot of unknowns about this thing." I had a lot of questions to ask, but we had other things to take care of. "I guess I'll just ask you to help me out when the time comes, Miss Shiro."

"Of course. I intend to carry out my duties to the fullest—protection, provisioning information, and any other miscellaneous tasks—as directed by Princess Ecstasia. Furthermore..." She looked at me with her expressionless face. "Please do not address me formally going forward. Just call me Shiro. And

please allow me to call you Miss Judge and Master, respectively.

Master.

The moment those dainty lips of hers said that word I felt a shiver run down my spine. My own personal maid. A beautiful girl with dog ears and silver-white hair. It was a guy's dream.

"Okay, got it. Thanks, Shiro..." For how great this was, my conscience wouldn't let me enjoy it fully. "And sorry about all this."

"...? I don't understand. What are you sorry for, Master?"

"Um. Well, we suddenly showed up in this world yesterday and now you have to call a random high schooler Master. You had to leave the princess, and you're always so expressionless, so I feel bad for making you do all this."

"Master, you are too kind. Thank you very much for your thoughtfulness." Shiro bowed her head, face still impassive. "But going forward, such thoughtfulness is unnecessary. I don't require an expression, so I don't give one. An attendant has no need of their own feelings. Please, use me as you like." It was a very decisive response.

"...Who taught you that?" I asked her, wincing.

"It's part of the teachings of my clan. 'The more emotion, the weaker the maid.'"

"I guess there's a lot I don't know about the people of other worlds..."

Honestly, I couldn't make snap decisions about this girl I'd only recently met, but...

"I think it's strange to say your feelings are unnecessary."

...I still wanted to make one thing clear.

"I confirm that I have heard your thoughts on the matter, Master."

Stare.

Well, that didn't go quite as expected, but there was no use in pushing my own values on her any further.

"Hey, Akky, Shiro...why don't we go somewhere where there are more

people?" Tsukasa, who'd been observing the people on the street, pointed toward the east. "There's a higher chance we'll run into a legal dispute in a livelier area. We have to adjudicate as soon as possible, right?"

"What does that mean, exactly?" I asked. "Do we need to hurry?"

"In terms of law terminology, 'as soon as possible' is about medium urgency. It's less urgent than 'immediately,' so I don't think we need to find something to judge right this second. However, since there is no justifiable reason for us to delay, if we don't find a case to adjudicate today, we may miss the chance to qualify to become the shard's owners," Tsukasa replied.

I didn't realize such a short statement could be read into so deeply. My sister really was the real thing.

"An astute observation, Miss Judge... Let us proceed without delay."

We started walking again, with Shiro leading the way.

From the perspective of Japan's Chiyodaku, we moved through the southeast part, near the south side of Tokyo Station.

"This area, Marunouchi, is the most affluent in all of Chiyodaku."

Tidy-looking citizens bustled around doing their shopping among the orderly rows of buildings.

"There are a lot of different peoples," I remarked.

I spotted more than just dog ears and tails. There were people whose lower halves were serpentine, cyclops, and even people with eight legs...

"There are tens of thousands of hybrid races in Chiyodaku, hence why it is called a 'salad bowl.' More than half the citizens are a hybrid of some kind, with pure-blooded humans making up less than half the population."

"What do you mean by 'hybrid'?" I questioned.

"With the increased instances of mixed parentage, it became difficult to keep track of everyone's heritage, and the effort was eventually abandoned. Anyone with even a distant ancestor of a certain species is considered a hybrid of that type. That being said, as a result of the adaptation to the humanistic urban lifestyle, almost all citizens are at least half-human. Accordingly, half-humans

such as Ileana would simply be called elves in Chiyodaku."

"Got it...," I said. The lineages had gotten so complicated they'd needed to simplify it. "Are you a kind of dog hybrid, Shiro?"

"...Something like that."

"That explains why the clothing shops have so many different types of clothing. It sure must be hard to keep up with... By the way, is that squishy thing over there another species?" Tsukasa was pointing to a jiggly being on the road.

It looked like a blob of blue gelatin, with dents that appeared to be eyes. It was about as big as a medium-size dog.

"Is that...a slime?" I wondered aloud.

It looked a lot like the slime monsters that appeared in video games. It slowly bounced along next to a human.

"Yes, that is correct," Shiro confirmed. "I'm surprised you knew what it was right away... Although, I should expect no less from a citizen of the real Chiyodaku."

"Actually, we don't have them in Chiyodaku; it's just a kind of monster that shows up in a lot of video games. Is it okay for them to be wandering around town?"

"In this world, there are many kinds of magical beasts. In the past, lots of them were violent because of influence from the Demon King's powers. But after he was defeated, they were released from his control and some of the monsters revealed themselves to be friendly. Blue slimes are one such example. They are born like morning dew in the grassy meadows from the condensed mana in the atmosphere. As they are easily tamed by humans and can grow to be quite intelligent, our kingdom's citizens love raising them as pets. Judging from the movements of that slime there, I believe it's a seeing-eye slime."

"So humans and slimes coexist here," I muttered.

It sounded nice and peaceful.

"I thought slime was that toy you make by mixing laundry starch and borax."

"Tsukasa, were you listening to anything Shiro just said?"

"But it looks like some kind of clear blue jelly, like one of those gel ice packs. It doesn't have a brain, so there's no way it's intellige—"

While Tsukasa was insulting the slime, a jiggly sound approached from behind, and a giant blue slime...

Sluuurp!

...crashed over her.

"Ngh glrp blrp glrrrp!" Tsukasa struggled as her body was enveloped inside the slime's gel body.

"It attacked her!" I exclaimed.

"Please, leave this to me." Shiro wrapped her arms around the slime, which was about the same height as her, and placed her hands on its surface like she was checking its temperature. She touched her forehead to the slime, and after sniffing it, she turned her attention to Tsukasa within the creature. She closed her eyes like someone in prayer. My sister, meanwhile, was shouting.

"Blrplrplrp! Blym shlorree! Blym shlorrreee!"

A second later, the giant blue slime heaved and spat her out with a "Bleh!"

Tsukasa was gasping for breath. "Ah, gaah! I'm sorry...! I'll never bad-mouth a slime ever again..."

She was crying.

"Wow. What did you do, Shiro?"

"I sensed the slime's anger, so I used a Telepathy Spell to tell Miss Judge to apologize to it. I'm sorry, but there was no other choice to protect her..."

A man who seemed to be the owner of the slime ran up to us. "Sorry! My little Slimey has a bad habit of eating people who make fun of him."

Shiro looked at me. "Master, what will you do? Shall we attempt to sue him over the incident?"

"No, there's no point. It was Tsukasa's fault anyway. We're the ones who are sorry."

I bowed to the owner.

The man looked at Shiro. "Eek! Y-you're the Royal Watchdog, aren't you? F-forgive me!" He apologized again before leading his slime away.

"I didn't know they called you the Royal Watchdog, Shiro," I said.

"Yes, at some point, I picked up that nickname. All I've done is serve Princess Ecstasia by punishing anyone who attempts to touch her, though."

"Gotcha..." I wasn't sure if I should feel safe or afraid with her as my bodyguard. "Anyway, you really saved us. Thank you. So you can understand monsters' feelings?"

"Yes, but only some of them." Shiro seemed to be happy, because her tail was wagging.

"All right, get up, Tsukasa. No more insulting slimes, okay?" I offered my hand.

"Okay..." Tsukasa took it with hers, which was covered in globs of sticky liquid. She looked truly repentant for what she'd done.

That Telepathy Spell Shiro used was really helpful back there. I wish I could do that...

Immediately, I felt the words *Spell Unlocked: Telepathy* flash in the back of my mind.

"Master, is there something wrong?"

"Um... Just out of curiosity, what does it feel like when you unlock skills and spells?"

"It differs depending on each skill, but in the case of spells, they each take a distinct form within the bearer."

"Okay, so it's like having a list of spells you've learned somewhere inside yourself."

After playing so many video games, that concept proved easy enough to accept.

Shiro stared at me. "Is that all?" she asked. Although slight, I sensed a new kind of vigilance in her gaze.

Thinking back to when we'd spoken in the bath, Shiro had mentioned a concern that I was concealing a dangerous power.

Maybe I shouldn't tell her yet that I had some magical powers awaken in me...

"Come on, let's go somewhere busier," Tsukasa called to us.

"Yeah, I guess there aren't as many people here, and it's pretty quiet," I agreed, grateful for the change of subject. "Shiro, do you have any recommendations for livelier areas nearby?"

"There's an area in the kingdom called Little Ginza just outside the capital city of Chiyodaku. How does that sound?"

I cocked my head. "You have Ginza here? Was it copy-pasted, too?"

"No, Little Ginza wasn't copy-pasted. It consists primarily of dwarf-and orccreated buildings imitating the Japanese style. There's often a lot of construction going on...so we may need to take some detours, but it's a very lively area."



"What you see to your left is called the Meadow of Beginnings."

Tsukasa and I followed Shiro, who'd led us to a spot overlooking a vast field.

We'd left the capital of Chiyodaku. To compare it to the real Tokyo's twenty-three wards, we'd walked through the south of Chuo-ku, which neighbored Chiyodaku to the east, to reach the border of Koto-ku, the next neighboring city to the east.

We'd exited the city of Chiyodaku on our way to Little Ginza, and the second we were beyond the capital's borders we were met with a wasteland of raw dirt ground. While we could see what looked like Little Ginza in the distance, the road before us was littered with construction sites. While avoiding them, I'd spotted the massive field, and Shiro took us to get a better look at my request.

"Now this looks like something out of a fantasy world."

This was the same grassland I'd spotted from Princess Ecstasia's room.

The view was a bit different at midday.

It looked typical of a fantasy world setting. The sun's light bathed the short grass, which swayed gently in the breeze. A few wild blue slimes were bouncing around. In the distance, I made out what I assumed were the homes of a nomadic tribe.

Everything looked totally different from all the Japanese-style modern developments. It offered us a glimpse of this world's original environment, and what slimes were like in their natural habitat. I couldn't help but grow excited. It felt like I'd jumped into the world map of a video game.

"I'm pleased to hear it's to your liking, Master."

"What kind of place is this meadow?"

"It was previously under the jurisdiction of the Chiyodaku Kingdom, but now it is an autonomous zone. Though there are some Chiyodaku citizens who still call it part of the nation, however. There are no towns, but some nomadic settlements can be found here and there. Long ago, adventurers who aspired to defeat the Demon King began their journeys here by fighting slimes. For the past few decades, it has become a farmland for raising pet slimes and other domesticated magical beasts used for meat."

"So that's why it's called the Meadow of Beginnings. This is where people started their adventures."

That's pretty awesome...

I peered into the distance and wondered what kinds of journeys began here and the sorts of people someone would meet.

"Let's hurry up and get back to where the action is. This place is full of trash anyway. Someone's been illegally dumping garbage," Tsukasa's remark ripped me from my daydream.

She was right. Between the meadow and the city were heaps of piled-up garbage.

"Tsukasa, ignore the garbage for a second and check out this meadow. Don't you think it's awesome?"

Come on, immerse yourself a little.

"Really? I mean, if we're looking for someone to put on trial, we need to be in town, not frolicking in the grass. I guess we might catch someone illegally dumping, but that doesn't really require a court trial."

"Oh, right... The shard did say we need to adjudicate a case as soon as possible." I'd almost forgotten. Perhaps I'd wanted to forget.

Although I'd tried to keep calm since coming to this world, I wanted to bask in the fantasy vibe and have some fun.

"I guess we should take care of our job first," I conceded. "By the way, Tsukasa, those new clothes look great on you."

My sister had stopped to buy a change of clothes at one of the stores we passed on our way here. Shiro had informed us that accepting positions in the court granted us an allowance. Upon hearing as much, Tsukasa got excited and immediately dove into the storefront of some knockoff brand called Youniqlo. Judging by her quick shopping trip with Shiro, this kingdom exclusively used Japanese yen, and the prices were about the same as in Japan, too.

"Shiro helped me pick it out! She really gets my vibe."

"I tried to go for a 'fantasy world office lady' style."

True to the maid's words, Tsukasa's clothes did resemble a Japanese office worker's outfit, but with a cool otherworldly twist.

Regarding fashion, some people we saw wore fantasy-style clothing, while others sported pieces of modern Japanese fashion or carried contemporary handbags. Rather than the usual blending of East and West, it was a blend of East and Fantasy. There were even people whose outfits looked completely Japanese.

It was really interesting how medieval European clothing had shifted toward the imported Japanese fashion, especially because it was kind of the opposite in actual Japan with Western attire in recent decades. Feels like I should change into something that fits in more with this world, too.

I started to feel uncomfortable in the high school button-up and slacks I'd been wearing this whole time. However, I could worry about my clothes later.

"Hmm. I think my hair is finally dry from that slime, so I'm ready to find our case. Let's go," Tsukasa said.

Our destination wasn't much farther, so the three of us continued west.

I looked up at the sign that read NOW ENTERING LITTLE GINZA as we stepped onto the main street.

"This place does resemble Ginza kind of. Except...," I trailed off.

Tsukasa nodded. "Yeah...a few things are different..."

The urban planning was clearly meant to accommodate various species.

I saw a clock tower that resembled the famous one in Ginza. In it, there was a department store with an extraordinarily large first floor. Giant hybrid couples came and went through the entrance, bowing their heads as they entered. There was another, tinier door to the side, which opened when a tour group of small-bodied people approached. Maybe the multiple entrances ensured no one got stepped on by accident.

A few other features caught my eye, too. Benches in the shapes of trees lined one area, and bird people sat on them. Others with wings flew into cafés from balconies. A nearby sign warned NO LITTERING. NO PUBLIC DEFECATION. FINES. On its pole was a sticker that read PLEASE SHARPEN YOUR CLAWS AT HOME. Everywhere I looked, I saw inventive designs.

"How does this town look to a real Japanese person?" Shiro inquired.

"It's very lively... All the different kinds of people makes it a bit chaotic. But I like it," I answered. Around the castle, everything except the palace itself looked very Japanese. Akihabara had been bustling, just like the real thing, but was also a tourist pilgrimage spot in its own right. The Meadow of Beginnings offered a uniquely primitive sort of atmosphere. And Little Ginza had that upand-coming town energy swirling with the life that came from its diversity.

Because there was no copy-pasted structures here, the buildings had all been

designed with accessibility in mind in the spirit of coexistence.

"So many different people, all in the same place... I have to imagine one or two strange incidents pop up," Tsukasa said.

"Speaking of which, if we do find a case to judge, what exactly are we supposed to do?" I asked.

Shiro was quick to answer. "The Shard of Judgment has the ability to facilitate a trial at any location."

"I thought we'd have to bring them back to the courthouse," I replied.

As we talked this over...

"Check, check, one two threeee..."

...the princess's voice came through speakers on the street.

"Perfect. Hello, everyone, thank you for waiting! It's time for the morning compliance broadcast! I've got an important announcement today, so this is a live broadcast!"

The speakers buzzed as a giant monitor on the wall of one building lit up with the image of the princess. She wore her usual pink maid outfit, white gloves, and tiara.

"I'm proud to announce that yesterday our judge summoning was successful!"

Gathered crowds murmured with opinions on this announcement. More and more people stopped walking to watch the princess.

"Our new judge is a real Japanese person! And! What's! More ☆! She's a citizen of Chiyodaku, Japan! At last, our kingdom has the proper judicial control that you've all been waiting for. Going forward, our laws and rules will work properly and we'll start doing a lot better protecting everyone's rights and all that stuff!"

It sounded like she was acknowledging the kingdom hadn't done a great job with judiciary matters in the past. Reactions to Ecstasia's news seemed favorable.

"Finally, some order to this chaos..."

"I wonder if I'll be able to sell my smutty fan comic now..."

"Maybe his parents will finally approve of our marriage..."

"Will Miss Judge do something about all this...?"

"Currently, the Shard of Judgment resides with Miss Judge and her assistant, Mr. Akuto. They should be around somewhere, accompanied by my head maid, Shiro, so if anyone wants to give a trial a shot, go ahead and ask them!"

Ecstasia made a heart shape with her hands.

"The Royal Cabinet's Japanization Plan will now enter its full-scale phase! In commemoration of this occasion, I hereby declare this year to be named the first year of the Chiyoda Era! Let's all work hard to create a friendly and fun kingdom!"

She raised her arms in a Y shape and made two peace signs with her hands.

"Everyone, Chiyoda coooool!"

The people on the street responded in kind. """Chiyoda coooool!"""

Bzzzt. The broadcast ended.

"Her enthusiasm never runs out." Being introduced over a broadcast left me feeling a little embarrassed.

"Now we really can't let them down," Tsukasa responded, diligent as ever.

"Which way would you like to go?" Shiro asked.

"Let's walk that way." My sister pointed down the main street, and we started in that direction.

While people had begun to notice that we were the Japanese people mentioned in the broadcast, no one went out of their way to bring us a case. While I wondered what we should do, Tsukasa spoke up.

"Hey, look how crowded that store is."

Just like she said, a shop was flooded with people.

"That's the Slime Store, the most popular pet shop in the kingdom," Shiro

explained.

Everyone departing the place had a pet slime with them. One carried a red slime in the palm of their hand, while another had a green slime riding on their shoulder. All their slimes were adorably small.

"Hmm... Should we take a look inside?" I suggested.

"Please, you two go ahead." Shiro's dog ears flattened as she lowered her head. "I can't go inside."

I was about to ask her why but noticed a sign in the storefront window.

NO DOGS ALLOWED

Pointing to it, I asked, "What's with that?"

"The owner of the Slime Store dislikes dog hybrids. He has a rule that we are not permitted inside."

"He can't just make up such a discriminatory rule," Tsukasa stated.

Shiro looked up slightly. "Really?"

"If this is a for-profit commercial store, the owner retains autonomy to choose freely whom to serve as customers—and to manage the store's facilities by controlling who enters his business. However, he can't violate the basic freedoms and equality of individuals however he likes. It's unjust to take away your right to enter the store simply because he's prejudiced against your cute little ears and tail. This sign is in violation of constitutional article fourteen, and the UN's International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination."

All of a sudden, Tsukasa was in full-blown judge mode, rattling off legal talk in the middle of the street.

Some other dog hybrids standing outside the store stopped to listen.

"Shiro, you like slimes, right? You want to go into the store, don't you?" Tsukasa pressed.

"Ah..." The head maid hesitated but silently nodded.

"Then, let's go."

"Wait, ah..."

My sister took Shiro by the hand and led her into the Slime Store.

A few dog hybrid kids who'd been watching followed after, one saying "Wait for me!"

I've got a feeling something's about to happen...

Realizing that this was going to be an ordeal, I looked up at the sign's twinkling, colorful sign and entered the building.



We were now inside the Slime Store. It's large, fancy interior resembled a hotel lobby.

Decorative slime-style signs hung from the ceiling and flashed with rainbow LED lights.

The wall of the store that faced the street was completely glass, giving the store a bright, poppy atmosphere.

Slimes of all different sizes were lined up on the tables.

"Aw, so cute!"

"Mommy, I want a pink one!"

"I'm sorry, that color is out of stock..."

"Whoa, the purple one costs a hundred thousand yen?"

"Now, regarding slime care..."

"We've got a new arrival! Today we unveil our new champagne-gold slime!"

It was quite an energetic place.

Small slimes of all colors were lined up on display—red, green, yellow, orange, pink, purple—and customers bustled around them. Store staff in shirts with the

shop's logo on the upper left side of the chest tended to prospective buyers. The business seemed very appearance-conscious because there were no chairs, only balance balls. In the back of the showroom, there was a stage, where someone was handing out pamphlets and giving lessons on basic slime care while a video played.

"Wow... Slimes really are popular," I said.

"They're pretty cute. They seem smart, too," Tsukasa mused.

Behind us, a father and daughter who looked like orcs had just finished a purchase.

"Make sure you take good care of it."

"I will! I'm gonna teach it water gun magic!"

Looking over to Shiro, I remarked, "She looks pretty glad to finally be inside." The head maid had picked up a small red slime and was petting it with a delicate finger. She beamed at the little thing, quite taken with it.

"Eek... Oh, no, I—I must focus on my work!"

Shiro looked torn yet didn't stop petting the slime.

She looks really cute...

The usually stern-faced white-haired maid fawning over the tiny red slime was too sweet.

"Hey, Tsukasa, does this count as part of our work?" I asked.

"Heh-heh. Well... To judge something properly, one must first investigate the scene in its natural state. Physically inspecting these slimes is an important step for the job." My sister must have sensed that I'd wanted her to give the okay and did just that.

"Master, Miss Judge, thank you..."

I was glad Shiro was happy, but she really didn't need to act so formal with us.

"You really love slimes, huh?" I said.

"I—I only care for Princess Ecstasia... All other feelings are irrelevant."

"If you say so."

Does she always shut out feelings? She's been working her whole life as an attendant, right?

That left me worried about how to interact with her.

"Huh? What's this smell...? Snff-snff..."



Having noticed something, Shiro brought her nose in close to the small red slime and started sniffing it.

The Ping-Pong-ball-size slime jiggled at her as if trying to tell her something. "Slurp, slorp!"

"Is something wrong?" I inquired.

Shiro was focused on the slime. "This is..." But before she could finish, someone interrupted her.

One of the dog hybrid girls who'd followed us into the store was causing a slight commotion. "There's a weird smell coming from this slime!"

One of the store employees went over and tried to silence her. "Please, keep quiet."

The store suddenly grew noisy. Then...

"What are DOGS doing in my store?!"

...an ominous shout cut through the chatter.

It's coming from up there.

Looking up, I saw a glass elevator descending from a higher floor with a whirring sound. A man who looked to be in the prime of his life stepped out.

All employees and customers grew noticeably excited.

"It's the owner!"

"Slivan Artiste..."

"The founder of the Slime Store..."

"They say he's an artistic genius!"

Slivan wore a colorful, rainbow patchwork turtleneck and stylishly stained blue jeans.

"So you've trespassed again...even after I prohibited your kind from entering?! You dogs are always sneaking in and looking for problems to soil my reputation!"

The slim man stood a little taller than me. Judging from the high-strung

expression behind his large glasses, I understood he was extremely agitated and frustrated.

The dog-eared girl who'd shouted earlier replied, "But this green one really smells funny, and—"

"Hmph! Clearly there's something wrong with your nose! I'm sick of these baseless claims from you dogs! Are you prepared to compensate me for damages if your lies hurt my business? Put down the slime and get out of my store. I don't care if you're a kid. I'll sue you!"

Slivan absolutely refused to listen to the girl at all.

"I heard all that," came a familiar voice from the entrance. "Anyone who obstructs the business of another by spreading false rumors shall be punished by imprisonment for no more than three years or pay a fine of no more than five hundred thousand yen. Penal Code, Article Two Hundred and Thirty-Three, Obstruction of Business..."

She wiggled her long ears as she walked in, reading aloud from a copy of the Six Codes. It was Prosecutor Ileana Saitou.

"Finally...I've found a crime after my long search!"

The half-elf, who we hadn't seen in about a day, looked disheveled. She must have been running around all over the place.

"You there. You're a prosecutor, right? Deal with these criminals and protect my store!" Slivan demanded.

"It appears that this indeed constitutes the structural elements of a crime as described in the penal code... I don't know about prosecuting a child, though..." Ileana struggled to make a decision.

"The child is telling the truth," Shiro cut in. "There is definitely a strange odor."

"The Royal Watchdog..."

The owner quailed momentarily. Then he noticed that Tsukasa and I were present, too.

"My, what's this? It's an honor to meet you. I saw the broadcast earlier.

You're a true judge, correct? And you're the assistant supporting her. I am the man who brought about the so-called Slime Boom, the founder of the Slime Store, Slivan Artiste. How would you each like your very own slime? Color slimes make wonderfully soothing pets, you know." He bowed to us while gesturing to the creatures on the table.

"N-no, thanks...," I refused. There was something shady about him.

"Oh, beg your pardon. Well, I couldn't help but notice you're traveling with the Royal Watchdog. There isn't any rule against making her my opponent in a court case in place of that child, is there?"

His question was directed at Tsukasa, but she walked behind me and whispered, "Tell him that's no problem."

"Er, um, no problem!" I parroted.

"Hmph... Then, to protect my store, I'd like to sue the Royal Watchdog! Let this case be overseen by the Judgment Spell!"

"Tell him we accept," Tsukasa whispered again from behind me.

I looked over one shoulder at her. "Wait. Why can't you tell him yourself?"

"According to the Code of Civil Procedure, Article One Hundred and Thirty-Three, an institution of action must be filed to the court. But in practice, the judge doesn't meet or speak to the petitioner at this point of the procedure. The judge's decision must be neutral and fair. Thus, whether it's a submission of a complaint or a claim, another court official must receive it directly.

This reminded me of the times I visited the courthouse back in Japan.

On one occasion, Tsukasa had forgotten her lunch, so I went to give it to her. Once in the courthouse, I realized there was nothing inside that directed me to where the judges were. Instead, I had to find a room in the Civil Affairs division to speak with some court staff member instead.

"Oh, right," I said. "It's to protect you from bribes and threats, right?"

"That's part of it, but it's more than that. In civil trials, the side who initiated the case comes to the courtroom first. If the judge is already there to meet them, the initiating side will get to talk to the judge before the opposition, possibly even multiple times. How would you feel if a public trial was held after one party had already met with and spoken to the judge? A defendant would feel like the plaintiff was already on good terms with the judge. Their faith in the honesty of the trial would crumble."

The princess had said that the Judgment Spell grants its powers to someone with judicial conviction who can carry out righteous judgment and gain trust.

Given Tsukasa's passion for being a judge, she strived to always be worthy of that trust. There was nobody better suited for the job.

"I see...," I said. "Then, what about Shiro?"

"That's right. You won't be giving any unfair special consideration to her just because she's your maid, will you?" Slivan cut in as if to warn us.

"Impossible," Tsukasa declared. "As the Chiyodaku Kingdom's first real trial, the case will be held in a public and unclouded courtroom." She strode forward as she continued. "The judge won't be involved in any of the procedures prior to the trial itself, such as assembling the case, review, or service of summons. The court assistant will handle that. I'll make sure the princess announces as much to the kingdom."

Suddenly, I felt very alone and in the line of fire.

Hold on a second, how do you expect me to do all that?! Just because my sister is a judge doesn't mean I have any idea how to prepare for a trial.

Shiro was supposed to tell me more details about the Judgment Spell before our first case, but it was already too late!

"Assembling, review, and service...," I repeated back the few key words I'd managed to catch.

As I did—vwoom—a "petition reception window" appeared before me.

This must have been the work of the Shard of Judgment. I could feel it thrumming in my pocket.

"Understood. I'll handle the petition." That was all I could think to say.

I hid my uncertainty behind a poker face perfected from so many versus games played over the years.

I could tell all the people in the crowd were watching my movements carefully.

If I faltered or showed any weakness, we'd definitely lose the people's trust.

I looked at the game-style window floating in the air before me.

It listed some categories and headings.

From one perspective, it was similar to the opening dialogue choices of a fantasy video game.

It's not like anyone actually reads the manual before playing a video game nowadays anyway.

"As a representative of the court, I will now hear your claim."

Okay, let's show them how it's done...

Article V Select YES to Use the Judgment Spell at Any Location

	Please select the appropriate case type from the list.
	Criminal.
	Civil.
	Family Affairs.
	Juvenile.
	Administrative.
	The window floating in front of me looked like a multiple-choice quiz.
	Trials came in a few different types.
ti	A criminal trial is one that starts with an indictment from the prosecutor. In his case, however, a civilian is suing another civilian, so it should be a civil case.
	"Civil," I said to the window. It lit up like I had chosen the right answer.

Th-that sounds terrifying... Loss of power, huh? Sounds like errors carry quite the risk...

the smallest mistake, you may lose your power to exist as a human."

"Master, are you all right?" Shiro seemed relieved. "Take care. If you make

"Hey, Watchdog. I'm the one suing you here. I'd appreciate it if you didn't chat up the court assistant. You could be swaying him to your argument."

"...Understood." Shiro hung her head.

The Slime Store owner was harsh but right.

Gotta keep this moving.

"Okay, so this is a civil case. What's next...?" I checked the new display on the window.

Ordinary suit.

Small claims.

Conciliation.

Demand for payment.

These were my new options.

I guess it's an ordinary suit...

I wasn't sure, but fortunately, I noticed Tsukasa was moving strangely behind the semitransparent window.

At some point, she'd moved from behind me and was silently opening and closing her mouth.

When we were younger, we tested how far away we could read each other's lips one time. I'd been able to read Tsukasa's from dozens of yards. She was mouthing, "Ask what request."

"What is your request with regard to this case?" I said.

"Let's see..." Slivan tapped his cheek. "Can I request that the dogs never set foot in my store again?"

He answered the question with another question.

Crap... How should I proceed?

The owner had spoken softly enough that Tsukasa didn't hear him, and I couldn't mouth anything to her with him standing right in front of me. On top of that, when we used to do this as kids, she always thought I said, "I love my sister!" Remembering that made me hesitant to try.

Then I remembered the words *Spell Unlocked: Telepathy* that had flashed through my head earlier.

Maybe if I concentrate...like I saw Shiro doing...

I imagined focusing my consciousness into my forehead—and directed it

toward Tsukasa with all my might...

<<Tsukasa!>> I sent my thought out to her.

<<Huh? Akky? Is this coming directly into my brain?>> <<Awesome, the Telepathy Spell worked!>> It felt like our brains were two-way radios that had been tuned to the same channel.

<<This feels similar to Shiro's voice when I was inside the slime... Since when can you do something like this?>> I figured this was part of my world transfer bonus. I'd have to explain that to her later, though.

<<The owner just asked me if he can request that dog hybrids never come into his store again.>> <<I see. Then you need to do exactly what I am about to tell you.>> There was a pause. I could sense her organizing her thoughts.

<<First, the courthouse is not a legal counseling service. Make it clear that we must be neutral and fair. Second, he needs to decide by himself what he is requesting. Third, don't affirm anything he says. Nothing he claims is necessarily true. Sympathy and compassion are not allowed, either. Once all the formalities are taken care of, you can pass it off to me. Okay?>> <<Got it...>> I was pretty sure I understood what I needed to do now.

"Assistant, shouldn't you be able to answer my question with a simple yes or no?" Slivan was getting impatient.

"Sir, this isn't a legal counseling service, and the court must remain neutral and fair. I am unable to tell you what you can or cannot request." That seemed about right.

"Hmph. Fine, then. I've already studied up on the law myself, thinking I might run into this kind of trouble someday. You're not a judge, so you probably don't know this, but Article Seven Hundred and Nine of the Civil Code states that I'm allowed to ask for compensation for damages from unlawful acts. And coming into my store and throwing around weird criticisms about my products is an obvious obstruction of my business, which is against the law. That makes this a civil case."

"Is that so?" I responded indifferently, remembering not to affirm anything.

"You don't need to be a lawyer to know this kind of stuff! I'm bound to win

this one! I won't push my luck by aiming for something I might not get, I'll just request payment for the damages. How about...one million yen? You won't be able to pay all that here and now, so you'll have to get branded with the Words of Judgment! After this, none of you mutts will dare come to my store again!" Slivan spoke loud enough for everyone around to hear.

Maybe he was trying to get the upper hand by giving the impression that he was right about all this.

Tsukasa told me once that civil cases don't always require a lawyer.

It sounded like the plaintiff was going to represent his case himself, without delegating to a lawyer. His confident words were immediately reflected in the window of the Judgment Spell.

Complaint, Plaintiff: Slivan Artiste

Defendant: Shiro Katou

Demands: The defendant pays the plaintiff one million yen.

Summary of dispute: The defendant voiced faults with the plaintiff's products (slimes) while in the store.

The complaint was organized into the window's display. It seemed to be using voice input.

"Assistant, does that sound all right?"

"What do you mean by 'all right'? It's not my place to approve."

<<That's the way! Confirm his intention to proceed, charge ten thousand yen for the fee, and assemble the case as Summary Court, Civil Case, Ordinary Suit. When it's done, show me the complaint. Until then I'll be over here working on my investigation.>> Tsukasa was in the corner of the showroom, where she had found a copy of the owner's autobiography and was busy reading it.

We had a limited amount of time until the trial began, so it was prudent to understand this place and the people involved as best as possible.

I'll do my thing, she'll do her thing, and we'll get this done.

"If this complaint is acceptable to you, I will receive your submission. The fee will be ten thousand yen," I said.

"Oh, right, trials cost money. Well, that's fine. Ten thousand is chump change to me."

Slivan took a money clip from his wallet and pulled out a ten-thousand-yen note. The bill with Fukuzawa Yukichi drawn on it disappeared into the window.

I selected *Ordinary Suit* from the list of trial types.

Chiyoda Era, Year 1 (Summary Court, Civil Case, Ordinary Suit) No. 1

The window refreshed to display the details of the trial.

I think that covers everything.

I held my hand to the window and brought it over to Tsukasa.

Swoosh.

The window silently moved in front of my sister, who was busy with some documents.

<< Let's call this trial Color Slime Case, okay? Next, create a certified copy for the defendant, serve the summons, then open the court session. >> Tsukasa sent the window back to me when I received her telepathic message. In the complaint section the case's name had changed to the *Color Slime Case*.

I tried telling the window to create a copy, and two copies of the complaint appeared at my fingertips. I handed one over to Shiro.

"Received..."

Once I'd finished the petition reception process...

...huge words appeared in the air.

Open the court session? YES / NO

Looks like this is where the real game begins.

I steadied my breathing. I felt my hesitation and anxiety over my lack of knowledge on court trials...magical court trials, to boot.

Shiro, the defendant, was about to be judged.

Something was definitely off about what I'd seen and heard in the Slime Store.

I thought about my sister's lack of knowledge on fantasy worlds, and doubts began piling up.

Still, we couldn't back down. We'd been summoned here to do this.

I can leave the legal stuff to Tsukasa. I'll handle the rest.

There was no other choice.

I tapped YES.

F .

The entire room began to rumble.

The Slime Store shook, and a low noise filled the place.

The floor of the showroom began to liquefy, becoming like the surface of a lake.

"What is thi-eep?!"

"Tsukasa!"

I ran to her.

Her legs had slipped, and her fifteen-year-old body fell over. I tried to shield her from the impact of collapsing by grabbing her. Having lived my whole life in a country prone to earthquakes, I reflexively knew I needed to protect her head from falling objects. Her safety was more important than mine.

However, I quickly realized these tremors were different from an earthquake, and nothing was falling over. Still stooped over to protect my sister, I realized the warm Shard of Judgment in my pocket was bouncing with energy and rising into the air.

The fragment gave off a golden light as a large set of balance scales appeared.

So this is how the Shard of Judgment commences a trial...

People who'd been watching things play out began to buzz around us.

"It's the Judgment Spell!"

"The trial is starting!"

"We should summon Princess Ecstasia."

No one was afraid, which suggested we weren't in any danger.

Looking carefully at the liquefied floor below my feet, I noticed that our surroundings hadn't actually melted but were actually just covered in very small, wriggling, pixel-like blocks. The rainbow slime signs hanging from the ceiling and the tables also began to vibrate and were automatically removed from the area.

A large open space was forming before my eyes, like the parting of the Red Sea.

Where's the window where I can see the current status...?

I brought my hand around and saw that the window I had just tapped now displayed the words *Courtroom Auto-Generation Mode*, and there was a minimap showing the room's seat layout.

Boing, boing, boing.

"Akky, look... Balance balls are coming at us..."

There was a black one and gray one, two that store staffers had been using earlier.

"There are balls for the owner and Shiro, too..."

Tsukasa and I stood at the back of the showroom.

From our position, the owner sat on a colorful balance ball to the right. Shiro was on a white one to our left.

I checked the seating chart on the mini-map.

It showed a black judge's seat, a gray clerk's seat, a rainbow plaintiff's seat, and a white defendant's seat.

Each seat was color coded and the setup looked just like...

"Tsukasa, it generated a courtroom in the store," I said.

New owners: Please face the Scales of Judgment and take the oath.

These words had appeared under the gigantic scales. They seemed directed at Tsukasa and me.

"Hmm... Okay. If this is part of the spell, then that's fine." Tsukasa stood. "I've always wanted to try holding a trial outside of the courthouse!" She smiled fearlessly.

"Bold as always." I tried my best to match her passionate stance. "Okay. Let's do this."

We read the lines verbatim as we stood in the store that had been turned into a courtroom.

""I do solemnly swear to administer righteous justice, based on truth and conscience, and to see through lies and falsehoods, for the sake of the kingdom.""

The floating scales gleamed. Some kind of powder resembling gold dust floated down onto us, the only Japanese people in the room.

It formed a shape as if to envelop us.

The powder became a set of robes with the design of the imperial mirror, *Yata no Kagami*, the symbol of judgment, on them.

Our first trial in this fantasy world was about to begin.



Article VI Civil Trial: The Color Slime Case

"To put it broadly, a trial is an act of legal decision by a judicial body such as a court or judge for the purpose of resolving an actual dispute."

The Slime Store had been rebuilt into a courtroom by the Judgment Spell.

"The court assistant and I were summoned to the Chiyodaku Kingdom by Princess Ecstasia less than one day ago. However, we have confirmed through observation of the citizens' daily lives that this kingdom's civilization has advanced to a level comparable to that of Japan. Hence, we will carry out our trial in the usual way to the best of our abilities.

Tsukasa was now dressed in a gown-style judges' robe.

She didn't sit on the black balance ball, preferring to stand with an intimidating posture in front of it with her arms crossed under her large chest.

"Miss Judge! I'm so excited to see your first trial!"

The high-pitched cheer had come from the kingdom's own Princess Ecstasia.

After hearing about the trial starting, she had come to watch front and center.

The gallery had been formed by rebuilding the area near the showroom's entrance into tiered rows. There were no chairs. It was more like stadium seating. Next to the princess sat Ileana Saitou, who was eagerly taking notes. The rest of the gallery was occupied by other citizens.

"My words are those of the court, and the court's decision brought before these scales holds the power of final judgment over this land."

The large scales floated above our heads, and surrounding them were the words *Civil Trial*. *Color Slime Case*. *Court in Session*.

The text was large enough for a passerby to read.

No turning back now... Not much I can do but keep an eye on Tsukasa and watch how things progress.

I decided to stay close to her. The entire courtroom was visible from the judge's point of view. Like Tsukasa, I was also wearing a robe that the Scales of Judgment had generated.

My robe's design was, in general, the same as Tsukasa's, with a badge in the shape of the imperial mirror on the back, and the Japanese character for *judgment* written in its middle.

Just before the trial started, Tsukasa had said to me, "If you notice anything, whisper to me telepathically."

I quietly took my seat on the gray balance ball while trying to keep from being obvious about what I was doing.

"Okay. The present case is a civil trial based on a lawsuit, and the purpose is to resolve a dispute between two private parties. I will go beyond detailed legal theory and apply the law in a way that is appropriate for this world. In principle, the rules of Japanese private law will be enforced, including whether the claims by the plaintiff are upheld. Furthermore, in terms of the courthouse..."

Tsukasa's solemn monologue continued for a while. Although she looked like a fifteen-year-old girl, her posture exuded a strong conviction, like a goddess of war.

"In addition to the adjudication, I would like to exact the procedures up to the civil execution as part of enforcing our rights and obligation."

"So if I win, you'll use the Power of Words on the Royal Watchdog? Ha-ha! Excellent!" the Slime Store owner Slivan remarked.

The plaintiff's seat was on our right. He was resting on a rainbow-colored balance ball.

From the way he spoke, it sounded like he'd seen one of the Judgment Spell's special powers before—and counted on seeing it again. Tsukasa and I didn't know the details of what he was referring to, so we'd have to figure it out as we

went along.

"Plaintiff, we'll begin from your allegation. Shall we proceed with the accusation as it is recorded in the complaint?"

"Yeah! That's right, Miss Judge. You've read the details already, right?"

Demands: The defendant pays the plaintiff one million yen.

Summary of dispute: The defendant voiced faults with the plaintiff's products (slimes) while in the store.

The case particulars were displayed under the scales.

"In a civil trial, in order for the demands to be accepted, it must be argued and proven that each type of claim satisfies the requirements set forth in the law. This is called the factual grounds for petition," Tsukasa explained.

This was getting a little complicated. Some of the people in the gallery started to look confused.

"However, it would be difficult to force Japanese law theory on the people of this kingdom. And it is impractical to find a reliable lawyer for every dispute. Hence, under the judge's control of court proceedings, and by the rights afforded to me by this position, I will organize the trial in a way that is easy to understand, and any points that are unclear will be clarified by exercising the judge's right of clarification. Plaintiff, do you accept that the grounds of your claim fall under Civil Code, Article Seven Hundred and Nine?"

"Y-yeah! That's right! I read somewhere that article means I can claim damages!"

"The article states that 'a person who has intentionally or negligently infringed the rights or legally protected interests of another person is liable to compensate for damages resulting in consequence.' Organizing the factual grounds for petition with this basis are as follows: "One. Existence of the plaintiff's rights or legally protected interests.

"Two. The defendant's acts that infringed upon item one.

"Three. The defendant's intention or negligence regarding acts described in item two.

"Four. Resulting damages and cost.

"Five. The causal relationship between the acts of line two and the damages of item four."

The five items Judge Tsukasa outlined were displayed at once as lines of black text under the Scales of Judgment.

"If we adjust these by aligning with all facts of this case..."

As she spoke, the headings under the scales were rewritten.

- 1. The plaintiff runs a business of selling colorful slimes at the Slime Store.
- 2. The defendant stated that a strange odor was coming from one of the colorful slimes.
 - 3. The defendant intentionally made the previously mentioned statement.
- 4. The Slime Store's business was interrupted, which resulted in corresponding damages.
- 5. The Slime Store's business was interrupted as a result of the defendant's statement.

"...this is the result. Calculation of the amount of damages can be conducted later, but...if these five points are cleared as factually correct, the plaintiff's claim will be acknowledged."

"Oh, w-wow..." Sliven looked on eagerly, while Shiro remained silent.

A few people in the gallery expressed their general understanding.

"I think I've got it!"

"Oh, so it's like a game."

"If they clear those five conditions, the owner wins."

"Next, I'd like to hear the defendant's plea regarding these five points," Tsukasa stated.

"P...plea?" Shiro sounded confused.

My sister was quick to explain. "First, you must voice your admissions and denials. You have three options, to affirm, deny, or claim a lack of information.

Furthermore, even if you affirm something, you may raise an affirmative defense if you have other facts to assert. Please voice them if so. What are your answers?"

After taking a moment, Shiro answered, "...For all points...I can do nothing but affirm..." Shiro spoke with a downcast expression. As the Scales received her response, every item lit up in gold.

They became a set of spheres that moved to rest on the plaintiff's side of the Scales of Judgment. "Ha! Ha-ha-ha! All clear! Wow, trials are so simple! I knew you'd be on my side, Miss Judge! Now my store will finally be safe! Thank you, judgment! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

The scale's pans clinked as they swung toward the plaintiff's side.

Is Shiro going to lose this easily?

She'd been thrust into the position of defendant to take someone else's place.

In the gallery, the dog-eared girl who'd started the fuss over the slimes' smell hung her head dejectedly.

I didn't think that Shiro, an upstanding head maid, would lie to cover for the girl.

<<Shiro. I want you to say what's really on your mind.>> Without thinking, I sent her a message with the Telepathy Spell.

There was no response.

However, the maid with white hair and dog ears raised her head.

"There really was a strange odor! And I hear a cry of pain from this little one!"

Her flat expression dissolved, replaced by one of heartfelt emotion as she made her case.

"Affirmative defense, acknowledged," Tsukasa declared.

The scales' movement suddenly stopped.

Slivan blinked. "Huh? What did you say?"

"The affirmative defense argues that the defendant's actions were not in

contradiction to the law. The court will examine the evidence regarding point two—the defendant's infringing acts—to confirm the truth of the statement regarding the slime's strange odor."

The ball for point number two, which sat on the plaintiff's side, turned black and returned to floating below the scales.

"We will take the red slime as evidence exhibit one. Assistant, please receive the submission of evidence."

"Okay." I walked over to Shiro.

The Judgment Spell, reacting to the situation, had created a window that read *Defendant's Evidence*. I took the red slime that Shiro had in her hand this whole time and put it into the window.

"Slurp, slorp."

The slime floated in the display. It was a strange sight, but it seemed like there was no problem with it.

"Hey! What's going on here?! Why are you suddenly on that dog's side?!" Slivan demanded.

Tsukasa didn't falter, though. "It should come as no surprise that one side's allegation begets a counter argument. The court is only clarifying a point in question for the sake of a fair trial. I explained this at the beginning of the trial. Do you wish to rescind your suit, plaintiff?"

"I won't accept defeat! You're not allowed to touch my products!" Slivan got up from his balance ball and tried to stop me.

"The trial must be based on the truth. The red slime is the current point of dispute," Tsukasa said.

"And I'm telling you her criticism that my slime smells weird is baseless! There must be something wrong with the dog's nose!"

"If what you say is correct, then the examination will make that clear. Plaintiff, what's your rush? You're making yourself look suspicious."

"U-uh... Um..."

A hush came over the courtroom. Then...

"The Rust of Doubt! It's coming for me! S-stay away!"

Dozens of ominous, black-red particles appeared around the frantic plaintiff.

The dust slowly drifted toward Slivan from the gallery like a pack of fireflies.

"Hmph, fine! Do whatever you want! It's pointless anyway!" The man dejectedly sat back down on his rainbow-colored balance ball.

So the Rust of Doubt is created when the gallery becomes suspicious of something or someone.

The people in the gallery cast skeptical stares at the plaintiff.

I'd heard that the Shard of Judgment possessed advanced calculation abilities. This must have been part of that.

I wasn't sure what happened when the rust stuck to someone, but I could tell it was dangerous.

"Assistant, please proceed with the examination of evidence," Tsukasa ordered, unperturbed. "Bring the red slime here."

"Understood." I did as she said and brought the red slime in the evidence window to her.

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"…"
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"..."

"...Slup."

I couldn't tell if anything was off about it.

There was no odd smell to me, and when I tried touching it, the creature jiggled like you'd expect.

"Defendant. Please describe the strange odor coming from the red slime," Judge Tsukasa said.

"Let's see... How do I explain it...?" The defendant was perplexed by the request.

"Please answer truthfully, as you experienced it."

"Okay, then..."

All eyes were on Shiro.

"It smells of rainbowberry peels, treant resin, and undine solvent."

The confusion on Tsukasa's face was evident immediately. "...?? Rainbow? Tree ant? Un...di...?"

Not good. This was what I'd been afraid of. They're all fantasy-world items.

Having never heard the words before, Tsukasa hadn't been able to comprehend Shiro's answer.

"I'm sorry. I suppose you don't know what those are," Shiro apologized.

Of course not. What was that supposed to be, some kind of riddle?

I listened for the gallery's reaction.

"Miss Judge is frozen in place..."

"She doesn't know what those are?"

"We used those in art class."

"I guess it's impossible for her to judge this world after all..."

We're just going to have to take a guess. Think. There has to be some connection between what we already know and those key words...

<<...ky, A-...kky...>> I felt Tsukasa weakly attempting to speak with me telepathically.

<<Tsukasa!>> I connected the channel between us again.

<<Oh, good! So I have no idea what she's talking about... But I can't have them thinking I'm incompetent...>> <<Don't worry. I have an idea! Ask if those things are magical paints.>> <<Okay! I'll give it a shot!>> The judge cleared her throat.

"Are those some kind of magical paint supplies?" she responded.

"Y-yes, that's right! They're similar to paints!"

"Hmm. I thought so. A judge's eyes cannot be deceived even by otherworldly things."

She puffed up her chest proudly.

The gallery nodded in approval.

"What excellent reasoning!"

"So she was just frozen in thought."

"This is the skill of a real judge!"

I was relieved to have somehow made it past that one.

"Damn... I didn't expect someone from another world to figure out that I had put paints into them."

"So the plaintiff acknowledges that he put paints into the slimes of this store."

"...Ha, ha-ha-ha! Don't be ridiculous!" Slivan adopted a big smile. "But what's wrong with injecting paint into slimes anyway?! I already looked into the laws. There's nothing that says I'm not allowed to inject paint into slimes!"

His shouts echoed throughout the courtroom as he tried to justify himself.

"And you know what?! I'm contributing to Princess Ecstasia's goal of making the kingdom a place where we all get along and have fun! People love my slimes! It's fun for everyone! They're not just blue; they're all colors! It makes them magnificent artistic products! And since they're art, it's only natural to use paint, right?!"

I see...

The wild slimes living out in the meadows were all blue. Apparently, any other color was a result of dye.

"But do you think it's all right to hurt them in pursuit of that goal?" Shiro argued back resolutely. "To dye them, and to cause these cute little slimes pain, all for the sake of art..."

"You claim to hear cries of pain? You must be imagining things! All slimes ever say is *slurp*, *slorp*!" Slivan asserted.

The argument was getting intense.

"I—I also think the slimes are in pain!" the dog-eared girl from the store said.

"..." The judge silently looked at the girl. With a small nod, she seemed to be allowing her to speak.

"Um, my friend told me that blue slimes grow really big, but these other ones don't grow big at all! And that they always act tired no matter how much you feed them!"

"Shut up, you little brat! I'll sue you, too!"

Disorder was growing in the courtroom. However, the truth was also becoming clear.

The girl's statements were consistent with what we knew so far. The only large slimes I'd seen were blue.

"So the slimes have been dyed and had their growth stunted..."

Now we had plenty of facts to go off. I could sense that Judge Tsukasa was getting ready to make her legal decision.

"In Showa Era Japan, 'color chicks' were sold at temple festivals and such," she began. This topic seemed unrelated, but I trusted my sister knew what she was doing.

A stir ran through the spectators.

"Sh-Showa!"

"Japan's legendary era!"

"When even Chiyodaku was nothing but burned-out ruins..."

"An era of miraculous reconstruction!"

I didn't know what kind of education the princess had been pushing, but mentioning the Showa Era seemed to be pretty effective.

"Color chicks, like the name suggests, were chicks dyed other shades. Chicks are essentially young, domesticated birds. Females lay eggs, but since males don't, they were quickly judged unnecessary. Then someone had the idea to stain them different colors so children would want to buy them."

Slivan grinned. "Ha! Ha-ha-ha! If they did it in Japan, then there's surely no problem with my color sli—"

"However!" Tsukasa interrupted. "Because of the stress the chicks suffered from being forcibly dyed, their life spans were shortened. Can you really say that inflicting harm on other living beings for selfish human desires is best for a kingdom where everyone gets along and has fun?"

"I don't think so!" the princess answered from the gallery.

"B-but," Slivan stammered. "There's no law against dyeing..."

"In the forty-eighth year of the Showa Era, which was 1973, the Act on Welfare and Management of Animals was put into effect. Its aim was to prevent animal abuse and to define the terms of animal welfare, which included the proper handling of animals and the maintenance of their health and safety. It strived to engender a spirit of responsibility among the people, to foster a respect for other life, fraternity, and peace, and to form a society in which people and animals coexisted in harmony. In light of the fact that animals are living beings, we must not kill, injure, or inflict cruelty on animals without due cause, and we must treat animals properly by taking into account their natural habits and by giving consideration to the symbiosis between humans and other creatures. Penalties have been established for any person who has harmed a protected animal such as a cat or dog in violation of this act."

"Buuut! My slimes aren't protected under tha—"

"In the slime care pamphlets distributed by the plaintiff, you claim to be a legally registered animal handler and that you are an expert on slimes' lives and habits. You'd exploit the law to make a profit, then refuse the responsibility of your actions? What kind of argument is that?"

"S-slimes are nothing but wild monsters that spawn in grassy fields!"

"Japanese dogs and cats were considered wild once. And so were humans! But now this kingdom even has seeing-eye slimes. Slimes coexist with the people—this is reality. That much is clear to anyone!"

"G-guh..."

The people in the gallery nodded as they listened to my sister's words. It looked like there wasn't a single person in the room who questioned her statements or disagreed with her.

"The court rules...that based on the intent of the law and societal reality... slimes are already recognized as protected animals!"

Judge Tsukasa's declaration shook the Slime Store as surely as a shock wave.

"You there, prosecutor. What do you think this means?" she asked.

"Y-yes, ma'am! Um...!" Ileana, seated in the gallery, hurriedly began flipping through her copy of the Six Codes. "According to the Animal Welfare Act, Article Forty-Four...store owner Slivan may be subject to imprisonment with hard labor for no more than two years—or a fine of no more than two million yen!"

"And in that case, is the crime of obstruction of business still applicable?"

"No! The defendant's acts would be considered a legitimate accusation of a crime...and the Slime Store's very act of operation covered under point number one would be considered illegal and lose its protection under the law!"

"You've studied well. That's correct."

"Th-thank you, Miss Judge!"

So that's what she was getting at.

The new reality of the case hit the people of the courtroom like ripples on the water.

"Wh-what is this...? I'm supposed to be the one suing her! This is ridiculous; it's just—stupid!" Cold stares from the gallery gathered on Slivan Artiste. "You all think I'm a criminal now?!"

Spectators traded hushed opinions.

"Your slime abuse has been exposed!" the princess said.

The rust that had been floating around the plaintiff suddenly moved toward the Scales of Judgment. It gathered around the plaintiff's side and covered his pan with its black-red color.

The five balls representing the factual grounds for petition vanished as if weathered away by the wind.

"M-Miss Judge! I was supposed to be winning four out of five of those! Just give me those four! You have to rule in my favor!" Slivan pleaded.

"All the claims must pass for you to win the lawsuit. There's no such thing as winning four out of five."

After the judge's response, the people who'd been watching the trial began offering their complaints about Slivan and his business.

"You didn't tell us these things were dyed!"

"I thought it was strange that there were colors other than blue."

"The poor slime looks like it's in pain..."

"Fix them!"

"I want my money back!"

"It seems you are accused of more than just slime abuse. Selling the slimes while concealing the reality of your dyeing practices could also be considered fraud," Tsukasa stated.

"That's right! Wow, this is quite the case!" Ileana was getting excited.

"...Ha, ha-ha-ha! Ridiculous! Fine, I deny that I ever dyed them!" the owner of the Slime Store sounded desperate. "Do you have any proof that I colored them?! You can't call someone a criminal without any evidence, now can you?!" There was a crazed glint in his eye.

"Indeed! It's not legally sound to call it a crime without evidence," Ileana said.

"That's what I thought! It's over; now get out of my store!"

Evidence, huh? We were missing a critical piece of information to nail him.

<<p><<Tsukasa. He's ready to make a run for it. What should we do?>> <<When I was looking around the shop earlier, I saw a place in the back that looked like a workshop.>> <<Want me to go check it out?>> <<Staffers made sure no one got in. I don't think you can.>> I wonder if there's any way to break through the guards.

Right now, the people's trust in the plaintiff was at rock bottom. There had to be someone I could convince to help me with the investigation.

That's when I spotted someone out of the corner of my eye...

A little girl?

From the edge of my vision, I saw a kid wearing a golden-brown parka bounce into the crowd and disappear.

That kid just came from the back. Looks like she was having a suspiciously good time...

A moment later...

"Boss! I brought it as fast as I could!"

...a staff member came hurrying over, wheeling a trundling cart.

"The new champagne-gold slime with gold leaf flakes!"

Magical syringe-like tools rested on top of the cart. They looked like they were for slimes. A limp-looking champagne-gold-colored slime rested next to them, along with some other equipment and paint.

"Wh-why would you bring that out here, you idiot?! The unveiling should've been canceled!"

"But you told me to bring everything out here a moment ago!"

"I've been in this courtroom the entire time! I said no such thing!"

The staff member looking baffled. Shiro walked over to stand next to him.

"How terrible... It was bad enough to add natural dyes to the slime, but now they're employing artificial materials... Having this sparkly gold leaf injected into it... I can tell this slime is in so much pain!"

There was no denying it. The creature's suffering was clear to all.

"D-dammit! Stupid, stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid stupid!!!"

The owner of the Slime Store, Slivan Artiste, started clawing at himself.

His glasses fell off and his colorful turtleneck began to fray.

"My reputation! Destroyed! Everyone ridiculed my colorful art...until I started tinting slimes! Until I started dressing and talking like this! And now, after everyone has finally acknowledged my brilliance!"

"Your reputation should be the least of your concerns right now. You hid the fact that you were dyeing slimes, deceived your customers, and harmed

protected animals. Why don't you think about atoning for those sins?" Tsukasa said.

"Why youuu... If not for this damned judge..."

His expression contorted with resentment, anger, and hatred. He swayed like a ghost, then brought his arm up to shout into the smartwatch on his wrist.

"HEY, BALLS! How do you like this, judge?" All the balance balls in the room reacted to his voice. "Crush her!!!"

A dozen balance balls—rainbow, black, white, gray, red, blue, green—moved to Slivan's order. Perhaps they had special mechanisms built into them. They bounced and sped toward us.

One of the rainbow-colored balance balls was headed straight for Tsukasa!

"I'd never let some lousy thing vandalize my courtroom!"

Tsukasa raised her right hand high above her head...

"Get out!"

...and smashed the balance ball with her "gavel."

That's Tsukasa for you. But...

"Bwa-ha-ha! No girl can destroy my work with her puny fist!"

The ball my sister whacked away bounded off the wall and sped for her again, even faster this time. It joined with the other spheres, coming at Tsukasa from every direction!

"Tsukasa, get down!"

"Akky!"

I had been searching frantically through the Judgment Spell's window for something to help ever since Slivan turned desperate. Unfortunately, I couldn't find any kind of defense ability.

I guess this is the only option.

The text displayed in the windows was held in place by a powerful force. Perhaps that would be enough.

"Please, protect her! Copy: Petition!"

Smack!

The balance balls collided with a window displaying a certified copy of the plaintiff's complaint that I'd created, sank into its letters, and stopped.

Pop! Pop! Po-pop! Pop-pop-pop!

The sharp edges of the text ripped holes in the balance balls, and they all began to tear open.

Multicolored shreds flew through the air.

"Eek!"

The owner, having started this whole rampage in an attempt to escape, let out a pathetic squeak and collapsed.

"Defendant, what do you request from this case?" Tsukasa asked Shiro while vibrant shreds fell like confetti.

"I don't care about money or anything like that. I just want him to cure the slimes..."

"The defendant's counterclaim is accepted."

Beneath the scales...

Counterclaim: The defendant of the counterclaim must cure all of the color slimes.

...a line of black appeared.

When the defendant sued back in response, it was called a counterclaim.

The plaintiff became both the original claim's plaintiff and the counterclaim's defendant, and the defendant became both the original claim's defendant and counterclaim's plaintiff.

"Y-you mean I've become...the defendant...?"

Judge Tsukasa slowly approached the store owner. "Counterclaim defendant, Slivan Artiste. I read your autobiography. As you claim to place great importance on customer satisfaction, you must have kept records of all the

people who purchased your color slimes."

"Yeah, what about it? It's all over for me. I'm a criminal now, thanks to you."

"You seem to be afraid that you're going to lose all you've built now that your crimes have been revealed. However, the court isn't attempting to take everything from you. There is room for forgiveness. You are the only one who can track down your color slimes and give them the necessary treatment. If you would stop despairing and simply accept the counterclaim's settlement... I believe the prosecutor will spare you an indictment."

Ileana needed a moment to recover from shock at the course of events but stood and answered once she did. "...Y-yes, that's right! As long as you cure the slimes, that is!"

"Ha-ha... So I'm to atone for my sins..."

Slivan took the champagne-gold slime that he'd wronged into the palm of his hand.

"I've failed as an artist," he mused. "The canvas of my soul...has been completely stained... Once people acknowledged my works, I just wanted more... I knew that slimes' lives were important, and I could tell that the injections hurt them... But I...I pushed thoughts of wrongdoing deep down... I thought if I could just keep dog hybrids, with their keen senses of smell, out of the store, then no one would ever know..."

He raised his head to gaze at a rainbow-colored sign. Then he returned his attention to Judge Tsukasa.

"Miss Judge... If you are offering me a chance at settlement despite all that...
Then I'll take it."

"I trust you won't forget the weight of those words."

A sound like a gong rang out as the Scales of Judgment above our heads began to move once again.

The particles of blackish-red rust had all turned bluish-white, and the golden pans detached as they emitted particles of the same color. Ignoring all laws of physics, the pans overlapped with each other in the center of the scales. Then they disappeared, leaving nothing behind but a harmonious, beautiful glimmer of gold.

A single line of black text remained floating in the sky.

I will cure all of the color slimes.

Swoosh. The words flew over to Slivan and imprinted on his skin like a tattoo.

They changed color, fading to match the shade of the man's skin.

"The Judgment Spell's Power of Words...," I muttered, amazed.

A new window with the header *List of Completed Cases* had opened up in front of me.

The Color Slime Case was recorded there, as was the line of text that had bonded to Slivan. There were some customizable details listed, too.

<<What's that, Akky?>> <<It looks like you can give the words that went into the store owner's body different effects.>> <<Hmm... I guess that's how the Power of Words works.>> <<Right now it looks like the conditions are... If he doesn't treat the slimes, his body will gradually become heavier. If and when he finishes the treatment, the effects will disappear.>> Tsukasa faced the owner, who was now kneeling.

"By the power of these words, if you neglect to cure the slimes, your body will become progressively heavier. If you complete the treatment, the effect will disappear. We the court would like to believe that you will do your utmost to carry out the treatment."

"Yes, I swear it. I will face my crimes...and redefine my perception of art."

The trial was over.

The red slime jumped out of the evidence window with a happy "Slorp!" And where the scales had been floating...

◎ JUDGMENT COMPLETE **◎**

...sparkling, celebratory text appeared.

The people in the gallery all stood.

"Oh, judgment! That was totally Chiyoda coooool!"

The princess's remark set off a roar of applause.



Princess

What a magnificent judgment on the Color Slime Case!



Shiros

Being suddenly called "defendant" felt like I'd become a criminal.



Princess:

Now that you mention it, the Hero is called the accused and Shiro was called the defendant...

Are the terms "the accused" and "the defendant" different?



Tsukasas

"The accused" is a designation in criminal trials. "The defendant" is used in civil trials. Many people dislike being called a defendant, but the reality in civil trials is that whoever sues first becomes the plaintiff. "Defendant" just means the person who was sued first.



Shiros

I see... So that's why I became the counterclaim plaintiff when I sued him back.



lleamas

If you get sued, sue them back! That's what I call judicial retribution!



Tsukasa:

You weren't much more than an onlooker back there, long ears.



Akutos

It was really cool how you fought back so resolutely.



Shiros

Master, I... I just couldn't resist helping the cute little slime...



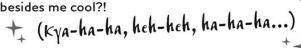
Princess:

You and the slime were supercute, Shiro!



Tsukasas

What?! Akky called someone besides me cool?!







Heh-heh-heh... Did you think you could hide in here and have all the fun without me?



11eamas

Why, you little! How did you get in here?!

Article VII The Court of the Chiyodaku Kingdom Shall Be Administered by a Judge, an Assistant, and a Maid

"Today, a real Japanese judge held a trial right here in Little Ginza! Ah, and here she is now! Miss Judge!"

"What beauty! What grace! And she only looks about fifteen years old! Apparently, she's actually twenty-eight!"

"She's shaking hands with that dog-eared girl!"

"Excuse me! May we interview you about today's trial?"

After the Color Slime Case, Tsukasa had shaken hands with the dog-eared girl whose comment started this whole incident and praised her for her courage.

While she had, a group of reporters approached and started filming.

Presently, I was watching that report in my new living quarters.

"Master, is this room to your liking?" Shiro asked. She'd become a personal maid for Tsukasa and me.

"Yeah... It's huge. And the sofa is really comfy... No complaints here..."

The large room was equipped with electronics and comfy furniture, including a huge TV, a regal-looking sofa, and a dining table.

In this world, almost all telecommunication electronics using television and the internet were still wired. Apparently, the atmosphere contained some magical elements that made radio wave transmission difficult. The news report I watched was on cable TV.

"I'm pleased to hear that. Since it is a remodeled section of Princess Ecstasia's villa, I was concerned some things about it might come off as strange."

That's right. This is the princess's former villa.

These living quarters were located in a corner of the Supreme Court building, which had been renamed the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse. The princess had the space remodeled for Tsukasa and me.

"Are you sure it's okay for us to use such a nice room?" I asked.

"Of course, particularly because you have accepted the responsibility of judging the Chiyodaku Kingdom. You've already carried out an actual trial and earned people's trust. Providing you with this residence close to your workplace is the least we could do."

"I hope that you looking after us doesn't count as bribery..."

Honestly, I was a little worried about that.

"...Master. Miss Judge didn't give me any special treatment during the trial despite me being her maid. Her fairness will dispel any doubts about that."

"Yeah... I guess you're right." One misstep and Shiro would've lost the case. It felt a little awkward to admit that, since I was the assistant during the trial. "It all went well because of you—and the way you voiced your feelings," I added.

"It went well...because I voiced my feelings?"

Shiro regarded me with confusion.

"That's right. I think it's great that you love slimes and that you helped that little girl and issued a counterclaim."

I was glad to know she wasn't some emotionless android-like person.

"I'm just glad that the color slimes will be cured." Shiro straightened up and wiped any feeling from her features. "The slimes caused me to let down my guard. I will return to being a strong maid."

"You don't have to..."

She's pretty stubborn...

"Whew, that was just what I needed! Oh, my interview from earlier is already on TV."

Tsukasa had returned from the bath.

She'd gone for a soak in the open-air hot spring in the courtyard, claiming she needed to relax after getting all stiff while on the job.

Now looking totally relaxed, she sat down next to me on the long sofa.

The scent of some flowery shampoo or conditioner tickled my nose. Her long, wet hair swayed close to me. Her damp skin peaked from the opening in her bathrobe.

"Shirooo, come over here! Let me pet you!"

"Yes, ma'am. Allow me to dry your hair with a towel."

The silver-haired, dog-eared maid came over, knelt before us, and got to work.

Her black maid outfit, her snow-white skin...and two swells like small hills were now right at my feet.

"Aw, Shiro, you're really so cute! Your tail is so fluffy!" Tsukasa happily pet the other girl.

A happy sound escaped Shiro before she caught herself and snapped back to attention. "I have prepared you a cup of milk tea for after your bath."

"Thanks! I think something with protein in it might be nice... Banging the gavel made my muscles all sore."

"I have prepared the tea with raw milk fresh from a Minotaur. It has very high protein content."

"You really are outstanding, Shiro... And petting your fluffy tail is the best!"

"Ah..." Shiro gasped. "A little more...gently, please..."

• • •

What is this? What am I looking at here? Petting? Are we really inside a court building right now?

The big-breasted beauty and the dog maid were suggestively petting each other.

And I'm supposed to live here with the two of them... This is bad...

I felt my cheeks and nose getting hot.

While I was concerned about Tsukasa's lack of experience with men, I was also a virgin.

Anyone interested in me in the past gave up when they saw my sister, thinking they didn't have a chance.

Ah, who cares! Gotta find something else to think about. Hoping to distract myself, I thought back on the trial.

Once the Scales of Judgment had disappeared, the Shard of Judgment had floated back to me.

After that, a new window with the title *Trust Level* had appeared.

I moved to the far edge of the sofa and tried opening that window again.

"We earned a total of...seven hundred and sixty-four in trust, but our current amount is only two hundred and twenty-eight..."

"I believe it was used to unlock and cast the Power of Words," Shiro explained from beside Tsukasa, who had started to drink her milk tea.

"The Power of Words...," I repeated.

"That's correct. It seems that each user manifests a different power suited to them."

A window appeared between Shiro and me, as though the Shard of Judgment was following our conversation.

Ecstasia Itou: Word Bubbles

Tsukasa Wagatsuma: Law Gravity

"Princess Ecstasia unlocked the power to make pink words float around like bubbles. Gaining that power cost her five hundred in trust. However, new users aren't able to use previously unlocked powers." There was a line through Ecstasia Itou's line, confirming Shiro's explanation. I guess her Word Bubbles weren't usable anymore.

"So Tsukasa's is...Law Gravity?"

The power must have come from the fact that Tsukasa was always talking about the weight of the law or the weight of a person's words."

"Harnessing the heaviness of words... That sure suits you, Tsukasa. So what's this trust level, then?" I said.

"The Judgment Spell automatically calculates a trust level based on the people who watch the trial. It takes the shape of a bluish-white light called Grains of Trust. When the trial ends, it's absorbed by the Scales of Judgment and converted into a trust level. Currently, there are five levels of trust from each person...and there were one hundred and fifty people in the gallery of the Color Slime Case. Based on the evaluation, I suspect the majority were very satisfied, and around thirty percent were generally satisfied," Shiro explained.

"I see... I had no idea that the spectators would have their own game system."

This was pretty different from how trials worked in Japan.

Still, it was cool that the court was able to tell whether the people trusted them in real time.

"We probably should've talked about this before the trial started," I mused. "It feels a little late to ask now, but could you tell us more about how the Judgment Spell works?"

I didn't know how we'd pulled it off, but somehow, we'd gotten through a trial without really knowing anything about this whole system.

"The most important thing is to beware the Rust of Doubt. It appears when the gallery's suspicions grow stronger instead of their trust. Even when there are no spectators, the Rust can appear when the Shard of Judgment's owner's convictions turn clouded. When we summoned you, Princess Ecstasia's body was nearly overcome with the rust, and she was about to lose her power," Shiro said.

"That blackish-red rust... Yeah, I definitely got a bad feeling the first time I saw

it."

"Violating the Oath is another thing to watch out for. If it becomes clear that the shard's owner has broken their promise, the Scales of Judgment will punish them. From what we've heard from other kingdoms...the retribution makes it so your body can no longer physically stand in the courtroom, among other things."

"That would be a terrible penalty for Tsukasa."

I guess that means the scales aren't completely on our side.

"The Scales of Judgment adapt in real time to display the current case's status. When you conclude the trial successfully, it generates an effect similar to a divine blessing."

"It's starting to sound like the God who created this system was a video game fan..."

"Also, becoming the Shard of Judgment's owners should have caused the quest display to update," Shiro added, and no sooner had she done so than the badge twitched in my pocket, rose into the air, and displayed new text.

Artifact Quest: Collect all shards.

Reward: The power to judge the entire world.

"The power to judge the world...," I read aloud.

It gave me chills.

It sounds incredible, so tremendous I can't even imagine it.

"At present, we know that the Hero possesses one of the other shards," Shiro said.

"That drunk old guy ...?"

"His name is Laman, and he's seventy. Currently, we believe that if someone with a shard tries another with one as a criminal, the judging side will take possession of the other's shard.

"Um... Is there a walk-through on how to use this thing?" I asked, feeling a little overwhelmed.

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I've only seen Shard of Judgment features that Princess Ecstasia and Ileana uncovered. You were already able to use most of the functions they uncovered on your first try, Master. There's little else I can tell you..." Shiro gazed at my sister and me with obvious respect. Her usual stony expression faltered a little. "Putting our faith in you was truly for the best, Miss Judge, Master. I can only marvel at the powers of insight and wisdom you demonstrated during the trial."

"Thanks, but... I was just playing around with those windows like it was some kind of video game. Tsukasa is the amazing one. She really did a great job judging, even with all that stuff about the slimes and the paint."

Shiro's direct compliment left me embarrassed. Honestly, I hadn't done anything remarkable.

Shiro stared at me intensely. "You are too humble."

"Uh, what's up with that look?" I questioned.

"The feelings and thoughts of real Japanese people... are fascinating."

"You and the other people of this world are far more fascinating to me," I answered. I wanted to know more about those who lived here. "Hey, how about this? I can tell you more about Japanese people, and in exchange, you'll tell us more about how you feel, Shiro."

"As your maid, I will share that information if I am ordered to."

"I don't want it to be an order... It's just as a regular promise between us."

"A regular...promise? That may be difficult." There was something like innocence in Shiro's eyes. "Do all Japanese people possess the gaming intuition that you exhibit, Master Akuto?"

"Huh? Gaming intuition? Is that how I come off?"

"Ha-ha. Shiro, Akky doesn't have any self-awareness when it comes to that stuff," Tsukasa remarked.

While we talked, the TV program continued in the background...

"How many trials have I judged? I stopped counting after I hit one thousand..."

We could see Tsukasa had gotten a little carried away during the interview.

My sister looked a bit embarrassed. "Oh, did I say that?"

"You did... And with that smug face, too..." I smiled wryly.

"Oh, this is almost the end of it."

"...A judge doesn't discuss the details of their trials. We put our all into our case. From this day forward, my assistant and I will give it our best to handle any case we're presented with. I hope the public will watch us with great interest."

"Miss Judge, you're so Chiyoda coooool!"

"And that's it for our report today!"

The program ended, switching over to a commercial for Minotaur milk.

"What did you think, Akky? Did I look cool?" Tsukasa asked expectantly.

"Uh, yeah! You did!"

Clearly, Tsukasa hoped to earn the trust and respect of the people through her work, even though she was in an unfamiliar fantasy world.

Hopefully, that energy would work well with the Scales of Judgment's trust-level system.

"Hey, Akky, why were you looking around in the background during the interview?"

"Oh, it was nothing serious. I just thought it was weird that the evidence we needed came out of nowhere right at the end of the trial, so I was checking around for stuff."

Tsukasa hummed. "Yeah. That was odd."

"The timing was almost too perfect," Shiro agreed.

After the trial, I'd spoken to the staffer who'd brought out that cart of evidence. He just kept insisting that Slivan told him to bring it all out.

That kid I saw in the golden-brown parka was suspicious... But I couldn't see

her anywhere in the trial footage.

"Still, the trial ended well. That's all that matters, right?" Tsukasa said.

"I couldn't tell what was happening very well from the defendant's seat," Shiro admitted.

"I see..." Maybe I was overthinking things.

Tsukasa took a moment to finish the last of her milk tea. "Anyway, I heard you two talking about the rules of the Scales of Judgment and gathering the shards and all that. I get that there are a bunch of weird mechanisms connected to trust and doubt... But basically, blue is good, red is bad, right?"

Putting it like that made it pretty simple to understand from a visual standpoint.

"I don't really get the whole quest thing, though," Tsukasa continued. "In any case, I'm ready to keep judging with you, Akky."

"Yeah... I'll worry about the magical stuff, and you just focus on the trials themselves," I replied.

After a moment of thought, Tsukasa said, "That old guy with the other shard is Laman the Hero, right? We can take on his trial next."

"I will inform Ileana," Shiro responded. "It's getting late, so the two of you should rest for today."

"You're right... And since my working hours are done for the day..." Tsukasa's expression was starting to switch over into her off mode. I really want a beer. Plus, I skipped lunch, so I'm really hungry. Can we go find someplace yummy to eat?"

"Now that you mention it, I'm hungry, too," I said. "Shiro, do you know anywhere good?"

"Certainly. If you're looking for a drinking establishment with beer and delicious food, how about...?"

Article VIII Alcohol-Related Harassment Is Prohibited, Even in the Adventurer's Tavern

It was the evening of our second day in the Chiyodaku Kingdom.

Tsukasa and I were in a back alley in the streets of Kanda, near Akihabara.

The main streets here were full of copy-pasted Japanese elements and overflowing with Japanese imitation items. However, once we moved a few blocks away, the town took on the vibe of a medieval fantasy world.

Brick buildings lined the streets, and we saw signs for armor shops and magical items stores.

Stalls in an open-air market offered mysterious herbs, fruits, and meats of magical beasts.

One large building stood out among all the others... A combination Adventurers' Guild and tavern.

"Whoa! A real Adventurers' Guild..."

A large, stone building with a rustic wooden door stood before me.

Above us was the sign for the Adventurers' Guild, which had a rolled parchment map motif.

THE GRAND VARNIER was written on the sign.

The restaurant Shiro had recommended was near this Adventurers' Guild. As someone who loved fantasy stories, I was obviously far more interested in trying this place than a Japanese restaurant.

"Ha-ha. You really do like fantasy, Akky!" Tsukasa said when I stopped to

marvel at the Adventurers' Guild.

Yeah, "like" is an understatement.

"You know, it's important to understand the culture of the people we're putting on trial. I bet there's a lot of useful information in a place like this!"

With this as my excuse, I asked if we could eat there instead.

"Hey, how're those new clothes?" Tsukasa asked.

I'd changed into lighter attire that looked like it was made for adventuring in a fantasy world. Shiro had picked out a few outfits for me and put them in the closet of our new living space; this was one of them.

"Good," I answered. "I thought it would be easier to blend in like this. What do you think?"

Tsukasa looked delighted. "It really suits you! It's cute!"

Well, that's not much help.

While we entertained a pointless discussion, I caught the aroma of herbs and meat wafting from the tavern.

"Okay, let's just go inside! I don't really get the whole adventurer thing, but whatever they're cooking in there smells amazing!" Tsukasa was starting to drool. She pushed open the door before I even got the chance. "If I don't drink something soon, I'll die! Waiter, I'll start with a beeeeer!"

She rushed in.

Oh boy. I guess I should've seen that coming.

I followed her into the tavern.

"Recruiting party members! Seeking healer!"

"New commission posted!"

"Here's the dungeon map you requested..."

"Heh-heh. I'll give ya a special price on this rare dagger, made with the fang of a flame dragon!"

"Long ago, the fox spirits attacked..."

A wave of information crashed over us all at once.

Rustic tables and chairs dotted the spacious, dimly lit building.

Tough-looking people of different humanoid species of various shapes and sizes sat together, trading stories and negotiating.

As I breathed in, a strange odor filled my nostrils.

It smelled like beasts, blood, and smoked meat.

This is cool. It's exactly what I've been looking for.

The scent of adventure filling the place was intoxicating. At last, the world I'd longed for was right before my eyes.

"Hey, mister. You looking for jobs? Or are you here to drink, meow?"

A girl with cat ears came over and started talking to me. She was dressed like a medieval European barmaid, but she also had a cat tail and paws for hands.

"What's the myatter? Are you hyp-meow-tized by my cuteness?"

She was indeed very cute, but an adventurer had no time for such distractions.

"Hmph. I'll have the strongest drink you've got."

I tried to put on a tough front. I'd always wanted to say something like that.

"Human. Purrrlease. I can tell by the way you smell that you're a minorrr. Meow."

"Oh, okay. Sorry."

Oops.

"No prrroblem. All wannabe adventurerrrs do it. I know how you feel, meow."

At least she was understanding.

I think I like this place.

"Then, I'll have something nonalcoholic."

"Sure, meow! If you want to order food, just pick from the menu."

Menu?

The waitress pointed with one paw, and I followed it to strips of paper with handwritten script covering the walls.

Addictive! Infinite Mandragora 650

Power Up! Red-and-White Mushroom Skewer 600

BIG! Mini Dragon T-Bone Steak 1,300

Stamina Up! Wild Horse Meat Sashimi 800

Our Classic: Fried Cockatrice 550

Special: Nine Cuts of Kraken 2,200

Best for Last: Golden Wheat Chiyodaku Risotto 800

Extra-Rich Gelato: Made from Real Milk of Domestic Minotaurs in Heat 450

And the list continued.

It all sounded pretty good. However, the style was more reminiscent of a Japanese establishment than a fantasy world.

"Anything wrong, meow?"

"Oh, no, I was just...admiring the penmanship."

"I wrote it with my tail, meow! I have a first-level certification in the Cat Calligraphy Proficiency Test."

The tip of her tail was dyed black.

"You're really good." Cat calligraphy, huh? I'd like to see that in action.

"Everyone tells me it's easy to read! For nonalcoholic drinks, I can bring you a beer called Poppy right meow."

"I'll go with that, then. And uh, the 'Classic,' please."

"Meowkay, that'll be a thousand yen, please!"

I handed her a one-thousand-yen bill from a wallet I'd borrowed from Shiro.

"Akkyyyyy! Over here!" Tsukasa was chugging her drink over at a table in the back. "Ahhhhh! Chiyodaku Ale is awesome!" She chomped at her food. "This mini dragon is pretty huge for being 'mini'! The taste is a little bland but totally edible!"

I took a seat across from her. She certainly seemed to be enjoying herself.

"I'm surprised this place doesn't bother you, Tsukasa," I said.

"Hmm? Why would it? Everyone's just eating and drinking, so what's the problem? It reminds me of an old European-style restaurant. And the menu looks really cool, right?"

She was right. The tavern area was full of people eating and drinking as anyone would.

Some of the customers even wore Youniqlo fashion, and a few were playing mobile games on their phones. It was far from scary... Really, it matched what I was used to from Japan pretty closely.

Seeing this much Japanization here is kind of a buzzkill. I'd rather immerse myself in the fantasy setting.

"Hey, Tsukasa. What does that taste like?" I asked, pointing at the mini dragon.

"I guess it's kind of close to crocodile meat. The mashed potatoes just taste like regular potatoes."

Checking the menu, I saw none of the meat or fish found in Japan. However, the mashed potatoes and brown sauce that resembled a beef stew were familiar to me.

It's just like Shiro said.

I'd asked her about this country's flora and fauna and its related cuisine before we left. She'd told me, "I don't believe any of the animals match those of your world. Some are similar, but they are indeed different beings. As for fruits and vegetables, we have a few that are the same and some that aren't."

While I was busy admiring my surroundings...

"Behind you, meow! Sorry to keep you waiting!"

...the cat-girl arrived with my golden Poppy drink and my fried cockatrice, which looked exactly like chicken.

"That looks great!" Tsukasa exclaimed.

"You can have some. Let's share it."

"Thanks! Mmm, this is tasty! And it goes great with my beer!"

We both pulled off some of the meat and started eating.

The fried bird was seasoned with some kind of garlic. The meat was moist and tasted awesome. I tried some of my drink.

"Hoo!"

The carbonation tickled as it flowed down my throat, massaging my insides. The feeling was very refreshing.

"I've never heard you make a sound like that," Tsukasa remarked.

"I couldn't help it. You want to try some?"

Tsukasa grabbed my mug and took a swallow. "Hoo!"

We were having a great time.

As we ate and drank, some other patrons approached us.

"Um, aren't you that judge and assistant?"

"We saw you on TV."

Munch, munch, gulp. "Yes, that's right," Tsukasa replied.

"Whoa, they're the real thing!"

"It's my first time meeting a Japanese person. You seem pretty normal, though."

The two were talking excitedly, and they quickly attracted the attention of others.

"Did you really smash the Lie Detector Orb?"

"But your arms look so scrawny."

"I was in the gallery! Y-you were beautiful!"

"Where does all that muscle strength come from?"

They barraged us with questions. I felt like an animal in a zoo.

"Japanese courts don't have a gavel, so I got used to slamming my fist on the table instead. The strength, well, I guess it's from an adrenaline rush. But more than that, the secret to strength is in the determination to administer justice! *Hic!*" Tsukasa declared proudly.

I sighed. "You always get so dramatic when you're drinking."

Now she was the one drawing the attention of more customers.

From the crowd, I overheard the conversation of a group of drunk middle-aged people.

"Seems like the time's finally come for the Hero... The sole survivor..."

"Guess it really was too much for Princess Ecstasia."

"I'm sure a real Japanese judge won't hold back on him, regardless of his past."

Curious, I decided to ask them, "Do you know the Hero?"

"Of course we do. He was a regular here," answered one of the men holding a beer mug.

His friends laughed as they offered their thoughts.

"He always drank himself sick and made a mess."

"And he stinks."

"I heard he had a falling out with his friends."

"He rules over that whole region with terror."

"I feel so bad for Kotoku..."

"It's basically a garbage dump, right?"

"The times have left that poor village behind..."

It sounds like people think pretty badly of the Hero and his village.

Although they were drunk, their words had an air of truth to them.

"Now that the Demon King's gone, the world doesn't need some rotten old hero!"

"Miss Judge will take care of him!"

Just then...

Thud, thud, thump.

...I sensed someone approaching.

Everyone around us hastily ceased talking and cleared out.

The very presence of this long and lanky figure caused them all to disperse from the tavern.

"Cowardly fools who can't fight on their own now take advantage of some Japanese brats. How ridiculous..."

The older man wore a weathered set of leather armor and strode across the floor slick with alcohol and oil.

Messy white hair topped his head. He looked no different from when we'd first seen him after being summoned to the Grand Bench.

The only difference was that his eyes were open, revealing them to be a sublime golden shade.

He cast them in our direction. "You spineless cowards are nothing but talk. It is only right that you should burn to death by my Holy Flame under the Scales of Judgment."

This was Laman, the seventy-year-old hero.



"Oof!"

The older man audaciously sat down on the bench next to me.

"Hey, you can't sit there."

The Hero ignored Tsukasa's attempt to shoo him away. "Hmph. Cockatrice, eh? I'm pretty sick of it, honestly, but perhaps I'll indulge in one bite." He started munching on our food without so much as asking. "You there, barmaid! Bring me a golden wheat ale!" he shouted.

"Mya!" The cat-eared girl ran away to the back.

What's he doing here...? Was he hiding in the bathroom this whole time?

There was something suspicious about his arrival. I took a look at him up close.

His skin looked as rough as his battered armor, and his hair was unruly. A stench hung about him that smelled like alcohol and body odor.

"What? Has my heroic aura rendered you speechless?"

The older man peered at me. Dark bags hung below his eyes.

"A jape. I do naught but drink until I pass out and sleep. Of course I stink. But if you cannot handle this much, then you would never survive on the battlefield."

He had the look of a fallen man—a wanderer.

"Is it all right for the accused to be drinking alone in public like this?" I asked, just hoping to get a little information.

"Ga-ha-ha! You're that judge's toady. The assistant, correct? I saw your broadcast. You are truly...naught but a little whippersnapper!"

Evidently, he hadn't heard my question.

The Hero patted my head like I was a little kid. There was something contemptuous about the action.

"That said, I defeated the Demon King when I was but a lad of sixteen. Age does not matter in combat."

Sixteen—my age.

Really? Is that true? Was the Demon King a pushover?

I felt conflicted as the older man patted me with his large, wrinkled hand.

However, before I could organize my thoughts into a response, Tsukasa snapped at him.

"Hey, don't just go touching him like that!" she shouted.

"And this must be Miss Judge. She's still but a little girl." The Hero moved on to eating Tsukasa's mini dragon steak.

"Why is the accused in a criminal case running free?" Tsukasa demanded.

Laman chewed loudly between words. "I suppose it's because the trial proceeded so poorly and kept getting extended. The elf told me to go home to rest."

"That sounds like house arrest. So the court didn't think you would run away," Tsukasa replied.

"A hero does not flee. The people of this kingdom have become weak, always dashing away in the face of the enemy. Believing the world is at peace has fostered complacency! And that damn pink princess has been carrying a sacred artifact! Ever since I heard some Japanese folk had taken her place, I have bided my time in cheap lodging until you came to possess the Shard of Judgment. I am merely here to wet my whistle. My intention was not to meet with you. However, it saves me the trouble of searchi—"

The barmaid hurried over. "Thank you for waiting. Here is your Chiyodaku Ale, meow." She handed a beer mug to the Laman.

"Hahhh. Chiyodaku, hmm? What a tasteless name. Nothing but weak, empty words born of this idiotic culture shift. I can hardly fathom how deep roots of this taint run after fifty years of useless culture."

Gulp, gulp.

The old hero snatched our food and drank his alcohol with a haughty attitude.

Everyone's afraid of him...

All the people who were crowding around Tsukasa had dispersed. They watched fearfully from afar.

I caught the nervously fidgeting barmaid as she was trying to make a run for it, and asked her in a whisper, "Sorry, but why is everyone afraid of him?"

"Shhh! Of course they're afraid of him, meow! He'll burrrn up anything and anyone who makes him mad with his Holy Flame! He reigns over his village with fear, and they say he's even killed people! Don't make him angry unless you wanna die, meow!"

She hurried to get the words out and scurry away.

Okay...so we don't want to irritate him.

"I can't stand it when nosy jerks get in the way of me enjoying my off time with my brother." Tsukasa apparently had no issue antagonizing this old guy.

"Pah!" the Hero scoffed. "Seething, aren't you, girl?! You there, another round!"

Tsukasa frowned. "Wait a sec, you old geezer. Are you paying for all this?"

"Huh? Pay? Heroes do not need to pay money. You stupid brats know nothing."

"Who do you think you're talking...? Fine, let us open court here and now. Shall we try you first for fraud, or for menacing the public?"

"Wait, Tsukasa. You shouldn't do that."

My gaming intuition told me this was dangerous. Something was off here.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

The barmaid came by with another beer and explained. "There is a special law that the Hero's party that defeated the Demon King eats here for free, forever, meow."

No wonder the beer kept coming even though this man was causing problems.

"In Japan, such an absurd rule doesn't..." Tsukasa was flabbergasted.

"Ga-ha-ha! What is it, girl? Do you plan on crying about how things aren't like Japan whenever events don't go your way? Like a little lost child!" He continued his eating and drinking.

"Grr!" Tsukasa gritted her teeth.

Chomp. "Oh, that bone's a big one. I suppose I'll just..."

Suddenly, the Hero turned his palm upward. "Holy Flame... Fireball."

With those simple words, a burning sphere about the size of a tennis ball appeared before him.

It glowed so brightly it nearly seemed white. I felt it sear my retinas and cause me to sweat. The temperature around us was rising.

The overwhelming power felt like it was emitting heat of thousands of degrees.

"There we go..."

The Hero took the various bones and food waste on the table, including the large bone he'd pulled from his mouth and tossed them into the flames. The scraps vanished with barely a puff of smoke.

"Amazing...," I said, mesmerized.

Seeing that marvelous power, I knew for certain that this older man was more than some vagrant.

"Oh? You don't fear it? These flames can melt anything, you know."

"Is that a threat? Hurry up and put away that magical fire or whatever it is," Tsukasa stated firmly.

"You know that skylight in the Grand Bench? It was I who blasted it." Rather than answer, the Hero continued to prattle on.

Tsukasa blinked in surprise. "What?"

"Those Scales of Judgment were getting on my nerves. So I decided to test whether I could destroy them. But my flames had no effect. I suppose I ought to have expected as much from a sacred artifact."

"You bastard... You dare defile the sanctity of the court?"

"Little girl. Have you ever killed a man?"

"...If you count giving the death sentence, then yes."

"Hoh-hoh. With that courage and conviction, you may be well suited to wield the artifact, after all."

Gladness shone in the Hero's eyes.

Why does he seem...happy?

While I grew uncomfortable, Tsukasa became progressively more irritated by the older man's behavior.

The Hero flaunts faults yet doesn't lay a finger on us. He admitted he was waiting for people like us to take the princess's Shard of Judgment. It's like he's trying to tick off Tsukasa and influence the trial's outcome...

"That elf brat and the pink one—their weak attempt at judgment was nothing but cowardly child's play. They relied completely on the Lie Detector Orb and brought the trial to a standstill for a month. Then they let me, a murderer, go free. No kingdom can operate this way."

The old hero looked into the distance for a moment, his gaze nostalgic.

"You. Girl. You're not going to tell me that trials take time in Japan, are you?" "Tomorrow." Judge Tsukasa stood up.

"Tomorrow, at the Grand Bench, we hold the trial of the Hero Laman!"

Article IX Criminal Trial: The Hero's Party Homicide Case

"The accused may enter the courtroom," I announced into the wireless microphone headset.

After our encounter with Laman at the Adventurers' Guild tavern, Ileana had somehow heard about the fuss and came running.

The seventy-year-old Laman turned unexpectedly obedient when told to return to his lodgings.

Guards were to patrol around the place until the trial.

Meanwhile, Tsukasa and I returned to the courthouse and began preparing for tomorrow.

Tsukasa read the indictment and other documents Ileana brought over—and issued various orders.

I studied up on basic criminal trial procedure, organized the Hero's transportation for the day of the trial, coordinated with the guards, and posted information about the trial online. Then Shiro and I prepared the Grand Bench together.

We stayed up all night.

At ten in the morning of our third day in the Chiyodaku Kingdom, the trial commenced.

"Admission to the courtroom completed. All are present. Assistant, Miss Judge, good luck, soldiers."

A beastman guard's final confirmation came through my wireless headset.

"Soldiers?" This is a court trial, not a military operation. Actually, maybe it's appropriate. This is going to be a real battle. And our opponent is Laman the Hero...

We would face him from the Grand Bench of the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse.

Before me was a large wooden door. The back entrance separating us from the courtroom.

"Akky. This is going to be my first serious trial in this world. We can't afford to lose."

Her attitude was like that of an athlete before a match, her body was filled with a fighting spirit. She was in on mode.

I've never seen her this fired up. Maybe it's because of her younger body.

"Got it. I'll do everything I can to help, outside of the law stuff, of course."

I planned to do my best to stay calm and collected.

Creeeeaaak.

It sounded like the guard had exited the room after the Hero was brought to his designated spot.

Shiro pushed open the door to the courtroom.

It's hot.

This was my second time at the Grand Bench. The room was sweltering with an unusual heat.

Viewing the room from the back, the huge round space seemed like an arena to me. The people in the gallery were already seated, and those who hadn't been able to get a seat stood wherever there was room. Crowded together, they looked like spectators at the Colosseum. All eyes went to Tsukasa and me as we entered.

My body froze. More than half of the gazes bearing down on us were hybrids of different species that I was unfamiliar with.

And here I was, a real Japanese person. Taking a kind of pride in that, I stepped forward.

My assistants' robes fluttered with the movement.

Using the Judgment Spell, I brought up the trial settings window as well as one that contained the trial records, including the indictment document. Only those who'd passed through a metal detector and undergone a physical inspection had been allowed to enter the courtroom. However, there was no way for us to prevent someone from using some kind of attack skill or magical spell.

I sensed Tsukasa behind me. In an emergency, I would act as her shield.

I continued forward and walked to the clerk's desk just beyond the judge's bench.

A stir ran through the gallery when the spectators saw Tsukasa take her seat. The buzz reverberated to the back of the Grand Bench where it faded into the two huge silk tapestries depicting the sun on the wall behind us.

Looking up, I saw the melted skylight. Below, on the far side of the chamber, were a pair of large tapestries of the moon. Many different people crowded the gallery. I spotted the princess and Prosecutor Ileana in the front row. Once I confirmed they were there...

...I looked to the center of the room, where I found the Hero and the witness stand that stood between him and my sister and me.

We'll do the trial the Japanese way, just as planned.

I took a small breath.

"First year of the Chiyoda Era, district court criminal case public hearing number one.

"The trial for the Hero's Party Homicide Case is now in session. All rise! Bow!"

The voice that came out of me didn't sound like my own. The quick tension and release of my throat caused my pulse to quicken and made me dizzy.

Still, I kept my eyes on the Hero as I sat.

I sent the trial record window containing the indictment and certified copy to Judge Tsukasa behind me...

...and for a moment, we shared a look of understanding.

The death sentence.

In a homicide case, it was possible to hand down the maximum sentence.

"Judge Tsukasa Wagatsuma. I was growing tired of waiting." Laman smiled like a crazed warrior glad to have found a worthy enemy at last.

The beads of sweat that rose from the surface of his skin instantly burst and turned to steam. From this strange sight, I knew that he wielded extremely powerful offensive magic, even in his old age.

"Do you really think you can judge the Hero of this kingdom, little girl?"

Drops of his spittle flew forth from his mouth, forming small balls of flames that rained down onto Tsukasa and me. I could smell my hair and robe getting scorched.

"Of course. That's why I'm here." My sister remained unshakable. Her confidence swelled as I heard her take in a powerful breath. "I'm the one asking the questions here! And don't you spit those filthy fireballs at me!"

The sound of her slamming her fist down on the judge's bench like a gavel echoed through the room.

Tsukasa had met Laman's challenge with her own.

A Japanese judge would face off against the Hero of a fantasy world.

"The Shard of Judgment...," I muttered.

Two fragments flew into the air, one from my pocket and from the accused's. They danced in midair as each fragment became a large, golden pan of the balance scales.

Small effigies appeared above each pan. Tsukasa and I were on the court's side, wearing our robes.

The Hero in his leather armor stood over on the pan of the accused.

Both rose into the air and attached themselves to the golden balance scales.

Bwonnng.

The grim noise of the scales sounded like a gong in the hot courtroom.

Perhaps because there were two shards, the Scales of Judgment were far larger than during the Color Slime Case.

The people in the gallery stared wordlessly into the air. I met eyes with the princess, who waved and called, "You've got this, Mr. Akuto! Go, go, governance!" I wasn't really in any position to wave back.

"Do you attempt to intimidate me by banging on your desk? How ridiculous. Your bark is worse than your bite. Or are you simply trying to hide that you're pissing yourself in fear? You're not only wetting your pants, but you're wet behind the ears, too," Laman needled.

"Perhaps the accused seeks to mask his own little accident, by running his mouth." Tsukasa replied. "I understand being anxious at a time like this, considering you're a seventy-year-old drifter, but please do your best to tighten your sphincter so as to not make a mess in the courtroom."

"Hmph. The kingdom's servants who guarded my room and brought me here were all quaking in their boots. This nation's sad state of complacency from all this peace is clear as day. When I was on the front line fighting against the Demon King's monsters—"

"Today's trial is not concerned with your memories from half a century ago," Tsukasa interrupted. "Let us consider this conversation to have established the identity of the accused. Assistant, please mark this in the record."

"Understood," I said.

Acting like I had it all under control, I moved my hands around the window in a way that seemed like it would do that.

"What new madness is this? Some sort of incantation?" The Hero was starting to have a hard time keeping up with Tsukasa's legalese. That worked in our favor. We needed to make sure he knew the court was above him.

"In the interest of the understanding of all present, allow me to explain." After framing it as something to benefit all the kingdom's citizens, Tsukasa

began to elucidate.

"The court will proceed with today's trial in accordance with the criminal laws of Japan. Regarding the court's judgment, there may be some here today who are familiar with yesterday's Color Slime Case. However, as today we are holding a formal criminal trial, things will be done differently. What will occur here will decide whether the kingdom's penal power is invoked upon the accused. The general principle of *nulla poena sine lege...*"

As she spoke, I took the opportunity to check the equipment under my desk.

Everything had been copied over at the same time as the courthouse itself, so it was all Japanese. There was a computer and a monitor hooked up to wired security cameras showing a feed of the inside of the courthouse. Video recording equipment would show live trial footage for the press. Part of my job was to monitor all this.

"...applies in this case. Accordingly, the power of the court is restricted by the laws of criminal justice, and the accused is assumed to be innocent until proven guilty. The prosecutor bears the burden of proof of the crime. If the crime is proven, the judge would like to take the extenuating circumstances into consideration rather than simply oppose the accused."

Shiro the maid oversaw the live-feed recording. Since the trial began, she'd been hard at work operating a large camera and documenting the situation from the gallery entrance. A few subordinate maids stood guard around her while also operating backup cameras.

Tsukasa and I had decided to broadcast the trial live and make it widely publicized.

"The general flow of a criminal trial is as follows. First, the identity of the accused is established, then the indictment is read aloud by the prosecutor. Next, the accused and their representing counsel give a statement. Opening statements follow, then examination of evidence, closing arguments, and sentencing recommendation by the prosecutor. With that done, counsel gives the oral argument, the accused will deliver a final statement, and judgment will be rendered."

Yesterday, Tsukasa had said to me, "To be taken seriously, we need a speedy

trial and execution of the sentence."

This was also to avoid being seen as a helpless while fighting with, and being belittled by, an older man.

What we're up against now may just be the Chiyodaku Kingdom itself. Are two Japanese people equipped to righteously judge a famous hero from another world? If we mess up here, we'll lose the kingdom's trust—and a lot more. I've always wanted to experience a fantasy world, but I never would've imagined I'd end up in a situation like this... But enough complaining. I need to focus on what's in front of me and not let the anxiety take over.

"The statements by the accused are sufficient to establish his identity. Thank you for cooperating with the procession of the litigation. Henceforth, you need not say any more. Even if the accused chooses not to speak, he will be at no disadvantage. This is called the right to remain silent. Do you understand?"

I could feel Tsukasa's clear explanations building our sense of credibility.

"Fine. I suppose there must be a reasonable procedure for the final decision to be recognized by the Scales of Judgment. Just show me you have the guts to seal the fate of the Hero who defeated the Demon King."

Something about the way the Hero spoke to Tsukasa had struck me as odd since we first met him.

By his tone of voice, it was as if the older man assumed he'd get the death sentence...

"Next! Prosecutor! Please read the indictment!" Tsukasa called.

"Yes, Miss Judge!" Ileana Saitou rose from the prosecutor's seat with a nervous look on her face. I saw her mutter to herself in a small voice, "This is my debut. I need to do my best to prove myself to Miss Judge!"

That's convenient—the record window is picking all this up, too.

The record window I had in my hands was automatically converting everything any relevant party said into text. It allowed me to catch every whisper.

I sat down in an effort to remain inconspicuous as I observed the broader

goings-on in the courtroom.

"The incident took place on the third day of last month, at approximately eight o' clock in the evening. The location was a hollow in the Hero's Village, which lies within the Meadow of Beginnings, an autonomous region of the Chiyodaku Kingdom. The accused, with intent to kill, used the Holy Flame Spell on the following former members of the Hero's Party and burned them to death: Fiona, age sixty-eight, Keith, age sixty-nine, Neidhardt, age seventy-two. The charge is homicide. Punishment falls under Penal Code, Article One Hundred and Ninety-Nine!"

The prosecutor read out the charges—homicide by burning to death.

Tsukasa and I had taken a look at Ileana's indictment and the official copy beforehand.

However, it needed to be made clear in the court under the Scales of Judgment.

"The accused may make his statement," Judge Tsukasa announced.

The people's gazes shifted from the prosecutor to Laman.

"Oh. My statement, let's see..." He scratched his head and cocked his head to one side. He was messing with us. "If you lose your nerve, children, I think I'll make you two Japanese visitors my next victims." He smirked, as if reveling in his own downfall.

"Irrelevant. Next, statement by the counsel..." An irritated Tsukasa directed the trial to the Hero's counsel. "Where is your counsel?" she asked. "I was told that all parties were present."

The counsel's seat, which was to the left from my perspective, stood empty.

"Huh. She was right there just a moment ago. She must be around here somewhere," Laman said.

"There is clearly no one present. This case requires that the accused has legal counsel, therefore, if none is present—"

"Objection, I say!"

Poof. Smoke billowed, and a single leaf danced in the air.

A girl wearing a golden-brown parka suddenly appeared in the counsel's seat.

She had fox ears, a tiny body like a kindergartner, and five large tails.

"Heh-heh—what lovely acoustics the courtroom has! I've been waiting to try that during a genuine trial."

Her face was positively shining with cuteness and youth, and she looked quite pleased with herself. The fox child theatrically pointed her finger at the judge.

Could it be...the kid I saw come out from the back during the Color Slime Case...is a fox spirit?

Just then, I heard a voice from my headset.

"Mr. Akuto, that is Tamamo Keisei. She is half-nine-tailed fox."

It was Shiro.

"The level of her concealment technique is quite high. I'm sorry I was unable to detect her."

"This world has fox spirits?"

"Although few, there are some yokai in our world like the legends in Japan. And while she may appear to be very young, as a fox spirit, she possesses thousands of years of knowledge and is very intelligent... She is a cunning old ruffian—and even took the highest score on the Chiyodaku Kingdom Bar Exam and is a registered lawyer."

Oh, so she's the one who placed first.

I've seen her type come up as an anime trope before, a baby face who's actually very old. She gives off the vibe of a strong character.

The information I got from Shiro made me more wary of her.

"Why is there a child in here...?"

Tsukasa, however, was ignorant of the child's true form.

"Tamamo. Knock it off. This isn't the time or place for your mischief," Ileana chided.

"I shall play where I wish! My pleasure is my priority. To me, what you do here is but a game—young twentysomethings gathered for a staring contest."

"You mock us, vixen!" Ileana shouted. "How dare you toy with the order of the kingdom... You should be stripped of your qualifications!"

"Heh-heh... You would bully me in retaliation for losing to me in the bar exam, Yeleniana?"

"Don't call me by that name!"

The two of them were quick to bicker.

Shiro offered her thoughts through my headset. "Those two are like cats and dogs. While the bar examination is one cause, it seems that Western-style fantasy species and Japanese yokai just don't get along well."

So by calling each other vixen and Yeleniana, they're trying to rile each other up. That doesn't seem the best combination for a prosecutor and a defense attorney...

<< Tsukasa. Listen to what Shiro just told me...>>

I used the Telepathy Spell to tell Tsukasa what I'd learned about Tamamo.

"And you thought you could dub me a liar with your Lie Detector Orb and throw me in jail!"

"From which you have clearly escaped!"

<<There's no way that this five-year-old is a lawyer,>> Tsukasa replied while Tamamo and Ileana argued.

<<You're a judge despite looking like a teenager... Look closely at her clothes.>>

<< You're right... She's wearing a lawyers' pin.>>

Her outfit was busy and jingling, with various button pins attached to her clothes and a game keychain hanging from her pocket. However, a lawyers' pin featuring a balance scale emblem inside a sunflower was displayed prominently

near the top of her collar.

<<It's pretty common in fantasy worlds for looks to be deceiving,>> I said.

<<So that means she really did have the top score... Got it. I won't underestimate her.>> Tsukasa seemed to have accepted the situation.

"It has been one month since I saw you, fox. Have you come to rejoin the trial?" Laman asked.

"Has it been that long, Laman, my boy? I couldn't get a single word in with that orb in my way." The fox girl cackled. "You've grown too skinny. Trouble sleeping?"

"Hmph. It will all soon be over. I know you aren't my ally, but if you know me, you know my oath. Get in my way, and I shall make fox barbeque out of you."

I guess the two of them aren't really on friendly terms, either...

"The counsel declared that they had an objection. To what?" Tsukasa asked, trying to refocus the conversation.

"Hmm? Oh, I've just always wanted to say that. You may proceed with the trial."



The fox spirit retreated with surprisingly little resistance. However, my trial recording window picked up her devious whispers. "I'm only here to enjoy a dramatic twist in the trial like in my favorite game, Felix Knight: Pro Attorney. And to see Yeleniana cry. And to confuse the young Japanese girl... Heh-heh-heh."

That fox is up to no good...

"Then let us move on to the next procedure," Tsukasa announced. "Prosecutor, your opening statement, please."

"Yes, ma'am. Ahem... The prosecution has put together a record of the history and abilities of the accused. Seventy years ago, the accused was discovered as a newborn baby of unknown origin in the Meadow of Beginnings by a villager..."

The atmosphere of the courtroom changed.

I imagined a baby, all alone in a meadow, over a half a century ago.

"His parentage is unknown. The local villagers raised the orphan child collectively as a member of their community—and named him Laman."

Hearing a real hero's story for the first time, I was absorbed right from the beginning.

"Thus, the accused became a child of the village. He was around age eleven when attacks from the Demon King's vicious monsters began to increase. His adoptive parents and friends were slaughtered in a single night, and his village was partially destroyed. It was at this time that he awakened to his true nature as a descendant of the Fire Spirit Clan. Empowered by his anger, his will took form as an offensive spell, Holy Flame, that could burn and destroy any object. He single-handedly defeated all the monsters in the area, then entered the royal army. He joined the front line against the monster attacks, helped to hold back numerous invasions, and reached the rank of warrior. At the age of thirteen, he was registered as a Hero with the intention of defeating all monsters in various regions as well as the Demon King himself. With that, he set out on his journey."

So far, this sounded like the sort of generic story I'd heard before.

A guy with a traumatic backstory inherits a power and uses it to rise in the ranks of his kingdom and eventually go off on a quest for revenge...

I had a few manga and games like that.

"During his journey, the Hero Laman proactively befriended individuals who belonged to marginalized and discriminated groups. The monster hybrid swordswoman, Fiona. Keith the birder and former thief. And Neidhardt, the assassin who attempted to kill Laman. These ruffians joined the Hero's party and spent three years fighting to reach the Demon King's castle. The Hero Laman converted all of his anger into flames and reduced the entire palace to ashes, with the Demon King and his generals waiting inside. The party never even set a foot in the place."

A staggering, tremendous, and exhilarating power.

The prosecutor continued with the story. The people in the room who looked middle-aged or older nodded their heads quietly like they already knew the tale.

"Historically, when the Demon King is defeated, his mana continues to circulate throughout the world until he resurfaces years or decades later. However, an unexpected effect brought about by the flames and a unique environment at the site of the Demon King's castle made his resurrection impossible. Hence, the Demon King's existence was erased from this world. Monsters no longer became crazed by his power, and all regions of the kingdom were freed from war. According to tradition, the members of the Hero's party were granted the benefit of free food and drink for the rest of their lives."

That much seemed more than reasonable for the champions who'd laid the foundation for the nation's current prosperity.

I listened with surprise and excitement to the story of the Hero for the first time, as did many younger people in the room.

"However, the record of the accused's glorious achievements ends here. Soon after he returned to the kingdom, the first large-scale Copy-Paste Spells were successful, and the Hero began to clash with our previous king, who'd renamed the capital as Chiyodaku. In defiance, Laman declared the Meadow of Beginnings, which had been under the direct jurisdiction of the Chiyodaku

Kingdom, an autonomous region, and severed diplomatic relations. Making his hometown, which had become known as the Hero's Village, the center, he ruled over the settlements in the Meadow of Beginnings using fear."

The story was taking an ominous turn.

"Yet the members of the Hero's party still frequented Chiyodaku. Day and night, they visited restaurants and demanded food and drink. They were known to start fights and arguments. Out of fear over the strong magical power the Hero possessed, no one, not even the king, could do anything to stop them. Citizens could only tremble in fear. These misdeeds continued for approximately fifty years, up until the day before the incident, the second of last month."

This was painting the Hero as a total scumbag.

Scorn for the accused entered the gazes from the gallery.

Now I get why they acted like they hated him so much at the tavern... But still... I can't help but feel like I'm not getting all the details of the story.

"The incident occurred around eight o' clock in the evening, on the third day of last month. Three bursts of flames were confirmed to have occurred in the Meadow of Beginnings—"

"I killed them," Laman interrupted, bringing the trial to a screeching halt. "It is as you said. I ruled the villages through intimidation and burned my old comrades to death, to naught but ash." The older man exuded a faint smile.

"So you confess?" Judge Tsukasa asked.

"This is what I've been saying from the start. When I ask if you have the courage to judge the Hero of this kingdom, girl... I mean you ought to quit wasting time and give me the death sentence already."

He wanted the death sentence.

I was floored by what was happening but tried not to let it show on my face.

"That's correct, Miss Judge—he's already confessed. The accused acknowledges his crime and wishes to atone for it with his life. We seek the death penalty for the concurrent charges of first-degree murder!" Ileana

declared authoritatively.

However...

"Miss Judge. This story...contains falsehoods."

...the lawyer, Tamamo Keisei, stood on a chair as she spoke.

"The first attempt at a public hearing for this case proceeded this far. However, at this point, the Lie Detector Orb began to glow red. Clearly, that suggests something is wrong. Someone isn't being truthful. What say you, Miss Judge?"

The fox child cackled mischievously.

"I have already destroyed that Lie Detector Orb. It's no longer relevant in this case."

"No longer relevant? But what I say is the truth!" Laman objected. "You, fox, I thought I told you not to get in my way!"

His anger manifested as a fireball in the palm of his hand.

"Ohh! How scary! Don't burn me! I am but a wee child! He's going to make me into fox barbeque right here in the courtroom, unless... Miss Judge, can't you do anything to stop him?"

The lawyer was clearly trying to sway Tsukasa.

Whether because of Tamamo or from the disturbance in the court...

...people began to murmur, "The Rust of Doubt!"

One, two...then ten, then a hundred small particles of black-red rust floated through the courtroom.

Overhead, the pan that held the images of Tsukasa and me were tinged with rust, as though they were decaying.

This is bad... They're starting to doubt the court. At this rate, we'll lose our ability to judge the case and our right to hold the Shard of Judgment.

<<Akky, I'm sorry, I don't know where the lie is or what I should do.>> That came as no surprise. We had too little information. And Tamamo was better than us at this.

<<Tsukasa, we don't have enough info. We should stay the proceedings for now.>> <<But... It wasn't supposed to play out this way...>> I looked back at her. She glared at the scales and grinded her teeth.

<< If we back out now, that old fart will never let me live it down.>> She didn't want to give up. And her worries were valid.

There was a huge rumble...

...and the Scales of Judgment began to lower from the air until they rested before Tsukasa and me.

Tsukasa Wagatsuma: Violation of oath detected.

A ruthless string of words was displayed before us.

The oath.

We'd taken an oath to administer righteous justice, based on truth and conscience, and to see through lies and falsehoods, for the sake of the kingdom. Maybe the scales had sensed that we weren't seeing through lies and falsehoods.

Punishment: Transform body so it may never again stand in the courtroom.

The images of myself, Tsukasa, and the Hero on the pans disappeared. Then the shape of the pans themselves transformed. Sharp, golden tentacles began growing out of them.

This is bad... We have to do something...

Laman the Hero made the first move.

"Holy Flame, Karmic Flare!"

Turning toward Tamamo Keisei, he produced a large ball of fire and shot it at

the scales.

The burning sphere, glowing so hot it was almost white, struck the scales directly, gave off a bursting sound like a firecracker, then dissipated.

While my vision was dazzled by the light, I felt the scorching heat on my skin like the courtroom had suddenly become a sauna.

I could feel the intense power of the flames as they flew past.

That Holy Flame Spell is amazing.

I wanted to try it so much that I forgot the present situation briefly.

Just then, I felt the words *Spell Unlocked: Holy Flame* somewhere deep within myself.

No way; I got it...? But... I have to deal with this first!

Color returned to my disoriented vision.

Apparently, the Scales of Judgment's tentacles had stopped for the moment.

If they'd been delayed by the Hero's magic, then there was no issue. But if they needed a finishing blow, then maybe I could...

Creeegaak.

The tentacles hadn't stopped after all.

More Rust of Doubt formed into black-red needles.

"Hmph, it seems my flames have no effect." The Hero sighed in disappointment. If his power couldn't stop this, then nothing could.

<< Tsukasa, please. We need to stay the proceedings and find out the truth!>> My sister stood with her arms crossed, unflinching even as the needles closed in on her.

"The fidelity of the trial has been called into doubt!" At her shout, the tentacles stopped moving.

"The court will take a recess to conduct inspection under Article One Hundred and Twenty-Eight of the Code of Criminal Procedure!"

All eyes were on her, including mine.

Behind her, the two tapestries of the sun were burning up from the flames Laman conjured. Between the twin blazes stood a beautiful young girl with long black hair that danced in the updraft of the fire. Still, she didn't move from her spot as she rendered her judgment.

"Oh-hoh-hoh! Invoking the Code, are you? What nonsense!" Tamamo Keisei lashed out.

"The investigation will cover all items related to the evidence submitted by the prosecution!" Tsukasa declared.

Ileana looked surprised. "M-my evidence? But why?!"

"Your evidence of the murdered bodies are nothing but photos of empty land," my sister replied.

Using the trial record window, I pulled up all the photographic evidence submitted by the prosecution and enlarged them for all in the courtroom to see.

There were a few dozen photos capturing three large blasts of flames as seen from Little Ginza. The fires were three different colors: red-black, yellow, and a white pillar. A single picture captured the aftermath of the crime scene. However, since there were no bodies, it was only an image of grassland at nighttime and a crater formed in the ground by the explosion.

"Th-that's because the accused's powers burned them so nothing remained!" Ileana argued.

"Even so, there are still questions remaining regarding the Holy Flame Spell's true power. If it truly is strong enough to destroy a body, we'll need a witness who can confirm as much!" Judge Tsukasa remained firm.

"But! As I said in my opening statement, the heinousness of the accused's actions are clea—"

"In addition, the record of the accused's previous offenses and personal

history are insufficient!" The booming echo of Tsukasa's voice caused the Scales of Judgment and her breasts to shake. "The accused's villainous nature is nothing but rumors! It lacks objective evidence!"

"Th-that may be so, but older records are not well organiz—"

"It doesn't matter! To judge him properly, I require you to submit all of the kingdom's available criminal records from the past fifty-four years!"

"I—I didn't realize... I mean, yes, ma'am! As you wish, Miss Judge..."

Ileana retreated with her head lowered in deference.

Laman refused to let this slide. "Hey, wait, wait! What, you intend to just spout all that nonsense then run away from this, do you?!"

"Act on Maintenance of Order in Courtrooms, Articles Two and Three!" Tsukasa countered.

"Huh? What is that, another incantation?"

"The accused, who has lit fire to the tapestries behind me, is judged to have disrupted the order of the court. A twenty-four-hour restraint will be applied!"

In response to my sister's words...

Detention: The accused will be held in custody for twenty-four hours.

...a line of text appeared in the air.

"Dammit, 'Holy Fla'—"

Laman wasn't fast enough. The line of text was already sinking into his body.

"Graaagh!"

Crash!

The older man's body smashed through the witness stand and was pinned to the floor.

It's Tsukasa's Power of Words... Law Gravity.

The line of black text wriggled on the surface of the Hero's skin.

That's Tsukasa for you. Somehow, she managed to regain control of the situation by drawing out the power of the Judgment Spell.

The expressions of the people in the gallery changed with each development. And they must have sensed that Tsukasa's actions were justified, as the particles of black-red rust had cleared completely.

I'm glad I was summoned to this world with her.

Only she would be able to stay cool in this situation and precisely cite a number of relevant laws. Still, we can't relax yet.

Insufficient trust level.

A new line of text had appeared under the scales.

According to my window, our trust level had fallen to zero.

Before I had time to catch my breath, details appeared beneath.

Please select a hostage as collateral for resumption of the trial within twenty-four hours.

1. Tsukasa Wagatsuma. 2. Akuto Satou.

Collateral?

While I was processing what this meant...

"I, the judge, am the one who must be held hostage!"

...Tsukasa made the decision for us.

The room began to rumble powerfully, and the two pans of the Scales of Judgment fused together and took on a new shape, becoming a golden birdcage.

Slam! It snapped her up like a bird of prey.

"Oh-hoh-hoh! You are lucky you still have your job! What an interesting turn

of events!"

Tamamo the lawyer bounded up and down and clapped her hands with a ridiculing sneer.

The accused, his face still pressed in the floor, muttered something. The court record window picked it up.

"Twenty-four hours... Elma will not yield to them so easily."

Who is Elma? Does she hold the key to solving this case? Where is she, and what's she doing?

As these questions swirled in my mind, I heard Tsukasa close the session that had fallen into complete disarray.

"I swear on my life. Twenty-four hours from now, the Chiyodaku Kingdom Court will render its verdict!"

The judge made her declaration from within the bars of the magical cage.

Article X Do Not Approach the Foxes That Haunt the Shrine

We'd decided to suspend the trial for twenty-four hours.

Shiro and I had tried to free Tsukasa, but it proved impossible.

Tsukasa was like a caged bird, but thankfully the bars meant we could still speak with her to plan our next move.

I needed to gather information on the Hero, while Tsukasa would investigate by reviewing records. A lie lurked somewhere in the Hero's story. We needed to find it and discover the truth.

"It'd be great if you can find us a witness," Tsukasa said. "Even if they only spotted the flames from far away... There has to be at least one eyewitness."

With that goal in mind, I left my sister behind and exited the courthouse.

"The Shrine of the Hero. Haven't been here since our jog around the castle."

Having run there, I caught my breath as I passed through the large shrine gate.

I entered the seemingly deserted grounds, and when I approached the mail hall, I noticed the door was already open as though I'd been expected.

Kind of suspicious, but there's no time. I just have to go in.

It was right around noon. There was no time to waste. I had to find a witness soon.

I stepped inside the shrine.

The building looked a lot like a Japanese copy-paste, but something was different. There were tones of otherworldly fantasy items.

A massive taxidermy dragon rested at my feet.

The names of the Hero's party members who defeated the monster were carved into its horn.

There was another stuffed creature that resembled a wyvern, its body the size of a truck. Another had three heads and looked like a cerberus...

"Wow... This is amazing..."

I couldn't help but be in awe. It really reinforced to me that ferocious monsters inhabited this world.

These taxidermy ones had seemingly been abandoned, left here to collect dust.

I continued past the disorderly menagerie and came to a wide-open space.

Here there were a large number of banners and standing signboards.

Congratulations on defeating the Demon King.

The Savior of the World.

Thank you.

Return of the Young Heroes.

Pride of our Village, Laman the Formidable.

Each was handwritten in an old brush script, yellow and faded with age.

From their contents, I guessed they were made around the time the Demon King had been defeated fifty-four years ago.

It bothered me to see that some of the signs had been abandoned in the middle of being made.

"I have arrived, Master," a voice called out from behind me. I'd known she was coming, so I wasn't surprised.

"No problems?" I asked.

"Laman has been brought to a holding cell in the basement of the courthouse. He didn't resist. I have prepared a royal carriage to transport the materials from the shrine."

"Great... Thanks a lot, Shiro."

She shook her head. "This much is to be expected of any maid, especially in service of those acting in place of Princess Ecstasia for a trial." Sensing the object of my gaze, she asked, "Does something concern you about these items?"

"Yeah, I was just wondering why they were abandoned here."

"I have heard stories from a maid who worked for the king who locked these things away. Fifty-four years ago, after defeating the Demon King, sixteen-year-old Laman passed through the Meadow of Beginnings during his return to Chiyodaku. There was supposed to be a homecoming ceremony to celebrate, but..."

Shiro's cool voice echoed against the floor and walls of the wooden shrine, giving her words a powerful sense of importance.

"The king was fifteen years old at the time. He'd only just recently managed large-scale Copy-Paste Spells and won popularity among the people. He'd also successfully copy-pasted into the Meadow of Beginnings on a large scale, which caused a dispute with Laman. The argument caused the king to call off all ceremonies."

"So even though the Hero defeated the Demon King, no one celebrated him for it?" I asked.

Shiro nodded.

How terrible...

I wanted to know more about the older man's past.

"Master, you will not bring these taxidermies to Miss Judge, correct?"

"...Nah. Let's go farther inside."

Pressing deeper into the shrine, we reached a chamber that looked to be a reference room.

Hundreds of jumbled wooden tablets, scrolls, and other papers chronicling the Hero's battle with the Demon King and records of his party's adventures were stored inside. RELICS OF THE HERO SHALL BE PROVISIONALLY STORED HERE BY ORDER OF THE KING.

According to an old paper posted on the wall, this was where all the materials relating to the Hero's exploits were collected.

"Could you bring all the documents in this room to Tsukasa?"

"Understood." Shiro started to pack the files into a cardboard box she pulled seemingly out of nowhere. "Master, please continue your investigation," she said as she left.

Okay, then... I guess I'll look over there next.

Off the hallway, a room called the exhibition hall caught my eye.

Upon entering, I was greeted by a large tapestry depicting the Hero's beginnings.

"'The Hero Laman receives his first set of leather armor'..."

It reminded me of the portraits of the former kings I'd seen in the castle. A footnote explained: *The Hero of the Holy Flame defeated the Demon King while still wearing this beginner's armor.* I guess Laman enjoyed playing on hard mode.

"Hmm. 'Miniature model of the Demon King's Castle'..."

The description below the diorama read: The Demon King bided his time in his palace at the edge of the continent for many years, while continuing to send out ferocious beasts. No one knows if anyone has ever entered the castle and returned alive. The castle's inner structure and the Demon King's appearance are also unknown."

"Wow, pointy... So this is who the Hero defeated... That's so..."

...Damn cool.

Laman had done what no one else had been able to do, and on hard mode, no

less.

The more I learned in that room, the broader my grin.

"Oops..." I accidentally bumped into a crystal ball that was rolling around on the floor.

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"Sir Laman!"
"Laman!"
"My brother!"
```

An image appeared from the crystal ball. Apparently, it was some kind of orb that could record video.

The projected scene showed a hill in the wilderness. Three people of different species raced over to a young man.

"Ha-ha-ha! That Demon King is no match for me... Ghhk!"

The teenaged Hero coughed up blood. Although much younger, he was definitely Laman.

I watched on.

"Everyone, thank you all for following me this far. We made it because of you, my comrades. We've proven ourselves to anyone who doubted or mistreated us..."

They were all injured, yet they embraced each other joyfully despite that.

More people ran up to the Hero.

"Hey, Elma, why are you recording? Get over he—"

The recording wavered, then stopped.

After picking up the orb, I placed it in a stand that looked to fit it. Inscribed in the stand were the words: Thanks to the great efforts of the Hero's party, there was a dramatic decrease in discrimination against mixed species.

"He really is a Hero," I muttered. My voice trembled with excitement.

I was happy to have been able to experience the story of a real hero who saved the world like those I'd always admired. However, there was something incredibly sad about it.

This place was abandoned.

I breathed in the musty air of the exhibition hall.

Some of the tapestries were blackened and moldy, to the point that I couldn't make out the faces of those depicted on them anymore.

This place was all that remained of Laman's heroism.

Even all these things, made so that no one would forget, had been forgotten.

Thoughts about the Hero when he was young and the older man I knew today swirled in my head.

I remembered all I'd seen since coming to this kingdom.

The Grand Bench, Japanese cars, anime merch in the princess's room, Youniqlo, dwarf-made imitations, Akihabara, Little Ginza, the Slime Store, the menu at the tayern...

As the amount of Japanese things in this world increased, so did the people drawn to them. From that came new culture—and a fun and prosperous kingdom.

However, the memory of the kingdom's salvation had been cast into a corner where no one would see it.

It just wasn't right.

The mass circulation of copy-pasted Japanese things had stolen away the people's interest and made them neglect the treatment of these precious objects. In a way, it was kind of like a cultural invasion.

Could this really be called prosperity? Was it truly for the best?

Is it even my place to question this kingdom's prosperity—or in its best interest?

No.

I shuddered.

I'd come here to save my sister, feeling like it was part of some kind of game.

However, at this moment, I was possibly the only person who'd see all this and consider the true meaning of the strange issues plaguing this world.

Tsukasa still didn't fully understand fantasy stuff, and the people of the Chiyodaku Kingdom had their own quirks, including a tendency to blindly accept everything Japanese.

I was just a regular high school student who loved games and fantasy.

Still, perhaps there was something only I could do for this nation.

"Fiona the Swordswoman, Keith the Thief, and Neidhardt the Assassin..."

Looking up, I spied a photo labeled with the names of the members of the Hero's party. The faces in the image were the same three I'd seen running to Laman in the orb's video.

They were the victims in this homicide case.

"I want to know the truth."

Did the Hero really kill them? If there's a lie in this story...

"I have to uncover it."

For the first time in my life, I felt truly passionate about something.

Wait. Is this enthusiasm or arrogance? Maybe this exhibit's just got me too excited and I'm getting carried away. But why did I react so strongly? Is this old place, its air brimming with the scent of heroism and taxidermy monsters, messing with my head?

"Come to me, boy...and I shall teach you something nice," a sudden voice invited, its tone bewitching and dripping with seductiveness.



I moved down the hallway to the Shrine of the Hero's courtyard.

"Oh-hoh-hoh. Come, boy...let us feel pleasure together."

An absurdly voluptuous woman lay there invitingly, her robe half-open.

"And what are you supposed to be?" I asked.

A totally ridiculous character had shown up out of nowhere and ruined my sentimental mood.

She didn't seem liable to leave me alone, though, so I decided to face her. She was beguilingly attractive, and her huge breasts were about the same size as Tsukasa's.

"Come, come. Take a peeeek ☆ at my boobies, boing-boing ☆."

"...Uh, yeah. Real sexy."

I responded to be polite, but this was getting really awkward.

"Ahhhn $\mbox{$\frac{1}{2}$}$. Come to meee $\mbox{$\frac{1}{2}$}$. Nuzzle nuzzle $\mbox{$\frac{1}{2}$}$. Let me touch youuu $\mbox{$\frac{1}{2}$}$. Become my servant $\mbox{$\frac{1}{2}$}$."

As she sidled up next to me, I realized she had nine foxtails.

"Hey, you're Tamamo Keisei, right?"

"Wha ...? How did you see through my transfiguration technique?"

"It was pretty of obvious... The foxtails kind of gave it away..." No other explanation made sense.

"Tch... I should never have used my mother's image. You are clever, Assistant Akuto Satou..."

Poof. The illusion broke and the little lawyer I'd seen in the courtroom appeared in the woman's place.

It was my first time seeing the girl up close. Her small body only came as high as my waist. Her fox eyes gleamed mysteriously, and fangs peeked out from her mouth. Her beastliness was softened by her chubby, childlike cheeks and her rounded contours.

That golden-brown-colored parka coupled with the way she moves... There's no doubt about it.

"You're the one I saw sneaking around the Slime Store," I said.

"Indeed! Heh-heh-heh... A fine piece of work, if I do say so myself. The staff had no idea that I transformed myself into the owner. I meant to come and play from the start of that trial but ran a little late. I arrived with all haste, then figured the way to mess with things would be through the evidence."

"Play? Mess with? What do you think trials are, some kind of—?"

"Game, yes. Do you not feel the same, boy? You seem to be enjoying the Judgment Spell."

Trials were like games. I couldn't completely deny it.

"How strange. You were totally unaffected by my illusion. My seduction technique usually has men crawling on the ground with their eyes rolled back in their heads as they spout their sperm on the floor."

I definitely hadn't expected her to use *that* kind of language. *I need to be* careful around this one.

"Say, boy, what was wrong with my seduction technique?"

What is this, her yearly performance review?

"Well... The way you tried to draw me in was too old-fashioned—and too blunt. Doesn't it embarrass you? I was embarrassed just watching." I elected to leave out the issue of my state of mind before Tamamo showed up and the fact that I'd been thinking of my sister.

"Guh... So a simple transformation is not enough to seduce a real, cultured Japanese man... Perhaps I need to learn some new techniques from the succubi..."

Tamamo took quick notes on what looked like a copy-pasted smartphone.

"By the way, how old are you? Is your young appearance an illusion, too?"

"I shall answer as a sign of my gratitude for your honesty. I am half nine-tailed fox. It has been five years since I came into this world, therefore, this is my true form. But we foxes enjoy a phenomenon called memory inheritance. I have received my mother's personality."

Her five tails caught my eye. For the first time, I realized one was smaller than the others.

Oh, I get it...half of nine.

"Tamamo. What do you want? You're not here to help the Hero, are you?"

"You are correct. I—or to be exact, my mother—was never a member of the Hero's party, though she did play with them on occasion. She had no bonds or affection for them. And after old Laman burned down the Demon King's castle, he just kept making one mistake after another until everything turned sour."

"Then why did you become his lawyer?"

"Because I know I can win. And because it is a chance to overturn Yeleniana's stupid indictment and make her dumb face look even dumber. Plus, no other lawyers would take his case. Heh-heh!"

The little fox spirit girl sat cross-legged on the floor, brimming with confidence.

"Hmm. That look in your eye, boy... Even if you won't become my servant, perhaps you'd be interested in working for me."

"What do you mean?" I questioned.

"Upon coming to this kingdom, I came to know about these Japanese things called 'games.' Felix Knight: Pro Attorney is a favorite of mine! It inspired me to read the entirety of the Six Codes and many bar exam study guides. With my memorization technique, I was able to take first place in the Chiyodaku Kingdom Bar Exam..."

She grinned, her eyes forming the shapes of crescent moons.

"I want to pull off a real, major reversal! Using my legal knowledge and the available evidence, I want to dramatically turn the tides of the case. I want to watch my opponents flail about as I revel in my skill. And to do so, I need the truth."

"Your play style is pretty messed up." Despite my remark, I kind of understood the feeling. As a video game lover, I knew that feeling of satisfaction. And I'd played *Felix Knight*, too. The story revolved around a lawyer who always found a way to turn the tides of his trial.

"You can call me messed up, or crazy... But these extremes are exactly what's

so interesting about human nature. Your sister... It seems her mind has also become younger again along with her body. Quite funny. I like her. Anyway, during the Color Slime Case, I gave you the evidence you needed. And now you can repay me."

"Tsukasa already had her sights set on the evidence you revealed. It was only a matter of time before we had what we needed. We don't owe you anything. Besides, you said you didn't do it for us. You just wanted to play around."

For now, it was best to keep wary of Tamamo. I didn't know if she was friend or foe.

"Heh-heh! Very well. You are a clever boy, indeed. Allow me to get to the point. For this homicide case, the court has taken issue with the evidence. I will tell you what I know, on one condition."

"What condition?"

"You play a match against me in one of your Japanese games!"

What a pain.

The sun was starting to set, and I still hadn't finished gathering all the information I needed.

If I didn't hurry, I might miss something important.

"Heh-heh! I have always wanted to challenge a real Japanese person in one of your greatest inventions—the video game! How about *Street F*ghter*? Or we can see who can speedrun Super M*rio the fas—"

"Sure. After the trial is over, that is," I answered.

Tamamo stopped in the middle of pulling out a few Super N*ntendo game cartridges.

"No. I cannot trust you to fulfill the promise. You must pay me in advance."

Ugh, this kid... I had to think of a good response.

"I played video games in the princess's room once...while drinking real Japanese miso soup at a real Japanese table..."

Her ears perked up at my made-up story. "O-oh...?"

"There's really nothing like playing Super N*ntendo while enjoying genuine Japanese miso soup..."

Now, that was kind of a stretch.

"That! That is what I want! Let us do that!"

"Okay, deal."

"It is a deal!"

Tamamo had taken the bait, and we sealed the agreement with a pinkie swear.

"With that settled, I shall give this to you, boy."

She pulled two sheets of paper from her parka, a map and a drawing. Both had been made with ink and a brush.

Red houses that resembled nomadic huts dotted a region on the map to the south of a big hole. *The Hero's Village* was written on the paper in childish scrawl.

The drawing looked something like a cola bottle with a demon tail growing out of it. It was labeled *Elma*.

"...ster. Master, are you in there?"

"Ah, the Royal Watchdog is back. I must take my leave. Do your utmost and secure my victory!"

Tamamo performed a somersault and vanished without a sound.

Article XI The Hero's Village Shall Not Follow the Principles of Local Government

"Please get in, Master."

I did as Shiro requested and got inside the coach.

"The Meadow of Beginnings is just a short flight away by pegasus-drawn carriage."

After Tamamo left, I'd reunited with Shiro.

Having already finished delivering the materials from the Shrine of the Hero, she had waited in front of the main building with a pegasus.

It was pulling a carriage designed for flight.

I summarized my conversation with Tamamo to Shiro, and she agreed to take me to the Meadow of Beginnings—the location of the Hero's home village and the scene of his alleged crime.

"Let's go, Shiro."

The instant I sat down and said as much, the horse and carriage immediately rose into the sky.

Sitting in the driver's seat, Shiro gave a "Hup!" as she snapped the reins. The pegasus brought us high into the air with but a slight movement.

It took off like magic and started gaining speed, and before I knew it, we'd left the shrine grounds behind.

"Wow... This thing's convenient. Why don't I see more of them around?"

I couldn't imagine why flying transportation was more popular.

"Due to their fickle nature, pegasuses are prone to issues when used for this way," Shiro explained.

"Huh, okay." I offered a random guess as to why. "Are they bad-tempered or something?"

"No. I don't fully understand, but it's said that they only allow those who are pure to ride them. Such discrimination as to who may sit in their carriages often causes trouble."

"Ah. That would explain why they aren't used too often."

Did it let me ride because I'm a virgin? I'm not sure how to feel about that.

Sitting there, I looked at the pegasus pulling the carriage. It let out a proud whinny.

Its face sort of reminded me of an older man's. That aside, it was a handsome white horse.

"Hmm... Horses really are cool," I muttered.

Of course, I enjoyed games where you could travel with a horse—and sometimes daydreamed of doing it myself.

Depending on the story setting, horses carried adventurers in light armor, knights in heavy armor, merchants pulling wagons, and sometimes even lancers, too...

"It's not difficult to acquire the Horse-Riding skill. If you so desire, I can assist you in unlocking it, as your maid," Shiro offered.

Unlock. Just as the word registered in my mind...

It's happening again.

I felt the phrase Skill Unlocked: Horse Riding somewhere deep inside my mind.

I guess I acquired it.

Maybe it had something to do with experiencing the skill up close and in

person.

Despite gathering skills and spells, I hardly ever had the chance to use them at all.

I kind of wanted to try them out, partially just to check if I really had unlocked them.

"We are now leaving the Chiyodaku Kingdom."

At Shiro's comment, I looked down and saw we were soaring over Little Ginza.

In just a few minutes, we'd moved a distance that would've taken a lot longer on foot. I relaxed a bit upon realizing how much time this had made up after losing so much to Tamamo.

"Great. This should give us a little leeway with our deadline," I said.

"Master, are you happy right now?"

"Huh?" I locked eyes with Shiro in the driver's seat.

"My apologies. Forget I asked anything." She turned away gloomily and focused her light, ice-blue eyes forward.

"No, it's okay. We promised to tell each other more about ourselves," I replied, remembering the conversation we'd had back in our room in the courthouse. "Um, do I seem that happy?"

"Yes. Your face—and your voice."

She was right.

I was still fired up from what I'd seen at the Shrine of the Hero. And that blazing feeling grew brighter thanks to the feeling of adventure that came with flying by pegasus.

"I don't understand." Shiro's comment unadorned, simple, and verging on cold. "To protect the kingdom, Ileana called for severe punishment against a dangerous person. Laman has done nothing but threaten the two of you. Yet you aren't angry, Master Akuto. Rather, you seem happy—and seek to know more about Laman. It seems strange."

The question in her statement was obvious. Shiro's expression was one of

straightforward interest.

I guess it would seem strange from her point of view. But still...

Some delicate, new emotion was on the verge of budding in the expressionless girl. I wanted to answer her as best I could.

After thinking it over for a few seconds, I said, "I guess it's just my conscience." The words came out of my mouth before I'd really registered them.

"I'm familiar with that word from the phrase 'guilty conscience.' And I believe that word was also present in the oath you took during the first trial. Is this the same 'conscience'?"

"Yup, that's right."

Oh yeah, I guess the oath did use that word.

"That only makes it more confusing. It doesn't make sense that you, a Japanese person would have a guilty conscience about Laman, a man who hates and mocks all Japanese things in this world."

"Is it really that weird?" I asked.

"It is!" Shiro's tail bristled as she turned to stare at me.

I've never seen her worked up like this before...

Thinking back, I'd told her that it was strange she considered her feelings needless on the day we met. Perhaps this was something like payback.

In any case, her question made me rethink my motivations. Ultimately, I decided to give her my unfiltered thoughts.

"I can't really explain it well, but somewhere inside me, there are certain things that I feel are good. On the other hand, there's some stuff I feel is strange or wrong. I think it's best to listen to those feelings and take them seriously. It doesn't matter to me if he despises Japan or makes light of it."

This was bigger than simple likes or dislikes.

"I just want to know the truth about this case—and about the Hero," I said.

"As the case's court assistant?" Shiro pressed.

"It's about more than playing a role."

"Then, why?"

Were Tsukasa here, she'd surely say something about her convictions as a judge.

I was different, though.

"Because I think it'll make this world a better place."

It felt like nothing more than a brave premonition, but it's what I wanted to believe.

The girl's pale blue eyes remained fixed on me.

Had that answered her question?

We gazed at each other for a bit, her beautiful eyes like a crystallized clear blue sky.

"...I don't understand the Japanese conscience." She looked disheartened but continued. "Thank you for explaining it to me, though." She spoke while exuding a soft, faint smile.

"I believe your simple and honest code of conduct is consistent with the direction that Princess Ecstasia wants for the kingdom."

"Is that a compliment?"

Shiro's face became expressionless again. "I will go back to my work now." She turned away.

Was all that really meant to check if I was doing something that might pose a danger to Princess Ecstasia? No way... She got all worked up, and her tail bristled... I think that was her own, genuine question.

It had been more than her acting as an attendant. I'd glimpsed the real her. The girl.

"Master, we will arrive soon."

"The Meadow of Beginnings," I muttered as I looked down. "A giant crater..."

There was a pit in the ground that looked like the sort left by a meteor. From

what I saw, it was larger than a baseball stadium.

Because of its shape, we hadn't seen it when we'd looked out on the grasslands at ground level yesterday.

"That's the scene of the crime," I said, double-checking the map that Tamamo gave me. "And those red houses south of the crater are the Hero's Village."

"Heading there now," Shiro replied.

The pegasus and carriage changed direction.

As we approached the ground, my nose picked up a strange scent. I smelled burnt leaves and branches, like a bonfire, but it was more than that. There was also burnt Styrofoam and rotting garbage.

The terrible stench assaulted my nostrils.

"What is that?" I said.

"The previous king successfully placed a large-scale copy-paste in this area approximately fifty-six years ago. As the story goes, he'd read a fragment of information about Japan and was drawn to the term *Yumenoshima*. Little did he know that he was copy-pasting a landfill site."

Yumenoshima. Literally, the "Island of Dreams."

"I've read about that place in a history textbook. Decades ago, during Tokyo's rapid growth, the majority of Tokyo's garbage was brought to Koto-ku. The name of the garbage processing plant built there is called *Yumenoshima*," I said.

"It was quite a shock to the king, who was only thirteen at the time. But instead of doing something about the garbage problem, he simply decided to never come here again. It was after this incident that Laman made his return."

"And that's why the Hero and the king fought," I reasoned.

Yeah, I'd be mad about that, too.

"Hold on a second. The garbage here isn't all that old."

Shiro nodded. "It seems that garbage begets garbage. Some of the trash left by the previous king contained items of value, so the people of this area never cleaned it up. Over time, this region came to be regarded as a place where dumping trash was okay, and people from other regions began tossing their refuse here."

"That's terrible... Wh-what's that?"

Dashing across the surface...

"Caw! Caw!!"

...was a herd of monsters, each about the size of a car and possessed of a bird's body and a snake for a tail.

"Those are cockatrices—pests that spawn near stagnant water. They seem to enjoy the stale air and sludge of the Meadow of Beginnings and have greatly multiplied in number over the past few decades," Shiro explained.

The cockatrices cawed shrilly while they kicked up debris from the ruins of an old house.

"It looks like no one's in there, but...they're destroying someone's house," I said.

"Somebody probably built the house not knowing that this was cockatrice territory, then had to flee after being attacked. Cockatrices have a high attack level, so please be careful."

I examined my surroundings again as we walked past the ruins of the home.

One area of the meadow was dotted with structures that looked like tents of a nomadic tribe. The huge crater was surrounded by trash.

Sludge had formed from the decomposing trash, filling the air with something foul.

"Blech... Wait, there's no road from here to Little Ginza," I remarked. "How do people bring all their garbage here?"

Shiro lowered her head. "I apologize. I'm not certain..."

If she doesn't know, this area has to keep things pretty private.

"You're dealing with this pretty well, all things considered," I said.

"By nose hab already been desensitized do dis sbell." Shiro's nose was clearly running, but she was unable to wipe it because her hands were full of the

pegasus's reins. "We hab arribed." She landed the carriage on the ground.



The Hero's Village greeted us with silence.

"Um...excuse me," I called out to a nearby older man.

""

He ignored me.

Maybe I need to properly introduce myself.

"Nice to meet you. Uh, I've come from Japan, and I work for the Chiyodaku Kingdom's— "Ptooey!"

He spat at me.

"Master, are you all right?"

Shiro appeared to be feeling better, having rinsed her nose at a nearby well.

"Yeah, I dodged it. Still, this doesn't bode well."

The people around us certainly didn't look pleased to have visitors. A few of the villagers looked at us but kept their distance.

There were twenty or thirty tentlike dwellings nearby, and the population of the village seemed quite low. Outside, there were a few dozen elderly and even fewer children.

It was strange to see the complete absence of anyone between their teens and their fifties.

Among one group, there was a child with a blue slime riding on his head.

"Isn't that guy the court assistant, Mr. Akuto?" The child was quickly silenced and ushered back inside their house by an older man who I assumed to be his relative.

"Shh! He's come to judge Laman."

"I don't think we can expect much cooperation from them," I said.

"No. How would you like to proceed, Master?" Shiro responded. "Shall we

investigate Laman's house or the crime scene?"

"Whichever is closer."

We started walking. Laman's house proved to be the nearer place.

"'Keep Out, Chiyodaku'..." I read the large painted sign posted outside the dwelling.

"I can sense someone inside. But I can't tell if they're friendly," Shiro cautioned.

"Someone's even drawn the symbol of the Scales of Judgment with an X over it..."

There were a few signs around the place, with upside-down black scales on them with X marks.

People must be really angry and frustrated over the trial.

Whoever we find inside is probably going to argue with us.

"This could take a while. Why don't we examine the crime scene first, before the sun goes down?" I suggested.

Shiro nodded. "Understood."



We're here to find and confirm the objective truth. As it stands, the accused's statement contains a lie. We have to uncover what it is.

The sun was dipping low to the west of the meadow as I pulled up a window with the photo depicting the scene of the crime.

"This terrain matches the photo."

The huge crater looked to be the same size and shape as the one in the picture.

Apparently, police who'd seen the blaze from the east had taken the photos on the day of the crime about a month ago.

"Where did all this new garbage come from, though?" I wondered.

One thing was clearly different from the image. The crater was filled with trash.

Vwoom.

Following the unfamiliar sound, I noticed a green light shining inside the crater.

The light eventually took the shape of a trash bag, fell to the ground, and rolled deeper, toward the center of the crater. It joined a massive heap that was piled as high as a school building.

"That's the spell circle of an elven object transference spell," Shiro said.

I blinked, puzzled. "A what?"

"It's a type of magic that connects two places and transfers an object through a one-way passage. The process involves elf-crafted magical tools...and it appears several circles have been set around this crater. I wonder where they're coming from. Perhaps there's a garbage dumping site somewhere that sends it all here..."

"I'm going down there to check it out," I said. "If you don't want to, then—"

"We don't know what kind of danger awaits. I will accompany you for your safety."

"Thanks."

The two of us stepped from the green meadow onto the burnt earth of the pit.

It took a few minutes to reach the center. As we walked, large bundles of trash continued to appear and roll down into the crater, accompanied by that strange *vwoom* sound.

A few of the portal sites were clogged with trash and unable to fit any more, so instead, they buzzed like broken speakers.

"Many of these appear to be connected to Little Ginza," Shiro remarked.

She was right. I spotted some flyers for the Slime Store among the trash.

"That reminds me. There was a lot of garbage piled up in the area yesterday."

Before we'd gone to the Slime Store, I'd noticed trash lying around everywhere. Wherever little Ginza's dumping spot was linked to the crater.

"This looks like the center... What a mess."

The middle of the hollow was filled with metals that had melted then resolidified and raw garbage slime.

"Evidently, there was an explosion of considerably high temperature here." Just like Shiro said, the middle of the pit had another, deeper hole within it, suggesting a second explosion. I had to be at least thirty feet in diameter, and the cause had been hot enough to melt metal.

"I don't think we'll find any human remains here," I said. There was too much trash around to dig for clues, either.

At the Adventurer's Guild tavern, I'd seen the Hero's Holy Flame disintegrate a bone.

It wasn't hard to imagine that it could incinerate a victim's body entirely.

"Okay, the next thing I want to check is... Hey, Shiro, can you cast a Fire spell?"

"My apologies. I have not unlocked any flame magic. What are you attempting to do?"

"I want to confirm something about the color of the flames."

I opened the photo evidence window again.

There had been three explosions. We didn't know their order, but according to Ileana, they were what killed the three victims.

The flames of each blast had a different color. The first was reddish-black. The second had reddish-black and yellow flames. And the third was a bright crimson that bordered on white.

"I guess I'll just try burning some random trash. Shiro, could you find some sheet metal or stuff that looks hard to ignite?"

"Certainly. Here."

Crash! Snap! Shiro started kicking and breaking apart a refrigerator that was

lying near us.

Her strength is superhuman. Maybe it comes from being a beast hybrid.

"Is this satisfactory?"

She casually handed me the door off the refrigerator, and I propped it up to make a hearth-like structure and filled it with trash.

"Shiro, stand back a little. I don't know if this is going to work."

"Master, what are you—?"

While picturing flames, I whispered, "Holy Flame."

Poof!

The spell let off a silly little sound, and a small fire about the size of a burning match appeared above my palm.

Shiro looked at me with her eyes wide. "When did you acquire a Fire spell?"

"I don't totally understand it myself, but I guess I got some kind of World Transfer Bonus that makes unlocking spells and skills really easy. I never had a chance to tell you."

Now it would come in handy with the investigation. Thankfully, after our conversation on the pegasus carriage, I got the feeling Shiro wouldn't see me as a threat for possessing this new power.

"You mean, the same World Transfer Bonus that changed Miss Judge's body?"

"I guess so. Uh, please don't tell anyone about it except the princess, though. If people grow overly cautious around me, it'll make things difficult."

"Understood. No one except Princess Ecstasia."

I lit a fire in the impromptu hearth.

The flames caught on the objects I'd set up, while the refrigerator door protected it from the wind and kept it from spreading beyond control.

Black smoke rose from the little red blaze. This was the same natural phenomenon I knew from modern-day Japan.

Now I knew that fire didn't produce different colors simply because this was another world. I tried taking a picture of the scene with the photo evidence window. It was added to a category labeled *Admin: Photographic Evidence*.

"Okay... I think the first flames were burning garbage." Just as I said this hypothesis, I started to stumble and feel faint. "Whoa... Wha—?"

"You may lean on me, Master." Shiro supported me.

"I suddenly feel dizzy..."

"I believe it's because you are not used to using magic."

"Oh... I almost forgot that I don't really know anything about magic in this world."

"We often compare using magic to playing a flute." I heard the sound of her maid outfit rubbing against something. She was holding my body close to her pale skin. "Your magical capacity is like your lung capacity. You use magic like blowing air out of your body. And the flute is the spell mechanism. While it only exists as an image in your mind, you still must press the keys accurately. Thus, manipulating magic is like working a flute. The more you hone your craft, the wider variety of skills you can use. To master it, you must believe in your power and exercise it often."

I felt the sensation slowly returning to my tingling face and body.

"Using a spell that you have just unlocked is like a child blowing as hard as they can into a flute without knowing how to play it—the sound will come out distorted. The body will temporarily run out of magical power and enter a deficient state."

"That was actually really easy to understand," I said.

"Strictly speaking, the effects are extremely varied depending on the individual's constitution and the nature of the spell being used. The biggest obstacle is whether you can acquire a spell in the first place. A World Transfer Bonus that allows you to clear that obstacle is...amazing," Shiro replied.

"Still, I'll only have weak spells if I don't work to master them... For now, I'm a potential novice at everything."

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"That...is true..."
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I remembered that Tsukasa had told me I could do anything I set my mind to back in the pub before we were brought to Chiyodaku.

What that really means is that I'm just a plain old, normal guy with no special powers. Even in another world, the best I can do is go make the most of my broad but shallow skill set. I want more powerful magic. Something heroic...

While I was distracted mulling this over in my dizzy head...

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"Caw!"
"Caw, caw caw caw!"
"Ca-caaaw!"
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...a gaggle of monster cries sounded from nearby.

"Master, it appears we are in cockatrice territory."

I looked in the direction Shiro was glaring at. We were already surrounded by a few dozen cockatrices.

"I'b sorry. I couldn't sbell dem... I didn't nodice." Shiro sniffed her running nose and coughed. "But do not worry, I will exterminate them. Please wait here."

She laid me down on the broken refrigerator...

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"Hya!"
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...and let out a powerful shout before disappearing.

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"Caaaw!"
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Death throes of birds followed. The cockatrices' heads were being blown off with a hammer.

I spotted Shiro floating in the air.

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"Haaa!"
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The beautiful white-haired girl spun gracefully amid blood spatters.

Sparks flew when she landed on all fours on the hood of a broken car.

The weight and power of her metal boots was immense.



She used some kind of special fighting technique that employed her powerful dog hybrid legs.

"I hope I didn't spray any gray matter on you, Master."

"N-no, I'm good..."

After receiving my answer with an expressionless face, she jumped up to strike her next target with a "Hup!"

A cockatrice readied its talons and plunged down to attack her, but she struck first, opening her legs to kick through its head and abdomen at the same time. The bird's head flew off and its body split open.

This is pretty bizarre...

Although it was frightening to watch, I was also impressed with the first inperson monster battle I'd ever seen.

Plunk...

A cockatrice head rolled next to me.

"…!"

Shiro silently landed beside it...

Squish!

...and stomped it with her boot, striking with the force of a hydraulic press.

"What a finishing blow...," I breathed, amazed.

"If they aren't dealt with quickly, there is the possibility they will turn undead," Shiro answered coolly.

Sounds like common sense in this world.

I watched in amazement as the powerful maid exterminated the giant bird creatures.

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"Caaaw!"
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"Caw caw caw!"

"Ca-caw!"

Undaunted, the bloodthirsty cockatrices started to beat their wings.

"I will eliminate them all," Shiro stated as she headed for the next nearest cockatrice.

Hmm? That last one she killed...

I noticed that its snake-head tail wasn't dead yet. It was hissing and lunging for Shiro, who was too occupied with the fight in front of her to notice.

That thing looks venomous!

The snake was a poisonous shade of purple.

If this were a video game, that thing would definitely have some kind of poison attack.

There's no way I can let it bite Shiro.

As if in a trance, I put my hand out in front of me.

"Shiro, behind you! Holy Flame!" I yelled...

...and my consciousness flipped off like a switch.

Article XII The Law Loves Truth

My eyes opened to find an unfamiliar ceiling.

Circular woodwork spiraled in a radial pattern from a pair of columns that supported the ceiling.

Above that was some kind of red tent fabric...

"So yer awake, kid..."

The voice came from a sexy woman with demonic horns and a tail.

"Gimme a break. Collapsin' in a pile of garbage? Yer stinkin' up the place."

She looked to be in her twenties. Her wavy hair was a purple-black shade, and her eyes were like bright amethysts. Presently, she sat on a small chair, wearing an angry expression.

"Wh-where's Shiro?!" I exclaimed, remembering what happened right before I passed out. "What happened?"

"Sleepin' there," the woman answered curtly, pointing with her purple nail.

Another bed had been laid out in the round, dimly lit tent. Shiro was resting on it.

"Lost consciousness after transferrin' her magical power to you. I had the pleasure of carryin' you both here."

"Thank goodness... So the snake got dealt with somehow."

"Ah-ha-ha! You know nothin', kid." The demon woman let out a high-pitched laugh. "The Royal Watchdog is resistant to poison. That's why she was ignorin' the snake and goin' for the fast-movin' bird. She ended up defeatin' all of 'em by herself."

"Then, my magic..."

"You got one shot off but only managed to spray some fire around yerself before passin' out. If that'd been a solo quest, you'd be dead."

"...Sorry."

I regretted acting so naive. Then I remembered...

"Wait, what time is it?"

...we were on a time limit.

"Bout three hours since you passed out."

It was already night. I sensed a calm darkness beyond the tent.

We still have time before the deadline. We're okay for now.

"Thank you for bringing us here... Uh, how long have you been watching us?"

"Since you came sniffin' round this house."

"Oh, then that means..."

"S'right. This is Laman's house."

I looked around. Aside from the beds, there were some kitchen supplies, a rustic hearth, lanterns... Nothing but the bare minimum.

"Gloomy place, ain't it? Everyone else is usin' those Japanese solar panels. But Laman only uses his money on other people..." As she spoke, the woman drained a cup of something that smelled strongly of alcohol. "Ahhh. Drinkin's 'bout all I have for fun these days. House-sittin' for a month has gotten pretty borin'."

She wore a reddish-purple form-fitting knit dress with deep slits up the sides. It showed off her nice, hourglass figure. She radiated a mature seductiveness.

"Um, are you...Elma?" I asked.

"S'right. The fox told you, didn't she?" Elma eyed me suspiciously. "An' you're that Japanese boy they summoned... Court Assistant Akuto, right?"

"Yes, but how did you—?"

I'd thought no one had TVs or the like out here. She'd heard about the news

too quickly for someone without modern communication devices.

"Slivan from the Slime Store came by recently. On one'a those expensive wyvern taxis, no less. He told me all about you and little Miss Judge."

"Slivan? What was he doing here?"

"Said a bunch of his pet slimes got returned to the store. People who bought 'em said they didn't want 'em anymore if they weren't really different colors. He brought a few of 'em here."

"Why would he take them to the Hero's Village?"

"He needed people to foster 'em until he found new owners. And he's payin' us for it. Slimes are used for labor round these parts... Anyway, he left claimin' he was gonna start workin' on his next creation."

A new relationship between the divided Chiyodaku Kingdom and the independent Hero's Village was sprouting.

"As you can see, this is a village of old folks and kids. All the young adults went to go work in the city and left the kids here. I figure if we take on some slime-related work, maybe it'll be enough of a reason to open a route from here to Chiyodaku."

Elma, this demonic-looking woman, was spearheading the effort.

"What're you lookin' at?" she demanded.

"You know a lot about Chiyodaku," I answered.

"I'm not like Laman. I used to work at a shop in Chiyodaku run by half-succubi. I shouldn't have to be stuck with these country bumpkins just 'cause of my history with those dead geezers."

Her tone was sharp.

She has a history with Laman...yet doesn't look nearly as old. It'd be rude to ask her age, though. Maybe her youth is connected to her demon magic. It doesn't matter. I've got to stay on target.

I sat up on my bed, faced Elma, and bowed my head. "Excuse me, can you please tell me what really happened? With Laman and the incident, I mean."

"Huh? What's the point in talkin' 'bout that geezer now?"

"The point is that I want his trial to reflect the truth."

"The truth? Reflect? Don't make me laugh! Don't you see? Thanks to you lot takin' your damn time, I've been stuck playin' house for too long. Just hurry up an' judge the old coot!"

Her tone is so harsh... Does she really hate him that much? I guess it doesn't matter. I need to solve this mystery.

I bowed my head even lower.

"I can't do that. Until you help me, I'll keep asking for months and months."

In reality, Tsukasa was trapped in the Scales of Judgment's cage, and I had to return in only a few hours, but I kept that part to myself.

"Kid. Are you really gonna try to mess with me, after I saved you?" *Clang*. Elma slammed down her cup and glared at me angrily.

She was scary... But this was no time to give in to fear.

"In order to judge him righteously, we need someone who knows the truth... We need your cooperation, Elma."

"I've got no obligation to help you. I'm doin' Laman a favor stayin' here until it's all over, and that's what I'm gonna do."

An obligation to help as a favor to her old friend. There was a clear antiquated morality in her words.

She wouldn't be swayed by things like righteousness and truth.

What can I say to convince her?

"Slorp."

A small blue slime jiggled up to me on the floor.

"Oh, are you one of the ones from the Slime Store?"

The slime shook up and down as if to say "Yes, that's right."

"Agh, not again. Hey, one of 'em got in here!" Elma called out to someone outside.

"Oh no, she found us!"

"Sorryyyyy!"

I heard two boys outside. They entered with their heads lowered.

"You two runts shouldn't be up this late. 'Specially not to eavesdrop on us."

I guess they'd been listening from outside the tent.

"Sorry, but we wanted to thank you, Mr. Assistant. This slime is feeling a lot better. Thanks, mister!"

One of them picked up the slime, and the other bowed his head toward me.

"...There's still a little bit of gold leaf left in there," I said upon noticing some small bits in the slime's body.

This slime was the one who'd come out as evidence at the end of the trial—the heavily modified one.

"Slivan said he'll come back and take out the rest after the slime gets a little bigger and stronger," one of the boys replied.

"Oh, well, that's good." I nodded, satisfied.

"I had heard that Chiyodaku had slimes of all different colors even though there are only blue ones here... It always seemed strange," one boy remarked.

Meanwhile, the other said, "Why didn't you thank him, Grammy Elma? Are you mad?"

"...I guess I gotta set a good example for the kids." Elma sighed. "Fine. We are indebted to you for savin' the slimes. As a show of gratitude, I'll tell you what you want to know. After that, we're even."

She ushered the children back outside. "Time for bed, you two." Once they were gone, the amethyst-eyed demon woman set another small chair next to the hearth. "Sit. Okay, what do you want to know, kid?"

I had to take advantage of the opportunity the slime had given me. So I asked her to tell me everything.

"Please start with when you first met Laman."



"I met Laman fifty-six years ago..."

"My home village rests on the outskirts of demon territory. At the time, half-demon, half-humans and other hybrids were discriminated against, so we weren't allowed in any kingdom I, a fourteen-year-old half-succubus, and Fiona, a twelve-year-old ogre hybrid, worked as vigilantes for the village, fighting off monsters. But the monster attacks were gettin' stronger by the day, and the village was nearly overrun. That's when Laman's party came to help us."

"Laman, a fire-spirit hybrid, was fourteen back then. He'd been declared the Hero by the king of that era and was on his journey to the Demon King's castle. He traveled with a thief who'd tried to steal with him and an assassin who'd been tasked with killing him by another kingdom..."

"What is it, kid? You saw all this at the Shrine of the Hero, did you? Then you know who I'm talkin' about. Eventually, Fiona and I joined the party, too. Together with Laman, we pledged to defeat the Demon King. And he swore to protect his comrades at all costs. The five of us destroyed the Demon King's castle."

"I'll let you in on somethin' you won't learn from that shrine. There are three kinds of Holy Flame spells that Laman uses the most. Fireball, a technique that creates a flame sphere he can throw. Karmic Flare is an even bigger version that takes longer to cast. That's what he tossed at the Demon King's castle, by the way. Last is Flame Oblivion, a powerful technique that incinerates everything around him. Each one creates fires that burn at thousands of degrees, but none

of them are very flexible, and it takes a long time to shoot the Karmic Flare over long distances. We all had our roles to help buy him time. Fiona specialized in close combat as our swordswoman, Keith handled covert ops and scoutin', and Neidhardt did the surprise attacks. I gathered the intelligence behind the scenes."

"After we defeated the Demon King... It was just one bad thing after another. We headed back to Laman's, plannin' to have a picnic together, but found it full of trash."

"That Laman... He went straight to the king, screamin' at him and throwin' fireballs. He was indebted to the old king, but that man died in the middle of our adventure. The new ruler had been crowned at fifteen. The kid started blatherin' on somethin' about an island of dreams in Kotoku, but Laman wasn't havin' it. He was so pissed that he shouted, 'Don't come to my village until you apologize, you pink bastard!' That's when the Meadow of Beginnings became an autonomous zone with the Hero's Village at its center."

"All the homecomin' ceremonies and feasts were canceled. The hero who'd saved the world shut himself away in his home. Everyone in the village and the members of the Hero's Party thought the king would apologize before too long, but he never did."

"The king successfully copy-pasted Japanese things over and over. He changed the kingdom's name to Chiyodaku, and the nation prospered. And without the common enemy that was the Demon King, people all over the world grew interested in the Chiyodaku Kingdom's new prosperity."

"Eventually, even the people of the Hero's Village began to change. From the

piles of everyone's trash, they dug out Japanese things that they thought were still usable. They called refrigerators and washin' machines sacred treasures. It baffled me. A name like that had always been reserved for ancient weapons that helped us battle demons."

"Everyday life in the village improved thanks to all the Japanese things, and everyone came to recognize their usefulness. However, Laman refused to admit that somethin' from the trash had value. Admittin' it would prove he'd been wrong not to accept it in the first place. He grew more insular, and stopped leavin' the village. Fiona was the one who tried to comfort him."

"Their relationship? They were married. Oh, you didn't know that? Yeah, I guess it wasn't official by Chiyodaku Kingdom standards. It's not like they signed any papers. Kids? Didn't have any. You know how Laman was found abandoned as a baby? They say it's fire spirit tradition to burn the mother to death after she bears a child of their lineage. Knowin' that, Laman didn't wanna risk doin' anything that might hurt Fiona."

"And so, the Meadow of Beginnings, the Hero's Village, and the Hero's Party were all left behind by the changin' times. Years passed. Keith and Neidhardt got tired of waitin' around and started makin' trips into the Chiyodaku Kingdom."

"A thief and assassin couldn't make a livin' in a nation following Japanese law, so they took advantage of the old king's promise to provide food and drink to the Hero's party and did nothin' but hang around and eat for free. When he got bored, Neidhardt used his disguise abilities to turn himself into Laman and mess around with people. They kept this up until they died last month."

"I couldn't stoop to such humiliation, though. I distanced myself from them and started workin'. As a half-succubus, I need to feed off men's essence to sustain my power, so I got a job at a place that facilitated that sorta thing."

"After a few years, Keith and Neidhardt got hungry for more money. Survivin' off drinks and appetizers was no way to live."

"Around the same time, Fiona got sick. She really needed to eat human flesh or else her body would start to fail, but she told me, 'I survive without it. I love Laman, so please don't tell him.' Laman sought Japanese medicine to help her and needed money to get it."

"The Chiyodaku Kingdom was growin' fast. And the city was runnin' out of places to dump its trash. Keith and Neidhardt latched on to that and brought the trash to the Hero's Village in exchange for money. They figured Laman could burn it for them, so there'd be no problem."

"Keith and Neidhardt used an old object transference spell scroll they'd stolen to create portals between Little Ginza's trash dump and the hollow in the Hero's Village, and they got paid based on the amount of trash they got rid of. Laman agreed to burn the trash so he could pay for Fiona's medicine. Day after day, for decades. For that medicine that barely did anything. And Fiona kept lyin' and told him it was helpin'."

"He knew people might make fun of an old hero left behind by the changin' culture and stuck burnin' garbage. But he thought if he made up the story that he ruled over the village with terror that the villagers wouldn't look as stupid. So Keith and Neidhardt spread the rumor claimin' that's what Laman was doin'."

"Last year, the king died. And right after, Laman came into possession of a Shard of Judgment. Apparently, it fell out of the sky right into the Hero's Village. He didn't want to use it, though. To him, judgment was killin' the Demon King. And there was no one else he wanted to kill. Exhausted from doin' nothin' but garbage cleanup, he decided to take Fiona, who was gettin' worse, to meet Princess Ecstasia and mend his relationship with the royal family."

"But before he could, some official who claimed he 'came from Chiyodaku' showed up with black balance scales and tried to take the Shard of Judgment. Laman fell ill after the fight and was laid up in bed for a while."

"During that time, the trash started pilin' up. Keith and Neidhardt decided to burn the trash without Laman's powers, and Fiona helped. I had my work, so I wasn't around to pitch in."

"On the day of the incident, the three of them were lightin' fire to the trash. I don't know the details about how they were doin' it, but I do know there was a strong wind blowin' that day...and before they knew it, they were surrounded by flames. I got worried about them, so I flew over the area to see how everything was goin', and I saw the three of 'em stranded in the middle of the crater. Maybe somethin' bad caught fire. There was a big explosion and a huge burst of black flames. I hurried to Laman to tell 'em what happened."

"Laman cut through the flames, and at the center of the hollow, he cast Flame Oblivion over the whole area. All of the burnin' trash was wiped out by Laman's spell, but it was already too late. Keith's, Neidhardt's, and Fiona's skin had turned an uncanny shade of bright red, and they couldn't move an inch. So Laman, screamin' in grief, cast another small Flame Oblivion. He buried

everything with his own hands."

"After that, Laman went catatonic. His heart was broken. When the police and prosecutor came from Chiyodaku, he didn't resist at all. In the beginnin', he even sat there listenin' obediently when Princess Ecstasia and the prosecutor started his trial."

"That's the whole story of the Hero's Party. Kid...are you cryin'?"

I was crying.

"That's just terrible... Why did it have to turn out like this?" Elma's explanation had cleared up every doubt and question I had about Laman. The truth was just too absurd—and too sad. "Couldn't he have chosen a better story route?!"

He was the Hero who'd defeated the Demon King, the Hero who'd saved the world, but the half century that followed his triumphs had been hard on him and his party.

Perhaps they'd made a few little missteps along the way, but things grew worse and worse for them as time went on. The small, near-invisible choices they made over fifty-four years had steadily led the Hero's party to a bad ending.

"You're grossin' me out, kid. I don't know what you're talkin' about with that 'story route' and whatnot. You and Miss Judge are supposed to be the ones judgin' the bad guy, so stop your pathetic blubberin'."

"But I don't think he's a bad guy anymore."

"What the hell are you saying?!" Elma snapped back at me. "Then who's the bad guy here? Three people died! And he couldn't protect them! In a world with no Demon King, who'll take responsibility for this shit outcome?! That old bastard has accepted his fate and wants to pay for it with his life!"

"But he doesn't need to!" I fought back. "Why should he have to pay with his life? The whole idea is old-fashioned, conceited, and meaningless!" I couldn't hate him for what he'd done. "Elma, please... Give this story as testimony before the court."

I got down off my chair and bowed my head to the last surviving witness of the Hero's party.

"Don't be ridiculous. I told you my story, and now we're even. Go home."

"I'm sorry, but... We need your testimony. I'm begging you." I pressed my forehead to the cold floor of the tent and pleaded.

"Tch. Hey, I know you're over there."

I sensed some people outside the tent at Elma's remark.

"Sorry, we were listenin' in."

"Grammy Elma, did you make him cry?"

"Slorp."

Some older people, children, and slimes were looking in at me.

I paid them no mind. "Please, Elma." I felt my hot tears land on my hands pressed against the floor. "Please, help us."

"I've already told you. I've no obligation to help."

I raised my head to look at her. Snot from my nose ran into my mouth. "Yes, you do. You have an obligation to protect your friends, just like you've done until now."

Hoping to convince her, I appealed to her bond with the rest of the Hero's party.

"At first, I thought you hated Laman. But from your story, I can tell that isn't true... You're just trying to uphold your promise to him."

"That old bastard wants to die."

"But that doesn't change the fact that you should protect him. It's the honorable truth."

Elma glared back at me with her terrifying, unblinking gaze and spoke. "Kid... You know nothing about Laman the Hero." She suddenly grabbed me by the collar and brought her face so close to mine that I could feel her breath.

"But I do! His story is that of a Hero who defeated the last boss and continued to protect his heroine and friends, all by himself! Do you want this all to end with him being judged a villain? How do you explain that to the children?!"

I heard the kids behind me gasp.

"..." The demon woman's eyes wavered. Elma had surely been helping her friends from a distance all this time, in her own way. However, it was easy to lose sight of things that way.

"Please, help us protect the truth," I entreated.

"What'll happen if I testify?"

"The world will be a better place."

"What's yer basis for sayin' that?"

"Obvious facts shouldn't need a basis for argument."

Elma went silent for a moment. "That arrogant way of speakin' and that look... You're just like him when he was younger." The woman released her grip on my neck, seemingly having reached a decision. "It's been decades since any man faced my intimidation with such resolve."

"Does that mean you'll—?"

"I like you." The half-succubus crossed her arms under her large breasts. "I'll give you your testimony."

"Th-thank you, so much!"

Thank goodness. I was so happy I bowed my head again. From behind me, I heard the older people and children sigh in relief.

"Don't get me wrong. I just don't want you gettin' any more of your snot all over the place."

Article XIII The Manifestation of Justice Shall Bring Forth the Dawn

Driving the pegasus carriage wasn't as easy as it looked.

As I zigzagged through the sky, Shiro, who I'd laid down in the back, woke up a few times.

She gave me some tips on how to operate it, and somehow, we managed to reach the courthouse before dawn.

Shiro took care of returning the carriage while I hurried back to Tsukasa.

"Tell me everything."

My sister looked the same as when I'd left her, sitting inside the cage made by the Scales of Judgment.

In the light of the moon and stars, I saw a conviction in her eyes. She'd known that I'd return for her.

The kingdom's old incident reports and moldy documents from the Shrine of the Hero were piled high around the Grand Bench. All of them were turned over, suggesting Tsukasa had read everything.

A maid who must have been the one who brought my sister all the files stood at attendance.

She bowed and said, "Please let me know if you need anything."

After picking up the princess, who was sleeping in a corner, she left.

Thank goodness for all this help. Now we've got to do right by them and finish this.

I parted cage.	the	sea	of	docu	ments	and	approa	ched	the	judge	inside	the	golden



"I found the truth, Tsukasa. I need to tell you everything I learned."

About the crime scene. About Elma.

I had no idea what it would mean from a legal standpoint, but I believed that Tsukasa would be able to make sense of it all.



"Illegal destruction of corpses, and professional negligence resulting in death." That was my sister's answer after hearing everything I had to say. "It's possible the prosecutor could add them as alternative charges," she added.

"Alternative charges?"

"There are situations when, after a trial has already begun, there is cause to believe another crime was committed, one uncovered during the course of the investigation. In those cases, the trial can add that other crime without having to restart the entire trial."

After getting all fired up from my adventure to the Meadow of Beginnings and listening to the Hero's life story, her levelheaded legalese brought me back down to reality.

"Okay, so...he'd be charged for a different crime instead of murder?"

I regretted getting so carried away and believing this would end with him being hailed as a benevolent superhero.

Three people had still died. We had to take this seriously.

"I'm sorry. I don't know what the decision will be yet. I have to save that for the trial."

Her verdict would be rendered on the courtroom floor, with those two burnt tapestries of the sun at her back.

The almost-thirty-year-old judge who had been transformed into a beautiful teenager fixed me in her gaze.

"Even if I've already made my decision, I can't tell anyone. Not even you. A judge can't reveal their decision until it is officially handed down in court."

I nodded silently.

Judges are constitutionally recognized as independent. That also means they're solitary.

Tsukasa had faced every member of the court except me before the trial was interrupted. The prosecutor, the lawyer, and the accused.

Bearing the burden of judging had to be the loneliest position in the kingdom.

Tsukasa sighed. "I'm so glad you got this to me. There are just too many things I can't understand when I hear them on the fly in the courtroom."

Her tone of voice had changed. Maybe she'd finished processing everything and switched to off mode.

"Are you sure you're good?" I asked.

"Yeah. I read fifty-four years' worth of criminal records and found plenty on Keith and Neidhardt, but nothing on the accused. I think this testimony has high credibility..." As she spoke, Tsukasa hugged her legs and looked to the side, then leaned toward me from behind the cage's bars. "You know, more than anything, I was scared while listening to you. I sympathize with the Hero's story."

"You do?"

"The way he stands out, his remarkable talents... What do you think that means?"

"I'm envious," I admitted. "I wish I was like that."

"The reality of it isn't so easy. It's scary." Tsukasa's long black hair cascaded over her shoulders and partially concealed her face. "Being really good at something tricks you into thinking you're amazing. That you're a good person because you're capable. But it's not true. And it makes it hard to know what's really important."

Her eyes turned distant, as though she were reflecting on her life. Melancholy glistened in them.

"I just happened to be good at my studies. I got the top score on the bar exam and became a judge. Still, I'm nowhere near perfect at my job. There's plenty I

don't know, and I'm criticized for it constantly. 'If you're so smart, why didn't you know something that simple?' Even when people aren't scolding me, I'm always afraid there's a mistake I haven't caught..."

I leaned against the outside of the cage from beside Tsukasa, pressing the side of my body against her.

"If only every opponent were easy to understand," Tsukasa said. "I was a hero when taking exams. I almost never made mistakes, and even when I did, they were easy to fix. But it really is far more complicated. I don't have many chances to compensate for my weaknesses. I worry it warps my viewpoint."

I felt the warmth of her body and rhythm of her breath through the bars.

"I'm always watching you, you know," she admitted. "Because when I watch you, I can confirm things about myself. I constantly wonder how things look through your eyes..."

"From my perspective, you're really cool," I told her, and I meant it.

Even with the power and position to judge others, Tsukasa was never conceited, and she carried strong convictions.

Her determination to succeed was stronger than anyone else's.

I got the feeling that she was fighting within herself about how to handle her own strong convictions.

But also, her words made me notice something.

Seeing the way Laman's sense of self had become warped, it wasn't out of the question for Tsukasa to become warped like that someday, too.

Had I come to this fantasy world alone and obtained some great power like I'd always wanted—be it fire, lightning, ice—I would've turned out that way eventually, too.

Maybe that's why I was drawn to him.

I wanted to know the truth about the Hero's party to see a possible outcome for myself.

And I wanted to uncover the real truth so I could handle it properly. Although

I didn't say this out loud, I acknowledged it within myself.

"This might be the first time you've ever opened up to me like this." I tried to comfort Tsukasa. I knew this was hard for her to talk about.

"Maybe it's because of my younger body or it's because we're in a different world," she replied.

"It's really cool of you to be able to view yourself from another angle like that."

"All right, if I keep being cool, will you give me a kiss?"

"Uh, I don't think so."

Tsukasa chuckled. Her beautiful reddish-brown eyes housed an unwavering sense of trust. They were radiant.

The light from the morning sky poured through the burnt skylight.

"Hey, I think this will depend on the court's final decision, but..."

"What a coincidence. I was just thinking about that, too."

My sister and I.

The two Japanese people in this world.

We traded ideas back and forth on how best to judge the case.

Our conversation continued until the break of dawn.

Still, we kept talking, paying no mind to the sun.



Tamamo:

Yeesh, what a downer! Methinks I shall bust in here and play!



Meamas

Why you...! Who said you could come in here? Wah! Ouch... I slipped and fell...



Akutos

Is it just me, or is the floor all oily?



Tamamo:

Nom-nom-nom. I was just having myself some deep-fried tofu as a snack, so now my hands are all oily. But everyone knows foxes love deep-fried tofu! It's your own fault you fell! Negligence level a hundred! Ha-ha, you fool!



Shiros

Speaking of negligence... That word came up in the main story...

Can you tell us more about professional negligence?



Tsukasa:

People tend to assume that the term "professional" means that the negligence only applies to work, but that's not so. For example, it also includes "repeatedly failing to exercise due care required in the pursuit of social activities and thereby causing the death or injury of another person."



Akutos

So if a fox is always eating deep-fried tofu...



Tamamos

Wh-why are you looking at me like that, boy?! Miss Judge, surely you cannot claim negligence for me having my snack!



Tsukasas

<< Akky, what do you want to do? Should we punish her?>>



Tamamos

Why are you so quiet? Even if this falls under my social activities, I shall argue that I am not being negligent!



Princess:

Before we saw you appear...you were spreading oil in front of Ileana, weren't you, little fox?



11eama:

In that case, it's not negligence, it's deliberate injury through your mischief, isn't it?



Akutos

I select "YES" to begin the trial.



Tamamo:

Noooo...!

Article XIV Judgment Shall Be Announced as a Verdict in a Court of Law

"I solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

It was ten in the morning. This was the fourth day since Tsukasa and I had arrived in the Chiyodaku Kingdom.

The time had come to resume Laman the Hero's trial.

At the designated time, the accused was escorted back to the courtroom. The Scales of Judgment released Tsukasa, transformed back to its original form, and floated into the air.

The magical words of restraint that had marked the Laman like a tattoo disappeared from his body.

Elma showed up and took an oath of sworn testimony.

Then she told the court her story.

"...And that's all I have to say. That's the truth about the Hero, and what really happened during the incident. How was that, kid?"

"Elma... Thank you."

Cameras captured her testimony and broadcast them across the kingdom.

The people in the gallery began to chatter.

"The Hero's reign of terror was a lie?"

"So it was Neidhardt in disguise causing trouble at the tavern."

"Well, he's dead now."

"The whole Demon King story feels so much more real now."

"What about his confession?"

"Was it a lie?"

"I guess he's innocent."

"My grandpa told me that Laman's not a bad person."

"Just an old hero warped by grief."

"I feel so bad for them all..."

The courtroom's mood toward the accused began to shift.

"Don't look at me like that! I don't need your sympathy! Nor do my comrades!" the old hero shouted at the gallery.

We'd needed Law Gravity to prevent him from trying to obstruct Elma's testimony. Now that she'd finished, the restraints disappeared again.

"Everything she says is total nonsense!"

With the witness stand now empty, Laman shouted to the courtroom, spitting flames from his mouth.

"What is your reason for saying that?" Judge Tsukasa asked.

"Her age doesn't match up with the story. Going by her appearance, she must be a liar."

"You really are a fool."

The half-succubus standing in the center of the courtroom released a purple mist from the surface of her skin.

Then...

"How's that, you old coot? It's been a while since we looked the same age, hasn't it?"

The vapor cleared to reveal a seventy-year-old woman.

"Elma... I never expected you'd show your true form, after growing so attached to your young body all this time."

"Well, I've changed my mind. What do you think happens when you hide your true self just to save face? You become ugly and twisted."

"I don't give a damn what anyone thinks! You know what I swore, Elma!"

"An ancient oath for an ancient era. There's no need to keep it. Fiona wouldn't—"

"Shut your mouth! You've sold your soul to Chiyodaku, you demon!"

"I haven't sold anything. Last night, I felt an old hero in my memories die." Old Granny Elma faced me. "I belong to a new hero now...my cute little Akuto."

She blew me a kiss.

<<Akky, you didn't tell me anything about this. Did you guys do it?>> <<No, no way.>> "Oh! Oh-hoh-hoh! How amusing! I cannot stand such delight!"

From the counsel's seat, Tamamo Keisei jumped up and down on her chair.

"To think everything would play into my hands so easily! With this exchange, the veracity of Elma's statements is clear! Surely all are convinced!"

Tamamo's goal was to upset the course of the trial and defeat Ileana, and Elma and I had just been used to accomplish that.

Having finished her testimony, Granny Elma sighed. "I had no intention of entertainin' foxes with my testimony. Oh well. I'll be waitin' in the gallery."

"Damn you, Tamamo...!" Prosecutor Ileana squirmed angrily. "I've scoured all the records, but there is no physical evidence or otherwise to contradict the testimony... Even the accused's infamous reputation was due to those lowlifes Keith and Neidhardt pretending to be him!"

I had to agree about the "lowlife" part.

Ileana whispered "I don't want to lose!" to herself as she hurriedly flipped through her copy of the Six Codes. Then...

"...Miss Judge. I would like to propose the addition of alternative charges."

"Proceed."

"Penal Code, Article Two Hundred and Eleven, crime of causing death due to negligence! And Penal Code, Article One Hundred and Ninety, crime of destruction of a corpse!"

"Does the counsel have any rebuttal with regards to the alternative charges?" Judge Tsukasa asked.

Tamamo sniffed. "Her resistance is futile. I shall give my comments in full later."

"Does the accused have any comment?"

"...I don't give a damn," Laman spat.

"The court has presented all information for the case. This concludes the examination of evidence."

The atmosphere in the courtroom shifted. We were nearing a conclusion.

"Prosecutor, your closing argument and sentencing recommendation, please," Judge Tsukasa said.

Ileana stood. "Right, my closing argument! I believe that the facts of this public prosecution have been sufficiently affirmed by the investigative materials and the confession from the accused! I recommend the accused be sentenced to death in accordance with the applicable laws! Even if the murder charge has not been proven, he is guilty of negligent manslaughter and illegal destruction of a corpse!"

"Counsel, your closing argument, please."

"Allow me to offer my opinion. Regarding the facts of the public prosecution, none have been proven to have met the required objective structural elements of their offenses. The only relevant evidence of the crime is the accused's own confession. The corroborating evidence is not enough for the prosecution to establish substantial proof. For the charge of negligent manslaughter, there is no confirmation that the incident was foreseeable, nor that there was a duty to avoid its consequences. For the charge of illegal destruction of a corpse, there is no proof of intent. I sincerely hope that the court will not apply any of the sentences the idiot elf has recommended."

A hush fell over the courtroom.

"The accused will come forward. Your final statement, please."

"...I killed them. I killed my comrades...and my wife...whom I swore to protect at all costs..."

"I will now hand down my judgment."



"I shall state the grounds beginning from the facts of the public prosecution for this case. The incident occurred on the third day of last month, at approximately eight o'clock in the evening, in a pit within the autonomous zone known as the Meadow of Beginnings. Laman the Hero is accused of the intentional murder of three individuals known as the members of the Hero's party. Fiona, age sixty-eight. Keith, age sixty-nine. Neidhardt, age seventy-two."



Tsukasa Wagatsuma, judge of the Chiyodaku Kingdom Courthouse, had begun the declaration of her verdict. Standing between the two scorched tapestries of the sun, she reviewed the prosecution's indictment.

After hearing her begin, the prosecutor, the counsel, and a few members of the gallery muttered to themselves and others.

When issuing a verdict, it was more common to start with the declaration of the formal judgment. However, it was typical to begin with the reading of the grounds in the case of a death sentence. Then again, it was in no way a rule of the law, merely something at the judge's discretion. It was possible to save the formal decision for later and start from the grounds. For example, a judge might do so thinking that the accused would stop listening if the decision was stated first.

Everything remained up in the air. Laman could still get a death sentence, penal servitude, suspension of execution of judgment, or even declared not guilty...

"According to the relevant evidence, the prosecution has stated there is sufficient proof that the accused killed the three victims, and that even if not recognized as homicide, that the charges of negligent manslaughter and destruction of a corpse still stand."

Tsukasa summarized the closing argument and sentencing recommendation.

"In response to this, the counsel stated that there is insufficient evidence to prove any of the charges."

Then she summarized the counsel's closing argument.

"There is the question of which of the three points in dispute may apply to the accused."

The Scales of Judgment creaked above our heads. Its pans began to change in response to Tsukasa's recap.

I looked up from the clerk's seat to watch the two pans line up front to back. The side of the accused held a small image of the Hero and one of two small Shards of Judgment.

On the judge's side were the likenesses of Tsukasa and myself.

Three charges floated beneath the scales.

Murder

Professional Negligence Resulting in Death

Destruction of a Corpse

"The court conducted a thorough investigation to ensure the trial reflected the truth. I would like to clarify and properly evaluate this case in a way that all of the kingdom's citizens may understand it, while restating the objective facts that we have found. First, there were three blasts of flames observed at the scene of the incident, as shown in the following photographs..."

I opened the Judgment Spell's photo window and expanded the photo evidence submitted by the prosecution so the pictures were lined up beneath the scales.

"Chronologically, we have the red-black explosion, then the yellow gust of flames, and last, the white pillar of fire."

All in the courtroom, including the accused, stared at the three photos. It was as though Tsukasa had used a spell to captivate them all with her words.

Shiro stood behind the gallery with a camera, capturing it all and broadcasting everything to the rest of Chiyodaku.

"If we compare the photos of the accused's Holy Flame ability and photos of regular burning waste..."

Following her words, I brought up the photo of burning trash I'd taken and a still from a video of Laman using his fire magic in the courtroom that Shiro captured.

"...Then judging from the color of the flames, the first explosion was a low-temperature combustion. The second was a high-temperature one mixed with a Holy Flame Spell. And the third was a pure Holy Flame."

I thought back to something I'd learned in school.

Low-temperature flames were redder, and incomplete combustions gave off

black smoke. On the other hand, high-temperature fires were closer to yellow or white in color.

"Furthermore, from the testimony that the victims' skin color was bright red, we can conclude that the cause of death was from carbon monoxide poisoning from the gases given off by the low-temperature flames.

"The first fire was an accidental explosion caused by Keith and Neidhardt when they lost control of the burning waste.

"The second was an attempt by the accused to extinguish the first using his Holy Flame.

"As the scene of the incident is a crater in the meadow, by the time the fire was extinguished, the three victims were already deceased from to carbon monoxide poisoning.

"The third flames destroyed the three victims' bodies.

"As such..." Tsukasa paused, and all the courtroom was silent. "...the accused did not intend to kill the victims, thus the charge of murder is invalid!"

Responding to her words, the line *Murder* below the Scales shattered and dissolved. The people of the courtroom showed no signs of doubt. Only the accused looked dumbfounded as he whispered "But...it was all...my fault..."

"Next, let us review the validity of the charge of professional negligence resulting in death. First, I will explain the crime of negligence."

Tsukasa moved to the next point under debate.

"In general, punishment for crimes applies to those carried out with intention. According to the Penal Code, an intentional crime is defined as one committed when a party knows that the action is a crime but commits it anyway. By contrast, a crime of negligence is one committed without intent, however, the state considers it a punishable crime for cases in which there are victims due to the negligent action. There are two requirements for someone to be tried as a negligent offender. The accused must have been able to foresee the resulting damage and must have failed to avoid the consequences of such negligence when they had a duty to do so."

Two orbs appeared next to the line of text reading *Professional Negligence Resulting in Death* under the Scales.

"However, the accidental fire that occurred in this case was caused by Keith and Neidhardt igniting trash without the accused's knowledge. There was no way for the accused to foresee this. Naturally, we can confirm that the accused had no duty to avoid the consequences of the action. Accordingly, the charge of professional negligence resulting in death is invalid!"

Tsukasa's declaration caused the two orbs and the title of the crime to dissolve away. Now only one crime remained.

"Lastly, we have the question of the validity of the charge of destruction of a corpse. We can see that the accused's action, burning the three corpses of the victims who died in the accidental fire with his Holy Flame, was intentional."

Ileana put her hands together on top of her desk as though in prayer. The court record window revealed what the half-elf was whispering. "Please, let me have one win to preserve my dignity as a prosecutor!"

"Regarding this point, the accused has stated before the court the following. 'I ruled the villages through intimidation and burned my old comrades to death, to naught but ash. I killed them. I killed my comrades, and my wife, whom I swore to protect at all costs.'"

Tsukasa had perfectly memorized Laman's earlier remarks.

"As has already been made clear by the witness's testimony, the idea that the accused terrorized the villages of the Meadow of Beginnings was a false rumor that the accused requested Neidhardt to spread. The statement that the accused killed the three victims with his Holy Flame is also a lie."

Laman's counsel, Tamamo Keisei, listened intently. "Come on, come on, show me that perfect victory!" she muttered, wagging her tails restlessly.

"However. From these statements, it is true that the accused did have a measure of substantial authority over the Meadow of Beginnings, and..."

This was it.

This was what Tsukasa and I had talked over last night.

A way we could save the Hero.

"...recognizing that he was overcome with deep sadness and remorse from the loss of his friends and wife and failing to protect them..."

A way to throw away all talk of punishment.

"...knowing that there is a risk of a corpse becoming undead if left without proper disposal..."

A way to argue the legality of the Hero's final act.

"...the court rules that the third flames cast by the accused was a justifiable act of cremation to prevent the corpses from becoming undead to protect the land that he rules and its citizens."

We can argue that the Hero performed a funeral rite.

I'd raised this idea to Tsukasa earlier. Shiro had told me about the risk of the dead cockatrices rising as undead, and I'd realized it was common sense in this world to dispose of corpses as quickly as possible.

Apparently, it was common practice to destroy corpses on the spot during the war against the Demon King's monsters.

"A need for corpse disposal only possible in another world... I'd never considered that. Still, I'll need to wait and make the final call after hearing the closing arguments," Tsukasa had said.

"Accordingly, the court does not recognize the illegality of the third fire created by the accused, and the charge of destruction of a corpse is invalidated."

Tsukasa had judged that the Hero was not guilty of any charges. The sole line of text remaining under the Scales of Judgment disappeared without a trace.

"Since there is no evidence of any crime, in accordance with the Code of Criminal Procedure, Article Three Hundred and Thirty-Six, I pronounce the verdict to be..."

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The judge issued her decision. A sound like breaking glass echoed through the courtroom. Prosecutor Ileana Saitou had slammed her face down on her desk.

In the court record window, I saw that the half-elf had whispered to herself, "I've failed...as a prosecutor..."

"Bwa-ha-haaa! Flawless victory! Take that!" Tamamo Keisei cried as she bounced over to Ileana. She smirked and poked at the dejected half-elf. "Well, how does it feel to have all three of your charges get flushed down the toilet?"

Meanwhile...

"What a farce..."

...Laman, no longer the accused, didn't look pleased.

"After all that back-and-forth and legal gibberish, I'm not guilty? Then, what was all this for? It's pointless! You haven't judged a damn thing!" the older man yelled angrily from the center of the courtroom.

"Yes, I have. I've judged that you do not have to bear any guilt," Tsukasa replied matter-of-factly.

"What sophistry! Fine. I understand that you really are too afraid. You didn't have the guts to judge me! You were too cowardly to sentence me to dea—"

"Princess Ecstasia Itou!" Tsukasa interrupted, calling toward the gallery.

"Right!" The princess stood and read off of a note in her hand. "Um, the free food and drink benefit granted to the Hero's party has been deemed unconstitutional and is hereby discontinued!"

Laman looked stunned. "Wh-what?!"

"Prosecutor!" Next, my sister called upon the despondent Ileana. She threw something small and shiny to her.

"Wh-what's this?" Ileana sat up to catch it. "My prosecutors' pin!"

"Make sure you indict that older man as soon as you see him try to take any

food without paying for it."

"D-do you mean I can continue my work?"

"A prosecutor's duty is to act as the representative of the public interest. To protect the nation and its people, they must never falter, no matter how evil a person they indict, and establish guilt based on the objective facts of the crime. You showed guts, and that's critical to prosecutorial justice. The court will take care of the rest. Keep up the good work, Prosecutor Saitou."

Thwunk. I could practically hear the sound of Tsukasa's warm encouragement hit Ileana in the heart like an arrow.

"Y-y-yes, ma'am...!" Ileana struck a determined pose, broken glasses and all. "I won't get discouraged, no matter what! I'll keep prosecuting, like a phoenix rising from the ashes! I'll follow you to the ends of the earth, Miss Judge!!"

Tamamo, taken aback by Ileana's proclamation, fell over on her backside. "Remember, lest you get carried away, that I'm the victor here!"

"The true value of judgment lies not in winning or losing. It is in exacting justice. You would do well to remember that, fox." So saying, Tsukasa came down from the judge's seat and began to walk the floor.

"The court does not fear Laman the Hero. And we do not assume that this is all over simply because he has been declared not guilty. Going forward, we must continue to right the wrongs related to this case. Wouldn't you agree, Princess Ecstasia?"

"Yes! We're gonna renovate and have a grand reopening of the Shrine of the Hero. Then we'll declare an official holiday in commemoration of the day the Hero's party defeated the Demon King. We'll also officially recognize Laman and Fiona's marriage in the kingdom's records. That's everything, right, Mr. Akuto?"

The princess was reading the memo I'd given her that morning.

"Yeah. All things Laman should have had in the first place, especially now that we know he's not guilty."

Last night, Tsukasa and I had come up with these terms in the case of Laman being cleared of all charges.

"Stop! What is all this? Stay away from me!" the older man cried.

"Laman. You are an accomplished laborer who single-handedly took in the waste of the Chiyodaku Kingdom in support of its rapid growth. As a Japanese citizen, I cannot look down on you any longer," Tsukasa said as she approached the Hero.

"Th-there's something wrong with you, you little brats!" Laman was growing flustered. "You should have no compassion for me, especially after I rejected this kingdom's Japanization and taunted you so ruthlessly at the tavern! Why are you doing this, you hypocrites?!"

"As I've said already, trials are more than winning and losing. They're about uncovering an ideal of how things should be. The court has chosen a future where you exist. I don't find that hypocritical at all." My sister remained calm, even in the face of Laman's criticism.

"You should've just given me the death sentence. If you take away my Shard of Judgment, and annex all the villages in the Meadow of Beginnings, all your problems will disappear, along with all the evil in this world!"

"We can't do that. You aren't evil. Over the past fifty-four years, a few mistaken choices led you astray. That you don't attack me or my brother despite your aggressive behavior is proof enough. And not a single doubt has been raised against the court's decision."

No Rust of Doubt had appeared around the Scales of Judgment.

That made it clear no one spectating the trial doubted the verdict.

"...I—I feel like I'm living a nightmare." The old hero staggered back a step. "No matter how you judge me, my wife is still dead. All around me are the corpses of my comrades I swore to protect. I can't even sleep anymore unless I drink. Th-this...is my reality..."

The older man's legs buckled, unable to support his thin body, and he sank to the floor.

"To be burdened with a crime without proper punishment is enough to make anyone lose themselves in time," Tsukasa said. "But you have no need for that guilt now. The charge of negligence—"

"I don't give a damn about negligence! I swore to protect—"

"Get ahold of yourself, Laman. Fiona wouldn't suffer this nonsense," Elma scolded as she approached from the gallery. She was still in her old form.

"Elma, how could you side with those brats...?" Laman cast her an angry look. "I knew Fiona was lying! That the medicine wasn't working... Yet still, I let her..."

"Fiona once told me 'Laman is everyone's Hero. And he's already saved me many times over. Please, remind him that his people need him.' She wanted me to tell you that, after she died. So turn around and see for yourself."

"What? What do you...?" Laman faced the gallery. "You all..."

The people of the Hero's Village were gathered there—older folks, children, and slimes.

"Please, forgive yourself."

"We heard everything from Grammy Elma."

"Slorp."

They all offered their encouragement.

Elma had hired wyvern taxis to ferry them to the courthouse.

"...I'd finally convinced everyone that I ruled you like a tyrant, and now you've put that effort to waste." Laman dropped to all fours. "If only it could be like it was before...," he whispered, his face downturned. "In the old days, we just had to worry about defeating the enemy—and then the stronger one beyond them. Our only goal was reaching the Demon King's castle. We marched with our hearts as one and our eyes on the road... Why couldn't it remain so simple?"

He seemed to lose himself in thought for a while before gazing up at the Scales of Judgment.

"I don't know...how to live in this world... My story...has already ended. Everyone is dead. My beloved wife is gone. How can I possibly...continue...?"

Perhaps that was how the old hero had felt all along.

"There you go again. The Meadow of Beginnings you kept isolated will become a part of the Chiyodaku Kingdom again, you know. Do you understand what that means?" Tsukasa's tone was strong.

"...I don't."

"You've illegally filled the place with a mountain of trash. We'll need you to get rid of it." The judge crouched down next to the man. "This is only the beginning. Come now, Hero. Stand up once more and show us your courage."

Tsukasa offered Laman her hand.

"Let me get this straight, girl. You want me to use my fire magic again?"

"If you have any other ideas on how you may contribute to the kingdom, by all means, tell me. Or would you prefer we bill you for the damage you've done to the skylight and tapestries?"

I walked over to them, to Laman. "If you don't want to, at least teach me how to use fire magic. I'll burn it instead."

The Hero's old golden eyes stared back at me, taking in my words. "You brats sure have some nerve to order me around." I spied a bit of vigor return to his gaze.

Tsukasa and I had discussed what we thought Laman's future might look like after the trial.

For all that had transpired, he still had mastery over fire magic. He would put that immense power he'd honed over half a century to good use, and we'd pave the way for him to do so. Our intent was to encourage him to wield his spells for the greater good once more.

"This is ridiculous," Laman said. "Is this what you call a real judgment from a Japanese court?"

"That's right. This is the real thing," Tsukasa replied.

The old hero broke into a smile. "Pfft. Ga-ha-ha." He started to laugh heartily like the time in the tavern. But...

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"Ha, ah, ugh..."
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...he quickly turned to sobbing.

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"Guh, ugh... I—I..."
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His arrogant attitude had been a front to conceal his weakness.

Tears held for so long flowed out, like a burden had been lifted from his shoulders.

"If only..." Laman faced the sky and closed his eyes. "If only I'd been judged by you sooner."

Bwonnng.

Laman's words triggered a sound that seemed to herald the end of an era. "Look, the scales," someone said.

The huge Scales of Judgment had begun to tip. The side of the judged sunk with the weight of his statement. The image of the Hero sitting on the pan disappeared. In its place was a Shard of Judgment, which slowly fell from the air to float toward its owner, the innocent Laman the Hero.

A line of text appeared under the scales to signify the end of the trial.

Applause filled the room.

Dozens, hundreds of hands clapped together. The people of the gallery all stood in ovation.

Then...

Fwoosh. A bluish-white light filled my vision.

This light...

I squinted my eyes. The glow came from the people in the gallery, but it also streamed in from outside, through the two entrances. It poured in with such force that it burned tapestries on the wall as they flowed toward the judge's bench.

They gathered together and spiraled upward.

<< Akky, are those...?>>

<<They're from the people watching the trial outside. Grains of Trust... No, they're more like...>> "Grains" no longer accurately described them. <<... Stars.>>

The orbs of light were absorbed into the Scales of Judgment.

After the trial at the Slime Store, they'd resembled fireflies. Yet this time, each light sparkled more powerfully than before.

Their radiance made the courtroom resemble a planetarium. The motes swirled and glittered, blocking out the midday sun.

People really were watching from all over the kingdom.

These Grains of Trust represented the level of trust we'd gained from the trial's spectators.

Their size and amount was automatically calculated based on each viewer's assessment.

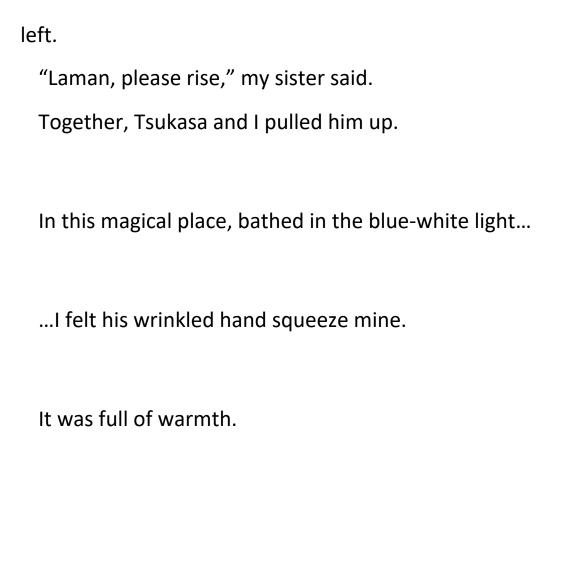
How much could these add up to?

I opened up the trust-level window to check. The number had passed a million. My eyes widened in disbelief as the total continued to rise. It soared higher and higher.

<<Akky...>> While basking in this incredible feeling, I heard a voice in the back of my head. <<Give me your hand...>>

That's right... We've still got something important left to do.

I took my sister's soft hand in my right. Then grabbed the old hero's with my



Epilogue: In Order Not to Be Judged by God, We Must Judge God

After the Hero's trial, we made sure the courtroom got cleaned up and watched the princess and her retainers finish up their administrative tasks. Then we returned to our rooms in the courthouse and slept like the dead.

By the time we woke up, it was noon the next day.

It had been dubbed Commemoration Day, a new public holiday celebrating the anniversary of the Hero's defeat of the Demon King.

Programs that reminded me of what people in Japan watched on the memorial day for the end of the war played on TV. One of them covered what I'd seen at the Shrine of the Hero, as well as Elma's story.

After watching for a while, Tsukasa and I decided to go out for a celebratory drink.

We ended up back at that Adventurers' Guild tavern, the Grand Varnier.

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"""Cheeeers!"""
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Tsukasa, Shiro, and I clanked our glasses together...

""Ahhh!!""

...and gulped down our drinks.

"There's nothing like a drink after gettin' it done!" my sister said.

"Miss Judge, Master, you did a magnificent job."

"Your camerawork was perfect, Shiro," I replied.

"You really captured everything well," Tsukasa agreed. "I think it'll help clear up any misunderstandings about Laman."

We'd already posted the trial footage on ChiyodakuNet for anyone to watch online.

"If my calculations are correct, a majority of citizens have already seen the broadcast. Couple this with word of mouth, the commemorative celebrations, and Laman's actions going forward, and I think his reputation will recover nicely."

"I'm glad you think so, Shiro," I said.

"Trials have a strange power, indeed. In the Color Slime Case, you judged someone who was concealing their crime. Then in the Hero's Case, you judged someone who hadn't actually committed any crime. And throughout the course of both trials, the people started to change."

While Shiro mused on this, the tavern girl came over and left a piece of paper on our table.

"Meowdy! Here's a flier for you! Please purruse it at your leisure!"

The flier's colorful text read NOW ACCEPTING APPLICANTS! ALL-INCLUSIVE TOUR OF THE MEADOW OF BEGINNINGS AND A HANDS-ON SLIME-BREEDING CLASS! SPONSORED BY SLIVAN ARTISTE, WITH THE COOPERATION OF THE HERO'S VILLAGE.

"...Shiro's right. People really are changing," I said.

We had the princess to thank for that. She'd hired orcs to build a road to the Hero's Village.

The Chiyodaku Kingdom and the Meadow of Beginnings had been separated for so long but were now finally linked.

Shiro's tail was wagged excitedly. "I'm happy for them...the people of the Hero's Village and the slimes..."

"By the way, Shiro, were there really more than three hundred thousand people watching the trial?" I asked.

According to the Judgment Spell's calculations, our trust level had gone from

zero to 1,558,015.

If each person's trust was on a five-point scale, I figured that number was a reasonable guess.

"No, that's too high, based on the kingdom's population. I'm not certain, but perhaps the trust was calculated on a ten-point scale because there were two Shards of Judgment in the courtroom."

"I see... So the reward increases with the number of shards."

I guess that's one incentive to find the rest. It turns out this is one of those games where we'll need to go around and collect items that've been scattered across the world map. How do we even begin to spend over a million in trust? There must be some way to unlock more powerful abilities...

"Akky, those scales threatened to make it so I could never stand in the courtroom. Let's just ditch 'em," Tsukasa grumbled.

"What are you saying?" I couldn't believe how differently we felt on this. "No way. They're obviously a key item!"

"But we normally don't need that thing to hold a trial."

"This isn't normal, it's a fantasy world..."

We started debating back and forth.

"Miss Juuudge! Mr. Akutooo! Great job yesterday; it was totally judicious!" Princess Ecstasia Itou had arrived. "Building the new infrastructure and setting up all the cables in the Hero's Village is going well so far!"

She must have come straight from the Meadow of Beginnings. All her retainers were with her.

"So anyway, I come bearing the other Shard of Judgment with a message from the Hero!"

When Ecstasia took the little thing from her pink maid outfit, it rose into the air.

Transferor: Previous Owner, Laman

Transferee: New Owners, Miss Judge and Mr. Akuto

Vwoosh. It displayed a window to request ownership transfer confirmation.

"Here's his message!" the princess said excitedly. "'This artifact is not meant for me to carry. I entrust it to the two of you.'" She read aloud from a note.

Tsukasa nodded. "Great, now we can ditch them both at once!"

"Let's hold off on that for now," I responded.

The princess, meanwhile, paid us no mind. "Okay, next part! 'I offer up my village as part of the kingdom. I will burn the kingdom's trash. From now on, I will serve the royal court with the two of you as its new rulers, and the Hero's Village will be renamed Kotoku Village."

"Princess, tell him the court doesn't get to rule anything, and that only official employees can work there," Tsukasa stated.

"And there's no need to change the name of the Hero's Village...," I added.

"Okey dokey! Oh, one last thing. 'Mr. Akuto. I promise to train you in fire magic, anytime you like.' And that's all he wrote!"

His message warmed my heart.

I'm so glad. I'm so glad we were brought here. This feeling of accomplishment made every struggle worth it.

"But first you must fulfill your promise to me, Akuto, my boy!" Tamamo Keisei came bounding over as though she'd been waiting for this. "Quickly! We must play video games in the princess's quarters! Posthaste!"

"There's no way Mr. Akuto promised you something like that!" Ileana grabbed Tamamo by the hood of her golden-brown parka and pulled her away from me.

"Oh, indeed he did! And don't try to stop us, you loser!"

"Perhaps I lost the case, but I won as a prosecutor!"

"What? Is your brain leaking out of those big ears of yours? You failed to prove even one of your indictments. You lose! Loser! Lose-y lose-y loser! And I... WIN ☆!"

"Didn't you hear Miss Judge say that trials aren't about winning and losing? It doesn't matter, though, because I'm going to win next time!"

The two bickered while they chased each other around the tavern.

"They fight so much that I'm starting to suspect they like each other," I remarked.

Tsukasa hummed. "A little competition between prosecutors and defense attorneys can be a good thing—at least for now."

Turning back to the princess, I said, "Oh, I almost forgot. Did you find out anything about that official?"

I had done everything in my power to help with this case and its aftermath, but there was one outstanding issue—that part of Elma's testimony about an official with black balance scales who claimed to be from Chiyodaku and tried to take Laman's Shard of Judgment.

"Sorry, I don't know anyone like that!" Ecstasia replied.

"Huh?"

"We haven't sent any officials out to the Hero's Village all year, and I've never heard of anyone with black balance scales."

"But..."

That person had kept Laman from meeting with the princess after the king's death. It was one of the major points that had led him to his bad ending.

The person with the black scales...had to be out there somewhere.

Laman had gone so far as to draw those black scales with huge X marks over them outside his house. He'd fallen ill because that person tried to steal his shard, which led to Keith and Neidhardt starting the fire that killed them.

"'Came from Chiyodaku'? That sounds like something a scammer would say," Tsukasa said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Scammers will often claim to be from a certain police station but never say they're an actual police officer, so they aren't technically lying."

Oh, I get it.

"So there's somebody pretending to be a Chiyodaku official who's trying to

collect all the Shards of Judgment."

Tsukasa nodded at my deduction.

This guy might be more trouble than I thought. Artifacts that manifest the power of judgment... There's still a lot we don't know about how they work. I wouldn't be surprised if some organization plotted to hoard them.

"The Shard of Judgment will transfer ownership now," Princess Ecstasia said.

Laman's shard slowly lowered into my hands. In response, the one I'd received from the princess flew out of my pocket.

"Two shards...," I whispered.

They joined together before my eyes, releasing a flash of golden light. Mini balance scales appeared, accompanied by lines of text below.

Artifact Quest: Collect all shards.

Reward: The power to judge the entire world.

I'd read this before.

The power to judge the entire world...

An abrupt rustling pulled me from contemplation. When I looked around, everyone but Tsukasa and I had bowed before the text.

"What's going on?" I asked Shiro.

"We sensed a strong, godly power," she answered, keeping her head lowered.

I didn't see anything but the dazzling glow of the scales. Apparently, the people of this world were the sort who put a lot of belief in their deity.

"It's pretty evil for a God or whatever to create something like this," Tsukasa said.

I turned to face her. "What do you mean?"

"Its existence causes conflict. And our court doesn't need it. Trials are a manifestation of humanity's intelligence."

"That's true, but..."

"Fine. Let's collect them for now. And then..." My sister stood from her chair.

She pointed her finger at the golden scales hovering before us. "...we'll use them to judge God itself."

The only Japanese judge in the entire world struck a confident pose.

"It's not God that makes the world a better place through righteous judgment. It's the people."

Surprisingly, the Scales of Judgment, having apparently adjusted their size for this setting, responded to Tsukasa's assertion, producing a new line of text.

Once you collect every Shard, God will appear before you.

A message from God had been built in for this situation.

"Bring it on. I'm coming to judge you, just wait and see!" Tsukasa's brazen attitude invited the reactions of those around us.

"Simply astonishing, Miss Judge..."

"Chiyoda cooool!"

"I-I'm right behind you!"

"Oh-hoh-hoh! How novel!"

Everyone buzzed excitedly.

Here we go again. There'll be no stopping them now.

"Hey, Akky." Tsukasa held out her hand and made her most unreasonable request yet. "Let's show that God that thinks it's better than us who the real judges are."

She says it like it's no big deal. But I guess that's part of what makes her so cool. Plus... If we can beat God, we'll solve this conflict. What an interesting ending that would be.

I stood and took Tsukasa's hand. "Let's go for it. For the sake of this world, our court will rise above even God itself."

My sister and I will run the Supreme Court of another world.

Afterword

It's nice to meet you, dear readers. I'm Fukurou Kogyoku, winner of the sixteenth MF Bunko J Light Novel Newcomer Award.

I hope you enjoyed reading this story about court trials in the world of the Chiyodaku Kingdom.

Since this is the first volume, I'd like to explain how this story was conceived.

Have you ever been to the Supreme Court? That big, imposing building?

The Supreme Court has been granted the greatest authority as the last bastion of justice...kind of like an ultimate weapon.

I saw some data that said Japanese courts are highly trusted by the Japanese populace.

Believing that myself, I started studying and got involved in judicial practices.

After a few years of that, I suddenly got an idea while watching a trial.

Could we say the same things if this was a fantasy world?

Many twists and turns later, that idea blossomed into the Chiyodaku Kingdom and its princess.

It's a lovely little place that, despite copying Japanese culture, or perhaps because of it, has many strange problems.

The Chiyodaku Kingdom's courthouse will continue to face some difficulties. Our characters may start to question what they trust—and what's right.

But to push ever onward for the sake of what you believe in is a beautiful thing.

Even if your faith is mistaken sometimes, that act of belief itself shows the brilliance of the human spirit.

Will the strength of Japanese judgment be able to stand above the God of another world?

I hope you'll keep cheering on the siblings until they find out!

Time for some acknowledgments.

First, I'd like to thank the five people who worked on the selection committee, as well as all those in the editorial department. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. Because of your comments, which I read over and over, I was able to take on the daunting task of revising the story. I...I-love you! (blush) To the illustrator, jonsun, you made everyone look so cute and cool! Thank you so much for bringing this quirky world to life in a way that shines with originality.

I'd also like to express my gratitude to my friends who always shared their thoughts and opinions with me, my creative colleagues, and my coworker "A." Plus, the designers, proofreaders, printers, booksellers, and my superiors at work who helped me. And all the interesting people and creative works that inspired me... There are too many to name. I'm glad to have been born in modern Japan.

Lastly, I want to thank "K," who oversaw this work. You always surprised me with your extremely apt callouts. You're a god of creative writing who always stopped me and my characters from getting carried away. I can't thank you enough.

In the next volume, I plan to deal with the issues faced by long-lived species in a way that befits a fantasy world.

I'll keep doing my best, so thank you for reading!

Twitter: @kogyokufukurou

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