

1

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EVIL-FIGHTING
ORGANIZATION

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MADE ONE
MYSELF!

AUTHOR: **HAGANE KURODOME**
ILLUSTRATOR: **KATTO**

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**I!
WILL!
BE!
THE
SUPER-
NATURAL
ORGANIZA-
TION!!!**

**I have decided!
I will be a corporate
slave no more!**

Kinemitsu Sago

Wielder of the
ultimate superpower

Boss of
Amaterasu

I would make myself a fated rival.

I would make a cute and powerful heroine.

I would gather companions with unforgettable personalities.

I would create an organization that fought against the world's shadows.

I would create the grotesque enemies to fight against.

I had the power to do it all.



Touka Hasumi
Member of Amaterasu
Buddhist-
attribute girl

Shiori Kaburagi
Secret organization
Amaterasu's
Pretty lady
sub-leader



**"Here. This is
the candidate
I've chosen."**

Kaburagi-san took out a folded piece of paper from the cleavage that was peeking through her casually loosened suit, then handed it to me. Omg, what's with that performance. It's like a movie. I love it.

CONTENTS

- Chapter 1: Training My Telekinesis With Unwavering Focus
- Chapter 2: THIS Is What I Get For Training My Telekinesis With Unwavering Focus?!
- Chapter 3: You're The Heroine, Right?! I Can Tell! So Just Come With Me Already!!
- Chapter 4: The Crazy And Innocent Dreams We Had When We Were Children
- Chapter 5: The Most Powerful Kind Of Superpower At Level 1
- Chapter 6: Espers Have No Limits! (They Do Actually)
- Chapter 7: Shadows Of The World Carefully Crafted One By One By A Master Artisan
- Chapter 8: An Over-The-Top Opening
- Chapter 9: Trying To Curry Favor With A Blatant Sexy Scene
- Chapter 10: This Samurai Loves The Training Chapters In Shounen Manga
- Chapter 11: The Scripted Boy-Meets-Girl
- Chapter 12: The Start-Up Secret Organization
- Chapter 13: Please Don't Be Reserved, This Unwinnable Fight Is An After-Sales Service
- Chapter 14: Be Still, My Right Arm!
- Chapter 15: A Real Healing-Type Heroine
- Chapter 16: Pain, Pain, Go Away And Never Come Back, Capisce?
- Chapter 17: "That Can't Be..... It's Too Soon!" Said The Boss
- Chapter 18: The Secret Organization That Fights Against The Shadows Of The World
- Epilogue: Ig's Spring Break
- Special Files: Head Of Japanese Operations Special Intelligence Agent Nicolas Stallone Of CIA Asia

Chapter 1: Training My Telekinesis With Unwavering Focus

I think all humans have, at some point in their lives, dreamed of having superpowers. Like “If only I could teleport~” or “If only I could turn invisible~”

For example, when you’re about to be late but are stuck at a traffic light and you’re repeatedly checking your watch, you might think, “Man, this would be much easier if I could just teleport.” Any healthy teenage boy has surely entertained delusions at least once or twice—while going *dufufufu*—of how they could do this and that if they could turn invisible. Innocent ladies may have dreamed—while going *uhehehe*—of being able to cast Charm on the handsome guy they fancy. (Though that’s not exactly an innocent lady anymore, but still.)

Naturally, I also thought about it a lot when I was in middle school, but as a run-of-the-mill Japanese person living in the start of the twenty-first century, just thinking about it didn’t change anything. If I was living in the twenty-third century, then maybe I would have had a chance, but oh well.

Upon entering high school, my delusions gradually began to dial down, and I came to think about that kind of thing less and less. Every once in a while, though, the question of “what would you do if you had superpowers?” would pop up and start a fun conversation.

Perhaps it happened because of a conversation I had with a friend on the way home from high school, or perhaps not. In any case, while I was sitting in my living room eating senbei crackers and watching variety TV shows, that neither benefited nor harmed me, I noticed that I had dropped quite a few crumbs on the ground. On a whim, I picked them up using telekinesis.



I didn't *try* to pick them up.

I picked them up.

"...Huh?" Realizing a few moments later that the cracker crumbs were in my hand, I scrutinized them.

That was strange, right? I feel like something incredibly strange just happened like it was nothing at all.

I looked at the floor. No crumbs. I looked at my hand. Crumbs. Yet I had no memory of moving my hand to gather them up.

Which means... What does this mean?

Now I was starting to doubt my memory of senbei crumbs even having been on the floor in the first place. I did not have early onset dementia; it's just that it was such a mundane thing that it didn't fully register in my mind. The only people who clearly remember every single detail in their lives are probably those with photographic memory.

Don't tell me I seriously picked the crumbs up with psychic powers?

For confirmation's sake, I turned to look at the bag of senbei, then mentally willed one to come out. But nothing happened. There was no sign of movement.

See? It doesn't work. Yeah, yeah, I just imagined it.

Heaving a sigh, I scattered the crumbs in my hand with telekinesis, then grabbed the TV rem—

"HAH?!" I dropped the remote control.

WUUUTTTTTTTTTT?! I didn't imagine it! This time, I didn't imagine it! Even though I didn't move my hand, the crumbs still dispersed! Eh? It wasn't my imagination, right? Or was it? Wait a second. Eh?

My heart was beating so fast, I felt like it would burst out of my chest. The last time my heart rate got this high was probably when I fell asleep at morning assembly from listening to the principal's never-ending speech, but then got reprimanded by the vice principal *by name*. He shouted directly into the mic, so

the feedback was going nuts, and I was jolted out of sleep so my head was all foggy, and when I looked around everyone was staring at me, and the silence was just excruciating, and my cold sweat just wouldn't stop... No, let's leave that memory well enough alone.

My head was a complete mess. According to light novel logic, now that I had awakened, in the near future I would be attacked, but a beautiful girl would show up and there would be a bloody struggle followed by some "oh yeah~!"

No, no, let's calm down. I can do without any and all blood-soaked developments, thank you very much. Let's calm down. Take a deep breath. Let's go cool my head. Yeah, that's a good idea. Let's go do that.

I tottered to the kitchen with unsteady steps, thrust my head under the faucet in the sink, then turned it on at full blast. Cold water cascaded down onto my head, then splashed all over and soaked my clothes and the floor. I shut the faucet in a fluster. *Shit. That was like, three times the amount of water that I had expected.*

But the silver lining was that the water that cooled my head also cooled my thoughts. I strained my ears, but the only sounds I heard were the usual low hum of electrical appliances doing their thing and the carefree laughter from the variety show that I had left on in the living room. While feeling the coldness of the water seeping into my clothes and making even my underwear wet, I stood stock-still in silence.

What can I say? I had cooled down. Both my head and my heart. Being able to use telekinesis didn't actually mean anything. The world was not going to end, my grades weren't going to get better, and my allowance wasn't going to go up. The water dripping off my hair just felt... melancholic.

I sighed, then grabbed a rag to wipe the floor with. I took off my clothes, wrung them out, and chucked them into the washing machine in the bathroom. Then I returned to the kitchen in just my underwear and proceeded to wipe off all the cutlery and spice bottles that had gotten wet.

I was glad my parents happened to be out. If my parents had seen how bizarrely I was behaving just now, I wouldn't have known how to explain myself. More than anything, it would have been awkward af.

After thoroughly cleaning everything up, I turned off the TV with a heavy spirit, grabbed the bag of senbei crackers, and returned to my own room. *Now I just feel stupid.*

I sluggishly pulled on a mismatching T-shirt and jeans, and sat on my chair. Then I sank deep into thought while holding my knees to my chest and munching on the rest of the senbei.

Having regained my calm, I started to doubt whether it really was just my imagination after all. If it was so obviously telekinesis to the point of knocking over houses or lifting refrigerators, then it might have been easier to accept. It would be so unbelievable as to be believable. But all that had moved in the end were just senbei crumbs. They were even smaller than BB pellets. One morsel probably didn't even weigh a gram. It wasn't the senbei that flew, but the crumbs. *Maybe it was just the wind?* That would have been way more believable than me suddenly having awakened a superpower.

I didn't remember clearly whether the windows in the living room were open or not. So to make sure, I got up from my bed and ensured that the door and window in my own room were firmly shut. Then I slammed my bed hard to make some dust float up. The sun that shone through the window illuminated the particles floating lazily in the air. There was no indication of them being blown in any specific direction by wind.

I broke apart a senbei to get a piece about the size of my pinky nail, then I placed it on my desk. I just stared at it, but it didn't move. Of course it didn't.

Next, I brought over a handheld fan and fanned it. The piece flew off like normal. *Well, I'm not sure what I expected.* It was as expected, but it seemed different somehow. *When the crumbs flew in the living room, they were more, like, stable, and flew in a more direct path... I think.*

I gulped audibly. *Should I do it? Am I gonna do it? If nothing happens, then this can become a funny story. Well, no, it'd be an embarrassing story. But if I think of it as a waking dream, then maybe it could pass as a precious experience.*

I broke off a small piece of senbei again and left it on the table. This time, I stared at it intently and consciously made an effort to properly remember what

would happen next. I held my breath to make completely sure that there was no wind, then I held out my hand. I visualized the senbei fragment being grabbed and pulled toward me.

As if it were the most natural thing in the world, the fragment floated up, then flew into my hand.

“Eh, seriously?”

I dropped the fragment. Held out my hand. The fragment flew into my hand. Once again, I dropped the fragment. Held out my hand. The fragment flew into my hand. One last time, I dropped the fragment. Held out my hand. The fragment flew into my hand.

Just to be doubly and triply and quadruply sure, I dropped the fragment. Held out my hand. The fragment flew into my hand.

This was starting to creep me out.

I wasn't going to pinch my cheek or mutter “is this a dream?” or do anything cliché like that. This was waaaaay too realistic for that. I had no doubt that this was reality.

Eh—

Eh— —

In times like these, what am I supposed to do? I had no prior experience or knowledge to draw from. “Hell yeah, I got a superpower!” wasn't exactly absent from my mind, but if I was being honest, I felt way more troubled than anything else.

‘Cus, y’know, in light novels and manga, specific reasons are provided for why the protagonist gets their powers, right? A voice appears inside their head asking for help, or they discover that they were actually part of the bloodline of some retired magician. They get a guide or a hint, or something like that, yeah?

So what was this? I dropped the senbei fragments. They floated up and settled into my hand. Dropped. Floated. Settled.

So, like, what is this, really? Depending on the way you think about it, it might be awesome, but still. Just, what? I was able to use telekinesis, but I didn't have

a single clue what triggered my powers. An ordinary teenager who awakens to superpowers is a standard trope, but almost invariably, it is eventually revealed that the protag's background was anything but ordinary.

Both of my parents worked, and my family was normal. There was no possibility of them actually belonging to some underground world. My dad was an inspector for materials used in making automobiles, and I personally saw him at work back in elementary school on Workplace Visit Day. He went on about light getting reflected when lasers hit the materials and bouncing off and whatnot. My mom helped out with the flower cultivation business at her parents' home. I helped out there every once in a while during summer break to earn some pocket money, so there was no room for doubt. I had never been spirited away when I was younger, there was no suspicious transfer student at school, and there were no enigmatic bruises on my body. Rather than saying that I had not encountered anything mysterious lately, it would be more accurate to say that I had not even seen the "M" in "mysterious" throughout the entirety of my life.

The hell, man. In my 17 years, I've never before been in any situation this incomprehensible. Even the math questions on the Tokyo University entrance examination are more comprehensible. I may not know how to solve those, but at least I kinda get what they're saying. But this, I don't get. Like, at all.

No, wait. Am I being too conceited thinking I'm the only person capable of using telekinesis? Is this perhaps one of those cringy chuunibyou delusions where I think I'm awesome 'cus I'm special and all that?

Could it possibly be that it's normal to be able to use telekinesis, but just that all the adults have been carefully hiding the fact?

Or maybe... has the entirety of the human race suddenly awakened to telekinesis at the same time? It totally... could not happen, d'oh... It can't, right? Guess I should look into it just in case.

I got back into my seat, turned on my computer, and got on the internet. I clicked through several news sites, but didn't see anything of the like. *Well, it's only been about 30 minutes since I became able to use telekinesis. Perhaps it just hasn't made the news yet.* Leaving the news aside for a while, I tried other

search terms.

[Search: adolescence, telekinesis, discover]

[Search Results: “things said by adolescents,” “Wikipedia—adolescence,” “adolescent mental illnesses,” etc.]

I clicked on all the links on the first page of the results, but all of them proved to be completely unrelated. I wasn't particularly surprised. If you mentioned adolescence together in the same sentence with telekinesis or whatever, it *would* raise doubts about your sanity for sure. Either that, or it'd evoke a gentle smile and an averting of the eyes. So with that, I had gone and reconfirmed that claiming to be able to use telekinesis would be just cringy as hell. *OK, yep, I'm never discussing this with anyone else.* Even though it was true, having to prove that it was true would have been a pain. In the first place, even I had been bewildered by it until I managed to accept it, so other people would probably just suspect it to be a magic trick or something. And even if I managed to prove myself, whatever would happen afterward would also be a pain. I might have learned something if I asked some renowned physics professor to use some state-of-the-art physics machinery thing on me, but I had no such connections.

So mum's the word on the whole thing about me being able to use telekinesis. All right. Just having decided on this one single policy has made all this online searching worth it. The internet really is almighty.

Next, I turned to a new set of search terms while hitting F5 on those news sites every few minutes or so.

“Illnesses of the mind” sounded worrying, but I didn't know if this telekinesis came with any risks or side effects.

Like, what if it shortens my lifespan every time I use it? Or I've become able to use it as a side effect of some illness? Or some poisonous substance builds up inside my body every time I use it?

Just to be sure, I walked out of my room to grab the emergency kit, then put the thermometer under my armpit. I looked up the normal heart rate of a 17-year-old male, then measured that too.

In short, I was absolutely normal. I wasn't experiencing any headaches or

dizziness. It seemed that at the very least, nothing awful was going to happen to me in the immediate future.

It might make sense to avoid using something that I'm not familiar with and just leave it alone, but that in itself may also be dangerous.

Like, if I don't use it regularly, then something like MP will build up inside my body until I eventually go boom. I'm gonna have to say "no thank you" to going boom.

Rather than just putting a lid on the whole thing, it might be safer to risk examining it long term. There's no indication of it going away if I just leave it alone.

Let's examine it as far as we can go. If this develops into a telekinesis cheat that enables me to become popular, then go me. Fuhehe.

I looked up "psychokinesis," "telekinesis," "mind powers," "parapsychology" and every single related word I could think of. I clicked on every single link and read it all. What I learned after one hour was that none of it was of any help to me whatsoever. There were sites that discussed the topic with the assumption that it wasn't real, and suspicious sites with dubious logic and mentions of power from the devil or inner energy. But not a single one of them—scientific or otherwise—was relevant to my current situation.

So from that, I arrived at two possibilities.

1) There was absolutely no precedent, and I was the first human in history to awaken telekinetic powers. Or there were others before me, but they died without realizing their powers, or their powers were so shoddy and pathetic that they got buried beneath the mountain of fakes.

2) This was a matter being restricted by the highest level of government, and all mentions of it on the internet were thoroughly erased.

Both seemed equally likely, but I was really hoping that it wasn't number two. *Special forces from a gigantic secret organization might be arriving at my door any moment now to kidnap me! That's scary, haha... No man, that's not funny at all. That might even be a one-way ticket to becoming a human test subject. I can only pray that it's not number two.*

After three hours had passed and the news sites still had yet to mention anything of the sort, I gave up on trying to gain information from the internet and decided to shift into actual experiments with my telekinesis. *Electric scale from the kitchen, check. Plastic bottle (with water inside), check. Measuring tape from my desk drawer, check.* To start, I lined all these up on my table.

The reason why the entire senbei didn't move but the crumbs did was because of weight. At least, that was my hypothesis. So I needed to confirm how much weight I could move.

Firstly, I weighed the plastic bottle after dumping the water out. It was 25 g... which was even heavier than an entire senbei. *Damn.* I had thought to test my upper limit by gradually adding water to it, but that plan had gone out the window.

Without any other choice, I broke off crumbs of senbei and weighed them on the electric scale, eventually determining the limit of what I could lift to be 3 g. I could move up to 2 g without effort, but when it approached 3 g, then I had to really consciously think of "moving" it.

Leaving aside the pathetic output that could only move a single ant, I had already made my first discovery: the output of my telekinesis could be controlled.

It was more of a "feeling" and less something I could put into words, but I learned that when using telekinesis, there were three steps involved:

- 1) Look at the target.

- 2) Hold out my hand.

- 3) Put in strength.

"Look at the target" was exactly what it sounds like, so we can skip it.

"Hold out my hand" required me to open up my hand with the palm facing toward the target. It still worked if I didn't hold out my hand, but then the output would drop significantly. To a third, to be specific.

"Put in strength" was also really difficult to describe with words. The only way I could say it was just that I put strength into it. It was like, straining, or doing it

seriously, or something like that. If you were to ask me where I poured the strength into or how I strained, I wouldn't be able to answer you. I guess if I really had to explain it... it was like having an invisible telekinesis muscle, or "telekimuscle" for short, and I just... moved it...

You know how you don't really feel anything when you pick up something light, but when you carry something heavy or are arm wrestling with someone else, your muscles start quivering and getting tired and you think to yourself, "Oh right, I have these things called muscles, I'm totally using them right now"? That's what it was like, sort of.

So then, after having determined my limit to be 3 g, I tried various things to see if I could make it go up to 4 g, such as doing handstands and getting down on all fours and shouting. As a result, I got tired, but this was a different kind of tired than the usual physical or mental kind. It was a sluggish, lethargic feeling, but after I rested for a bit, the tiredness went away. The normal conclusion to draw from this was that something like MP gets expended when I use telekinesis. I still didn't really get it, but I was pretty sure that was the cause, so I wrote down "Be careful of MP over-usage!" in my experiment log and engraved it upon my heart. Excessive physical exhaustion could lead to death, and excessive mental exhaustion could lead to neurosis. Surely excessive telekinetic exhaustion wouldn't lead to anything good either.

Next was range. How far could my telekinesis reach? I quickly found the range to be far beyond what my tape measure could determine. Rather than saying that I could reach anywhere in my room, it would be more correct to say that it reached however far I could see. The flip side of that was that if I couldn't see it, then it was out of range, regardless of how close it actually was. If I couldn't see the target clearly, like if it was on the other side of a dirty pane of glass or it was simply too far away, then the accuracy would drop. However, the output remained the same.

Last was operability. How precisely could I move things with my telekinesis? This turned out to be extremely limited. I could only "draw toward myself (my hand)" and "push away from myself (my hand)." To put it broadly, I could only initiate movement along the direct line connecting me and the target. Sideways movement was NG. To be more specific, I felt like it could be possible, but even

when I strained my telekimuscle so much that it felt at risk of tearing, all I could achieve was such minute movement that I wasn't sure if I had just imagined it or not. So for all practical purposes, sideways movement was impossible.

I wrote all my findings down in my experiment log. I had both run out of ideas and also heard my mom's car enter the garage, so I hurriedly returned the electric scale to the kitchen and called an end to the day's experiments. I mean, it wasn't like I couldn't secretly keep at it in the middle of the night, but wouldn't it be scary if I lost control over it and got my family members caught up in this? Though maybe I was being overly self-conscious for someone only capable of moving a mere 3 g.



The next day, I was stricken with telekinetic pain. Exactly like how if you overwork normal muscles, it would lead to muscle pain, and if you overwork your brain, it would lead to a headache (yes it would). But with that said, I totally did not expect overusing telekinesis to lead to telekinetic pain. If you asked me exactly what kind of pain it was, I would again be at a loss for how to describe it to you. If I had to put it into words, then it was something like *"FORUAH!"* If I was to express it in a chuuni way, then it would be something like "I feel chaos overflowing from within as my soul breaks out of its shell." But then again, it didn't particularly hurt if I chose not to use telekinesis or just thought about having it, so I decided to just let the telekinesis rest for a day.

On my way back from school, I stopped by a family restaurant. No employee suddenly started breathing fire, no men in black or beautiful girl showed up to have a gunfight over me. Aside from my friend spilling Coke all over my uniform, the day was so calm that I almost couldn't believe it. Thankfully Febreze managed to cancel out the sugary smell, or else I would have demanded cleaning fees from him, seriously.



Next day after that, I decided to stop checking the news sites altogether because there was just no change at all. I even lost the motivation to check. There had been nothing ever since I woke up to my telekinesis two whole days ago, so I thought that only checking the newspaper would be more than

enough.

The telekinetic pain also got a lot better, so I tried using telekinesis again, at which point I discovered that although the range and everything else remained the same, the output had changed. I could now barely move up to 4 g, I could also feel that my telekimuscle had grown a bit in size. *4 g! It's amazing! 1 g! It went up by 1 g! But it's still just 4 g! That's not even enough to move a single pencil! Fuck!*

If I took into consideration the day that I rested due to telekinetic pain, the rate of growth was 1 g per two days. Which meant 182 g in a year. After an entire year, I still wouldn't be able to move a 500 ml bottle of water. If I kept diligently training every other day, then I'd be in my middle ages by the time I could make a cat float. *U~~WA~~AH. So pathetic! You think I'm stupid? If I do normal muscle training, no, more like, even without doing muscle training I can already throw the cat. Forget a ball, I could even play catch using the cat. Don't underestimate me-ow.*

Though this might have seemed like a privileged problem—considering how normal people couldn't use telekinesis—I began to think that learning one or two more English vocabulary words would be more useful than training my telekinesis. At any rate, even if I revealed myself to the public and managed to get the whole supernatural phenomenon thing confirmed (after what I was sure would be a ton of trouble), all that'd be waiting for me would be the awful life of someone who went viral for a while before sinking back into obscurity. Studying earnestly, enrolling in a good university, and entering a good company like normal people do was definitely a far better prospect.

However, with that said, it didn't take that much time or effort to do the training, so I decided to keep at it.

But honestly, I was feeling quite disappointed about the whole thing. It was entirely different from the superpowers that I'd dreamed of when I was a child. No mysterious guy had shown up, no invaders from space had shown themselves, no agent from an organization had made contact, and no door to another world had opened up. Even if a mysterious guy showed up, rather than using my 4 g telekinesis to resist, it'd definitely be faster and far more effective to just throw a flowerpot at the guy or even just punch him with my bare fist.

Telekinesis seemed seriously meaningless.

It was at this point that I got it. This entire time, what I had wanted wasn't superpowers, but the extraordinary days that came with superpowers. Well, extraordinary days would be dangerous in extraordinary ways and that would suck too, so what I wanted was something that I could enjoy to a certain degree while guaranteeing my own safety. Or perhaps an ability that allowed for more flexibility... that would have been great. The only thing I could think of doing with 4 g telekinesis that could only go in a straight line was throwing thumbtacks one by one like caltrops. But even then, it would be much faster to just chuck a whole bunch of them with my bare hands. *Haaah. There goes all my excitement. Right down the drain.*



The human ability to adapt is a frightening thing. After ten days, I'd already grown used to being able to use telekinesis. Thinking about it now, if you handed a laptop to someone from the Heian period, surely that person would start off confused but then gradually get used to it, just like I did. Though they would probably be shouting all the while about it being witchcraft or something. Perhaps even telekinesis would be a widely accepted part of physics for someone living a thousand years from now.

I wasn't experiencing abnormalities with my health either. On the fourth day, I purposely fell and hit my head so that I could be hospitalized and have them do a detailed examination. But the results came back all green.

As for the telekinesis experiment notebook, I had just started the third page and was steadily gathering detailed data.

Firstly, whereas I had expected the growth in output to be in increments of 1 g, it turned out that I had merely jumped the gun. It grew like 3 g → 4 g → 5 g → 7 g → 9 g → 11 g. Apparently, it grew at an exponent of 1.3 every time. That rate was way better than what normal muscles could achieve. After punching it into my calculator, I found out that if I maintained this pace, after a month it would become 118 g, and after a year it would become more than 1640 trillion tons. Numbers are crazy. Even heroes from fiction would go pale in the face at those results. I looked it up, and apparently Mt. Fuji weighs 1.15 trillion tons.

Isn't that scary?

However, I didn't know whether there was an upper limit or not, so I purposely kept my expectations in check. The limit being at, say, 100 g seemed entirely possible. And also, there was always the possibility of the ability leaving me as suddenly as it came.

Furthermore, I could only grab solid bodies. Because I couldn't see air, I couldn't picture myself grabbing it and so it didn't work. Liquids were hard to grab, and the time I tried lifting 11 g all at once, it just overflowed and splashed everywhere. The fact that it did float up enough to splash all over meant that it did work, but it felt like trying to scoop water with a ballpoint pen. Moving fire was impossible, and bending light was, of course, also impossible. I didn't even feel like I could do anything about fire and light.



Regardless of tests or the class field trip, I diligently continued training night after night. After two months passed, I'd become capable of moving 8 kg. The output had reached the point where I wouldn't be embarrassed to call it a proper superpower. This was enough to move most things that I would normally move with my hands in my everyday life. Succumbing to my inquisitiveness, I tried dropping my eraser and picking it up with telekinesis during class, but I didn't get caught. Either it wasn't seen altogether, or it was seen but the person who saw it thought they'd just seen wrong.

I got a bit full of myself and told my friend I'd be doing a card trick but performed it using telekinesis. He totally loved it, which made me feel great.

However, afterward he pestered me quite persistently to reveal how I did it, and I became really troubled for an answer. Finally giving in, I confessed to him that I did it with telekinesis, but since I had previously declared it to be a card trick, he didn't believe me and only thought I was saying that to get him off my back. Then I showed him my actual telekinesis, but he ended up thinking that to be a trick as well. I found myself in quite the tough spot.

Something told me that the more I tried to prove myself to him, the more obsessed he would get about it, so I dodged his questions with something random and then made a run for it. The next day, when he started pestering me

to show it to him again, I told him that my mom accidentally threw my rigged cards away and stuck to that story. Then I swore to myself to never use telekinesis in front of someone else ever again. *Telekinesis will forever remain a personal hobby. Showing it to other people is just so tiring...*



So then, as my telekinetic output increased, I ran out of things to move with my mind. I upgraded from rice cooker to bookshelf. From bookshelf to fridge. Then from fridge to car. After moving the buses at the nearby bus depot for four months, I began to feel the effectiveness of even that waning.

I realized something. Namely, that in this world, it's actually quite hard to find things *that* heavy just lying around.

Generally, a bus is about 6 to 8 tons. I'm sure a house is heavier than that, and a skyscraper is even heavier. But I couldn't very well go around lifting up things fixed into the ground. I considered moving trains, but I could imagine how catastrophic things could get if I used telekinesis to move a train in motion, and it was beyond my ability to sneak into a train depot.

Having no other choice, I put a temporary halt on increasing the output and focused instead on duration, precision, and breadth of application. The way I saw it, having an output of around 7 tons as a base was more than enough to work with.

So the first thing I trained was vectors. I wanted to be able to move in all directions, be it front, back, up, down, left, or right. Back at the very start, I felt a slight response when I tried initiating horizontal movement, so I thought the chances of success were rather high. And when I gave it a try, it turned out quite well. Aside from pulling and pushing, I found myself capable of exerting 2 to 3 kg in all other directions.

Perhaps because I was using my telekimuscle in a way that I hadn't before, the telekinetic pain the next day was way worse than what I'd had for a long time.

Because I trained my fundamentals first, my mastery over the other vectors proceeded much smoother than I had expected. A mere three months later, I had become capable of exerting the full 7 tons in all directions.

But the price of that was a rumor going around of buses flying in the dead of night as if they were possessed. The moment I heard that rumor, cold sweat flowed down my back like a waterfall. Apparently I had been seen. So that was it for moving buses.



Around the time I had mastered all vectors, I started my third year of high school. I wasn't that worried about not being able to make my livelihood, so I just chose an industrial school on the lower half of the spectrum that suited my academic ability. It was true that aiming for a research position in physics would have been the most relevant in light of my research into my own telekinesis, but to be frank, I wasn't that bright. My scores were above the median line, but I didn't have the brains to come up with something revolutionary.

As I steadily made progress in my exam preparation, I also steadily made progress in my telekinetic training. By this point in time, it had completely become a hobby of mine. I kinda felt like I had grown to use telekinesis as a break between study sessions to refresh myself.

So, after mastering all vectors, the next thing I aimed for was the opposite of "to move": "to stop."

Up till then, I'd been using telekinesis only to move things, such as "drawing" to me or "pushing" away, but I was sure that it could be used for the opposite as well. Such as fixing in place something that was flying in the air, or stopping a ball that was rolling down a slope. Making the telekinesis "stall" could be another way to put it.

But now this, it was hard. If what I'd been doing thus far was straightforward, like lifting dumbbells, this felt awkwardly difficult, like doing the invisible chair exercise. When I lost focus, the stopping power gradually dissipated. It would feel easy to do at the start, but with the passage of time, I would feel my telekimuscle quivering and screaming for release. But by training it up, I'd be able to gain pink(?) telekimuscle with much more explosive power and endurance. It wasn't like gaining them would have changed anything for me, but guys are creatures that pursue muscles even when it's meaningless. Muscles are status.

So I lifted my desk while studying. I lifted the chair that I was sitting in while practicing my English listening comprehension. I lifted my dad's car while solving past exam questions.

For someone doing both studying and telekinesis training at the same time, both my grades and telekimuscle grew at a steady rate. Well, y'know, it's like those who do sports while they study. Just as there are people who become unable to focus on studying when there's music in the background, there are people who can focus better on studying while listening to music. In my case, it's just that telekinesis and studying turned out to be a good fit.



Spending my summer vacation stupidly earnestly studying and practicing telekinesis for twelve hours every single day paid off. I managed to get an evaluation of "A" for my preferred university, and it also no longer tired me out to activate my telekimuscle's endurance and fixation power the entire time. Though I confess those overnights really might have been a bit much.

Both my teacher and parents recommended that I aim for a university one rank higher, but I managed to turn them down with random reasoning. The university one rank higher was not near an ocean. So anyways, as long as I didn't commit some huge blunder on my university entrance exams, I was set.

While watching my elegant friends, who had spent their summer leisurely now attacking their books with not so elegant faces, I was able to submerge myself in my hobby for a while.

The next task I tackled was the manipulation of the shape of my telekinesis. Instead of using telekinesis to interfere with something, I was trying to manipulate telekinesis itself. Thanks to my earnest efforts at training up my telekimuscle's endurance over the summer, I'd gained a much keener sense of telekinesis as a power in and of itself.

Due to my need for an intermediary to use telekinesis up till then, I'd had great difficulties with manipulating things that I couldn't see, such as air, and things without a definite form, such as liquids. However, having become capable of controlling telekinesis itself, I could use telekinesis to form a fan to fan air or form a cup to scoop water. Or at least, that's what I felt like I could

train myself to eventually do.

For starters, I made a board with telekinesis. Starting from the point that it'd always been, I extended it to the size of a one yen coin. That took me about an hour to do. Rather than it being hard to do, it would be more accurate to say that it was a very delicate thing to do.

Using the analogy of physical muscles every time is a bit, y'know, but anyways, it felt kinda like screwing in a screw or pounding in a nail. Instead of just using and training muscles in a vague way, it was more like trying to use those muscles to do something. Even though my telekimuscle itself still had a lot of fuel, the telekinetic fatigue was so overwhelming that I called it quits after an hour. And since the default was a point, the next day I had to expand it to the size of a coin all over again. But that was part and parcel of what made all of this worth doing.

In the end, it took me a whole week to expand the dot to the size of a 500 yen coin. Then after that, a month to reach a thousand yen bill. I was gradually getting the hang of spreading the force field, and two months later it took me only fifteen minutes to spread the field to the size of eight tatami mats (12.24 square meters). I was sure that with further training I would be able to spread it even further. But that wasn't all. I also began training to do it faster and also to make more complicated shapes with it.

And so I became capable of spreading the point into a board. But I wanted to be able to make a board right from the get-go.

The range of my telekinesis was everywhere I could see. In other words, it meant I could initiate telekinesis anywhere within my field of vision. At the time, I could simultaneously control two to three separate instances of telekinesis at the same time. Which meant that I didn't actually have to always start with a point and expand that, and that it should be possible to initiate an instance of telekinesis in board form from the very start. The reason why I'd been using the point and spread method up till then was because it was easier, but I'd started to get the feel of telekinesis as a board, so I thought it about time to put that into practical use.

Thus began training with that in mind. The first day, what I got after two

whole hours of effort was a board as thin and fragile as a tissue. But a week later, that had become straw paper, after which my proficiency continued to grow day by day. Two more weeks later, I had become capable of creating a board as strong as wood and the size of a tennis court in three minutes. Even I was surprised at how fast my progress was.

Perhaps it was thanks to me having been diligent in training my fundamentals the entire time thus far, but I could visibly see the growth of my skill with telekinesis as of late. *Could it be that I'm actually a genius? Could this be me becoming stronk with my self-taught superpower? Is it gonna begin? Are my extraordinary days going to begin?* ...But there hadn't been any hint of something like that happening anytime soon.

Even Ichirou and Jobs didn't reach their level of success overnight. Succeeding a little, failing a little, and pushing themselves forward, they gradually propelled themselves from normal people to heights that normal people consider to be extraordinary. In that sense, it may even be said that it was only normal for nothing extraordinary to happen when you just passively sit there waiting. You had to take some sort of action, had to give whatever it was a try.

Having raised my mastery over telekinesis so high, I was capable of creating a rather significant commotion. If I was just looking for showiness with zero consideration for the consequences, I could go stand in front of a TV station in Tokyo and lift and swing around a large truck. Doing it in front of so many eyes would have made it really hard to just write it off as a mere trick.

However, that kind of extraordinary was different from what I was looking for. I didn't want to be swamped with TV reporters, or featured on page one of newspapers, or to be the topic that gossip magazines and self-claimed professionals got to say whatever the hell they wanted about. What I did want was something more, y'know, like having battles with other espers. I would have maybe a teleporter and a psychometrist on my team, and oh, all the situations that we would get ourselves into... Rather than extraordinary days peppered with ordinary days, the clash of extraordinary against extraordinary was more my cup of tea.

Hmm. It's said that university students have a lot of free time. If that turns out to be true, then let's make some time to go looking for comrades.



Around when I'd just finished taking the National Center Test (mid-January), my telekinetic board formation had shaped up quite nicely. Formation time had gone down to under ten seconds, and I could freely make whatever shape I wanted, be it board, cup, ellipse, or anything else. Furthermore, I had become capable of covering objects with complicated shapes, such as plushies and bouquets, with a layer of telekinesis. It was still far from a perfect fit and was more like a plastic cover with some gaps and bumps, but it was serviceable. Instead of a board, now it'd become more like a barrier. While in the bath, I would scoop up water with a barrier, then change the shape of the barrier while making sure not to spill any of the water. Together with all the other stuff that I was doing, my mastery over telekinesis grew in leaps and bounds.

I also took to folding origami with telekinesis and carving sculptures by moving the carving knife with telekinesis. What I was aiming for was a precise yet powerful telekinesis ability.

Well then. Having already been slightly unsuitable for my university of choice in a good way, I passed the university-specific entrance exam with ease. And thus, I became a full-fledged university student. After moving into my own place, I ended up with three free days before the matriculation ceremony. So what did I do with that time? Of course I spent it on telekinesis training. What was that about preparing for my courses? As if I'd do that. Just grabbing enough credits to graduate was good enough, duh.

At night time, when all the good children were in bed, I left my apartment to head toward the sea. It took only 10 minutes on foot. It was quite close, actually.

Listening to the sound of the waves, I got down onto the sand. With only a small flashlight illuminating my path, I made my way to the edge of the waves. Then I used telekinesis to lift up a huge mass of seawater.

Have you caught on yet?

Indeed, the me at the time had become perfectly capable of lifting up water.

One cubic meter of water weighs 1 ton. Seawater is boundlessly plentiful, so there is almost no upper limit on the weight it can provide. The idea was that

from then on, I would be able to train the output of my telekimuscle until 7 tons seemed like nothing. This was half the reason why I chose a university close to the ocean.

I could finally resume increasing my output. Up, up, and up, all the way. Honestly, I didn't really have a specific number I was aiming for, I was just trying to raise it as high as I could.

But I ended up overdoing it and spent the entire night on the beach playing with seawater, which caused me to catch a cold and I was almost limping into the matriculation ceremony. Even espers can't beat illnesses. I had clearly gotten a bit drunk on the freedom of living on my own. Sorry, me. (´•ω•`)



As it turned out, in university, as long as you got the credits, you could basically do whatever you wanted. You could devote yourself to your club, you could play around with your friends, you could hole up in your research lab, or you could make a killing doing part time jobs.

Finding myself with three times the freedom that I had expected, I unhesitatingly poured it all into my hobby.

Which meant my telekinesis, of course.

While keeping up my training, I started buying and collecting occult magazines and reading through publications. I also attended lectures given by self-claimed specialists, a few times even managing to meet and chat with them in person.

With the money that I saved up from part time jobs, I started flying here and there. Mt. Aso in Kumamoto Prefecture. The Sea of Trees at the foot of Mt. Fuji. Guiana Highlands in South America. The Tower of London in England. It didn't matter to me if it was in the country or overseas. I went to way more suicide spots and "power spots" than I could count with the fingers on my two hands.

However, none of them felt quite like what I was looking for. And my university didn't have an Occult Club in the first place.

I also attempted to meet people who claimed to have superpowers while hiding my own identity, but all I discovered was just sheer disappointment. After they'd gone on for a helluva long time, muttering random nonsense that

were supposed to be spells in a dimly lit room, with only a “the color of the water has changed!” to show for it.

It looks like a stupid trick every which way, thank you very much. Even if it really is a superpower, I wouldn't acknowledge it. It's way too pathetic. You. Lack. Effort! It was so pathetic that I couldn't hold in my anger. I ended up using telekinesis to completely wreck that person's entire house, but I do not regret it at all.

Fucking messing with me...!

So yeah, in this way, my first year at university ended up being mainly a fruitless effort. But despite the futility of it, it became clear to me that even if there were espers, I wouldn't be able to find them using the methods of a normal person. So I wrote that lesson off as the silver lining.



On one hand, the search for comrades completely fell through. But on the other hand, my training was going exceedingly well.

Lifting seawater required quite a few things: accuracy, so the water didn't spill; an output that could support the weight; endurance, to continue supporting the water in the air; the shape formation to maintain the barrier; and basically every other area I had cultivated thus far in my training.

When I became capable of easily lifting a cube of water that I used a 50 m measuring tape to measure, I realized that that meant a weight of 125,000 tons. I looked it up, and discovered that this was more than enough to lift up a medium-sized tanker. Dayum. If my telekimuscle was a normal muscle, then I would have become so macho that I'd be a monster. Let alone a tank, I could probably have beaten a battleship in a fight.



Due to spending too much of my time on telekinesis, I was in danger of having to repeat the year, but managed to pull through somehow and thus became a second year student. This year, I thought to shrink my sphere of activity from worldwide to just citywide.

By then, my output had already reached the point where I was no longer able

to measure it, and I had also attained the precision and endurance to wrap every single grain of rice in a bowl with individual barriers and maintain that for a whole hour. So next was the Era of Responsiveness. I needed to be able to use telekinesis whenever I wanted, right there on the spot, exactly the way I wanted to.

At the time, it took me 2 seconds to put up a barrier. And I wanted to bring that down to the average response time of a human, 0.2 seconds.

Furthermore, I wanted to be able to use it naturally to assist physical motion. For example, if I ever sprained my leg, I could still use telekinesis to aid me so that I could still jump and prance about like my foot was still fine. Another way of putting it is that I wanted to make it so that my normal actions could be boosted to superhuman levels, such as jumping dozens of meters and pulverizing concrete with my fist. Leaving aside whether I would ever get the opportunity to pulverize concrete with my bare hands in my entire life, of course.

So, to that end, I began incorporating training into my everyday life.

As soon as I woke up in the morning, I threw up a small stone left beside my pillow even before I sat up. Then, right before the small stone hit me, I reflected it back up with the barest minimum of barriers. I would continue this for 5 minutes.

During that time, I would not use my hands. Telekinetic output decreased when I didn't hold out my hand, but the point was that having to hold out my hand all the time during my everyday life would just look too suspicious. Just as if it was a third arm, I wanted to become capable of using telekinesis as naturally as seeing, smelling, or breathing.

By the time I finished my little stone training, I would be wide awake, so then I got up to go make breakfast. However, I did it using only telekinesis. I used telekinesis to hold the frying pan, used telekinesis to start a fire in the stove, used telekinesis to cut the vegetables, and then used telekinesis to fry it all. I also coated the frying pan and all the cutlery with a barrier to prevent them from getting dirty. Let alone going electronic, I went all telekinetic. I was still using a naked flame, though.

Then when I commuted to school, I cast a barrier to keep my feet several millimeters off the ground. But instead of maintaining the barrier, I only cast it every single time my foot was about to touch the ground, and dispelled it immediately after lifting my foot. When I started doing that on the first day of classes in the second year, I almost became late. The first day, I only managed a speed of 300 meters per hour. As can be imagined, this proved extremely difficult to do, and it took me 3 whole months until I returned to being able to walk at a normal pace. My university friends even started suspecting whether I had a foot injury or something. Although I felt kinda bad about it, I played along and acted like there really was something wrong with my feet. Now that I think about it, that might have been a bit overboard, as it wasn't like I was hurrying the training in preparation for an upcoming fight with a mysterious villain or something.

But anyways, after lectures, I once again took care of dinner in all-telekinesis style, then did normal muscle training while studying by operating my computer and moving my mechanical pencil with telekinesis. Training telekinesis to aid everyday motions was fine and all, but it would be problematic if my normal muscles atrophied due to overdoing it. So an appropriate amount of muscle training was also necessary.

When the clock struck midnight, I stopped studying, put on the mask that I had bought in Bali when I went there in my first year, then stepped out. It was the witching hour.

With telekinesis as support, I jumped from roof to roof, then walked (ran) on thin air to the sea. Once I reached the sea, I held up seawater to make an above-water athletic course, then flew around that. I wasn't worried about being seen by someone. It might have become a rumor, but my identity wouldn't be blown, so it wasn't a problem. That's what the mask was for. Though admittedly, it did double my suspicions.

But even this lifestyle that seemed to evoke the question "what on earth are you training yourself to fight against?!" turned into mere routine after half a year. More like, due to putting on a mask and flying around at night, I felt a sense of euphoria from my chuunibyou acting up again.

Well, I was *actually* using telekinesis, so I'm not sure if that could still be

called chuunibyou anymore, but still.

All my wages from my part-time jobs at the time went toward a pair of steel gauntlets as well as a pair of boots that's selling point was that they could withstand up to 2 tons of weight. *I mean, y'know, an organization that targets espers might show up all of a sudden. So, y'know, as a countermeasure, yeah?* ...Though there still wasn't any sign of such an organization. More like, since I had become more than capable of snapping the Tokyo Sky Tree in half, if someone showed up that was capable of fighting toe to toe with me, then that would mean one helluva kaiju battle.

But anyways, as I gradually grew numb toward the insane training menu that had apparently been set up for the sake of defeating a mysterious enemy beyond my ken, I found myself with more free time to resume looking for comrades.

Now, I had already learned the lesson that I probably wouldn't be able to find other espers if I searched alone. But with that said, I didn't have the connections to probe around the underworld either. So the best compromise was to borrow the power of the mass media.

However, I didn't think even for a moment that just showing "the real thing" would be enough to convince other espers to gather.

Up till then, I had already combed through various TV stations and various TV programs in search of other espers, but had yet to see even one instance of someone who looked authentic.

I bought all the videos and DVDs of a certain program, but 95% of their guests were clearly just faking it, while the other 5% I couldn't make a call on based off of what I saw on the screen.

So I then made use of my off days to once again fly all around the country and the world in an attempt to meet those remaining 5%. However, one of them required booking an appointment 5 years in advance, one of them was really wishy-washy about showing me their superpower and in the end got defensive and chased me out, two of them who claimed to be able to predict the future took my money but then only gave me vague spiels that could be interpreted every which way, and all the rest did not even publicize their contact

information.

That's how I knew. That's how I was forced to accept the truth. Namely, that I was the one and only esper in this entire world.

However, surprisingly, I didn't feel disappointed. It was more like, *Ahhh, just as I'd suspected*. I already had a vague suspicion that that was the case, and telekinesis having become so everyday for me probably also played a part.

I remember when I got my first game back in elementary school. At that time, I felt like I had gotten my hands on some legendary weapon, and was so happy about it. I went around bragging to all my friends, and got completely hooked on playing matches with others. Then when my preferred entertainment became manga, the game became reduced to an almost insignificant piece of the extraordinary, something on the level of seeing a shooting star on a normal day.

It was the same for telekinesis. After three whole years of being able to use it, I had become completely accustomed to it. It was still fun, and it was still very much worth doing, but at most it just felt like enjoying a sequel to my favorite game, and there was no more of the excitement and expectation toward something unknown. I could almost sort of see how it was going to play out in the future.

More than likely, no other espers were going to appear.

No organization was going to show up aiming for my life.

I wasn't going to get to flirt with a pretty girl.

There weren't going to be any side effects from telekinesis.

I wouldn't learn why I attained telekinesis in the first place.

I would continue training my telekinesis like it was an everyday thing, and that would just be the end of that. I could easily imagine myself like that, and I was fine with it.

But well, I also thought that it might be cool to create a huge commotion after I trained myself to the upper limit. *Perhaps that might lift the curtains on a fantasy that might wake me up. There might at least be an atom-sized chance*

of that happening, right?

But until that day comes, I will just continue training my telekinesis.

With unwavering focus.

Chapter 2: THIS Is What I Get For Training My Telekinesis With Unwavering Focus?!

I became a university junior. It was about time to dial down on the university life as job searching began looming on the horizon. I was told that once I became a senior, I would be absolutely swamped with that. But let's talk about my telekinesis first.

According to my calculations, I'd already trained myself to the point where I could offset Fat Man, the atomic bomb that was dropped on Nagasaki. Modern-day atomic weapons are a far cry from the ones in WWII era, so I couldn't say that I could deflect an atomic bomb. But flip it around, and it could be said that I was unstoppable short of an atomic bomb. I was, in effect, a one-man army.

However, I was still vulnerable to more subtle forms of attack. I couldn't use telekinesis when sleeping, and I couldn't block light, which meant I was still susceptible to radiation. I wouldn't notice it if someone attacked me from a blind spot, and neither did I have any way to deal with being poisoned. Even though I had zero intention of doing anything that would cause me to have to face such... challenges, as I continued ruminating on them, I eventually came to feel like I might actually have a way to do something about at least a few of these weaknesses. And, having come up with ideas, there was no way I wouldn't try them out.

Telekinesis is deep. My heart danced with the excitement of exploring as yet unreached depths. How could it not? So firstly, I took to sharpening my sixth sense through telekinesis. When I say "sixth sense," I don't mean intuition or anything spiritual, but the unique sense that I felt from telekinesis. If I acquired it, then surprise attacks would become ineffective against me, and clairvoyance would be a pipe dream no more. Now, as for specifically how I went about it, you see, when I tried to telekinetically lift something too heavy for me to lift, I would get a feeling of straining. That feeling was to be the key in this next round of training.

The sensation of strain, or the lack thereof, gave me a general sense of the weight that was being lifted. In other words, through telekinesis, I was able to sense the weight of something. Telekinesis was not just an incredible and invisible muscle. Just like my eyes and ears, it also served as a sensory organ that could send feedback back to me.

So for starters, I dove into the Japan Trench (greatest depth of 8,020 meters), then lifted up two masses of seawater of slightly different weights. The right mass was barely beyond what I could handle, and the left mass was barely within what I could handle. And my aim was to familiarize myself with the feeling of difference between the two.

Down there at the bottom of the sea, while maintaining my supply of oxygen with a barrier and my line of sight with flashlights, I lifted up seawater, then let go. Lifted up, then let go.

One, two. One, two. One, two.

Focus.

Gotta focus.

Don't think, feel.

Just like how those aunties at farmers' markets could tell the exact weight of a potato just by picking it up, I wanted to train myself to become capable of precisely determining the weight of something without even thinking about it. To put it in terms of hearing, anyone can tell which is louder between the sound of a roaring motorcycle in the dead of night opposed to the sound of a one yen coin hitting the ground. No one has to consciously go "sound of a motorcycle vs. sound of a coin, which one is louder, um, um, let me think for a moment." It was the same thing.

May the sense of telekinesis truly become my sixth sense! I got so hyped up about it that I bought a bunch of lunch boxes from a convenience store, then spent an entire weekend down there in the company of deep-sea fish. But upon thinking about it more calmly, I realized that I didn't have to actually do this training in an oceanic trench, so I went home and shifted into comparing between a 90 yen apple and a 30 yen orange.

Training at the bottom of the Japan Trench, hah. Sigh, people who abruptly gain power sure like to go off and do crazy things with their power. I'm not in a Jump manga, there's no demand for any eccentric and incomprehensible training menus. Well, I mean, if there's actually a "OHH! So that's what that training was for! Uwahh I've gotten so strong!" development filled with clichés and passion waiting for me, then I'd love to take part. But unfortunately, I have no stage to display the results of my training.

Seriously, why aren't there any espers other than me? I really want to say "There is something wrong with the world!" but it's my existence that is wrong, haah.

With a tinge of futility dwelling in my chest, I finished up a report for a course while comparing the weight of pebbles and differently-sized spoons. I wanted to really praise myself for thinking of training by comparing the weight of vegetables at the supermarket. Being able to identify the heavier and more magnificent ones was a win both for me and for my finances. Booyah.

And after keeping at it for two months, I became somewhat capable of determining the amount of strain felt by my telekimuscle. It was the birth of my sixth sense.

This newly honed sense of strain in my telekimuscle, this sixth sense, turned out to have an incredible range of applications. For example, I could spread out a thin layer of telekinesis over the ground in the vicinity. Through it, I would be able to determine the weight of people and vehicles passing by, which would enable me to sense it when an invisible assassin closed in on me.

"H-How could you tell?! My invisibility was perfect!"

"Hmph, underestimating the sixth sense of a telekinetic was your downfall."

You get it? You get it, yeah?! Haah, that'd be so freaking cool! Though there was a problem... well, two problems. Techniques to turn invisible don't exist, and I don't even have enemies to fight... Shit!

Another application was to deploy a circular barrier around me with the fragility of a piece of tissue so that I would be able to tell when anyone intruded close enough to break through the barrier. It would be effective against attacks from behind. In actual fact, one time when I kept this barrier deployed around

me for no reason whatsoever, I happened to clinch a beautiful evade when a friend from university snuck up behind me to do the “tap your shoulder then poke your cheek with a finger when you turn around” prank. I told him “You forgot to hide your presence” with a smug face, but he just ignored me. Sniff.

Putting that aside. I’d successfully awoken my sixth sense, but there was still room for further development. So, so much more room.

See, the sensation of weight through my telekimuscle was, in effect, a substitution for the sense of touch. I wanted to expand it to envelop all five senses of a human—namely, sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. *To see, hear, smell, taste, as well as touch with telekinesis! If I succeed, then I’d truly become capable of acting like a mysterious power in the shadows who knows everything!*

At that time, the range of my telekinesis was dependent on my sight. I could initiate telekinesis wherever I could see, but that also meant I couldn’t activate it in places I couldn’t see. However, if I became capable of extending the range of my telekinesis as well as “see” with it, then I could theoretically send telekinesis all the way to Hokkaido while staying in Okinawa. I would effectively be watching the Sapporo Snow Festival live while sipping freshly brewed guava tea! *How awesome would that be?* And furthermore, if I added the senses of hearing and smell as well, then it would effectively mean actually being in Okinawa and Hokkaido at the same time.

I could “take a business trip overseas” while staying in Japan the whole time.

Say a tornado was to arise in America.

I could send telekinesis to stop it in its tracks while watching the live stream on the TV in the university cafeteria.

The tornado on the TV would get pushed back by some mysterious force.

The lunch ladies and other students would buzz with astonishment and bewilderment.

And there I would be, grinning nihilistically while wordlessly enjoying my 380-yen bowl of sanuki udon.

Oh hell yeah! But yeah, I would probably just be in everyday common places

similar to that while performing feats of long-distance telekinesis. If I had my way, I would have loved to do it while wearing a black outfit and hiding my identity behind a hood while tipping back a tequila inside a dark underground bar. But I was just a normal university student. I couldn't afford such expenses just for the sake of atmosphere.

Please, will someone please sponsor me? Why am I living such a generic life when I have such an incredible power? I think by now, I can probably fight on equal ground with a superpower country's entire military force. I mean, I admit that I haven't exactly been spreading the word about me having this superpower, so there's no one who even knows about me. Ah~ah~ah~ah, here comes the despondency again. LF extraordinary pl0x.

So then, based on that train of thought, the second phase of my sixth sense training was sight. "I will 'see' with telekinesis!" This was what I wanted to make happen. With it, I would be capable of not only sensing behind me but would actually be able to see too.

It is said that 80% of the sensory input that humans receive is from sight. By learning to "see" with telekinesis, I would be able to add the 80% of telekinetic sight to my usual 100% sensory input. That meant expansion of my sensory input to 180% (sloppy calculation). But joking aside, that calculation might not have been that ridiculous. Let alone behind me, I would be able to sightsee in Brazil even while physically remaining in Japan. It would be true clairvoyance.

However, I was quite stumped in regards to the training approach. To be honest, I couldn't really think of where to start.

The fact that the range of my telekinesis was limited by sight meant that the two were probably not entirely unrelated. So there was a connection between telekinesis and sight. However, I didn't really get it. I didn't get it, so I decided to start by improving what I did get.

My telekinesis only activated within the range of how far I could see. If I couldn't see due to distance or due to the object being on the other side of something like a murky glass pane, then the precision would drop. If it was beyond the horizon or completely out of sight, such as hidden behind a wall, then I couldn't activate telekinesis on it at all.

Up till then, I hadn't yet attempted extending the range. That's why I decided to start with that.

What I thought to do was simple.

I would buy a telescope.

I would look at somewhere far away through the telescope. I would activate telekinesis at the faraway place that I saw. And that would be it!

I thought that if I couldn't activate telekinesis at the place I saw through the telescope, then that was fine as well. It would be relevant data. But if I actually could activate telekinesis through the telescope, then that would serve as an enormous breakthrough. By using an astronomical telescope, I could possibly even be able to activate telekinesis on the moon.

So I went to a retail store and informed a shop clerk that I wanted to buy a telescope. I looked through it as a test and found out that I could indeed use telekinesis through the telescope. So I bought it on the spot. 39,800 yen was quite the hefty amount, but it was definitely worth it.

Every morning, before heading to class, I went out to my veranda and used telekinesis on faraway tree branches and store signs through the telescope. This gave me an entirely new, strange sensation different from anything I'd felt before. When I used telekinesis through the telescope, I got hit by a dizzying feeling like I was trying to see through a powerful pair of glasses. Based on all my experience up till then, I determined it to be a good omen. When things felt tough or strained, that always led to the growth of my telekimuscle. The feeling of discomfort surely meant that there would be growth, just as long as I got used to it and overcame it.

In actual fact, on the first day I was hit with dizziness and a headache just by using the lowest magnification. But by the fifth day, I had already gotten used to it, and my range without the telescope had also gone up somewhat.

One funny thing that happened was that a week after I began this training, the police came knocking on my door saying that "we've had reports of someone living here suspected of peeking..." I desperately convinced them that I was bird-watching. *What a horrible false accusation!* The training with the telescope proved very effective, and my range increased by leaps and bounds.

Firstly, I developed a unique feeling for places so far away that I could only see vaguely. Somehow, just somehow, I became able to feel targeted “weights” in a desired general area. And if I sent telekinesis toward that target, it activated just fine.

The key was “weight.” It was against “weight” that I could use telekinesis. Sight through telekinesis was connected to weight, or in other words, the sensation of touch. The stress training with my telekimuscle surely played a large part in making this possible.

With the range gradually but steadily increasing, after two months I became completely able to use telekinesis on things out of my line of sight. However, the accuracy was significantly worse. All I could do was activate telekinesis on an object of roughly a certain weight in a general area. I could only use it in an imprecise way like that. I couldn’t create barriers, couldn’t make things float or stop in midair. The only things I could do were fundamental movements like pushing and pulling.

However, that in itself was already great progress. Because it meant that I could use telekinesis on objects hidden behind obstacles.

With that, I could send criminals who were hiding behind fortifications flying with an invisible force. Most likely. I could only determine targets I couldn’t see by their weight, so I’d have to know the criminals’ weight beforehand, though.

The sensation of using telekinesis on something that I couldn’t see either due to distance or due to obstacles was kinda similar to squinting to see somewhere faraway. By focusing and going “*nnn*,” it became possible to see just a little bit farther. Once I grasped that sensation, it became a matter of just repeating it. The secret to growth in telekinesis lay in repetition.

Farther, then even farther. At the start, my range was a mere 300 meters. After I familiarized myself with the sensation of using telekinesis 600 meters away at the first magnification setting of the telescope, I challenged myself to maintain that range without the telescope. I felt for a “weight” at the 600-meter mark and applied telekinesis to it. If I couldn’t do it, then I simply peeked through the telescope to regain that sensation.

When I mastered 600 meters, I went up to 3 times the magnification at 900

meters. Then, rinse and repeat.

The telescope that I'd purchased had a maximum magnification of 150 times. Gradually, I familiarized myself with increasing degrees of magnification. By half a year later, I had a maximum range of $300\text{ m} \times 150 = 45\text{ kilometers}$. With that, even someone who'd run a full marathon to get away from me would still be within my reach. Though well, I could only target things based on weight, so it wasn't as useful as it sounded.

After having done it for a whole half a year, I became so used to it that I no longer needed the aid of the telescope to continue the range extension training on my own.

However, one problem remained.

I did indeed succeed in extending the range of my telekinesis. But the all-important goal of "seeing" was yet unfulfilled. I didn't know what to do, so I did it all. I spent a whole day with a blindfold on. I gradually dimmed my room to find the point where I could and could not activate telekinesis based on naked sight. I crossed my eyes. I bought 3D picture books with images that jumped out. I kept one eye closed. I tried to burn an image into my mind then closed my eyes and attempted to use telekinesis based on the image.

As a result, thanks to one of those methods, or a combination of them, I actually became able to "see" with telekinesis.

You know how normally, when you close your eyes, everything is dark, but then if you directed your consciousness into that darkness, you would see dizzying waves of color? As I proceeded with my "sight" training, that dizzying feeling gradually subsided, shapes vaguely took form, hues turned vivid, and silhouettes became defined. In the end, I acquired a sense of telekinetic sight no different from actual sight.

With this, I'd attained complete freedom to see absolutely whatever I wanted that was within range. Obstacles were obstacles no more! I had complete freedom with angles too! But at the same time, the width of possible misuse of my telekinesis also leaped up. I could watch movies from the best seat in a cinema without paying for it. I could peek under the skirt or into the bathroom of any girl I fancied. I could even peek at manga manuscripts without waiting for

them to be published. *No, no, no, I must not.* If I didn't harden my heart, I would have been swallowed by darkness. So this... this is the destiny of those who wield power (lol).

But speaking of destiny! This is what it actually is! I cried in half rage as I stepped into the hell that was job searching.

Yep, I'd become a university senior. I had to join the workforce. I thought it ridiculous how the job search was supposed to start in April. That meant looking for a job even while all my time was being taken up by final year reports.

Wasn't university supposed to be a place for studying?

Well, I could wail all I wanted, but I had no way of destroying the distorted (in my opinion) social norms of Japanese society. I mean, I could physically destroy the central Japanese government, but I didn't see how that would change the intangible social norms. Rather, doing so would only turn me into Public Enemy Number One.

Those who live by the sword will die by the sword. Karma. That was how society was made. Or at least, that was what I learned from manga. *Sounds like baloney.*

Leaving aside destiny and social reform and whatnot, job searching was an issue that I had to take seriously.

The ideal would be to find a job doing what I loved. A job in a field that matched my talents would have been fine too, as would a high-paying job or one where I could take it easy.

What I loved was telekinesis. What I was talented in was telekinesis.

I had poured all my efforts into telekinesis ever since high school. *"With the power of telekinesis, I could contribute to your company by optimizing your operating processes!"* They would probably think I had a few screws loose if I said that. If they said, *"Then how about you use it for us to see (provocation)?"* Then I would reply, *"Sure thing (activates telekinesis) (interviewer floats in midair) (building collapses) (I laugh at the top of my lungs while floating above the street that has been reduced to mountains of rubble)."* That wouldn't even be funny.

All joking aside, I could just dial it all the way down and lift a coffee cup or something to convince them of my power. If I was an interviewer, no way would I let go of an applicant with such a buzzworthy and convenient skill. So I got the offer. I accepted said offer, then there was the company initiation ceremony, rookie training, mountains of work, rising performance evaluation, special bonus, promotion, floods of marriage interviews, then thankfulness that I'd kept up the telekinesis training... as if.

I came back to my senses in the middle of my delusion.

Am I seriously going for a normal salaryman job despite possessing such incredible superpowers? Isn't there, like, some place where I could make better use of my powers?

How about a secret governmental organization tasked with handling supernatural phenomena? Beating back alien invasions and... well, I already know that this world doesn't have anything exciting like that. So, leaving that aside, if I got hired as the president's bodyguard, I would be able to protect him from even a rain of nuclear bombs. Throw me into a battle-torn area and all enemy soldiers would succumb to a mysterious force within a few days.

One esper for your country. How about it?

But well, I had no connections. How do presidents even hire their bodyguards? And in the modern world, matters are no longer as simple as defeating all the enemies in battle, what with religion and poverty and political agendas being all intertwined together into Gordian knots of huge proportions.

Just twiddling my thumbs won't get anything done, so should I just go for it? If I reveal myself flashily and announce that I'm looking for a job, honestly speaking, I don't think it'd be that hard to get a job offer.

BUT! Frankly speaking, I was terrified of the price of fame.

I knew from the internet how quickly people could mob up to wail on someone who rose to fame too abruptly. An esper who can face off against an entire army would be a perfect target. My history and relationships would be dug up to the last detail and reported on every channel, so-called experts would irresponsibly say whatever they wanted and debate about me, then once everyone was tired of the buzz, I would be tossed away. *That's terrifying!*

There's no way I could withstand that. My heart would snap.

But as I wracked my brain thinking of a good solution, time continued flowing by mercilessly. Caught up by those around me, my job search continued on, I went to interview after interview all without revealing my telekinesis, was backed into a corner by final year projects, spent my days being chased by this and that, and before I knew it, I had become accepted into a medium-sized venture company.

I was secretly surprised.

Seriously, nothing happened. Even though I trained so hard in telekinesis, within the duration of my rosy student life, no secret organizations and no heroines from other worlds came knocking.

What am I supposed to do now? I've gone and become a member of society. If you're coming, then come quickly, extraordinary days! If you come to me when I reach middle age, then I'll have trouble keeping up with adventuring and all that, so you'd better come quickly! You're not coming? You're seriously not coming?

...They never came.

I uneventfully graduated from university and started my new job. Everything was so normal that I wanted to puke.

After becoming a working adult, the days passed by quickly.

The spotty rookie training that tried to cram too much into too little time. Finding my duties entirely different from what I was told when applying for the job. Being obligated to come to work at 7 a.m. even though the start of the work day was supposedly at 8 a.m.. Having to punch out at 8 p.m. before going back to my desk. The OT hours that went unpaid as a matter of course. Mandatory attendance even on public holidays (unpaid). Calls to return to the office right when I got home all tired out. Unreasonable claims. Responsibility that just kept piling on. Cheap wages disproportionate to the work I put in. A tiny mistake that caused a client to leave, for which I got severely reprimanded and the promotion lined up for me went poof.

It was tough. It was tough, but humans adapt quickly. After a year, I got used

to the job, and learned how to relax more and cut corners where I could. The new batch came in, so my seniors' attention and all the miscellaneous tasks went to them.

After two years, my lifestyle gradually became settled.

One night I returned to my cheap apartment, and undid my tie while fetching a beer from the fridge with telekinesis. I threw myself onto the sofa, then turned on the TV.

It just so happened that a late-night anime was airing, one of those with superpowers. The protagonist, a kid who was apparently a fire wielder, was directing his sword toward a young girl in a scandalous costume while shouting "Why did you betray us?!" The heroine was crying while being forced by shadows controlling her body to stand up and lunge forward in attack. The protagonist met it with pain in his face. Then there was the mastermind with glowing glasses smirking while watching through a monitor.

It looked so fun... I crushed the empty beer can into the size of a golf ball, then threw it into the trash can behind me with telekinesis. *What's the difference between me and that protagonist?*

I am definitely stronger than him. Oh look, the heroine used a sword made of compressed shadows to bisect a truck. Sit down, you chumps, I could even bisect Mt. Fuji if I wanted to.

But, really, it just looked so fun... That was exactly the adolescence that I'd wanted to live out.

Why was I watching piss-poor quality late-night anime with a beer in hand while feeling sorry for myself?

I chose this life. Fearing the price of fame, opting to err on the side of caution, I had kept my telekinesis a secret. I was afraid of standing out. Those fears were probably quite true. But you can't kidnap a tiger cub without stepping into a tiger den. Then again, it was also true that my choice to not take risks was what led to this absolutely boring life where I lived purely on habit.

Tears streamed down my face.

Am I fine with this? With my life being like this? Am I really satisfied with

dragging out my days at a company that I don't love, being worked to death by my superiors, desperately holding onto a seat that anyone else can sit in, living a life that would be forgotten ten years after I die, never becoming anything more than a mere cog of a company? As I questioned myself, I felt the fire that had been doused by two years as a working adult coming back to life.

Surely it wasn't too late.

That's right. I just didn't have enough resolve during my student days.

I had an epiphany.

If extraordinary days won't come to me, then I myself would make those extraordinary days.

I would make myself a fated rival. I would make a cute and powerful heroine. I would gather companions with unforgettable personalities. I would create an organization that fought against the world's shadows. I would create the grotesque enemies to fight against. I had the power to do it. I had trained so much that I could do all of it.

I drained my second beer, then stood up with resolve burning in my eyes.

UOOOHHHHHHH!

I have decided!

I will be a corporate slave no more!

I!

WILL!

BE!

THE SUPERNATURAL ORGANIZATION!!!

Chapter 3: You're The Heroine, Right?! I Can Tell! So Just Come With Me Already!!

Upon resolving to build a secret organization, I immediately submitted my resignation letter the very next morning. Only by me threatening to take the company to court did my superior eventually accept my letter and also concede to giving me all the paid leave that I had piled up (I had to insist on getting paid). I think there was some social commentary that could be derived from the fact that my resignation letter would have been simply torn up and tossed into the trash if I didn't resort to coercion, but that's none of my business anymore. *I mean, isn't it supposed to be part of our rights as Japanese citizens?* I was already patting myself on the back for quitting.

In any case, with this I now had two months of time until my official resignation. Before I dove into Operation Exciting Secret Organization Start-Up, I confirmed the cards in my hand.

First, capital. I had 1.2 million yen in savings. My base of operations was a cheap place in the outskirts of Tokyo (age of building, 20 years). My ride was the esteemed 30-year-old mini-bike passed down from one of my university senpais. Despite being older than even me, it was still very much in active service. Fridge, microwave, TV, air conditioner, computer, and the usual household appliances, all check. A modest collection of manga, light novels, DVDs, and games. The pressure-resistant boots and steel gauntlets on a wall, as well as the weird lion dance mask that I had bought as a souvenir from Bali all gave off a very... distinctive aura in the middle of it all.

Now, friends and connections. *Um, normal, I guess?* In regards to my family, my parents and all my grandparents were in great health. No siblings. A few cousins that I meet pretty much only during New Years, and I was not particularly friendly or unfriendly with any of them. For what it was worth, in my smartphone were the contact details of clients that I had gone drinking with due to work, coworkers, and friends from my student days. If I sent out an

invitation to go hang out, some might answer, some might not. Not a single connection to sons or daughters of distinguished families, heirs to ancient martial arts dojos, or top-notch university elites. If I really had to name the weirdest contact I had, then it would be Bob, the pro wrestler who I met on a train during my overseas travels. But he had apparently changed his contact details and I couldn't get through, so that didn't count. *So, in summary, normal!*

Next is what I imagine many would like to know most: my own specs. Graduated with a degree in engineering from Mitsukado University. Two years of working experience before, um, "going independent." 24 years old, male, height of 172 cm, weight of 65 kg. No abnormalities detected during my latest health checkup. No chronic illnesses. Medical history of mumps and chicken pox. Had to remove a right molar due to cavities back in middle school. Certification on hand: personal vehicle driver's license and English Proficiency Grade 1.

Telekinesis. Output: immeasurable. Extrapolating from calculations, way more than enough to lift up Mt. Everest without breaking into a sweat. After the idea of using telekinesis to apply burden to telekinesis came upon me, there was no longer any limit to my growth. Maybe I already could actually split Earth in half like in a gag manga.

As for the range, I'd already been able to reach the other side of the planet since three whole months ago. There was literally nowhere left on Earth that was beyond the reach of my telekinesis. It had become objective truth that it was impossible to run away from me. *Even if you hide inside a bathroom stall, I will find you...!* Furthermore, thanks to the training that I had steadily kept up even while working, my telekinesis had attained all five senses. In other words, while staying inside my one-room house, I was capable of seeing, hearing, feeling, smelling, and tasting anything in the entire world.

Battle ability. I permanently had a powerful barrier deployed around me that, according to calculations, was strong enough to completely protect me from anything on the level of the meteor impact that caused the dinosaurs to go extinct.

In regards to poison gas, I was walking around with enough air in compressed packets that I could safely walk around for several days.

I had also granted perfect temperature insulation to my telekinetic barrier. Thanks to the radionuclide sample stored at my university's research wing, I had also completed the training to perfectly block off radiation. Radio waves and electromagnetic waves? Done and done.

On the idea of using telekinesis as propulsion to achieve high velocity travel, I had also trained enough to simultaneously keep up an anti-g-force suit capable of withstanding acceleration of up to 10 gs.

Fighting in absolute darkness was no obstacle to me, as I could either compress air quick enough to make it ignite and turn to plasma to secure myself a light source or simply just rely on my telekinetic sixth sense. It hardly needed to be said, but of course I could also keep going in space, deep sea, and magma without any problems whatsoever.

I was a true monster if there ever was one. *Seriously, what was it that I was planning to fight against...?*

When I watched alien invasion movies and action movies based on catastrophes like meteor collisions, I could no longer feel even the tiniest of twinges of a sense of impending crisis. *What is this, it's so low level and beneath me, how can this even be called a crisis...?* is all that would fill my mind.

Though granted, I was completely incapable of resurrection, super regeneration, teleportation, stopping time, manipulating causality, immortality, or any such fantasy powers commonly depicted in works of fiction. So I suppose you couldn't really call me truly invincible. Although I would succumb like any normal person to cancer or AIDS, it was at least some measure of reassurance to know for a fact that I wouldn't lose even if the whole of humanity were to come after me.

So then, by using all of the cards listed above, it was finally time to get started.

But with that said, the youth that I had lost wouldn't come back to me. I wasn't exactly old enough to be called an uncle, but the adjective "fresh" seemed equally as inappropriate for my age. As a human being, I had already lost the time most filled with sparkles and glitter. I knew for a fact that no secret organization of super-powered individuals existed in the world, there

were no invaders from other worlds, and neither was there some ancient human race ready to wake up after being frozen for millennia. Dreams and romance were equally empty. Even if I made a secret organization, it would be no more than mere child's play.

For me, anyway.

However, how would it be for the members of the secret organization?

As an example, what if I suddenly showed up—dressed in black from head to toe—in front of a bored high school student and straight up attacked him with (suuuper held back) telekinesis? Then say a pretty girl (a puppet manipulated by telekinesis) showed up to save him. After which, the (fake) pretty girl would guide said high schooler to meet the leader of a secret organization (the same person as his attacker, namely, me) that pursued such evil espers... Even if the actual truth of the incident was a mere charade through and through, for the high schooler concerned, this would be a striking injection of the extraordinary that would absolutely blow his mind.

The high schooler would win 'cus he now had something to break up the tedium of everyday life. I would win because I could superimpose my past self onto him and, in spite of the envy, get to enjoy living vicariously through him. It would be a win-win for both parties.

This was definitely going to be fun. *If there's no fate or destiny, then I'll make it myself! If there's no drama, then I'll produce it myself! If anyone has any criticism to voice about me toying with someone else's life or deceiving them, then come say it to my face!* I myself wanted an adolescence like this even if I was actually being deceived or toyed with (shedding tears of blood). There should be quite a lot of those who harbor the same yearning as my own. There's no other way to explain why the overused "ordinary high school student awakens to a superpower" trope still sells so well.

I counted myself luckier than most because I had my telekinesis as a vent for my frustrations, but say there was a guy who snapped underneath the weight of this yearning and turned into a murderer "because I just couldn't fill this hole in my chest; it didn't matter who it was." If I could change his story into "I joined a secret organization hoping to fill this hole in my chest, and now I am

living life to the fullest every day,” then that would already be me contributing to society, wouldn’t it? Oh yes it would.

So that’s that! Self-justification done!

Next, I listed out specifically what it was that I had to do.

- Be the enemy boss *and* also the boss of the secret organization. (It would be the greatest plot twist ever, don’t spoil it!)

- Build a secret base underground in the South Pole.

- Prepare mysterious enemies that seem to be coming over from another world.

- The mysterious enemies would probably be targeting some as yet untouched resource in our world.

- Found a secret organization to fight against the “shadows of the world” described above.

- Set up branch bases all throughout the world.

- Recruit members. “Actually, within you sleeps an enormous power (not actually true)!”

- Grant code names and ranks to the members of the secret organization.

- A mascot character would be great.

- How awesome would it be to have a dedicated line that could make the government move with a single phone call?

- Secret identities needing to remain secret should go without saying.

- Financial poverty at a level that can’t even be laughed at is just way too sad. LF patron pl0x.

- A mechanic who could handle oxidized silver or a really macho operator who stays in the background would add so much character to the organization.

- Decide on a distress signal for emergency summons.

- Some feminine presence. Not even going to insist on it being a cute JK. I really didn’t want a secret organization only filled with guys.

Well, this is about it, I suppose.

Hmm, looking at it all written out in a list is quite something indeed. If I didn't know better, I would have called these the delusions of a middle school (chuu) 2nd (ni) year student. But you know what? I very much can realize them all. Yep, 'cus I got telekinesis.

...Even I've gotten a little bit scared of myself. Why would you be capable of realizing them all? That's nuts. But it would be so much fun... Oh yeah, I'm definitely gonna do them all.



While lounging at my kotatsu and snacking on mikan, I attempted to sort out the order of priority to the most pressing tasks that I'd have to do in the next three days and also flesh out more specific to-do objectives. But in the middle of doing that, I realized that it would be very difficult to pull everything off by myself.

As a general outline, I would be creating both a secret organization and also the enemy it would fight, with the aim of granting all its members the joy of extraordinary days. All so that I could watch and live vicariously through them. It seemed very much like what a god of mischief might do.

Thing is though, it would be extremely difficult to act out the role of the mysterious mastermind without having someone in an intermediary managerial position. If the boss who was supposedly shrouded in mystery frequently appeared in front of the members and directly explained missions, gave them counsel, and coached their training, then there wouldn't be any mystery left whatsoever. If I had to do everything myself, including stepping out to buy equipment, examining and maintaining the secret organization's facilities, and the designing, manufacturing, and ordering of the costumes, then I would undoubtedly become stretched beyond my needs. To that end, I would need, at the very least, at least one person to act as an intermediary between me and the members, someone in an adjutant position. And that adjutant alone would know the full truth of the entire operation. More like, there'd be no meaning if they weren't in on it too. 'Cus I'd be wanting that person to both act as an advisor and also be someone that I could entrust various behind-the-scenes

work to.

The adjutant: the only person who knows the true identity of the shrouded-in-mystery boss... doesn't that sound absolutely awesome?

And thus began my search for an adjutant.

The requirements were as follows:

1) Someone who yearned for extraordinary days. Preference given to anyone with experience being a member of a secret organization.

2) Would need to be capable enough to serve as an advisor. No particular qualifications required.

3) Being rich or powerful enough to make it easier to build connections would be a definite plus.

4) Preferably a pretty lady or cute girl.

Naturally,

1) was a requirement I was not going to yield for anything. Inviting someone fully satisfied and content with their current life into the world of the extraordinary would be completely meaningless. Doing so would make neither party happy.

2) was also quite self-explanatory. If I may be blunt, it doesn't matter how much passion someone has, if there are only weeds in their head then they just won't do as an adjutant. Muscleheads with passion are very welcome to join us as a lay member.

I was willing to admit that 3) might be a bit hard to meet. To set up a secret organization, money, land, and connections would be needed. I could technically resolve everything with telekinesis. However, having money or power would make things that much more efficient.

Lastly, 4) was more a wish than a requirement, honestly speaking. I would have been fine even if this one was not met. The possibility of someone possessing the quality of being a pretty lady or cute girl *and* all of the above is extremely minuscule. Real life is not like light novels where every single female character that shows up is a drop-dead beauty, so this wasn't something that I

would get too hung up over. As long as the person fulfilled the three other requirements well enough, even if it turned out to be a middle-aged fatty with a balding head, I would have gladly welcomed him as a comrade. But even I had the right to dream, right?

I was okay at English, so I would have been fine with the adjutant being from an English-speaking country. Eventually I planned on expanding the secret organization overseas, so it wouldn't be a bad idea to have such an adjutant be in charge of recruiting personnel of other nationalities when that happened.

Therefore, the range of my search for an adjutant was going to cover the high-class residences in Japan, the UK, the USA, and Canada. What I would do was first infiltrate with telekinesis, then spy on their everyday life to determine their aptitude.

Going onto social media to look for people bored with their everyday life and tracking down their address to check them out might sound like a good idea on the surface, but social media is pretty much a nest for bored people (my personal preconception), so this parameter would actually be too broad to be of much help. In the first place, someone so loose with their private information such that I would be able to track down their address from their social media would not be apt as an adjutant anyways. The adjutant of a secret organization doing social media and accidentally leaking organization secrets, how stupid would that be...

So I began my search, starting from my vicinity and gradually going further. I sent my telekinesis into all the luxurious residences in the affluent neighborhoods close to the city centers within Saitama, Chiba, Tokyo, and Kanagawa.

The process would have gone so much faster had I been capable of splitting my consciousness or parallel thought or cloning myself, but unfortunately I did not possess such skills. So I went through every household one by one. There's no law prohibiting trespassing private property with telekinesis, so what I was doing was undoubtedly within the law. However, it was also equally undoubtedly an infringement of basic concepts of manners and respect. But that said, I wouldn't be able to create my secret organization if I let myself be bothered by it so I put it out of my mind.

Going from “Knock, knock” to “Thanks for your hospitality” took at least an hour every rep. Houses that did not have works of fiction, be they novels or manga or Blu-rays/DVDs, were summarily dismissed. Those that did, I ascertained their affinity with my own preferences based on the selection available. Collections filled with a large concentration of works depicting guro or blood-stained cruelty, as well as isekai works that read like fluffy journals, I bid farewell to.

When I found someone who seemed promising, I waited for them to come home to observe them directly. If the person seemed like they’d be satisfied enough with their life as is, then I quietly left them alone. I had no intention of bringing trouble to the door of someone who was already happy. Having a terrible personality also prompted me to leave. *Why would I choose an adjutant who’d give me headaches on my own accord? That would be stupid.*

If I felt something from them, such as a yearning to go to another world or a wish for a girl to fall out of the sky, then that meant they warranted further observation. If the person was intelligent and I felt “this person just might do!”, only then would I make contact.

But after observing the lives of rich people for three whole weeks, I still did not meet a single person that I felt right about. Almost all of them were facing life head-on, spending their days appreciating some form of art, eating out with friends, going for drives, taking trips, or other similar activities. In short, they were of absolutely no interest to me whatsoever. As it turned out, having manga and novels lying around was actually a pretty common thing in most homes, but the selections were all too normal. Even while observing them going about their everyday lives, I couldn’t detect any signs of escapism. Every once in a while would there be a rich person who actually was in debt or was all spent with socializing, but none of them showed signs of wanting to escape into superpowers or fantasy. *I guess having money really does go a long way in helping someone enjoy life...*

It was the 25th day when I finally found someone who piqued my interest. It was a woman living in a luxurious house with a lawn that was located in a high-class residential area in Tokyo. Her name was Shiori Kaburagi. She was 23 years old, and with the exception of her hired help, who commuted, lived practically

alone. Judging by the work she did on her computer at home, she was apparently raking it in doing stocks, cryptocurrency, and forward trading. If that was all there was to her, then she would have just been slightly more unique than the others, but not particularly worthy of further acknowledgment. But no, she had so much more that made her extremely noteworthy.



First of all, she was making her help call her “my lady.”

“My lady”! In modern-day Japan! Was she in her right mind?! Until I heard it myself in person (through telekinesis), I had thought that unrealistic way of calling someone already extinct, nothing more than a relic of the past. Yet she was asking to be called by that title, with no sign of being embarrassed about it. *Like, damn.*

Secondly, she was a drop-dead beauty. Having gone through so many affluent families with telekinesis, by then I had seen quite the number of daughters from rich households. However, none of them even came close to being as well-featured as she was. What with her cool demeanor, if she was to tie her hair up into a ponytail and hold a shinai, then she would be the perfect image of a Yamato Nadeshiko, the consummate realization of the ultimate Japanese beauty. What she had was way more than enough to stand toe-to-toe with top idols and actresses.

Thirdly, she possessed unparalleled passion for and effort toward beauty. At a table in her in-house office, she had tacked up 23 photos, most likely ones taken at each of the birthdays that she had celebrated thus far. Up until her entrance into middle school, she was extremely obese and had a face that looked like it had been run over by a farm tractor. But during her three years in middle school, she gradually shed the weight and transformed herself. By the time she entered high school, she was almost unrecognizable, having attained perfect proportions and unbelievably good looks. It was the result of weight loss efforts severe enough to puke blood combined with the mastery of makeup. While I was observing her, every morning she would wake up at 6 a.m. sharp, do stretches, go running, train her inner muscles, shower, take care of her hair and skin, put on makeup, choose what clothes to wear, do calisthenics after lunch, make sure to bring a white parasol and put on sunscreen and perfume before going outside, instruct her help in making nutritionally balanced meals (she apparently held a nutritionist’s license), and without exception go to sleep at 10 p.m. sharp. In short, she spent every single day never lacking any attention toward her beauty and health. What was so amazing about it all was the fact that she absolutely did nothing to hide all the effort that she was putting in. The fact that her help was allowed to enter the room where she put

up the photos of her past self was the most telling sign. Even guys would want to hide it if they had a terrible past. She had mental fortitude as tough as steel. *Seriously, damn.*

Fourth, her clothing choice. It's often said that anything would look good on someone pretty, but Shiori Kaburagi's clothing choices were far out. Could you believe it, her normal attire consisted of authentic dresses like I'd seen only in paintings from Europe in the Middle Ages. Allow me to repeat myself. Was she in her right mind? I was so nearly convinced of her actually being someone born in an alternate fantasy world that I infiltrated the public office to check her family register (yes, she was a full-blooded Japanese person). I could say with certainty that there was no one like her. On off days, she would also go out wearing a kimono and geta sandals. *Dayum.* Her sense and nerve was inhuman. The fact that she could pull it off like it was nothing only made it that much more unbelievable. (Incidentally, she did her morning jogs in a normal tracksuit.)

Fifth, she possessed both a voracious appetite for self-improvement and exceptional intelligence. She spent three to five hours every day at her computer. The rest of the time—aside from that which she would spend on her beauty—was almost entirely spent reading. And almost 90% of what she read was technical material of the highest level in those respective fields. Western stuff was of no hindrance whatsoever. Or rather, she apparently was paying top dollar to get unlimited access to theses written and published overseas. She would be watching a kabuki play on Saturday, after which Sunday would see her at a preview screening of the latest work in Hollywood. She would also sit in on lectures hosted at Tokyo University (apparently her alma mater).

Sixth, she had chuuni notebooks that were so serious that they were beyond laughing at. Even at 23 years old, Shiori Kaburagi was still writing in notebooks of make-believe. Or so you'd think, until you realized that the contents were so technical that they could all be published as proper scientific dissertations. For example, included inside were, in the case of a zombie virus outbreak, projections of the spread pattern of infection and conjectures for possible ways to identify the source of infection. In the case of being summoned to another world, what would be her chances of survival, and deliberations on the possible

effects on her body in the case of the other world having different laws of physics. Falling through time, cold sleep, awakening to superpowers, the existence of a superior ancient civilization, and so much more. Her deep dive notes conveyed an enormous breadth and depth of knowledge, a delightful disposition, and a highly developed logical thinking ability. *Dayum*. The fact of her owning so many books on fiction—spanning everything from classics to light novels—that it took up a third of the space on the bookshelves that filled the reading room that took up two entire rooms spoke volumes about her disposition. Judging by the selection of the books that she had bought most recently, she was apparently currently hooked on the evil villainess protagonist genre as of late.

And those were the six aspects that made Shiori Kaburagi incredible.

It was only on the first day of observation that I felt aroused by peeking in on the private life of an intelligent beautiful lady. After a whole week on this stakeout, I had nothing but respect for her. Kaburagi-san was freaking amazing. Rather than adjutant, the very moment she expressed a desire for it, I would yield the position of boss to her without missing a beat. I would be the adjutant. The decision to invite her was set in stone.

Such outstanding talent was completely beyond anything I had ever dreamed of. She was already halfway to being a resident of a storybook.

I had full intention of revealing everything about my telekinesis and my whole plan to Kaburagi-san without holding anything back, but I wanted to at least start with a surprise.

So while Kaburagi-san was in the middle of working, I made a fountain pen on her table float up and write something out on a blank sheet of paper. The abrupt occurrence caused Kaburagi-san to widen her eyes and freeze in astonishment.

[My apologies for the sudden telekinesis. I am Kinemitsu Sago. As you can see, I am an esper. I am contacting you because I want to invite you to join me in creating a secret organization of espers. If you are interested, then please either reply verbally or write your answer down. Then I will tell you how to contact me.]

After reading what I wrote out, Kaburagi-san mulled over it for a short while, then abruptly began taking the fountain pen apart. After completely dissecting it with the swift and practiced hand of a professional, she examined each and every part carefully, then put it all back together restlessly.

Next, she got up to check on the fasteners on her windows. After which, she got out a stepladder and began examining her ceiling. Every time she finished with a section, the blush in her cheeks deepened in color, and she would murmur in disbelief.

These actions looked extremely familiar. They were almost exactly the same as what I did back when I first awakened to telekinesis. I doubted whether what happened was truly a supernatural phenomenon and took pains to confirm that it was not a prank of either man or nature.

That cautiousness to not immediately jump to the conclusion of it being a supernatural phenomenon, as well as that unconcealable curiosity and expectation! I could relate so well.

Seemingly having allowed herself to be convinced, Kaburagi-san nervously cleared her throat, then turned to speak toward the piece of paper.

“I am interested in hearing what you have to say. Would you tell me your contact information?”

She accepted! I was 99% sure that she would, but it really is reassuring to hear her say it out loud. I happily wrote down my Skype username for her. Seeing that, Kaburagi-san’s expression turned... complicated.

“So you aren’t going to teleport a proprietary communication terminal over...”

Ah... I’m sorry for ruining the atmosphere. It’s true that a secret organization that recruits members over Skype is pretty disappointing. But please forgive me. I have no money and I can’t teleport things. What I can do is shoot a letter at Mach 10 through your window, but the shockwave would probably cause a huge mess and I don’t think you’d like that.

“However...” But then Kaburagi-san quickly recovered, and smiled beautifully with one hand over her mouth.

“Fufu, things have finally gotten interesting.”

I know, right?! Yahoo!

Chapter 4: The Crazy And Innocent Dreams We Had When We Were Children

After receiving Kaburagi-san's acceptance of my invitation to join my secret organization, I stuffed documents and a plastic bottle into my bag, then immediately stepped out to head toward her luxurious mansion, which was located in the Mejirodai district of Tokyo's Bunkyo City. How? On my mini-bike, of course. Shooting straight over with telekinesis would take me less than a minute to make the journey, but I couldn't very well do that. It'd be way too conspicuous.

I could envelop my body in a black barrier that cut off light and in so doing make myself unidentifiable even as a human, but that would be as conspicuous as those villains in pure black in detective manga. Something so suspicious moving at high velocity under broad daylight would just be asking to be reported to authorities. And that was why I was straddling my beloved mini-bike with the engine puffing away as I made my way through downtown while properly obeying traffic laws. *Oh right, I've got to buy rice and miso on my way back.* Yes, this homey method of travel was the only one available to me.

Just as Kaburagi-san said, as an esper, not being able to teleport directly was so lame. Jumping from rooftop to rooftop could also be quite a stylish way to get somewhere, but in Tokyo, where high-rises were everywhere, just one glance outside would be enough to catch me in the act. That option might merit some consideration during the night, but doing so during the day would surely attract quite a lot of attention. Being witnessed was a huge no-no. Without having connections with anyone in the police or government or even the media, I couldn't make any careless moves. *Maybe we should eventually get a totally kitted-out supercar or an airplane with a dope silhouette that can do vertical takeoff. Let's give that more thought another day.*

Anyways. After 30 minutes on my bike, I finally arrived at Kaburagi-san's house. I had never come in person before, but I knew it inside and out. The help

answered when I pressed on the intercom.

“This is the Kaburagi residence. Kindly please identify yourself.”

“I’m the person who called earlier, umm, I’m Sago.” I was about to call myself an esper, but then swallowed it back down. Kaburagi-san was the only person that I would reveal myself to. Obviously that meant the help would be kept in the dark about it.

“Ah, Sago-sama. Yes, I’ve heard from my lady. Please come in.”

Aha, there it is, “my lady.” Am I really still in modern-day Japan? As my excitement began to bubble up from inside of me, the wrought iron gate opened all by itself. This gate was outfitted with a high-tech electrical mechanism for opening and closing. The tastefulness of spending money on details like this was exactly in line with that of my own.

After passing through the beautiful front lawn in which bloomed seasonal flowers that were carefully tended to by the gardener who visited once every week, I knocked with the lion head knocker on the main door. The door was opened immediately afterward.

“Welcome to my residence, Sago-san. I am head of the Kaburagi family, Shiori Kaburagi. I offer you my hospitality.” Kaburagi-san pinched her dress with both hands and curtsied. The luscious black hair that reached her waist fell down in smooth waves. Her motions were that of a front-stage actress, so perfect as to be a rare sight even in Middle Age-themed fantasy movies. That alone was already enough to overwhelm me. I almost hallucinated that I had wandered into a movie.

“Nice to meet you, I’m Kinemitsu Sago. I’m an esper.” In an effort to return Kaburagi-san’s preemptive attack tit for tat, I manipulated the water in my plastic bottle to write out “Kinemitsu Sago” in midair in lieu of a namecard. Seeing that, Kaburagi-san clapped a hand over her mouth and her eyes widened as she took an “oh, my!” pose.

Fuhahaha, that’s the look of surprise that I wanted to see. How’s that for theatrics? My sole reason for bringing this bottle along was for the sake of this dramatic presentation. So, having already emptied all the water, I no longer had any use for it, and thus simply crushed it with telekinesis then chucked it into

my bag.

Kaburagi-san wordlessly guided me to her parlor. The exact same moment we both sat down onto a sofa in the parlor, the help (a 60-year-old auntie geared up in a maid uniform) showed up with a tea set in hand. After deftly making all the preparations for a tea reception, she bobbed a bow and then exited the room, all without making any unnecessary chatter. The black tea seemed like very high-class stuff. Though to be honest, the instant I saw actual tea leaves being used instead of a tea bag, there was already zero room for doubt that this was something much more expensive than any black tea I'd ever had before.

According to the documents inside Kaburagi-san's house safe that I had read by infiltrating with telekinesis, Kaburagi-san's parents were both normal company employees. Let alone royal European bloodline, her family had absolutely zero history of any contact with Europe. However, these mannerisms, this hospitality... If this scene was isolated and extracted by itself, then nobody would have even a speck of doubt that Kaburagi-san was the esteemed daughter of a noble family. Exactly what was it that drove her to be this way?

"So then." Kaburagi-san broke the silence with a cool voice that belied the eagerness that could be gleaned from her forward lean. "Does the fact of you inviting me into a secret organization mean that there's a superpower sleeping within me as well?"

"Ah, sorry, probably not." Kaburagi-san's face turned crestfallen at a visible rate. Ugh, the self-awareness of having made a pretty lady make such a face pained my heart deeply.

I'm sorry for having gotten your hopes up. But this just isn't that kind of talk.

"Then what is the reason for your invitation? It's... not because I have money, is it?"

"Ah, that actually is the reason, I'm sorry..."

"Seriously...?" Kaburagi-san looked so troubled! To be honest, it was super awkward for me as well. There she was, her heart filled with the expectation of the beginning of a dazzling drama with espers, only to be dragged back to reality so hard with the single line of "please give me some money" that she

might almost have even sunk into the ground. I felt so, so bad about it.

While feeling apologetic the whole time, I shared with her every single detail of my story, starting from when I awoke to telekinesis up till that moment. I also showed her my 15 notebooks of the research that I had done. It was a very, very long story, and I was very thankful that, aside from backchanneling where appropriate, she quietly listened to what I had to say to the very end.

“Sago-san, I understand your feelings very well.” As I finally took a sip from my cup of tea which had grown cold, completely tired out from speaking for so long, Kaburagi-san nodded her head deeply. Even though I had practically done all the talking up till then, there was a definite sense of empathy and unity that had blossomed between the two of us. Honorific speech fell into speaking like equals as if it was the most natural thing. It even felt like we were friends of many, many years. Even though I was pretty sure I didn’t have telepathy, I could tell that Kaburagi-san was also feeling the exact same thing.

“When I was in elementary school, I wanted to be a princess who lived in a magic castle so keenly that I put in effort while keeping it a secret from my parents.”

“I totally get that...” This was extremely common for elementary kids. Guys generally want to become a hero like in one of those sentai shows. There was also a period of time when I really, *really* wanted to be Godzilla, so I could totally empathize. Though due to some strange twist of fate, I had become a uber esper who could easily wring Godzilla into a pulp. I could even nullify his radioactive atomic breath.

“And well, the result of my continued effort even after becoming an adult is as you can see. After amassing enough wealth to do so, I had planned on having a castle built and buying a noble title and then having Granny call me ‘Princess.’”

“Fuah?!” What the heck, that’s way too aggressive, Kaburagi-san! Have the two of them lived like this the entire time thus far? Finally I understood the strange combination of childish ambition with adult-like execution. I was sure that even if I searched the entire world, she would be the only person so earnest and serious about wanting to become a princess. I respected her from

the very bottom of my heart.

“Kaburagi-san, you really are amazing. I feel like I can’t match up to you at all.”

“Ufufu, hearing that makes me glad for having worked so hard this whole time. But Sago-san, you are no slouch yourself, yes? Being able to train so hard, all while keeping it a secret, with no goal in sight... how can I put it... I hope you don’t take this the wrong way, but you are not a normal person either.”

“You think so? Well, I guess so, maybe!” The reason why I trained so hard in telekinesis was solely because I found it fun, but even I understood that a normal person would not have been able to keep at it so long as to become capable of destroying the entire earth.

No matter how fun something is, people eventually get bored and sick of it. Even the console game that I was so obsessed with, that my parents scolded me about playing it too much and had to confiscate, I grew bored of after a few years and never touched again since.

But this telekinesis of mine, that I had continued to hone and polish for so long without ever falling into that rut, I would let no one deny.

In addition, despite its relative lack of usefulness thus far, by gaining the cooperation of a person with such high specs and deep understanding of the extraordinary as Kaburagi-san, my telekinesis could possibly finally be put to good use.

But that said, all this had been very abrupt. Although it was around noon when I had arrived, the sky had already turned dark. She surely needed time to arrange her thoughts, so I thought it appropriate to go home for the day.

But when I told her so, Kaburagi-san asked why I wasn’t going to stay the night, as if doing so was the most natural thing to do. But I couldn’t very well go that far though, could I?

“I don’t think it a good idea for someone as beautiful as Kaburagi-san to allow a guy who you’ve only met for the first time today to stay overnight. What would you do if something were to happen?”

“But Sago-san, while you were stalking me, you’ve already seen my naked

body, haven't you? Isn't it a bit late for that?"

"Ah...!"

That's right, I did tell her even that. Me from ten minutes ago, you, sir, are an absolute moron for sharing completely unnecessary details in the spur of the moment!

In contrast to my paling face, Kaburagi-san surprisingly did not express any sign of displeasure at all.

"It's fine. You even told me that I'm beautiful, so I don't really mind it anymore. Though if you had called me ugly even after seeing my beauty, I *would* have torn you apart limb from limb."

"Eep!"

M-My lady, that's scary, yo. She said it nonchalantly with a smile on her face, but she was probably at least halfway serious about it.

"In addition, after seeing Sago-san's telekinesis for the first time, this pounding in my heart hasn't slowed down even once. I still want to hear so much more." Kaburagi-san pressed her voluptuous breasts with a hand and smiled gently.

S-So cute. Even though I knew how she had been passionately doing breast enlarging exercises and had been doing research on the poses that would get to a guy best, in spite of all that, she was still cute beyond question. *You've got it completely down pat, Kaburagi-san!*

However, as the person who readily changed his mind and easily accepted her offer to stay the night after being baited with something that had so completely surpassed mere "coyness," I was in no position to say anything. Like I had any chance of turning down an invitation from someone so beautiful and cute and smart who shares such similar interests as me and possesses mental fortitude of orichalcum... just give it a rest already! Kaburagi-san invited me to the dining hall, where we enjoyed the dinner that the help had prepared. After that, with almost dancing steps (more like, she was pretty much actually dancing), she brought me to her reading room.

When I was wondering why the reading room, Kaburagi-san drew me over to

the bookshelf on which she kept the crystallization of her tenacity, the collection of her chuuni treatises.

“Sago-san, I told you that I wanted to become a princess. But actually, I also wanted to become a magical girl. Even now that is still the case.”

“So it seems.” I expressed concurrence while looking at the rows of thick notebooks all labeled “Discourse on Magical Girls.” *This person really is incredible.*

Kaburagi-san pulled out several of those notebooks and flipped them to show me while continuing.

“Naturally, I had also spent hours and hours pondering over ways to gain magical abilities or superpowers. With your testimony, as someone who can actually use a superpower, I think I can narrow down the actually plausible options. The data needed for that is all here. Everything here was made and compiled by me. I was halfway to giving up and writing it all off as mere delusion, but it seems that the time that it is no longer mere delusion has come.”

“Interesting.”

My understanding of Kaburagi-san caused my interest, which had already been tickled, to become even more engaged.

It wasn't that I myself had not spent time thinking about ways to attain superpowers. However, as someone who already had one, rather than the requirements on how to awaken or attain it, it was far more fun to just continue training what I already had.

Precisely because she didn't actually have a superpower or any magic abilities, the detailed deliberations that Kaburagi-san had accumulated over the years had the chance to become a source of breakthrough.

If we knew the way to allow someone to attain a superpower, then the secret organization would be one big step closer to becoming reality.

“All right, so you want me to help with looking through all this?”

“I will be the one to select the materials. Sago-san, please answer the

questions that I will now be asking you.”

I see, that way might actually be better. I nodded to express my acquiescence, at which Kaburagi-san immediately began her questioning.

“So then, let’s start with... how about this. When you awakened to telekinesis, was there any divine revelation?”

“Divine...?”

“Such as hearing the voice of a god-like existence, the appearance of a strangely shaped bruise, that sort of thing.”

“Ahh, that? Nope, not at all.”

Upon hearing my answer, Kaburagi-san moved to the next shelf.

“Before awakening to telekinesis, did you visit places like the pyramids or Stonehenge?”

“Nope.”

“Any pre-existing ability to sense ghosts and the like?”

“Nope.”

“Experience of being spirited away or abducted by aliens... clearly that’s a no.”

“As you say.”

The finger that had been wandering over the shelves stopped at the third one from the top.

“What do you know of your bloodline?”

“My mother’s side have been farmers all the way back. Supposedly that traces all the way back to the Edo period. I’m not so clear on my father’s ancestors, but *his* dad and granddad apparently ran a sake brewery. It got shut down when I was a kid, though.”

“All normal, then. Your telekinesis grows as much as it is used, correct?”

“Correct. Even up to now I haven’t come across any limits to its growth.”

“When you use your telekinesis, you feel ‘tired.’ But then that symptom

eventually goes away by itself as time passes.”

“Yes.”

The finger that had been slowly moving along the books on the third shelf suddenly drew out a certain notebook.

Oi, oi, don't tell me you actually hypothesized the existence of an esper like me...?

“Have you ever experienced your telekinesis going berserk contrary to your will?”

“Not even once.”

“Have you ever felt your telekinesis grow weaker after an extended period of time of disuse?”

“Hmm, not sure on that one. In the first place, I've never stopped using it for an extended period of time. However, so far, I've yet to feel it growing weaker at all.”

Finally, Kaburagi-san stopped turning the page. Her finger slid over a page filled with equations and diagrams until it was pointing at a certain line.

“Which brings us to... this. An expandable source of superpower. In Sago-san's case, what you call your telekimuscle. The possibility of being able to pass on a superpower to someone else by transplanting part of that source is extremely high.”

You serious? Let's do this transplanting then.

Chapter 5: The Most Powerful Kind Of Superpower At Level 1

Having heard that there was a possibility of increasing the number of espers made me so excited that my head seemed about to boil over, but even in a situation such as this, Kaburagi-san would not make an exception to her healthy lifestyle of sleeping at 10 p.m. sharp. She showered and took off her makeup in a flowing manner, bid me goodnight, then left me alone in the reading room to read up on her chuuni notes. When she asked me to stay over, I had thought that she meant to stay up and talk overnight. Hats off to Kaburagi-san's ability to do everything at her own pace.

I had been given permission to use the reading room and a guest bedroom as I pleased, so I decided to read as much as I could until I felt sleepy.

The theories written on the page that Kaburagi-san had pointed out were all very highly technical, but because she had also included a well-thought-out summary, I could somehow understand the general gist of it. It was, in short, the theory of reciprocal interference. If I could touch something, then that something could touch me. If it could be seen, then it could see.

For example, imagine a super pissed-off boxing ghost that can phase through matter. When it is in its phase through mode, it doesn't matter how pissed off it is, there's no need to be afraid of it. The fact of phasing matter means an inability to interfere with matter. It can be as pissed-off as it wants, and it can unleash as many attacks as it wants, but everything is just going to go right through. Be pissed by your lonesome for all eternity!

In contrast, consider if that ghost could touch and move matter if it so wishes. Now it would actually be a bit of a pain. The ghost punch that it unleashes as it brandishes its fists in rage... would actually connect. That'd be a problem, wouldn't it? However, doing so would also be to reveal its weakness. The fact that it can deliver punches means that at the instant of the punch, it has dispelled its phase through ability and is properly materialized. Consequently, in

that instant, you can beat the shit out of it and (physically) exorcise it.

This is the concept of reciprocal interference. It doesn't matter how eccentric and far out the existence is, if it can interfere with something, then it can be interfered with in turn.

According to this theory, telekimuscle should indeed be transplantable onto another person.

When I thought about using telekinesis, my telekimuscle flexed and telekinesis activated. When I overused telekinesis, that telekimuscle grew tired. This was something that I knew.

I was sending information to my telekimuscle, and my telekimuscle was responding accordingly.

My telekimuscle was sending me information, and I was accepting what it was sending.

In other words, reciprocal interference had been established. I could interfere with my telekimuscle. I should have even been able to use telekinesis to rip off a small part of my telekimuscle and transplant that onto another target.

By then, I had the theory down. So I thought to give it a try right there and then. *No one can curb my curiosity!*

I directed my attention toward my telekimuscle. I could feel this splendid telekimuscle that had grown so magnificent as to fill every corner of my body. How much effort did I pour into nurturing it for it to grow so much?

So I used telekinesis to pinch an eensy weensy, itsy bitsy part at the very edge of my telekimuscle... *Okay, yes, that worked. That was easy.* I had never thought of using telekinesis to touch my telekimuscle, but it turned out to be as simple as just thinking about it.

All right. So now I just have to rip it—

“OWWWWWWWWWWW!” Intense pain that felt like the very core of my brain being seared by a flamethrower prompted me to spontaneously let go of my telekimuscle as I rolled around on the floor in agony. The pain receded very quickly, but my heart was pounding like a raging beast even as I felt the blood

draining from my entire body. It felt like having a bucket of cold water splashed onto my head when my body was burning from a fever.

With my head cooled down, I was able to comprehend what had just happened. My telekimuscle was a muscle for performing telekinesis. There was no way it wasn't going to hurt when I forcefully tried to rip off a part of a muscle. The fact that I felt muscle pain in my telekimuscle when I overused it should have been a clear warning sign that it had pain receptors.

Shit, that was a very careless thing to do. Offhand knowledge really isn't enough. Let's properly consult Kaburagi-san next morning.

Then the day broke, and it was morning. By the time I finally dragged myself out of the oh-so-soft bed in the guest bedroom, Kaburagi-san had already finished putting on makeup and was at the dining table, speed-reading through multiple newspapers all in different languages. Today was a pale pink dress. My well-worn wristwatch indicated that it was 8 a.m. Since I had stopped going to work, my waking and sleeping time had been gradually getting later and later. *That's not good, now is it?*

As I told her about my agonizing episode last night over breakfast, Kaburagi-san looked troubled.

"I had predicted that there would be pain, but I didn't imagine it would be to such a degree. I apologize. I don't have any ideas for how to anesthetize your telekimuscle."

That was grave news indeed. If even Kaburagi-san could not come up with a solution, then it would be that much more impossible for me.

So what now? Do I have no other choice but to simply endure that hellish pain to forcefully tear off a piece of my telekimuscle? Just recalling the incredible pain that felt like my very soul was being clamped in a vice from last night made me grimace unconsciously. *Did I really have to endure this in order to make the transplanting happen?* I absolutely dreaded the thought.

"To be honest with you, I had been holding out hope that today might be the day I begin my life as a magical girl. But with things being the way they are, there's no helping it. I don't want Sago-san to be in pain on my behalf. Let's look for another way."

In spite of her kind words, Kaburagi-san was very visibly disappointed. It pained my heart deeply. But tearing off a piece of my telekimuscle to realize the transplanting idea would also mean pain. A lot of it. In the telekinetic sense.

I understood full well Kaburagi-san's yearning for a superpower. I could empathize from the bottom of my heart.

But don't misunderstand me.

I, too, was equally as desperate for Kaburagi-san to become an esper! No matter how long I waited, no matter how much I searched, I was the only esper in the entire world. Not being able to share it with anyone! Being on my lonesome this whole time! Do you understand this emptiness that had been continuously gnawing away at me?! If Kaburagi-san could become an esper, then of course I would be happy about it! I might even venture to claim that I'd be even happier than Kaburagi-san herself.

Very well, watch me do it. A method to increase the number of espers is rolling about right under my nose. I-I-I-I-I-I'll do it, all right.

I put down the piece of French bread that I had been eating. Kaburagi-san looked at me with puzzlement as I got down onto the floor in readiness for the impending agony, my resolve set in stone.

"What? What kind of ritual is th—"

"GAAAHHHHH IT HUUURRTTSS! FFUUCCKKKKK! UOOHHHHAAAAHHH!"

"Kyah?!"

I was writhing around in sheer agony. Kaburagi-san was almost about to fall out of her chair in surprise.

But, look at this! Well, I mean, it's not visible, but still. I've gone and done it. I've successfully torn off a tiny piece of my telekimuscle! It had hurt so much that it felt like my life was in danger, but the wound did not hurt at all anymore. In fact, it didn't even feel like that *was* a wound. Apparently the pain was only during the time of the actual tearing off. I was already completely fine.

Seeing me becoming exhausted in an instant and then clambering back onto a chair with a smug face, Kaburagi-san was able to guess what had happened. She

became really flustered.

“Um, thank you. But I... I wasn’t trying to put pressure on you in a roundabout way or anything like that! Seeing you in so much pain, I... I thought Sago-san was dying...!”

“Ah, did it really look that bad? But nah, don’t worry about it. Let’s keep things moving at a brisk pace, shall we? So what should I be doing with this to transplant it?”

I had zero intention of doing this to put her in my favor. *“Don’t misunderstand. I did not do that for your sake. I did it only for me”* would sound so *tsundere* that no way in hell would I... actually, on second thought, I might actually want to try saying it. This is one of the ultra rare moments when that line can actually be used. All right, it’s the perfect chance so I might—

“Very well, if you say so. But allow me to say it again. Truly, thank you. So then, in regards to how to transplant—”

However, Kaburagi-san did exactly as I said, she moved the conversation right along. Thus, I lost my window of opportunity. *W-Well, it’s, it’s cool...*

“Try to push the piece of telekimuscle against me and then make it stick with telekinesis.”

“How exactly would I do that?”

“You were able to tear off your own telekinesis, right? So Sago-san should have at least a general feeling for where your own telekimuscle is. Find the same place on my body, then try to make it stick.”

I see. After hearing her spell it out that way, I realized that I did indeed have a general idea of where a good place would be. How do I put it, it’s like, the inside of the body, or the depth, or the interior of the shell? Something kind of along those lines. If I were to express it in a cool way, then it would be the soul (lol).

In any case, it seemed like it might work. *Let’s begin the transplanting!*

As Kaburagi-san stood in front of me with flushed cheeks and her hands clasped before her as if in prayer, I immediately took to... wait, no.

“Hold on a moment. We have no idea what would happen if the transplant

succeeds, right? Wouldn't it be better to experiment on an animal first?"

"Fair point. But would you be fine with the honor of the second individual to ever receive a superpower in this world being an animal?"

"*Kuh*, I totally get that!" And therefore, I began the transplant.

This can't be that hard. This... goes there... does this... like this! Or is it like this? Hm? Did I do it wrong?

"No, don't worry, this will work. All right, stick right there... gah. Now hold on, it's only just a little bit more... right there you go... all right, now stick... ARG! It fell back off! You bastard, just stick already! You... are... not... sticking!"

"...Is it not working?"

"No, I'm actually really, really close. It feels like trying to stick a piece of Scotch Tape onto a board coated with oil. Rather than saying that it doesn't stick, it'd be more accurate to say that it peels off too easily. Seriously getting on my nerves."

After heavy fighting that lasted more than ten minutes, I finally succeeded in transplanting the piece of telekimuscle onto Kaburagi-san. However, it was so precarious that it seemed like it would come off from the tiniest of pokes. It wasn't attached in any physical sense, so even intense exercise would have no bearing on it whatsoever. However, just a little graze with telekinesis and it would surely fall right off.

After listening to me explain the above, Kaburagi-san said that next should be a period of wait-and-see. Would it naturally attach itself after giving it some time? Or was some extra stimulation necessary to fix it in place? Further observation was needed.

As the person who had suffered so much pain to make this work, I prayed earnestly for its success.

When the transplanting was over, Kaburagi-san's face crumpled into a smile as she pressed the part of her chest closest to her heart.

"If this goes well, then I would be a real-life magical girl."

I don't want to interrupt you while you're feeling so emotionally touched, but

that's not where I transplanted the telekimuscle. Though I would be hard-pressed for an answer if asked exactly where it was that I did transplant to.

During the time when we were just observing and waiting for any sign of change to manifest itself, Kaburagi-san—who had officially agreed to become my adjutant—and I talked at length regarding the location and set up of our secret organization's base.

First of all, the “underground beneath the South Pole” that I suggested was summarily dismissed. 'Cus the commute would be a bitch.

Japan is roughly 14,000 km away from the South Pole. The maximum velocity that I could help generate with my telekinesis was Mach 10, but even so it would take about an hour for a single trip. Which meant a 2 hour round trip. Though inconvenient, this in itself was still within reasonable bounds as normal commute to work. However, the shockwaves and sonic booms caused by moving at Mach 10 would be extremely conspicuous. And if the journey was made over open water, then it would generate an ocean current, which would also be extremely conspicuous. When also thinking about having to regularly transport over necessary daily household consumables, then the South Pole's impracticality was plain to see. It was, in short, too far away.

When I consequently proposed “Let's live in the South Pole then!” Kaburagi-san completely killed the idea with a simple “Do you think you can live without the conveniences of living in Japan?” She was right, of course. No convenience stores and no delivery for online shopping? You can bet I'd be sick of it within a month.

And that was why the idea of a secret base in the South Pole was put on indefinite suspension until we had access to instantaneous travel or tessering through space or a door that could connect to anywhere or any other similar such superpower.

Kaburagi-san's highly enthusiastic proposal for a castle hidden behind a barrier was dismissed by me in turn.

In the first place, I could not erect a barrier of invisibility. I could make a telekinetic membrane that reflected light like a mirror, but concealing the presence of something as huge as a castle with this mirror trick would be asking

for too much.

Secondly, we didn't have the funds to build something on that scale. Kaburagi-san's entire fortune was supposedly 1.5 billion in value. When considering the value of the land, construction fees, and the expense of furnishing the interior, even with my savings of 1.2 million added to the pot, we would be waaaay under budget. We also discussed the idea of me carrying out the constructing with telekinesis, but unfortunately I had no formal training in architecture. If it was just to keep up appearances, then I could indeed come up with something that might look the part, but a tiny earthquake would probably be enough to send it all crumbling into ruins.

Kaburagi-san was extremely wealthy, but that was only on a personal level. It was not enough to cover the construction cost of a large-scale secret base.

In addition to all that, to be blunt, how the hell would it be a *secret* place if it was built by construction crews and architects and whatnot walking around the place? Even the suppliers would be privy to the location, wouldn't they?

So in the end, we settled on just buying some existing property, making the front look like some sort of company or store, and secretly turning that into the base. We both came to the mutual understanding that this was indeed the most practical thing to do.

In many works of fiction, secret organizations have a front and are located underneath a store or something. Guess that wasn't just done 'cus it's cool; there actually was a practical reason for that trope after all.

It would be one thing if it was just Kaburagi-san and me, but we couldn't very well invite new members of the secret organization to Kaburagi-san's home. So for the moment, Kaburagi-san's pocket money secured us an underground bar located along a narrow alleyway one street off a main road in the Kitasenju area of Tokyo's Adachi City. I found myself in awe of Kaburagi-san's ability to take out a lump sum of 18 million like it was nothing, but when I said that I'd use telekinesis to expand underneath the store she replied with "Being able to say something like that as if it's nothing is what makes Sago-san so incredible." Touché, I suppose.

As for the bar, we planned to just permanently hang a CLOSED sign on the

door and install two doors that would only allow organization members to enter.

I was actually pretty satisfied with how close it got to the whole “secret organization lurking in the shadows of society” vibe, but apparently Kaburagi-san was not entirely satisfied with it. *Well, it’s true that this sort of setting isn’t exactly female-targeted, I suppose. Let’s move eventually.*



Good news arrived a week after the transplant procedure. The telekimuscle had successfully become attached to Kaburagi-san, thus becoming the source of her superpower. One morning, she apparently just knew that she could use a power, and also reported feeling the unique sense of fatigue and growing pain that I was so familiar with! Hearing that it was neither physical fatigue nor normal muscle pain cinched it for me. The way she put it was, “If I were to express it in a chuuni way, then it’d be something like ‘I feel chaos surging out like a wave as my hidden soul seeps out of its shell.’”

Thank you for that expression that sounded familiar yet brand new at the same time! This was very much worthy of celebration, yet we couldn’t be entirely happy either.

Because as it turned out, the superpower that Kaburagi-san acquired was apparently not telekinesis. The telekimuscle had seemingly undergone a mutation somewhere along the process of attaching itself to Kaburagi-san.

“I cannot use telekinesis to push or pull things. I do indeed have a superpower, but even when I use it, nothing happens. Could it be that I don’t have the talent for this...?”

Kaburagi-san’s shoulders drooped, so I tried to encourage her. “Even I could only move a mere 3 g at the very start. Although the effect might be too weak to be noticed right now, I’m sure it’ll grow as you train it.”

“I... suppose you have a point, since it is indeed a fact that you’ve become an esper without suffering any side effects,” said Kaburagi-san as if to convince herself. However, her face was still tinged with unease. Just when I thought that I hadn’t given her enough encouragement, Kaburagi-san tilted her head in the cutest manner possible and asked, “By the way, Sago-san. I’ve given it some

thought, but...”

“Yeah?”

“Aren’t things going a little too smoothly? I had thought out so many scenarios in which the transplant would fail, but all that’s gone to waste now. In cases like these, isn’t there usually an incident where my powers go out of control or an enemy organization attacks or shows up to sabotage our efforts?”

...Hah. And here I was, wondering what it was that she was going to ask. *You are still naive, Kaburagi-san. If such painful, dynamic, and exciting events would happen all by themselves, then I wouldn’t be here going to all this trouble of creating my own secret organization (like, srsly!).*

“Carve this into your heart, Kaburagi-san. No matter how long you wait, such exciting and interesting incidents won’t happen spontaneously. That’s how shitty this world is. If you want an incident, you have to make the incident.”

“...I see.” She nodded gravely in understanding.

Back when I woke up to telekinesis, I had taken data on my superpower through any method that I could think of. But as you might imagine, it was a far cry from the methods available to a Tokyo University graduate with over a billion yen. For example, she borrowed the research lab of an underclassman at the university to get precise numerical readings on various very technical parameters (all while deftly hiding the fact of any relation to superpowers). She also got a general practitioner whom she was financially supporting to allow her to use medical equipment to do examinations from a medical perspective. I did get an explanation about what it was that she was examining, but it was all so technical that I only understood about half of it.

As the days of medical and scientific exams went on, Kaburagi-san also continued nurturing her superpower, repeatedly experiencing the supernatural fatigue and supernatural pain that I myself had. Eventually, her superpower gradually began to reveal its true nature.

Apparently, when she activated her superpower, everything went dark and she couldn’t move for the briefest of moments. What had happened prior was probably that this brief instant was just too short to be noticed. But there was something strange about that: even when I was observing Kaburagi-san using

her superpower, I didn't notice her surroundings growing dark, and neither did I see her stop moving. Around three weeks after her awakening, she said that this phenomenon was lasting about 0.5 seconds according to her internal clock, which meant that it should have been quite obvious to the naked eye.

Don't tell me it's a superpower to "make herself hallucinate about becoming unable to move and see anything for a period of time"? Come on now, that can't be right. A superpower that is only harmful to the wielder? But what was so scary about it all was that I couldn't entirely rule that out as a possibility. There was no guarantee that superpowers could only be something helpful or convenient to the wielder. It wouldn't have been all that strange for a harmful superpower to show up.

For several days, Kaburagi-san walked around worried and deep in thought, but one day during lunch, while she was absentmindedly staring at the old-fashioned grandfather clock chiming noon, her eyes suddenly widened. Abruptly, she took off her expensive-looking wristwatch and inexplicably sucked air into her mouth—or so I thought, but then I saw that she was already spitting it back out. Then she looked at the grandfather clock, then at the wristwatch, then nodded.

"What? Did you have an epiphany about something?"

"I finally get it. My superpower is chronoprohiberis. In other words, the ability to stop time. And when time is stopped, I'm the only person who can move."

"Eh... WWWHHHHHAAAAAAAAAAAAATTTTT?!"

What's up with that?! That's, that's amazing!! Stopping time is one of the strongest kinds of abilities!! That's so unfair!!! I want that one too!

"I'll trade you for my telekinesis."

"When time is stopped, air and clothes are stopped, which effectively means I can't move. Light is also stopped, so everything is dark and I can't see anything. You sure about that trade?"

"Oh..." *I see, so that's how it is.* It made sense when she spelled it out like that. If the time of everything else other than the wielder is stopped, then it stood to reason that that would happen. *On second thought, it really isn't cool...*

but this is chronoprohiberis we're talking about, of course it's... is it... cool? Nah it's not...but... Our hopes lie in the future, yep! You must continue training your chronoprohiberis with all you have, Kaburagi-san!

Chapter 6: Espers Have No Limits! (They Do Actually)

The source of Kaburagi-san's time-stopping powers, her mutated form of telekimuscle, I decided to name "stoprotein." Just like my telekimuscle, I was sure that her stoprotein would grow with use. Incidentally, when Kaburagi-san heard the name I had come up with, she burst into laughter. *Sorry not sorry I have such great naming sense.*

As things stood, when Kaburagi-san activated her powers, she couldn't move, nor could she see anything. In short, there was nothing advantageous at all in her activated state. She wanted to escape this situation as soon as possible, to begin training asap to make it so that she could move and see when time was stopped, but I talked her out of it. According to my experience, going for applicability before properly building up the fundamentals was not the right way to go about it. At the start, I could only "push" and "pull" with my telekinesis. Me being able to move onto training for the other vectors of up, down, front, back, left, and right down the line was only because I had diligently worked on "push and pull" to raise the output. If I had gone straight to training vectors without increasing the output, then surely it would have ended up in failure.

The "basics" of Kaburagi-san's chronoprohiberis was stopping time. My recommendation was to first focus on lengthening how long she could keep time stopped. Currently, she could only handle 0.5 seconds. Starting on the applicability when she reached nine seconds still wouldn't be too late.

In fact, I considered recommending that she go the extra mile and aim for a whole day first. However, when time was stopped, the air outside her body would be stopped as well. In other words, keeping time stopped for that long would mean eventual death by suffocation. By necessity, she would need to shift to training to exclude air from the effects of her chronoprohiberis around when she reached the one minute mark.

Kaburagi-san understood and accepted my advice, and accordingly threw

herself into fundamental training. As for me, I commuted to her house every day, where we continued talking through all the details of founding a secret organization and fleshed out all the ideas we wanted to incorporate. Also, I secretly tried to train to stop time as well. I thought that if the mutated telekimuscle could do it, then surely the original telekimuscle should be capable of the same. As for specifically how I went about using telekinesis to stop time, I drew reference from a certain theory often used in sci-fi and pseudo-scientific fantasy manga. Namely, the concept of molecular immobilization.

The world is composed of molecules. Therefore, if all molecules are stopped, that means everything is stopped. Et voilà, artificial chronoprohiberis! So I immediately tried doing it.

All right. First, I use telekinesis to grasp the movements of the molecules... The movements of... molecules...? Then I got stuck. How was I supposed to grasp something so small that I wouldn't be able to see it even with a magnifying glass? Would it be effective to try to get a feel for it by starting off looking through an electron microscope? Realizing that this training would be beyond my means, I promptly set off to beg for an electron microscope from Kaburagi-san. *Mommy Kaburagi, I want a high-magnification electron microscope! Gimme gimme gimme~!* ...Or so I had thought when, just as I stood in front of the door to Kaburagi-san's home office with hand held up ready to knock, realization hit me.

Even if I stopped all molecules, I still wouldn't be stopping time.

The movement of molecules is heat. Stopping them from moving was not the same thing as stopping time. All that would be happening is the molecules losing all heat and cooling down to absolute zero. If I were to replicate the effect of chronoprohiberis through molecular immobilization, then that would mean fully grasping the movements of each and every single molecule and memorizing their kinetic energy and vector and offsetting those values. Then when I wanted to resume time, I'd have to re-assign all those values to all those molecules. How many quadrillions of molecules—nay, it's definitely far more than even that—do you think there are? And I'd have to remember each and every one of them? I did not have such ridiculous mental processing capacity. It would be one thing to stop all of them at the same time, and to move all of

them together in the same direction, but then that would not be chronoprohiberis.

In conclusion, stopping time through telekinesis was impossible. I was the stupid one for trying to realize troll physics from fiction. *Whew, that was close. If I hadn't realized in time and brought this up to Kaburagi-san, she would have laughed at me for sure.*

And so, as I may or may not have killed time on similarly idiotic projects, my two months of paid leave that had accumulated from my two years of working as a salaryman became all spent, and the day of my official resignation arrived. Naturally, even though my application for payment had been successfully submitted, the company cited “because you abruptly quit for selfish reasons” to refuse said application. In other words, I did not get my salary for those two months. I mean, I knew this would happen. Kaburagi-san was absolutely furious on my behalf, so much so that she offered to help arrange for a lawyer. However, fighting it out in court would require a ton of time and effort that could be much better spent toward founding our secret organization. So I turned her down. *Hah! Go and feel good about yourself for swindling that tiny amount of chump change! I've got much more important things to do.*

However, with this, I had finally become an official NEET. And the secret organization would have to remain a secret, which meant I couldn't name that as my place of occupation.

The boss of a secret organization who just comes off as a NEET to the outside world? That'd be so freaking lame, I wouldn't be able to bear living in such apparent disgrace. Furthermore, as someone brought up as a citizen of Japan—the country of overworking—my very being would cry out in unrest at not being officially employed. So I decided to consult Kaburagi-san about this.

While wearing blue light glasses and working in front of her computer, Kaburagi-san tilted her head in a mystified manner. “Sago-san is the boss of our secret organization. And I'm the patron and adjutant. That is our division of roles, isn't it? You don't have to do any work. I'll earn enough for everything.”

S-So reliable! Shit, at this rate I'm going to become solely dependent on her. I'm going to become a mere bum.

With my manly pride on the line, I tried to offer a rebuttal. “You’re right about all that, but looking like an unemployed bum to the rest of the world pains my heart. I want to be able to earn at least enough to cover my own living expenses.”

“Mmm, I guess I can see where you’re coming from. But if you want to earn your own money, then why don’t you just use your telekinesis at a random casino? I would imagine it wouldn’t be hard to make a jackpot or two happen, right?”

“That’s no good. I don’t want to cheat at gambling.” In actuality, I had plenty of ways to cheat and win big without any chance of being found out. That’s how precise and subtly I could use telekinesis. However, every year when my entire extended family would gather together to celebrate the New Year, an uncle on my father’s side who owned a casino would regale everyone with the hard-luck story (or heroic saga, I could never tell which he intended it to be) of the time a cheater made such a killing at his casino that it had nearly gone bankrupt. By putting his job and the jobs of his employees and all their families on the line, he managed to find out how the guy did it in the nick of time and thus successfully got the guy arrested. After hearing that story every single year, I couldn’t bring myself to do injustice by any casino.

Rather, if I ever went to a casino and won a round, the only thoughts that would fill my mind would be *“Ahh, I’ve lowered their funds and the person in charge of their accounts is going to have such a tough time”* which obviously took all the motivation out of me. Even though I knew that the business wouldn’t go in the red if they were operating normally, but still.

“Then how would you like to try running a bar? We said that we’ll make the front of our secret base a bar that we’ll just permanently keep closed, right? But the day before, we also agreed to import actual alcohol for the sake of the atmosphere, so I think we might as well run it as an actual bar. The location is good too, so I think we could earn quite a bit, actually. What do you think?”

“Mmmm!” No lie, I was immediately in love with the idea. Within a mere three seconds, I’d already thought up this entire backstory: I was a normal person who knew about the existence of espers, but had no talent myself and thus could not become one. As an ordinary bartender, I could listen to the

organization members' troubles and offer them advice and whatnot. BUT! My true identity would be the boss of the whole organization! *That sounds like a ton of fun!*

Although I would technically still be half-dependent on Kaburagi-san, and the only thing that had changed was just the appearance of things, who cares! In the first place, as Kaburagi-san said, the original agreement was that she would fund everything. And in return for her funding, I had bestowed upon her a superpower of her very own, something that no amount of money could make possible. *This is a WIN-WIN scenario. I'll just brazenly allow myself to freeload as my well-deserved compensation. It's not like I'm just lazing around doing nothing anyways.*

"So. Much. Yes!"

"All right then. The remodelers are also in the middle of building a live-in area for employees, so once construction is over, you would be able to move in directly. Incidentally, Sago-san, do you know what is needed in order to run a bar?"

"A stoic bartender?"

"No. What you need is a license as a Food Hygiene Supervisor."

"A license as a Food Hygiene Supervisor?" I had indeed heard previously that some license or other was needed in order to run a restaurant. I also seem to remember that being the reason why, during the school fair back in high school, the teachers were so strict with the classes that were selling food and drinks. High schoolers could not apply for the license, so the restrictions on the managing and selling of food and drinks were super severe. My logical self understood that Kaburagi-san was entirely right that I would need such a license to run the bar, but my emotional self felt slightly disgruntled at having to do something so mundane. *I am a man who is going to do great things (i.e. apply for a license as a Food Hygiene Supervisor). See, that doesn't quite work.*

"As for the 'Application for Permission to Operate a Restaurant' and 'Notice of Commencement of Building Usage,' as well as the 'Application of the Use of Naked Flame' so we can use naked flames and the 'Notice of Commencement of Operation of Late-Night Alcohol-Providing Restaurant,' and even your 'Notice

of Self-Employment,' I will do them all. When I'm done, please look through them and sign and chop, all right? For now, just focus on getting that license. According to what I've heard, the course shouldn't be too hard."

"Oh, ah, yes ma'am." And so I left all the complicated paperwork related to the opening of the bar to Kaburagi-san and focused on getting the license for being a Food Hygiene Supervisor.

As it turned out, the lecture held by the Tokyo Food Hygiene Association was scheduled for five days later, so I bought a reference book to pre-study so that I wouldn't become one of those mentally pitiful students who attended the course and yet still failed the certification exam. At the same time, I also began packing my things for the upcoming move into the underground bar. I was very busy. There wasn't enough time.

Speaking of there not being enough time, Kaburagi-san's chronoprohiberis was smoothly growing in terms of how long she could maintain it. Her rate of growth was, to my surprise, even greater than mine. Specifically, it was 1.7. Back when she realized her superpower, she could maintain it for 0.5 s. But after that, with the rest days sandwiched in between, every third day it became 0.85, 1.45, 2.45, such that today it had reached 4.18 s.

My own telekimuscle's growth rate had been 1.3 back in the day, so 1.7 was astonishingly high. Who was it who said she had no talent... Was it that Kaburagi-san was high spec'd even when it came to superpowers, or was it that stoproteins naturally had higher growth rates? At first glance, the numbers 1.3 and 1.7 don't look very different, but don't underestimate geometric series. My head start of around 10 years would one day be overcome with ease. It was a scary thought, but also very reassuring at the same time.

But shadows eventually cast over the light of hope from this promising growth rate. It was on a day after I had anticlimactically acquired the Food Hygiene Supervisor license with ease, after I finished moving, after I changed all my correspondence addresses, and in the middle of procuring all the machinery and tools needed to run the underground bar. Down in the new late-night bar where the smell of fresh wood from the new flooring was in the air, I was in the middle of playing around by levitating 15 cocktail shakers in the air and shaking them all at the same time. When Kaburagi-san stepped in with a grave look on

her face, I greeted her with a freshly-made cocktail. Incidentally, Kaburagi-san's outfit of the day looked like white cloth loosely wrapped around her body in the style of those Grecian sculptures.

Did she brazenly walk on the streets in that...? What is her heart really made of? It's gotta be orichalcum, right?

"Sago-san, you've never had problems growing your power, right?"

"Mhmm, never."

As I answered, Kaburagi-san gracefully brought the cocktail glass to her lips, then sighed pensively. She cut the perfect picture. If a super obese woman with ripe compost for a face wore the same clothes and tried to do the same action, it would only make onlookers want to avert their eyes. I for one thought it the best decision ever made in history that Kaburagi-san decided to go on a diet and learn how to put on makeup.

"Actually, the duration that I can stop time for has stopped growing."

"It stopped?"

"Upon reaching 44 seconds, it stopped growing. There's no growing pain either. Does this mean that there's no more room for growth?"

"Ah... I'm afraid I don't know. Even though you're putting your faith in me, I'm sorry, I got nothing." The bullish growth that Kaburagi-san had been enjoying only made her that much more depressed. After that, she asked me a few more questions, but, unable to properly answer any of those either, I only felt more and more apologetic.

For a while, we just passed the time in silence, with me wordlessly pushing over cocktails as soon as Kaburagi-san finished the previous one. Although she definitely was used to much more professionally made drinks, she still wordlessly downed all my amateurish concoctions.

Eventually, Kaburagi-san gave her own cheeks a slap and stood up. She had a refreshed look on her face. "If my time won't grow anymore beyond this, then there's no helping it. I'll start on applicability training tomorrow onward then. First would be to secure my sight when time is stopped. Actually, I already have an idea how to go about this. The fact that what I put inside my mouth doesn't

have its time stopped means that the target of my power isn't me, as in specifically the physical matter that my body is composed of, but actually a selection of space. So all I have to do is simply expand that selection... Yes, I think I can make it work. Oh, but of course I'll still continue my fundamental training, just in case."

After smiling and thanking me for listening, Kaburagi-san went home with steady steps. All I did was literally just listen, but was that really enough? It kind of felt like she had pulled herself together by her own strength, though...

After that, Kaburagi-san continued her fundamental training for one more week, but the duration of her chronoprohiberis never went above 44 seconds. It became clear that 44 seconds was the limit of her growth.

On the other hand, after a mere ten days of applicability training, she had already overcome the fact of being trapped in darkness when time was stopped. *Yep, she really is a genius after all.* The theory behind it was based on high level concepts involving time and space, on top of which the method relied heavily on a feeling unique to using stopprotein, so I didn't fully get her explanation. But apparently the gist was that if she kept a source of light inside her mouth, then she could illuminate her direct surroundings. Just imagining it seemed surreal. Though I wouldn't be able to see it because time would be stopped, but still.

What with Kaburagi-san's exploration of her own powers and my re-employment, the time of the secret organization's official launch drew near.

All that was left to do was to fabricate a "shadow of the world"-ish something to be the secret organization's enemy. Then the very bare minimum requirements for the secret organization would be met, and we could finally begin recruiting members. *We're almost there!*

Chapter 7: Shadows Of The World Carefully Crafted One By One By A Master Artisan

After a fierce and heated debate (aka chuuni theorycrafting argument) with Kaburagi-san, we finally decided on our secret organization's name and its Five Precepts. The secret organization "Amaterasu" would be founded and operated based on five fundamental principles.

Amaterasu's Five Precepts!

- 1) The existence of the secret organization must be kept a secret! This means no listing it on the stock market! No public website either!
- 2) The aim of the secret organization is to fight against 'shadows of the world,' officially named 'World Shadows,' or just 'Shadows' for short! It is our duty to fight the bad guys!
- 3) The secret organization must have a mysterious source of funding and connections! Kaburagi-san, I choose you!
- 4) Members must possess a superpower! If it's for the sake of increasing the number of espers in the world, then I'm not afraid of tearing off parts of my telekimuscle again! (*No, my voice is not shaking, you're just hearing wrong.*)
- 5) Members are to live both an ordinary and an extraordinary life! It doesn't matter how much power you have, someone who can't protect their ordinary days can't protect the rest of the world's ordinary days!

That's it!

With the Five Precepts that determined our management policy settled, we were ready to start operating as a secret organization as soon as we prepared some World Shadows. However, Kaburagi-san said she wanted a bit more time, so we put on our brakes. Apparently, she wanted to be a bit more proficient with her superpower first before we began.

Our roles settled down as follows: I would be the organization's boss as well

as the master of the Ama-no-Iwato bar, which would serve as its front, and Kaburagi-san would be the organization's patron as well as sub-leader. The two of us would be the instigators who would bestow upon our superpowered members drama and dreams and battles and unforgettable memories. I wasted my youth endlessly twiddling my thumbs and waiting in vain for extraordinary days. Kaburagi-san lost *her* youth being bullied and called by the terrible nickname of "Deburagi." So these members would enjoy their youth to the fullest in our stead. We would let them live out a superpowered story of adolescence filled with tears and laughter, exactly like what happens in the manga and stories that they love so much. The two of us would watch on heartwarmingly and have our hearts go pitter-patter while the wounds from our own school days were healed. Everyone would win.

For the sake of this, neither I nor Kaburagi-san would cut any corners when setting up the stage. That's what the preparatory period was for.

It would be Kaburagi-san's role, as the second-in-command of the secret organization Amaterasu, to order the members around to do this and that. However, if she was not already a masterful wielder of chronoprohiberis by then, the newly-joined members would surely be disappointed. "*I can stop time, but when time is stopped, I can't move*" just wouldn't cut it.

In order to grant the members the impression of a more unique character, Kaburagi-san wanted to come off as the beautiful witch who provided guidance to a young magical girl. In order to pull that off, being able to come across as a master over chronoprohiberis was a must. At the very least, that meant being able to move when time is stopped. She went to have a talk with an old, famous professor in the physics department at Tokyo University. She bought a ton of books on space and time and dissected all the theories inside. The two of us also had long, extensive discussions. After all that, finally there was sign of a breakthrough.

The theory was not too complicated. Going by her previous finding that time did not stop for the light inside her mouth and the watch on her wrist, it was clear that it was not only her body itself, but that everything *inside* her body was also unaffected by her chronoprohiberis. Therefore, she would suck in as much air into her lungs and cheeks as possible, then activate her powers while

in that state. During stopped time, she would then repeatedly suck in and expand her cheeks and stomach. And that was it.

By doing so, she would have effectively gained control over the space that her cheeks and stomach would occupy when expanded. Though limited to only those areas, that was still actual movement when time was stopped. Then afterward, all she would have to do was familiarize herself with the feeling of “moving when time is stopped,” and then gradually expand the range of movement.

At the start, Kaburagi-san was a bit doubtful of this theory of mine, saying that it was too feeling-based, but very quickly changed her opinion. When she tried doing what I suggested, she felt a different feeling of strain on her stopprotein, and growth pain returned. According to the way she put it, it felt like trying to use a muscle that had never been used before. In addition, she said that she indeed felt like she was getting a hold on the feeling of moving during stopped time.

“If stopping time up till now was walking, hmm, I suppose this would be like skipping instead” was what she said. In other words, there was a certain knack to it, but once she got the knack then it wasn’t too difficult to do.

After getting the hang of it, Kaburagi-san passionately trained so hard every day that her stopprotein was left dead tired. After a single month, she had become fully capable of movement during stopped time.

Without wearing any clothes, that is.

Apparently, excluding clothes from her chronoprohiberis was going to need a bit more time. However, just being able to move her own body around freely was already enormous progress. What’s more, being able to move around with heavy makeup on meant that from makeup to stockings, then from stockings to underwear, and eventually from underwear to a dress, and voilà! Being able to move with clothes on did not seem like such a far-off vision anymore. *You are so very close to graduating from practicing in such immodest guise in the bathroom, Kaburagi-san! You can do it, I have faith in you!*

As for myself, naturally I was not just twiddling my thumbs during Kaburagi-san’s training period. What I did first was to develop and refine the World

Shadows that we would be going with. When I first began, I thought to “borrow” yakuza members and con men and other such criminals. However, fighting against the shadows of society rather than the shadows of the world would be an infringement of the Five Precepts, so I gave that idea up. Also, it was probably not such a good idea to use superpowers to beat up actual, real-life humans.

The mindset that “I can beat them up if it’s a bad person” could all too easily devolve into “I can beat them up if I don’t like them,” and at the end of that path would just be self-serving lynching. Like hell these mischievous brats who’d just gotten their hands on superpowers would be able to continue keeping themselves in check. I actually did keep myself in check, but I was fully aware that I was an extremely unique case.

Furthermore, actually killing another human being, even if it was a pure accident, would undoubtedly cause mental trauma. Depending on the person, it could even cause difficulties returning to normal, everyday life. This would violate “Precept Five: Members are to live both an ordinary and an extraordinary life.” We couldn’t have that. We had no need for the “*Kuh*, what have I done, I have finally gone and killed another human being...” trope. In manga and stories, this kind of trauma in the protagonist’s heart would be healed when the heroine comforted or cheered him up and then the plot could move on, but this was real life. Words of comfort could easily cause the opposite effect, and encouragement could ring hollow in the listener’s ear such that the entire situation gradually spirals out of control until all hell breaks loose. We would *not* be deliberately sowing seeds of trouble. As such, using actual humans as World Shadows was a hard “no.” Neither I nor Kaburagi-san wanted to see a dark, adolescent drama filled with blood and anguish of the “too serious to laugh off” type.

What I thought of next after “humans” was “mannequins.” So not actual humans, but human look-alikes. Differentiating them would be easy, merely a matter of choosing different combinations of clothes and faces and other equipment. The creepiness of self-moving mannequins was also a huge plus.

But that was no good either.

I had Kaburagi-san buy a few of them for me so I could try out how it felt to

control them with telekinesis. However, what I found out from the whole process was that it would be an enormous pain to acquire and dispose of them.

Firstly, where would these mannequins be when they weren't attacking the members of our secret organization? In the show window of a department store somewhere? Hidden within the trash heap of a deep and secret alleyway? Mannequins are quite sizable, actually. They would be quite conspicuous anywhere and everywhere. Leave them in random locations, and they ran the risk of being removed. It would also be safe to predict that they'd be destroyed in the fights against organization members, which means that we would need to regularly buy them in bulk. That would draw way too much attention to ourselves.

Cleaning up would also be a huge pain. What would we do with the defeated and thus broken mannequins? Leave them untouched, and eventually that would mean broken mannequins littered all over random alleyways and rooftops and other unfrequented locations. Someone would be bound to stumble upon them, then eventually suspicions would mount, an investigation would be launched, and bam our secret organization would be revealed. I could just see it happening. Even if it didn't go so far, there'd be no avoiding it turning into an urban legend.

But then consider... what if we properly disposed of them away after each fight? So after every single fight, we would assiduously pick up all the fragments and pieces that made up an entire mannequin (or several), put them into a trash bag and take them home, then chuck them out on oversized garbage day? Tell me that won't be suspicious. Neither did I want to illegally dump them in the ocean or mountain. A whole pile of broken mannequins deep in an unfrequented location in the mountains—that sounds like the setting for a horror movie more than anything, really. And whoever owned the mountain would be troubled too. There is no location on this entire earth where it is okay to dump trash illegally. I found myself being envious of computer games where corpses would just disappear by themselves.

Thus, for the above-mentioned reasons, mannequins were also out of the question.

For the foreseeable future, the activities of our secret organization would be

limited to the Tokyo area in a certain radius around the physical location of Bar Ama-no-Iwato. With that in mind, we needed to make the Shadows based on something easy to procure and obfuscate. I also thought about going full telekinesis and making the Shadows be purely telekinetic puppets. However, the fact that no corpse would be left behind after they were defeated left something to be desired.

After some more thought, I settled on a black membrane made with telekinesis filled with water and pebbles, which would look and move like a slime. The pebble would be the nucleus, the water its muscles, and telekinetic membrane its skin. This way, it would be easy to adjust its shape and size. Also, the pebble nucleus would be visible through the half-transparent membrane, which would make it an easy-to-understand target.

When it was defeated, then it would die in an explosion of water and rock, which gave a very satisfying sense of accomplishment. Furthermore, water and rock could be found everywhere, so there'd be no evidence to cover up after a fight. But most of all, its appearance was truly "shadow of the world"-ish. It was black, and the way its slime-like body oozed and crawled was sufficiently creepy. If someone random came upon it at night, it would make them scream and their legs would give out, whereas it wouldn't be that bad for someone used to the sight. That was the fine balance that I had managed to strike.

Incidentally, World Shadows were human desire for power taken form and possessing stones, which was why they sought out and attacked espers to eat them. That was the setting we were going with. With this setting, Shadows could keep showing up limitlessly and it wouldn't be weird. It also perfectly explained why Shadows didn't attack normal people but went after espers instead.

If a Shadow defeated an esper, it would swallow up that esper and in so doing, go crazy with the power it had just attained and turn to attacking normal people. Also, Shadows would go berserk if bathed in fear, so alerting the general public to their existence would only make things worse. Just saying, the confusion and fear felt by masses of people would supercharge any nearby Shadows! So the point was to keep the Shadows hidden away from the light of day and lurking only in the, well, shadows.

The World Shadows that I came up with in this manner were very well received by Kaburagi-san. With that, the enemy of our secret organization was decided. However, even after fleshing out the concept behind the Shadows, I still had time left over because Kaburagi-san still wanted to train a bit longer. It was true that it would be hard to maintain an image if she still couldn't move during stopped time without being naked. There was no helping it. Being able to move with clothes on, and being able to use not only light from inside her mouth, but also light from a headlight (search helmet with light) or a penlight, that was the bare minimum.

In the first place, I myself had spent around ten years training my telekinesis in order to qualify—well, maybe I was a bit overqualified—as the boss of a secret organization. In comparison, Kaburagi-san was making enormous progress in what hadn't even been half a year yet. She was mastering her own superpower way faster than I had. Although the limit of her powers wasn't all too high, but still. I had already finished moving into Bar Ama-no-Iwato, and had even finished making the secret passage that led to the secret underground room. And I was also done with the World Shadows. There was nothing else that I needed to get done while waiting for Kaburagi-san's training to be done. So, as a way to kill time, I did a bit more research into telekimuscle transplant.

First, the rate of success. I discovered that as long as the target was human, then the success rate was 100%. By sticking and retrieving it from passersby, I learned that it was easier to stick it onto males, and it was easier to peel it off of females.

As for the chimpanzees and Japanese macaques in the zoo, well, it was even easier for the fragment to come off than it was for women, but if I kept it in place for several hours, it worked out fine.

I also had Kaburagi-san buy me a guinea pig to test on. The telekimuscle fragment did not stick. It felt as pointless as trying to stick down water with tape.

When it came to fish and insects, it was like trying to stick the fragment to air. No feedback whatsoever, so no-go. It was the same for concrete and trees.

In summary, the conclusion that I arrived at was that the ease of transplant

was proportional to how similar to me the target was. Of course, I made absolutely sure to retrieve every single telekimuscle fragment that I used for experimenting. *The test subject escapes and later on returns as a threat to the secret organization!* was a development that could stay inside the books, thank you very much.

Incidentally, we also thought to try testing whether Kaburagi-san's stopprotein could also be used for transplanting. However, the instant when I tried to telekinetically rip off a part of her stopprotein, a hoarse, full-throated scream that sounded like it came from someone about to die stabbed into my ears. Apparently it was so painful that she slipped into her natural voice. No wonder I always thought she sounded so nice. Turns out that it wasn't only her face that she worked on, she was affecting her voice too. I found myself in awe once again at Kaburagi-san's passion toward beauty. She stout-heartedly asked me to try again, saying that she'd bear it next time, but the previous scream sounded like her life was at stake so I called the experiment off. Who knows, maybe someday there would be a chance to try again.

In this way, right when my own experiments reached a good stopping point, Kaburagi-san's training also reached a good stopping point.

Here we announce Kaburagi-san's specs! Maximum duration that she could stop time for: 44 seconds! Everything was dark when time was stopped, but she could utilize the penlight tucked into the chest pocket of her dress as a light source! Of course, she could move with clothes on! She could also undo the effects of her chronoprohiberis on any target with but a single touch! In this way, she let me experience the world with time stopped, but sound was also stopped so it was very silent! Aside from that, everything else was surprisingly ordinary! However, dispelling chronoprohiberis from anything other than herself supposedly takes a huge amount of stamina and thus was very tiring! When the freed target was the size of another human, then the duration of her chronoprohiberis abruptly dropped to a mere ten seconds! Then only one second for something the size of a road roller! However, if she only targeted herself, and alternately stopped time for several seconds and rested for several minutes in intervals, then her stopprotein could stop a cumulative duration of five to six minutes before completely giving out! It was the same theory behind

how instead of doing many push-ups consecutively, repeating sets of only one push-up and some rest would mean being able to do more push-ups overall! Incidentally, the act of selectively dispelling chronoprohiberis could also be used as an attack! If she touched a living being frozen in time and dispelled the effects only on the target's heart, then the heart would go into cardiac arrest because all the blood was still frozen and thus no blood would supply the beating heart! (A moment of silence for the poor guinea pig who got reassigned from being the subject of my telekimuscle transplant experiments to being the subject of this experiment and thus passed away at the age of one year and two months!) It could be said that this was more than sufficient power to live up to the title of being the second-in-command, the sub-leader of a secret organization. With this, we could finally start being a secret organization.

Apparently there was still more augment ability to Kaburagi-san's chronoprohiberis, but then technically the same could also be said of my telekinesis. But she and I could wait no longer to get started.

All preparations were in order. Kaburagi-san came to Bar Ama-no-Iwato in a high-class, tailor-made suit, then sat on not a chair, but the Shadow that I had out as a trial run.

Then, in an affected air, she said, "Master, the usual."

It was the middle of summer. It was an "Ah yes, it happened on a sultry summer night..." kind of feeling. Well all right, we had the A/C on, so it was cool, but you get what I mean.

I wordlessly opened the most expensive bottle of wine we had. Kaburagi-san took a sip, swirled it around in her mouth, then swallowed it while savoring the taste.

"The moment is upon us."

"Your final candidate?"

"Here. This is the candidate I've chosen." Kaburagi-san took out a folded piece of paper from the cleavage that was peeking through her casually loosened suit, then handed it to me.

Omg, what's with that performance? It's like a movie. I love it.

For the sake of deciding on the glorious first-ever member of our secret organization, Kaburagi-san and I had each chosen a single candidate. Today was the day where we decided whether it would be the candidate I chose, or the candidate she chose.

The criterion for my search was “a normal middle schooler who wishes for the extraordinary.” There was no one more suitable for being a secret organization member than a normal middle schooler. Sluggishly going through days of ennui, not particularly passionate about anything, quickly growing bored even of the occasional passion, constantly entertaining delusions of “Aah~ If only I had some mysterious power.” The kind of middle schooler that was a dime-a-dozen. This was the kind of person that I wanted to bestow a mysterious power upon.

Would that person turn out to be the kind who would remain an ordinary person despite possessing extraordinary power? Or would that person begin to shine like a diamond upon acquiring extraordinary power? I was fine with either outcome. What was important was giving that person the chance to change. I fully sympathized with the kind of adolescent boy who only sat there with his mouth open, waiting for someone to feed him the bait that was the extraordinary. Because I myself had been so back in my day. Even after I awakened to my superpower, I remained passive, made no move to initiate anything on my own accord, and only waited for the extraordinary to come to me. This was why it was adolescent boys, the dime-a-dozen kind that was only passively waiting for something extraordinary to happen, that I wanted to give this chance to.

In contrast, the criterion for Kaburagi-san’s search was “a middle schooler who is doing their very best.” There was no one more suitable for a secret organization than a middle schooler who is doing their very best to work toward a specific goal. No matter who it was that denied their dream, no matter if they were disparaged, no matter if they were ignored and ostracized. Through it all, they would be the one to acknowledge themselves and continue striving toward their goal. This was the kind of person that she wanted to bestow a mysterious power to. In this world, there was no guarantee that hard work would be repaid. Diets could rebound. Makeup could lead to scoldings by teachers. Missteps and failures could cause one to almost lose hope. At that

point, “Ahh, if only I had a mysterious power” would slip into one’s head in desperation. It was the dreams of such people that Kaburagi-san wanted to fulfill.

To those who couldn’t step forward, I wanted to grant a trigger for that first step. To those who were already striding forward, Kaburagi-san wanted to reward them for their efforts. Neither of us were wrong. I understood Kaburagi-san’s feelings, and Kaburagi-san understood mine. But we would not compromise. Not to each other.

Thus today’s final candidate deciding match.

I also took out the piece of paper on which I had written the name of my candidate. After stacking mine on top of hers, I fluttered both in the air.

“How should we decide?”

“I was thinking a coin.”

“Ohh, so classy... I was thinking of going with rock-paper-scissors, actually.” Seeing me looking slightly embarrassed, Kaburagi-san smiled wryly,

“I’m fine with rock-paper-scissors too. Let’s start, then.”

“Oh, really? All right, got it. Rock-paper-scissors, single round. No ‘On second thought, let’s do three rounds!’ afterward.”

“Okay. Rock... paper...”

“...Scissors! ...Wha—?” I was holding out Paper, and Kaburagi-san was holding out Scissors. It was my loss, plain and simple.

However, I saw it. Kaburagi-san’s hand had blurred unnaturally in the middle of holding it out.

“Hold on, you 100% stopped time just now to confirm my hand! That’s cheating, you cheated! That doesn’t count! We’re doing it again!”

“Wasn’t it a single round?” Kaburagi-san used her fingers to comb her bangs upward while smiling triumphantly.

That’s such a childish thing to do, Kaburagi-san! Dammit, if I’d known that we could use our powers, then I would have used telekinesis to freeze your hand

and turn you into Ms. I-can't-move-my-fingers!

...Sigh, forget it. I was the one who said that we would only do a single round. A telekinetic never goes back on his word. Kaburagi-san is supporting us with both money and ideas, and she also conceded to my preferences for the secret base. Let's just let her win this one.

I checked the name of the final candidate written on Kaburagi-san's piece of paper. *So it shall be.*

The glorious Member #1 of Amaterasu, the secret organization that fought against the shadows of the world, would be... a Buddhist middle school girl from Saitama Prefecture, Touka Hasumi.

Chapter 8: An Over-The-Top Opening

Touka Hasumi was a middle school second year who lived in Saitama Prefecture. She was of the age when the chuuni disease would be the most acute.

What Kaburagi-san did was comb through social media to find candidates, then hire private detectives to investigate those candidates' personal backgrounds. However, just in case, I also checked on them with telekinesis. There's no such thing as over-investigating when it comes to background checks.

What I did could technically be phrased as "stalking a middle school girl" and thus could frame me in a very negative light, but there was no way I wasn't going to thoroughly investigate someone I was considering granting a superpower to. One of the candidates that I myself was considering, a boy with the family name Satou who lived in Kanagawa Prefecture, I observed slipping out night after night, without his parents knowing, to catch cats and strangle them to the very edge right before death. Similarly, a girl with the family name Nakamura in Chiba Prefecture was, instead of studying, writing down the names of people she hated in a notebook and detailing in length the most brutal and gory deaths that she could wish upon them. No way was I going to hand over superpowers to people like that.

That was why, even if I had to resort to stalking, it was absolutely necessary that I investigate candidates thoroughly to confirm any hidden crazy sides. However, Kaburagi-san forbade me to do any stalking during bathing, changing, and bathroom visits. Very insistently, at that. Apparently she was still holding a grudge about how I peeped on every single aspect of her life before I made contact. *Forgive me please?*

As a result of both investigative approaches, Touka-chan's history was laid to light without much issue.

Touka Hasumi, 14 years old. Small build, short black hair. Living with her

parents in an apartment. No siblings, family of three. Slightly above-average grades. Smart enough to somehow manage tests with only a night of cramming. Slightly below-average physical prowess. However, her movements during PE class stretching and dancing indicated that she had very soft joints and an exemplary sense of balance.

Touka-chan's family was a problematic one, the main cause of which laid with her father's insufficient income. He was an earnest and sincere person, but unfortunately was not good at catching on and going along with the flow of things. He had been stuck performing miscellaneous tasks for the longest time, unable to climb the ladder of promotion. Things that he was already familiar with, he could carry out quickly and efficiently as routine, but he was extremely terrible at handling unexpected situations or new challenges.

Due to her father's lack of potential for advancement, her mother was forced to work part time at a supermarket, something that she was very disgruntled with. Every night when her father came home tired from work, her mother would bestow upon him the triple combo of a torrent of insults, cold dinner, and a darkened living room. The two of them often fought. While one would often indoctrinate the daughter with "never go out with men like your father," the other had adopted "don't become like your mother" as his go-to phrase.

Neither of them abused her directly. However, the sight of how naturally she could detect an oncoming fight and make herself scarce by silently slipping into her room pained me to continue (secretly) watching and listening. Because she had grown up in such a family, Touka-chan herself had a rather warped personality.

If she got close to her mother, then her father would show his displeasure. If she got close to her father, her mother would show her displeasure. Staying at home was nothing but pain.

But that said, the option of killing time by hanging out with friends was not available to her either. Touka-chan was a complete loner. Back during her elementary days, on one Parent Day, her mom could not come due to having caught a cold, and so her father had showed up instead. However, his strange and suspicious-looking mannerisms became a story that spread like wildfire through the school, such that it became the standard topic of all in-school jokes.

Ever since then, Touka-chan had no friends. She had turned into one of those calm, quiet, unsociable characters who avoided people and rarely spoke out loud.



Her cute face also played to her misfortune. Though she wasn't exactly a drop-dead beauty, but she was cute enough to rank first or second within her school year, with the kind of cuteness that entirely suited her reading a book while surrounded by lots of small animals. The sight of the boys who had just started being interested in the opposite sex making passes at her only served to earn her persecution from the pitch-dark association that was middle school girls. *Girls are scary.*

A gloomy, ash-colored adolescence.

Parents that could not be relied on.

No friends.

Teachers who couldn't help.

Gradually accumulating stress.

Her negative emotions sought an outlet with swelling impetus.

And at the end of her rope, Touka-chan... discovered Buddhism.

...

I feel like there might have been a jump in logic at the end there. However, according to what I found through my stalking and telekinetic house call, it seemed like that was exactly what had happened. It was completely beyond me how things turned out that way, but it was a rather wholesome outlet, all things considered. In fact, it was so wholesome that even Prince Shoutoku would give his stamp of approval.

However, the basic principle of Buddhism is "to escape from the cycle of suffering." It made me think whether a mere 14-year-old actually underwent so much suffering as to ponder on something so deep. I mean, like, really?

As could be expected of the candidate raised by the ultra-hardworking Kaburagi-san, Touka-chan was also an off-the-charts hard worker herself.

Touka-chan's mornings started with sutra chanting. She would do this every single morning without fail, in a small voice so that she wouldn't be overheard by her parents in the next room over.

One of the teachings in Buddhism is “no lying.” True to form, Touka-chan never ever lied. In social situations where she received peer pressure to lie, she would simply clam up and not say anything.

However, it was what she did after school that was most noteworthy. If you could believe it, every day along the way home, Touka-chan would stop by the riverbank and carve Buddhist sculptures out of the rocks lying around. Her methods were indeed those of an amateur, but come rain or shine, she carved with all her heart. According to an offhand murmur I heard, it was for the sake of “merit-making.”

The case could probably be made that her efforts at merit-making were already paying off. After all, the reason Kaburagi-san discovered her was by noticing a picture of the Buddhist statues on this riverbank that someone had uploaded onto social media. Perhaps there was some credence to Buddha’s providence after all.

What with her conversion to Buddhism and all, if we deemed Touka-chan unfit for our secret organization, then we would have to dismiss every single middle and high schooler in all of Japan. So naturally, she passed the background check with flying colors.

On a certain summer afternoon, after we had finished one final briefing session, Kaburagi-san put on her favorite black gothic dress and restlessly got into a car. The idea was that she would make her way to Saitama, then make contact with Touka-chan while making it seem like a coincidence. Then hopefully, things would develop straight into recruitment.

I myself was to return to Ama-no-Iwato, and remain ready to play my part in the encounter through long-distance telekinesis. I also bore the heavy responsibility of recording the entire incident on video camera. It was going to be *the* opening scene of the very first secret organization on Earth. Not getting it on tape would be sheer absurdity. As they say, pics or it didn’t happen, right?

Kaburagi-san got into her seat and put her seat belt on. But right before she set off, a conflicted look came over her face and she spoke out loud.

“I was debating whether to tell you or not, but I think I’ll tell you after all. To be honest with you, Touka-chan actually was my second candidate.”

“What... did you say...?” *Does that mean there’s someone out there who’s even more suitable than Touka-chan for joining our secret organization?*

Kaburagi-san continued half-apologetically. “Does the name ‘Mrs. Marrick’ ring any bells? The self-proclaimed witch. Several years ago, there was an incident where her house collapsed in an unnatural way. It was newly built, there was no earthquake and no explosives, and yet it seemed like her house was crushed by some incredible force. Right before the incident, apparently someone had paid her a visit while hiding their face and identity. I thought that that person might be the second naturally-awakened esper after Sago-san, but all my efforts to uncover that person’s identity have proven entirely fruitless—”

Unable to bear listening to the very end, I interrupted her, “Sorry, that was me. After getting my hopes up with only some stupid trick to show for it pissed me off so much that I used telekinesis to crush her house.”

Talk about a trip down memory lane. It was back in my university days when I was going around looking for espers other than myself. *So it had become something that people talked about, huh.* Having something silly that I did in youthful indiscretion being spread about felt slightly embarrassing.

“Eh... S-So it was you in the end?” However, Kaburagi-san, who had just confessed something in full seriousness only to learn that she was talking to the very person in question, was way more embarrassed than me. She was red to her ears and staring quiveringly at the ground. *Yes, Kaburagi-san, you’re very cute!*

“Well... I’ll... just be off... then.” After seeing off Kaburagi-san drive off as if running away from the situation, I turned around to head toward Ama-no-Iwato.

Then I changed gears. Operation Opening, start!



The clouds floating in the sky were stained a deep red as the summer day slipped into dusk. Summer break was drawing near, and Touka-chan was on her way home after her daily routine of carving Buddhist sculptures at the usual riverbank.

Touka-chan always took the same route home. And along that route was a narrow alleyway that almost nobody else ever used. Although this stretch was short enough to go through in under a minute, it was hidden from view of the nearby residences thanks to the trees in the park in between. In other words, it was the perfect ambush location.

As Touka-chan walked on with heavy feet and head hung low, thinking about how she didn't want to go home, she suddenly noticed a long shadow seemingly extending toward her. So she lifted her face to look—and found herself face to face with a World Shadow.

Touka-chan's jaw dropped in shock.

The Shadow that had appeared was the size of a large dog, and looked like a thick, black, stretchy bag filled with water to bursting, just left there in the middle of her path. If she looked closely, the skin was barely transparent enough so that the stone nucleus in its center could be seen. However, she did not have the presence of mind to do any observing. Her mind raced trying to come to terms with this apparition that had suddenly intruded into her everyday life.

Slowly, ever so slowly, the World Shadow began inching toward Touka-chan. Still petrified with shock, she merely followed its movement with her eyes.

Well, will you look at that? I had expected her to scream and run for it, but she's calm. Oh wait, no, that's not it. It's just that her mind is still trying to process the situation, I see. To be fair, I haven't made it attack her yet. For a generation that's used to seeing even gorier monsters made of CG crawling around in movies and dramas, maybe this reaction is on the more normal side.

Though well, if she wasn't going to run, then that was fine too. I made the World Shadow move in as gross and fear-inducing a manner as possible, then sent it lunging toward Touka-chan while adding some wind to create the impression of speed.

Here, take this tentacle punch with all this weight behind it! If you get hit by it then it's going to hurt like hell and cause a huge wound—is what wouldn't happen because I practiced several hundreds of times to make sure that it doesn't happen.

The punch that was my very best effort at holding back connected, causing Touka-chan to fall onto her butt.

I purposely left a brief lull before initiating a follow-up attack. Was she going to tremble in fear, scream, or run away? I was waiting in anticipation for which she would choose when abruptly, Touka-chan came to a start, took out a copy of a sutra from her chest pocket, crushed it in her hand, then threw a punch at the Shadow!

Interesting, I like the way you think! True enough, against an apparition that looks so “bad,” Buddhist-attribute attacks seem like they might be effective! I totally get it! That was exemplary split-second thinking, I’ll give you that! But aww, it’s just too bad that Sutra Punch does not actually work against World Shadows!

Her fist merely bounced off, as if she had just punched rubber.

Fuhahahaha, here’s payback! Take one more tentacle punch! After taking the second punch in her shoulder, Touka-chan sluggishly began scrambling to escape. With a face that looked on the verge of tears, and while reciting the Heart Sutra under her breath the entire time, she wobbled to her feet and turned to run away. However, a quick glance over her shoulder showed her that the World Shadow was, of course, crawling at high speed in pursuit. Touka-chan’s face scrunched up in fear.

Good, this is just the right degree of a crisis. She was just flustered enough that the simple countermeasure of raising her voice to scream for help had completely slipped her mind.

And so right then, I sent Kaburagi-san the GO signal with telekinesis!

Due to her turning back so often to keep an eye on the World Shadow that was closing in, Touka-chan had completely forgotten to pay attention to where she was going. With perfect timing, Kaburagi-san walked out of the corner and BAM! Caught her in a gentle embrace! Touka-chan’s eyes bulged with bewilderment!

Kaburagi-san spoke softly to Touka-chan, whose mind could no longer keep up with what was happening. “You are... I see, you haven’t awakened yet, have you? Stand behind me. I’ll take care of it.”

Th-There it is!! The suggestive line that serves as the gateway to the scenes “Where Everything Changed”!!! I had completely slipped into spectator mode as I thrust a beer can into the air back at Ama-no-Iwato. This was exactly how I had wanted to be swept up into the extraordinary. However, the extraordinary never came to me. But at that very moment! Touka-chan, onto whom both Kaburagi-san and I were projecting our past selves, was being swept up into the extraordinary! I was moved beyond words.

Kaburagi-san hid Touka-chan behind her back, resolutely facing off against the approaching World Shadow.

Then...

The world colored deep red by the setting sun...

...Stopped!

From Kaburagi-san’s rouge-colored lips came the finishing line, “O time, cease thy flow.”

Well, to be entirely honest, I had no idea what was actually going on during stopped time at a place so far away. However, if everything was going according to what we had agreed on previously, then Kaburagi-san should have been stylishly dicing up the World Shadow.

But... belying all our expectations, most likely during stopped time right after Kaburagi-san’s line, Touka-chan had slipped in between Kaburagi-san and the Shadow as if to protect it.

Standing in the way with hands outstretched, she said in a quivering voice, “Killing goes against the way of Buddhism. I have no idea what this thing is. It is most likely something bad. But even so, please at least spare its life...”

You serious...? I mean, yeah sure, you’re the Buddhist-attribute character, but... like, really...?

Kaburagi-san looked very troubled. Her lips moved, silently asking me what to do, but I hadn’t the faintest idea either.

Please go with the flow and ad lib something, Kaburagi-san. If you really need it, the World Shadow that is currently reading the atmosphere and staying put

can suddenly attack her from behind, thus creating a situation where there's no choice but to kill it.

Kaburagi-san admonished Touka-chan with carefully chosen words. "Although you might feel pity for it, this is something that *must* be eliminated. World Shadows are not alive. They are simply clumps of malice, something like a naturally-occurring calamity."

"Oh, so it's not a living creature? Then getting rid of it won't be a demerit. In that case, be my guest." Touka-chan readily moved out of the way.

Just like that?! You're trying to make us laugh, aren't you?!

Then Kaburagi-san must have stopped time again, because the next moment, the World Shadow was in pieces. With terrible timing, right then it began to rain. Neither of them had an umbrella on them. The two of them exchanged looks.

Kaburagi-san bent her knees a little, took Touka-chan's hands into her own, then spoke to her concernedly while peering into her face. "You must be feeling very confused right now. However, the fact that a World Shadow went after you means that you can no longer remain a mere bystander. There's a lot I need to tell you. Would you be willing to come with me?"

After thinking about it a little, Touka-chan nodded. The two of them then broke into a run through the rain that had started falling in earnest, heading toward the car that was parked a distance away.

The water and stone fragments that had made up the World Shadow were quickly washed away by the rain, leaving not even a trace behind.

Thus the curtains fell on Act I.

I hyped myself up because as soon as Kaburagi-san brought Touka-chan to Ama-no-Iwato, then it would be the time for my acting.

Watch me pull it off.

...I will pull it off, won't I?

I suddenly found myself with butterflies in my stomach. I had already practiced a lot, but I started making cue cards too just in case.

Chapter 9: Trying To Curry Favor With A Blatant Sexy Scene

On that fateful summer night, after her narrow escape from her first-ever encounter with a World Shadow, Touka-chan was brought by Kaburagi-san to Ama-no-Iwato. Together into the small alleyway sandwiched between high-rises, down the short flight of stairs heading underground, and through the door with the CLOSED sign, Touka-chan was cowering behind Kaburagi-san the entire way.

No normal middle school girl would go into a closed store that didn't even have a sign out this late at night. No doubt guilt and unease were coursing through her system, as if she was doing something bad. However, maybe because of how Kaburagi-san was acting like she had every right to be there, Touka-chan obediently stepped into the store right behind her.

Touka-chan's face was stiff with nervousness.

My own nervousness was the same, if not greater, than hers.

I greeted the beautiful lady and cute girl in a stylish dress shirt and black vest, with my hair gelled back classily. On my face was the sour expression that I had trained for ten straight days under Kaburagi-san's expert coaching. Well, to be more specific, by "greeted" I meant lightly looking up at the sound of the door chime and briefly pausing in the middle of polishing a wine glass.

According to Kaburagi-san, my face "isn't bad," but regretfully lacked the age and aura of dignity that a true bar master would have. What I lacked, I tried to compensate for with a reticent personality and sour expression.

Indeed, call me the "Guardian," for I am the tight-lipped master who serves as guardian to the entrance of our secret organization's base...!

"Master, allow me to introduce you. This is Touka Hasumi-chan, she is someone within whom sleeps the seed of a superpower. It isn't decided yet whether she'll join the organization or not, but for now can she have something

warm to drink? The rain caught us unawares.”

I nodded wordlessly, served a mug of coffee that I had made ahead of time and some milk and a sugar pot, then withdrew into the back of the store.

...Or at least, that’s what I pretended to do, all while telekinetically starting the bath and also keeping the secret recording running.

Touka-chan dumped a ton of milk and sugar into her coffee. After taking a sip, she then sighed in contentment. Kaburagi-san smiled wryly while holding her own cup daintily.

“I’m sorry if he looks surly. He’s actually a really kind person.”

“Does that person also... um, can he stop time too?”

“No, he cannot. Master only helps us manage this place. He himself does not have a superpower. He *is* in the know about our circumstances, though. Just as I said in the car, at the moment, there are only two people who can wield superpowers: Boss and me—Oh I’m sorry, and Touka-chan, which makes three of us.”

“So do I really have to join your secret organization?” asked Touka-chan in an almost inaudible mumble while holding her coffee cup with both hands and shrinking into herself.

Is it just me, or does she not seem very enthusiastic about joining?

Kaburagi-san circled an arm around Touka-chan’s shoulder, then began to pat her head tenderly. “We won’t force you. While it’s true that World Shadows target espers, if you want, I can ask Boss on your behalf to remove your superpower so that you can return to being a normal person. If you don’t want to fight, then we’ll respect your feelings.”

That was well put. Although Touka-chan fervently chased Sunday morning magical girl anime while sighing desirously, if she was too scared to do actual fighting herself, then with regret, with the utmost regret, we wouldn’t coerce her any further. I would also call off the telekimuscle transplant. Amaterasu was a humane secret organization.

“I...” Seemingly having gained some measure of security from Kaburagi-san’s

warmth, Touka-chan stared into her coffee as her voice gradually shifted from diffident mumbling to being slightly louder and more enunciated. “I wanted to help people. In a cool and cute way, like a magical girl. I wanted someone to say ‘thank you’ to me. Those two words were all I wanted. But then it occurred to me that in order for me to save people, those people would have to be suffering first. In other words, I had been wishing for people to suffer. I... I hated myself so much for having made such a terrible wish. Not once, not twice, but so many times, even...”

“I see...” I understood where she was coming from. Struggling with such black-and-white morals is so common for middle schoolers that it is almost a cliché. Adults, however, generally have become capable of compartmentalizing, and thus are rarely seen wrestling with this. As expected of a real middle school girl, she sure was living her youth.

“It is because I want to erase these evil passions of mine, to be liberated from such earthly desires that I chant sutras and carve Buddha sculptures.”

“I... see...?” That was where she lost me. *What are middle school girls (philosophical query)?*

“But it turns out I was wrong, wasn’t I? Today, I have finally become enlightened. Kaburagi-san, when you came for me, I was so happy. You saying that I don’t have to fight if I don’t want to also made me very happy. Surely, the reason for helping other people is insignificant. There is no doubt that helping people is a good thing. In addition...” Touka-chan raised her face to look straight at Kaburagi-san. “You said that World Shadows are the desires of humans thirsting for power taken form, right? Even though I may be only a mere lay follower, as someone walking the Way of Buddha, I shall sever those desires. For that, I will fight.”

Touka-chan’s resolute words caused Kaburagi-san to impulsively envelop her in a bear hug. If I hadn’t been playing the part of the hard-boiled master of the bar, then I too would have jumped out to hug her as well.

Isn’t this girl too much of a good girl?! Are you a Buddha?! I love you! (brain dead)

However, my brain could not remain dead indeterminately. With perfect

timing, I made my way back to the storefront while announcing myself with loud footsteps.

I only said, “Bath is ready,” then opened the counter swing door and stepped aside.

I-I did it! I did it, Kaburagi-san! I managed to say it without tripping over myself! That was actually pretty good. Though it was a mere three words, I tried to deliver them in the most surly voice I could manage, so I was on edge worrying about what I would do if I bit my tongue or choked on my words.

When compared with Kaburagi-san, who was practically the walking personification of acting, my own acting ability was below the level of a beginner. So before I did anything to expose our gig, Kaburagi-san took Touka-chan’s hand and guided her through the swing door and into the back. When she passed me, she secretly sent me a wink, so I also secretly returned with a thumbs-up. *Things are going great. The video is going to turn out amazing~!*

The back of Ama-no-Iwato’s counter was connected to my own living quarters. I didn’t have anything out that I minded being seen.

Due to my promise with Kaburagi-san, peeking during changing and bathing was NG. Therefore, that was where I switched to sound-only.

The recorder picked up the sound of clothes rustling.

“By the way, why were you wearing a dress?”

“Fufu, I was pretty, wasn’t I?”

“Ah, yes.”

Kaburagi-san’s voice was colored with pride. Her assertive pride in her own beauty was one of her good points.

“But Touka-chan, you’re also really pretty. I’ve wanted a cute little sister like Touka-chan for the longest time.”

“Someone like me can’t... *kyah!*”

“Look at how much your hair sparkles! You also have a really good body shape. But you could try just a little harder with makeup and underwear.”

Oh heeey now. Is this girls' talk between a beautiful lady and a cute girl that I'm hearing? All I was told in advance was that they would go in together and get along. Is this yuri? Is this kimashi?

After the sound of rustling clothes stopped, next was the pitter-patter of flat feet on the ground, then *SPLASH*. Apparently they'd gotten into the tub.

"But I don't have any fashion sense. I also don't have the courage to wear something amazing like what Kaburagi-san wears."

"Sense is something that you polish, and courage is something that you build up. When I was your age, I was a shitty fatty with a face like a mud fence who stuttered and looked like a bumpkin. Cuteness and beauty is something to be worked on. You should keep challenging yourself to try new things. And if anyone laughs at you for it, then I'll send them flying."

"P-Please go easy on them?"

Ahhh~ A beautiful, confident woman giving close-up one-on-one guidance to a cute girl struggling with lack of confidence? Is there anything better?

And is there anything more despicable than me, for eavesdropping on it all?

But hey, y'know. At this very moment, Kaburagi-san and Touka-chan, in other words, Japan's top beauty and the cute Buddhist-type adolescent girl are naked in the bath together and practically flirting with each other.

"Kaburagi-san, do you like singing? There's a song that I really like that I sing every day when I'm soaking in the bathtub."

"Oh really? What kind of song is it?"

I had indeed promised to not peek. However, there was no way to expose me for peeking. Whether to peek or not was entirely up to my discretion. All I had to do was shift my telekinesis the tiniest bit, and then I would be able to behold the pink-tinted scene of defenseless yuri dialed to max. *No, peeking on a middle school girl is crossing the line!* It crossed a line, but... to be blunt, I was very aroused.

Heh heh. Screw it, I'll just help myself. A little bit won't hurt—

"Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra—"

...

Avalokita Bodhisattva

Who deeply practices the Prajna Paramita

Clearly sees five Skandhas as Emptiness and thus relieves all Suffering.

Oh, Sariputra

Form is no different from Emptiness

Emptiness is no different from Form

Form is then Emptiness

Emptiness then is Form

Feeling, Perception, Volition, and Consciousness also are Form

Oh, Sariputra

All existence is Emptiness

There is no Birth and no Beginning

No Defilement and no Purity

No Accretion and no Diminution

Therefore, given Emptiness

There is no Form

No Feeling, Perception, Volition, or Consciousness

No Eye, Ear, Nose, Tongue, Body or Mind

No Color, Sound, Smell, Taste, Touch or Object of Mind

No Illusion, yet also no cessation of Illusion

No Ignorance, yet also no cessation of Ignorance

No Decay and Death, yet also no cessation of Decay and Death

No Suffering

No Cause

No Cessation

No Path

No Knowledge

And no Attainment

There is nothing to Attain

Thus a Bodhisattva relies on the Prajna Paramita

So that the Mind is without Hindrance

For without Hindrance, there is no Fear

All Illusion and Attachment is severed

Nirvana lies at the ultimate end of Life

Buddhas of the past, the present and the future

All rely on Prajna Paramita

To attain unsurpassed, complete, perfect Enlightenment

Therefore know the Prajna Paramita

As the great miraculous Mantra

The great bright Mantra

The supreme Mantra

The incomparable Mantra

For it removes all Suffering

And is True, not False

Therefore we proclaim the Prajna Paramita

And speak the Mantra:

Gate Gate

Paragate

Parasamgate

Bodhi Svaha!

The Heart Sutra

Sutra chanting reverberated throughout the bathroom.

My heart became still.

My worldly desires seeped away.

Get ye away from me, Mara!

I prepared hot cocoa for the girls who had just come out of the bath with the heart of a Buddha.

Man, I guess lust isn't one of the deadly sins for nothing.

Chapter 10: This Samurai Loves The Training Chapters In Shounen Manga

If the decorative wine bottle fixed to the innermost cupboard on the Ama-no-Iwato floor was pulled, then a lock would unlatch and the cupboard would slide away. I had bought the rails and metal fixtures from the home improvement center and used telekinesis to build this gimmick myself a la weekend carpenter. I was very proud of it.

Behind the cupboard was a short spiral staircase based on the one in Kaburagi-san's house. At the bottom of it was a pair of steel doors engraved with the mark of a sun that were so sturdy and massive that they would make any onlooker wonder who or what it was supposed to protect from who or what. And when these doors were opened, then the true base of Amaterasu would be revealed. And as World Shadows were not the kind of entities that would disguise themselves to sneak in, there was no need for passwords or electronic locks. It was enough to ensure that no normal person could "accidentally" wander their way here.

For the moment, at least.

After getting out of the bath together, Kaburagi-san began taking Touka-chan through the command room with souped-up computers and gigantic displays, the massive training room, and the equipment room lined with shelves of equipment such as rapiers and stun grenades and stab-proof vests. When they were done with the full tour, Kaburagi-san drove Touka-chan back home, as she still had school the next day.

It was already quite late, but apparently both her parents worked so late that as long as she got back before the date changed they would not suspect anything. *Please spare us from the offhand comments that make us stare into the abyss out of the blue.*

When Touka-chan was going through the tour, I secretly transplanted a telekimuscle fragment onto her. Based off of the feeling I attained from

Kaburagi-san's precedent and all the animal experiments I conducted, I determined that mutation and fixation would take around five to ten days.

The cover story was that Touka-chan had within her a sleeping superpower that she was not aware of, but it was trying to wake up and thus drew the World Shadow that attacked her in its frenzied desire for power. This power of hers would fully awaken through meditation and interaction with other espers. And until she trained enough to be able to protect herself, the secret organization's mysterious Boss would be protecting her with his mysterious power.

Allow me to explain! The Boss of the secret organization Amaterasu! He was the founder of Amaterasu, and had a superpower that let him sense whenever a World Shadow appeared! His true identity and power was entirely wrapped in mystery! Only Kaburagi-san knew, and she had also been granted the honor of beholding the tiniest fragment of his limitless superpower! Back when she was at the end of her wits regarding her own superpower, it had been Boss who had mentored her! And it is for this that she continued to pay him respect! So! Exactly what was the Boss' true identity?! No one had even the faintest idea!!!

But well then, leaving aside the absolutely cool Boss wrapped in mystery aka Sago Kinemitsu for a moment, we talked about Touka-chan's superpower. We had no way of predicting what kind of power it might be.

Perhaps it might be physical enhancement.

Perhaps it might be clairvoyance.

Perhaps it might be teleportation.

But regardless of what it was, we were sure that it could be utilized to fight against World Shadows with some training. We were not worried on that front.

What we *were* worried about, however, was of her awakening to a mind-reading-type power. Then it would become impossible to keep the fact of all this being a charade hidden from her. If that really happened, then we would have had no choice but to reveal everything to her and pull her over to the instigator side. We did not want to steal her sparkling youth away from her, but in this, everything was up to G—I mean, to Buddha alone.

Oh benevolent Buddha, we beseech You to give Your protection over Your follower who walks on Your Way.

Three days after the World Shadow assault incident, Touka-chan's summer break began, at which she began commuting to Ama-no-Iwato via train every day. If Kaburagi-san was present, then she would say: "this happened to me today," "I want to do something like this," "please tell me more about yourself, Kaburagi-san!" However, if it was only me in the bar (Kaburagi-san had work and also relationships to maintain so she couldn't be in the bar all the time), then Touka-chan would just take up a seat in the corner and work on carving a palm-sized Buddha sculpture with her chisel and a block of wood. Due to the reticent character I was enacting, I couldn't talk to her of my own accord. And Touka-chan, for her part, was emitting the "don't talk to me" aura unique to loners.

Touka-chan won't open her heart to me... sniff... I guess a middle school girl just doesn't get the charm of a stoic bar master. Or is it that I lack the sufficient charm? I mean, girls her age easily fall for the slightly rough older men, don't they? (my personal prejudice)

But well, leaving my charm building efforts for another day, Touka-chan successfully awoke to her superpower six days after the transplant. Unlike Kaburagi-san's case, where it took quite a while for it to become clear what superpower it was, Touka-chan's was clear from day one. Apparently if she strained hard, then for the briefest of moments, sparks would come out of her hands. It was a blatant case of pyrokinesis. So easy to understand!

When I shared that I had dubbed Touka-chan's supernatural source "burninglutamin," Kaburagi-san gave me a half smile. When she in turn told Touka-chan, she murmured, "Boss and I might actually get along quite well."

Boss aside, you can totally get along with Master also, you know? I mean, not that I care either way, of course. Ahem.

Touka-chan's pyrokinesis apparently worked kind of like telekinesis, in that if she directed her consciousness to her hand and strained, then fire would come out. As always, there was nothing better than mere repetition when starting out. The point was to use her burninglutamin until it was dead tired, feel the

growing pain, then wait for it to recover. Patiently building up her fundamentals through such repetitious training was what awaited Touka-chan in the coming days.

But be it due to her youth or her natural disposition, Touka-chan's growth was off-the-charts fast. Well, her growth rate itself was only 1.4, which wasn't really that high.

Sago Kinemitsu: Telekinesis, rate of 1.3.

Touka Hasumi: Pyrokinesis, rate of 1.4.

Shiori Kaburagi: Chronoprohiberis, rate of 1.7.

If you lined up us that way, then sure she looked normal. However, for Touka-chan, growing pain came quick and receded quickly. For Kaburagi-san and me, if we completely tired our superpower source out, then we would get the growth pain the next day. Then it would take one more day for that to recede, such that we were growing once every other day.

In sharp contrast, after Touka-chan overused her burninglutamin, the growth pain came immediately and receded by the next day. In other words, she was getting the 1.4 growth every single day. In two days, that was a combined factor of 1.96! That was even higher than Kaburagi-san's rate! *Say no to inflation!* This actually made Kaburagi-san and me a bit disheartened.

When a person gets old, muscle pain arrives later. When still a student, intense exercise would be accompanied by proportional muscle pain the next day, but after putting on some years, that time lag gradually grows by a day, then two days, serving as a merciless reminder of a declining body. *Is the difference in growth pain the same as that? Do the young kids get higher growth rates? The two of us are still only in our twenties, so we thought ourselves still young. But then this happens. It really sucks to grow old, doesn't it?*

Though well, I was 17 when I first woke up to my telekinesis. Honestly speaking, if asked to expound on the difference between a 17-year-old and a 14-year-old, I wouldn't be able to do much aside from tilting my head. We only had three samples thus far. There was too much room for selection bias.

Furthermore, Touka-chan's growth pain supposedly felt like "karma roaming out of my earthly body to being one with the sky of chaos." The Buddhist inflection made me laugh out loud a little. *Your character's shown itself in the most insignificant of places!*

Touka-chan could emit flames from both her left and right hands, but the temperature was a mere 41°C, which was the degree of someone with a terrible cold. Sparks really did emit from her hands, and her hands really did turn red and burn, but it was only 41°C. That was not real fire.

Though it was subtle, the slightly hot temperature confirmed that those flames were not illusionary. But that said, nothing could be set afire with that temperature. It could be great in place of pocket warmers in winter, but using it in an attack in that state would be a very tall order. The basics of pyrokinesis were apparently duration of activation time, such that the more she trained, the longer she could continuously keep the flames going. In other words, raising the temperature was apparently in the realm of applicability training.

On the first day, Touka-chan could not manage even a full second, but by day 14 of training she had already reached 55 seconds, which meant she had already surpassed Kaburagi-san. And her limit was still nowhere in sight.

Upon being overtaken so quickly, Kaburagi-san got flustered and asked me to try transplanting another telekimuscle fragment onto her, but sadly that did nothing to change her growth rate. Clearly the quantity of telekimuscle transplanted had no bearing on growth rate and growth limit.

Despite having been fired up when she resolved herself to fight World Shadows at the start, Touka-chan gradually began showing signs of getting bored. I mean, 41°C was, well, just 41°C. Even if she enveloped her fist in flames and threw a punch, forget Fire Punch, it would be Warm Punch at best. Even a stun gun or knife had higher attack power. To be blunt, it really was quite lackluster.

I also understood the feeling of not quite feeling motivated even in spite of clear growth. Surely she was thinking, *What am I supposed to do with this disappointment of a power anyways?*

While she was doing nothing aside from repetitive training every day,

Kaburagi-san and Boss were going around defeating World Shadows (or so went the backstory). The understanding of how powerless she was must have been quite vexing as well.

But you know what, Touka-chan? That is a path that I have also walked. If you don't throw it aside just because of its unimpressive state and continue to work at it steadily and diligently, then the results are bound to follow.

You have no time to be bored.

For you are a pyrokinetic.

Get more fired up.

Feel the burning passion in your veins.

It is when humans get passionate that they discover their true selves! That is why you need. To. Be. On. FIIIIIRRRREEEEEE!!! Thus! We're moving onto applicability training! I know that you're a modern-day middle schooler with a short attention span, so for your sake, I've already thought up a way to train and raise the temperature of your flames!

Having 55 seconds as a base seemed like enough to work with. Of course, I would have her do the new applicability training together with the old fundamental training at the same time, but the point was that Kaburagi-san had also shifted to applicability at 44 seconds, and it had worked out fine. That was why I thought it as good a time as any to proceed with Touka-chan's applicability training.

What got my attention was the temperature of 41°C.

Why not 100°C or 36°C, but specifically 41°C? Maybe there was no reason for it, but neither could I stop thinking about it.

Speaking in broad terms, the only time humans get in contact with 41°C in everyday life is when they get sick or when they enter the bath. So I asked Kaburagi-san to check. And sure enough, although Touka-chan didn't have any clear memories of being sick, her everyday bath water was indeed set to 41°C.

When Touka-chan activated her pyrokinesis, supposedly she only felt a vague sense that she was using her power, and none of the heat. That meant that

when she was emitting flames, her body was cutting off her sense of temperature at 41°C. Therefore, I hypothesized that it was because 41°C was the temperature that she came into contact with every day that she could only emit and resist 41°C.

Kaburagi-san wanted to poke holes in my hypothesis, saying that it was too reliant on guesswork, but I disagreed. My own training in telekinesis had involved the same process of feeling, hypothesizing, experimenting, and eventual success. That had been true of Kaburagi-san's chronoprohiberis training as well.

In the first place, superpowers themselves were an illogical thing, so logic was only good enough as a source of reference. Think, and feel.

In the end, Sago-style training paid off once again. We had Touka-chan stick her hand in slightly hotter 45°C water while activating her superpower and trying to raise her temperature resistance threshold to match. She reported feeling a different kind of growth pain to what she had felt before, and lo and behold, the next day she could emit 45°C flames.

In addition, we also learned that emission and resistance activated as a set, which meant that if she was splashed with hot water when she was not emitting flames, then she would get scalded like any normal person would.

When the report that the experiment had succeeded came in, Kaburagi-san had thrown up both her hands. After sending the innocently rejoicing Touka-chan home, Kaburagi-san sat at the counter at Ama-no-Iwato and threw back consecutive sake cups of Japanese rice wine.

"About those training menus. Why does it seem like Sago-san thinking them up by feeling is more effective than me putting something together with logic? Why does that feel so unreasonable to me?"

"Uh, even if you ask me that..." If there was a difficult math test that I spent tons of time studying and memorizing equations for and then sat down at the exam hall all fired up to tackle it, only to see a kid sitting next to me solving everything perfectly with intuition alone, then even I might blow a fuse or two. So how was I supposed to answer Kaburagi-san's question?

Seeing me continue polishing a wine glass in awkward silence, Kaburagi-san

assured me that she was not blaming me or anything. “Surely Sago-san is just naturally gifted at training up superpowers. I’m going to just leave everything related to superpowers to you in the future.”

“You got it.” And that was how I got entrusted with everything related to superpowers.

As the bar master of Ama-no-Iwato, I spent everyday accumulating knowledge and technique, brushing up on my aura of dignity, and assiduously thinking up training menus.

Officially, I was only the front face of Ama-no-Iwato, the secret organization’s headquarters, and did not have any superpower. Therefore, the person thinking up the training methods was the mysterious Boss. For Touka-chan, Bar Ama-no-Iwato’s master was just a surly-faced dude who never stopped polishing wine glasses save but to serve coffee. At the very least, I wanted to get closer to her before summer break ended. Though it was completely a case of me reaping the seeds I sowed as it was nobody but myself that had decided on a reticent and unsocial character.

As for Touka-chan’s training for higher temperatures, we settled on increments of 8°C each time, which was just barely not hot enough to burn. When she was resisting 45°C, 45°C felt like 36°C (human skin temperature), which meant 46°C would feel like 37°C. In other words, going 8°C above the temperature she could resist meant the equivalent of 44°C. This was as far as we could take things without her overstretching herself.

At the start, we used water. We heated water in a pot, made sure of its temperature with a thermometer, then had her stick her hand in. 45°C, 53°C, 61°C, 69°C, 77°C, 85°C, 93°C, then finally 100°C.

Then we turned to the gas stove, which could go all the way up to 1,700°C. She would get burned if she thrust her hand into the gas stove all of a sudden, so we adjusted the temperature through a frying pan. The scene of Touka-chan pressing her hand against a heated frying pan looked like the poor girl was being forced to suffer through some terrible torture.

Graduating from the gas stove’s 1,700°C would take 200 days of 8°C each day, going by simple calculations. In other words, slightly over half a year. Let alone

summer break, even winter break would be over by then.

Though I was getting ahead of myself, I had already thought about shifting to an oxy-acetylene welding torch after the gas stove, which would give us up to $3,000^{\circ}\text{C}$. Then nitroglycerin—more commonly known as dynamite—for $4,000^{\circ}\text{C}$. To go any higher than that, we would need to go to the sun (surface temperature $6,000^{\circ}\text{C}$, core temperature $15,000,000^{\circ}\text{C}$).

With the limit of nitroglycerin (which was much more accessible than the sun) being at $4,000^{\circ}\text{C}$, that worked out to about a year and four months. Was that long or short? And well, all we could do was keep our fingers crossed that she didn't hit her growth limit under 100°C to become Water Warming Girl. The fact of it being entirely possible was what kept us on the edge of our seats. If she could at least become capable of setting paper on fire (450°C), then that would be enough to look cool.

Around the time when she successfully exceeded 100°C and graduated from the danger zone of being Water Warming Girl, August had rolled around, and we also had her begin what I called flamethrower training.

By default, Touka-chan could only envelop her hands in flames. That was cool in its own right, but if things remained that way, then she would become a Magical MMA Girl who punched everything with flaming fists. It wouldn't hurt to learn how to extend her range, which in the simplest form was to spray flames like a flamethrower.

Flamethrower training began with raising the temperature on the index finger alone. So, 100°C at the index finger, 41°C at the rest of the hand. Getting the feel for maintaining this temperature difference took a week.

After she managed to raise the temperature on the index finger alone, then next was the thumb alone, pinky alone, ring finger alone, then middle finger alone, in order. Likely due to having gotten the knack from the index finger at the start, this took only 3 more days.

Successfully managing the temperature difference between fingers meant moving onto different parts of the hand, such that by the end of that phase she could do it for a single fingernail, a single fingertip, only the wrist, or anywhere else on the entire hand.

Having mastered this, next she began training to transfer the heat. From the wrist, to the palm, to the base of a finger, to a fingertip, then back. This she repeated again and again, until finally, she could smoothly pass the heat back and forth like the ebb and flow of a wave. Then lastly, all that was left... was to just unleash the momentum! If the heat actually projected riding on the momentum of the waves of heat, then that would mean success.

Sure enough, by clearing the applicability training phase by phase, she became capable of consistently spewing out flames from her fingertips around the end of August. Her maximum temperature had also reached 300°C, which was just one step away from paper combustion. Setting sawdust on fire was not a problem.

At that rate, she would be ready for her first fight with a World Shadow around mid-September.

Another development that happened in August was that the duration of how long Touka-chan could keep her flames going, which Kaburagi-san and I had half thought would extend without end, finally hit its limit at 18 hours. The two of us, who had already made peace in our hearts—*Ahh, this must be youth*—weren't quite sure whether to feel relieved or disappointed about it.

Though, in the first place, there wouldn't ever be an opportunity for 18 continuous hours of flame emission. Factor in time for sleeping, and for all intents and purposes, 18 hours equated to being unlimited. Going forward, we would be concentrating only on the applicability training to raise temperature and expel flames.

Now then, summer break for a student naturally also meant homework. Aside from when she was in the underground base doing training that had to be kept secret, Touka-chan was sitting at a table in the air conditioned bar, enjoying a fulfilling life the dream of many an adolescent boy's fantasy. Specifically, she was getting one-on-one tutoring from a young, beautiful tutor on an almost daily basis. And this young, beautiful tutor was a Tokyo University graduate to boot.

Dammit, I wanted secret personal lessons like this during my summer break too. Make sure to fully bask in your youth, Touka-chan. Ten years later and it'll

be too late to cry about it.

During the course of the summer break, Kaburagi-san and Touka-chan grew to become as close as sisters. Touka-chan looked up to Kaburagi-san as a role model of the ideal adult woman, but it wasn't to the degree of blindly accepting everything she said or did. When Kaburagi-san would start drinking come twilight, Touka-chan would make a disapproving face (because apparently consumption of alcohol was forbidden in Buddhism). On the other hand, Touka-chan clearly often stayed up late at night, in spite of repeated admonitions from Kaburagi-san about the negative effects that had on her skin.

Touka-chan's "my pace" and "my rule" characteristics were also reflected in her belief system. After watching her for a long time, I gradually came to realize that Touka-chan's "Way of Buddhism" was actually quite half-assed. What she did was basically cherry-pick only the teachings she liked from the large range of all the schools of Buddhism that existed. She held Buddha in esteem, but branded all monks as degenerates that extorted money from parishioners. She shunned alcohol, but had no problem wolfing down meat.

When Kaburagi-san pointed that out, Touka-chan got defiant and said, "It's all right. Buddha has a generous, forgiving heart."

That's not the issue here though, is it...?

I also wanted to grow close to Touka-chan, but she showed absolutely no sign of opening her heart to me. The fact that nothing would happen if I only waited passively, that nothing would begin if I didn't take the first step, I already knew full well. If I wanted to get closer to Touka-chan, then I had to do something about it myself.

Consequently, I took to studying latte art during the summer break. Cute latte art was a surefire way to get to an adolescent girl's heart. Ama-no-Iwato was a bar, but during the daytime it could be a café. Then there would be no problem serving latte art.

My character thus underwent a slight alteration to incorporate the feeling of an awkward father with a stoic appearance and mannerisms hesitantly trying to close the distance to an adolescent daughter through heartwarming latte art.

Kaburagi-san worried about me—"Are you sure you can fully act out such a

complicated character?”—but I was beginning to feel slightly left out seeing the two of them get along together so well, so I stuck to my guns. I was also worried about fading away into the background if the female-to-male ratio grew any larger, so I insisted ahead of time that the next member be a boy.

After getting Kaburagi-san to buy me an espresso machine and all the other equipment needed to do latte art, I practiced assiduously when Touka-chan was downstairs training. Kaburagi-san indeed lived up to her role as Amaterasu’s patron with how readily she bought anything I asked for. I had almost no memory of Kaburagi-san saying “no” when I activated the “Buy me this, Kaburagi Mommy!” card.

Am I turning into a leech? But thank you, I am always in your care.

I was much more skillful with my telekinesis than my hands, to the degree where I could draw out Byodoin Temple’s Phoenix Hall without any practice (Kaburagi-san absolutely loved it). However, the setting was that the bar master did not possess a superpower, so I couldn’t cheat like that in front of Touka-chan.

The last day of summer break, because Kaburagi-san was absent, Touka-chan was sitting in the corner seat and quietly copying the Heart Sutra by hand. Without saying anything, I walked over and served her a cup of coffee, complete with latte art.

Touka-chan first stiffened up at my sudden approach, but the instant she saw the latte art, her eyes went wide. “It’s a kitty cat! It’s so cute!” Her face brightened up like the sun.

So bright! She was much cuter than the art, of course.

I had to use telekinesis to stop my facial expression from crumbling into a smile and maintain my usual surly face.

With the ice broken between us, Touka-chan offered me her thanks. *Now aren’t you glad you did that, Bar Master?*

After summer break ended, Touka-chan transferred schools and began a brand-new life. For my part, I tried to help alleviate any stress from the new surroundings she might have been feeling by supplying her with endless cups of

latte art. And hey, if doing so meant me earning more points with her, then all the better.

That's right. Starting from the second semester, Touka-chan was going to begin living in a company-owned house belonging to her father's company that was located in Adachi City in Tokyo, which "just happened" to also be where Bar Ama-no-Iwato was located. That also meant transferring to the nearby middle school.

This was all made possible by Kaburagi-san's arrangements.

There were two main reasons why we did this: because of the commute time, and also to improve her family conditions.

First, the commute. Traveling from the Hasumis' previous house in Saitama Prefecture to Ama-no-Iwato in Tokyo took an hour by train. Up till then, Touka-chan had been on summer break so it was fine, but spending two whole hours commuting after school on a school day was too much to ask for. The train fare was also no small expense.

Next, improving her family conditions. In the first place, Touka-chan's parents were at odds with each other mainly because of her father's low salary. So what Kaburagi-san did was offer his company a huge investment, which came with the condition of sending him to the company's head office in Tokyo with a raise in salary. The company immediately folded before the sight of a number that seemed like it had one zero too many. In this way, her father officially got his promotion.

Although it was a rather abrupt and off-season personnel change, because the company presented it as one of the brass just happening to notice Touka-chan's father's honest work attitude and putting in a word somewhere, the person in question did not suspect anything and simply rejoiced at his fortune. Having been freed from her reluctant part time job thanks to her husband's salary raise, her mother also rejoiced. Then, talk of moving house came up due to the job transfer. As she had no friends in school anyway, Touka-chan had no reason to object. And that was how the Hasumi family got all their things together and moved house in a jiffy.

Touka-chan happily reported that her parents had stopped fighting after the

talk of the job transfer came up.

Her power to shape the situation to her liking with a wad of bills was one of Kaburagi-san's strengths. But then again, the cost of bulldozing our way through this incident was a rather significant portion of her personal assets. She apparently was trying to think something up as it seemed likely that we might find ourselves facing similarly large expenditures later down the line.

Incidentally, Touka-chan's transfer was something that we had been considering ever since we recruited her.

Have you caught on yet?

Indeed, it was because we were going to recreate the done-to-hell-and-back cliché of "a pretty girl transferred in and it turns out she's an esper!" Just wait and see! I'm going to set up the perfect boy-meets-girl encounter!

Chapter 11: The Scripted Boy-Meets-Girl

The candidate that I had selected in opposition to Touka-chan was one Shouta Takahashi-kun (14 years old, middle school second year) of Adachi City, Tokyo. In the first recruitment round he became relegated to “we’ll remain in great expectation of your wonderful achievements in the future,” but in the second round, he was finally officially accepted. Kaburagi-san and I were planning on accepting only one candidate per recruitment round until the two of us got more used to running a secret organization.

So then, now we laid out the profile compiled through the telekinetic-style background check that I had explained before. Incidentally, because Shouta-kun was a guy, Kaburagi-san heartlessly did not issue a ban on peeking at him showering/changing/using the toilet. Well I mean, as another guy I was not going to willingly seek out after another guy’s fanservice scenes, so I wasn’t going to be doing any peeking anyways.

So, Shouta Takahashi, 14 years old. Average height and build, black hair cut short. Born and raised in the same condo in Adachi City in Tokyo his entire life. Family of four composed of his parents, himself, and a brother who was three years older. Grades in the upper spectrum of the bottom half of the grading curve. Clearly one of those “can do it when putting in the effort” types, yet wouldn’t study before a test unless his parents got really annoying about it. Slightly above average in regards to physical prowess. So-so for a kid in the go-home club.

His hobbies included TV, smartphone games, karaoke, and manga. I also caught him recently taking to searching up sexy pics when he thought his family members weren’t watching. Apparently he was in the big boobs faction. *Sorry for exposing your sexual preference.*

He had friends like any normal kid. After school, they would drop by a fast food restaurant, and on off days they would gather together at someone’s house with consoles in hand to fight PVP matches or go out to sing karaoke

together. The so-called “study sessions” that they held before tests usually ended with them just wasting time chatting away. Although there wasn’t a specific girl who he hung out with consistently, neither did he put up any walls against girls. It had been half a year since he last had a girlfriend.



So far, everything was super normal and unremarkable.

He wasn't particularly living life to the fullest, but neither was he particularly suffering from any misfortune. Being alive was pretty fun, and his day-to-day experience was so wholesome and generic that it would never occur to him to ask himself the question "do I find life enjoyable or painful?" In comparison to Kaburagi-san's and Touka-chan's histories, his was so normal that it might give the viewer a vague sense of "this ain't right." The only thing that could possibly be considered special about him was that he had had a girlfriend and had already lost his V-card by second year in middle school.

However, even so!

...No, really, that was it for Shouta-kun's history.

No strange sexual tendencies! Though granted, the reason why his previous girlfriend had broken up with him was that he had touched her boobs out of the blue when she wasn't feeling it, but that wasn't particularly noteworthy coming from a middle school boy.

No dark backstory! He had no history of being bullied, and neither had he ever been a bully. Sometimes he would argue with family members calling them "idiot" and "stupid," but again that was within the scope of what happened in common families.

Although Kaburagi-san could logically understand, she could not empathize with why I chose Shouta-kun. But the way I saw it, it was his normalness that made him perfect as a candidate.

The ennui and desire for the extraordinary that Shouta-kun nursed were feelings that I was all too familiar with. Manga could be interesting. Mobile games could also be interesting. There were so many sources of entertainment. But still, it was not enough. It felt like something was missing somewhere, somehow. After reading a blood-pumping battle scene, the thought "*I so want to do this too!*" would rise unbidden while I was still excited. But, no go. Couldn't do it. 'Cus reality was in the way.

In daydreams, there would be plot twists and happenings one after another, cute girls galore, grand achievements, adventures, romance, epic ownage, and

so much more. After being overly used to such rushes of excitement, real life, though substantial, felt unsatisfying somehow. I knew that that was what people commonly call a “first world problem.” Despite living a life where I had everything I needed at my disposal, I still wanted more.

However, despite the burning desire for even stronger stimulation, despite all the wishes for the extraordinary, Shouta-kun put in no effort whatsoever! Instead, he had adopted a 100% passive stance of “If only a beautiful girl would fall down from the sky~” or “If only I would awaken to a superpower~” He was just waiting, in this shitty world of reality where nothing interesting happens if you don’t make it happen yourself.

Ahhh! Just thinking about it made me wince. In the past, I was Shouta-kun. Shouta-kun was the me before I awakened to telekinesis. In this modern-day Japan, surely there were mountains of youngsters like Shouta-kun who were carrying out fulfilling lives of ennui.

Therefore, Mr. Telekinesis and Ms. Chronoprohiberis were going to present Shouta-kun with a present of the extraordinary (cultured product).

I knew that Shouta-kun had gotten into fantasy-style light novels as of late and was borrowing and lending them with friends. The chuuni notebook hidden in the lowest drawer of his desk was also no secret from me.

We very carefully carried out the preparations for Shouta-kun’s induction into the extraordinary. Firstly, we made sure that Touka-chan transferred into the same school and same class as Shouta-kun. Here, too, Kaburagi-san’s superpower of “being rich” did amazing work. The school found it suspicious as hell that she asked for the right to decide class sorting (and have it remain a secret) even though she was not an alumni nor did she have a child enrolled in the school. However, at times, slapping someone’s face with a wad of cash was more effective than telekinesis. Kaburagi-san pushed through with a glib tongue and forcefulness. Worst-case scenario, I was ready to use telekinesis to overwrite or swap the class sorting papers stored in a cabinet in the teacher’s lounge. But that would be very unnatural, so I was glad that we successfully made it happen through the proper channels (money).

Next was influencing Touka-chan’s new place of residence. We made sure

that she moved into the company residence closest to Shouta-kun's condo. If they lived on opposite sides from school, then it would make it hard to carry out the "By coincidence I just happened to witness the shocking truth about the cute transfer student" event.

Same class. Same direction home. This was important. If either of these were not met, then, well. "A cute girl transferred in, but we were in different classes, our homes were in different directions, of course we didn't meet each other on off days." Then all the way till graduation, nobody would discover anything about anybody and everybody would just graduate as strangers. That's why Kaburagi-san and I decided to take extra measures, because we could see things turning out that way all too easily.

So then. With all preparations in place, finally it was time to begin Operation Boy Meets Girl.



Shouta-kun's class was in an uproar over the pretty girl who had transferred in over the summer break.

Touka-chan herself was already quite cute. Add on to that all the advice and training that Kaburagi-san had bestowed upon her over summer break, and she was already a completely changed person from before. She had learned how to put on makeup and how to present herself. The improvement in her family's circumstances and her having gained reliable adults in her life (us) had softened her aura somewhat. Furthermore, having gained a superpower had enabled her to become more confident in herself.

Her new classmates, in their middle school way, felt that something was different about her. As if she was more comfortable in her skin. An intangible aura of confidence. She became the center of attention in her class almost immediately. During the breaks between classes, she was encircled by girls bombarding her with questions. In contrast, guys tried to get close by offering to guide her around the school or whatnot. In response, the girls then tried to push the guys away from her, seemingly fueled by some enigmatic sense of duty. She was being pulled left, right, and center. The normally serene and quiet Touka-chan looked slightly taken aback by all the ruckus, but she still managed

to handle everything in a calm manner.

I was worried whether there would be any girls jealous of her popularity with the boys like in her old school, but thankfully that proved to be unfounded worry. There I was, watching on heartwarming while feeling relieved that it was a class of kind kids, when Kaburagi-san explained, “The girls sensed that Touka-chan lived in a world different from their own, which meant she would not be a rival and thus did not need to be kicked down. That’s why they’re fussing over her instead, because being able to claim a close relationship with a popular and cute girl would raise their own value.” When I heard that, I just despaired. Maybe we should have just made girls the World Shadows. *They’re freaking terrifying, damn.*

Faintly clad in an air of mystery, like a flower on a high peak, and cute. Quite good at studying, but not so athletic, yet the gap only served to add to her charm. This was her class’ general opinion of her after several days.

Furthermore, Touka-chan was keeping the whole Buddhism thing under wraps. When she was asked “What’s your favorite song?” by the question-loving girls, she was not bold enough to answer “Heart Sutra” outright. The “H—” part did come out of her mouth, though.

As for Shouta-kun, he was among the mass of boys trying to get close to Touka-chan. The approach he came up with was to offer to help with her class duties, but just like the other boys, he was summarily chased away by the army of girls. Then during swimming class, he was only within the mass of boys, this time to ogle at Touka-chan in her school swimsuit. All in all, he was normal. Their homes were indeed in the same direction, but the role of guiding her to and from school while she was still new to the area was completely hogged by the girls, to his great disappointment.

Due to being a transfer student, Touka-chan was assigned the very last in both class number and seating position. In contrast, Shouta-kun’s last name of “Takahashi” caused him to number around halfway on the roll. Therefore, his seat was further in the front, such that he was physically distanced from Touka-chan in class.

But well, this was expected. If he was aggressive enough to break through the

barricade of girls to make a pass at her or stalk her home to find out where she lived, then I wouldn't have chosen him as a member of our secret organization in the first place. This was par for the course.

About a week after the transfer, the heightened mood of the class slowly began to settle down. Despite feeling very regretful, Shouta-kun, along with many of the other boys in the class, gradually shifted to a more passive stance in regards to getting close to Touka-chan, coming to terms with the fact that such beneficial coincidences won't happen naturally. Just being lucky enough to be in the same class as the school's prettiest girl became enough for them.

But see, that complacency.

That's no good.

Absolutely no good.

We couldn't have that.

The story would end right then and there.

And thus, that's where our Operation kicked into motion.



After school on a certain day, Touka-chan was, as always, invited by some girls to go home together. But she had turned them down, this too being as always. The reason was so that she didn't drag anyone else into her fight against World Shadows.

Touka-chan, for her part, was already progressing on her own story. Since the day she transferred in, she had already experienced three fights against World Shadows. During her first battle, she was stiff with nerves and ended up taking a Tentacle Punch in her shoulder, which almost made her cry. However, she gradually learned how to keep the Shadows at bay and weaken it with bursts of fire before ultimately finishing it off with a kick to its nucleus. After establishing that fighting style from the first fight, for the successive fights she repeated it again, with increasing confidence. It seemed like she might even be close to being able to win coolly by incinerating the nucleus with a concentrated burst of fire.

The setting went that World Shadows are the manifestations of the desires of humans starved for power and target espers, but generally they only appear during dusk or nighttime and only in places with very little people.

Why was that, you ask?

Well, if you want the meta answer, then it was because if they appeared willy-nilly during the daytime and Touka-chan had to mobilize every time that happened, then her attendance record would be severely affected and she would have to repeat the year. And if they appeared in places with lots of people, then it would turn into a big tumult and our secret organization wouldn't be a secret anymore.

The lore-friendly answer, so to say, was that due to their nature of being “the desires of people starved for power,” they were affected by people's general unconscious prohibition against employing violence in the daytime in front of many people. It was the same reason why delinquents would remain docile when passing through the business district during the day but then go wild doing whatever they did behind the school building around twilight.

And thus, Touka-chan was going home by herself.

Shouta-kun saw her go, and then also made to leave as well, as he had made plans to meet up at a friend's house after he dropped off his stuff at home. But as he was on his way toward the shoe lockers, he noticed a sheet of paper floating to the ground in the hallway. He picked it up, and gasp, was this not Touka-chan's copy of the notice of the upcoming Parents' Day! What fortuity! What a coincidence! Surely this was the work of a certain telekinetic who had secretly slipped it out of Touka-chan's bag and put it in place exactly when Shouta-kun was passing by!

It had not been long since Touka-chan had left school. Shouta-kun hesitated briefly, but then opted out of the innocuous choice of putting it into her desk, choosing to run after her instead. Of course he did. This was a chance for him to get closer with a pretty girl. He wasn't going to let this chance go to waste.

Around the time when Shouta-kun dashed out of the school, Kaburagi-san wrapped up the long phone call she had been having with Touka-chan to slow her down and informed her in a serious voice that Boss had just sensed the

appearance of a World Shadow. After being notified of the location, Touka-chan confirmed in a slightly nervous tone that she could head over with haste.

With perfect timing, Shouta-kun managed to catch a glimpse of her in the distance just when she hung up and took off at a run, her short hair waving in the wind. Shouta-kun was surprised to see her suddenly start running, but then quickly gave pursuit.

It was twilight. The sky was slowly being dyed madder red.

Things were going well. It could probably be said that the most difficult part of setting up something like this was the time coordinating, making sure that everybody was where they were supposed to be when they were supposed to be there.

Touka-chan gradually headed down roads with less and less people, and Shouta-kun followed suit. He was faster on foot, so the distance between them was gradually shrinking.

And then, right before he entered within shouting distance of her, Touka-chan abruptly turned into a narrow alleyway.

Naturally, Shouta-kun also rushed in in pursuit.

The Parents' Day notice was still firmly in his grasp, and he was panting heavily. He looked up to call out to her... and witnessed the scene of a pretty girl in a sailor uniform incinerating a freakish black slime-like monster with crimson flames emitting from her hands.

"Hasumi...-san...?"

"?!"

The ordinary boy, Shouta Takahashi, who murmured in blank astonishment.

The beautiful girl who transferred in, Touka Hasumi, who could not hide her "oh no!" face with wide open eyes.

———On that day, the young man's ordinary days went up in flames.

"Sooo... what's with the narration?"

"UWAH! K-Kaburagi-san, please tell me if you're here!"

I was happily providing commentary while munching on dried squid back at Ama-no-Iwato, with my guard entirely down, when abruptly Kaburagi-san popped up out of the blue, obviously having stopped time and erased her presence just to sneak up on me. I jumped almost to the ceiling, I swear. So embarrassing.

After that, she just wouldn't stop smirking for the longest time.

Chapter 12: The Start-Up Secret Organization

“For now, don’t move. Stay there.” After becoming freed from her frozen status, Touka-chan took out a small fire extinguisher from her bag and sprayed the weeds growing in the cracks between the sidewalk bricks that were smoldering. The abrupt visitation of the extraordinary had receded as quickly as it had arrived. Though small, the all-too-familiar red extinguisher that could be seen around every single corner at school being discharged in bursts of white smoke dragged Shouta-kun back to his senses, bewildered though he still was.

I get it, I totally get it. “Is this fantasy? Reality? Which is it?” is what you’re feeling, right? But sorry, it would be a big problem if a fire started, so this is necessary...

As someone who had already experienced a lot of things beyond what normal middle schoolers would, Touka-chan’s handling was calm and on point. While keeping an eye on Shouta-kun, she called Kaburagi-san. Kaburagi-san then instructed her to bring Shouta-kun to Ama-no-Iwato, so that she could decide whether to take measures to ensure his silence or, if he happened to have a superpower sleeping inside him as well, to also recruit him to the organization. The reality, of course, was that recruitment was the only option.

Along the way to Ama-no-Iwato, Touka-chan relied on only two lines to fend off Shouta-kun’s barrage of questions: “I am sworn to secrecy” and “We are going to meet my superior now so ask your questions then.” However, those answers only served to make Shouta-kun more and more excited.

The pretty transfer student’s true identity was a pyrokinetic! Furthermore, she apparently belonged to some sort of organization, and was carrying out secret missions for it! Touka-chan, for her part, honestly just wasn’t sure how much she could say and thus wasn’t saying anything, but to Shouta-kun’s ears, it must have sounded like she was leading him on. His curiosity was being stoked higher and higher in an endless loop.

Eventually, they arrived at Ama-no-Iwato. The sight of Touka-chan

approaching the shady store with a CLOSED sign out and opening the door without any hesitation whatsoever caused Shouta-kun to falter for a brief moment, but then stars seemed to explode out of his eyes as he followed her in. That seemed like the right time to switch over from telekinetic stalking mode.

I shot Shouta-kun a glare when he walked in, but then quickly returned to polishing the wine glass in my hand with the usual sour look on my face. That was it for my role this time. After that, I just had to wait for a chance to transplant a telekimuscle fragment onto Shouta-kun while he was occupied listening to Kaburagi-san talk.

The sight of the beautiful lady wearing a fluttery, ultramarine dress more grandiose than anything he had seen before sitting at a table with the Archaic smile on her face almost caused Shouta-kun to stumble backward in shock. That was, until his eyes were drawn to the lady's very voluptuous breasts. However, seeing her "sister" being the target of such lecherous eyes soured Touka-chan's mood, prompting her to slap Shouta-kun's face with a sutra, which did successfully bring him back to his senses. He grabbed whatever it was that had hit his face, saw that it was a sutra, then fell into even greater confusion than before.

Girls, don't you think you're being too heavy-handed with your characters from the get-go? Shouta-kun's head is giving off steam right there. Let's go a bit easier on him, yeah?

After that, Kaburagi-san gave Shouta-kun the full brief, during which he couldn't help but to sneak occasional glances at her bosom. The story went that by sitting across from him, she determined that he did indeed have a Seed sleeping inside him, so after listening to everything she had to say, then he would be given the choice whether to step foot into this side of the world or not.

In truth, a lot of people had those Seeds, but they were buried so deep within that even World Shadows could not sense them. Normally, those people went about their entire lives with that Seed remaining buried, never getting involved with World Shadows. However, sometimes something could act as a catalyst that caused that Seed to react. When in that state of half-awakeness, it could

be sensed by World Shadows, which would invite them to attack. Touka-chan had half-woken by herself and thus got attacked in this way.

Shouta-kun also had a superpower sleeping inside him. If he so wished, then the mysterious Boss could use his mysterious power to wake it up fully. If he didn't want it, then he'd just be left alone.

In addition, the ability to detect Seeds was very rare, so rare that only Boss and Kaburagi-san had it. There's no helping that only two people had it, it was just that rare. Yep.

"Even though you are still a minor, the moment you resolve yourself to step into our world, then you will be treated according to the customs of our world. In both the good and the bad. You don't have to decide immedia—"

"I'll do it! Please let me do it!" Shouta-kun's answer was quick. He seemed very motivated too. Though well, he had yet to experience firsthand the terror of a World Shadow. Clearly, he was only thinking of this as an opportunity to share a "secret relationship" with the cute girl who slapped his face with a sutra and a beautiful lady wearing fantastical clothing (and a surly-faced uncle who seemingly never stopped wiping that wine glass as a plus one). As a clincher, he would get a superpower out of it. There was no reason to refuse. The thought of taking some time to properly consider the offer probably never even crossed his mind. *That's youth for you, isn't it? Run, young man, run.*

Around when their conversation wrapped up, I had also successfully completed the transplant. So before it got any later, Shouta-kun exchanged contact info with only Kaburagi-san and Touka-chan and then went home. As for the bar master that he skipped... he didn't care about being skipped. *Sniff.* There was no need for them to exchange contact info. Shouta-kun probably thought that it'd be hard to talk to said bar master because of his surly face. That was definitely it.

Touka-chan was extremely indignant, raging about how "Takahashi definitely doesn't know the Buddhist Five Precepts nor the Noble Eightfold Path. He's full of worldly desires!" But after she said everything she wanted to say, she also went home. Situation resolved.

What superpower would Shouta-kun awaken to? Would we be able to

incorporate it into our “extraordinary” narrative? Would he also turn Buddhist? I could hardly wait to find out.

On another note.

During the time when we waited for the telekimuscle fragment to attach to Shouta-kun and mutate, Kaburagi-san and I busied ourselves searching for ways to raise money. The reason was because stock trading, cryptocurrency, and forward trading on a personal level was not going to be enough to cover our secret organization’s operation costs, especially if we were to continue to expand our scale in terms of both membership and activity. This was all the more true due to the fact that our capital had decreased quite significantly from our recent expenses. Unfortunately, World Shadows didn’t drop money when defeated. We were deep in the red just by keeping the organization itself running.

The one thing we had going for us was our access to superpowers. So Kaburagi-san brainstormed several ideas for how to make easy money without it causing too big a fuss.

I also tried to brainstorm something, but no good ideas came to mind. Ok look, I was the kind of person who joined a company straight out of university, only to learn that the company was exploitative af. So in short, the only experience I ever had with working was being used as a mere cog in the world of corporate slavery. So it was way too tall of an order to ask me to come up with an idea for earning money. Off the top of my head, I could only think of robbing a bank or assaulting yakuza bases. I was confident I could pull it off without leaving any evidence behind, but it would become an insanely bizarre phenomenon that I could just see becoming the talk of the entire world. In addition, I didn’t want to resort to illegal methods, not when we weren’t even backed into a corner.

After bouncing a lot of ideas off of each other, we ended up with seven money-making schemes that passed Kaburagi-san’s logic filter.

1) Taking videos of animals that would be impossible to take through normal means. This means bucketloads of precious footage of super rare animals living in super hard-to-reach or outright unexplored areas of the world. Such as in

Antarctica or deep under the ocean.

2) Private courier service. I could easily send even ten copies of the Statue of Liberty flying at Mach 10 simultaneously.

3) Private space business. Including launching rockets up and maintaining man-made satellites. Everything about this could be taken care of with telekinesis.

4) Mountain rescue. I could search from both sky and ground and even rescue with great speed. Whereas such search & rescue operations usually required enormous amounts of money, we could offer our services at ultra low prices.

5) Picking up asteroids or meteoroids. Apparently scientists would buy them at sky high prices. I'd make a killing just by picking up rocks in space.

6) Boosting electricity generating facilities based on hydropower or wind turbines. The only difference between them is *what* it is that turns the turbines. I could use telekinesis to turn them, yo.

7) Pulling up resources from the bottom of the ocean. Are you thinking that it's not worth it setting up pipelines all the way to the ocean floor? We have the perfect service for you: telekinesis!

So then, we looked at each one of them with greater attention.

Firstly, due to the issue of credibility, it would take quite some time for four out of the seven to generate any significant profits.

Hey there, do you want to buy this close-up footage of animals that no one knows much about due to living in incredible hard-to-reach places? For example, this is one of a snow leopard living in alpine heights. And this is a giant squid that lives in the mesopelagic zone! Now, although that might be material that biologists would water at the mouth for, credibility would be hard to establish. If asked, "This is an incredible video! But how did you take it?", then we wouldn't be able to answer. Worse case, our videos become suspected of being mere CG, as fabrication of data isn't that rare an occurrence in the academic world. It would probably take a lot of effort to sell people on suspicious video footage whose origins couldn't be traced.

Those large shipments that you usually send by tankers and trains, such as

petroleum and other raw materials, we can deliver for you at Mach 10! Freight charge, zero! Fuel surcharge, zero! On top of that, it's fast and safe! But again the issue of credibility comes up. We might have been able to rack up some business delivering small packages, but that wouldn't yield any significant profit. To earn big, we would need big jobs. But who would entrust a big job to a delivery service that relies on unexplainable and untrackable delivery methods? It would only invite suspicions of failed or delayed deliveries, or even of us running away with the goods. Furthermore, it was my understanding that the market for international courier servicing was already locked down tight from mutual interests and all that. Any newcomer who tried to carve out a piece of the pie would get stomped. Hard.

As a derivation of the delivery idea, delivering things to space. I could easily send up cargo several tons in weight with telekinesis and leave them in geostationary orbit, and each time I did so, I would earn 7 billion yen! Too easy! There's no job on Earth that pays a daily wage of 7 billion yen. This would go way beyond making a killing.

However, yet again, this would be difficult to pull off in a short time frame due to credibility.

What goes up in rockets are generally things like supplies and experimental materials for space stations, man-made satellites, and space exploration probes. Do you know how much money those organizations spend on those things? After pouring in all that time and money and passion into making what is essentially their baby, do you think they'd then entrust it to some random space launch company that seems so wrapped in mystery?

Mountain rescue. The good thing about this idea was that I would get called to action only when someone gets trapped or stranded on a mountain, which meant I could use the rest of the time however I wanted. Take snow-capped mountains that would be a challenge to summit, such as K2 or Everest. Telekinesis would never be undeployable for search & rescue due to bad weather conditions. Because I would have to search by sight through telekinesis, I wouldn't be able to guarantee 100% success. But even so, it would still be much more efficient and quicker than any human search party.

But once more, credibility. Search parties are literally the last lifeline.

Mountain climbers, on their part, would naturally request rescue from parties with a notable track record that they can trust. Telekinetic-style Search and Rescue Co. would do a job worth every penny of the large premium, but I couldn't imagine us getting jobs all that often. Furthermore, the fact that this method would mean me becoming responsible for actual human lives was too heavy for me, so I'm, well, less than enthusiastic about it, shall we say.

The four listed above could indeed be made possible by starting with small jobs and steadily building up trust and credibility. If we did them, we would do them conscientiously, and it could be argued that telekinesis was basically just a highly developed version of existent methods. Results are bound to follow steady accumulation of achievements. As long as we put in enough time, they were bound to pay off. Especially in regards to the rocket idea, Kaburagi-san had a friend from her university days who was starting up a venture business in that field, so we actually did begin talks about using telekinesis to send things up to space. After very strongly ensuring his silence, we showed him glimpses of what I could do so that he could use it as a reference for his plans. The answer that he gave us was that it might be possible to send the first telekinetically powered trip up in two years, if things went smoothly.

But, well. Honestly speaking, that time frame was a bit inconvenient for us. Two years at the earliest, maybe three years? Worst case, five years, or even ten years? It would take time to build up trust, and during that time our earnings would be a mere pittance. We would have to keep the secret organization running for several years on unreliable funding while continuously having effort and time diverted elsewhere.

The only possible breakthrough, the space idea, was indeed progressing, but we still very much wanted an easy source of income that would be a *little* bit easier to achieve.

Now, as for the fifth method of picking up meteorites, that wouldn't require any credibility. Meteorites were things that could fall just about anywhere, so I could just telekinetically pluck a meteoroid out of space. Then I would just have to repeatedly insist "I picked it up" like a slightly dull elementary schooler and no one would be the wiser. And yet a good one could fetch me several millions. Hooray for "finders keepers."

But there were two obstacles to this plan. Number one, it would be very hard to sell it without a certification of authenticity from a proper appraiser. Number two, I would have to look for a lump of rock within the wide expanse of space.

The certificate we could probably procure by bringing the meteorite to the right appraiser. So that left the problem of actually finding the rock. My telekinetic sixth sense was really just me imparting my five senses to telekinesis. An easier way to describe this is that I was making a dummy out of telekinesis and then seeing and hearing through that dummy. I could not do large area sweeps. Well, technically I could spread out a thin telekinetic membrane, impart the five senses to it, then wave it around like a fan, but doing so was incredibly tiring. It was still tough for me to perform “deployment of a spread out telekinetic membrane,” “long distance control,” “five senses bestowal,” and “move” all at the same time. *Yes I know, I need to train more.*

Unfortunately, the drastic measure of nabbing a random piece of debris from the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter was as yet beyond me. The range of my telekinesis, after all my steady and diligent training, was only enough to circle the earth once. Even the moon was too far away for me, so something even farther than Mars was entirely out of the question. Even if I were to continue training diligently, it would take me anywhere from several years to over a decade before I could reach the asteroid belt. And that was based on the assumption that I myself had no growth limit. Also, bringing it over would be too conspicuous. My telekinesis was not capable of camouflaging or making something invisible, after all.

Just picking up a random meteorite near earth was possible. Possible, but a huge pain in the butt, would still be very conspicuous, and would rely heavily on luck.

Earning money by generating energy. Now we were talking.

There were actually quite a lot of hydroelectric and wind turbine power plants that were privately owned. However, the majority of them were in less than ideal locations and thus could only generate less than ideal amounts of power. Some others were just deteriorating from age. So in short, many of them were in danger of becoming bad debts, if they weren't already one. In the first place, the mechanism behind most power plants was “make/harness kinetic energy to

move a turbine,” so there wouldn’t be any problems with telekinetically turning said turbine. If it came to it, we could “borrow” just the turbines and power generator parts from a decommissioned nuclear power plant.

If it were possible, we would have preferred having our own power plant through which we could then generate as much power as we wanted. But unfortunately, our decreased capital was not sufficient to invest in one from scratch. Therefore, for the time being, Kaburagi-san visited wind power plants that were struggling financially to pitch, “Would you be interested in letting us apply our technology to your wind turbines to increase your power generating efficiency? We cannot disclose the details of our technology, but we are fine with being paid only after you confirm that our technology works, and we will also pay reparations for any damages caused.” After trying several companies, finally we got “If you think you can do it then let’s see what you got! (paraphrased)” as an answer from one of them.

So we tried it.

The very next day after the contract was signed, the wind turbines abruptly began spinning like crazy thanks to the “secret technology.” The president, who honestly had only signed the contract hoping to rake in the damage indemnities, had such trouble believing what was happening that he had the measurement equipment checked three, no, four times.

However, the operators themselves were also very much in shock themselves when they saw the wind turbines suddenly pick up speed until they reached and then maintained the optimum output rate, even though there was no change in the wind. In addition, the blades turned at exactly 8 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. for exactly eight hours every day. Even though it was me obeying labor laws in my turning of the turbines, in the operators’ eyes it apparently seemed like it was the blades that had gained intelligence and were obeying the labor laws. Because of that, there was a small uprising among the workers that went along the lines of “Apply the labor law standards that even the blades obey to us humans too!” which further worsened the confusion in the company. I did feel a little sorry about that. Either way, it seemed like it would be a while until the company settled down enough to pay us the money owed us per the contract.

When that got on track, we were set to earn a billion yen every year. *We win (smug face)*. Although it was a little bit of a bother to have to continuously turn those blades, I just had to remind myself that I was doing it for an annual salary of a billion yen. The contract was written up so that the money enters Kaburagi-san's account based on the amount of power generated, so I could take leave whenever I wanted.

We had another money-making method that we were serious about: pulling up deep-sea resources.

There are plenty of rare earth elements and methane hydrate sleeping under the ocean. Though selling them was bound to fetch good money, setting up the infrastructure to mine all the way down there would be an enormous investment.

And that's where telekinesis would come in. I could just telekinetically pull up entire deposits of said rare earth materials and methane hydrate. And that would be it. For me, it was the same as picking up a rock that had fallen into a puddle.

However, just pulling them up was not enough. Dirt and other impurities would need to be purified or filtered out, and unfortunately that was not easy to achieve with telekinesis. Therefore, we decided to outsource those steps to an external company. Kaburagi-san just happened to know someone from her university days who was starting up a company in that field, so we got in contact with them and signed a partnership. Kaburagi-san would employ a "secret technology" to pull up resources from the bottom of the ocean, and the start-up company managed by her acquaintance, Kaneyama Tech, would then be in charge of the refining, processing, and selling. It was the perfect WIN-WIN partnership. We had already begun tests for the pulling up and purifying steps.

Even if it did not work out too well, this method was guaranteed to earn us at least a hundred million annually. But even more importantly, this would serve as our access point to the processing and manufacturing industry. In the future, we planned on having Kaneyama Tech make all the equipment for our secret organization. With our fates so tightly intertwined with each other, surely Kaneyama Tech would protect our secrets for us. They would never betray us or leak our information.

As laid out above, our money-making progressed quite smoothly, save for the odd bump here and there. Seeing Kaburagi-san almost dying from the workload of business plans and interest calculations and negotiations made me feel really bad. Unfortunately, me trying to help out in any way would only end up causing more trouble for her. So I was in charge of the foundation of all our plans, the telekinesis. And Kaburagi-san was in charge of everything else necessary to realize those plans.

However, despite being absolutely swamped with work, Kaburagi-san herself seemed like she was having a ton of fun. The way she put it was “The more I dream, the more it becomes reality. There’s nothing more fun than this!”

When she put it that way, I could see where she was coming from. If we were in opposite positions and I was told “You have access to as much telekinetic energy as you want, so think of a way to use it to make money!” then I would definitely become absorbed in dreaming up those business plans and whatnot. Though admittedly, I was pretty stupid compared to Kaburagi-san, so all the ideas I came up with would be crap, but still.

Kaburagi-san was so busy that she dialed down on the stock trading and other money games. From then on, she began shifting to focus on being the intermediary for all our telekinetically-reliant money-making venues.

The beautiful young woman going around offering mysterious technology to various corporations. That description fit “top brass of a secret organization” to a T.

Back when I began searching for an adjutant, I had only a vague image of a secret organization. Seeing it come together like this, step by step, made me incredibly happy.

...Perhaps it was our bad for being so occupied with all the money making, because a problem came up, and it was from within.

It was Shouta-kun.

Shouta-kun had indeed awakened to a superpower. Just like Touka-chan’s, his also turned out to be a pretty obvious one. It was cryokinesis, the ability to generate and manipulate ice. So I named his source “iceteroid.” The growth rate of his iceteroid was 1.4 at the frequency of every other day. Just like

telekinesis, the basic training was not duration of use but output, such that on day one he could only emit -0.2°C , but could continue doing so nonstop. In exchange, the instant he tried to go any colder, he felt enormous strain on his iceteroid and abruptly felt extremely tired.

Then after that, the fundamental training that had become customary by now began. However, one must not forget that Shouta-kun was but an ordinary middle school boy.

Having awakened to a superpower, of course he was over the moon. And of course, he started to get cocky.

For example, even though he was strictly told to keep his superpower a secret, he still tried to low-key brag about it to his friends (which Touka-chan managed to stop). He also pretended to be sick so he could skip school and spend the entire day having fun with freezing water in plastic bottles and the bathtub. Danger signs also began to appear, such as him pouring water into an ant nest and then destroying the nest by freezing all the water at once. *Don't you go breaking our secret organization's Five Precepts, kid.*

This was how Kaburagi-san and I finally understood how obedient and docile Touka-chan was. That's right, Shouta-kun's reaction was the more normal one.

Shouta-kun was a normal student who got caught up in the extraordinary. In other words, from his point of view, he was the protagonist of a light novel.

Well, it often happens that protagonists get drunk on their own power and mess up bad. *Shouta-kun, you didn't really have to be that much of a protagonist, you know?*

So, it was obvious what had to happen next.

It was my calling, my honor, my obligation... to give him an unwinnable fight to straighten his character out.

Chapter 13: Please Don't Be Reserved, This Unwinnable Fight Is An After-Sales Service

“Let me give him a verbal warning first,” said Kaburagi-san after blowing on a café latte with a disfigured image of a dog drawn on it. She had come to Amano-Iwato during a weekday afternoon specifically so we could discuss the details of this unwinnable fight.

Her reply prompted me to tilt my head dubiously. “If he was so smart that he would obediently back down from a verbal warning, then he wouldn't have gotten cocky in the first place. Just yesterday he froze the school pond and made a sword that he started swinging around. Thankfully Touka-chan was near and quickly melted everything. And speaking of Touka-chan, he's completely ignoring all of her warnings too.”

“Touka-chan is in the same grade as him. Him not listening to her is understandable. There's much more meaning when it's an adult giving the warning.”

“Won't having an adult giving the warning only prompt a ‘tsk, shut up, you just don't get it’?”

“Though he might dislike being warned, he might hate *not* being warned even more. Think back to your own childhood, Sago-san. Do you remember having been one-sidedly yelled at by an adult who never stopped to listen to what you had to say? Did you not think to yourself that you did not want to be that kind of adult when you grew up?”

“Ugh!” Kaburagi-san's “Verbal Attack” dealt critical damage to my mentality!

I was quite shocked to realize that I had turned into one of those adults I hated as a child without being aware of it. Kaburagi-san was right. Even if it might not be effective, we should first give Shouta-kun the opportunity to make his case and talk to him as mutual adults.

I apologize, Shouta-kun. I was in the wrong for thinking of beating you down

without giving it due thought. Please forgive me...

Though well, if verbal admonishment did not work, then I was more than ready to completely tear him a new one and knock him down a peg or two. On that front, Kaburagi-san was in complete agreement with me.

After school, even without being summoned, Shouta-kun come to Ama-no-Iwato together with Touka-chan.

“Shouta-kun, a moment please?”

“...What is it?” He apparently could already sense the incoming lecture from the sight of Kaburagi-san beckoning him over. He went over to sit across from her with a wary look on his face, casually picked up the pitcher left on the table to pour a cup for himself and chilled it with no hesitation at all.

It was clear that using his superpower was fast becoming a habit for him. Even without chilling it, there was ice in the water pitcher, so the water was already very cold.

Then Kaburagi-san proceeded to admonish him, in a manner so gentle and civil that not even a teacher or parent would adopt. However, despite looking ill-at-ease, the words “I’m sorry” never came out of his mouth. Rather, he began trying to justify himself.

“I mean, why is it so bad to show our superpowers to other people anyways? You make it sound like becoming famous is bad or something. We could be on TV! Or rather, we could earn so much money from the, what do they call it, appearance fees? These are superpowers that we have! Real ones!”

Oh yeah, suuuure that would happen. You should watch the news more, young man. Do you not know what “price of fame” means? Are you saying that you won’t mind it if one of your classmates shares an embarrassing story of you from elementary school for the entire country to hear on national TV? Trust me, you will want to die. Best-case scenario, you’ll stop going to school.

The reason why actors and actresses and idols can be all shiny and happy on TV is because they have production companies backing them up and doing all the necessary groundwork. You try going out there all nonchalant-like, you’ll only be turned into everyone’s favorite toy. Amaterasu is not here to be your

support in becoming famous.

Kaburagi-san opened her mouth to reply to Shouta-kun's half-assed logical arguments, but before she could say anything, Shouta-kun changed the topic to one that suited himself.

“Rather than that, listen to this! I did the math, you see. I started with -0.2°C and have a growth rate of 1.4 every other day, yeah? Then that means in only 44 days I could reach absolute zero! Isn't that just crazy? I'd be invincible!”

Even Kaburagi-san could not help but to smile wryly at that. I also had trouble keeping a straight face.

Invincible? Don't make us laugh. Save that for at least after you're capable of plunging the entire planet into the new Ice Age. Even if you could achieve absolute zero, Kaburagi-san could give you a heart attack in 0 seconds. Try fighting me, and you'd end up even worse than minced meat. There's always someone better than you.

After that, Kaburagi-san tried several times to steer the conversation back. However, it was clear that Shouta-kun had no intention whatsoever of listening properly. He couldn't even manage a single good excuse. Eventually, Kaburagi-san gave up trying.

In other words, Shouta-kun failed in evading his unwinnable fight.

Very well, you have made your choice. As the ancient Chinese put it, “seeing is better than hearing from a hundred witnesses.” We will now be resorting to a little bit of violence.

One unwinnable fight, coming right up.

Around the beginning of October, on a chilly day when the trees lining the streets were beginning to turn red, Touka-chan and Shouta-kun were commuting to Ama-no-Iwato as usual. As of late, Shouta-kun had been getting more and more cocky, to the point where he had taken to shaking down lower year students. However, when Touka-chan got near, he would turn docile. The reason was because whenever she caught him doing anything stupid, she would begin chanting sutras right into his ear. She was forcibly helping him earn merit and also cool his head down at the same time. It was very effective.

When the two of them stepped into the store, they found it completely empty. I was temporarily taking refuge in a nearby hotel, rolling about on the bed in one of the guest rooms while providing ongoing commentary again.

Being relatively still new to Amaterasu, it was Shouta-kun's first time being in Ama-no-Iwato with both Kaburagi-san and me absent. He turned to Touka-chan with a puzzled look, asking, "There's no one here? Where's Master?"

"Apparently out attending a consultation for fire insurance."

"Then Kaburagi-san?"

"She's attending the Ceremony of the Conferring of Duchess Peerage of the Principality of Marinland. She said she won't be back for three days."

"...Uh, what?"

"Ceremony of the Conferring of Duchess Peerage of the Principality of Marinland."

It took Shouta-kun a full ten seconds to fully process the string of vocabulary that he would never have heard if he had continued living an ordinary life.

"Umm... so that means she's gone to become a noble?"

"Mhmm."

"How does that even... that person is Japanese, isn't she? What's with her, seriously..."

She is a romantic girl who has never forgotten her childhood dream of becoming a princess. Pay her your respects. When she comes back, she'll already be a real princess.

The atmosphere had turned weird, but I decided to move the story along regardless. Before the two of them could activate the wine bottle mechanism and go downstairs, I called the bar.

The ringing of the old-fashioned phone set up in Ama-no-Iwato prompted the two of them to look at each other.

"We should probably pick that up, shouldn't we?"

"Without permission? Wouldn't that be bad?"

“But there’s no one here right now, and it might be urgent... Um, hi, this is Ama-no-Iwato.” Touka-chan had placed a hand on the receiver hesitantly, but when it continued ringing, she shored up her resolve and picked it up.

Immediately, I played the voice file that I had put through a voice changer in preparation beforehand. “Emergence of World Shadow detected. Location: Katsushika City. Has already powered up by eating and killing someone with a Seed. Enter the underground sewers through the manhole cover behind the city office of Katsushika. That is the area it has fled to. Ensure its elimination. My powers do not work well underground. Do not expect backup support. Godspeed.” The mysterious synthetic voice said everything it wanted to say and then hung up.

Touka-chan stared at the receiver dumbfoundedly, which promptly Shouta-kun to ask her impatiently, “Who was it?”

“Boss... I think. It was a synthetic voice, though. A Shadow has shown up in Katsushika City so we should go defeat it, apparently. Without backup.”

“Hah? It was Boss? So he just orders us around and sits on his ass?”

“It was soft, but I think I heard the sound of explosions in the background. I think he’s also fighting right now.”

Oh ho, there’s the Touka-chan I know! She really does pay attention. Thanks for picking up on the minor details. Incidentally, those sounds were also synthesized.

Touka-chan calmly tried to get in contact with Kaburagi-san, but Kaburagi-san had left the whole unwinnable fight scenario to me and was on her way to the actually real Conferring of Peerage ceremony with a light heart. Therefore, she was above the clouds in an airplane. Her phone was turned off. She could not be contacted.

The only adult left was the bar master, but neither Touka-chan nor Shouta-kun had his number.

The fact that there was already a casualty (※ not actually true) was frightening news. The more time that went by, the higher the possibility that more casualties would arise.

Despite feeling anxious about it, Touka-chan still decided to go defeat this World Shadow together with Shouta-kun. Although he was still being in fundamental training, Shouta-kun had already reached -10°C. Even more importantly, he was the only other person available who was in the know. She apparently made the judgment call that if she were to face off against a World Shadow that had already gotten buffed from eating someone with a Seed, then doing so together with a novice was better than doing so alone.

As for Shouta-kun himself, he was extremely excited, filled with baseless confidence that he would “finish it off in a split second!” It seemed very likely that he would still go even if Touka-chan told him not to. She didn’t really have a choice.

So the two of them flagged down a taxi and rushed to the location they were told to. After they paid the taxi fare and circled around to the back of the city office, there in the narrow alleyway between buildings, was indeed a half-opened manhole. As if that was not enough, there were wet traces that headed directly to said manhole.

It was obvious that this was the dungeon entrance that the World Shadow had gone through. Making it obvious was important. There would be no meaning in having them waste time here trying to work it out.

Shouta-kun clad both of his hands in cold air, kicked away the half-opened manhole cover, then jumped straight down. *BAM!* He clinched the landing with a loud sound. What a dashing figure he cut! But no really, that was a really foolish thing to do. If I had indeed adopted Kaburagi-san’s suggestion to “position a mob of enemies directly under the manhole cover,” then he would already be dead. *You did not have your guard up at all while jumping down just now, right?*

“Oh shit, that was a bigger drop than I expected. My feet hurt.”

“Don’t move without thinking! What would you have done if there was an ambush?!” Touka-chan illuminated her way with low-temperature flames while carefully descending down the rungs built into the wall.

Shouta-kun shook his legs to get rid of the numbness while laughing fearlessly. “World Shadows are mainly composed of water, right? Freeze them,

and they'll shatter with a punch! Easy peasy~ My ice is de~finitely much more compatible than fire."

"Didn't Kaburagi-san give you a talking down just the other day about being overconfident? You have too many worldly desires. Takahashi, you have really low merit right now."

"Oh shut up, Buddhist girl. You're so not cute."

The words that Shouta-kun spat out in response to having his parade rained on caused me to look around half instinctively. *You sure are lucky Kaburagi-san didn't hear that!* I heard it though. Even if it was the kind of abuse meant as a cover up for his embarrassment in front of a cute girl, that was beyond what I could defend. *Touka-chan does not need to shut up and she is very cute! Though she is a Buddhist girl, that part's true. But either way, don't lower my opinion of you any more. Otherwise, it just might affect how harsh your unwinnable fight is, young man.*

After that, without me having to do anything, the two espers decided on their own accord to split up. It was good in that it made my job easier, but as the senpai, Touka-chan had made the wrong judgment call in leaving Shouta-kun to face his first fight alone. Apparently she had forgotten how stiff she herself had been during her own first fight.

But with that said, Shouta-kun was also partly to blame for that confident "just leave it to me!" Just how cocky has this brat gotten, seriously. Add superpower to the feeling of invincibility unique to adolescents and you get a complete asshole, apparently. *I need to hurry up and give him the beating he deserves (musclehead thinking).*

With the light from his smartphone illuminating the shallow flow of water, Shouta-kun swiftly walked deeper and deeper into the sewers. At the very least, he had taken out the magic marker from his pencil case and was making marks on the wall every ten paces or so in order to not get lost. That I would give him credit for. So he hadn't completely lost his mind yet.

However, this was an unwinnable fight.

When he had gotten a good distance away from Touka-chan, far enough that she would barely be able to hear him scream, the star performer made its

appearance. It was a Level 2 World Shadow.

The World Shadow that was the size of an adult had been clinging to the ceiling. At this moment, it slowly oozed to the ground in front of Shouta-kun.

He let out a weird exclamation that sounded something like “*Uhhiha*,” but did not seem particularly frightened. Instead, he immediately charged forward to throw a punch.

The fist enveloped in cold air landed squarely, piercing through the black surface membrane. But then it got caught right after. It did not reach the core. Neither did the World Shadow get frozen.

“Wai—What? You...!” Shouta-kun then brandished his other fist, but the result was the same. He then tried to pull his hands out, but the World Shadow had no intention of letting go of the two hands that had invaded into its own body. To add to that, it even sprouted tentacles that hugged him from the front, aiming to envelop him completely.

Shouta-kun, game over. More like, you lost way too quickly! Though practically speaking, even without the whole “unwinnable fight” difficulty setting, this result was only natural.

Thinking about it seriously, would a tub of water freeze over with a single fist emitting -10°C ? Of course not. At most, the temperature of the water would drop just a bit and feel cooler to the touch. What Shouta-kun needed was either training to shoot his cold air from a distance, or to have generated a sword of ice ahead of time that was long enough to reach the core.

I had given the Level 2 World Shadow several features so that it could impart despair worthy of its “Level 2”-ness, such as making it capable of moving even when frozen and making its core tougher than normal stone, but all that went to waste.

“Shit, then I’ll freeze you from the inside out...!” Shouta-kun was apparently planning on a very battle manga-like plan, but he was already too late. Way too late.

Carelessness. Impudence. Hubris.

And now, he had to pay the price with his body.

“IT HUUUURRRRTTTSSS?! I’M GONNA DI—AAHHHHHHH! NO, STO—HELP, AAHHHH!”

While the World Shadow was still firmly holding Shouta-kun in its embrace, I tore a fragment off of Shouta-kun’s iceteroid. Bloodcurdling screams reverberated throughout the underground sewers.

Remember this well. This is what it means to “be eaten by a World Shadow.” Sear this feeling of having your very soul torn apart into the marrow of your bones.

Just one time was already enough to make Shouta-kun lose control of his bladder. However, I was not going to let up there, because I knew. I knew that when guys around this age taste a bit of hurt, afterward they were still filled with excuses like “I was holding back” or “I was just off my game” or “I didn’t sleep last night” or “I actually had a headache at the time.” Point is, they still wouldn’t repent. That’s why I had to corner him so badly that he wouldn’t be able to gloss it over with an excuse later.

I had to corner him...

...

I couldn’t bring myself to do it. That scream was not normal. It was on the level of someone dying in agony. The pain was so acute as to rip off the act put up by Kaburagi-san, who possessed the mental strength of orichalcum. Doing any more would just be mere torture.

Change of plan. Shouta-kun was spared from a second time. It hurt *me* listening to that scream.

Barely conscious and completely sapped of the strength to resist, Shouta-kun was just allowing himself to sink deeper and deeper into the World Shadow when abruptly, Touka-chan showed up. Upon being slashed with her blade of fire, the World Shadow faltered and spat its prey back out. Immediately after that, it was bathed in flamethrower blasts, and then its core was shattered with a precisely aimed fireball. K.O.

“Hold on, Takahashi! You all right? I heard you screaming really loud! Are you still alive?!” From Touka-chan’s point of view, considering how she had heard

Shouta-kun screaming like his soul was being torn asunder and how she had found him half swallowed by a World Shadow, the fact of him having already died was probably a very real possibility. She was beside her usual calm self as she rushed over, propped up his upper body, and shook him violently.

I had proven personally that there would be no physical injury nor any prognostic symptoms, but... he isn't going to die from shock, is he?

Shouta-kun faintly opened his eyes, looking toward Touka-chan with unfocused eyes. *What a relief, he was still alive.*

“Fire... the fire... it's so warm...”

“Oh, are you cold? Want me to warm you up?” The mumbling Shouta-kun was enveloped in lukewarm flames.

Though it was still yet autumn, this was underground, and with his cryokinesis disengaged, his cold resistance was also dispelled. *I see, so you're feeling cold, I thought, but he seemed strange somehow. He seemed to be in a trance while trying to touch Touka-chan's flames, and there was a dangerous light in his eyes.*

“So it was fire after all. Fire purifies darkness. This... so this is...”

“Takahashi? You all right? You in your right mind?” asked Touka-chan apprehensively, having also noticed that he was acting strange.

Abruptly, Shouta-kun's pupils widened and his eyes flew open all the way.

Uh-oh...

“FIRE! This... so this... IS THE TRUTH OF THE WORLD...!”

N-NOOOOOO!

He's opened a door he shouldn't have!

I overdid it!

“Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra—”

“Sorry, no, spare me the sutra chanting please.”

At a loss for what to do, Touka-chan began chanting the Heart Sutra, at which Shouta-kun immediately returned to normal. *Is that actually a spell that dispels*

debuffs?

Anyways, I'm glad he's all right after all.

Chapter 14: Be Still, My Right Arm!

After Touka-chan helped dry Shouta-kun's wet clothes with her flames, the two of them dragged their weary bodies back to Ama-no-Iwato and found me waiting with hot black coffee. Bit by bit, Touka-chan told me what had happened. I did not interrupt her, merely listening patiently with my usual surly face. Shouta-kun was sitting in a corner seat, splayed out over the table like melted ice. I decided to leave him be. Anything I said to him at that moment would only be salt on an open wound.

It did not seem the proper mood for a self-reflection debriefing nor training, so the two of them headed home with heavy steps before it got dark.

I locked the store and withdrew into my living quarters. While replaying the footage I had taken today, I held a reflection session by myself.

With the footage in front of me, the sharp contrast in Shouta-kun's attitude before and after the incident was clear to see. Before, he talked on and on and never gave it a rest, but on the way back to Ama-no-Iwato and the entire time until when he left to go home, he did not say a single word. I could tell he was down, but couldn't figure out exactly how badly.

Was he just temporarily depressed, or... *He's not going to hang himself, right?*

I got scared thinking about it. After all, adolescents do have a strong tendency of bouncing from extremes to extremes. He was just recently in seventh heaven about having become an esper. Having been slapped down from there could all too easily make him feel as depressed as if the world was ending.

Having become very worried for him, I sent out telekinesis to follow him on his way home. When I found the (probably) traumatized young man, he just happened to be walking into a home improvement center.

I was alarmed, thinking *Is he going to buy rope to commit suicide with?!*, but it turned out I was completely off the mark. After wandering around the cosmetics corner for a while, what he eventually put into his basket was red

hair dye.

What's this? He's running an errand? I don't seem to remember anyone in the Takahashi household sporting such funky hair color. I then became even more confused as, after leaving the home center having bought only the hair dye, Shouta-kun then walked into a clothing store next. There, he bought a black T-shirt with a flame pattern, as well as a lighter that he grabbed from the display shelf next to the checkout counter at the last moment.

Having seen all that, finally I was beginning to get an inkling of what this now silent and taciturn young man was thinking.

As expected, as soon as he arrived home with the shopping bags dangling from his hands, Shouta-kun made a beeline for the washroom. He changed into the T-shirt he had just bought, then proceeded to dye his own hair while consulting the instructions on the box.

When he was done, reflected in the mirror was the figure of a patient suffering from a severe case of chuuni, who was sporting the fashion of a punk kid who tried to pull off an “image change” over the summer but failed spectacularly and yet had gone too far to turn back and thus was going ahead with it anyways.

As for the person in question, he was staring into the flame from his newly bought lighter and was looking mighty pleased with himself.

OWWWWW! Cringe cringe cringe! My very soul hurt! What is with this pain, I don't remember having torn off a piece of telekimuscle!

“This is the crimson heart of fire... this is Truth.”

Shut up, don't say a single word more! What are you, a pyrokinetic?!

The dangerous door that Shouta-kun had opened, apparently had not closed. This... was half open, if I had to say.

The figure of Shouta-kun holding up the fire from the lighter like some sacred flame in a grandiose pose made me sigh deeply. So this is how those eccentric characters in light novels are born. I could now empathize with the bosses who ruled over evil organizations filled with quirky, weirdly mysterious members that they had created. Make a tiny effort to strengthen a human, and it blows

up into something way beyond expected. Going from a troubled “What is this? Why did it turn out like this? What am I supposed to do with it?” to a defiant “Oh to hell with it, let’s just go along with it then!” The ratio of guilt for having caused this to happen and amusement was about half and half, I’d say.

So, did I overdo the unwinnable fight incident? Was I in the wrong for causing this normal, ordinary young man to go mad by giving him a superpower?

...No, that was not quite the case.

Be it money, authority, or muscles, no matter what kind of “power” it was, Shouta-kun was definitely going to get cocky because of it. It just so happened that the “power” he obtained this time was a superpower. Rather than him growing up into an adult and making a terrible mistake that could not be reversed, it was much better that he made his big mistake now, in his youth, when everything could still be swept under the rug as jokes and memories. Definitely.

All right. That’s that for my self-justification. Even parents can’t fully control the development of their children. So it was only natural that I, a complete stranger, would mess up a little. It wasn’t really that big of a mistake so I’m still in the clear!

Well, regardless of how I resolved it inside my head, Shouta-kun’s abrupt “yankee and chuuni” appearance at the dinner table prompted an emergency family meeting. Shouta-kun, for his part, only stuck to the single line of “I became enlightened to the Truth of Fire.” His mom was out of her mind thinking that her son had gone mad, and tried desperately to convince him to revert back. His dad, however, with a slightly pained yet nostalgic look on his face, tried to smooth things over by telling his mom that “everyone goes through that phase eventually, let’s give him some space for now.” That really stuck with me. *Shouta-kun’s parents, I’m sorry.*

Leaving aside all the hubbub in the Takahashi family for the moment, that night I experimented with transplanting the iceteroid fragment that I had torn from Shouta-kun. His “awakening” had been so remarkable that I had entirely forgotten about it until then.

In conclusion, transplanting of the iceteroid fragment was impossible. The

feeling of adhesion that I get from transplanting telekimuscle was entirely absent. I could tear the iceteroid fragment into even smaller pieces, but could not stick them to anything. So that was it for second-hand transplants.

With that realization, my dream of turning myself into a telekinetic who could also wield chronoprohiberis and pyrokinesis and cryokinesis all at the same time went up in a puff of smoke. It was a bit of a disappointment, but I also felt that things were better this way. Just telekinesis alone was already way more than I could handle.

Then the night passed, and morning came.

Curious about how the family meeting ended up, I sent telekinesis over to the Takahashi household, and found Shouta-kun in his bed nursing his right arm and groaning. As I continued observing him, wondering what was going on, eventually I realized that it was because his control over his cryokinesis had gotten a bit unstable. I telekinetically checked the state of his iceteroid, and found it healing where I torn the fragment from. Every once in a while, the iceteroid would twitch, which would cause some cold air to leak out from his right hand. The symptom was similar to how normal wounds get itchy and prickly when healing... apparently.

When I tear my own telekimuscle, this never happens. Is the difference due to the long years of training I put in? Or is this within a general margin of error kind of thing? I had torn his iceteroid the way I usually tore my own telekimuscle without giving it much thought. Maybe it was because his iceteroid was still weak from being in the early stage of development and I had taken too large a chunk out of it.

I guess I should have performed more thorough experiments on animals first. Up till now, the only experiments I performed on animals were to test how easy it would be to transplant a telekimuscle. Perhaps I should have taken the extra step of actually transplanting and then tearing fragments off.

This time, the iceteroid went haywire in a rather quite manageable way. But one step in the wrong direction, and Shouta-kun could perhaps have lost all control and turned into a popsicle.

While I was reflecting over this, Shouta-kun got up to grab several hot packets

from his dresser cabinet, then wound bandages around his arm to hold them in place. He clenched his fist several times in confirmation, making small adjustments to the position of the hot packets and bandage.

That was a pretty smart idea. With his power only at -10°C, ten hot packets would be more than enough to offset even a small rampage of his powers. Despite how “protecting the ordinary days” was one of Amaterasu’s Precepts, I was more than ready to cut him slack for taking the day off. Seeing how passionate he was about maintaining his ordinary life made me very happy. Although he had run from extreme to extreme, I could see that he had done his fair share of self-reflection.

...But, you know.

How do I put it?

The way Shouta-kun was at the moment, he seemed like he would break out a “*Kuh*, be still, my right hand!” at any moment.

Any moment now, really.

I mean, he really *is* in such a situation, but still.

How much more interesting do you have to get, Shouta-kun? Where has the you that was so normal and ordinary gone?

When Touka-chan arrived at school, she found her classroom 50% more rowdy than usual. Stepping in with slight bewilderment, she immediately found the yankee and chuuni half-half sitting there, bathed in the concentrated fire of the entire class’ disbelieving gazes. Looking like she was almost going to tear up, Touka-chan grabbed Shouta-kun’s collar and dragged him to the landing of the staircase that leads to the roof that people rarely take. Then she backed him against the wall and clinched a katedon on him.



“What’s with that getup? You in your right mind? Did you get a head injury? You all right? Want me to chant you some sutras?”

“There’s no need for sutra chanting. I’ve just realized the Truth of the world, that’s all. No biggie, really.”

Touka-chan was extremely surprised at Shouta-kun’s answer. “Eh, you’ve attained enlightenment?!”

“...No, I haven’t.”

“But you realized the Truth of the world, right?”

“Uh-huh.”

“That means you’ve attained enlightenment!”

“No, I haven’t.”

“...?”

AHHH! What’s with this completely out of sync conversation! I wanted to retort so badly. If only Kaburagi-san was here. Oh, wait, no, probably even she would find this situation troubling.

“I don’t really get it, but you should probably stop all... this. You’ll definitely get yelled at for that hair, and it’s against school regulations to wear patterned T-shirts underneath your uniform.”

“I don’t expect to be understood. The Truth is hard for others to understand. It’s enough that the Truth of Fire burns within my own heart.”

I was already reduced to looking on heartwarmingly at all the random bullshit he was spouting, but apparently that was not the case for Touka-chan. She withdrew her hand, backed up a bit, took a good long look at Shouta-kun’s clear, straightforward eyes, then nodded as if impressed.

“I think I sort of get it. In other words, Takahashi—no, Shouta, you’ve begun to seek your own dharma. That is a good way to make merit.”

Touka-chan had apparently asked what she wanted to ask and determined this to not be a problem. She gave Shouta-kun a light tap on the shoulder, then went back to her classroom. Shouta-kun also quietly followed behind her.

That day, Shouta-kun spent all of the breaks between classes either being called out and scolded by teachers and the vice principal, or in the toilet silently staring into the flame of his lighter. However, his attitude in class had turned serious, and he gave it his all taking notes in class and never once fell asleep.

So in short, the unwinnable fight incident had generally turned out well. With that said, it was a whole day of me coming to terms with the fact that the old Shouta-kun was gone forever. I wasn't really quite sure how to feel about it.

With that said, I couldn't very well continue to waste time reflecting, so I decided to move on. Because of Shouta-kun's "be still, my right arm!" incident, I was made aware that I needed to know more about telekimuscle transplant. To that end, I needed to perform more experiments. That meant cases of the full transplant-observe-remove process.

Naturally, human experiments were entirely out of the question. But with that said, it was a bit worrying whether the results I get experimenting on mice would apply exactly as-is to humans. Therefore, I decided on the compromise of experimenting on primates. I would use telekinesis to look for monkeys the world over, transplant telekimuscle fragments onto them, then monitor them to observe how the fragments mutate. Then at the end, I would completely tear off their source of superpower, and examine what I got. I saw in a movie how monkeys who had awakened to superpowers being left alone could eventually wipe out all humanity to create their own planet. So I would be extra careful about cleaning up after myself.

And so that's what I did. I chased down troops of Japanese macaques and western lowland gorillas and other primates, transplanted telekimuscle fragments onto them, then monitored and observed them. I devoted myself to gathering info, and entirely left the evaluation and analysis to Kaburagi-san, who had proudly returned to Japan as an official duchess of the Principality of Marinland. Incidentally, Kaburagi-san exploded with laughter at Shouta-kun's abrupt change in the mere three days she hadn't seen him. Well, I mean, there's really no other way to react to it other than "laughter" or "being put off," really.

The transplant on the primates all succeeded, but only about 20% of them displayed indications of having realized their new superpowers. Of that 20%,

90% were so surprised at the mysterious phenomenon that they never tried to use it again. Of those that were not surprised, half of them played with it with great interest at first, but then got bored of it soon after. Therefore in the end, those who were interested and continued using it... in other words, tried to train their new power, amounted to a mere 1% of the experimental subjects.

However, after transplanting telekimuscle fragments onto a large number of primates, monitoring and observing them, telekinetically feeling out the mutated fragments, ripping out pieces, and scrutinizing those pieces, I became capable of telling apart superpower sources by feel. For example, telekimuscles felt like normal muscles. Stoproteins were stiff and would pulse mechanically. Burninglutamins were squishy and warm. Iceteroids were like well-chilled tofu. The rough, prickly ones were elektokisin, and the gum-like stretchy ones were speedopamin. And so on and so forth.

Furthermore, Kaburagi-san was able to categorize the feelings that I described into detailed classifications and draw correlations and associations. Thanks to that, when I touched a superpower source that I had never touched before, I would still be able to make an educated guess as to what effect it causes.

It took slightly under two months before we were done with our experiments, but they proved extremely fruitful.

As for when I thoroughly removed the superpower sources from the monkeys, I did it in a split second so that they only get that split second of pain. But even so, many of them screamed in agony, and many even lost consciousness. As a way to thank them for participating in an experiment that they did not agree to, I broke the arms and legs of the poachers who were targeting rare monkey species and thrust them at the local police forces together with more than enough evidence to incriminate them. There was no doubt that there would be a second and a third wave of poachers soon, as the problem was not fundamentally resolved, but at least the monkeys would get a brief moment of respite.

While giving thanks to the monkeys' priceless sacrifice, Kaburagi-san and I decided to immediately put to use what we had just learned. In consideration of how the fight against World Shadows was going to be *made* a step more intense going forward, we were in dire need of a specific something.

To come straight out with it, we were going to look for a healer character.

Chapter 15: A Real Healing-Type Heroine

It was decided that we would need to look for a healer character to support Amaterasu as the fight against World Shadows was going to pick up heat going forward. Same as before, Kaburagi-san and I both selected a candidate of our own.

During the period of time after a telekimuscle fragment is transplanted and mutated but before any training begins, pulling it off would only give a brief, passing jab of pain like bumping your little toe against the corner of your dresser. As we both agreed that it was time for our organization to go worldwide, I started conducting mass transplanting and mutation monitoring all over the world.

As a result, many cases of individuals suddenly feeling pain akin to bumping a little toe against a dresser occurred all over the world. Because it was easy to write off such an abrupt and passing jab of pain as “feeling under the weather,” and also because it happened all over the place and there were only several hundred such cases, this did not even become a rumor on the internet. I did feel slightly bad about having ruined a whole lot of people’s day, but I did not regret it.

Statistically speaking, the power of healing was quite rare.

The most common ones to awaken to were the ones that enable the wielder to control fire, ice, electricity, wind, and other such natural phenomena. This made up about 80% of the pie chart, and Touka-chan and Shouta-kun both fell under this category.

The remaining 20% were “Others,” which included chronoprohiberis, intangibility, physical enhancement, clairvoyance, teleportation, and invisibility, just to name a few. Telekinesis was probably in there somewhere, but maybe because it was just that rare, I had yet to see anyone else awaken to it. Healing was but a single branch within that limited 20%, such that out of the roughly 1,500 subjects I had experimented on (which included the primates), I found

only four such cases.

Coincidentally, the candidates that Kaburagi-san and I chose out of those four both turned out to be nine-year-old girls. Her candidate lived in the UK, and mine lived in Brazil.

As the income from the power plant and Kaneyama Tech was stabilizing and even gradually growing, Duchess Kaburagi decided to completely withdraw from all the stock market and cryptocurrency stuff that she was doing before. She still held onto some stocks, but apparently would no longer actively buy or sell anymore. Because she was busy with that, on that snowy day in early winter when we were to have the decisive match for choosing between our respective candidates, I headed over to Kaburagi-san's house. Her help remembered me and thus let me go straight in. After handing over my coat, I walked down the red carpeted hallway, then knocked on Kaburagi-san's door.

"Come in."

Upon being granted permission in her usual beautifully affected voice, I opened the door, and found her posing cutely with a sideways peace sign in front of a full-length mirror.

I was at a loss for words.

No, well, even I normally wouldn't mind so much a sideways peace in front of a mirror. What gave the image that much more impact was her outfit.

The form-fitting dress mainly based on white and pink was cut sheerly both in the back and at the bosom area, and the miniskirt held nothing back in revealing her shapely thighs. Add to that star-patterned knee socks and shoes decorated with tiny wings. In her hand was a short stick embedded with a large jewel.

There was no room for doubt that this was a cosplay of a magical girl. A 23-year-old adult woman! Magical girl cosplay! Not at the cosplay area at a convention, but as a part of an otherwise ordinary day! Where's the ordinary? Is it here? What on earth are you doing, Duchess?! The hell with "Come in"! This is definitely not a "Come in" scene! How can you be so calm about being seen in this getup?! No wait, this was the kind of person she was from the start!

Come on, for a 23-year-old, this is...

...

...Hm? It actually kind of works.

“Come on in. You’ve come to decide the final candidate, right?”

“Y-Yeah...?”

Kaburagi-san said absolutely nothing about her magical girl cosplay, moving the conversation on as if it wasn’t anything out of the ordinary.

Why was it? Even though it was a costume that she was supposedly 10 years too late for, it seemed to suit her as well as any other outfit. How could this be? There was almost none of the “ah, this person is cosplaying” or “this person is trying too hard” kind of feeling. She was wearing it so naturally that it made me think, “this is probably what life would be like if a world of sparkly magical girls really did exist.” When I looked closely, I realized that her facial features looked slightly different, looked younger than usual. She must have changed up her makeup. Even the interior design of the room had been swapped with something more cutesy and fantasy-like, which matched with her outfit very well.

Thinking about it, from the point of view of a middle schooler, a 23-year-old woman would indeed be an “auntie,” but from the point of view of a woman in her thirties or forties, the 23-year-old would be nothing more than a slightly older kid, I guess? So it still wasn’t too late for her to become a magical girl... I guess? I wasn’t sure about anything anymore.

Seeing me being all confused, Kaburagi-san gave me a wink and threw me a magical☆kiss. Apparently the attack had a piercing effect, because it passed right through the telekinetic barrier that I had permanently deployed around myself and caused me to have a near-heart attack.

That’s cheating! You’re cheating, Kaburagi-san! Aren’t you 23? Yet how can you still be so cute?! It’s so affected but damn me if it isn’t working! You’re amazing, Kaburagi-san! What was so amazing about her was how she did not look even a tiny bit embarrassed. She believed 100% that she was cute. And it was indeed true that she was cute. This 23-year-old who could make a magical

girl outfit work was very cute. Did I have any other choice but to fall in love with her all over again?

By pinching my own telekimuscle, I barely managed to bring myself back to my senses. I took a deep breath, then brought the conversation back on track. Today, I had not come to behold the sublime form of Duchess Magical Girl Kaburagi.

“This is my candidate.”

“And I choose this one.”

I used telekinesis to take out the paper from my pocket, folded it into a crane, made it fly over to land on the table, then spread it out again. Kaburagi-san snapped her fingers, and seemingly pulled her paper out of nowhere. It was simple, but it worked well. As expected of my rival. I suppose chronoprohiberis really was better for little show-off matches like this.

“How shall we decide?” I asked.

“How about dart-throwing?”

“OK, I’ll take you on. This time, hmm, let’s do two rounds.”

The two of us retrieved darts from the dart board hung up on the wall in Kaburagi-san’s room, then stood next to each other at a certain distance away from the board. There were a total of four darts. Kaburagi-san’s two had a red mark on the feathers, and my two had blue marks on the feathers.

The rules were simple. After our combined throws, we’d check the board and the person whose dart was the closest to the bull’s-eye would be the winner.

I yielded the first throw because of “ladies first,” but then Kaburagi-san said with a straight face, “This time, the use of superpowers is forbidden” while fiddling with her dart.

“I don’t mind.”

“Certain phenomena that seem like they were caused by superpowers may occur. But if superpowers were not actually used, then it’s fine.”

“...Got it.” In other words, cheating is fine if it’s not exposed, right? I had no objections. This adult would not get angry if both parties implicitly agreed to

the cheating ahead of time.

When Kaburagi-san took a pro-looking stance and was just about to throw her dart, I called out to her.

“Kaburagi-san.”

“Yes?”

“That outfit suits you really, really well. You are the cutest in the entire world.”

“*Ufufu*, I know, right?”

Dammit, that didn’t work. Psychological warfare failed. And there I was, thinking that she would at least blush a little and mess up her aim.

Kaburagi-san smiled happily without being flustered, then threw her first dart with perfect form... but the next thing I knew, her dart had already landed smack dab in the middle of the board.

Oi, I didn’t see the trajectory of the dart. Right off the bat, huh?

“Oi, just now you definitely stopped time and walked over to jab it in directly! That’s against the rules! You cheated!”

“I did not. What proof do you have?”

I pressed her for an answer, but Duchess Magical Girl was apparently going to play innocent.

Oh yeah? I see, so that’s the kind of person you are. Very well. If that’s what you’re going for, then I will do what I gotta do.

“Starting now, I’m going to record everything. If the footage suddenly jumps and something’s moved weirdly or disappeared, then that’s going to be proof that you cheated.”

“Sure, go ahead.”

I put my phone on video mode and propped it against a flower vase, directed toward the dart board. Then I made my first throw.

I knew absolutely nothing about how to throw darts. I had zero prior experience with such a classy pastime. But that was not going to disadvantage

me in any way.

I used telekinesis to make a circular passageway from the dart directly to the dart board. I also covered the rest of the dart board, except the bull's-eye, with a telekinetic barrier as protection. Naturally, Kaburagi-san's dart was not under said protection.

And then! My dart! Which I also protected with a barrier! Shot out! At Mach 12! The dart landed in the bull's-eye in a split second! The shockwave of the impact assaulted the circular passageway! Naturally, Kaburagi-san's dart was completely smashed to pieces.

HA HA HA HA, YOU FOOL! I pulverized your dart faster than your reaction time, so fast that you couldn't activate your chronoprohiberis in time! Look at the dust that your dart had been reduced to! If you think you can put it back together during stopped time then let me see you try it!

Even Kaburagi-san could not help but be shaken at the sight of what was left of her dart.

"H-H-H-H-H-Hold on, my dart has been reduced to dust?! You definitely used telekinesis! That's against the rules! You cheated!"

"I did no such thing. You see, I just have a really strong throwing arm."

"Wh—" Kaburagi-san clutched her head from my sloppy excuse. If you cited some random bullshit logic, then smart people could easily turn that back on you. So actually the best tactic was to say something dumb on the level of an elementary kid's excuse.

"Well, all right then. Next time you use your 'strong throwing arm,' then we're going to measure it with a dynamometer."

"As you wish!"

Kaburagi-san sighed as if in resignation, then took up the pose to make her second throw. Her sloppily thrown dart barely landed on the very edge of the board. She had clearly given up.

"So it's my win."

"What are you saying? Can't you see my dart stabbed right there in the bull's-

eye?”

“What?” That prompted me to double check the darts on the dart board. The one deeply stuck in the middle did not have my blue mark on its feathers, but Kaburagi-san’s red mark.

So she switched them, huh? But even if she stopped time to switch out the darts, I had everything on camera so it was meaningless. Her cheating would be exposed and that would be that... was what I was thinking, until I saw in the footage that the dart that was pulverized and the dart that did the pulverizing both had a red mark on the feathers.

“HAH?!” Shit, she got me. She had switched out the dart in my hand before I threw it! It had never even occurred to me that the dart in my hand was not my own, and thus ended up destroying Kaburagi-san’s dart with Kaburagi-san’s dart.

So being shaken at my dart throwing was just an act! The smartphone was only pointed at the dart board. There was no way to prove that she had switched the darts when I was in my throwing pose. I had been careless.

The rule was that whoever’s dart was closest to the center of the board would win. The important part was whose dart it was, and not who had thrown the dart.

I had one last throw. I had to make it count. *What can I do? Use telekinesis to pull out the dart currently in the middle... No good, that would be too obvious. There is no way to explain how a dart can just fall out by itself when there isn’t even a wind. The tactic of switching them out is sealed by the running camera.*

What should I do? Is there any good way to...?

...

Screw it.

Let’s go with brute force.

Before I threw my dart, I used telekinesis to start an earthquake. It was a minor one that would be 3.0 on the scale if measured, but the dart in the middle of the board “fell out” due to the quake. Kaburagi-san had immediately

dived under a table as soon as the quake started, so her reaction was delayed. Several seconds later, the earthquake stopped as suddenly as it began. Before Kaburagi-san could do anything, I threw my dart. It missed because I was an absolute noob, but no matter, the only dart still standing on the board was sporting the blue mark on its feathers that identified it as *my* dart.

It was my complete and perfect and indubitable victory. I mean, what a coincidence it was! Who'd thought that a natural disaster would take my side!

Kaburagi-san crawled out from under the table, took one look at the dart board, and caught on immediately. While brandishing her magical stick around, she raised a fierce protest. "Is this even within the realm of cheating? Shall we turn on the TV to look at the news? I can bet you there's no earthquake warning being hoisted!"

"It was probably an earthquake with the epicenter right underneath the Kaburagi residence. Exactly 1 meter underneath, probably. There's no worry about this earthquake causing any tsunamis."

My excuse caused Kaburagi-san to burst out laughing. Once she started, she couldn't stop. She tried to cover her mouth with her hands, but the sound of laughter still spilled through. Apparently I had tickled her funny bone.

After a while, Kaburagi-san's laughter finally subsided. While wiping tears from her eyes, she said, "Oh, all right. You even made me laugh, so I'll just give you this win."

Hell yeah.

So it became set in stone that the next member to join Amaterasu after Shouta-kun would be the nine-year old girl, Igbadi Sognah Muguu-chan from Brazil!



Igbadi Sognah Muguu-chan, nine years old, nicknamed Ig. She was a girl with a tiny build who lived in a rural orphanage in Brazil. When she was two, she had been found weakened and shivering from the cold underneath a tree at the edge of the forest by the previous director of the orphanage, and then welcomed in as a new member of the family. Apparently that previous director

had been a member of a minority tribe, and so that was why Ig was given this name.

The part where she was picked up right at the edge of dying from weakness and then nursed back to health was great, but then the previous director, who was known for being a person of great character, died from a chronic disease. Immediately after, the next director, who was a mean and malicious person, took up the post. During the seven years after that, Ig-chan became the target of bullying in the orphanage.

She was locked inside a narrow room and not given enough food, and yet forced to be a playmate for the other children by the director's orders. No, not playmate. She was reduced to being a mere toy. She was already smaller and weaker than other kids her age. However, the director gave the kids just cause to rain violence upon her, and she had no willpower nor the means to resist.

The fact that I found her in my random search throughout the world for subjects to test telekimuscle transplant on, and that she awakened to healing, was surely the providence of Buddha or the Truth of Fire. Gaia whispered to me to save her.

However, regardless of how she was a target of bullying, Ig-chan still technically belonged to the orphanage. I could not very well just kidnap her. To be more exact, I could actually just telekinetically kidnap her and not leave any trace behind, but when it's available, it's always better to do things the proper and official way. Two wrongs do not make a right.

Therefore, in order to save Ig-chan, I got on a plane and flew to Brazil. After landing, I switched to train, then to taxi. Then when I was out of eyesight, I moved at super speed using telekinesis. All in all, it took me only a single day to go from Japan to the orphanage when Ig-chan lived.

The sudden visit by a Japanese person was received warmly by the outwardly kindly-looking middle-aged woman who served as the current director. My cover story was that I had fallen in love with Brazil's countryside and was considering moving here. As my moving gift, I passed over cash and foodstuffs and clothing. It was super effective. Incidentally, although I could not speak the common language in Brazil, Portuguese, the director was educated and could

speak English, so we had no problems communicating with each other.

When I was dangling the offer of giving the orphanage financial support in front of the director, I spotted Ig-chan peeking apprehensively from behind a window. I pretended to have taken a liking to her at first glance, and offered to adopt her. The director readily said yes. She probably thought that it was easy cash. *Feel happy about it while you still can.*

The elated director guided me to the room where Ig-chan was normally locked up. When I walked in, I found her quivering in fear in the corner. I picked up her small, malnourished body in my arms with all the kindness I could muster. Ig-chan had not been given even a blanket, so her body was very cold. However, I could certainly feel the pulsing of her life in my arms.

The only things I knew about Ig-chan were what I managed to gather in a week of telekinetic digging. However, when I stood there with her in my arms, I strangely felt a love for her welling up from inside me. With this tiny body of hers, with no one being her ally, locked up in this tiny room, she had done well to have held on so long. She had really done very well.

From now on, I will be her ally. I will be her new family.

Although I originally sought her out for her healing power, I was now totally fine even if her healing power did not grow.

“Everything’s gonna be all right now.” Naturally, she did not understand the Japanese I said. However, apparently the meaning got across.

A drop of tear welled up in her lightless eyes, and she clung to me. Weakly, but with all she had.

I then left the orphanage behind me, while using telekinesis to punch the director in the face once every other second.

In this way, this tragic heroine, this proud *Callithrix jacchus* in the order Primates, aka “common marmoset”—the cat-sized monkey Igbadi Sognah Muguu-chan (♀, nine years old) successfully joined Amaterasu as the newest member.



Chapter 16: Pain, Pain, Go Away And Never Come Back, Capisce?

As part of bringing Ig back to Japan, I had to go through Eduardo Gomes International Airport. However, because the traces of abuse on Ig's body were so obvious, I was delayed by a day. There were both old and fresh wounds all over her body. That included numerous bald spots where the fur had been pulled out by brute force. She must have had a bone fracture in her right front paw before, as it was bent and would not move at all. Even considering how she was small enough that I could carry her with one hand, she was still unnaturally light. It really was quite unbelievable how she had managed to live through everything she had. So it was only natural that the airport staff would stop me. I panicked a little when I was escorted to the customs office. The staff bombarded me in Portuguese with terrifying looks on their faces, but I chose to sit quietly and take it all.

Eventually, a staff member who knew English was brought over. I explained the story of how I had saved Ig, and after seeing how Ig was clearly reliant on me and refused to be separated, they finally believed me. Before I boarded, they even went to the trouble of calling a vet to administer anesthesia so that she would remain docile during the flight, and they put her in a cage together with a shirt with my scent on it before bringing it over to the hold.

Upon returning to Japan after the three day absence, I immediately brought Ig to the vet that Kaburagi-san recommended. For a common marmoset, 9 years old was already an old granny. Although she had no chronic diseases, she was indeed very weak and wounded all over. Due to worries that she did not have the physical or mental capacity to withstand surgery, the conclusion was that her bent paw would have to be left as is. The vet was already giving me lots of advice for how to make the remainder of her life more comfortable, but I thought it was still a bit too early for that. Of course, the reason was because Ig possessed healing. This was a superpower within which dwelled possibilities that surpassed what modern medicine could achieve.

I would not let her story end as nothing more than a monkey who lived an unfortunate life. As the one who had lived the longest, most painful monkey life in all of Amaterasu, she had the right to live long and happy. Amaterasu was a secret organization that fought against World Shadows! World Shadows, all right? The shadows of a single orphanage were nothing in comparison. There's no way we couldn't save a single monkey!

After receiving my international call to the phone in Ama-no-Iwato, Kaburagi-san had already procured a nesting box, a perch, fruits, bugs, monkey food, and everything else that would be needed. However, Ig turned out to be fiercely wary of Kaburagi-san. When Ig bared her tiny teeth and raised warning cries that sounded like an angry little bird, Kaburagi-san looked sad but withdrew quickly. *Sorry for my child. Please forgive her.*

This was hardly the time to be running normal operations, so Kaburagi-san contacted the middle schoolers and told them that Amaterasu was going to be temporarily closed for a week. That time was going to be dedicated toward nursing Ig back to health.

Spending time with her, feeding her, looking over her, talking to her, and reassuring her. And at times, I stopped fussing over her and just let her be. This was all important. Both the climate and environment were different from what she was used to in Brazil. Everything she saw was new, and could make her feel uneasy. I was her sole refuge. I could not step away. But then again, I didn't even try to step away.

Let alone sleeping, even when I went to the toilet or went to take a bath, she would still follow me. If I ended up a bit farther than her, then she would seemingly go half-mad and cry in desperation. It was my first time being so depended upon by a nine-year-old girl.

Although I had done some preliminary research prior to, I once again combed through websites and books on common marmosets, before trying to start Ig's superpower training. This might have been a bit tight in terms of timing when considering that she was getting used to a completely new environment, but this was of top priority. If she could use her healing powers, then her wounds would surely heal faster. She should also recover faster from her weakened state. Maybe she could even heal her bent right paw. And we can surely dream,

but what about her whittled down life span.....? Before acting as the healer role of Amaterasu, Ig needed to train her healing powers for her own sake.

Firstly, Ig needed to realize her own power and try to use it. No matter the ability, if it wasn't used, then it wouldn't grow.

Common marmosets live in groups, and they have the custom of grooming each other's fur and licking each other's wounds. Also, when they got hurt, they would remain stationary in an effort to hurry the recovery. In other words, common marmosets naturally already had the concept of "being hurt," and instead of simply waiting for it to heal naturally, they had the intelligence to proactively take steps to induce recovery. They could sense it when a companion was injured or sick, and had the compassion to try to make that go away. So it was my hope that Ig's natural aptitude as a healer could create good synergy with her new healing powers.

Specifically, what I used was a two-step training process that combined "Pavlovian conditioning" and "operant conditioning."

In simple terms, Pavlovian conditioning was the establishment of a conditional response. Long ago, a physiologist named Pavlov had used the following steps to teach his dogs to learn new conditioned behaviors.

- 1) He let the dog hear the sound of a bell.
- 2) He gave the dog food. While eating, the dog produced saliva in its mouth.
- 3) Repeat 1) and 2) (i.e. turn the two steps into a conditioned response).
- 4) Eventually, the dog would begin salivating just by hearing the sound of a bell.

Just like how some people would refeel what they felt when watching the climax of a movie they loved just by hearing the background music from that scene, or like how other people who had a drowning experience would be afraid of submerging their face in water, every single person had something like that. In a general sort of way, that could be said to be Pavlovian conditioning.

Therefore, every time I massaged Ig, rubbed her head, or fed her painkillers, I would give her healinglycogen a rub. I wasn't pinching or pulling it, so there was no pain. However, there would be a definite sensation of having been touched.

At first, Ig was very surprised at this new sensation. However, after I repeated it again and again and again over many days, she grew accustomed to it, so much so that she would look mystified if I didn't rub her healinglycogen when I normally would.

By doing this, "healinglycogen = something that is calming" became conditioned within Ig. That made her aware of the presence of her healinglycogen, and at the same time also fostered the understanding in her that her healinglycogen was a "good" thing.

If she was a human, then I could have just verbally explained everything without taking such roundabouts methods. I wonder if monkey trainers all use such repetitive and time-consuming tactics when teaching their monkeys?

After making Ig aware of her healinglycogen and teaching her what it was, the next step was to have her use it. This was where I employed operant conditioning. To put it roughly, it was the idea behind "praise a child, and the child will grow."

Every time Ig would use her healing ability, I would praise her and give her a reward. This way, she would become encouraged to use her ability more and more. If she did, then I'd praise her even more. By repeating this loop many times, it would condition her to actively use her healing ability. The end state that I wanted to reach with her was that the moment she sees someone injured, instead of licking the wound, she would use her healing ability first. It also seemed like a good idea to teach her to use her powers whenever she hears "Heal" like dogs hearing "Hand" or "Wait," but that might have to wait a bit.

If I was in contact with her healinglycogen, I could feel it quiver whenever it was used. By touching it the entire time, I would know to shower her with praise whenever she used it.

Though in the first place, I still did not know whether Ig's power was self-healing or other-healing. It could very well be that self-healing was the fundamental, and other-healing was an applicability option. Equally likely, other-healing was the fundamental, and it would require more effort to self-heal. As of yet, there were too few cases for me to collect enough data to

identify the specifics of a healinglycogen through touch.

Ig already had on her numerous wounds from the abuse that she had suffered. If her ability truly turned out to be self-healing, after she successfully does it once, she should automatically get around to all the other wounds on her own accord. It would effectively set up the conditioning that “using her ability = she feels better,” so I wouldn’t have to employ operant conditioning anymore.

However, if her healing ability was actually of the other-healing type, then she would need an “other” to heal. Therefore, in the middle of cooking, I temporarily dispelled my permanent telekinetic barrier on my little finger and pretended to have “carelessly” cut it.

“Ahh! Ouch! Owwww! I’m gonna diiiieee!” As I expressed my pain in an overly dramatic way, Ig got off my shoulder while chattering anxiously. Then she started to lick my finger with everything she could.

No change in her healinglycogen. She did not activate her healing ability.

No, that’s not right, Ig. That’s not what I want... but thank you nonetheless.

After that, I would “carelessly” bump my little toe against my dresser, “carelessly” slip down the stairs and get a big bruise, “carelessly” touch a heated frying pan and burn myself, and so on and so forth. But in every case, Ig would only lick the injured part, albeit with all she had.

I mean, it did make me happy. Quite happy, in fact. She would even help groom my hair before I went to sleep. I could feel Ig’s kindness loud and clear. She was going the right direction. *But this isn’t it...* Though of course, I understood that this was something that would require time and timing. It wouldn’t go well if I forced her to do it. I only needed her to use her healing ability just once. Then after that, everything should naturally fall into place. But that first time was the problem.

It took around ten days to reach the operant conditioning stage after Ig’s arrival, during which Ama-no-Iwato remained closed (though the CLOSED sign had been on the door ever since we went into business). Ama-no-Iwato had become the two middle schoolers’ hangout spot, so there was a worry that they would find themselves another hangout spot if we kept them away too long.

Therefore, even though we were still in the middle of Ig's training, we still decided to resume normal operations.

After the ten day absence, Touka-chan greeted me with good manners, then her eyes shined at the newest member on my shoulder.

"Is that the Ig-chan that I've heard so much about? She's so cute!"

"Seems weak," said Shouta-kun dismissively even while shooting curious glances over at Ig-chan, who was being wary of these humans that she had never seen before. He took out a chocolate cigarette from his winter uniform pocket, lit it with his lighter, then sucked on it as if it was delicious. Well, I'm sure it actually was delicious. That punk kid, filling the store with that freaking sweet chocolate smell.

I had heard the funny story from Kaburagi-san about how during the time when I was off to Brazil, Shouta-kun said some random nonsense like "I want to see fire" and so took up smoking, but then almost immediately got thoroughly grilled and roasted by Touka-chan and so he switched to chocolate cigarettes. Actually seeing him do it in person, I loved it. Image-wise, he was slowly polishing up his delinquent image, but all that he was doing was just sucking (more like nibbling) on a snack that he had singed.

Sighs, to think how that normal, ordinary Shouta-kun had turned into such a hilarious, quirky character. Whose fault was it, huh? Oh right, it was my fault.

The cover story for Ig was that she was a super rare case of a monkey that possessed a superpower, and that she was on the verge of death after escaping from a mob of World Shadows when Boss, who just happened to be in Brazil, found her and thus ordered me to take care of her. Touka-chan extended a finger while going "It's all right, don't be scared," but Ig's response was to chatter really loudly in intimidation and smack away her finger. Touka-chan looked a little hurt at that, but she did not continue bothering Ig to get a reaction. *She really is such a good girl.*

However, it was clear that Ig was still not ready to accept humans other than me. She was still extremely wary of Kaburagi-san. Considering how much abuse she had suffered at the hands of humans so far, it was more than understandable, though.

Or so I thought, when next, as Shouta-kun extended his finger with that chocolate cigarette in his mouth, Ig timidly reached out to touch it in response, while looking toward me for confirmation the entire time. Although she quickly pulled back afterward, it was clear that she *had* touched his finger.

Wait, what? Pretty lady and cute girl is NG, but delinquent is OK?

“Oh, it touched me, it touched me.”

“Eh, you can touch her? Then I... ouch! Eh, why?!”

“Hah, probably cus you stink of all that Buddhism. I knew it, it’s Fire over Buddha any day.”

“Oh, shush. If it’s fire over Buddha then she should like me! I’m so much more ‘fire’ than you!”

“Tsk tsu tsu, you lack Fire in your heart.”

Shouta-kun and Touka-chan took turns offering their finger, but it was clear to see that Ig was much less guarded with Shouta-kun. The smug look on his face was goddamn irritating.

For a while longer, the two tried to give Ig food (but failed), then tried this and that to little effect, before finally heading downstairs for 30 minutes of their respective daily training and then heading home.

The store returned to being a quiet space with just me and Ig. After sniffing the air several times and looking all around her, finally she relaxed and loosened her grip on my shoulder. I scratched her under the armpit, and she narrowed her eyes in enjoyment.

It was hard to tell whether she was a female that liked guys, or whether she was less wary about guys because I was a guy.

Fortunately, it was winter, so I then made it a daily effort to bring her out for a walk while keeping her in my muffler. She had a history of being abused, but that was not a good reason for her to remain so wary of other humans. She needed to get used to humans a little at a time. If her fear wouldn’t go away no matter what, then I wouldn’t press it, but she ought to at least try to overcome her trauma. Judging by her reaction to Shouta-kun, I determined that this was

not altogether impossible.

After two to three weeks of walks, the conclusion that I arrived at was that Ig was averse to the smell of makeup and perfume. She was not wary against old grannies and little girls just because they were female. On the other hand, she disliked guys who had on makeup or a lot of hair gel. Hair dye alone was acceptable, for some reason.

Thinking about it, the orphanage director who had abused Ig was a middle-aged woman who put on tons of makeup. In addition, the kids in that orphanage also played a lot with empty makeup containers. The possibility that the smell rubbed off onto them was high. It was likely that that smell had become associated with fear in Ig's mind.

As a test, I had Touka-chan approach Ig without any makeup on. True enough, Ig was less wary than usual. That clinched it.

So.

...So.

That's game over for you, Kaburagi-san.

Kaburagi-san vehemently refused to take off her makeup to get close to Ig. She wouldn't even consider it. Apparently she had dreamed of having Ig sit on her shoulder like a magical girl mascot, so she was really disappointed, but even so she absolutely refused to go bare-faced. I knew what Kaburagi-san looked like without her makeup, and ensured her that she was still more than pretty even so, but apparently it was a matter of principle or something. Things improved a little bit when she tried going with lighter makeup, so that was apparently the farthest she could compromise.

She then came up with the idea of coming to Ama-no-Iwato every night in an effort to make Ig become accustomed to her makeup, but unfortunately, what I observed told me that it would most likely end up as wasted effort.

Leaving that aside... during the afternoon of one such day, while wiping a table, I tripped without warning and "carelessly" bumped my head against the table corner and dramatically writhed about in agony. Ig immediately scampered over and placed a paw on my head. Then, for the briefest of

instances, a soft white light emitted from that paw.

“Oh, ohhhhh?!” I felt the healinglycogen move! Finally, success! A whole month after coming back to Japan! She’d finally gone and used it! “Ig! Yes! Good! Very good! It’s healed! Look, it’s healed! Well done!” I praised her again and again and again, and took out the ultimate quality monkey food that I had bought in expectation of this day and let her eat it. The effect of her untrained healinglycogen was practically negligible, which meant I still hurt where I bumped my head. But even so, I praised her again and again and again.

In truth, Ig’s healing ability really was praiseworthy. I had seen it clearly. What was with that white glowing effect! Was that some holy light or something? A tiny, nine-year-old girl with a backstory of abuse who healed people with a holy light? If she wasn’t the main heroine, then who was?!

Chapter 17: “That Can’t Be... It’s Too Soon!” Said The Boss

The rest was easy after Ig used her healing ability that first time. At first, when I got hurt, her go-to response was to lick the wound, and only use healing every so often. However, when I didn’t really act happy when she licked, but then made a big show of being happy whenever she used healing, then she began to proactively prefer to use healing. Two weeks after that first usage, she was almost guaranteed to use healing whenever she sensed me being hurt or in pain.

Unfortunately, there was no way to accurately measure her healinglycogen’s growth rate. If she desperately used her healing ability one day, then she wouldn’t use it the next day, so it was almost a sure fact that she was also feeling the chaos-like growth pain with the frequency of growing every other day. Judging by how it took her two weeks to go from “less effective than a band-aid” to “the wound feels kind of warm,” her growth rate couldn’t be that low. If I really had to quantify it, then it would be somewhere in the ballpark between 1.2 and 1.8, probably.

Assuming that the fundamental of healinglycogen was direct healing, then eventually Ig would need to move into applicability training. After wracking my head over this for a whole month, near the end of February when the cold of winter was beating a retreat and spring was starting to show its face, I finally allowed myself to acknowledge how freaking unfair Ig’s healing ability was.

To get straight to the point, Ig’s healinglycogen did not need applicability training at all. Although the effectiveness was still low, it was capable of healing everything from the get-go.

First of all, I was able to quickly confirm that she could heal cuts and bruises. Well, if she couldn’t, then her power couldn’t really be called “healing.” This was within expectations.

What I confirmed next was burns and bone fractures. The bone fracture part

especially required careful testing, because depending on the way her ability worked, it could very well heal fractures by merely fusing together the bone in their incorrectly bent positions. I had to gather quite a bit of courage before I broke my own pinky. It took her three times due to her limited proficiency, but her ability did make the displaced bone return to its correct position automatically before fusing back. As for the burn, there wasn't even a scar after she healed it (though I couldn't tell if that was more due to the short period of time between being burned and being healed).

Third was its effect on old wounds. Seemingly having gotten used to using her ability, Ig, being the old granny she was (in common marmoset years), would sometimes spontaneously use her ability on her own waist or teeth. Every time she did so, her old wounds would fade a little more, and the bald patches from where her hair had been pulled out slowly began growing back in. I was completely mystified by the working principles of her ability, but clearly it was effective against old wounds and dead hair roots as well.

Fourth was its efficacy against diseases and poisons. When the flu was going around, I purposely went to places with lots of people to catch it, but then Ig healed even that for me. It wasn't exactly instantaneous healing due to her low proficiency, but even so, I completely recovered in a single day. Kaburagi-san called in a big favor with a doctor that she knew from her university days to get us a large variety of poisons that wouldn't leave any after-effects. I then purposely ingested those poisons, but Ig managed to heal every single one of them.

The clincher was her ability's effect on cells. In order to not leave any evidence behind, I sneaked into a small-scale hospital located in another prefecture together with her and had her use her ability on a sleeping cancer patient. As a result, the cancer lump shrunk very considerably. In addition, when comparing the blood sample taken from her during her first visit to the vet upon arriving in Japan to the blood sample taken from her three months later now, her estimated age had changed. She had supposedly grown younger, from being nine years old to being somewhere between seven and eight years old. In other words, Ig's healing ability was also effective against unnatural cells and cellular deterioration.

It was incredible and unfair and bordering on the criminal. Why was it that, without doing any applicability training, her ability could exhibit such mind-boggling all-purpose utility? *How long do you think I spent expanding what I could do from simple pushing and pulling within my line of sight? Ten whole freaking years! Don't come swaggering in here with your "I don't need no training" all-powerful healing ability! What is the working principle behind it anyway?!* Even Amaterasu's top intellect, Kaburagi-san, quickly gave up trying to figure out this incomprehensible omnipotence. It truly was a "super" power. I almost snapped from envy. Don't get me wrong, I really thought it amazing. I was overjoyed at how much it exceeded my expectations. I was overjoyed, but I was also outraged.

No cheat codes! Don't fuck around! It makes us espers who have to train diligently look like fools! However, even that rage simply dissipated when Ig stared at me with those round, beady eyes filled with pure trust. But that was also a part of what made it so unfair. I knew that she didn't have any ill will. Or rather, she only had goodwill.

Though if we were to start talking about cheats and whatnot, the same could be said of how I still haven't bumped into any growth limit, or of Shouta-kun's very high initial starting value, or of Kaburagi-san's 44 seconds of time stop, or of Touka-chan's daily growth frequency. Everyone had their own special something. I suppose it was a bit too late to gripe about any of that.

The common trait between all the superpower sources was their geometric growth. This meant that growth would start out super slow, but somewhere down the line would shoot up abruptly. Taking 1.1 of 1 would only give you a growth of 0.1, but take 1.1 of 1,000, and that's growth of 100. Ig was also beginning to display the indications of this. Sometime in the first half of March, she should already reach the level where she could completely heal major injuries in a few seconds. That was if she did not hit her growth limit, of course.

With this, we were pretty much done with the arrangements for healing in the case of injuries. It was about time to have our first large-scale battle event.

It's pretty easy to forget after becoming an adult, but students are busy with being students too. Shouta-kun and Touka-chan were both second years in middle school. Slightly more than a month later, and they'd already be third

years. That meant high school entrance exams.

Although the plan was for Kaburagi-san to give them private tutoring, there was no way that she had the time to do it often. It would depend on which high school they were aiming for, but it would probably still require many hours of studying. On the surface level, Amaterasu's activities had the just cause of protecting the world, but their real purpose was to help its members have extraordinary days. Therefore, getting in the way of studying and negatively affecting those members' futures could not have been farther from the point. In short, studies had to come first. Period.

Fighting with World Shadows between twilight to night actually required quite a bit of time. If the students were just about to motivate themselves to study when they suddenly received a summons to fight, then they would get increasingly stressed out, which in turn would make it harder to focus. Therefore, we would be dialing down the frequency of the fights against World Shadows. Them serving as a break between study sessions would be just right.

By relying on the cover story that Kaburagi-san would be shouldering their portion of the fights, the two students wouldn't be suspicious even though the number of times they got summoned actually equaled the number of World Shadow appearances. In the first place, the narrative was that Kaburagi-san had been protecting Tokyo all by herself before Touka-chan joined us. More like, they wouldn't even in their wildest dreams think that the World Shadows were holding back from appearing out of respect for their studying time.

In regards to the large-scale battle event that I had mentioned earlier, there was actually another reason for it other than studying for exams. Simply put, it was because the World Shadow fights were beginning to turn quite formulaic as of late. The main culprit for it was Shouta-kun.

After the unwinnable fight, Shouta-kun realized his own unpreparedness. He turned down all successive commands to sortie, instead focusing single-mindedly on training. Thanks to that, he finally attained absolute zero (though according to Kaburagi-san, it wasn't exactly absolute zero, but just infinitely close to absolute zero), which he called Eternal Force Blizzard. In addition, he had become capable of manipulating the cold air from his hands to a certain degree. He then came up with a pretty interesting way to utilize this ability. In

short, by emitting super condensed cold air in the shape of a sword or a shield and then pouring bottled water over it, he had attained instantaneous weapon creation. Apparently the range of how far away he could manipulate cold air was roughly arm distance.

Touka-chan also accepted advice from Shouta-kun, such that she also learned how to make swords and shields out of fire. Judging by that, I hypothesized that elemental espers have the ability to manipulate their specific element within a 1 to 3 meter radius by nature. When considering the fact that all those superpowers were offshoots of telekinesis, then perhaps it wasn't so strange that there were some vestigial characteristics that carried over.

As could be inferred from how Shouta-kun could not only emit cold air but manipulate it as well, his cold air was not just a cold haze. His ability did not cool things by shifting away heat energy, but rather affected molecules directly to suppress their movements. As a result, whatever he cooled would turn very hard (this was all explained by Kaburagi-san).

A very rough way of explaining it is that whereas normal cold air causes things to slow down by sapping heat away, Shouta-kun's cold air causes things to slow down by forcefully holding them down. The result of the target, and its molecules, being slowed down and thus cooling down is the same either way, but the process makes a huge difference.

Molecules that are cooled by normal cold air merely lose their vigor and slow down, such that they would still fly away if a force was exerted on them. In contrast, the molecules cooled by Shouta-kun's cold air would be forcefully held in place, so they wouldn't fly away even when a force was exerted on them. In other words, they became resistant against external forces. That effectively meant they got tougher.

When I first heard this, I was quite skeptical. But then I discovered that when something was being cooled by Shouta-kun's cold air, it really did get tougher. A shield near absolute zero was almost indestructible. The experiments conducted in the secret base confirmed that at the very least, handguns could not even leave a scratch. In fact, the impact of the bullet making contact also got fully absorbed. If Shouta-kun moved away, the cooled down subject would still keep its temperature, but lose its toughness. So unfortunately, we couldn't

really have Shouta-kun make absolute zero shields en masse and pass them out to make everyone impervious to bullets. That said, this was still very incredible, so much so that it almost sounded fishy. Kaburagi-san muttered about van der Waals forces and spin angular momentum and whatnot with her head tilted in thought before appearing convinced, so I took that to mean that she could somehow explain it with physics. It was all over my head though. She could try to twist her logicalities all she wanted, but what with superpowers being something beyond the ken of man to begin with, it was my opinion that it would only be pseudoscience at best.

When Shouta-kun returned to the field in February, he fought with his weapons of ice and heart of fire with such forceful intensity that I found it almost alarming. His fighting style was cold and decisive, highly flexible, and very alert.

Thinking to give him more tempering just in case this fight after several months (his second ever) revealed that he hadn't actually repented much, I assaulted him with a large World Shadow. However, even when standing in front of a World Shadow the size of a small truck, Shouta-kun did not falter. First he froze his surroundings to form an absolute zero dome around himself. That nigh-indestructible white wall basically protected him fully from all tentacle and body slam attacks. Then during that time, he made a thin, long spear with water from a bottle. The only thing left to do after that was to grasp the right timing to dispel the wall and stab the World Shadow's core for a flawless victory.

Even after that, he did not let down his guard. The second smaller World Shadow that I deployed to ambush him from above when I expected him to be basking in the aftertaste of victory was easily sidestepped, completely frozen, then shattered with one stomp of his foot.

From start to finish, his movements were that of a battle veteran. Although he did not have any of the agility and sharpness of someone who had trained in a martial art, how do I put it, you know that "shin-gi-tai", er, the "mind-technique-body" thing that karateka always talk about? Yeah, it was like he had the "heart" down pat.

To be blunt, it was problematic for us that Shouta-kun learned *too* much from

that one instance of defeat. The third fight, fourth fight, fifth fight, Shouta-kun continued displaying an unshakable, powerful showing. Protecting at times, attacking when the chance arises, never hesitating to retreat when necessary. The sixth fight ended up being a tag fight. When Touka-chan expressed her surprise at Shouta-kun's composure, he told her, "You must become like fire, Touka." I didn't understand what he meant at all. I didn't understand, but there was no doubt he was strong. Clearly, I had woken up an absolute beast. Thinking back now, even during the unwinnable fight, he had tried to freeze the World Shadow from the inside out even while being swallowed whole, attempting manga-like fighting techniques normally impossible to imitate even while panicking. I suppose that should have given me a clue already.

Therefore, with Shouta-kun being like that, the fights that were supposed to make his heart pound and his hands sweat were quickly turning into mere grinding. Any half-assed World Shadow would be completely wrecked by Shouta-kun in mere seconds. But on the other hand, if we were to deploy World Shadows that even he would struggle against, then Touka-chan wouldn't be able to keep up. Touka-chan was still in the middle of growing, unable to generate flames hotter than the 1,200°C of a family-use gas stove. In the first place, Touka-chan's ability had bad affinity with the water-filled World Shadows. The way she normally fought was to vaporize or to burn off the World Shadow, so the bigger it got, the less effective her fighting style would become.

If we made World Shadows that could give Shouta-kun a run for his money the default, then Touka-chan could easily die.

And thus, that was where the large-scale battle event would come in. If Touka-chan was to challenge it by herself, she would lose. If Shouta-kun was to challenge it by himself, he would also lose. The two of them would have to combine their strengths, and even receive a bit of backup support from Kaburagi-san. In short, the only chance they had at winning was if the entire roster of Amaterasu fought defensively. Through acting out the fight with this ridiculously powerful enemy, while one aim was of course to put a little "fun" back into the World Shadow fights that were fast becoming mere grinding for Shouta-kun, the other aim was to be an incredible middle school period memory. A present from Kaburagi-san and I, so to speak. An opportunity for

them to end the school year with a bang, before entering the depressing exam season of year three. If we let this timing slip by, the next time we could do this would be after they entered high school. In other words, we'd have to wait a whole year.

So then, for the sake of this event, once again we had to run about doing a ton of preparatory work. This event, which I named the "Human Graduation Exam," was going to be a large-scale battle, or a so-called boss fight. Major injuries were planned. I would hold back to ensure that they didn't die, but it would be too unnatural if they got off with mere scratches after a boss fight. This was where Ig would come in, to do the healing. But in order for that to happen, it was imperative that Ig got used to either Touka-chan or Shouta-kun, at least enough to accompany them. If the students had to come all the way back to Ama-no-Iwato when they got heavily injured, that would be a waste of time. Not to mention, they could just as easily die while on the way.

To that end, I began to proactively set Ig on Shouta-kun. For example, I would have him feed her monkey food. I also tried to familiarize her with his smell by wrapping her up in the muffler that he had forgotten. Shouta-kun, for this part, also grew to like Ig quite a bit. Three weeks later, Ig was so familiar with Shouta-kun that she could sit on his shoulder. In fact, she got too familiar with him, so much so that she abruptly pulled out the box of chocolate cigarettes from his chest pocket and tried to run off with it. When she was caught by her tail, she then threw the box to Touka-chan, which was a good indication that she had also grown to accept Touka-chan quite a bit as well. For the sake of getting close with a cute mascot, Touka-chan also worked hard, such as changing to fragrance-free makeup and dialing down to natural-style makeup. That hard work paid off.

Incidentally, Kaburagi-san considered her smells an integral part of her "beauty" as a whole, so she had quickly given up trying to get close with Ig, and the two were pretty much locked in a permanent cold war. Apparently part of it was also Kaburagi-san still holding a grudge over the fact that I had declined her invitation for a meal on Christmas citing that I had to take care of Ig. I suppose it really would be humiliating to have lost against a female monkey... yeah, I suppose I had wronged Kaburagi-san. But it really was a crucial time when I

couldn't leave Ig alone. Being pulled left and right by two girls during Christmas, I sure had become a big shot. Is this the famous "moteki," the so-called "popular season in one's life"?

While I was proceeding with Ig's training, Kaburagi-san proceeded with updating our wardrobe. Specifically, that meant dog tags and battle suits.

The dog tags would act as identification for members of Amaterasu. In the first place, dog tags were worn by soldiers so that even if their face was blown off or their entire body was burned beyond recognition, they could still be identified. Amaterasu was a secret organization that carried out intense fighting against the terrifying World Shadows day in and day out. Being swallowed by a World Shadow such that not even a body remains... would never happen, of course, but the ongoing narrative was that even something that like was a possibility. That was why it would be better to have a dog tag. Having one is definitely cooler than not (90% of the reason).

Kaburagi-san seemed to have trouble comprehending, barely managing a "So, this is something for if we die in a horrible, terrible way?" Touka-chan was more surprised and delighted at the rare instance of hearing me speak and personally hand her something. But Shouta-kun alone fully understood and was super happy about the dog tag, so I counted that as having gone over well in my book.

Incidentally, on the front of the dog tags was carved the sun symbol that represented Amaterasu, while on the back was carved the owner's personal name, identification number, blood type, and birth date in simple font. The material used to make them was an alloy of platinum and several other rare metals. I did the design myself, and the manufacturing was taken up by Kaneyama Tech, our industrial partner in our deep-sea rare metals and methane hydrate enterprise.

The battle suits, as was obvious from the name, were to be used during battle. For example, although Touka-chan's flames would not hurt herself, her clothes could catch fire like normal. She was doing training to expand the area of her heat resistance to include her clothes, but it seemed like it was going to take quite a while longer. If her clothes got burned away accidentally in the middle of fighting and she did the "*Kyah!* You pervert!" thing, that instant of letting her guard down could prove fatal. Even if she had the mental fortitude

to continue fighting even after her clothes were burned away and the parts that shouldn't be exposed were exposed, there would still be a problem after the fight. She couldn't very well walk home stark naked the entire way.

To add to that, if the two students received attacks from World Shadows while wearing their school uniforms, no matter how many sets they had, it would never be enough. Similarly, what would their parents think seeing their children come home so often with their uniform damaged? Kaburagi-san's financial superpower could easily supply them with endless sets of uniforms, but them wearing brand-new uniforms all the time would be quite suspicious as well.

Therefore, these battle suits were meant to be worn underneath their uniforms, so that they could just quickly take off their uniform before shifting into battle mode. That was the kind of battle suit that was needed. Walking around with the suit in their bags and then changing immediately after receiving a summons would be too time-consuming, not to mention it would be an enormous pain having to find a place to change in. How much easier it would be if we could realize those henshin scenes where they could get changed in a split second of being enveloped by light. Unfortunately, that wasn't quite possible.

In consideration of how the battle suits had to be worn as an inner layer, them being too thick would negatively affect quality of everyday life. It would be problematic too if their classmates realized that they were wearing weird suits underneath. Therefore, the suits had to be ultra-thin and form-fitting.

The black, stab-proof suits that Kaburagi-san ordered from a professional designer were made of sharkskin fabric, with a meshed structure and plenty of notches that made it cool in the summer and warm in the winter. The suits came with a hood and a mask that covered everything above the nose for those moments when hiding one's identity was necessary. The reason for the difference in design between Shouta-kun's tough-looking design with only a bit of exposure here and there against Touka-chan's showy one with lots of exposure was chalked up to her need to expel heat, but I would bet it was mostly just the designer's taste. When she first wore the very form-fitting suit, Touka-chan was super embarrassed and tried to hide from Shouta-kun's sight,

but sadly(?), Shouta-kun only had eyes for Kaburagi-san's voluptuous mounds, which were greatly emphasized by her suit and which she exposed proudly.

Young man! What happened to your heart of fire?! Isn't this when you're supposed to call upon it?!

What with having to take off these 600,000 yen, tailor-made suits beforehand in order to not draw suspicion while changing clothes for P.E. class, we couldn't exactly have them "battle-ready" at all times, but this was about as far as we could take things from a practical standpoint. Aside from one spare set stored underground in Ama-no-Iwato, each of them were also handed one more spare set to keep at home. As for the hiding location, well, that was their own responsibility. Touka-chan chose a pretty good place, hollowing out an ashura statue and hiding her suit inside. In contrast, I wasn't sure what to say about Shouta-kun hiding his in the same place as his porn mags. I mean, it wasn't like I didn't understand. For him, it was the spot that he thought would be the hardest to be discovered, so it just happened that the two had to share the same location.

Finishing up Ig's training.

Passing out the dog tags.

Readying the battle suits.

Refining the scenario script, and getting all the preparations done.

The month was March, and it was a peaceful day right before spring break. Finally, the Amaterasu-produced large-scale battle event, Human Graduation Exam, was about to begin.

Chapter 18: The Secret Organization That Fights Against The Shadows Of The World

On a peaceful day in spring, Duchess Shiori Kaburagi of the Principality of Marinland was elegantly enjoying a cup of black tea in an open terrace cafe somewhere in Adachi City in Tokyo. The refreshing spring breeze ruffled her waist-long wavy black hair, carrying on it a faint, sweet smell. The sight of this breathtakingly beautiful lady in a black dress turning the pages of her book with elegant gestures drew the eyes of every single person passing by, regardless of gender and age. The space she occupied seemed strangely complete, as if it was cut out of a painting.

And that was where I went *boom!* with telekinesis.

Kaburagi-san started, then lowered her line of sight to her bountiful bosom, where the dogtag she had around her neck was (telekinetically) vibrating. That was the signal for an emergency summons.

“To think that it really is happening...” she murmured, before closing her eyes, seemingly shoring up her resolve. Then she closed her book, stood up, and brought her bill to the register.

“You can keep the change. I’m in a rush. Sorry for the trouble.”

“Uh... what?”

She smiled at the young part-time staff who was staring at her dazedly, taken in by the sight of her matchless beauty, and slipped a 10,000 yen bill into his hand. The young man could do nothing except watch on dumbfoundedly as the lady wrapped in mystery walked off with a quick stride, leaving the hard sound of her heels behind in her wake...

...And that was when I retrieved the video camera that had been recording both video and audio from behind a potted plant as Kaburagi-san got into her favorite black luxury car. With an irrepressible grin on her face, she flashed a peace sign toward empty space (in other words, me), which prompted me to

pump my fist in delight back at Ama-no-Iwato. *That was perfect, Kaburagi-san! Let's host a viewing party when everything's over!*

Then the scene changed to the Year 2 Class 2 classroom of a certain private middle school.

With spring break only two days off, the atmosphere inside the classroom was extremely languid. The Japanese language teacher's lullaby-like droning had already reduced half of the class to nodding their heads fighting off waves of drowsiness, whereas the remaining half was only half-heartedly taking notes. This was true also of the top beauty in the entire year who was sitting in the back of the room, Touka Hasumi. While tucking back her short hair every once in a while, she was also absentmindedly drawing cutesy Buddhas at the edge of her notebook. In the seat next to hers was the delinquent with fiery red hair who had already completely fallen asleep, Shouta Takahashi. For some reason, he was twitching every once in a while.

And that was where I went *boom!* with telekinesis.

The dog tags that the two of them were wearing abruptly began to vibrate. This feeling of suspense from being ambushed in the middle of their peaceful ordinary life, this feeling of secrecy from the meaning behind the vibrating dog tags that only the two of them understood! *Yep, there's no helping it! It's for the sake of fighting against a World Shadow, after all! Go on! Run, you two! Dive into the extraordinary to protect your ordinary! Don't worry, I'll make sure to get it all on tape!*

"Teacher, my stomach hurts so I'll be going home early."

"Ah, I'll escort her."

"H-Huh?"

Touka-chan abruptly stood up with both hands clutching her stomach, her line delivery slightly bordering on ham acting. As the Japanese language teacher blanked out from being caught off guard, Shouta-kun seized the opportunity to ride along with her excuse, which bewildered the teacher even further.

The two of them looked into each other's eyes, nodded in concert, then left the classroom in almost a run. The other students left behind in the classroom

were gradually rousing from their slumber and raising a slight buzz. Everyone had felt that something out of the ordinary was happening. The way the two had acted was too sudden. The way they looked was not normal. Anyone could tell that it was no mere stomachache. And yet, if it was not a stomachache, then what was it?

However, despite restlessly looking at each other due to the lingering fragrance of the extraordinary, not a single one of them had the initiative to chase after the two who had been acting so strangely. Class was still in session, they told themselves. Chasing after the two would be highly conspicuous, they told themselves. Just somehow, it would be embarrassing, they told themselves.

Oh yes, I was thoroughly familiar with such inner thoughts. How sad it was when people couldn't take action even when there was an opportunity right in front of them...

Eventually, the Japanese language teacher, though not quite convinced, managed to get over it and resume his lesson. It did not take more than five minutes for the slightly restless atmosphere in the classroom to settle back into the ordinary humdrum again.

At that time, Touka-chan and Shouta-kun were dashing down the hallways, heading toward the shoe lockers. It would have made such a good scene if they jumped out from a window, but they were wearing their indoor shoes. It's a bit lacking, but oh well, there was no helping it.

As the two were changing their shoes in front of their respective shoe locker, Shouta-kun noticed Touka-chan looking worried and asked teasingly, "What, you scared?"

"Of course I'm scared. An emergency summons in the middle of the day means that a Shadow that Kaburagi-san can't defeat by herself has appeared. What can we do even when we get there?"

"Oi oi, get a hold of yourself, 'senpai.' You've been fighting longer than I have, right?"

"Only a little bit longer. You've already gotten much stronger than me. In power... and in heart too, I'm sure."

“Don’t worry. When push comes to shove, I’ll protect you. Even if it costs me my life.”

“Shouta...”

As Shouta-kun pounded his chest confidently, for some reason Touka-chan directed slightly heated eyes toward him. Their eyes met. After a short moment of hesitation, the two slowly drew close to each other.

Wait, hold on. Wh-What is with this atmosphere? This was not in our script. Eh? You two are going to kiss? Is this one of those famous romantic subplots? I’d totally welcome it! My heart is all aflutter! Go for it...! Go clinch it...!

Touka-chan looked up at Shouta-kun, stretched up a bit, closed her slightly moistened eyes, then brought her lips—

—to nowhere as the phone in her chest pocket rang with the Heart Sutra song!

AHHHHHHHHHHH! BBUUDDDDHHHAAAA! YOU FUCKING BASTARD! I WON’T FORGIVE YOU! I’M SO GOING TO BUST THROUGH THE WALL OF TIME TO TEAR YOU A NEW ONE! Buddha, aren’t you a bit too strict against lust? That time in the bath and now this...! Fuck, this is why reality is shit! Why does reality have perfect timing only in times like these!

“...Your phone is ringing.”

“...Mm.”

Bittersweet atmosphere, completely dispersed. The two stepped away from each other awkwardly. It turned out that the caller was Kaburagi-san. It was a brief call, only alerting the two to the fact that she had driven to the school gate to pick them up.

Dammit, this was on me, I had dropped the ball on the coordination. Kaburagi-san didn’t know what was happening here, much less had any intent of interrupting. If I had noticed her about to make the call and had her wait a while, at this very moment... at this very moment...!

But regardless of my deep regret, the event continued on of its own accord. After changing into their exercise shoes, the two students ran to the school

gate, then got into the car that Kaburagi-san was waiting in. As they followed the Arakawa River toward Tokyo Bay, Kaburagi-san briefed them together. Ig was also in the back seat.

While the car sped on at 1.3 times the speed limit, which was the very limit of what traffic police wouldn't pull people over for, Kaburagi-san spoke with a grave look on her face.

"Boss called. This time, the World Shadow has appeared in the sea east of Hachijojima Island, within Japanese territorial waters. This Shadow, which we are provisionally calling 'Super Water Sphere,' is headed toward Tokyo. It is our task to stop and eliminate it."

"Over the sea? Why in such a weird location...? More like, it's daytime now." Shouta-kun tilted his neck while humoring Ig, who had climbed into his lap.

Touka-chan also nodded wordlessly.

This was a very reasonable question. World Shadows normally only appeared during dusk and in places with no human presence.

"World Shadows basically appear in places where people don't feel an inhibition against using violence. That applies to the open sea. Normally, there is no prey to attack in the ocean, but this time was a rather big exception. An illegal fishing vessel got stranded from engine failure. Eventually, hunger and thirst set in, and the resulting violence and madness attracted a World Shadow. After the Shadow swallowed everyone on board... it has grown to 50 meters in diameter."

"Fifty?!" exclaimed Touka-chan in disbelief while switching to her battle suit by taking off her sailor school uniform.

The largest World Shadow that had appeared to date was around 4 meters in diameter. In other words, the size had abruptly jumped tenfold all at once. That was quite some extreme inflation, but all the fault for it lay 100% with the reason that made it necessary, Shouta-kun.

Kaburagi-san had expected to field the question of "why would you know so much the super-sized World Shadow that had just appeared," but apparently the two students were still trying to wrap their minds around the scale of this

time's fight. They ended up asking about Boss instead.

"What about Boss? Hasn't he always been personally taking care of the really cataclysmic ones like these?"

"Boss doesn't have time for that now. At the moment, he's fighting with a 600m-sized World Shadow off of the coast of Ireland."

"Wha—?"

"S-Six hundr—?"

The two were rendered dumbstruck.

That's right, 600 meters. At that very moment, in the present continuous form, a 600 m scale sphere of water was firing off water beams like nobody's business, while a mysterious black-robed doll that was supposed to be Boss was pounding into it with telekinesis. It looked literally like a clash of the titans. Though of course, it was nothing more than a charade with me controlling both sides, just for the sake of creating an alibi for "Boss." What with the fight going on off the coast of Ireland, the surveilling of the three Amaterasu members' actions, and the soon-to-begin Human Graduation Exam, my brain was nearing its processing limit. It was kind of like singing and doing mental math while running all at the same time. It was quite tough.

So then, after the two students now understood the details of the ongoing situation, then came time for the final confirmation of their will. They were soon going to be plunged into an exam that would prove that they had surpassed, aka "graduated" from the realm of being human, in the form of the fight to stop the Super Water Sphere from destroying Tokyo. This was going to be their last opportunity to pull out.

It hardly needed to be said, but this fight was going to be severe on an entirely different dimension from what they had been dealing with previously. Surely they found it frightening and daunting. *My* legs would give way if I was told that I had to fight the Super Water Sphere with superpower proficiency merely on Shouta-kun's and Touka-chan's level. My stance was that the extraordinary was to be only something to spice up the ordinary, and not something to get so serious about that I would bet my life for.

So what about Shouta-kun and Touka-chan? Did they want to save Tokyo, even if it would cost them their lives? Or would they value their own lives more? I was fine with whichever they chose.

When a person truly puts their life on the line for someone else, and manages to overcome the trial that called for such a degree of self-sacrifice, that experience will undoubtedly turn into a large source of confidence and pride that will support his or her life in all the years to come.

On the other hand, realizing how important one's own life was to oneself was also of enormous weight. This was something that I thought to myself every time I read news of students choosing to end their lives, even though they had yet so much ahead of them. Kaburagi-san was about to open her mouth to ask for confirmation from Shouta-kun and Touka-chan, but before she could do so, the former spoke first.

"That's really bad news then, isn't it? Do we have a plan or something? If we're going to be fighting over open water, then I can freeze the surface to give us ground to stand on." Shouta-kun was in the middle of checking the zippers on his battle suit even while looking from the corner of his eye at Ig pulling out the pack of chocolate cigarettes from his school uniform's pocket. His tone sounded like fighting was only the most natural option to take.

"I think the most of what I can do is spam Flame Javelins at it to make it falter." Touka-chan, too, answered like fighting was a given, all while checking the high-pressure gas contraption installed near her hands to boost her output.

The two of them did not seem like they were underestimating the enemy, neither was it their personality to overestimate their own powers. In other words, this meant that from the very start, they already had enough resolve to stand up against this frightening menace without any hesitation whatsoever. Turned out there was no need for a pep talk from us at all.

"Are... you two not afraid?"

"Mhmm, I'm scared, but my dad and mom are both still in Tokyo."

"Hah, sour-faced Master is too."

"Mm. It's our city, so we'll protect it ourselves."

The surprise attack caused my cheeks to grow warm. *Y-You're making me blush, Shouta-kun. I am not a conquest target. Stop raising my Appeal Meter.*

Surely this was a sign of the growth that these two had experienced through their time in Amaterasu. This display of emotional strength and goodwill that was hard to find in adults, much less middle schoolers, brought a heartfelt smile to Kaburagi-san's face.

"Well said. We are Amaterasu. We are espers whose duty is to fight against the Shadows of the World. Let us stand up, with our lives on the line."

Kaburagi-san absolutely clinched her line delivery, and the transcendental-looking smile of valor on her face was the absolute perfect match. But then, right at that instant... Ig jabbed a chocolate cigarette into one of her nostrils.

I clutched my head. *AHHH! Another perfect line delivery gone to waste! Ig! No! Just, no! Can't you see Kaburagi-san's fingers twitching like mad? Apologize immediately! It's great that you've gotten familiar with humans, but you've gotten way too familiar!*

"Chi chi chi chi chi chicchi chichi?!" After sticking another chocolate cigarette into her remaining nostril and then chattering as if in laughter, Ig found her head shoved into the gap in the back seats in the next instant.

The atmosphere had turned into a rather comedic one, but the nerves were gone from Touka-chan's face as she rescued Ig wryly. *Do Ig's healing powers heal mental illnesses too...?*

After parking the car at one of the coin meters at the harbor area, the group of three stealthily made their way down an empty road lined with warehouses. Everyone had finished changing into their black battle suit, and Ig was snugly tucked into the front of Touka-chan's suit. It seemed like the students had struck the perfect balance between being overly lax and too tense. They were in their best condition.

"How are we going to proceed from here? By boat?"

"We will borrow a little bit of Boss' power here. This is quite valuable, but now is the time to use it. You two, hide your faces."

The two obediently pulled their hoods forward and put on masks adorned

with a sun relief. Amaterasu was a secret organization. Although they would be revealing their figures, their identities remaining secret was an ironclad rule. Kaburagi-san also did the same to hide her own face, after which she took out a figure of a bird made from Japanese paper and ripped it apart.

Abruptly, the three of them were enveloped by a half-transparent membrane shaped like a bird.

“Uwah!”

“Eh, wha-wha-woah we’re floating!”

“Stay still. We’re taking off.”

A powerful gust of wind arose, carrying them higher and higher as the nearby warehouse shutters clattered loudly. The previously half-transparent membrane gradually turned black, such that it became impossible for anyone outside to see inside.

After rising high enough, the now jet-black giant bird rotated to set its bearings, then zoomed off like a fighter jet. Quickly picking up speed, soon it went supersonic, turning into a black shooting star.

Wow, Boss-made items (in actuality just me doing all the work) really are amazing! This was actually quite challenging and tiring to control. Good thing I had spent every night the past two weeks practicing.



The fight to protect Tokyo began with the Super Water Sphere getting the first hit in. The large bird approaching at Mach 8 was shot down by a super thick jet of water. In terms of destructive power, thankfully the large black bird managed to offset the impact by using up the last vestiges of its strength, but then that left the three Amaterasu members abruptly in freefall from 30 m up in the sky.

Or so it seemed when, in the next instant, all three of them were standing on top of an ice floe. Apparently Kaburagi-san had stopped time, then manipulated the area affected by her power to effectively make steps for them to descend to the ocean surface.

“That’s crazy huge...!” While continuously releasing cold air to increase the size of their ice floe, Shouta-kun looked up and voiced his awe on behalf of everyone present. The gigantic sphere of water was floating about a meter in the air.

Just hearing the number “50 m” and seeing the real thing firsthand were two entirely different things. This overwhelmingly enormous World Shadow with a diameter of 50 m was akin to a skyscraper moving about with killing intent. Unlike normal World Shadows, the membrane enveloping this one was not black, but transparent. The water inside was easily visible, and looked like it had a will of its own. The core deep within was also very big, roughly 1 m in diameter, and shone dully like lead. In fact, it *was* lead. The toughness of lead was a bit too much for Shouta-kun’s frozen weapons to destroy, but its melting point was 327.5°C, which Touka-chan’s 1,200°C could easily handle. Teamwork was going to be key.

“Eat this! Eternal Force Blizzard!” By making footholds with ice, Shouta-kun immediately rushed at the fear-inducing World Shadow, then swung a fist while activating his ultimate technique as the very first attack.

He sure didn’t hold back! Though admittedly, there are times in battle when it is wiser to forgo tactics like wait-and-see and probing attacks. I couldn’t even count how many times it was in my childhood that I screamed “if you can only fight for three minutes then start by spamming your beams and sure-kill attacks already!” in frustration while watching certain giants of light on TV. Using a sure-kill attack as the first strike was justice. There was nothing surer than not giving the opponent an opportunity to retaliate. I could relate completely.

But that said, this situation wasn’t one where things would go so smoothly. This was 50 m. Fifty. Meters. Shouta-kun’s attack managed to instantaneously freeze a portion of the Super Water Sphere, which then fell away into the ocean, but that was almost nothing in comparison with its entire size. It was like being bitten by a tiny mouse. It would hurt, but wouldn’t amount to any significant damage. And of course, retaliation was forthcoming.

However, this was the enlightened Shouta-kun here, and not the overly-cocky Shouta-kun of the past. He fully expected his attack not to work, and also expected a counterattack. Immediately after getting his EterFor in, he used the

momentum from the attack to get to the other side of the Sphere, vigilantly keeping an eye on his back the entire time. By way of a decoy to help him get away, Touka-chan also released a searing hot lance 3 m in length made by compressing flames conjured from every part of her body, but I decided to ignore her for the moment.

Super Water Sphere sprouted a huge tentacle of water and brandished it.
Hey, hey, I'm going to attack you~

“Shit! Eternal Force Blizzard!” Shouta-kun had correctly read the telegraphed attack. Thrusting his hands toward the direction of the tentacle, he froze the air to make a pure-white wall. The fact that he made the wall in only one direction instead of all around must have meant that he was concentrating all his strength there. It was clear that he considered the tentacle a very real threat.

All right, his preparations were done. Which reminded me, the experiments we conducted back at Amaterasu only tested the power of his defense up to the level of handguns. I was extremely curious to find out exactly how great an attack Shouta-kun's EterFor was capable of withstanding. So I got it into my head to test it out right then and there. Even if he could not fully defend against the attack, I could just shift it at the last possible instant to avoid him taking the full brunt of the attack. Yep, there was enough of a safety margin.

So as a probing attack, I swung the giant tentacle ve~ery gently, only just enough to squash Tokyo Skytree into a pancake.

“Gn, o-aaaAAAHHHH!”

“Shouta!”

Shouta-kun roared as he was being swallowed by the violent torrent of water pressure. Touka-chan could only shout his name, understanding that she would only get in the way if she was to jump into the fray.

Several seconds later, the water tentacle swept past, revealing a thoroughly drenched Shouta-kun with his shoulders heaving up and down from heavy breathing, but otherwise none the worse for wear. He had fully blocked the attack. In terms of defensive capability, he had already exceeded the limits of man-made weapons.

Incidentally, Shouta-kun...

Why do you keep shouting out your attack name? It seems like you're having quite a lot of fun, aren't you? I'll make sure to thoroughly grill you afterward about your reasoning behind this very interesting practice!

"I gave it a try just now, but apparently I can't defeat this by controlling time alone. What a truly troublesome opponent this is," said Kaburagi-san in a frustrated tone after instantaneously moving to Shouta-kun's side with Touka-chan in hand.

You sure know how to play it up, Kaburagi-san. Because I knew that she couldn't actually control space, it seemed to me like she had merely sat back and watched while leaving the preliminary skirmish to the two students. But it was clear to see that the students had no doubt whatsoever that she had indeed been participating properly.

"Let's chip away at it a little at a time. I'll be support. You two focus on dealing dama—"

"Sorry, Kaburagi-san, but that attack just now really did a number on my iceteroid. It's already hurting quite a bit. I can only manage Eternal Force Blizzard one more time, and that's if I really push it," interrupted Shouta-kun in vexation.

Kaburagi-san directed reproachful eyes toward an empty space at an angle that the two students could not see.

S-Sorry. I went too far. I was only thinking about how he could probably defend against it, and forgot to consider the consequences. I suppose my standards had indeed gone slightly awry. I'll be more mindful going forward.

The two of them had effectively no limit to how long they could continuously use their powers, so I had planned a mid-stage part of the fight that was just long enough that they wouldn't get bored. Clearly, all that had just gone out the window. There was no other choice but to make the rest of the fight short and decisive.

Kaburagi-san sighed, saying, "Change of plan. Let's aim for a short and decisive fight then. I'll help Touka-chan increase her instantaneous firepower to

blast everything away, so Shouta-kun, you take up support and protect us two.”

“Understood!”

“Don’t worry, Touka. I’ve got your back.”

“Is that so? Then what about mine?”

“Ahh, yes, yours too, Kaburagi-san.”

After briefly chuckling at the sight of Shouta-kun scratching the back of his head in embarrassment while Touka-chan looked down with faintly blushing cheeks, Kaburagi-san quickly put a serious face back on and started moving.

Super Water Sphere was reading the atmosphere and busying itself with rebuilding its body by sucking up water from the sea during the exchange, but at this moment it also resumed moving. The fight was back on.

Immediately after the fight started again, suddenly dozens of flame javelins slammed into the Super Water Sphere like a volley of missiles. An enormous amount of water enveloped in explosive flames vaporized instantly, expanding to 1,700 times its original volume. The subsequent explosion sent even more water blasting away than the original vaporization by flames. The attack had apparently triggered a steam explosion.

Touka-chan must have repeatedly created flame javelins → shot them out → had their time stopped → and created more during stopped time in order to artificially prepare such a large number. Although a single shot might have been weak, shooting several together at the same time created a synergistic effect, thus giving rise to an accumulative destructive power greater than the mere sum of its parts. This was a move that would normally have required years of slow, diligent training on Touka-chan’s part. The fact of having realized it this early on made for a very vivid illustration of how powerful chronoprohiberis was.

This steam explosion attack pounded into Super Water Sphere again and again. The roiling water vapor and searing heat waves it gave rise to were incredible, to put it lightly. Shouta-kun was busy repairing their cracking ice floe during the brief break between attacks. If the floe gave out, then the two girls would fall straight into the ocean. What Shouta-kun was doing might have been

inconspicuous and far from flashy, but it was still a very valuable contribution.

I could have just let them steamroll the Super Water Sphere like this, but solely being on the defensive all the way to the end didn't quite fit my personality. Probably having picked up on the commotion, there were even news helicopters that had foolishly (or bravely?) gotten close enough to film the fight. So I decided to make one last counterattack.

I had the Super Water Sphere, which had already been reduced to half of its original size, float several tens of meters high into the sky and expand into an enormous board parallel to the water surface.

Touka-chan let up her attacks, warily observing the suspicious movement. Kaburagi-san displayed a look of understanding—"Attack Pattern F? Got it."—on her face.

Fast to comprehend and react, Shouta-kun shouted in an agitated voice, "Kaburagi-san, gather everyone to me! It's going to fall!"

Just like he said, I was going to unleash a large-area attack that was effectively an incredible amount of seawater crashing down like a waterfall. This moment in time, Kaburagi-san's stopprotein was already quite spent after all the heavy use, such that it could no longer maintain stopped time for the full 44 seconds. I estimated that 20 was probably the most it could manage. It was physically impossible to move everyone out of range of the attack within 20 seconds. If evasion was not an option, then their only choice was to defend themselves and ride it out. *Come, Shouta-kun. Now is the time to surpass your limits!*

"Eternal Force Blizzard!" A mere split second after Kaburagi-san used chronoprohiberis to gather Touka-chan and instantaneously move next to Shouta-kun, he created a white dome that enveloped them entirely. The enormous mass of water falling down battered at the dome as if to break through, but ultimately failed to even leave a crack. After the torrent of seawater passed, the spherical chunk of ice floating on the surface of the churning sea was suddenly opened up by a flaming sword, revealing the three of them safe and sound within. Shouta-kun was breathing extremely heavily, only capable of remaining on his feet thanks to Touka-chan lending him her shoulder.



At that exact moment, a water tentacle whipped at them from behind. Kaburagi-san managed to evade it, but the two students were sent flying 5 to 6 meters in the air.

Gehahaha! You've let your guard down, Shouta-kun! Or so I wanted to say, but it was clear that it was more the case that he was so spent that he couldn't react. After the massive waterfall attack and all the damage it had received so far, the Super Water Sphere had shrunk to around 5 m. If the tentacle hadn't also been sized down proportionally, this attack would have killed the two of them instantly.

Thanks to all the practice I did on medical training dolls, I had a perfect grasp on how much to hold back. Just as intended, the bones in Shouta-kun's right shoulder and three of Touka-chan's ribs were broken.

On paper, a bone fracture might evoke only a superficial "Ahh, yeah that probably hurts." However, place that bone fracture within the context of being in a fight to the death, and then that fracture turns into a lethal injury. The two of them screamed out loud in agony, all appearances and shame discarded. They were no longer capable of fighting.

The thing about extreme pain is that even if you have the will to continue fighting, your body will do whatever it wants. Even if your head tells your body to "Stand up! The enemy is right before you!" your body will ignore it, instead obeying the protective instinct of curling into a fetal position. The only way to maintain the ability to move while under extreme pain is to endure similar or greater levels of pain repeatedly until your body grows used to it. Pain feels vivid every single time, regardless of how many times you've experienced it before. The pain never grows less. However, being able to move even while in pain—that is what pain endurance is. This was something that I had learned after tearing off pieces of my telekimuscle several hundreds of times.

The two students, naturally, had not undergone such training. Shouta-kun had experienced it once, but pain endurance was not something that could be acquired in a single go.

With the two combatants down, Kaburagi-san, who possessed no attack power on her own, was checkmated. However, this was the opportunity for the

Amaterasu member who had not contributed anything so far to take the spotlight.

Upon hearing the cries of pain, Ig popped her head out from the front of Touka-chan's suit. The warm, white light emitted from her tiny, furry paws fully healed the two teenagers in the blink of an eye. After having heard me cry out so many times from my farcical injuries and casting healing on me in response, Ig had gained the habit of reflexively casting healing whenever she heard anyone crying or groaning from pain.

"Thank you, Ig-chan!"

"Chi chi chi!" Upon being hugged thankfully by Touka-chan, Ig chattered happily.

The water tentacle brandished in ruthlessness against this heartwarming scene between a young girl and a small animal was perfectly parried by Shouta-kun with a shield of ice that he pulled out from beneath the waves.

"Phew, that was close. Kaburagi-san!"

"Yes, we have to finish this quickly." After running over, Kaburagi-san looked at the shrunken down Super Water Sphere, then looked up at the news helicopters hovering in the sky a distance away. The longer this dragged on, the greater the probability of accidentally hitting a helicopter. In addition, all of them were already extremely fatigued.

Touka-chan confirmed, "I'm also near my limit. This is my first time repeatedly using such large firepower. That combination technique with Kaburagi-san... I think I can only manage it one last time."

"Understood. Let's aim to bring it down with that. Three, two, one!"

In concert with Kaburagi-san's signal, the very last vestiges of Touka-chan's power manifested in a total of five flame javelins that slammed into the Super Water Sphere. The Sphere made no attempt at evasion, simply staying in place and taking it.

However... it was not enough! The amount of damage dealt was insufficient. The Super Water Sphere was still floating there, now only 3 meters in diameter. It wasn't that I had maintained it to be spiteful. This was honestly a simple

matter of insufficient firepower.

Kaburagi-san directed “Can’t you read the atmosphere? It should have been over just now, right?” eyes toward empty space, but she was calling it quits too early.

When I corner someone, I make sure to corner them to the very end. Case in point: Touka-chan was on her knees, moaning in despair. Apparently that truly was the very last bit of her power. Having failed to finish it right there and then, she no longer saw any hope of victory.

But in contrast, Shouta-kun had not given up yet. His iceteroid was overburdened and thoroughly expended, no longer capable of generating absolute zero, a.k.a. Eternal Force Blizzard. The recovery from that heavy injury had also depleted both his physical and mental stamina. However, being able to overcome all that was the mark of a true protagonist. Shouta-kun answered my expectations.

In protection of Kaburagi-san and Touka-chan behind him, Shouta-kun took up an imposing stance with a shield of ice in one hand and a spear in the other. He used the shield to deflect an incoming tentacle attack. Upon seeing the shield break in half, he then discarded it without any hesitation.

Roaring with fighting spirit, Shouta-kun rushed toward the Super Water Sphere with both hands holding his spear. It was a so-called lance charge.

The Sphere shot water bullets at him as a last-ditch effort, but he saw through all of them, cool as ice, and evaded everything with only the barest of movements, while thundering forward with the ferocity of fire.

It was all or nothing. This thrust that he poured everything he had into, accurately reached the core of lead, then p—

Pi—

Pie—

Pier—Failed to pierce it!

That’s right, the core was made so that his ice weapons alone could not destroy it!

I clutched my head once again and sighed. *~ I can't believe it! Reality seriously is shit all the way through! He had surpassed his limits to manage this one attack, why can't you just give him his miracle already! This isn't even steel or titanium we're talking about. It's just lead! Crack already! Read the goddamn atmosphere! But if the useless gods above won't grant a miracle, then I'll grant it! There, miracle granted! Done!* I used telekinesis to crack the core of lead, then made it crumble to pieces. The water that had been floating in midair fell down together with the core fragments, slipping through the gaps in the ice floe and into the ocean.

Even so, Shouta-kun remained vigilant. It was only after he confirmed that nothing was coming back up out of the water that he relaxed and fell backward onto the floe.

Everyone had done a fantastic job. Since they were done, I also sent the Super Water Sphere over in Ireland flying off in a flashy display of power and wrapped things up over there.

From Shouta-kun's point of view, it had probably seemed like his wholehearted attack had barely fallen short, but right before he succumbed to despair, reality stopped teasing him and finally gave in. But honestly, I had no intentions of teasing him. I really was just trying to decide whether to let things end here or have it go on. This was something that I finally understood from being on the side behind the curtains, but that brief pause right before a boss in a game or anime goes down? It's possible that that was a "Honestly, this is still a bit too early to die... what should I do... well, guess I'll just let them have the win!" moment for someone in the back. *Antagonists have it tough too.*

While commending the two kids who had tried so hard it seemed like they might even have whittled away a bit of their life energy, Kaburagi-san took out a waterproofed figure of a whale made from Japanese paper. When she tore it, a half-transparent whale appeared. The two students looked slightly surprised, but then quickly caught on and simply closed their eyes in acceptance.

With that, the unidentifiable group of espers composed of three humans and one animal became swallowed up by a black whale under the eyes of the news helicopters, then sunk out of view into the sea.

Good job, everyone. The Human Graduation Exam is officially over.

Epilogue: Ig's Spring Break

Igbadi Sognah Muguu's morning began, as always, when Kinemitsu Sago got out of bed. When her little ears picked up the sound of rustling sheets from the direction of the bed, she peeked out from her nesting box on the perch placed in a corner of the room, and twitched her nose a few times. Not finding any bad-people smell in the air, she relaxed and climbed down from her perch to clamber onto Sago's head.

"Oh hey there, Ig. Good morning."

"*Chi chi!*" Ig replied energetically to Sago's sleepy-sounding voice while going through his hair.

He was the leader of the troop that she currently belonged to. Every morning without fail, he would wash his face and brush his teeth. Ig could not understand why he would repeatedly thrust a stick into his mouth until he spewed foam, especially when it wasn't even food, but she understood that Sago was both very careless and very apt to doing incomprehensible things. Therefore, she paid it no mind, focusing on grooming his hair while he brushed his teeth.

After the teeth brushing, Sago laid down and began watching TV. Ig also watched together with him, while constantly shifting back and forth between his shoulder and his head. During this time when Sago had his eyes fixed on the TV, there would be knives and pans and ingredients flying about by themselves. Up until recently, Ig had watched that, but by now she had grown bored of it. The screen with the rapidly changing colors was much more interesting to her.

When breakfast was ready, they began to eat. This morning, Ig's menu was monkey food, a slice of apple left over from last night, and a spoonful of honey. When she dropped food crumbs onto Sago while eating on his head or shoulder, he would get very angry. Therefore during meals, she had to leave these positions where she felt ultimate peace and safety and instead get down to eat on top of the low dining table.

The entire time while eating, Sago's eyes never once left the TV screen. He had been like this every day since a week ago. At times, he would also be taping it. He was confirming how information was spreading, and also keeping record of Amaterasu's first time being on TV for commemoration.

UK public broadcasters had managed to film the entire fight off the coast of Ireland and were reporting on it. It was the same for the fight in Tokyo Bay and Japanese public broadcasters.

At first, the UK TV stations had received information about a gigantic, unidentifiable mass appearing over the sea, and thus dispatched helicopters to get some firsthand footage. Artificial satellites confirmed that it was a very large sphere of water floating over the ocean and moving at 20 km/hr. Although it was a very unbelievable phenomenon, it was also, oddly enough, a sort of believable phenomenon at the same time. That was why the military was not deployed. If it was an easily understandable threat like a dragon or an alien spaceship, although there would have been quite a bit of chaos and scrambling about, the military would still have been sorted in a timely manner. However, it was just a large lump of water. Something that was indeed quite unrealistic, but only half-assedly so. Was it a peculiar natural phenomenon? An unknown living being? Something out of the occult? Aliens? There was no way to tell at all. Physicists and marine biologists found themselves suddenly bombarded with questions, to the point where they couldn't even move a step.

Before the helicopters got on scene, a mysterious, black-robed person appeared out of nowhere, standing in the way of the 600 m-class water sphere off the Irish coast. Top-down footage from artificial satellites was not very clear, but it seemed like the black robe was fighting with the water sphere. Every time the black robe moved his hands, an invisible force would slam into the water sphere. The sphere, in turn, was spouting tentacles and water jets the scale of tsunamis, but all of these were blocked by yet again some invisible force. When one of the helicopters finally got close enough to run its cameras, the reporter onboard excitedly shouted, "An invisible titan is fighting with a water monster!"

This spread throughout the media as is, such that the mysterious person in the black robes became known throughout the world as "Invisible Titan (IT)," and the gigantic sphere of water became known as "Water Monster (WM)." In

Japan, however, they were called “Titan” and “Super Water Sphere,” respectively.

There were some voices who condemned Titan for attacking the Super Water Sphere that had appeared harmless previously, but almost all of them went silent when it was pointed out that the news helicopters had also been protected from several stray attacks from the Super Water Sphere by an invisible force. Even so, the theory that “the Super Water Sphere got angry from being attacked by Titan” had already put down very deep roots. Neither Titan nor Super Water Sphere left any messages. The reason and meaning behind the fight between the two could only be guessed.

On the other hand, the 50 m one that appeared in Tokyo Bay was handled by a group of three mysterious individuals. Judging by the circumstances, their black outfits, their hostile actions against another Super Water Sphere, and how they had made their exit with a black whale like Titan did, it was conjectured that they were in the same position as Titan.

According to security camera footage and eyewitness reports, the three had appeared in Koto City in Tokyo and then made their way to the scene in a high-speed transport that looked like a giant, black bird. However, be it due to coincidence or conspiracy, there was no information whatsoever on the three before that point, such that it was impossible to determine their identities. The traffic of people and vehicles going in and out of Koto City was very high. A quick change of clothes was all that was needed to easily blend in with the crowd. The masks also made facial recognition impossible.

The three respectively displayed powers of fire, ice, and teleportation, and successfully clinched a victory. It was hard to see from the satellite and news helicopter footage due to all the steam and bad angles, but the presence of a small automatic machine or small animal was also confirmed.

With the inclusion of the black bird and black whales, the group generally came to be called “Unidentified Black-Clothed Group.”

The above was all of the information that the broadcasters gathered. Anything beyond, be it deep dive inferences, heated discussions, conspiracy theories, and all else was relegated to the realm of gossip magazines, variety

shows, radio talk shows, and the internet.

Sago used telekinesis to look into the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department, National Diet Building, various TV stations, and the Japan Self-Defense Forces, and confirmed that none of the ongoing investigations were even remotely close to approaching Amaterasu. However, although he knew this, he still could not help but to check those places again and again in worry. In addition to that, because he could not help but to become restless every time he saw the gallant figures of Amaterasu members on screen, he found it impossible to stop watching TV. In comparison with how he had been almost glued to the screen the entire time for the first three days after the incident, this was already a major improvement.

After breakfast was done, and Sago was finally satisfied and took his eyes off of the screen, he stood up with a fruit knife in hand before tripping over nothing and falling to the ground. “AHH! OOWWW! THIS HURTS SO BAD! UWAHH, SAVE ME!”

Upon comprehending that Sago had carelessly stabbed the fruit knife deep into his own thigh while falling, Ig quickly scampered over and healed him. She then patted hasty Sago’s thigh while opening the three packets of gum syrup—her recent favorite—that she had received as a reward for healing him. Sago was the reliable troop leader who had saved Ig herself, but he was also a very big klutz who would severely injure himself at least once every other day.

After going through the usual paces of this very common occurrence, Sago changed into his bartender outfit, then stepped out from his living area into the Ama-no-Iwato store area. He performed a cursory cleaning of the store, then sat down, with legs crossed, to practice on his acoustic guitar. This was his “so that I can say twenty years later when I’m in my forties that I did guitar in my youth” practice.

Badly and clumsily he played, while singing to his own accompaniment. However, Ig still swayed her body in time, because she liked his songs. They were bad even in Ig’s ears, but they were wholehearted. They had soul. And he *was* getting better, just the tiniest bit, every day. Ig would always feel happy whenever she listened to his songs.

After about an hour of practice, Sago put his guitar away and took up a light novel that depicted superpowers. After the Super Water Sphere incident, the quick-witted bookstores started to proactively recommend books related to superpowers. Sales were so good that everywhere ran out of stock. The one that Sago was currently reading was one that he had borrowed from Kaburagi. Every once in a while, he would murmur “I see” or “Ah, you’re going with this development?” while taking down notes. Ig got bored because he wouldn’t pay her any attention, so she returned to her nesting box to take an afternoon nap.

“Ig! Lunch!”

Eventually, she woke up to a wonderful smell and Sago’s voice. When she reached the store area of Ama-no-Iwato, she found Sago eating a plate of pasta while making fruit juice with a blender. The paste that was strawberries and bananas with just a little bit of pineapple was served in Ig’s dish, and she lapped it up blissfully. Sago then diluted the leftover shake with milk and yogurt, then chugged it down in one go.

As she was regretfully licking the last traces of her meal off of her dish, Ig’s ears picked up the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs that led to Ama-no-Iwato. Ig lifted her head, swiveled her ears, then promptly clambered onto Sago’s head warily.

Just as expected, the person who walked in was the person who smelled thickly of the bad-people smell, Shiori Kaburagi. She was holding a small box decorated with a store logo. The outfit that she was wearing today was a white blouse paired with a high-waisted black skirt that had a corset-like part at the waist area, which gave her a chaste and pure image. In fact, during the short walk between the closest parking lot to Ama-no-Iwato, this appearance of hers had already committed mental massacre of more than ten virgin boys. The destructive power was such that even for Sago—who was used to seeing Kaburagi in amazing clothing choices—this was more than enough to be lethal. Seeing Sago clutch his chest in agony, Ig quickly cast healing on him, then bared her teeth against Kaburagi, who had clearly just inflicted an incomprehensible attack on him.

“Good morning. I brought cake today.”

“Good morning your clothes look great today too it’s simple but suits you so well so hey you want to drink some juice?”

“Sure, thank you. Is this a lassi?”

“Lassi? I don’t know all those fancy names, but this is fruit thrown into the blender and then mixed with milk and yogurt.”

“That’s a lassi. The fruit kind.”

Ig had a strong animosity against this Kaburagi, who sat next to Sago so familiarly and opened the box to begin poking at the cake inside. Everyone was being tricked by this bad person who strolled in looking like she owned the troop, doing as she pleased. Ig would have loved to chase her out, but unfortunately, the troop leader, Sago, had taken a liking to her. Ig could not do anything too overtly hostile. That was why she had to resort to harassment like what a mother-in-law does to a daughter-in-law.

Ig scampered to pick up a fork left inside the sink, then used it to roll up Kaburagi’s wavy hair like spaghetti. She was going to completely mess up that impudently well-groomed hair.

In fact, the hair with a fork tangled inside looked so ridiculous that Ig laughed, “*Chi chi chi chicchi chi chi chi?!*”

The next instant, Ig found herself hanging upside down with her tail tied to the end of the string that dangled down from the ventilation fan in the ceiling.

The screaming Ig was rescued by a sighing Sago, then subjected to a very unreasonable scolding. Ig dropped her shoulders dejectedly, remorsefully reflecting on how she needed to be smarter with her harassment next time.

After a short rest, and during the time when Ig was casting healing on her tail and also licking it, the two held a quick meeting.

“So about Kaneyama Tech. As it turns out, being able to prepare a large amount of resource samples was huge. Performance is rising explosively. They’ve also begun using Sago-san’s high-pressure black box in seriousness.”

“Oh, really? No wonder the number of usage requests have gone up as of late. Even though it’s literally just a black-colored box.”

The large, black box currently sitting inside one of the laboratories at Kaneyama Tech had a touch panel where a user could input desired “Pressure” and “Duration,” and then Sago would get a notification on his smartphone. Upon seeing that message, Sago would then deploy extremely high pressure—beyond that which is possible to achieve with modern-day technological standards—inside the black box. The name of the black box was “Black Box.”

At the start, the eyes of the Kaneyama Tech researchers went bloodshot trying to decipher and reverse-engineer this box provisioned to them by Kaburagi. However, no matter how much they studied it, it was truly nothing more than a simple iron box with a touch panel and a transmitter. Eventually, they grew slightly fearful of it and decided it was best to simply let sleeping dogs lie. They stopped studying the box itself, and instead turned their efforts toward exploring ways to make good use of the box. One of those achievements was an artificial diamond larger than anything ever made before. Kaburagi and Sago could not successfully make diamonds from graphite just by simply applying pressure due to their lack of technical knowledge. Therefore, that diamond was a collaborative success backed by Kaneyama Tech’s technical knowledge and technique.

“Is it becoming too burdensome in terms of time? You still have the wind power plant, right? If it’s too much, then I’ll adjust your schedule.”

“Ahh, that could be good. Turning the turbine blades is quite dull and bothersome. If the Kaneyama Tech side is going well, then it might be a good idea to start scaling down the wind power plant venture. But we’d be leaving them in a rather tough spot if we were to pull out so suddenly, so maybe gradually... but on second thought, nah. I actually quite like the employees over there. They’re really interesting. Have I told you? They’ve begun building a shrine to what they call the God of Turbines.”

“I’m sorry, what...?”

“Honestly, the shrine is fine. What I’m worried about is the counterintelligence front. Are we really fine? It’s already been a whole week, but the reporting is showing no signs of abating. Won’t there eventually be some incredible forensic investigator or something that really finds us?”

“Everything’s fine, I’ve thoroughly controlled all the foundation-level information. There was no security camera footage. No eyewitnesses. No physical evidence. None of us will talk or post anything online. All the evidence, if there was any, at the warehouse area was washed away by that heavy rain, right? You also have a thorough idea of the movements of the government and police and mass media from your telekinetic monitoring, right? Recently, investigation is being narrowed to the suburbs of Tokyo, but it’s mostly only the media, what with the absence of any human or property damage and no laws having been broken. Well, and there are also the academics making plans to investigate the ocean, I suppose. But anyways, my point is that there is a limit to the number of people being mobilized, even for a human wave attack. Information being gathered on the internet is also greatly affected by hearsay aimed to affect share prices in the stock market and thus has very low credibility. I say this to you two times every day, don’t I? Stop worrying.”

“I understand all that with my head, but still. Ah, screw it. Anyways, so how’s the plan to take advantage of this incident to expand our influence into the government, police, and mass media?”

“Going very well. That is something you can leave entirely to me. However, there’s a need to proceed carefully, so I have to do it alone... please don’t misunderstand, I’m not saying that Sago-san is no good, all right? It’s just that we all have things that we are suited and unsuited for.”

“Don’t worry, I know that. I made you my adjutant so that I can leave all that to you. I’m not bothered at all.”

After the two wrapped up their discussion, Sago withdrew to the counter, and took out two boxes tied up with ribbons from a shelf. Then he adopted a sour face and began to wipe wine glasses. Kaburagi began reading a small, Western-published booklet. A short while later, Shouta Takahashi, who was wearing charcoal-patterned shorts and a crimson red T-shirt and jangly silver accessories, and Touka Hasumi, who was wearing jeans and warm-colored matching T-shirt and cardigan, showed up.

They exchanged brief greetings, then quickly set eyes on the two boxes sitting on the counter. After all, there were cards printed with their respective names tucked into the boxes.

“These are presents from Boss. He asked me to tell you two that you did a great job.”

“Boss was here?!”

“Until a short while ago. You two just missed him. He’s on his way to the Maldives now. He’s a very busy person.”

Touka was looking around excitedly, but then wilted with disappointment at Kaburagi’s words. The two were actually meeting with Boss almost every day, but haven’t quite managed to *meet* him just yet.

Shouta looked at the ribbon-wrapped cylindrical box addressed to himself and said half-amusedly, “Boss uses such cute wrapping? Is Boss actually a girl?”

“I did the ribbons.”

“Eh?”

“...”

After that murmur, Sago wordlessly served a latte with the image of a stick man attacking a round object with flames drawn in the foam. Master’s clumsy expression of gratitude and appreciation evoked a laugh and a word of thanks from Shouta.

The presents were both unwrapped on the spot. Shouta was super happy about his lantern lit with a flame taken from the sacred Olympic torch, and Touka rejoiced at receiving one of the thousand-year-old lotus seed found inside a Buddha sculpture in Horyuji Temple last year.

Ig’s interest was piqued by the unique seed and so she tried to bite it, but then got scolded quite seriously by Touka. Ig evacuated to Sago’s shoulder with tail curled, thoroughly bewildered.

The four people then gathered around Kaburagi’s laptop to check out rumors on the internet and chat while enjoying café lattes and cookies. That said, Sago stayed silent the whole time, though.

“Seems like our codenames have all settled down. Is it because the West has more open debate than Japan that all the codenames ended up being in English?”

“Admittedly, the 600 m one in Ireland did appear before the 50 m one in Japan. Titan, or IT, is Boss, right? Time Lady, TL, that’s Kaburagi-san, and Burning Girl, BG, is Touka.”

“And Shouta is FK, for Freezing Knight.”

“Ig doesn’t seem to have a name... oh right, it’s Healer. Is that actually a codename? That theory of her being a small automatic machine is so funny though.”

“That is a bit funny, yes, but... hmm, as expected, seems like we’re being bad-mouthed quite a bit.” Posts on the internet included: “Why did they show up but not explain themselves?”, “They probably have a guilty conscience about something,” “I bet they’re full-on homos and shitty lesbians,” “Human garbage who destroyed natural miracles produced by Mother Earth,” and a lot of other similar disparagement. The general populace seemed to not understand how much of the damage to the city coastline infrastructure had been averted. Naturally, there were also a lot of people who interpreted the incident favorably and expressed feelings of admiration. Although there was indeed a lot of praise, that didn’t make the disparagement any less hurtful.

The mass media’s enthusiasm was akin to chasing a criminal or an escaped rare animal, such that many media outlets even offered prize money for anyone with plausible information. The two students could not hide their vexation toward people who could not sympathize with why they wanted to keep their identities hidden, even in light of how hard they worked this time. True to Kaburagi’s prior warning, now it was clear to the two of them that if their identities were exposed, they would lose every last ounce of privacy and every single detail about their lives would be dug up and made a sport of.

Kaburagi admonished the two disgruntled teenagers. “Imagine this incident being covered up and everybody being forbidden to speak about it as if it had never happened. Or imagine hearing *only* hero worship and flowery rhetoric. In comparison to either of those, the way things are now, with a good mixture of abuse and praise, seems much more natural, doesn’t it? This is proof that they are all living in peace.”

“...That might be true, but that’s adult reasoning. I can’t just accept things

being like that. All these people saying whatever they want without using their heads. There's no Fire burning inside their hearts. These people are no good."

"Agreed. They seem like they have very low merit."

Kaburagi did not refute their words of indignation, merely smiling and changing the topic. Their attention was quickly diverted as soon as she brought up the World Shadows.

After the Super Water Sphere incident, the frequency of World Shadows appearing throughout the world had gone down drastically. The entire world had come to know of the existence of overwhelming violence and had become afraid. That served to suppress the violence in the unconscious part of people's minds. However, since the existence of the water monsters and the espers who defeated those monsters was now a known fact, very soon in the future, human desire for violent power would become even greater. "Danger past and God forgotten," as the saying went. In the same way, people tended to forget their fear. After all, there was no actual damage incurred by the Super Water Spheres, so it was understandable that the current atmosphere of fear would soon begin fading away. The hunger for this new form of violence that had just been proven, superpower, would undoubtedly affect peoples' unconscious, and through them, the World Shadows.

As the conversation went on and on, Ig found herself bored out of her mind. What they were chattering about was completely incomprehensible to her, yet Sago was so occupied listening to them that he was not paying any attention to her, no matter how much she pulled his hair or ears. She had already taken an afternoon nap earlier, and so was not sleepy.

After smoothly getting off of Sago and onto the ground, Ig suddenly noticed Ama-no-Iwato's door standing ajar. Shouta had failed to close it properly. What with her body's age having been dialed back and the improvement to her living conditions, Ig had regained the sense of curiosity that she had been born with. She had never gone outside on her lonesome before. The custom of taking morning walks with Sago had gradually petered out starting a week ago, so she was beginning to miss the outside air a little.

Therefore, with her interest fueling her, Ig slipped through the gap in the door

to have an adventure in the outside world. The four humans were busy talking and laughing, and thus did not notice her. This was the start of her great escapade.

Ig jumped up the steps that led to Bar Ama-no-Iwato, and reached the overground surface. Then she started exploring the city, flitting between shrubbery and roadside trees. She sucked the honey from flowers blooming in shrubbery and ate insects clinging to the thin branches of roadside trees. The wings were not yummy, so she threw those onto the heads of the people passing by below.

As she was making no effort to hide herself, she was spotted by humans several times. Many who gave off strong bad-people smells raised a fuss and tried to touch her, but she slapped them away and ran off. There were ones who had kind-looking eyes and did not smell of the bad-people smell, so she let them pat her a little, but they all did it very badly so she ended up shaking them off too.

The early afternoon sun was bright, and the sound of cars was cacophonous. Having only come out previously in the early morning when there was very little traffic, Ig rubbed her eyes before darting into a back lane to get away from the sound and prevalent smell of bad people. The afternoon sunlight was blocked out by high-rises, such that the concrete block walls were nice and cool. Ig nonchalantly strolled across the walls, but after having moved so much, found herself slightly hungry. This was when the eddies of wind blowing around the tall buildings brought a fragrant smell to her nose. It was the smell of honey.

Ig stopped, and turned her nose to follow the smell on the wind. A brief pause later, she shifted from the wall to a telephone pole, jumped off onto a rain gutter, then skillfully climbed up some vines hanging off of some potted plants being grown on one of the apartment verandas.

When she crawled through an open window into one of the apartments, she found a young man sitting half up in bed, looking at her with eyes wide open.

This was the room of a sports athlete. On a shelf was a beautiful, new-looking basketball displayed next to an old, well-worn basketball. On another shelf were several golden trophies in a row, and on the wall hung a uniform and

several honorable certificates. Many sports magazines were lined up neatly on a bookshelf.

However, the facial color on the face of the high schooler with a buzz cut who owned the room was not good. His right arm was wrapped up in a sizable cast hanging down from his neck.

“What? A monkey...?”

Paying no mind to the young man astonished at the intruder who had come in through the window, Ig locked on to the piece of toast on his knee and leaped at it. She licked it blissfully, before realizing that the nearby jar probably held even more honey inside. She batted at it and rolled it around, but the contents just wouldn't come out. The young man smiled wryly, then spread more honey onto the piece of toast that now had fur and dirt all over it.

“!” That movement caused the young man to scrunch up his face and cradle his right arm. After not moving for a short while, he then heaved a long, heavy sigh. “Oi, monkey, I don't know where you're from, but go back after you're done licking that. I'm in no mood to fawn over a small animal right now.”

“Chi chi chi.”

“What, are you going to laugh at me too? Yes, I'm a shitty idiot who broke his arm in a shitty test of courage and ended my own career as a sports athlete! Shit! Shut up all of you, you don't have to tell me, I already know it all! What does Dad mean by he's sad, like hell he's sadder than me! Ow...” The agitated young man groaned again.

With honey plastered all over her mouth, Ig, as a conditioned reflex, cast healing on the young man's arm. Miraculous light illuminated the dim room.

“?!” Wordlessly, the young man stayed as still as a stone statue while accepting the warm, white light. Several seconds later, Ig stopped her healing and, having lost interest, returned to licking honey.

After a full minute of being shell-shocked, the young man abruptly came to a start, then looked at his right arm. He lifted it, moved it, swung it around, and was astonished. He looked at the miraculous monkey with what was surely the most surprise that he had ever felt in his entire life.

“You... right, I’ve read about you on the internet. You’re the small animal that belongs to the Black-Clothed Group, aren’t you? So you were a monkey.”

“Chi chi.”

“Oh, don’t worry, I won’t tell anyone. You’d probably be happier with that, wouldn’t you? But still, haha, here I was, thinking this a shitty and boring world with nothing good in it, when it turns out that miracles really do exist. All right, you just wait here, I’ll bring you a banana right now. You’d prefer that over honey, right?”

The young man carefully got out of his bed so as to not turn the monkey over, then left the room with a light step while singing joyfully.

The instant the figure of the young man was out of sight, Ig’s body floated up in midair. Being familiar with this mysterious phenomenon, Ig was surprised, but not panicked. She knew that this mysterious power would never cause her harm. After traversing through midair and flying through the sky, Ig eventually found herself falling down, eventually landing on the chest of Touka’s cardigan as she was shouting Ig’s name in the direction of some shrubbery.

“Hyah?! Eh, wha-wha-wha-?!”

“Chi chi chi chi chi!”

“Eh... Ig-chan? Eh? Why did you fall down from the sky? Ah, why are you sticky all over? Is this honey? You smell like honey. What were you doing, we were looking for yo—hold on, don’t burrow insi—Get out here right now!”

In the end, Ig was brought back to Ama-no-Iwato by Touka’s hand. Then, after the student pair went home, Ig was severely scolded by Sago. However, he would never hit her or tear her fur out no matter how angry he got. That was one of Sago’s good points.

Next time, she needed to go out in a smarter way so that he didn’t get mad, thought Ig to herself remorsefully.

After Kaburagi also went home, Sago got into the shower, changed, and climbed into bed. Ig also clambered into her nesting box and closed her eyes. Just the right amount of fatigue and the feeling of a full belly caused her to feel sleepy very soon.

Being saved by Sago was why she was no longer fearful of the next day coming. With the peaceful sound of him breathing in his sleep as BGM, Ig tranquilly slipped into sleep herself.

Special Files: Head of Japanese Operations, Special Intelligence Agent Nicolas Stallone of CIA Asia

Nicolas Stallone was an agent belonging to America's Central Intelligence Agency, or CIA, who was currently undercover in Japan. Seven years ago, he had been appointed as the Head of Japanese Operations of CIA Asia for a few reasons: he had experience being an exchange student in Japan, he spoke Japanese well, and he blended in with those around him, as he was a second-generation Japanese person.

A Special Intelligence Agent was, in more colloquial terms, a "super-powered spy." This involved phasing through walls, instantaneous teleportation, tracking down someone's location by touching a letter they had sent, and predicting the future. That was what was so "special" about these agents. Or at least, that had been the idea behind the founding of this unit back in 1970.

In the 70's, the spiritualist movement was at its peak. Espers appeared on TV almost every day, displaying inhuman feats such as floating in midair and bending spoons. Some promised spiritual healing or synchronicity with higher dimensions. Others asserted that aliens had already descended upon Earth. There were self-proclaimed prophets as well, to whom people flocked to en masse. Naturally, this mindset had also affected the military and intelligence organizations.

Being in the middle of their Cold War with the Soviet Union, America was seriously considering using espers in that conflict. A supernatural soldier who could stop someone's heart just by staring at them! A supernatural intelligence agent who merely had to close his eyes to eavesdrop on a meeting between the top brass of an enemy country despite being several thousand kilometers away! A spiritual healer who merely had to wave his hand to remove a bullet embedded in someone, all without even breaking their skin! They would be invincible.

It was an era when it was not strange at all to believe in such things. Large

amounts of secret funds were poured into both the military and CIA, and everyone was frothing at the mouth to find espers and apply them to practical use before the Soviet Union could.

However, they failed. The fever receded, they woke from their dream, and the time to face reality arrived. Despite having expended very significant capital, manpower, and hours into finding espers, they had absolutely nothing to show for it. All the “espers” that they found were nothing more than masters of sleight-of-hand, con artists, or simply liars. Every single report was either devoid of content, or filled with a thick stack of papers that was equally devoid of content. Everything had been in vain.

Therefore, funding was restricted, and research into superpowers shifted from the status of a high priority secret project to something shameful to be hidden away. However, it never did get scrapped outright. The military did completely rule off strategies involving espers, but in the CIA, this position of Special Intelligence Agent remained. Due to the feeble hopes and dreams of certain top brass along the lines of “Maybe espers are so rare that we just haven’t found one yet” or “Maybe a real one is living in hiding somewhere,” this unit was tasked with carrying on various investigations.

Eventually, the Cold War ended, and the century turned. And somewhere along the way, this unit had gradually turned into a sinecure where the CIA kept problematic agents that it couldn’t quite let go of. It was an easy job that dealt in “special” information, which meant looking for espers and writing half-hearted reports. It didn’t matter how badly written the reports were. Nobody expected any useful information on superpowers and espers anymore. This was literally just a job to keep people on the payroll.

However, upon being selected for this Special Intelligence Agent position, 29-year-old Nicolas was wild with joy. Sure, it was a sinecure, but the salary was extremely good. It also served as proof that he was considered talented by the higher-ups. And he was far beyond the point of caring about the fact that this also proved that the higher ups thought him a “problem child” as well.

Nicolas practically skipped home and told his wife that he got a job transfer to Japan, that he couldn’t go into details but it was a promotion, and that they should prepare for the move immediately. Then, on the same day, he found

himself slapped with divorce papers. They had a two-year-old daughter, and his wife was against bringing their daughter up in a foreign country. Nicolas's bad drinking habits were also a big factor. Although he was a diligent and serious person while sober, he loved to drink. And whenever he got drunk, he would overspend and buy extravagant things, or cause some great mishap, or sometimes both. Because of that, their family's finances were always very tight, and there were bad rumors going around the neighborhood about their home. This habit of his had been a source of contention for a long time.

The Stallone house was filled with the sound of a huge fight that lasted a day and a night, eventually ending with Nicolas accepting the divorce and going to Japan by himself. In the heat of the moment, Nicolas convinced himself that if he accomplished some big achievement and came home in glory, then his wife would see him in a new light and everything would be fixed. He was confident that he could do such a thing. Nicolas was talented enough that CIA was willing to pay him a hefty salary just to keep him on.

The reason behind that was due to his ability to sniff his way to the truth. Nicolas was slow and very dull when it came to small, everyday crimes like theft and blackmail. However, the weirder or more convoluted a case, the sharper his mind became.

It was he who arrested the culprit in the string of vampiric-themed serial ritualistic murders called the "Dunwich Horrors." It was he who found incriminating evidence on "21st Enigma," the group of scam artists who concealed themselves behind numerous layers of very ingenious camouflage. It was he who identified the moles of the drug cartel Alka who had burrowed into the CIA. All of those were his achievements.

It took him only two days to catch the Dunwich Horror, even though the police in the area had no leads after two months of investigating. The story of how he caught the trail of 21st Enigma, who had avoided detection until they had raked in a collective amount of 600 million dollars' worth of damages, and then arrested them in a dramatic fashion was still being told to this very day. As for how he identified the moles in the Alka case, well, suffice to say, it practically went down like a spy movie.

However, his numerous shining achievements were all tarnished by his

drinking habit.

During the Dunwich Horror case, he was in a drunken stupor when he joined the police force chasing the escaping criminal. He crashed a police car into a civilian residence, injuring seven innocents to varying degrees.

As for the 21st Enigma case, he had divulged various CIA secrets to a masked Enigma member who was treating him to drinks at the bar. If the arrest had happened two minutes later than it did, those secrets would have been plastered all over the internet.

In the Alka case, he did everything perfectly up to the point where he managed to identify all the moles. But then they talked him into allowing them “one last drink before we get put away for the rest of our lives,” smashed his head with a wine bottle when the opportunity arose, then they all got away.

A great number of achievements, and a great number of mistakes. The person who exemplified both extremes of the spectrum in such sharp relief was this very man, Nicolas Stallone.

Under the pretext of being an agent chasing a wanted criminal who had fled overseas, Nicolas entered Japan and began his duties. Agent Nicolas was confident. Sure, the US and the rest of the world might have had no success so far, in spite of the astronomical amounts of time and money they had expended. However, with his ability and his zeal, he was certain that he was going to be the one to find these espers. He fully believed that he was going to eventually parade back to his home country as a great discoverer and a legendary agent. If he couldn't do it, then it would be impossible for anyone else to.

Agent Nicolas poured all of his energy into investigating Japan from top to bottom. He signed up for religious cults that claimed to have a founder who could perform miracles. He infiltrated occult organizations. He went through all the temples and shrines tied to supernatural stories. He chased down every suspicious-sounding story on social media, examining and analyzing every single detail. He devoted two whole months to the rumor of “buses flying in midair late at night” on the outskirts of Tokyo. His investigation into the “mysterious destruction of Mrs. Marrick's house” took up four whole months.

However, every single one of those leads hit a dead end. He saw neither hide nor hair of any espers. No matter what it was that he looked into, concrete evidence of espers never came to light.

His efforts to catch what amounted to smoke gradually whittled down his investigative desire, and so four years went by in a flash. Then Agent Nicolas came to a certain realization. He had been crazy. It didn't matter if he had the ability to sniff out the truth if the truth—the espers—did not exist in the first place. How was he supposed to find something that didn't exist?

Just when he was losing his self-confidence, something happened to deal him the final blow: one of his previous colleagues, with the greatest of intentions, secretly took a picture of Nicolas's now six-year-old daughter and sent it to him. This seemed like pure cruelty to Nicolas, who only knew what his daughter looked like at age two, which was when he had last seen her. He had thrown too many of his years into the gutter, missed too much of his daughter's life.

Unbearable regret completely crushed Agent Nicolas' heart. He didn't want honor and fame anymore. This was no time to be chasing some silly fantasy. What he needed to do was give up alcohol and live a quiet, reserved life back home, even if it meant shifting to a much lower-paying position.

He pleaded with his superiors to let him return to America. However, unfortunately, he did it while completely drunk, sobbing into the phone. They immediately turned him down and unconditionally rejected all further petitions. Agent Nicolas was reduced to a mere husk of a man.

After that, he spent three years bar-hopping in Tokyo. His beard grew out, and he drowned himself in alcohol from dawn to dusk, and his suit became shabby and worn-out. He had bags under his eyes, and the shadow of death seemed to hang over him. Nevertheless, such faces were all too common during the nighttime in Tokyo, so no one gave him a second look.

However, seven years after coming to Japan, the first turning point came for Agent Nicolas. After having wandered through almost all the bars within Tokyo, he suddenly spotted an unfamiliar one tucked away in a small alleyway in the Kitasenju area of Adachi City. On the door down at the end of a short staircase was hanging a CLOSED sign that had not been there a week ago. The store's

name was not displayed anywhere. There was no window, so it wasn't possible to see into the store either. Although he was already thoroughly wasted, Agent Nicolas' nose could pick up on the slight smell of alcohol through the door. So he tottered into the bar despite the sign.

The inside of the store was filled with the smell of new wood and an abundant variety of alcohol. Agent Nicolas' blurry eyes immediately looked over the array of bottles on the shelves behind the counter. Within the lineup were, to his surprise and excitement, extremely expensive and rare labels that one would be hard pressed to find in first-rate restaurants, much less a newly-opened bar.

More than satisfied with the selection of alcohol, Agent Nicolas grabbed a counter seat and checked out the interior of the bar. There were five seats at the counter and two tables. Soft jazz was playing on the record player sitting on a corner of the counter, giving the store a soothing and composed air. There were no other customers in the store, and there was only a single person who seemed like the bar master behind the counter.

The bar master appeared to be a man in his mid-20s. His stylish dress shirt and black vest, as well as his slickly gelled hairstyle, did not do much to make up for his lack of dignified presence. In fact, he looked more like a youngster from the street playacting as a bar master. Granted, with that sour look on his face, it wasn't like the clothes didn't suit him, but he was decidedly not pulling off the look as well as he could.

This master was polishing a wine glass, not sparing even a glance at Agent Nicolas. It looked like he had no intention of welcoming nor chasing away this customer who had come in when the bar was closed.

"Gimlet," said Agent Nicolas while taking out a chocolate cigarette and lighting it.

The master shot him a brief glance and, while maintaining the sour look on his face, put down the glass that he had been polishing, put out a cigarette tray, then began preparing the cocktail.

A gimlet was a cocktail made by adding lime juice to a distilled liquor such as gin and then mixing it in a shaker. It was a very standard drink offered at most

bars. Although Nicolas had placed his order without looking at the menu (not that there had been a menu), the master did not look particularly troubled, and he started making the drink immediately.

There were many ways to spice up a gimlet, such as adding liqueur, sugar, or gum syrup. But judging from the ingredients that the master took out, it seemed like he was going to make the simplest version, the recipe that beginners started out with. There was no problem with that in and of itself, but something was tugging at Agent Nicolas' mind. A few seconds of observing the master, and then he realized the reason for it.

Even though the master was only looking at his hands, there was a very hard-to-describe sense of hesitation, as if he was performing the task while checking a memo. This was slightly different from the impression given by someone doing something while trying to recall how to do it. Agent Nicolas thought this very strange, but after a sip of the gimlet wordlessly served to him, the alcohol promptly made him forget his doubts.

When Agent Nicolas put his empty glass down as if banging it onto the counter, something else seemed to catch his attention. He struggled to think through his alcohol-muddled mind as he waited for the next drink that he had ordered, this time a slightly less well-known one. As he continued to rudely tap the edge of his cocktail glass against the counter in time with the jazz music, he realized what it was that seemed off.

It was the sound.

This was not the sound of tapping a wooden counter. After several taps, he determined that the counter was reinforced by metal plates or something similar.

Movies frequently have scenes where characters hide behind a counter that serves as a shield from bullets, but this was impossible in reality. Bullets can easily penetrate counters, so it was pointless to reinforce bar counters to become bulletproof. It was on the same level of meaninglessness as reinforcing wine bottles to become bulletproof. Doing so cost a lot of money, and the chances of a bar being the scene of an actual gunfight was almost nil. If it was a counter made of stone, then it might indeed be bulletproof to a certain degree,

but going to the trouble of reinforcing a wooden counter with a metal plate could be said to be completely pointless.

It's not like there's any chance this is the effort of a deluded adolescent boy making sure that this place is ready in the case of a gunfight, thought Agent Nicolas while tilting his head. However, once again, he took one sip of his new drink, and the alcohol promptly made him forget his doubts.

Every once in a while, the master changed the vinyl record on the record player, the different melody causing the mood in the store to shift just the slightest bit. This master was so unsociable that it was hard to imagine he was in the service industry, but rather than giving off a feeling of disagreeableness, it was actually quite comforting. Something in the store, or maybe everything in the store, seemed to be shaking up something that had been forgotten deep in the depths of Agent Nicolas's heart.

By now, he was starting to enjoy himself quite a bit, so Agent Nicolas tried ordering five drinks all at the same time for fun. The master dipped into the back for a while, then reappeared carrying all five cocktails on a silver tray. The unexpected speed with which the drinks were completed randomly triggered Agent Nicolas to explode with laughter, pounding the counter with mirth. It had been so quick that it was as if the master had grown several arms to make all five together simultaneously. The tiny rational part of his drunken mind denied this image, whispering to him that there were probably other employees in the back, but another part of his brain told him that there was no indication that anyone else was back there. Back and forth his thoughts went, forming an impromptu debate inside his mind. However, after downing all five drinks, once again the alcohol promptly made him forget his doubts.

The next thing he knew, he found himself waking up splayed out over the counter. A fragrant smell in the air caused him to slowly raise his face as he grimaced from a terrible headache. The arm that he had been sleeping on was completely dead, and he had drooled all over. The receipt that he found under his arm had been doodled all over and was, as could be expected, also stained with drool. He checked his wristwatch. Let alone morning, it was already almost noon.

"Oh, my...!" He jumped up in a fluster and tried to get down off the bar

bench, but then stumbled, which prompted an expletive.

He had done it again. He was an expert when it came to falling asleep at bars and waking up the next morning, but it had been a while since the last time he had done so. He thought himself fortunate for not having been unceremoniously dumped outdoors. He had no memories of the previous night whatsoever, but he somehow had the impression that he had enjoyed himself.

He looked around searching for the toilet to do something about the nausea in his stomach, then found the bar master placing a cup of hot coffee in front of him, with the steam still rising. Nicolas offered a word of thanks, then drained the entire cup in one go. Unlike the sludge that was instant coffee, this rich fragrance and full-bodied flavor spread throughout his entire body. Apparently, this cup was made using really good beans. The smell, taste, heat, and caffeine all worked together to invigorate him.

“No, no, I’ll be leaving now. Thanks for letting me stay the night.” After stopping the master, who seemed about to pour him a second cup, Nicolas gave his thanks and took out a ten thousand yen bill. According to the receipt in his hand, it seemed like he had already settled his bill, but he meant this as payment for the coffee, for staying the night, and for all the trouble he had caused. It would be one thing if he was a regular, but exposing such a shameful display during his first visit did make him feel slightly embarrassed.

“...”

“It’s fine, I don’t need any change. This is a tip.”

Upon being told so by Nicolas while he was in the middle of opening the register to take out change, the master paused with a slightly troubled look on his face. After taking a brief moment to think about it, he eventually returned the change back to the register, dug inside his pocket, then took out a piece of candy that he placed into Agent Nicolas’ hand.

Agent Nicolas looked at the cheap-looking strawberry candy in childish wrapping paper inside his hand. After a second of being dumbstruck, he abruptly laughed out loud. There were many Japanese people who were so excessively reserved that they would forcefully give him back even the smallest bit of change. In that regard, this master’s response was brilliant. It made

Nicolas want to visit again.

He left the underground bar and returned to the light of day, jostled about by the hustle and bustle of the city. Another changeless day had begun again. However, the sweetness of the candy inside his mouth gave him a little bit of motivation to do some proper work again for the first time in quite a while.

After that, Agent Nicolas became a regular at the bar, visiting once every two or three days. The bar always had a CLOSED sign out, but he came to understand the bar's slightly strange rule that if the door was locked, then it really was closed; but if the door was unlocked, then the bar was actually in business.

The bar was, at most times, seemingly reserved for Agent Nicolas alone. However, every once in a while, there would be nights when he would not be alone in the bar. The large majority of these other customers were dead drunks who wandered in, just as he himself had, but apparently there was also another regular: a woman of unbelievable beauty who always wore unbelievable outfits.

On a certain night two months after he began visiting the bar, Agent Nicolas realized that he had forgotten his lighter. The one that the master lent him had the bar's name and address printed on it, and this was the first time that Agent Nicolas learned that the bar's name was "Ama-no-Iwato." He had drank at literally hundreds of bars all over Japan, but this was the first one that he had frequented so much. This was also the first bar where he had not caused a great ruckus or any great problems while being dead drunk.

Agent Nicolas started doing the reports to the CIA that he had slacked off on for several years now, and he began to treasure his visits to Ama-no-Iwato as a refuge to forget all the troubles from his work.



Due to Tokyo's population and high traffic, it was naturally the place with the highest chance of encountering an esper. Therefore, all while collecting information about supernatural sightings through the internet, Agent Nicolas also began to walk through the streets of Tokyo energetically.

On one of those days, Agent Nicolas came upon a very strange-looking puddle in an alleyway.

Located behind an abandoned factory, this was a dim path surrounded by a rusted fence and concrete walls that probably nobody would have any reason to walk through. There had been no rain in Tokyo yesterday or the day before yesterday. There was no gutter or downspout nearby, nor were there any decorative plants that needed watering. There was no discarded water bottle lying on the ground either.

The puddle was quite sizable, probably filled with enough water to fill several two-liter bottles. It was indeed just a water puddle, but Nicolas could not think of a reason to explain the presence of this puddle being here. A water puddle "was just there." This fact in itself seemed quite bizarre.

Nicolas got on his hands and knees to observe the puddle up close. The water was odorless, and at normal temperature. However, near the center of the puddle were fragments of a brittle kind of stone. On the fence and concrete wall were scorch marks of a fire and the remains of foam from a fire extinguisher. When he tried to scratch at it with a fingernail, the dried extinguisher residue fell off easily, which proved that it had not completely dried up yet. Having entered his fair share of crime scenes that had been burned down, Agent Nicolas could tell that this meant it had been less than 24 hours since a fire extinguisher had been used here.

After gathering all this information from this scene, Agent Nicolas stood up, then brought his hand to his chin and lost himself in thought. An unnaturally large water puddle behind an abandoned factory. Traces of someone purposely using a fire extinguisher to put out a fire that had been set here. These tiny, out-of-place details that appeared out of the ordinary all pointed toward—
—fireworks.

Summers in Japan equated fireworks. The back of an abandoned factory,

which supposedly no one else would come to, would probably make for a perfect place to secretly set off fireworks. Somebody had most likely come here, played with their fireworks, and brought both water and a fire extinguisher along with them.

Agent Nicolas was satisfied with his conclusion, then left the scene while shaking his head and shrugging his shoulders in amusement.

On another day, Agent Nicolas set off to investigate the strange rumor surrounding a certain “Yamayagawa Wind Power Plant.” A power plant that had been about to go out of business due to sluggish power generation had suddenly received a new lease on life. Somebody who worked at the plant had posted “Just by installing this box, the blades begin turning at the perfect, optimum speed. It’s like some sort of artifact or something” on the internet. Furthermore, that post had been deleted almost immediately, and that worker was then summarily fired.

Because the CIA had given Agent Nicolas the cover story of being “an agent chasing a wanted fugitive who had fled overseas,” he was able to walk into the place through the front door by saying that there was a possibility the fugitive he was chasing had infiltrated the place and was setting something up.

“If possible, we would like to hold off on evacuating the employees until it is determined to be absolutely necessary,” whispered Igarashi, the president of the plant, while walking down a corridor in the middle of giving Agent Nicolas a tour of the place.

Agent Nicolas frowned.

The president quickly tried to gloss it over, adding, “Please don’t misunderstand. It’s just that if we stop operations, it takes quite a bit of time to get everything up and running again. A decrease in electricity output means a decrease in our performance, which in turn means a decrease in our employees’ income. This is for the employees’ own sakes. It hardly needs to be said, but of course human life takes top priority.”

While spitting on the president inside his mind, Nicolas replied amicably, “I totally understand. The probability of this fugitive having set up any bombs is very small. I have no intention of causing any unnecessary waves either. Tipping

the fugitive off and letting him get away is the last thing I'd want."

Under President Igarashi's guidance, Agent Nicolas then spent the next two hours going around the facility with a dummy explosives sensor in hand. Of course, no explosives were found. When the tour was over, the two of them returned to the president's room, then sat down on sofas facing each other to enjoy a cup of tea. The president had jumped suspiciously every time the sensor beeped, as if the sensor itself were a bomb, but seeing as nothing had happened, he seemed to have calmed down.

"Incidentally," said Agent Nicolas while putting his teacup back down and getting to the topic. "I heard that your company recently installed some new parts to your wind turbines. There were no explosives in the facility itself, but in light of eyewitness reports of the fugitive and his modus operandi, I'm thinking that the turbines are actually the most suspect. I'm truly sorry to ask this, but can you stop just one of the turbines to allow me to inspect it?"

"I'm afraid that's not possible." President Igarashi's response was instantaneous. It was so fast that it was as if he had been expecting this question and bracing himself for it.

The smell of something clearly being hidden caused Agent Nicolas to glare at the man. "Did you not say that human lives take top priority?"

The roundabout censure caused President Igarashi to falter slightly, but then he quickly rebutted with, "I have said this previously, but stopping operation means a very long start-up period and significant losses. Additionally, and I do not know where you've heard this information from, but this is our company's trade secret. Even if it's for the sake of chasing a fugitive, we cannot reveal it so readily. We have full, yes, full knowledge of everything in this regard, so I assure you that there is absolutely no need to look into this. Sir, I am afraid you may be overstaying your welcome." President Igarashi stood up as if in rage, gesturing toward the door with a hand.

He was clearly hiding something, and one didn't have to be a CIA agent to see that. It was very suspicious.

It was indeed suspicious, but... the attitude that President Igarashi was displaying was exactly that of the president of a venture company who had

abruptly gotten their hands on some new technology and was unwilling to let go of it.

Back in Nicolas' home country, in the holy land of venture companies known as Silicon Valley, he had met many people who acted like this. A technological breakthrough that could save a company was rare, but not particularly mysterious. Wanting to keep technology to oneself was very normal. According to his investigations, the electricity output of this power plant was indeed high, but not unnaturally so.

Agent Nicolas's job was to look for espers, and not to be an industrial spy. Looking into the new technology being employed at Yamyagawa Wind Power Plant was beyond his area of expertise. There had been no suspicious new hires who joined the company around the time when its output went up, and he had found no suspicious materials anywhere. The only source of unrest were whispers that he managed to hear from several employees quietly discussing plans for a labor strike to insist on the company obeying labor laws.

Agent Nicolas shrugged his shoulders, then left the room obediently.

This day too, he had found no espers, nor did he come upon any signs of their existence.

It was already obvious by this point in time, but no matter how earnestly he chased down leads, no matter how many days he spent on this, he was not going to find espers anywhere.

Summer passed, autumn passed, and winter came. The seasons progressed steadily, but the investigation was seeing no progress whatsoever.

The human heart has a very intricate relationship with fatigue. When compared to running toward a goal 10 km away, running for 10 km without knowing where the goal is would prove much more tiring. Keeping at a task while not knowing when, or if ever, it ends is a very heavy burden on both the body and mind. In that aspect, searching for espers was the worst job ever. It was a job with no end in sight, to the point where it could make one think that it might be easier to seek a handshake with God. Agent Nicolas' heart had already been crushed long ago. He was already convinced that espers did not exist. There was no way they existed. This cruel world had no salvation. It was

simply realistic to the very end, and superheroes who flew through the sky were mere figments of the imagination.

However, this torment of searching for something that did not exist seemed to be less painful than before. Rather, Nicolas felt like he was in better shape than he had ever been before. After all, even though he was visiting Ama-no-Iwato once every two or three days, he had not made a single mistake because of alcohol during his investigations! Even he himself marveled at this. If things went as they used to, then he would have grasped some great clue, and then promptly wasted it because of his drinking habit. However, there was no sign of this happening anytime soon.

Though in the first place, he was not going to find any major clues to waste, because there was no way any clues toward espers existed. So in that aspect, this was not strange at all. But this effectively meant that he had passed seven whole months diligently working, all while drinking enough alcohol to drown himself in, and yet had not made a big mistake even once. Did this not mean that he had already overcome the bad part of his drinking habit? There is a saying in Japanese that goes something like “the day you think of something is the best day to do it,” which was similar to the English idiom “strike while the iron is hot.” For the first time in a long time, Agent Nicolas went to drink at a slightly higher class bar instead of Ama-no-Iwato.

The next morning, he woke up to find himself leaning against a light pole under the cold, winter sky, cradling a bottle of wine. The wallet in his chest pocket had been reduced to a mere 100 yen. His eyes widened with realization.

The bad part of his drinking habit had not been fixed at all. Ama-no-Iwato was just special. Only when he drank at Ama-no-Iwato was his drinking habit under control. Ama-no-Iwato, and Ama-no-Iwato alone, was Agent Nicolas’s special place. It was the paradise that he had been guided to after searching long and hard. Although it was a bar completely not helpful in his search for espers, this was an irreplaceable utopia for him. The unique, inexplicable atmosphere coming from the master and the bar itself had Agent Nicolas’ heart in a grip and wouldn’t let go.

Agent Nicolas stood up while snorting back his dripping nose, then tottered off toward Ama-no-Iwato while suppressing his headache and nausea. For some

reason, he really wanted a cup of Master's steaming hot coffee. Not as Special Intelligence Agent Nicolas Stallone, Head of Japanese Operations of CIA Asia; not as Agent Nicolas, who is chasing an international fugitive; but as a mere man who had foolishly thrown away his daughter and wife while chasing impossible illusions, he wanted someone to listen to his grumbling.

He eventually reached Ama-no-Iwato somehow, but not before vomiting in several public toilets along the way and tripping and slipping on a pebble-strewn patch of ice while taking a shortcut through an alleyway. Because his wallet was empty, he was given a sandwich and a coffee on his tab. He was also given enough homemade pickles and bread to last until his next payday.

There are those who say that "there's no rain that never lets up," or "there's no night that never breaks." These people are basically trying to say that all tragedy is guaranteed to be over someday. However, Agent Nicolas did not believe in those sayings. Just as there are those who could not reach the skies after devoting their entire lives to trying, there exist unreasonable tragedies that last for a person's entire life. Those who succeed say "be forward-looking, be positive, and the world will change."

But that is a lie. The order is wrong.

It was because they succeeded that they could be forward-looking. It was because they succeeded that they could be positive. It was because they succeeded that their worlds changed. Those at the bottom of a pit of despair with nothing to hope for after repeated failures could not believe these words said by the successful. In fact, they only come across as empty and patronizing. And that was how things really were.

Agent Nicolas would continue to fail. He would continue to fail for all eternity. The rain wasn't going to let up. The night wasn't going to break. After all, there was no way that he would ever find an esper. He would remain a deadbeat on the CIA payroll, he would never again meet his ex-wife, he would simply continue his meaningless investigations without making any achievements. He would slowly grow old, he would continue drowning himself in alcohol, and then one day, he would suddenly drop dead due to some pathetic reason. Past glory eventually fades away and gets forgotten. The thoughts of this dark future kept coming back to mind, no matter how many times he tried to throw it off.

Ama-no-Iwato had indeed saved him a bit. However, so long as he never found an esper, the base problem would never be resolved. His renewed vigor would gradually be ground down by reality, until he inevitably returned to his lethargic days of drowning in alcohol.

Agent Nicolas continued to fall. Down, down, down he fell, to no end—
—or so things were supposed to go.

The second turning point after his discovery of Ama-no-Iwato came to him suddenly.

This was on a certain peaceful day in spring. Head of Japanese Operations Special Intelligence Agent Nicolas Stallone of CIA Asia was devouring a large-sized beef bowl in a chain restaurant in Adachi City within Tokyo. He was already in his mid-thirties, but his unique facial features, due to the fact that he was a quarter Caucasian, were drawing the eyes of the female student sitting next to him. His “successful businessman” look was composed of a navy blue suit and black hair gelled back and a faint, refreshing cologne. It was very helpful whenever he wanted to negotiate with someone of the fairer sex.

While enjoying a cup of barley tea after his meal, Agent Nicolas caught sight of the emergency news broadcast being displayed on the TV and completely spurted out all the tea in his mouth.

“*What?!*” Paying absolutely no mind to the female student who was dumbfounded at being covered in barley tea, Agent Nicolas shot to his feet and leaned over as if he was being sucked toward the TV.

The screen was showing three people standing on top of an ice floe, seemingly conjuring lances of fire out of nowhere and shooting them. Apparently they were fighting against a water sphere surrounding a stone-like core. That in itself was not particularly strange. This kind of scene was not particularly uncommon to see in a movie or TV show. However, what made it so unbelievable were the flashing on screen text “LIVE from Tokyo Bay” and the line “We interrupt our usual programming to bring you this emergency news” that kept on scrolling past repeatedly at the bottom of the screen.

In his doubt, Agent Nicolas first thought that this was surely some misunderstanding or mistake, but at that exact moment, the smartphone in his

pocket began to ring. He checked, and it was a call from an unidentified caller.

In other words, this was from his superior.

His heartbeat quickened. He nearly threw his invoice and a ten thousand yen bill at the cashier, then bolted out of the store and circled around to the back. As soon as he brought his smartphone to his ear, his superior's impatient-sounding voice asked, "Let's get straight to the point. Do you have a grasp on the current situation?"

"I saw it on the news just now."

"What is *that*? This kind of thing is your jurisdiction, right?"

Like hell he knew what it was. Agent Nicolas swallowed those words back down in the nick of time. His very next words would be extremely critical. If he exposed himself to be incompetent here, then this time for sure, he was going to be fired. If he could provide useful information, then glory and honor was waiting for him. However, in his seven years of investigations, he had come across nothing relevant to "a water sphere around a core that looked like stone that appeared in Tokyo Bay" nor "the existence of an esper that can create lances of fire." Nothing at all...

... But wait, was that actually so? That instant, the various pieces of information that he had accumulated throughout his various investigations all pieced together inside his brain like a flash of lightning.

"Traces of ***that*** were found around Tokyo at least as far back as six months ago."

"Go on..." His superior backchannelled in a surprised tone, clearly not expecting a proper reply.

Agent Nicolas was so agitated that the idea that had occurred to him and the information that had gotten pieced together almost seemed to burn through his brain. He continued talking all while still sorting through everything.

"However, *those* water spheres up till now had been much smaller, more on the scale of two or three buckets of water... when considering evaporation... it is my deduction that they've only been the size of a large dog to an adult male. I've come across traces of two of them myself so far. Both of them—" Agent

Nicolas dug through his memories.

In the summer, that scene that he had thought to be the place where someone had set off some fireworks. In the winter, the patch of frozen ground that he had slipped on when his wallet was empty and he was hurrying toward Ama-no-Iwato. Those unnatural lances of fire on the TV, that ice floe that should not have been in Tokyo Bay.

“—were found in small alleyways that nobody passed through. In one site, I found signs of fire usage, and the other site was frozen... although it was indeed winter, when considering the temperature over here... yes, that patch of ice really was unnatural. I’m thinking that there is, at minimum, two types of superpowers, and here I’m purposely choosing to call them superpowers, and there are individuals wielding these superpowers—”

At that fireworks scene, there had been some kind of stone that had been grounded and crushed. The frozen surface had pebbles strewn all over. The water sphere currently on the TV had a stone-like core.

“—who are fighting against these water spheres, which seem to be formed around cores of stone. To my knowledge, the incident this time is the biggest one that has ever occurred.”

“I see. However, I’ve read none of this in your reports. This is undoubtedly very important information that should have been reported, is it not?”

“...Unfortunately, I had not gotten my hands on sure evidence or eyewitness reports as of yet. Up to now, we CIA have been led on wild goose chases again and again by false information. I confess that I have been overly cautious in my attempt to avoid the same mistake this time around.”

After a short “I see,” his superior went silent.

This was an extremely nerve-racking silence. Nicolas did not know what words were coming next. He had yet to fully grasp the situation, but the fact that his superior had directly called him so quickly spoke volumes about the severity of the situation. “Espers really do exist after all” was as big a deal as a god descending, and it was actually happening right this instant. Agent Nicolas’s greatest fear was that an elite-track with a spotless record was going to be dispatched to Japan and that he himself would be assigned under him. His

apprehension was that all his investigative results so far, and the credit that it entailed, would be wrested away from him. Having lived the life he had for such a long time had caused him to first jump to negative thoughts.

After a brief pause that felt like an eternity, his superior said, “Hindsight is 20/20, but it seems like sending you to Japan had been the right thing to do after all. As of this moment, you are assigned as the person in charge for this Water Monster Incident. Within twenty hours, we will dispatch ten agents to serve under you, and we are open to sending more if you deem it necessary. Use them as you see fit. We will also transfer the necessary operation funds to your account. Do whatever it takes to secure these espers before any other countries get their hands on them. But for now, you will be reporting about this to the president directly in 30 minutes.”

“I’m sorry?”

“You. The president. Reporting in 30 minutes. Prepare a written manuscript beforehand. I wish you luck.” After those words of encouragement, his superior hung up.

Agent Nicolas stared at his smartphone, still having trouble coming to terms with what was happening.

Espers really did exist.

The CIA was moving.

Everything had paid off.

The darkness that was supposed to continue on forever without end had actually lifted.

Something hot bubbled up from deep inside him. All his work had not been in vain. This was a miracle. The excitement and pride of being in the center of this change in an era was enough to bring him to tears. Turned out, this unbearable world with no salvation actually did have sweet, sweet hope.

However, he had no time to remain emotional. Agent Nicolas wiped away his tears, then jumped into the nearest café in order to begin working on the report that he had to submit to the US president. He hurriedly wrote down all the information that he knew on a piece of memo paper. It was an extremely

tall order to write up a super important report that could sharply change how supercountries move within 30 minutes, but he had no choice but to do it anyway. Having to do something upon being ordered to do so was one of the drawbacks of being a government employee.

After that, every single one of Agent Nicolas' days became dizzyingly busy. Because a Super Water Sphere had appeared not only in Tokyo Bay but also off the coast of Ireland, the CIA had to divert personnel toward that side as well. However, because the Special Intelligence Agent who acted as Head of Irish Operations had not found any traces of espers or the water monsters before the incident, much more emphasis was placed on the Japanese side, where such prior information *had* been found. Also, the fact that there had been one person who stood off against the Super Water Sphere in Ireland, whereas there had been three people who stood off against the one in Tokyo Bay, gave rise to the simple calculation that finding an esper in Japan should be three times easier.

By now, Agent Nicolas had access to a direct hotline to the president, and he was one of the most important people within the CIA, heading a special investigation headquarters composed of 50 agents. If all of the part-time agents were also counted, then he had ten times that number under his command.

Whereas the United States Army Special Forces, colloquially known as the Green Berets, are said to be worth a hundred men each, this did not mean that one of them was capable of defeating a hundred men. Rather, by winning over locals and turning them into allies before giving them training to convert them into potential soldiers, and by acquiring moles and cooperators, they effectively raise results equal to the work of a hundred men. It was the same for CIA. In no time at all, they had secured and were manipulating a large number of cooperators among the residents of Tokyo.

Naturally, many other countries also did the same. This was true of course of Japan, who had the home ground advantage, but agents coming from various countries all over the world all rushed toward Tokyo like a tsunami, scrambling to get their hands on intelligence. While progressing his own top secret investigation, while at times fighting against spies of other nationalities, and at times cooperating temporarily, Agent Nicolas eventually came to realize the

espers' very high concealment ability.

First of all, and this was obvious, but during the Water Monster Incident, none of the espers revealed their identifies. They all wore hoods and masks to conceal their faces, and their way of escaping through those black whales that dove into the ocean made it impossible to track them afterward. In addition, when the group of three were moving toward Tokyo Bay, they had set off from a warehouse area that had been devoid of people, and there were no eyewitness reports at all. None of the security cameras caught anything. Going by body size, it was possible to deduce the espers' genders and general ages, but that was hardly enough to get a sketch of their faces. Facial recognition systems were even less useful.

If they had a footprint, fingerprint, trace of blood, or a strand of hair, then they could have worked off of that. However, with the worst timing, the weather had taken an abrupt turn for the worse right after the incident, such that any evidence that could have possibly been left near the warehouses was all washed away by a great storm. According to a cooperator who worked in the weather observatory department, this weather change was not unnatural, but was extremely rare. Based on this, Agent Nicolas also suspected that there was an esper who might be capable of interfering with the weather.

The traces of battle that Agent Nicolas had come upon previously were also entirely erased (the scorched fence was removed entirely). The cover up was extremely thorough.

Being good at erasing evidence was one thing. These people were also very good at not leaving new traces of themselves. "The culprit always returns to the scene of the crime" is often said, and this is a saying that epitomizes the sense of unease that wracks a culprit.

The behavior taken by those who commit an impulsive crime could largely be split into two categories:

- 1) They ran away before anyone spotted them.
- 2) They hurriedly tried to erase all evidence before running away.

Just these two.

In the case of 1), 9 times out of 10, there was evidence left behind. Being as flustered as they were immediately after committing the crime, certain pieces of evidence slipped their minds as they made their escape. However, after getting away and calming down, something would come to mind. Then they grew fearful that the evidence they had left behind would point to themselves, and therefore returned, either to conduct a more thorough erasure of all the evidence, or to check the police's progress in chasing down the culprit. Those who were overly confident or especially afraid of the police might not return to the crime scene, but in that case, then the evidence left behind could be used to identify the culprit.

Culprits who did 2) instead of 1) were much more composed. However, they were so composed that even after erasing the evidence and getting away, the tiniest details would still bug them. Things so detailed that only the culprit would understand and that the police would normally not catch grew bigger and bigger in their minds, until they could not help but to come back to the crime scene, determined to perfectly take care of *all* evidence *this time*. This high-strung nature of theirs made them even more susceptible to return to the scene. Even if they didn't, they began acting extremely suspiciously. Either way, they were generally quite easy to identify.

These espers were neither 1) nor 2). They erased all their evidence, did *not* return to the crime scenes, and clearly had the mental fortitude to just go on with their ordinary, everyday lives after what had happened. The CIA employed many cooperators to keep the warehouse area and Tokyo Bay under 24/7 surveillance, but after a whole month of this, espers were nowhere to be found. They were of the rarest and the most annoying type. They had the craftiness to erase evidence, as well as the confidence that they just wouldn't be caught.

If the Water Monster Incident had not occurred, and they had continued having their small-scale battles all over various unattended places, they probably would have remained in obscurity forever. Despite the fact that this was the kind of case that Nicolas was usually effective against, this time, they had yet to see hide or hair of the espers. Every time they thought they had finally found something, it would go up in a puff of smoke. They consistently struck out so frequently that it was as if their investigation was completely

being leaked. It probably should not be surprising if the espers had among their numbers someone who could use clairvoyance to keep an eye on the CIA's operations.

Agent Nicolas employed a large variety of methods, all of which proved fruitless. However, this only served to raise the CIA's expectations even higher. The more troublesome the target, the more reassuring they would be as an ally. The fact that CIA agents couldn't find a single clue in spite of the numbers they had on the board only went to show how capable these espers were. It was completely different from all the fake espers whose lies had fallen apart with just a tiny poke.

Now that real espers were proven to exist, winning them over (or arresting them) could very well affect the direction taken by an entire country. Naturally, Agent Nicolas also gave everything he had toward this cause, but his heart was not in it.

No matter how hard he worked, he still could not see or brag to his wife and daughter. Although he had divorced for the sake of prioritizing his work, now that his work was back on track, that did not automatically equate to being able to get back together. A national crisis? No, this was the time that he should be correcting his priorities, focusing on repairing his broken family.

However, Agent Nicolas had his pride. Having discarded his family once to choose work, choosing now to discard his work to waltz on back home was not something that his pride would allow him to do. He also understood that trying to chase both half-heartedly would cause him to lose both. Only after he tracked down the identities of the espers would he go back to see his family, holding his head high. This was the way Agent Nicolas intended to get closure.

That said, being so tense the entire time would mean being unable to be effective when the time called for it. Therefore, he sometimes would ask his subordinates out for a drink. Once, he brought them all to a more spacious bar than Ama-no-Iwato because of their large numbers, and as could be expected, he ended up dead drunk. Because of that, he missed the meeting that he had set up with the wealthy lady in eccentric clothing, who had expressed interest in becoming a cooperator. After that, she cut off all contact with him. However, that was but a small matter. If he got serious, Agent Nicolas could find as many

cooperators and sponsors as he wanted. Letting one or two people slip through his hands was no big deal. As long as they caught the espers in the end, then all's well that ends well.

Despite Tokyo having been turned into the stage of a massive spy war, today too, Head of Japanese Operations Special Intelligence Agent Nicolas Stallone of CIA Asia set off in search of espers.

Afterword

When it comes to the publication of this book, I first want to express my gratitude toward ancient oracle bone script. If oracle bone script had not existed, then we would not have had kanji. If we did not have kanji, then we most likely wouldn't have had hiragana or katakana either. I would not have been able to write an afterword that starts off as ludicrously as this one. I am truly grateful. Apparently, there are some people of valor who give thanks to the big bang for having occurred. I, being the sensitive and reserved person that I am, find expressing my respect toward oracle bone script to be the very limit of what I can manage.

So then, I had made it my life goal to publish a book and donate it to the National Diet Library, but ended up realizing that goal much, much earlier than expected. My life is done. I've cleared it. And so now, I'm starting my second playthrough. As luck would have it, it seems that I'm starting my second life in a powerful New Game+ mode, with a Writing Skill already unlocked. This is clearly one of those other-world reincarnation OP stories that are so popular nowadays, no doubt about it, I know all about them.

I have yet to decide on my goal for this second life, but I think it is a brilliant idea to start it off by checking whether or not I acquired a superpower in the process of reincarnation.

...I've finished checking. Nope, I have no superpowers (srsly?!).

—Hagane Kurodome, a certain day in January 2019.

Bonus Short Stories

Equipment Weight Limit

On a certain day, I felt like doing some weight training on a whim. Upon bringing out some dumbbells from the storage room into the underground training room beneath Ama-no-Iwato, I found the place already occupied. It was Shouta-kun and Touka-chan. Unable to do anything more than nod imperceptibly in response to their cheerful greetings, I was reminded yet again how frustrating and yet how cool it felt enacting the Master character. It always lifted my mood to imagine myself having become one of those bar masters that I had looked up to in my youth.

I started doing my own strength training in a corner of the room while looking at the pair out of the corner of my eyes. Apparently, they were in the middle of testing out the durability of Shouta-kun's equipment. They had a 90-liter bucket—large enough to fit a person inside—filled with water, which Shouta-kun was using to make various weapons that Touka-chan would then melt back into water.

“So next is a double-pronged vajra?”

“The hell is a ‘vajra’? It’s a hammer, stupid.”

Shouta-kun stuck a hand into the bucket, activated his superpower, then withdrew a hammer made of ice as big as he was. He sluggishly lifted it up, then swung it in an amateurish motion more accurately described as mere flailing. It was clear that he was not in control of the weight of the weapon at all.

“Nope, nope, too freaking heavy. My body’s all over the place.”

“Ehh, didn’t you say the same thing for the greatsword? You were the one who said you wanted to fight with a giant weapon though.”

“Stu~pid. You try lifting this then.”

“.....I can’t even lift it.”

“See?”

Touka-chan was quivering with the effort of trying to lift the hammer. Judging by the look of the thing, it was probably 40 to 50 kg. That was about the weight of an average middle schooler. Of course it would be difficult for someone to swing around a weapon that weighed the same as themselves. I was more surprised by the fact that Shouta-kun could even swing it at all.

Many characters in manga and anime are depicted fighting with hammers or swords, but in reality, that’s really hard to do. Simply put, a lot of muscle is needed to brandish that kind of weight.

In the case of your slim middle schooler with an average build, wielding a normal iron sword is already unrealistic. Even if said middle schooler could lift it and manage a swing, it would be a ridiculously huge swing telegraphed a mile away, exactly like what Shouta-kun was doing. I also could see the beauty of a single-burst large-scale attack with low precision, but that’s less useful than trash in an actual fight. Reality is merciless.

“Considering how much weight I can handle, a longsword or a spear is the best I can do. A knife has too little reach. Guess I need to settle for a good balance between maneuverability and power.”

“What are you going to do about defense? Are you going to make a suit of armor out of ice?”

“Oh, nice idea.”

He returned the hammer to the bucket, and Touka-chan melted it. Then Shouta-kun got into the bucket himself and used his power to make a full-body set of ice armor. Despite the simple and boorish design, it looked really cool. Apparently he had a really good sense when it came to fashionable armor. I felt my heart throb.

Then the knight of ice came out of the bucket..... or not. He groaned and moaned with fighting spirit, but to no avail. Apparently he couldn’t move at all.

“Ngooohhh!Shit, I can’t move. Looks like even the joints are frozen on this thing.”

Psyyyched!

“Can you adjust it so that the joints don’t get frozen then?”

“I can’t get that precise with the freezing yet. Also, this armor is goddamn heavy. I wouldn’t be able to fight at all while wearing it. Soz, Touka, help me melt it.”

“So you basically sealed yourself into an ice coffin with your own power?”

“Oh, shut it.”

After several more rounds of trial and error, eventually Shouta-kun settled on using either an ice sword or ice spear depending on the situation, paired together with an ice shield for defense. Attacking or defending with absolute zero was going to be his secret ace because of how exhausting it was.

So apparently, this was how espers decide on their fighting style. It was quite entertaining to watch.

Sleight of Hand and Superpowers

Kaburagi-san often dropped by Ama-no-Iwato. At times she would have lunch while we talked through some new development with the secret organization, and at times she would come at night to enjoy a few glasses and shoot the breeze. Even though she owned the place, she still properly paid for all her food and drinks, so she was one of my VIP customers. I’m totally her sugar baby, aren’t I.....

Tonight, too, Kaburagi-san graced the store with her presence. I took out a bottle of wine per her request. All the alcohol in the store was purchased with Kaburagi-san’s money, so pretty much the entire store was her personal bottle keep.

Kaburagi-san stretched out a hand over her glass of white wine, then groaned cutely like “Mu mu mu,” followed by “Color changing superpower!”

Instantly, the white wine in her glass turned into red wine. You liar, you definitely stopped time and just switched it out!

“Heat-up superpower!”

I used telekinesis to compress air to generate heat energy, and used that

energy to turn her red wine into warm wine. Kaburagi-san giggled, then took a sip. Using the superpowers that we had spent so much effort into training up for silly sleight-of-hand tricks like these was also fun.

Oh that's right, speaking of sleight of hand.

"You remember Mrs. Marrick, the one who chanted a spell to change the color of water? I never really did figure out what she was doing. The color purity was shit, but could it be that she actually was an esper who could change color?"

"Ahh, that was definitely thermochromism."

"Thermo-what?"

I hadn't actually expected an answer, but immediately got one. Kaburagi-san repeated "thermochromism" one more time, then explained, "It's the phenomenon where temperature causes the color of a substance to change by affecting its molecular structure. It is a form of chemical reaction. Do you remember Mrs. Marrick having the heater on full blast, claiming to be weak to cold? That was part of her set up. She mixed temperature-sensitive fluorescent microgel into cold water, and then bought time for it to warm up by chanting her nonsensical spell. When warmed to a certain temperature, the molecular structure would change all by itself. That was her trick."

"Wow....."

I somehow got it. What I got was that Kaburagi-san was really smart. Turns out that it was a science experiment more than a sleight-of-hand trick. My guesses had been that Mrs. Marrick was sprinkling color-changing dye faster than the eye could see, or that she had an assistant in the ceiling who secretly dripped food coloring into the cup, or something equally as silly.

"So she was deceiving people with such a complicated method....."

"Really? This is a rather common phenomenon though. When you cook meat, it also changes color from red to brown, right? That's also an example of molecular change."

"Oh, when you put it that way..." It really was quite common. I guess it wasn't so much a matter of being smart or dumb, it was my perspective that was off.

Without sufficient knowledge or imagination, even sleight of hand could look like a superpower.

On the flip side, for someone with sufficient knowledge and imagination, perhaps even superpowers could look like nothing more than mere sleight of hand.

The Time When Touka Hasumi Almost Became a Nun

Touka Hasumi was a second year at a private middle school. Aside from having awakened to Buddhism, aside from her super cuteness, and aside from her superpower, she was very much your normal, average middle school student. At times she would be secretly contributing to the great fight against the man-eating World Shadows, but she still had tests like normal, had homework like normal, and would still get scolded by her teachers and fall out with her parents like normal. During the tough and bitter times, what sustained her heart were the teachings of Buddha.

Aside from abstaining from killing, stealing, lying, and intoxication, there were also many other rules in Buddhism. By keeping to those rules closely, one could rid oneself of desire, attain enlightenment, and escape from samsara, the cycle of suffering. Although the version of Buddhism that Touka-chan was following was highly customized, she still put in a lot of effort to stay true to it, aiming for enlightenment through actions like copying and chanting sutras. But even so, there were times that she struggled with it. Times when no amount of sutra copying and sutra chanting and Buddha figure carving could calm the anger or depression churning in her heart.

So what then?

Her desire to renounce the world and become a nun would shoot up sharply, that's what. She would find the idea of shaving her hair and discarding her family and everything she owned more and more attractive, that's what.

On one such day, Touka had accidentally put all the test printouts into a paper shredder while helping out a teacher at school. Naturally, she got scolded for it. When she got home, she discovered that her mom had thrown away her sutra copying tools without asking her, which stressed her out terribly. Upon stepping

out of the house to calm herself down during the time she had before dinner, she suddenly recalled that this was the day when the ashura statue that she had ordered was supposed to reach the Buddhist store that she frequented. So she went to pick it up, then headed over to Ama-no-Iwato.

For fear of exploding into an outburst should she open her mouth in her current irate mood, Touka greeted the other person in the store, Shiori Kaburagi, with only a brief head nod (Master was not present) before grabbing a table and setting her ashura statue onto it. She then took out inkstone, a writing brush, ink, and straw paper, and proceeded to occupy herself with sutra copying.

The change in her was not long in coming.

First, her nervous foot tapping stopped.

Next, the whirlpool of anger and helplessness and other such negative emotions roiling within her eyes cleared away, leaving them crystal clear.

Not content to leave it at that, Touka wordlessly took out a cutter from her bag, and brought it up to her hair to shave it off, as if doing so was the most natural thing in the world.

Due to her weakened mental state being compounded with an overdose of Buddhism in a short period of time, she had contracted acute “renounce the world and become a nun” poisoning.

Kaburagi, who was sitting nearby reading a book, caught her actions out of the corner of her eye and spurted out a mouthful of coffee. She stopped time immediately, then confiscated the cutter and wrapped Touka-chan’s small body up in a hug.

“Touka-chan, calm down. Don’t be hasty. What happened? Want to share it with Big Sister?”

“Bad things happened, so I want to go become a nun.”

“I-Is that so.....”

Touka’s tone was eerily calm. Her words were so unexpected that backchanneling was the best that Kaburagi could manage.

“I hate both this desire-ridden earthly world, and I also hate myself for also being someone who cannot shake free of desires. I can’t stand it anymore. I’ll go be a nun. This hair is wrong. The urge to care for it and keep it pretty is desire. I need to discard all desire. I need to cut it.”

“That’s a good desire, one that is fine to hold onto.”

“No, I must not. I can’t stand it anymore. I must discard my hair and my money and everything I own. I will join a temple. I will go become an ordained nun. Please don’t stop me. Please return my cutter to me.”

“How about let’s calm down first? I’ll listen to you, so talk to me? Yes?”

“There’s nothing to talk about. Please let go of me. I will go become a nun. I’ll do it today. I’ve already made up my mind.” Making no attempt to escape from Kaburagi’s embrace, Touka merely remained calm, looking firm in her resolution.

Realizing that logic was not going to convince Touka, Kaburagi decided to change her approach. Her brain whirled quickly and, taking into consideration Touka’s current mental state, calculated out the argument that would be the most effective in this situation.

“So it is because you want to be rid of desire that you want to become a nun, right?”

“Yes. That’s why—”

“But that’s also a ‘want.’ In other words, a desire. You can’t help but to want to become a nun. You’re desiring to become a nun. Aren’t you supposed to discard all desire?”

“?!”

It was as if lightning had struck Touka. She staggered backward a few steps, looked between her ashura statue and Kaburagi several times, then hung her head, murmuring, “Then I’ll give up becoming a nun.....”

“I’m glad you understand. Come, sit, sit. Talk to Big Sister. What happened?”

After that, Touka unloaded a whole mountain of her tough, bitter, and painful feelings onto Kaburagi, swore to never lose to the desire to become a nun ever

again, then headed home with a light heart.

Touka's path of Buddhism was fraught with suffering indeed. Namu Amida Butsu.

An Episode from Before the Store Opened

This might be quite obvious to some people, but there are a lot of different kinds of alcohol. Beer, wine, Japanese rice wine, shochu, and whiskey are but the tip of an iceberg. There is a large variety of selections, a large variety of prices, and a large variety of stores that sell them. There are local brews made in small quantities in rural areas are quite hard to procure even in Tokyo, the center of all commerce. But with that said, making a trip all the way north to Hokkaido or all the way south to Okinawa just for a single bottle wasn't something normally done. Calling the brewery up to have them send a bottle over would still incur courier costs.

For this reason, there exist purchasing agencies specializing in alcohol. What they do is gather orders from multiple clients and then travel all around not only Japan, but the entire world to negotiate the purchasing of alcohol in bulk and arrange for delivery. Naturally, they charge quite a hefty commission, but it's still cheaper than arranging delivery on an individual level.

When Kaburagi-san explained all of the above, I was listening with nothing more than a "well, good for those wine lovers, I guess" attitude. However, upon being brought to a real agency store, I felt the blood drain from my face.

Ama-no-Iwato was a newly furnished underground bar. Therefore, I understood the urge to take advantage of this being a new venture to start off on a good foot, which meant working a bit harder to gather a good selection from the get go, to put in a little more effort into stocking up.

The purchase agency we visited was a converted warehouse, filled with so many boxes stacked so high that making my way through it felt like maneuvering through a maze. Along the way, I noticed extremely terrifying prices written on cardboard boxes and boxes of other materials. What is this "Sink the Bismarck" that is 16,000 yen for a single liter? Is it a wine or a whiskey? I can't tell at all from the name. Is there some crazy dangerous

ingredient in it that explains the price? The low-malt beer that I usually drink is 350 yen per liter. How many fold is this?45-fold?! Is this 45 times more delicious then?? You've got to be kidding me!

As Kaburagi-san led the way through the cluttered labyrinth with the hem of her dress lifted up elegantly, I poked her in the back. She slowed her pace and turned around to look at me.

"Kaburagi-san."

"What is it?"

"Can I go home?"

"I think you really should meet the owner of this store though. You'll be in his care going forward, won't you?"

"This isn't a place where a commoner like me should come to. What am I going to do if I accidentally knock over a box and break all the bottles inside?" The store owner would definitely get pissed. I would get pissed if I were him. This was on a whole different level from breaking the cheap wines sold in supermarkets.

Kaburagi-san smiled wryly. "When it begins to tip over, can't you just use telekinesis to prevent the box from actually falling?"

"Well, when you put it that wa— That's not the problem, you se— HOLY CRAP what the hell this is 90k a bottle?! Is this a horror movie?! Two bottles of this is already more than my monthly after-tax salary!! Why is this just lying around here together with all the other stuff?! This is totally a high class store! Wait don't tell me, so the dude that we met at the entrance was a guard?!"

"Sago-san, hold on, calm down. It's fine, don't freak out, this isn't scary at all."

"This is freaking terrifying!" Gigantic monster battles and nuclear warfare did not scare me, because I could easily handle them with telekinesis. However, telekinesis can't do jack shit about an expensive bottle of wine that's shattered on the ground. Telekinesis and restoration are two completely different superpowers. I'm getting goosebumps on my arms.

Seeing me starting to slowly back away, Kaburagi-san said nonchalantly, "As I

said, there's no need to be scared. I have enough money to buy out this entire store."

"Eh, seriously.....?" Let alone tens of millions, everything here together probably adds up to several hundred millions though.

I looked at Kaburagi-san's face. She was serious. Dead serious. Dayum. I never imagined that I would live to hear the phrase "buy out this entire store" in real life. Kaburagi-san, are you sure you aren't a character from a work of fiction?

"Of course. So you don't have to worry about paying for damages. Have you calmed down now?"

"Yes ma'am, I'm completely calm now."

"Then shall we go?"

"Yes ma'am."

"Can you stop with the 'ma'am' thing?"

"All right."

The moment I knew that we could just slap our way through with money if push came to shove, I wasn't scared anymore. In other words, even if there is a matter that telekinesis cannot solve, we can still rely on money.

Relieved, I resumed following behind Kaburagi-san.

Hentai Kidou Kamen

Keita Ouchi was a member of the Street Performance Club in Mitsukado University. Lately, he had been entirely focused on practicing his tightrope walking for the sake of the upcoming university fair in autumn. But that said, this was a far cry from the hardcore tightrope walking performed by professionals in circuses that involved ropes set up several tens of meters from the ground. His routine was much safer in relation, composed mainly of jumping and prancing on top of a flat rope the width of kishimen noodles set up 50 cm above the ground.

Although it was only 50 cm above the ground, the rope that he worked with

was 5 m in length, which made it hard to set up inside a small room. So what Keita did was go up to the roof of his apartment every night, set it up, and then practice for an hour. He had fully explained everything to the landlord and properly gotten permission.

That night, too, Keita was practicing on the roof. He did not have any lights turned on, and was relying only on the light from the streets and the moon, as his actual performance was also going to be on a similarly dimmed stage.

When he got a bit tired, he descended from the rope to take a short break. With nothing better to do, he stared absentmindedly at the nightscape stretched out before him. Residences with the lights turned off. Convenience stores lit up like beacons. Traffic lights. Blinking stars. A random passerby jumping from roof to roof before clinching a landing on Keita's apartment.

"Wha—?"

"Uwah!"

Keita's exclamation of surprise caused the mysterious jumper to also start with surprise. Apparently this person had failed to notice Keita's presence due to him having been practicing in the dark. Judging from his voice, this was a man similar in age to Keita himself. He was wearing a black coat, a mask that looked like the kind used in lion dances, and extremely sturdy-looking mountaineering boots. Was he man or apparition? His bizarre aura and entrance caused shivers to run down Keita's back.

"Ahem. Good evening to you."

"G-Good evening to you too."

However, belying his outlandish appearance, he cleared his throat and offered his greeting so normally that Keita reflexively greeted him back normally. Of all things, the man then dived into making small talk, completely dragging Keita along into his pace.

"It's sure gotten chilly nowadays, hasn't it? Do you know how cold it gets jumping this high up at night? This season somehow makes the hot oden in convenience stores taste so much better, don't you think? Oh hey, is that a balance beam? Wait, no it's not. Eh, a gigantic strand of kishimen noodle? No,

don't tell me, I got it, you're doing tightrope walking, right?"

"Um, yes. I'm part of the street performance club at university."

"The street performance club! That sounds great! Oh, are you perhaps practicing for the university fair? What a coincidence, I am too! I'm in the middle of practicing my wire action, actually."

"Wire action....."

Upon hearing this word, everything clicked into place inside Keita's mind, and the fear and nervousness he was feeling seeped away. Wire action would indeed explain those consecutive monster-like jumps that he was making. More like, what were those inhuman jumps if it wasn't wire action? It wasn't like masked superheroes existed in real life.

"That's incredible. Your jumps looked really good."

"Thanks, man!"

"How long have you been doing it?"

"For about 4 years, I'd say. I've only just recently started to get the hang of it. Ah, I'm talking about the wire, of course."

".....Umm, so where is your wire right now?"

"This is it."

"Where?"

"Oh, you can't see it? Ahh, must be 'cus it's too dark. This is the latest product made by Panasotec that only hit the shelves last month. It's their thinnest and strongest wire yet, three times thinner but three times stronger than their last model! Technology really is amazing nowadays, isn't it? If someone didn't know any better, they might even mistake this as magic or a superpower, wouldn't you think? Hahaha."

"Ha, ha ha....."

Having been caught in the middle of making that exact misunderstanding, Keita could barely manage a dry laugh.

Soon after, the wire stuntman wrapped up the conversation, then made his

exit by jumping to the next rooftop. Keita saw him off before resuming his own practice, inspired to work even harder.

That year, the performance by Keita's street performance club received rave reviews. However, for some reason, there wasn't even a peep from anyone regarding a wire action performance.

Table of Contents

[Cover](#)

[Color Illustrations](#)

[Chapter 1: Training My Telekinesis With Unwavering Focus](#)

[Chapter 2: THIS Is What I Get For Training My Telekinesis With Unwavering Focus?!](#)

[Chapter 3: You're The Heroine, Right?! I Can Tell! So Just Come With Me Already!!](#)

[Chapter 4: The Crazy And Innocent Dreams We Had When We Were Children](#)

[Chapter 5: The Most Powerful Kind Of Superpower At Level 1](#)

[Chapter 6: Espers Have No Limits! \(They Do Actually\)](#)

[Chapter 7: Shadows Of The World Carefully Crafted One By One By A Master Artisan](#)

[Chapter 8: An Over-The-Top Opening](#)

[Chapter 9: Trying To Curry Favor With A Blatant Sexy Scene](#)

[Chapter 10: This Samurai Loves The Training Chapters In Shounen Manga](#)

[Chapter 11: The Scripted Boy-Meets-Girl](#)

[Chapter 12: The Start-Up Secret Organization](#)

[Chapter 13: Please Don't Be Reserved, This Unwinnable Fight Is An After-Sales Service](#)

[Chapter 14: Be Still, My Right Arm!](#)

[Chapter 15: A Real Healing-Type Heroine](#)

[Chapter 16: Pain, Pain, Go Away And Never Come Back, Capisce?](#)

[Chapter 17: "That Can't Be... It's Too Soon!" Said The Boss](#)

[Chapter 18: The Secret Organization That Fights Against The Shadows Of The World](#)

[Epilogue: Ig's Spring Break](#)

[Special Files: Head of Japanese Operations Special Intelligence Agent Nicolas Stallone Of CIA Asia](#)

[Afterword](#)

[Bonus Short Stories](#)

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There Was No Secret Evil-Fighting Organization (srsly?!), So I Made One
MYSELF! Volume 1

by Hagane Kurodome

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