



5

story by
**HISAGO
AMAZAKE-NO**
illustrations by
KUROGIN

Knight's & Magic



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Ah,
I've got
cuteness
on both
sides of
me...
This is what
happiness
is!

Addy was
positively
beaming,
being
flanked by
Ernie and
Eleonora...

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Emie grinned fearlessly. The Magius Jet Thrusters roared, and Ikaruga accelerated as if it were stabbing through the sky. The drake and the fierce god met in battle.

"No need to worry; Ikaruga and I will challenge you with everything we have! Our **Magius Jet Thrusters, Bladed Cannons, Rahu's Fists—** all of it!"

Emie grinned fearlessly. The Magius Jet Thrusters roared, and Ikaruga accelerated as if it were stabbing through the sky. The drake and the fierce god met in battle.

"No need to worry; Ikaruga and I will challenge you with everything we have! Our **Magius Jet Thrusters, Bladed Cannons, Rahu's Fists—** all of it!"



Eleonora took a deep breath and looked around at the gathered knights. The megaphone mounted in the royal knight spread the queen's voice to every corner of the gathering.

"O knights of Kuscheperka, march forth!"

"Take back this kingdom! Take back our stolen capital!"

Claim victory with our own hands!"

Just a little more! Let's go,

Tzenndrim-bllleeeeee!!

Kid had his Tzenndrimble run, and so the centaur knight galloped through the storm of spellfire.

Arkelorix

Main Pilot: Cristobal Haslo Jaloudek

specs

Height: 10.7 m

Operational

Weight: 18.7 t

Equipment:

Longsword x2, Back

Weapon x2



explanation

A unit of the highest class built exclusively for Jaloudekian royalty. One was made for each of the royal siblings. The Arkelorix operates as a leader unit in place of the royal knight, which cannot leave. Given that an extravagant amount of funds went into its creation, its abilities are well above any other silhouette knight in Jaloudek's army. It features power on par with the heavy Tyrantor with the agility of a standard silhouette knight, making it unbeatable.

Veyloccinos

Main Pilot: Kerhilt Hietakannes

specs

Height: 11.2 m

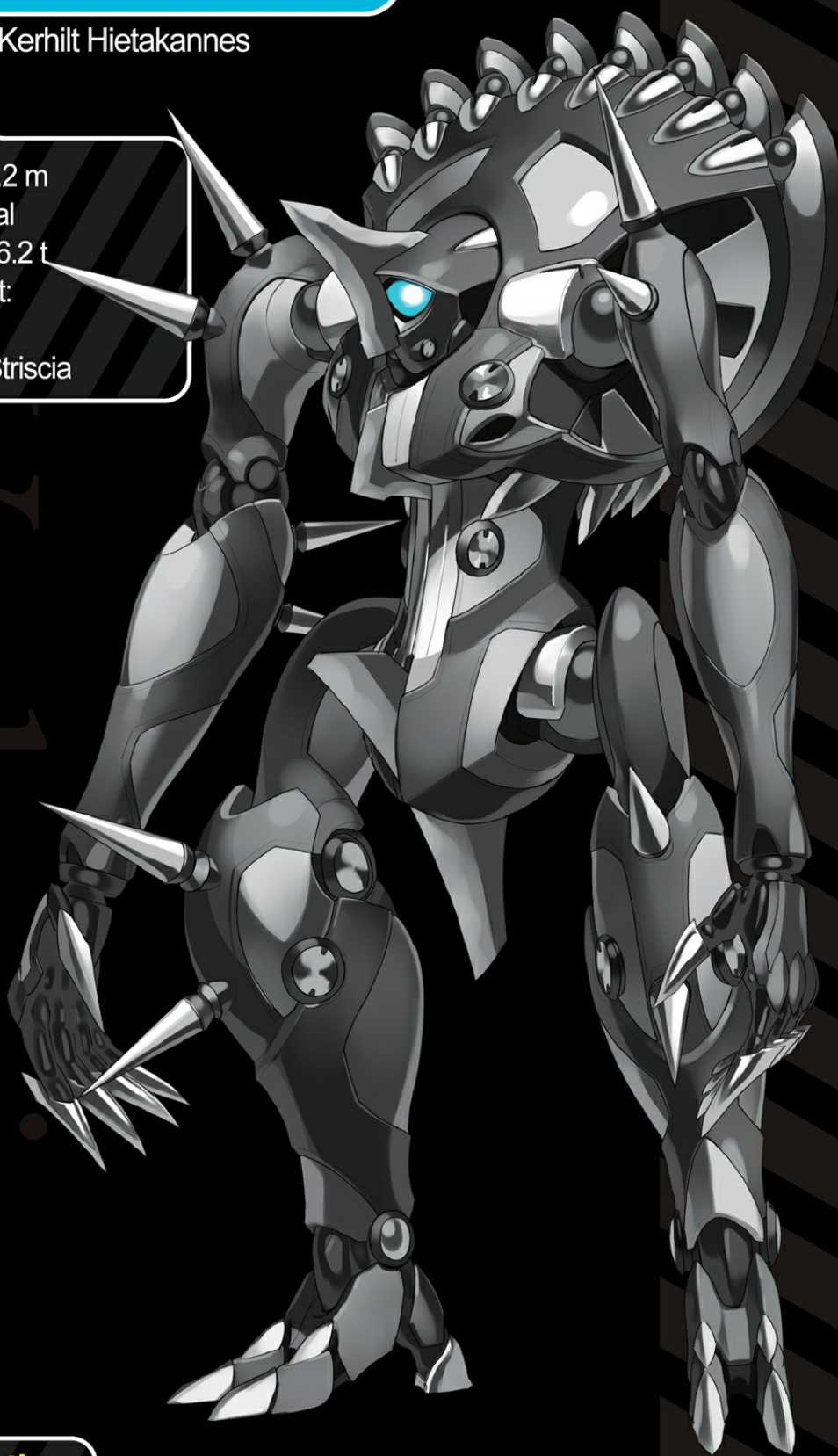
Operational

Weight: 16.2 t

Equipment:

Estoc,

Stabber Striscia



explanation

The personal unit of the Copper Fang Knights' leader. Based off of the Vittendohlas given to her knight order, it is a strengthened version specialized for offense. While it mainly uses ambushes and hit-and-run tactics that utilizes its nimbleness, its attack power combined with the unusual weapons it is equipped makes it a force to be reckoned with, even in straight combat. However, it requires a skilled knight runner to make use of its abilities thanks to the complicated controls this necessitates. It's a rather difficult partner.

Knight's & Magic 5

INTRODUCTION

One year since the start of the Order's fight

One year has passed since the release of volume 4 in April of last year. Sorry to have kept you waiting!

“When will the next one come out?”

“Is there not going to be a volume 5?”

A lot of you have been voicing your worry, but finally the next volume is in your hands.

To make up for your wait, we've powered up this volume's beefiness—and the satisfaction of reading it too!

In particular, the battle scenes will surely feel like you're watching **Ernie** and the rest of the **Order of the Silver Phoenix** fighting right in front of you in virtual reality.

“Let's goooooo!!!” It's time to **raise the curtains** on this feast!



illustration:
KUROGIN

Knight's & Magic 5

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Prologue

In the lands near the severe mountains of Auvinier, which separated the continent of Setterlund into an east and west side, lay a flatland in the middle of a forest, from which the mountain ridges served as a backdrop.

This area, which was basically just bare, leveled ground, was now essentially a graveyard to countless weather-beaten corpses. Some were sliced in twain, some were burned, some were impaled, and some seemed to have been pulverized by a great force. All of these carcasses were squished to an unrecognizable form; not a single one looked as it did while whole.

If you peered closer, it would be possible to spot what seemed to be human limbs, as well as empty helmets. These empty husks used to be human shaped. However, in a strange twist, no matter how much one might search, they would never find any of those things so necessary to a human: blood or flesh. What they would find instead were crystalline fibers, metallic bones, and armor—all strewn through with thin lines of silver. Indeed, all this marked these carcasses as inhuman. They were silhouette knights, made through a merging of the magical and the mechanical.

In this place, which could accurately be called a graveyard of giants, the only movement was the occasional gust of wind. It was quiet, as if all life was holding its breath and hiding...



The year was 1281 O.C.

The Occidents—the group of nations occupying the western half of the continent of Setterlund—were in the midst of a swirling tornado of war. Later generations would refer to this as the Grand Storm of the West, as the great war of this age would involve a great many nations.

The first arrow had been loosed by one of the mightiest kingdoms of the west, Jaloudek. They conquered their way through several smaller nations

before clashing with another major power, the Kingdom of Kuscheperka. Jaloudek made their burning ambitions clear and invaded.

The start of hostilities was normal for wars of this era, and people had thought this was just an extension of the usual skirmishes. These two kingdoms had clashed on and off many times over the course of history, after all. However, these expectations were betrayed as the war proved to be far more fierce and one-sided.

Jaloudek had implemented both a powerful new silhouette knight and an unprecedented flying weapon—the levitating ship—in quick succession, completely turning the conventional wisdom of war on its head with each new strategy they employed using these weapons. As a result, their invasion was one-sided, and proceeded with the speed and ferocity of lightning. Kuscheperka lost its core—the king—early on, along with its capital. Those that refused to surrender fell one after another to the considerable power of Tyrantors, and the other members of the royal family, who had just barely managed to get away from the slaughter at the capital, were hunted down by levitating ships. It seemed like the land which once belonged to the Kingdom of Kuscheperka would soon be swallowed up by Jaloudek. Yet just as this conclusion had seemed totally foregone, it was overturned from a completely unexpected direction.

Several months into the war, a certain group crossed the Auvinier Mountains into Kuscheperka. They introduced themselves as the Silver Phoenix Mercantile Company, and they stood in the way of the king of Jaloudek’s ambition.

The Silver Phoenix Mercantile Company—obviously, this was an alias for the Order of the Silver Phoenix, which was famous all throughout the Kingdom of Fremmevilla—possessed powerful silhouette knights that were the equal of Jaloudek’s Tyrantor, which they used to carry out fierce attacks against the Jaloudek Army. Nothing could stop this group, and before long they had managed to free the surviving members of Kuscheperka’s royalty, throwing off Jaloudek’s plans in a major way. With the Jaloudek Army in utter confusion behind them, the Silver Phoenix Mercantile Company turned to supporting the remnants of Kuscheperka’s forces, bestowing upon them a new silhouette knight, the Laevantia, as well as devising a method to resist the levitating ship.

Prince Cristobal, Jaloudek Army's supreme commander, was whipped up into a frenzy by this, and he brought a large force with him, committed to destroying the Kuscheperkan remnants. Both sides met near the town of Micilie, located in the far east of Kuscheperka. The fierce battle lasted an entire day, from which the Order of the Silver Phoenix, along with the Kuscheperkan remnant forces, emerged victorious. They completely dominated the Black Knights which comprised Jaloudek's main force, as well as the airborne Steel Wing Knights. They then capitalized on their momentum to retake Fontanie.

The former Kuscheperkan army, which had stacked loss upon loss until their country was in ruins, was heavily encouraged by this striking victory. They marshaled around the princess, Eleonora Miranda Kuscheperka, crowning her and announcing the founding of the New Kuscheperka Kingdom at the same time.



The year was now 1282 O.C. The Grand Storm of the West seemed like it was dying down, but then it turned around and returned to its point of origin. Its destination was wrapped in darkness so deep that no eyes could pierce it. The New Kuscheperka Kingdom was, for now, the victor. Meanwhile, the Kingdom of Jaloudek might have lost, but they were still strong. They quietly sharpened their fangs, anticipating future victories.



This place, containing so many silhouette knight wrecks, used to be an airport for the departure and arrival of levitating ships, Jaloudek's threatening vehicles that used the secrets of ether to fly freely through the sky.

In fact, there were nearly enough wrecks here to bury the whole area—which was definitely not small—beneath them. Under closer inspection, it was possible to pick out some strange details. The bits and pieces of armor and helmets had similarities in their designs. In other words, they were all the same type of silhouette knight. This was natural, of course, as these were all Jaloudekian Tyrantors that had been destroyed in the battle of Micilie.

The reason these wrecks had been gathered in one spot was the contract that had been formed between the Kingdom of New Kuscheperka and the Order of

the Silver Phoenix. The contract went thusly: Any and all silhouette knights destroyed by the Order of the Silver Phoenix would become their property as a reward for their efforts in battle.

That also meant they would become the property of the order's captain, Ernesti Echevalier.

It was impossible to arrange these heavily damaged remains in any sort of order, so they were just piled up randomly. They were no longer able to function as silhouette knights. Pretty much the only way to make use of them would be to somehow recycle the materials. And there would only be one person who would be happy to be given such junk: Ernie, of course.

Said boy was currently inside his blue silhouette gear, happily digging through the mountain of wreckage. His silhouette gear was the first model ever made, a Motor Beat, which didn't have a magius engine installed. He and his Motor Beat disassembled the wrecks with overflowing passion and great dexterity, essentially making a hole in the pile.

After a while, he emerged from the mountain carrying a large amount of wreckage, a very pleased expression on his face. "We've got a big old pile of disassembled parts now, so I think it's about time we send some back."

"Wait, we have this much already?! You're a bit *too* into this, Ernie." A rather reproachful voice countered Ernie's happy utterance from the shadow of the mountain of parts. It was Adeltrude "Addy" Alter, Ernie's childhood friend and aide to the captain of the order. She was in a Motor Beat as well, standing imposingly with its hands on its hips.

Addy was here to help Ernie, but even in a silhouette gear, it took quite a lot of effort to keep up with him—Ernie was so immersed in his work that it didn't seem like he'd take a rest anytime soon. Though he felt exasperated, Ernie still picked up the parts that he'd enthusiastically thrown all over the place in his efforts and piled them up on a carrying rack to cart them off. Without the strength of a silhouette gear, this kind of work would have been impossible for just two people to pull off.

After descending the mountain of wreckage, they came across another person working at its foot, also in a silhouette gear. He was carefully arranging

the parts that had been brought down by the two up top and closely inspecting them. It was Batson Termonen, a knightsmith and another one of Ernie's childhood friends.

Batson was a dwarf and was about the same height as Ernie while being nearly twice as wide and much more muscular. He was using a work-specialized silhouette gear that had been even further customized, named the Dwarf's Fist. At the moment, he was using all four of the silhouette gear's arms to deftly inspect the parts while jotting down any revelations he had on a piece of paper.

"How're things going, Batson? Here's more incoming," said Ernie.

"Mmnn, pretty good, all things considered," Batson answered. "Ah, put the new stuff right there."

His vague response, all done while not pausing his work, was a little reminiscent of Ernie. Batson was one of the few people who shared Ernie's interests, even among his childhood friends.

Ernie put the rack down where he'd been told and stopped his Motor Beat. The armor's torso opened up with the hiss of pressurized air being released, allowing the small-statured boy to jump out. He immediately went to peek at what Batson had jotted down, quickly becoming absorbed in the notes. Ernie was happy to do anything that involved robots, whether it be hard labor or intense mental work. In the face of the hobbyist who had already immersed himself in the next step of his work without rest, Addy could only shrug. She also got out of her Motor Beat before coming up behind Ernie and latching onto him.

"I'm tired, Ernie. I'm gonna stay like this for a while to fill up my motivation pool!"

Addy let out a contented sigh once she confirmed the familiar feeling of the boy nestled in her arms. No matter how great the utility of a silhouette gear, extended use of it still placed a burden on the pilot in terms of both physical stamina and mana. That being said, in Addy's case, she was trained well enough that such a thing wouldn't matter for a long while. But that had nothing to do with it. She just needed an excuse. Ernie supported Addy's weight as he fixed his hair.

“Thanks for helping, Addy. You can feel free to rest while we’re sorting through the results. Once this is done, we’ll go back to disassembly.”

“You’re as mercilessly chipper as ever, Ernie...” Addy muttered.

Ernie didn’t seem to pay much attention to the way Addy appeared to wilt; he was already immersed in the work of screening through the parts. Addy understood this, so she made sure not to get in his way while still clinging to him. She passed the time while vacantly staring at whatever Ernie was working on, but soon enough she tilted her head, a question on her mind.

“Hey, Ernie, haven’t you been looking at the same thing for a while now?”

“Oh, so you could tell?” he answered. “Yes, this is likely the core of their technology.”

That was when Batson, who’d been comparing a variety of parts to a diagram he had in his hand, looked up. “I thought so too! Hey, Ernie, check this out. See, here... It looks similar; they have the same function. This is the secret to how that ship flies!”

The diagram was an outline of the Etheric Levitator, which was the secret of the levitating ship’s ability to suspend itself in the air. They’d sussed this out using the ship they’d captured in the battle at Micilie.

“I see. This lends some credibility to our conjectures. We might’ve gotten our invitation to the skies with this,” Ernie said as he stared at the part Batson was pointing to. This part, too, had come from the Tyrantor wrecks. At the center of the device was a crystal that gave off a dull, rainbow-colored shine.

Ernie traced the outline of the device with his finger, a smile creeping up his face. It was the happy expression that accompanied the discovery of a new function, a new piece of technology. This was even more pronounced since it had to do with levitating ships and silhouette knights.

“I’d thought this crystal was worthless. But someone out there discovered its value. I wonder what secrets lay within... I’d love to uncover them all,” he muttered.

“Ernie’s got a villainous look on his face again...” Addy responded with light exasperation.

Who knew what Ernie would pull off once he got that secret in his hands? Addy and Batson gave each other *understanding* looks. That was when a deep voice called out to them from the other side of the mountain of wreckage.

“Heeeeyyy! Where are you guys?! Did you get yourselves buried somewhere?! Gah, jeez. It’s such a waste to leave all of this just rolling around as useless scrap. We should just hurry up and recycle it all.”

“Mrrmm... Here, boss! We’re over here!”

Responding to that call, David “Boss” Hepken, chief knightsmith of the Order of the Silver Phoenix’s smithing department, laboriously climbed over the mountain of wreckage, then appeared on its summit. Once he saw Ernie and his friends at the foot, surrounded by a large number of parts and diagrams, the first thing he did was sigh.

“Well then... You seem happy.”

“I am! Very much so!” Ernie replied. “This is all soooooo delicious to learn about! I want nothing more than to eat it all up!”

“Just like catnip to a cat. I was wondering what you were getting up to, spending all your time here... I should’ve known.” The boss could only shake his head in resignation when he saw how passionately Ernie was gazing at the wrecks, a bewitched smile on the boy’s face. There’d been no need to worry—Ernie was actually doing *too* well. This pile of carcasses was like a mountain of treasure to him, and as the boss had predicted, he’d been so engrossed in his analysis work that he’d neglected to eat or sleep.

Ernie clearly hadn’t considered his own position when he did all this; his passion for his hobbies just overtook everything else. This was a proper technical investigation of the Jaloudek Army’s weaponry, done by “Captain Echevalier,” but really it was just because Ernie was a silhouette knight maniac disguised as the world’s foremost expert on the subject. Still, it was a problem for the captain of an entire knight order to throw aside all his other work to immerse himself in silhouette knight corpses like this.

“Well, I guess this research definitely needs to be done. Just keep it in moderation, will you?” the boss said. “You’ll cause way more trouble if you push yourself too far and end up collapsing. Let’s call the Laevantia done and

move on to mass production now. There's no need to rush the research on Jaloudek's stuff."

The boss was right—feedback had come in from the prototype Laevantias that were New Kuscheperka's most cutting-edge units, and they had now been refined into a form that could withstand mass production. At the moment, all private and military workshops in Fontanie were working at full capacity for this very purpose. The knighthsmiths were facing a seemingly endless amount of work, but their faces were bright and their morale was high because of the refounding of their nation. That meant the Order of the Silver Phoenix should have had some leeway, but none of that mattered to Ernie.

"I know that but I'm definitely not doing this out of simple curiosity—I *swear* I'm not! Still, Jaloudek's technology here—meaning the levitating ships—is a completely new kind of weapon that can fly and even transport silhouette knights—it's an extreme threat—so if we can analyze it and put it to practical use it'll be very beneficial to us. And more than anything I'll be super happy! Plus it will bring the whole of humanity a step forward meaning we should *all* be happy. So really there's no other choice than to research this until we know everything about the underlying principle and to do so as soon as possible." Ernie rattled off at lightning speed. He was speaking so quickly that it was nearly impossible to even tell the words apart.

"Okay, okay, slow down. So how long is this project gonna be?" the boss asked.

"Well, let's see... I think we're about to get to the secret core of this thing. Ah, don't worry! I won't leave anybody out once I've unveiled it. I'll definitely teach everyone all about it!"

Seeing Ernie so excited and energetic that he seemed like he'd bounce off the walls as he talked, the boss finally threw his hands up in surrender. "S-Sure, okay. I get it, I get it already, so just make sure you don't collapse."

The boss knew that Ernie wouldn't listen to anything he said in this state. Luckily, Jaloudek was lying low for the moment, so they likely had some time before anything would happen. It probably wouldn't be an issue to let Ernie do what he liked for a while—that was the decision the boss came to, though it

was more like he just gave up.



While Ernie and his comrades were spending their days enjoyably and fruitfully, a certain incident was occurring some ways away from Fontanie in Kuscheperka's old capital, Dervankhul.

Jaloudek took this city over at the start of the war, and it was now the headquarters of the Central Protectorate Government, the symbol of Jaloudek's control over Kuscheperka. Because this used to be the capital, it was replete with all sorts of facilities. Among these was an area commonly called the workshop district. Many large buildings meant for the purpose of constructing and maintaining silhouette knights were lined up side by side here, making it a critical location for the city's military garrison.

Soldiers and knightsmiths of the Jaloudek Army were constantly running around at the feet of the Tyrantors in maintenance. In this clamorous and hectic air, a single man walked along in such a leisurely fashion he stuck out like a sore thumb. This man was none other than the chief of Jaloudek's development and research workshop, Horacio Kojass. He looked around the workshop listlessly as he gave orders to his various subordinates.

"Okay... So just finish up this area like that. Yeah, I think that's good enough. Right, I'll leave the rest to you—I have something I need to attend to in the back."

Since the founding of the Kingdom of New Kuscheperka—or more accurately, since their loss at the battle of Micilie—Jaloudek had been desperate to replenish their lost forces and come up with a countermeasure for the anti-levitating ship weapons. As long as these problems went unsolved, they were under threat of completely losing any advantage in battle they'd enjoyed until now. The knightsmiths were thus being bombarded with all sorts of orders, and their workload was increasing daily. Even so, Horacio simply blurted out the bare minimum of orders before leaving as quickly as he could.

Today had proven to be like every other day since this started, and the knightsmiths who were left behind simply sighed before slowly resuming their work. They could only imagine what would happen if his orders weren't so

accurate.

Horacio was the kind of person who cycled constantly between a small collection of well-worn clothes, and he could never get rid of the sullen impression he gave off. That being said, he *was* the father of the levitating ship and an engineer without equal. He wouldn't have become chief if he weren't, after all.

Once he'd finished giving out his orders, he left the crowded workshop district. He was headed for his own personal workshop. This place contained the results of his research, which he'd been working on since the day he'd heard that one of his levitating ships had been brought down.

"With the near annihilation of the Steel Wing Knights, the levitating ships can no longer dominate the skies. Just making another ship won't work. This world sure is harsh—I feel like I just gave birth to this idea the other day." Horacio's whisper sounded rather deadpan as he walked toward a strangely shaped weapon suspended in the middle of the workshop. This bizarre object was set around a cylindrical core, and silver plates with silver nerves and Emblem Graphs ran through it. It was a true wonder that it hadn't fallen apart on the spot.

"Which means I really do have to complete this as soon as possible. This new *propulsion system*, that is..."

Horacio had been spending his time to this point grilling Dorotheo Maldness and the survivors of the Black Knights for information. One detail, though, was much more interesting to him than the rest.

"A fountain of flame burst out of its entire body, granting it absurd acceleration... Absurd to think that a silhouette knight could accomplish such a thing, and even fly with it! *And* completely crushing my levitating ship on top of that!"

He was referring to that silhouette knight that was like a fierce god, a thing so ridiculous it was easy to accept that it had been the direct cause of so many of the Steel Wing Knights' losses.

"It flew! Really?! It flew?! A silhouette knight! Ridiculous. If a silhouette knight really could fly freely through the sky, then I wouldn't have bothered making

the Etheric Levitator!”

Annoyed, he pulled on a lever, and an external ether reactor started to spin up. The device quickly awakened, eating up mana stored in some crystal tissue. It didn’t take long for the air intake attached to the machine, modified from an intake of an ether reactor, to hit shrill levels of noise. Then, following the Emblem Graph carved into the thing, the sucked-in air was used to activate a magical phenomenon. It was the basic fire script of the Architect family of spells—the gathered and compressed atmosphere morphed into violent, intense fire, all of which was directed and discharged in a single direction following the script.

The bright light of the flames threw the man’s face into stark shadow.

“Spew out flames and fly through the sky... Flames! That means explosion magic! That means...using the backlash of an explosion to propel one forward! Ha...ha ha ha... What genius! What idiocy! Whoever made this must be insane!”

The flow of flames—which should probably be classified as jet magic—had the potency of an overspell and threatened to blow the entire device apart. If it wasn’t solidly affixed to the floor, the thing would’ve flung itself straight into the wall.

To begin with, it was insane to think of casting explosion magic near oneself. It was common sense that being near an explosion and the resulting shock wave would damage the user. Naturally, willingly subjecting oneself to the shock wave was not the thinking of a sane person. It was madness; the product of a warped thought process.

Horacio’s expression twisted, and a loud and piercing laugh came out of his mouth. One wrong move and this fire would spell the user’s destruction, but it also produced incredible propulsion. Using such a method was basically suicide; it was crazy enough to shake Horacio’s already distorted personality to the core. He started to feel a sort of respect for the enemy engineer that gave such a thing form, but that also came with a maddening amount of jealousy.

“The levitating ship exists in the sky because of the Pure Ether Effect! But this fool has taken to the air with just explosions and fire! Heh heh... HAH! Does that mean my entire clan’s ideas are inferior to one fool’s?!”

According to his interviews, the enemy silhouette knight was moving using great gouts of fire. That alone was enough to bring him to the conclusion that the enemy was using the recoil from explosions as propulsion. His inventiveness truly marked him as a prodigy. Or possibly... There was some sort of special factor that could only be communicated between two insane people.

“This propulsion system uses mana to produce thrust far more powerful than wind could ever be! This might even be enough to power *that*.”

This imitation Magius Jet Thruster of Horacio’s own design was still a strong enough propulsion engine that it couldn’t be compared to conventional technology. There was only one conclusion to be drawn from that. It needed to be bigger and even more powerful—

At some point, the machine used up all its mana and stopped. Horacio approached it and smiled wide. “Once *that* gets a complete frame, it will surely be able to wrest control of the sky and everything else within with its talons. That’s right—the sky belongs to me! Once I finish this, I won’t have to bother with any of that minor annoying crap! Yeah, I don’t care if we win or lose; I just want this boring war to be done with. Then I’ll be able to fly as much as I want!”

This engineer that dreamed of the sky was working only for his own desires. He didn’t care one bit about the country and its victory or anyone’s survival. Luckily—or maybe unluckily—this madness was still his own little secret.



The most standout characteristic of the Grand Storm of the West was how many new technologies were deployed during its course. Both the Jaloudek Kingdom—the greatest player on this stage—and New Kuscheperka had their own abnormal engineers, and their achievements would lead the war into greater confusion along with the passage of time.

Part 9: Birth of the Drake Arc

Chapter 38: March of the Kingdom of New Kuscheperka

Under a calm sky and slowly flowing clouds, a faint breeze blew past a sitting girl, lifting her hair as it did so.

The girl gently returned the teacup she was holding to the table, freeing up her hands to hold down her hair as she slowly stood up. Calmly, she walked over to the railing, allowing the scenery around her to sink in.

She was at the center of Castle Raspede, and so she saw its signature four minarets, as well as the castle town radiating out from her position—she was observing Fontanie, the capital of New Kuscheperka.

This city, which had seemed to be suffocating under the rule of Jaloudek, had recovered quite a bit of its liveliness once it had been returned to its rightful owners. This was all thanks to trade being partially reopened with Fremmevilla Kingdom, which lay across the Auvinier Mountains to the east through the Occident Road.

While this was great for the people, it was also a lifeline for the newly founded nation, which was still in a precarious position.

“Even though this city—and the country itself—are slowly regaining their original states...” said Eleonora Miranda Kuscheperka, the girl who just the other day had been crowned as the queen of New Kuscheperka.

“Is something the matter, Your Majesty?” a knight gently called. Judging from his relatively light armor, he was clearly a knight runner, and he had a strangely shaped staff, along with a silver short sword at his hip.

Instantly, Eleonora’s clouded expression cleared. “Sir Archid.”

While the queen was smiling, the young knight runner she’d called out to, Archid Alter, put on a troubled face. “Whe— Whoops. Your Majesty... I am just a simple knight, so there’s no need for you to refer to me respectfully like that.”

“Oh, no, Sir Archid. This is not a matter of our respective positions. It’s just what I’d like to call you. Also... There’s no need to be so stiff. Please talk to me normally, like you first did. Did you dislike that?” Eleonora’s expression clouded once more, causing Kid to scratch his head, at a loss.

She was referring to when she had still been a princess and had fallen into the evil clutches of Jaloudek. The Order of the Silver Phoenix had sallied forth to save the captured royals, which had led to Kid swearing to fight as Eleonora’s knight in a bid to bolster her spirits.

So her trust in him was deep—which was a good thing, but Kid couldn’t help but wonder if it was okay that she was so strangely attached to him. Not only that, but Ernie and Emris had assigned him to her in some strange show of consideration, so he was both a member of the Order of the Silver Phoenix and a knight serving directly under Eleonora at the same time.

These days, he acted as her bodyguard, but he was also being tossed about by the increasing amount of playfulness she was showing when she could allow herself to.

“That’s not... No, I didn’t,” Kid replied. “Uh, but setting that aside, you were sighing. I was just wondering if something was worrying you.”

Eleonora gave a small gasp as she brought her hand to her cheek. “Oh, no, I was just happy to see Fontanie regaining its liveliness...”

Kid tilted his head, puzzled. Her dreary expression didn’t match her words. He shifted his gaze to the scenery beyond the railing.

They were on a balcony on the upper floors of Castle Raspede. This place was normally rather dreary itself, but now the air seemed much more bright and splendid.

A table had been placed on the balcony, and an array of colorful snacks were lined up on it. There were also waiters diligently moving around and refilling drinks, among other things, to allow people to continue their conversations uninterrupted. Though it was small, they were currently in the midst of a tea party.

“Ah! So this is where you two were! Sneaking off to have a private

conversation, huh? Hey, your tea is getting cold.” Addy slipped in between the two, whose conversation had petered out. Behind her, attendants were already replacing the old tea. Addy spent a small while staring at Eleonora before she suddenly grabbed onto the queen’s hand.

“Jeez, Helena, what a waste of your pretty looks! Come on, stop looking down all the time. Let’s enjoy some delicious cake and regain our spirits!”

“You’re right. Sorry, Miss Addy. I shouldn’t be moping in this situation... I already decided to face forward—toward the future. Hee hee, let’s go try some cake together.”

While they were close in age, Addy’s attitude was far too familiar considering Eleonora was a queen. Though Kid felt troubled by his sister’s attitude, it didn’t seem like anyone else minded. Furthermore, Eleonora started to cut out a piece of cake for Addy as well as herself. Such an action was a far cry from anyone’s imagination of a queen; she acted as if she were a normal girl.

“Ha ha. It’s just us here. There’s no need to worry about that sort of thing, so just enjoy yourselves.” Martina Alt Kuschperka smiled as she watched over the girls. She had become Castle Raspede’s master in place of her now departed husband and was currently serving as the queen’s aide. And it was because she was staying right by Eleonora’s side to help the girl that Martina knew how much weight she was carrying.

“She’s right. I mean, look how delicious this tea and cake is!” Addy exclaimed.

“You’re just being way too casual about all this...” Kid muttered.

Though this party was supposed to be a casual one where social standing didn’t play a part, Addy was the type of girl to not care about any of that regardless. Despite his misgivings, Kid came around in the end. “Well, you’re right that being formal all the time is just suffocating.”

As soon as he said that, a cake suddenly appeared before him.

“Would you like some cake too, Sir Archid?” Eleonora asked.

“Huwha?! Uhhwh— Yes, thanks. I’ll have some... Ah, um...you can just give me the plate; I can eat it myself... Uh...”

For some reason, Eleonora did not give him a plate. Instead, she extended a piece of cake on a fork and kept it there, insistently. Kid got an extremely bad feeling about this turn of events, so he tried to resist, but he was powerless against Eleonora's gentle smile.

“Okay, I’ll just eat it like this.”



Kid was pressured by the smile, but he didn't take long to prepare himself for what was about to happen.

Queen Eleonora was raised in a gilded cage, and the war had been a great shock to her. As she had recovered from this shock, she had also gradually awakened to her sense of responsibility as a queen, which was why she'd started to change her mannerisms. However, such a change caused some recoil, it seemed, as every once in a while she would show an extremely impish and mischievous side. This came out especially often when Kid was around.

"I'm glad to see you doing so well, Helena!" Emris Jeijer Fremmevilla nodded exaggeratedly. He was watching this lively exchange from the neighboring table as he attempted to take a full hand of confections and eat them.

Isadora Adalina Kuscheperka was sitting next to him, and she caught that in time to slap the food out of his hand. "Yeah, yeah. Why do you have to make a mess out of everything, Ris? Don't do that. Just please eat like an actual noble, with a fork and knife."

"Eating in tiny bites like that just isn't for me."

Isadora pouted, and her silent glare intimidated Emris into picking up a fork and stabbing it into the cake. He continued to carry the whole piece into his mouth, to which Isadora reacted by bringing a hand to her cheek with an exasperated look.



After everyone participating in the tea party had their chance to enjoy it and take a rest, Ernie popped up.

"Please excuse my lateness."

"Ah, you're finally here, Ernie! C'mere! Here, we made sure to leave some cake for you." Addy eagerly prepared a place for Ernie beside her, patting the open seat once she was done.

Ernie accepted this goodwill, sitting down in the proffered spot without fuss. He took a sip of the tea he was immediately offered, and he let out a sigh of contentment.

Ah, I've got cuteness on both sides of me... This is what happiness is! Addy was positively beaming, being flanked by Ernie and Eleonora, but let's leave that aside for now.

"The taste of tea after some hard work is exceptional," said Ernie.

"Thank you for all your hard work, Lord Echevalier. We rely on you for so much," Eleonora said.

"Oh, please, don't mind that. I was late just now because I was having so much fun getting all the materials in order, after all," the boy replied.

While the Kuscheperkans seemed apologetic, those of the Order of the Silver Phoenix were quite a bit more cavalier about all the work Ernie was doing, treating it as just another one of his flights of fancy. In truth, if they left him to his devices, Ernie would immerse himself in his research endlessly.

Martina and Eleonora took a collective breath and let it out, their features softening as they did so. This tea party was set up to give Eleonora a break, but it was also a place for a certain important discussion to be held.

"Lord Echevalier... I have something I'd like to discuss with you," Eleonora started.

"Stop it with the 'lord' stuff; it's too much for me. Thank you, but while I've been given a knight order, I don't possess a peerage. Please, treat me casually."

In this world, the position of knight did not automatically confer a minor peerage. Knighthood was more like a job, especially since it was basically an intermediate step to becoming a knight runner, a title which pointed to one's ability to handle silhouette knights.

Eleonora was already troubled as to how to proceed, even though she'd just barely broached the subject. While she *was* inexperienced as a queen, the fact that Ernesti Echevalier was just incomprehensible was also a factor.

Even though he was seventeen—the same age as her—he was basically the same height, despite being a boy, and he had features so lovely he *could* be mistaken for a girl. At first glance, he looked so slender and delicate it was impossible to think he was built for violence, but in truth he was the strongest knight runner and in charge of his own order. Furthermore, his Ikaruga had

capabilities so ludicrous that it started to be feared by friend and enemy alike after the battle over Micilie; its overwhelming achievements had led it to be called a god of death.

By now, the Kuscheperkans knew that he had a somewhat strange value system, and that he prioritized silhouette knights over everything else. His drive was insane, and while it was nice that he'd strengthened his allies' silhouette knights and created the missile javelin, he'd lately been going on a rampage in an attempt to defeat and take ownership of all the enemy's silhouette knights.

On top of all that, he was the knight captain of the Order of the Silver Phoenix—the most powerful combat force available to New Kuscheperka—and a major player who supported their revival. In the first place, the order was incredibly mysterious. It was known that they'd come from Fremmevilla, brought by Emris when he'd hurried here to help his aunt, Martina. They also knew that this group defied almost all common sense.

The Order of the Silver Phoenix possessed the most powerful, cutting-edge silhouette knights, as well as unique centaur knights, which allowed them significant strength in battle. This alone made them very valuable, but they also provided the newborn country with the methods to manufacture powerful new silhouette knights of their own, and they'd even managed to quickly counter the levitating ships, which as of yet were still largely unknown outside of Jaloudek. Their range of activity had already far exceeded that of a normal knight order. And when it came to their captain, not even the New Kuscheperkan queen could afford to treat him crudely.

Normally, the queen should be dealing with Fremmevilla's second prince, Emris. However, things weren't that simple, and it seemed that the Order of the Silver Phoenix prioritized the word of their captain even over royalty. While they sometimes showed great exasperation at his antics and seemed to treat their captain rather casually, it was clear that the order had an unshakable bond of trust with their captain.

Ernie lacked a peerage, but he was a knight captain with monstrous strength, and as a result, Eleonora had to tread lightly. This made Ernie a rather absurd existence to them, as those from the Occidents placed heavy importance on lineage and the rule of nobility.

“Then...allow me to call you Sir Ernesti.” After some hesitation, Eleonora decided to treat him courteously as Kid’s friend.

However, it seemed this wasn’t as casual as he was expecting, and Ernie shot a look at Kid—who was standing behind the queen—and received a silent shaking of the head in reply. “Okay. If you’re satisfied with that, Your Majesty, then I am as well.”

Eleonora seemed a little relieved to hear that. She then drew a quick breath and broached the subject once more. “So, as you might have expected, I wanted to talk about the silhouette knight remains under your possession.”

She was talking about the contract the Kingdom of New Kuschelperka had signed with the Silver Phoenix Mercantile Company, which pertained to destroyed enemy forces. In this war, which made use of giant humanoid weapons, the wrecks that were left behind were an important source of remuneration. It was possible to recycle the destroyed machines for parts, and their hearts were so overwhelmingly tough that they could often be reused as they were.

The problem was that the order’s results were far *too* impressive. With Ikaruga at the forefront, a mere three companies had managed to decimate an entire Jaloudekian brigade. And those remains were now firmly in the order’s hands.

“We have restored our home into a new kingdom, and we are about to strike back at Jaloudek in earnest,” said Eleonora. “In order to do that, we need as many silhouette knights as possible.”

The New Kuschelperkans had introduced the powerful new Laevantia during the previous battle, to accompany the Lesvant Viede, but those were just prototypes that had been forced into action. Fontanie and the surrounding towns were currently all working at a fever pitch, mass-producing this new model, but they still didn’t have enough. The Lesvant Viede still made up a majority of Kuschelperka’s army, but its extreme lack of speed made it exceedingly unsuited for offensives. They couldn’t afford to strike until they gathered enough Laevantias. In order to do that, they needed enough hearts and metal.

“That is why we would like to restore the wrecks that you possess and add them to our army,” she concluded.

Ernie and the rest of the Order of the Silver Phoenix had come from the Kingdom of Fremmevilla, Martina’s home, and were giving Kuscheperka their full support and cooperation. However, it wasn’t as if they were in the new kingdom’s formal command structure. In the end, they were just helpers, and their position required some delicate balancing.

“Many nobles still remain under the control of the enemy, and we are still harried by a lack of military strength. Returning to the wording of our contract...please...” Eleonora trailed off.

“Okay, I accept your request,” Ernie said readily with a smile.

Eleonora and the others felt a little cheated by how easy this had turned out to be, but they quickly got a hold of themselves. They’d learned by now that this boy’s smile was dangerous.

Sure enough, Ernie didn’t betray their expectations. “Let’s see, then how about we do this? No matter how good we are at constructing silhouette knights, it’ll be way too much work to rebuild that many. So I’ll allow you to make use of the extra stock. Let’s say that we’re lending the units to you for the duration of this war. How does that sound?”

Though Eleonora and the others were worried, Ernie’s suggestion stayed within the bounds of common sense.

“Thank you very much. With this, we’ll have enough to fight...” Eleonora breathed a sigh of relief.

However, Ernie wasn’t done. The new queen gasped and stiffened up as he continued. “In this case, the silhouette knights we lend you will still be considered our forces. This means they will apply to our original agreement: that all the enemies we defeat will become ours. Wouldn’t you agree?”

The New Kuscheperkans immediately understood what he was angling for. As long as the contract was valid, every defeated enemy meant another silhouette knight for the Order of the Silver Phoenix. These units would then be rebuilt and returned to the battlefield, where they would continue to defeat even

more enemies—this gluttonous cycle would continue until the enemy was utterly destroyed.

This struck Eleonora and Martina speechless, and they couldn't help but stare at the smiling boy. Ernie didn't seem any different from usual, which meant he was still sane and being completely serious; he intended to swallow a major kingdom whole.

"Hey, look at the face my aunt's making now! You've gone too far!" Though the mood had turned strange, that wasn't something Emris was able to read, and he suddenly grabbed onto Ernie's head. He then started to muss the boy's hair.

A small chuckle came from the small knight captain. "It was a joke. So much junk would only be more work to rebuild, and that's more trouble than even I want. So as far as the conditions of the contract go, let's revise them with the excuse that the kingdom has been restored and our employer has changed. Of course we will lend you the restored units—we can't let this chance to strike back at Jaloudek escape us."

Emris finally relinquished Ernie's head, and the boy continued as he tried to fix his hair. "Also, I prefer my silhouette knights functional."

"Y-Yes, those certainly are better... Thank you, Ernesti." Martina managed to recover, though the queen remained frozen. In the end, everything settled in a way that matched the Kuscheperkans' goals exactly, but they didn't feel like they could relax just yet. After all, though Ernie called it a joke, no one present took it as such.

While the Kuscheperkans shivered at this, the Order of the Silver Phoenix carried on as usual. They could easily imagine their captain flattening an entire country for the sake of silhouette knights, after all.

"Hey, stop doing that to my aunt and the girls," said Emris.

"What? I would never! I was just joking—trying to ease the tension," Ernie replied indignantly.

"In what world would that not leave everyone *more* tense?"

Once again, Emris tried to catch Ernie, but the boy escaped, only for Addy to

grab him instead. She held him firmly as she fixed his hair. It was hard to tell if that treatment was a bit too *heavy* or not, but it only served to deepen the Kuscheperkan royals' worries. It seemed they would need to continue to get along with the lovely—yet terrifying—knight captain for the foreseeable future.

Kuschere Road was a main artery that ran all the way across the lands that used to belong to the Kingdom of Kuscheperka. Most of this land had now been conquered by the Kingdom of Jaloudek, and this was still true even after Kuscheperka's rebirth. While it was difficult to enter the lands that were still under Jaloudek's control, the roads within New Kuscheperka's territory were filled with carts carrying supplies even now.

In accordance with the discussion held some days ago, the Order of the Silver Phoenix loaned New Kuscheperka some of their silhouette knight wrecks. Though these silhouette knights were destroyed, they were still useful resources; especially since in most cases, the ether reactors and magius engines could be reused as they were.

With this influx of materials, New Kuscheperka now had to reorganize its army. They rounded up every smithy in the area, even outside of Fontanie, and put them to work producing more Laevantias.

During the battle for Micilie, the New Kuscheperkan forces and the Order of the Silver Phoenix managed to slay Prince Cristobal, the enemy's supreme commander. Yet Jaloudek was still in control of the large majority of Kuscheperka's original land, and their overall strength hadn't seemed to take even the slightest hit. In order to be able to go on the attack, the Kuscheperkans would first need more numbers. As an aside, New Kuscheperka was in such a hurry to increase the size of its army that the initial wave of Laevantias built during this time were said to have Tyrantor parts directly installed. In most cases, this fact was ignored. That is, as long as it didn't cause any problems.

Thus the finished Laevantias were sent all over the newly founded country, either in preparation for the coming attack or to protect their own lands.



A caravan traveled down the road, kicking up dust as it went.

This was one of the transport caravans meant to bring silhouette knights to the front lines of the fight against Jaloudek. Only this one had a rather peculiar trait—its carriages were supersized, large enough to fit the ten-meter-tall Laevantias in their completed forms. Similarly, the horses pulling these carriages were not normal, as they had humanoid upper torsos attached to horse bodies in the unnatural form of a centaur. Furthermore, they stood fifteen meters tall. They were Tzenndrimbles.

Normally, transporting silhouette knights was done either by having the completed silhouette knight move to the destination itself, or by only building it partway and splitting the parts between several different carts only to complete it on-site. Both methods required a fair amount of time, but there existed a group that could carry things around much easier all while being a fearsome fighting force. Of course, this was referring to the company (ten units) of Tzenndrimbles which belonged to the Order of the Silver Phoenix.

A Tzenndrimble's movement speed far outstripped that of a silhouette knight. This, combined with its outstanding ability to carry extra loads, allowed it to move silhouette knights with great haste. To New Kuscheperka, whose production of these silhouette knights was so hurried that their shipments couldn't keep up, this ability was of great value. Most soldiers who fought on the front line were having to make do in their obsolete Lesvants or Lesvant Viedes. Arrivals of these new and powerful silhouette knights were always met with joy.



The following event took place during one of Third Company's many deliveries during that period.

"Be on alert, everyone. Something's coming!" Third Company's commander, Helvi Olbarri, shouted through her megaphone, straining to see what it was through her machine's holomonitor. "Not that it isn't obvious who would be coming to a place like this."

Her men also quickly caught on to the identity of the new arrival. A black-painted vessel—a levitating ship—was in the sky.

Gradually, the silhouette solidified, and Third Company could see the

Jaloudekian flags emblazoned on the sails stretching out to either side. The Steel Wing Knights, Jaloudek's aerial force, had taken a huge hit during the battle of Micilie and had been devastated. While they hadn't lost all the levitating ships available to them, they'd lost enough to make it impossible to take action in unison as a large force. So, they were relegated to fast strikes with a small force like they were doing now—a form of guerrilla warfare.

The levitating ships used their ability to ignore terrain to appear out of nowhere, but they chose to persistently hound the supply trains instead of attacking bases.

"I thought they were specialized in brute force, but it looks like they've mastered the art of tiny gains as well. Wow, they sure are terrible people!" It was understandable that Helvi would be fed up. Jaloudek's levitating ship crews had learned from their defeat and stopped descending to attack.

Instead, they now preferred to attack from high in the sky, never stopping as they did so. However, a levitating ship's only means of attacking ground units was with stones thrown from their Catapults.

The Catapults were far from accurate, though, so it was nearly impossible to hit normal carriages so long as they were moving. Frankly, attacks by levitating ships were not much of a threat; they were more harassment than anything.

"Jeez, they do this every single time. Don't they ever get tired of it? It's so annoying... And it looks like we won't be able to shake them off either."

Though Tzenndrimbles excelled in speed, it wasn't enough to outrun levitating ships that could travel through the sky. Even allowing this single ship free rein of the skies above them would prove an incredible hindrance.

"Mind the rocks! I don't believe they'll be able to hit us that easily, but... Huh?" Helvi expected this to be the usual bit of harassment, but those expectations were quickly dashed.

The levitating ship chased Third Company while circling around in the sky. Once it aligned itself parallel to the company, it unleashed bright red, burning spellfire instead of rocks. The rapid volley impacted around the company, throwing up fierce fountains of fire. For an instant, Third Company was shocked, but they quickly understood what was happening.

“What?! They’re attacking with silhouette arms?! No way...” Bad premonitions never prove false. When Helvi looked up, she saw something tubelike sticking out of the levitating ship. The fact that she could see it clearly even from this distance meant it was large. But that wasn’t all—it was also familiar.

“A Llevant Viede...imitation? Anyway, this means they’ve made their own wizard-style weapons.”

The levitating ship continued firing while Third Company was busy being shocked, and explosions bloomed around them. Given that they were towing heavy carriages, the Tzenndrimbles wouldn’t be able to dodge forever.

“Commander! This can’t go on!”

“I know!” replied Helvi. “I guess delaying this would just be letting them kill us. Return fire! Show them our hospitality!”

The Tzenndrimbles followed their company commander’s order, several of them deploying the weapons they’d been carrying. Multiple rail arms wriggled and pointed in concert toward the sky. These were the antiair weapons that launched missile javelins: Vertically Launched Javelin Throwers.

It’s already been said that Third Company was doing great things with their carrying capacity. However, their standout performance in this role wasn’t solely due to that. They also sported a powerful antiair weapon in the form of the missile javelin. Several units of the company were always carrying this new weapon just in case. These took up quite a lot of space, since silhouette gears needed to accompany them to reload the javelins, and they couldn’t dedicate too much room to these lest they lose out on space for their cargo. Still, that didn’t mean they could leave themselves open to attacks by levitating ships.

“Aim, fire! Teach them just who they’ve picked a fight with!”

The missile javelins took flight, producing copious amounts of smoke. These projectiles, connected to the launchers by a silver nerve apiece, could be freely controlled by the knight runner, and they flew unerringly at the levitating ships. With enough speed, the javelins would be able to essentially ignore the levitating ship’s armor. Levitating ships were essentially large boats, and while only a few hits would fail to affect one, there was always the chance that a

javelin would hit the Etheric Levitator or some other critical part, destroying it and causing the ship to fall. More than a few ships had gone down due to this during the battle for Micilie.

When faced with this mass of missile javelins, they would have no choice but to run away—or so Third Company had thought.

“No way!”

Suddenly, the sky flashed with a loud noise. It was like a bolt from the blue; such an unnatural phenomenon could only be caused by magic. Whatever it was, it had the potency of an overspell, and it accurately shot down some of the missile javelins with bolts of lightning.

However, the lightning was not perfect. While several of the missile javelins were shot down, most managed to weave through the lightning to hit the levitating ship.

While Third Company watched on with a combination of shock and tension, the levitating ship withdrew. While the javelins had damaged the ship’s armor, it wasn’t fatal. But it also wasn’t clear whether or not further attack would even work. While withdrawal *was* cowardly, it was also smart.

While seeing the departing levitating ship off, Helvi found she had yet to shake off the shock. “Damn them... What was that lightning? They managed to defend against the missile javelins, even though we fired more than one at once...”

The implications of this were terribly complicated. One of the direct repercussions was that their antiair weapons had lost some efficacy. Indirectly, however, it meant the comeback of the levitating ship, which also meant Jaloudek was clawing back their strength. This would put New Kuscheperka at a disadvantage.

“This just means the enemy isn’t taking it easy either,” said Helvi. “We’ll need to tell Ernie about that strange ship as soon as possible.”

The Tzenndrimbles turned around and set off once again. Once they’d delivered their Laevantias, they would hurry back to Fontanie to report.



While Third Company was off delivering Laevantias, the other two companies of the Order of the Silver Phoenix went to the border between Jaloudek and New Kuscheperka—the front lines of the war. On paper, the Order of the Silver Phoenix was just a borrowed asset from Fremmevilla. But because that didn't allow for enough flexibility in some cases, they were actually being treated like a special knight order serving directly under Queen Eleonora. And, not that it's of any real import, the Silver Phoenix Mercantile Company's name was still in use.

While New Kuscheperka was still finding its legs, the next-generation units brought by the Order of the Silver Phoenix—which would later be referred to by their birthplace as “Eastern Types”—started to be employed in earnest. The order was also the most experienced in handling these new models, so they were warmly received everywhere as both the strongest military force in the kingdom and as instructors to the local knight runners, who were still not used to the new machines.

First Company, led by Edgar C. Blanche, marched from New Kuscheperka's border, pressing toward a base held by Jaloudek. There were no Lesvant Viedes with them, which would have slowed them down; the Kuscheperkan part of the detachment consisted only of Laevantias. They were pretty much just there to protect the borders, but it wasn't as if they were only defensive all the time.

The Order of the Silver Phoenix, as good on the offense as they were, spent a lot of their time striking out to recover as much land as possible.

“Our target isn't a small base like all the others up until now. The enemy will likely put up heavy resistance, so be careful!” Edgar said, attempting to raise his men's morale. A rallying cry came from behind him in response.

His company had managed to take several small bases thus far. To a silhouette knight, these were basically like overgrown checkpoints, so they were barely worth attacking or protecting. Bases of that size had no real defensive strength, and so the outcome of attacks on them would be entirely decided by field battles between silhouette knights. This would be the first time they were attacking a solidly fortified position, where terrain mattered. This would definitely be a siege.

They were currently on the way to this target: a fortress that blended into a hill. It was surrounded by terrain with bad footing and a forest that would limit the movements of a silhouette knight, helping with the defense. There were a limited number of paths leading to the target.

First Company and the New Kuschepinkan Army marched forward, approaching the base with their shields raised. They were already within range of the defenders' trebuchets and could be attacked at any time. Eventually, they caught sight of the enemy. Tyrantors were using their large forms to block the path leading to the fortress. Furthermore, they were behind emplaced shields, clearly showing they were specialized for defense. First Company used their silhouette arms to bathe the position in spellfire, but such fire was too weak to get through the large shields and the silhouette knights behind.

"Guess they're not just big for show. How tough."

Tyrantors had always been gifted with especially thick armor. Given that they wouldn't be moving much, this was making the best use of their good points. Also, these Tyrantors were using the terrain, setting themselves up on a narrow road to make sure that the enemy would never be able to bring their numbers to bear. As long as the heavily armored Tyrantors were fighting defensively, not even First Company would be able to get through them. Thanks to the lay of the land, it would be hard to circle around this group, and attacking them would be fruitless. With sunset arriving, the New Kuschepinkan Army began its withdrawal.

"These kinds of forts are hard to attack, huh?" said a Kuschepinkan pilot.

"On top of that, we're up against Tyrantors. Enough that they were crowding the road," another replied.

The Jaloudekians didn't chase after the New Kuschepinkan Army as it retreated; the Jaloudekians' response seemed oddly easygoing. Thanks to that, the knight runners of New Kuschepinka were feeling rather talkative. Edgar groaned as he listened in on their conversation. He looked at the situation differently than they did.

"You're right that the Tyrantors have strong defenses," Edgar agreed. "But more than that, the way they move is much more *solid* than before."

The Order of the Silver Phoenix spent a lot of time on the attack. Because of that, Edgar had more knowledge and experience of the enemy than the New Kuscheperkan knight runners. That was how he was able to so clearly feel their change.

“We can spend a lot of time attacking this base, but all we’ll see is skirmishes like this. Something feels off.” Edgar couldn’t quite tell if this feeling was just because the introduction of the Laevantia had closed the gap in silhouette knight strength.

Jaloudek’s Tyrantors were strong in part thanks to their large frames, but this was somewhat countered by their thick and heavy armor. Suddenly, Edgar had a realization.

“We haven’t taken many losses either...”

While they hadn’t done much damage, they hadn’t taken much either. He couldn’t feel the sort of assertiveness from these foes that had been present when the Jaloudek Army had been actively trying to conquer them. Most fights now were between a small number of Tyrantors or sporadic attacks from levitating ships. There had been no large, concentrated push, and it was easy to see that they were only sending out small portions of their forces. Jaloudek’s plan seemed to have shifted to defense.

“Did they feel like they couldn’t carelessly attack because of the Laevantias? Or are they afraid of another massive round of casualties from Ernesti?” No matter how much Edgar pondered, no quick answer came to him. He felt irritated; he knew he was missing something. “No, they aren’t just pulling back. It feels like they’re waiting for something.”

Was this a ploy to buy time? Either way, time was something both sides needed. Both nations needed to regroup and reorganize after the battle of Micilie.

“Still, that doesn’t mean we should allow ourselves to get flustered and charge into their defenses. That wouldn’t be smart.”

Given that they didn’t know their enemy’s intentions, the New Kuscheperkans couldn’t afford to make a careless move. The Order of the Silver Phoenix was New Kuscheperka’s greatest asset. This became more and more obvious the

more battles they took part in, and the order was gradually sliding into the position of being the nation's mental and spiritual support. That meant they couldn't afford to lose.

While New Kuschepërka was on the verge of rallying, though, they still didn't have the ability to try to push Jaloudek out for real. This base's defenses continued to frustrate the new kingdom's army, and time continued to pass.

With Jaloudek's aim unclear, the war was starting to stalemate.

Chapter 39: Jaloudek's Scheme

The stage had now moved away from Fontanie in favor of the city where Jaloudek's Central Protectorate Government was seated, Dervankhul.

This took place before the Kingdom of New Kuscheperka took its first, gasping breaths; before the shock of the battle of Micilie had time to fade. In the audience chamber of the former royal palace, a single man wailed in lamentation as he prostrated himself—or rather, fell powerlessly on the floor.

"Prince Cristobal, no! How... How could this happen?! For him to pass away before me... That should not have been allowed to happen!" It was the knight who was Second Prince Cristobal's right hand, Dorotheo Maldness.

As if he were angry at himself, he struck the floor over and over, causing it to creak and groan. His son, Gustavo, silently watched over him from behind.

"Calling this a monumental blunder would be too lukewarm! The Black Knights were unable to protect him, even while being by his side! I should not have accepted my punishment for self-reflection—I should have gone with him! If I were there, I would at least have been able to trade these old bones for his life!"

"That's enough. Raise your head, Dorotheo. We were the ones who ordered your punishment, and we can hardly blame those who weren't there. But I understand your grief, even if it is for something you couldn't have changed." A similarly grief-stricken voice comforted Dorotheo from the throne in front of him.

This throne used to be for Kuscheperkan royalty, but now that the kingdom had been conquered, it had passed to the hands of Cristobal as the supreme commander of Jaloudek's army, only to further be passed on to the young lady that was currently sitting in it.

Her name was Catarina Camilla Jaloudek, daughter to the current king, Bardomelo Bilt Jaloudek. She was the first princess and Cristobal's older sister.

"Still! While it may be above my station to say this, I have been both tutor and subordinate to the second prince for many years. The laws of heaven and earth

dictate that one of my age *should* be leaving this world before him! No matter the reason, what would you call this, if not a failure?!”

Ever since Dorotheo had retired from being a soldier due to his age, he had been making use of his experience to teach the second prince. This purpose naturally saw him evolve from mere instructor to trusted right-hand man as Cristobal grew up, and thus the prince was like a son to him.

Catarina sighed, sinking into the throne. “I understand how you feel, Dorotheo. You have given your all to Cris for so many years. But that is exactly why we don’t have time to grieve.”

Dorotheo finally looked up, and he saw Catarina’s face, paler than usual. He swallowed, immediately realizing the depth of the mistake he’d just made. Dorotheo was not the only one feeling the effects of Cristobal’s loss. Of course his elder sister would be feeling many times more sorrow than he. He felt deeply embarrassed by his lack of insight, to have disregarded her in favor of drowning in his own feelings. As had been mentioned before, he was loyal first and foremost to Cristobal. But at the same time, he was just as loyal to the rest of Jaloudek’s royal family as anyone else.

“I’ve decided. The cause of all this damage to our kingdom...and by extension, the one who killed Cris, must die. We *will* find the one that did this and end them,” Catarina declared.

This wasn’t just out of a desire to avenge her family. Cristobal was royalty, and he had been conferred the title of supreme commander of the nation’s invasion forces. Even though it was a result of war, the death of someone of royal blood demanded retribution. Neglecting to reap that vengeance would ruin their reputation as a major power.

“Dorotheo, you must start by finding the proper target for your wrath. Who killed Cris?”

The surviving members of the Black Knights had brought back reports of Cristobal’s final moments. He had fallen from the flagship along with his silhouette knight, Arkelorix—but not in the confusion of pitched battle. Someone had directly caused his death.

After a long pause, Dorotheo raised his head. “I have an idea as to the

culprit.” There was no hesitation in his eyes. He had his enemy in his sights. “It would have to be someone capable of directly ending His Highness while in his levitating ship in the sky! Kuscheperka has no levitating ships themselves, but *that one* exists...the silhouette knight that can fly!”

His words were a trigger, reminding Catarina of something buried in the depths of her memory. “Are you talking about the one that sank your ship?” she ventured.

“I am indeed!” he replied. “Only that beast could do these monstrous things. It flies through the skies on its own, wielding impossible power, capable of bringing a levitating ship to ruin! It can only be that *thing*, that absurdity capable of turning the laws of the world on its head. It was clear to me that it would eventually be a major obstacle.”

Catarina let out a long, heavy breath. She’d almost forgotten about it. Back when Dorotheo had first reported his encounter, she’d been more concerned with the escape of the Kuscheperkan royals and the effects that would have. She’d never imagined the subject of that report would end up killing her little brother. If her memory was correct, the enemy he was referring to was truly worthy of being called a monster.

“Are you saying that thing killed Cris?” Catarina’s utterance, almost just a groan, did not reach Dorotheo’s ears. It simply melted into the thick mood of the room.



“Oho, what’s this? It seems everyone’s gathered in one place.” The melancholic air in the room was instantly dissipated by a newcomer. His footsteps pitifully pitter-pattered on the stone floor. That somewhat foolish sound heralded the man’s arrival.

“Well... If it isn’t Lord Kojass,” said Catarina.

“Indeed, it is I, Horacio Kojass. I have come according to your summons.”

Catarina’s expression was dark, and Dorotheo looked like a man possessed. In the midst of such a gloomy and oppressive mood, Horacio heedlessly gave a friendly bow. Despite his looks, he was quite a gutsy man. After all, he was

eccentric enough to come all the way to the front lines of a war just to confirm with his own eyes the exploits of the levitating ships he'd made. Meanwhile, Catarina, who'd been the one to call for him, shifted gears and assumed the guise of a calm princess. They were pressed for time, so she did away with greetings and pleasantries to cut straight to the heart of the matter.

"I've been waiting, Lord Kojass. Getting right to the point, I want to know how your plan to strengthen the levitating ships has been going. In order for our army to recover from our loss, it's urgent that the ships be stronger. Kuscheperka has yet to make any outstanding moves, which means they need time to reorganize their forces as well. Still, that doesn't mean we have time to take it easy."

"I understand. While I may not know much, I have exercised what little power I have to carry out what I believe to be a great idea."

A small bit of relief made its way through the complicated mix of emotions playing across Catarina's face. "Let us hear this idea."

"First, while I find this hard to bring up... It would probably be necessary to completely redesign the levitating ship for a perfect countermeasure. However, a modification on that level would take far too much time. So, please understand that I have centered this plan on a series of small-scale improvements."

Catarina paused for a moment before replying. "That will be fine as long as it is effective. While I'm sure you made it possible to accomplish in a short time, there would be no point if it doesn't do much."

Horacio took that moment to glance over at Dorotheo. Unlike Catarina, who was keeping up appearances, he was making no effort to hide his gruff attitude. Horacio, meanwhile, decided to step on the tail of the beast as he opened his mouth. "About that... First, I was thinking of reducing the number of Tyrantors we can fit into one ship."

"What?! How is that an improvement, my lord? How do you plan to fight by cutting out the linchpins of our power?!" Horacio's unexpected reply caused Dorotheo to lose his head.

Horacio gestured to calm the man down before continuing. "Sir Dorotheo

raises a good point. So allow me to explain... Up until now, levitating ships have largely relied on the Tyrantors they carry to contribute in battle. However, that battle has taught us that this cannot continue. We require more than transportation capacity. While it's true we already have the Catapult, we can't rely on it to hit moving targets. So I employed a change of perspective. Let us use the enemy's methods against them. We will create a silhouette knight specialized in spellfire like their Lesvant Viedes, pack them into the levitating ships, and use them like silhouette arms of the ships themselves."

For a moment, the chamber was completely silent. Each person present chewed on Horacio's proposal. Eventually, Catarina gave him a look, and Dorotheo nodded with a mild grimace.

"It is somewhat grating to know that we are imitating them, but I realize we need to use everything we can," he said. "By the way, Lord Kojass, while that idea would be good for the offense, a problem still remains. What took down the majority of our silhouette knights were strangely powerful javelins. How do you plan to stop those?"

Horacio folded his arms together and sighed. "Truly, a difficult question to answer. From what I've heard, those weapons were able to penetrate the outer skin of a Tyrantor with enough speed. That means they are far too powerful to stop with the amount of armor we can put on a levitating ship. Even assuming we could make the armor thick enough to withstand such a blow, it would make the ship much heavier, and we would lose the advantage in speed. That is why I propose we make double use of the bombardment-type silhouette knights we are theoretically designing. We can have them shoot the javelins down with spellfire, or have them hold shields to protect the ship."

The others were unable to instantly absorb the point of this idea, and the chamber fell into a skeptical mood. In a sense, this was understandable. Horacio's ideas were astoundingly primitive, but they were similar to the CIWS of a modern warship.

He had come to understand the gist of what had happened during the battle for Micilie through his interviews with the survivors of the Black Knights. The battle had been overflowing with peculiar new technologies. That roused him, giving impetus to his thoughts and pushing his ideas up a level.

While trying her best to come to understand such advanced technological ideas, Catarina voiced a question. “Do you really think that will be enough, lord?”

“I believe it will at least have some effect. However, it is far from perfect. As I’ve said at the beginning, the biggest problem is time. We don’t have time for additional large changes. I’m afraid that remaking the levitating ship from the ground up would put us too far behind, given that we don’t know when Kuscheperka will make their move.”

While it definitely felt like an emergency fix, Horacio’s proposals seemed like they would at least have some effect. He was right—time was the most important factor, so they couldn’t afford to make sweeping changes.

Catarina nodded. “I suppose it is better than nothing. Fine, Lord Kojass. Let us move forward with your proposals. But that means the role of levitating ships will change greatly. Dorotheo, gather the remaining Steel Wing Knights and come up with a better way to fight.”

“As you will,” Dorotheo said. “This should open up some avenues for the remaining Steel Wing Knights. Also... There is the matter of the powerful enemy we must defeat.”

There was no need to even look at Dorotheo—his intent was clear. He was referring to the Nightmare of Micilie, who had reaped such a fearsome toll on the Black Knights and was much more threatening to the Steel Wing Knights than the strange javelins were.

“His Highness Prince Cristobal’s killer, that terrifying silhouette knight...the ‘fierce god,’” Dorotheo finished.

“Do you have a good idea on how we can take it down, Dorotheo?” Catarina’s question reminded Dorotheo of a certain memory.

He would never be able to forget; it was still vivid in the back of his mind. He thought of that heinous avatar of strength. It was able to fly through the air despite being a silhouette knight, wielding power that a Tyrantor had no hope of matching. Was there even a way to beat it? Even a knight runner as skilled as Dorotheo found such a prospect hard to imagine.

Though he felt intense shame, he had to respond truthfully to his lady's question. "I think it would be incredibly difficult to defeat our enemy, even if Lord Kojass were to design a completely new levitating ship..."

"Hm... You're talking about the fierce god? I've heard of it—the thing is a product of madness, no doubt. But it's not as if there's no way to beat it." Rather than censure Horacio for his sudden rude outburst, the other two were shocked by what he'd said, and all eyes turned to him.

"What?! I am well aware you are an excellent engineer, my lord. But you understand strategy and the ways of war as well?!" Dorotheo exclaimed.

"I do indeed. Well, I may call it a method, but I'm still an engineer. I'd be *making* a means to accomplish it. As for whether or not we can actually beat it, that would depend on the knight runner piloting my creation." Though he sounded unmotivated, the slight tilt at the corners of his mouth betrayed his confidence.

A small crack appeared in Catarina's calm facade. She was impatient to avenge her little brother, but she nevertheless maintained her composure as she said, "Let us hear it. What do you plan to do?"

"We will fight with volume."

This was met with an immediate shake of the head from Dorotheo. "I'm sure you know what happened during the battle of Micilie. Facing great numbers is nothing to it and its ability to fly. As proof, the Black Knights have been almost utterly destroyed... Numbers alone will not suffice."

"You are correct, but you should change your point of view a little. Stacking up a multitude of weak pieces will only result in them being easily swept away. So the next step is to concentrate a lot of strength into one piece. I was thinking of creating something to surpass it." Horacio sounded as if he were giving the answer to a riddle.

The other two exchanged looks. Horacio's reply was shattering their common sense to dust. The engineer who had brought levitating ships into the world was attempting to make something even more fantastic from the Jaloudekian ashes of Micilie.

“So what do you think? It would take some time, but... If you would allow it, I will be sure to accomplish this task.” Horacio lowered his head.

Catarina closed her eyes and pondered for a while. Eventually, she nodded. “I’ll allow it. Do not fail me, Lord Kojass.”

“Your Highness! Please, give me the order! Give me the role of the pilot! I will give the entirety of my remaining life to defeat our sworn enemy!” Dorotheo burst out immediately. The only thing he had to be proud of was the martial skill he’d accumulated. There was no hesitation in him; his final mission would be to avenge Cristobal and help Catarina.

“Very well. Give your life to me, for his sake. We will not stop until our jaws reach our enemy’s throat. I’ll leave the rest to you.”

“My greatest thanks!”

Dorotheo seemed to rapidly swell with an air of impending brutal violence, and Catarina nodded, satisfied. Though he was old, Dorotheo was a famed commander within Jaloudek’s army. His determination to bring back a good result was worthy of trust.

Then, Catarina shifted her gaze behind Dorotheo. “You won’t be alone, Dorotheo. I will release you from your confinement and give you a mission as well, Gustavo Maldness. Your skills with the sword will serve your father well.”

“I hear and obey. Leave it to me, I’ll go on a rampage.” Gustavo had been kneeling thus far, but now he made a vigorous reply. But, while his words were enthusiastic, the gaze he was pointing toward the back of his father—whose will to fight was going wild—seemed cold.

Aw, well. It looks like the old man’s raring to die. I guess there’s nothing for it, though. Given how His Highness is dead. His thoughts differed somewhat from his father’s. While he was also a soldier serving directly under Cristobal and had a passing amount of loyalty, he wasn’t nearly as fanatic as Dorotheo.

So, assuming my old man’ll take care of the revenge stuff himself, I should probably go on a bit of a rampage too. The enemy’s gotten real strong, after all. Helping him is an option, but even if I don’t, it’ll still be worth it to swing my sword some.

He was also plenty mad, though in a different sense from his father. Gustavo was a madman, addicted to combat and in love with his own sword. Fighting was his favorite thing. The battles he could smell coming from being attached to Catarina and Dorotheo drew him in. His thoughts did not show at all, though, as he bowed his head in laudable fashion.

“I don’t believe Kuscheperka will be able to make a move immediately *because* of the large victory they’ve just won. We also have to distribute our soldiers, to catch the sparks that will inevitably leap from the embers that have been stirred up. The means Lord Kojass speaks of will take time. First, we must stabilize our footing. In order to do that, harden our defenses until the time is ripe.” Catarina’s order was quickly transmitted throughout Jaloudek’s territories.

That was why, for the first time since Jaloudek had started this war, they had a major change in tactics.

The Tyrantors in each area fortified themselves in impregnable fortresses, resolute in not allowing any invaders. Meanwhile, the surviving levitating ships were refitted as the imitation Llevant Viedes were constructed. The Llevants they’d seized were used for this process. Because this remodeling only focused on their bombardment capabilities, their excess of obsolete models were perfect for that job. Because their purposes were essentially the same, these things would likely turn out nearly identical to the Llevant Viedes. Now that the Black Knights had lost their power, Jaloudek relied on the revival of the Steel Wing Knights as their lifeline. Their orders were strict: This work was to be the highest priority.

Jaloudek’s schemes, resulting in a new levitating ship and defensive tactics, killed New Kuscheperka’s momentum, slowing the war to stagnation. In the midst of all that, another strange presence had started to squirm. A monster whose sole purpose was killing the fierce god was being born, and its hatching was crawling ever closer.



It was approaching summer of the year 1282 O.C.

After the dramatic change that was the founding of New Kuscheperka, the

wind flowing across the land had stagnated. But signs of change had suddenly arisen once again. In the midst of all this, Ernesti, the knight captain of New Kuscheperka's trump card, the Order of the Silver Phoenix, was hosting a secret gathering.

"Thank you for coming, everyone. Let's get straight to it: Allow me to explain the results of our investigation into Jaloudek's Tyrantors and levitating ships."

Naturally, it wasn't to talk tactics and strategy. Sadly, this hobbyist's interests would never turn toward the war itself; his attention was solely on the toys in front of him. Ernie, his mood effusive, was carrying a bundle of paper so thick, it looked like it could be used to kill someone as he started his explanation.

"My word, I *thought* you were fondling those wrecks really passionately. So you've already figured out everything there is to know about them?" David—the boss—was the first among the people Ernie had called to say something. He and the rest of the order's knightsmiths weren't surprised, as this was the usual thing with the boy.

However, the knightsmiths of New Kuscheperka were far less composed. They looked at the small boy in front of them with hard-to-describe expressions. Levitating ships were the mysterious weapons that had been causing the Kuscheperkans so much pain throughout this war. An unknown technology enabled the ships to float, and the New Kuscheperkan knightsmiths couldn't imagine this mystery being solved in so little time. Furthermore, it was odd to them that Ernie was spreading this information on such a large scale. The Order of the Silver Phoenix was a reliable ally, but it was still from another country. Were they really okay with leaking such crucial technology so easily, when it was so likely to turn the tides of a battle? At the very least, their common sense told them such information should be kept hidden.

Heedless of this confusion swirling in the crowd, Ernie happily started to talk about the findings that came of his refusal to leave the wrecks alone. "Levitating ships certainly have a lot of mysteries to them. However, we have a working example in our hands. And luckily, we also found the key to understanding everything. Let's see... I would love to start talking about the ship right away, but first, let's start with the silhouette knight that is the main source of their power: the Tyrantor."

Ernie turned to the blackboard, looking so happy he could burst out into a hum at any moment. He then started to write a summary of the details given on the papers that had been passed out to everyone.

“Tyrantors, as you might be able to tell from their looks, are very heavy. I checked their innards and confirmed the existence of many familiar faculties, like some capacity frame, back weapons, and strand crystal tissue. Even the way it’s all connected is familiar... It seems they’ve very carefully copied the Tellestarle. The only modifications they’ve made on the design is to put it in a heavyweight body to specialize its strength output.”

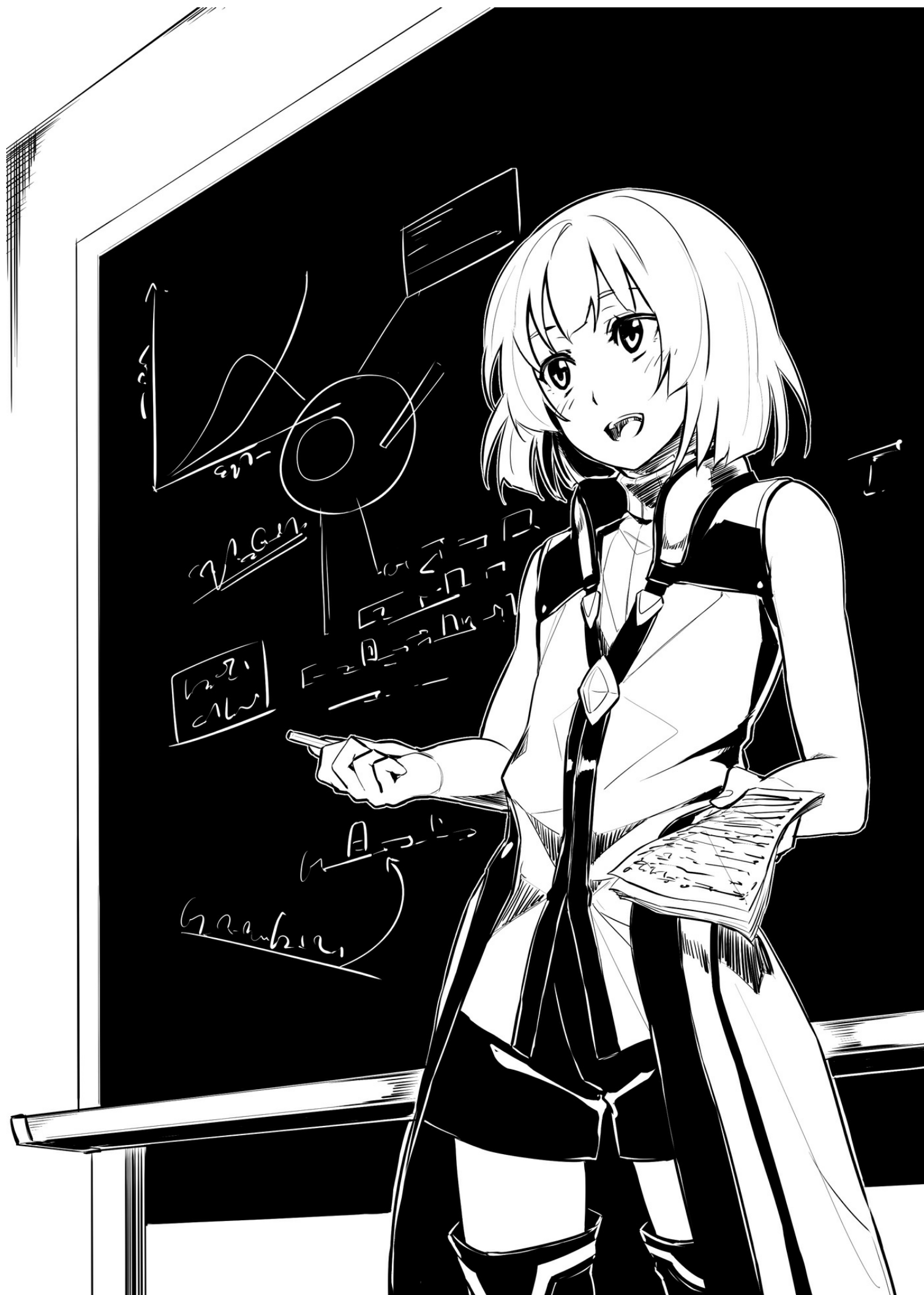
“Hmph. It’s infuriating, but we already knew this.” The boss crossed his arms together as his expression turned angry. He knew how they’d obtained the Tellestarle these silhouette knights were based off of. There was no way anyone would be happy thinking of that sequence of events.

“Indeed. But there is something mysterious about this. When using the strand type tissue, the increased strength causes the mana expenditure to rise accordingly, which would make it exceedingly fuel inefficient. We also had trouble with this. But the Tyrantors are able to operate for quite a long time, which means there is some sort of trick to it.”

“We *did* have a lot of trouble with the fuel efficiency problem. There’s no way they’d be able to fix that so easily,” the boss confirmed.

The knightsmiths of the Order of the Silver Phoenix got faraway looks in their eyes, which made Ernie chuckle. Fully completing the Tellestartle into the Kardetolle had been quite the difficult road, but there was no need to revisit it now. Jaloudek’s engineers had managed something the Order of the Silver Phoenix hadn’t.

Ernie drew up a rather strange diagram on the blackboard.



“This was where they inserted their own technology. We found this thing directly connected to the ether reactor. Once we started examining its innards, we found that the structure is simple: They just placed a piece of etherite in the middle. This device is also connected to the silver nerves, which allows it to be controlled by the magius engine. So, I took a little look at the magius engine.”

One does not simply take a “little look” into a magius engine, but no one pointed that out.

“When this device is activated,” Ernie continued, “the etherite inside reacts, creating high-purity ether. That is directly fed into the ether reactor. Let’s see... We’ll call this device an ‘ether supplier’ for now.”

“Hey, that’s...” Right away, the light of understanding dawned on the knightsmiths’ faces. At the same time, a shade of pain mixed into their expressions.

“As I’m sure you all know already, etherite is, as its name implies, a physical lump of ether. If it’s mined and then left alone, it will melt into the area’s ether and disappear, which is why it’s been thought to not have much of a use up until now. However, it appears they’ve found a wonderful way to use this material. This makes it possible for us to create a large amount of mana for our silhouette knights, though only for a limited amount of time. That is, if we refine high-purity ether. It’s a pretty interesting invention; it seems like Jaloudek has someone capable of these unique ideas!” Ernie clapped, but everyone else’s shoulders fell.

“Jeez, complimenting the enemy? What are you getting at?” the boss said.

“I’m not complimenting *them*. I’m praising their engineers. It’s true that the knight runners using them are enemies, but the people who made these things aren’t enemies as well, not necessarily. Either way, a good thing is a good thing. Look at all this ingenuity on display—it’s totally worth praising! Though... You’re right, it’s too bad they’re not allies.” Ernie spoke with a heartwarming smile.

While the boss and his men seemed a little exasperated, the Kuscheparkan knightsmiths couldn’t help but groan. As far as they were concerned, whoever invented these technologies *were* enemies, considering the suffering the Tyrantors had caused. The New Kuscheperkans wouldn’t be caught dead

praising them. However, the captain of the Order of the Silver Phoenix had managed to find points on which to praise their enemies' technology, even after they'd stolen his new silhouette knight and used it to stand against them. The knightsmiths were impressed by how deep the well went for the leader of the strongest knight order, who possessed such incredible technology and combat prowess.

The murmurs of admiration among the crowd almost prompted the boss to mutter, "He's not some incredible guy or anything; he just doesn't give a crap about anything besides silhouette knights," but he managed to clamp down on the truth, settling for just looking fed up with everything. The fact that he said nothing meant he was being considerate, at least.

"By the way," Ernie said, bringing the meeting back on subject, "this ether supplier isn't all-powerful."

"Huh? Whaddya mean? From the way you talked about it, it sounded like the stuff of dreams that could solve all the fuel problems with our Eastern Type silhouette knights." The boss tilted his head in confusion.

Ernie's expression clouded "I...suppose it would be most accurate to call it poison. After all, ether reactors are made to operate using the thin ether mixed into the atmosphere. Injecting dense, high-purity ether puts an extreme burden on the reactor. Overuse of the ether supplier will degrade the reactor."

"Whoa there!" the boss exclaimed. "The ether reactor is the most precious part of a silhouette knight. You're telling me these make 'em into disposables?! Talk about extravagant. Damn, I guess not everything can be perfect."

"Indeed. That's why these should only be used in a true emergency. I believe the Jaloudekians don't like using it too much either."

The silhouette knights of the Order of the Silver Phoenix, as well as the Laevantias that the order had helped make for New Kuscheperka, had dealt with the fuel efficiency problem by intentionally lowering the strength output while expanding the mana pool. However, Jaloudek pursued extreme strength with their Tyrantor, so this method would not work for them. That was how the strange device Ernie had discovered came about. It was a double-edged sword that allowed their silhouette knights to maintain their strength for an extended

period in exchange for eating away at the machine's most vital part: the ether reactor.

"That will do for the preamble. Now, let's move on to the main course," Ernie said. "Next, I will be talking about their completely new weapon, the levitating ship. I've made quite a number of discoveries as to how it works, since it is full of unknown technologies."

Everyone's expressions tightened up. Levitating ships were history's first practical airborne weaponry, deployed by Jaloudek. The unknown secrets behind such a thing were about to be revealed. Ignoring the unrest from the crowd, Ernie deftly manipulated the chalk in his hands with light clacking sounds, leaving behind trails of white on the blackboard that turned the unknown into the known. Watching him gave everyone present a rather indescribable feeling.

"The overall design is rather simple," Ernie started off. "Most of the hull is made of wood or metal, and the structure isn't very complicated either. As you can see from the outer appearance, it moves by catching the wind in these sails. As far as this goes, it is the same as a normal seafaring ship. But it isn't, because this one sails through the sky."

Finally, he was getting to the heart of the mystery. Someone in the crowd gulped.

"The core of the levitating ship is a reactor that's completely different from an ether reactor. I'm sure all of you know that I've messed with the ship we captured to death. However, the principle behind the device was still unknown to me. Until we made an interesting discovery while giving the Tyrantors a close inspection, that is."

Ernie made a grand, loud rap on the blackboard. He was pointing to the device he'd diagrammed just a little bit ago.

"I discovered that these ether suppliers had been attached to the Tyrantors as well. I originally found these connected directly to the levitating ships' reactors. And not just one or two, but a great many of them. I've explained the purpose of these things already, and given that, I can say that these are the heart of this new reactor. At the very least, it's clear that the levitating ship's reactor

requires a large amount of high-density and high-purity ether.”

“So...what’re you saying in the end?” the boss asked.

“They’re not floating using mana, but some property of ether itself. There’s no doubt there’s some sort of secret along those lines. Someone has made a discovery that none of us knew about.” Ernie laughed; he was having fun. “The preparations have gone perfectly. Next, let’s go run some tests using the captured levitating ship!”

With a start, a wave of agitation spread through the Kuscheperkan knightsmiths. Ernie was referring to the enemy flagship they’d captured undamaged during the battle for Micilie. Normally, the ship would have been examined over and over, endlessly. They’d actually managed to figure out how to control the flagship due to the information they’d extracted from the prisoners they’d captured along with it. However, the ship had yet to take off since. Everyone was too put off by the ship and the prospect of flying—something they had no experience with—to try it.

“Hmph. Fine, let’s do this. How could I be afraid of the sky? My fate’s linked with yours already, kid. This doesn’t scare me.” The first one to stand up and volunteer was the boss. He crossed his arms together and puffed out his chest as he nodded reassuringly.

However, there was a trickle of sweat going down his brow, and it seemed rather difficult for him to even stand up, which made the true state of his heart obvious. At the same time, the rest of the Order of the Silver Phoenix bravely joined the boss.

“Okay! Then let’s all fly together!” Ernie exclaimed. “It’ll be fine—I fly a lot in my Ikaruga. It’s fun!”

“Now is the only time I’ll ever be jealous of your bottomless positivity and fearlessness...” the boss muttered. But it wasn’t just him—everyone there thought the same thing.



“Seeing it again really drives home how enormous it is. I bet it’s as big as a brigade-class monster. To think this thing can fly.” The next day saw the boss

mutter that line in a truly heartfelt tone as he stood in front of a levitating ship.

It used to be the flagship of Jaloudek's invasion army, but it'd been captured essentially undamaged when Ernie had boarded it with his Ikaruga. It was their only ship.

The levitating ship had room to load silhouette knights inside, so of course it was fairly big. Now that he was getting another look at it, the boss was actually pretty moved at the thought of this huge thing somehow floating in the air. He turned around to Ernie, who had used the thumbs and index fingers of his hands to make a square frame, which he laid squarely on the ship.

"Truly surprising. If you can believe it, all of its flight power comes from a device called an Etheric Levitator," said Ernie.

"I believe you said that it's completely different from an ether reactor, and that it works only on ether, right? Now then... I think everyone's gotten to their places by now. Let's start." The boss gathered strength in his belly and deliberately made a confident show as he boarded the ship.

Many members of the Order of the Silver Phoenix were inside already, and they were all attending to their own tasks. It looked like they were suppressing their own feelings about the unknowns of flying by concentrating on their work. Ernie was the only one who was lighthearted and excited, and he looked up at the device that was the heart of the ship.

"The pillar of the levitating ship, the Etheric Levitator... Heh heh heh, I wonder what it's like inside?" he muttered, entranced, stroking the surface of the device.

"Hey, don't break it. In fact, don't touch it at all. You got it? Do NOT do anything unnecessary!" the boss shouted angrily.

The Etheric Levitator was shaped like a giant lamp; its middle was made of glass, allowing one to see inside. It was about as big as a silhouette knight. It wasn't in use at the moment, so it was empty.

The boss went around throwing out orders, until he eventually shouted, "Okay, it's about time for the big test! It was working properly before, so I don't think there's going to be a problem, but we've never seen anything like this.

Keep your wits about you!”

Everyone responded with tense looks as they took their places.

“Start the ether suppliers! Put some high-purity ether into this thing!” the boss shouted.

Once they started to operate the control panel, the Etheric Levitator woke up, accompanied by a slight vibration. Meanwhile, the ether suppliers worked to inject high-purity ether into the levitator. Said ether eventually gathered into a faintly glowing mass in the center of the machine, creating a Levitating Field.

Everyone gulped as they watched the wavering rainbow-colored light coming from inside the machine. Before long, they started to feel the bizarre sensation of the floor under them floating up. The person assigned to observing the outside world through the windows let out an excited, shrill shout. “Th-The ground is shrinking! We’re floating up!”

“Stop the ether suppliers—the levitator too, after making sure it’s in a stable state. We need to do some preliminary examinations. There’s no need to go too high.” It wasn’t long before Ernie gave his orders, and the crew hurried to stop the ether supply.

As long as there was no outside interference, the Etheric Levitator would stay in a stable state, which meant it would stop them from rising any farther. The levitating ship was now hovering a few meters off the ground.

For a while, the boss remained still with his feet planted firmly on the floor, silent. But then, he let out a slow breath before stroking his beard in amazement. “This huge thing really floats... I mean, I’d heard about it, but actually experiencing it is just crazy.”

“Indeed. Making this incredible machine alone is worthy of praise. This is so fun!” Ernie, who’d brought knowledge from Earth with him, was familiar with large constructs that could fly. That ranged from blimps that used the buoyancy of gasses to stay in the air to planes which operated using the dynamic lift of their wings. However, the boss was only a resident of this world, so such a concept was completely unknown to him.

Because the Etheric Levitator was almost completely silent while running, a

strange quietness filled the inside of the levitating ship. But gradually, that was replaced by boisterous noise. The order members were checking the situation; some were sticking themselves to the window, while others were timidly walking around.

“For now, let’s weigh anchor and moor ourselves here. There’s a mountain of things we have to examine and confirm in regards to the structure of the ship and the effect of ether. Things are going to get busy,” said Ernie.

That was how their understanding of ether grew by leaps and bounds, thanks to obtaining an intact levitating ship and the technological analysis that followed.

This initial test was only the start. They continued to do a battery of other experiments, during which the Order of the Silver Phoenix became used to flying and operating the ship. Before long, they started to do things like test the limits of the ship’s speed in the name of a flight test, and even try out inverted flight, which almost caused them to crash. It seemed their captain had passed down his unique brand of foolhardiness. At the same time, Ernie was energetically pursuing knowledge of the mechanisms involved.

“For a flying machine with no prior examples to take advantage of, this is extremely well-made,” he said. “But looking at it from the other direction, I do feel like the guy who made it was rushing a bit too much, or maybe he was just too influenced by seafaring ships? The biggest flaw I see is the lack of propulsion. It’s got that so-called Blow Engine, which is a machine that uses repurposed silhouette arms to create wind to fill the sails, but that’s it.”

“I see. So in short, if you take out the fact that it flies, it’s just a sailboat,” the boss replied.

“Exactly. And because it carries silhouette knights, it’s heavy; levitating ships are surprisingly slow. That’s why Ikaruga was able to easily catch up to them. If we want a decent amount of speed, we’ll need some Magius Jet Thrusters, at the very least.”

“You and Ikaruga would be the only ones in the world who’d ever call this thing slow. Also, its mana pool won’t hold up if you stick those thrusters on here; it’s not Ikaruga.”

Ernie nodded. “You’re right, this is difficult. We would need a vast mana pool and an ether reactor with enough output to support that. It’s not like there’s no way to improve things right now, but...”

The boss had one eye closed as he thought up solutions while listening to Ernie talk. So, he had an inkling of what the fix was going to be. His title of chief knightsmith for the Order of the Silver Phoenix wasn’t just for show. The answer already lay within all the knowledge and experience he’d accumulated. “Well, you’re right that there is a way, but whether you’d really want to go that far is the question.”

“I’m just saying it’s an idea. We *do* have a lot of room to look for other options.” Ernie seemed half in a trance; his imagination was likely running wild.

The boss just shrugged exasperatedly.

Chapter 40: Stirrings of the Drake

The year was 1282 O.C. Time had passed, and autumn was fast approaching.

In Fontanie, the capital of New Kuscheperka, Eleonora looked around at the nobles sitting in front of her in one of Castle Raspede's meeting rooms. "How goes the war?"

"Right, allow me to report. First, the construction of Laevantias and their shipment to the front lines is almost complete. We are also increasing our own forces. But...our enemies have changed their tactics, and we are unable to make any progress."

New Kuscheperka wanted to retake their lands, while Jaloudek was trying to stop them. This part of the war had seen both sides unable to accomplish much, resulting in a period where it seemed like time was just passing by. New Kuscheperka had attempted several attacks by now, but each time they had been repelled by Tyrantors and their strong armor.

"Furthermore, they have stopped using their levitating ships en masse, instead preferring to go back to hit-and-run tactics with single ships. This has resulted in complications in our supply train, which, needless to say, is not good."

On top of that, they'd improved the wizard-style levitating ships that had previously been reported, and the ships were now sporting enough combat strength to be dangerous on their own. There had been a strength gap between New Kuscheperka and Jaloudek from the beginning. Now that things had reached a stalemate, this gap was becoming more pronounced.

"What about the Order of the Silver Phoenix?" Eleonora asked after a moment.

"Right! They are continuing to participate on the front lines. However, even with their help, we are finding it difficult to breach Jaloudek's defenses. We are currently exploring our options, hoping to find an effective countermeasure."

Eleonora hung her head after hearing that bitter, distressed report. She could hardly be called experienced, so she didn't have the words to help in this

situation. She'd normally rely on her aide Martina for matters like this, but her aunt wasn't very well-versed in military affairs either. If anything, Emris would have been better suited for this subject. In the end, the only thing Eleonora could do was nod.

"I understand. I am expecting your best efforts in that regard."

"As you will!"

The reply was confident, and the Kuscheperkan nobles sprang into action. In truth, all the nobles and knights were earnest in their desire and efforts to take back their nation's land. However, it was also true that those efforts weren't producing results.



There existed a fortress city on the western border of New Kuscheperka, located a short ways from a tributary road branching off Kuschere Road. Though it was just a tributary road, it was well maintained and large enough for both carriages and silhouette knights. In other words, this place was important enough to count as part of the front lines of the war.

"Open the gates! Open the gaaaates!"

A man on horseback, bearing the flag of New Kuscheperka, approached the fortress city. In response, the mechanical front gate started to rise, emitting creaks and groans befitting its weight. This was the type of gate that was raised rather than opened and was made to be heavy and solid—not something that could be easily lifted by silhouette knights, let alone humans. It just barely moved with the help of a giant waterwheel built in the river next to the city.

Passing through the opened gate, the man on horseback entered the settlement. The city didn't start right on the other side of the gate, though; he was now in a depression, surrounded by another set of walls. A squad of Laevantias glared down at the rider. While he was carrying the flag of New Kuscheperka, there was no guarantee this was genuine. Only when the rider removed his leather helmet and revealed his face was he deemed safe and let through.

"What?! Did you just say that those Jaloudek bastards brought their

silhouette knights forward?”

The minor noble in charge of this fortress city, Baron Ladisrao Mascaran, let his expression contort in consternation at the report he’d just received. The great purge enacted by Jaloudek upon their conquering of Kuscheperka had seen nearly all the higher-ranking and major nobles of the kingdom eliminated. Now, New Kuscheperka was being propped up entirely on the backs of middling and minor nobles.

As Jaloudek had started to focus on the defense, Ladisrao’s section of the front lines had turned to days of staring at each other in a stalemate. That was why New Kuscheperka had kept their guard up and sent out many patrols. One of them had caught the aforementioned silhouette knight movement and had come back to report.

“Hrm, it’s been a while since they’ve made a move. So they’ve gotten tired of holing themselves up.”

Jaloudek’s army was clearly continuing their defensive strategy. At least, that had held true until this sudden change. The baron’s suspicions were understandable. Were the Jaloudekians testing them? Or did they no longer have a reason to play defensive? Such a sudden change meant an equally large underlying reason.

“So what’s the size of this enemy group?”

“Sir! We could only confirm a single company.”

“One company? That’s not much... Maybe they’re just scouting in force?”

“Unfortunately, sir, they aren’t slowing down or wandering about; they’re heading straight for this city. There’s no sign of them inspecting the surroundings.”

That information just made things even more incomprehensible. There was no way a single company of silhouette knights could take down a fortress city of this size on their own. While things might have been different in the past when Kuscheperka only had Lesvants, they were now fielding Laevantias—which couldn’t be felled so easily by Tyrantors.

“I don’t understand this move. But whatever it is they’re planning, it’d be best

to eliminate the company anyway.”

The baron’s doubts had not been cleared away, but he still decided to intercept the Jaloudekian silhouette knights. No matter their reason for approaching, there was no need to let the enemy anywhere near their fortress city. He decided to play it safe and send out double the numbers—two full companies—to eliminate the Tyrantors.



The gate opened alongside heavy creaking. Two companies of Laevantias marched forth, their footsteps resounding. These companies linked up with the horse-mounted recon unit, who had maintained their vigilance over the enemy force. Before long, the Laevantias split into a left group and right group in order to pincer their prey.

“There don’t seem to be any troops waiting in ambush. And neither does this seem to be a trap using levitating ships...”

In addition to the Laevantias and their support, recon units on horseback spread out in all four cardinal directions. These riders continuously ran around on the lookout for enemy reinforcements or detached forces, but they came up empty. Furthermore, the fortress city had placed their Lesvant Viedes on the walls in preparation for a now-familiar attack from the skies, but there was no sign of that happening either. The city they were defending was one of many along the front lines and was equipped with more than enough forces.

“How strange. Damn you, Jaloudek... Do you really intend to take the fortress city with just these forces?”

While those in the rear’s doubts only strengthened, the Laevantias that were sent out to intercept the enemy company were about to make contact.

“Deploy back weapons! Ready the shields! We’re taking the initiative!”

Their plan was simple: One side makes contact with the enemy first, while the other attacks after a delay so as to hit the Jaloudekians’ back after they’ve turned around. The company attacking first made their standard preparations for battle. Before long, they were able to spot the large black silhouette knights through the sparse tree cover. The enemy cut an oppressive and intimidating

form, as this detachment of Jaloudek's army was—as was standard—based on Tyrantors.

“A half-assed bombardment won't do anything against their armor! Know that your spellfire is just to keep them in check, and finish them off in close combat... Hm?! What the—?!”

The group of Laevantias had ratcheted up their speed to close in on their target when they noticed something off about the enemy formation's movements. One silhouette knight had come out in front of the others. Those movements seemed to be ignoring the enemy's formation, as it ran forth fast enough to leave its brethren behind.

“What the heck is that? Is it bait? No, that can't be it. Are Jaloudek's knights just incapable of maintaining formation?”

“I don't know either. Maybe they've just grown arrogant, or their common rank and file have lost their discipline. Either way, allowing a single silhouette knight to break formation like that is a foolish move. Let's take this one down first!”

Though such a mistake kind of spoiled their enthusiasm, it didn't change what the New Kuscheperkan knight runners had to do. The formation of Laevantias pointed their back weapons at the lone silhouette knight that had jumped in front of them.

“What the hell?! It's covered in swords! That's ridiculous!”

The lone silhouette knight was different from the Tyrantor in shape—unusual for a Jaloudekian silhouette knight. But that wasn't what drew the New Kuscheperkans' attention; it was the silhouette knight's equipment. There was no way to tell what the pilot was thinking, but there were far more swords than necessary affixed to the silhouette knight, marking it as especially odd.

“Covered” was hardly an exaggeration.

“If it's got nothing but swords, there's no need to hold back. Bathe it in spellfire!”

The heavy Tyrantors were slow, so the “sword” knight that had dashed forward couldn't hope for support. But that didn't mean the Laevantias would

hold back. They fired their back weapons successively, unleashing shining red bullets of flame and sending them screaming at their target. A storm of spellfire assaulted the “sword” knight, and it looked as if it had suddenly been engulfed by a wall of fire.

The sword knight’s response was as unusual as its choice of equipment. It refused to slow down in the face of such a murderous welcome, choosing instead to charge forward, the drawn swords in both hands flickering as it did so.

The attacking Laevantias held their breath, watching for the results of their bombardment. Soon after, they doubted their eyes. The sword knight dodged all of the spellfire as if it’d seen through everything. Anything it couldn’t dodge, it deflected with its swords with the most efficient movements possible, so that it wouldn’t slow down at all.

“That’s ridiculous! Agh, front line, prepare for melee combat!”

Though they were shaken by the enemy’s absurd skill, the Laevantias responded quickly. Though it had managed to dodge their bombardment, that didn’t change the fact that the Laevantias outnumbered it. The three Laevantias in the front rank folded their back weapons and readied their swords and shields as they faced off against the sword knight.

Footsteps quickened. The crystal tissue driving the silhouette knights forward played a powerful melody as they ate large amounts of mana to produce destructive force. Both sides clashed for an instant. Immediately after, the knights of New Kuscheperka once again doubted what they were seeing. A Laevantia’s entire shield arm had been sent through the air, after which the body it belonged to fell, shards of crystal scattering as it did so. The sword knight, meanwhile, didn’t slow down at all as it sprang on its next prey.

“Wha—?! This thing’s too...strong!”

With dexterity that could only be described as brilliant, the sword knight brought the second and third Laevantias down as well. None managed a protracted fight; they were all defeated in one strike. The sword knight accurately aimed for the joints of its opponents’ armor, destroying the mechanisms inside. It did this so fast that even those who were watching this

from up close couldn't tell what had happened. This was when the New Kuscheperkan force finally realized why the sword knight had run forward alone. In the face of such absurd skill, they felt an entirely different level of pressure than when they were facing Tyrantors.

"Hey, come on now! You went ahead and got all these shiny new suits of armor, but the people inside are just as clumsy and shitty as ever! That's just boring!" Even though he was achieving so much in this battle, the pilot of the sword knight actually sounded dissatisfied. He even went as far as to shout taunts through his megaphone to try to rile up the New Kuscheperkans. Unfortunately, after the display of skill he'd just shown, they were too wary to fall for it.

And so, from the cockpit of the (aptly named) Sword Man, Gustavo shouted once more. "Awww, I miss that red one. You guys are just boring!"

Every step Sword Man took was accompanied by a clanking of the swords on its body, as well as a step back from the Laevantias. Just one silhouette knight was overpowering them mentally. Once the New Kuscheperkan knights realized this, they resolved themselves to step forward instead. They had no chance in close combat, so they planned to mix spellfire into their melee combat to create a variety of attacks their enemy had to deal with on top of their numbers.

"Oh? What's this, you're still going to welcome me? Hah hah! Great, I love that! But it's too bad—I'm out of time. Spread to the wings, Tyrantors... Surround and crush them."

Sword Man's presence seemed so huge to the New Kuscheperkan knights that they'd forgotten about the Tyrantors. The rest of the Jaloudekian company had finally caught up to Sword Man, passing by it as they approached the Laevantias. Since both models of silhouette knight were of the Eastern Type, there wasn't much of a difference in their capabilities. But, because Sword Man had defeated some Laevantias, the difference in numbers was fatal. The New Kuscheperkans were quickly overwhelmed by this disadvantage.

That was when the other company of New Kuscheperkan Laevantias made their appearance. It hadn't taken that much time to circle around to the opposite side, but this new company was surprised that the first company

couldn't even hold on for that long, so they hurried into the fray to save their comrades.

“Oho? So you planned to pincer us. Well, you're right about one thing. The numbers advantage is important, isn't it?!” Once again, Sword Man ran off on its own, charging into the midst of the newly arrived company.

The results of this new clash were the same as the last. Every time Sword Man flashed its blade, a Laevantia was cut down. The New Kuscheperkan silhouette knights' powerful back weapons proved useless, and as soon as they were brought into close combat, they lost to their enemy's prodigious swordplay. Sword Man quickly devoured four Laevantias in quick succession, rendering the new company at nearly half strength already.

While Gustavo was reaping his ghastly price, he made his irritation known. “This is no good. Are you guys really knights? You can't even liven things up. There's gotta be a limit to how boring a fight can be.”

He was rapidly losing interest in the silhouette knights of New Kuscheperka. He already felt that dealing with the remainder was too annoying to bother, so he apathetically ordered the Tyrantors to clean things up. By this time, they had finished defeating the first company, and so they charged toward the second one, heavy footsteps resounding the entire way.

“Damn...these guys...are strong! So we can't win alone... Retreat! We need to get away!”

In the face of the attacking Tyrantors, the second company of Laevantias decided to withdraw. By itself, Sword Man had managed to take down half of the entire force, so they were lacking in strength. If the Tyrantors managed to catch up, they would inevitably be decimated, but for some reason the Jaloudekian company did not give chase. While it was understandable for the slow Tyrantors, Sword Man made no moves either.



Upon the return of the silhouette knights, Baron Mascaran ground his teeth after seeing how many losses they'd suffered. He'd sent out twice the enemy's number, so he hadn't underestimated their strength. Unfortunately, they'd far exceeded his already respectful estimations.

“Damn them, they must be the cream of the crop! I think we’d be able to take those bastards down if we send more forces, but...I don’t want to take unnecessary damage. Agh, I hate doing this, but...”

He gave up on any further attacks, deciding to hole up in his fortress city. He still had a large force within its walls, and he believed he could adequately defend himself even if the enemy sent reinforcements.

But the enemy made the effort to attack. Why would they do so if they knew they would just have to turn back fruitlessly?

In the end, he was never able to wipe these doubts from his mind. Nevertheless, the New Kuscheperkan Army made preparations to intercept the enemy in the vicinity of the fortress city. A defensive detachment stood in front of the city, while Lesvant Viedes were placed on top of the walls.

While watching his enemy’s movements from a distance, Gustavo’s Sword Man dexterously shrugged. “Whoa, there. I guess I went a bit too hard, since it was the first chance I had to go wild in a while. The plan was just to hit them a little to lure some more out with the prospect of revenge. Oh, well, I guess making them hole up is fine too. Hm? Out in front of the fort, that looks like about three companies, I think? Hey, fire off the smoke signals. Three of them.”

His men quickly moved to carry out his orders.

“Now then, old man, it’s your turn.”

The thin trail of smoke coming from the forest wasn’t just obvious to its intended recipients—Baron Mascaran saw it as well, from atop his walls. “That’s...a signal for a separate force. I’m guessing we’ll be seeing a levitating ship soon. All hands, prepare for antiair combat! We won’t let you breach this fortress city so easily!”

His order was spread throughout the ranks, and the tower knights pointed their silhouette arms up at the sky. They’d fought against levitating ships many times by now, so they were plenty prepared. A period of silence and stillness then befell them, and eventually their prediction proved correct—but only half so.

“What...is that?” the baron couldn’t help but mutter.

A black form flew through the air, splitting the clouds. The men in front of the fortress city stiffened up nervously while watching it seem to slide through the world toward them.

“So it really was a levitating ship,” one of them said. “Still, there’s no way just one would be able to do anything about our—”

That was when they finally realized something was off. Levitating ships had been introduced with the initial invasion of Kuscheperka. New Kuscheperka’s army had fought these weapons many times by now, and they’d expanded their knowledge of the levitating ship’s functions. There was even a captured example to go by, so there was no way they’d mistake one. However, the ship approaching them now was different.

Every levitating ship they’d seen thus far looked exactly like a seafaring ship that was just flipped over and made to float in the sky. But the singular ship approaching them was an exception. Its center was bloated, and the only part that still looked like it belonged to a ship. However, the long and thin prow and stern that stretched from the center were very much unlike a regular ship. Sails extended out on either side of the hull, swollen with wind. These were oddly thin as well and looked like bat wings. The entire ship gave off a luster that betrayed metal armor, all of which was layered in a complex pattern like a silhouette knight’s outer skin to make it moveable. Yes, this armor could shift around. As proof, as soon as the ship noticed the New Kuscheperkan army, its entire body flexed and shifted as it changed direction, dropping altitude as it approached them.

As it got closer, more details became clear. The New Kuscheperkan soldiers held their breath. This strange, looming ship could no longer really be called one. A better, more fitting expression would actually be—

“Is that a...levitating ship?” one of the soldiers asked. “But it looks weird...like one of those ancient, extinct monsters—a drake! What the heck are those guys in Jaloudek thinking?! Are they crazy?!”

In the land of the Occidents, said to be the origin of humanity, large monsters had long since died out. Once the advent of silhouette knights led to the rule of humans, those monsters were all destroyed. In the modern day, these creatures

were but legends. The levitating ship that appeared in the skies now called to the memory of one such monster, and its appearance was indeed fearsome.

Dorotheo Maldness growled as he glared down at the fortress city and the forces arrayed in front of it. “A fortress city belonging to our revived enemy... I would think it’s garrisoned by an entire battalion, maybe less. A good choice as my first prey—I’ll be able to show off as much power as I want. I will be testing your creation to its fullest, Lord Kojass!”

This ship was shaped like a drake, so one might think it no longer had any of a ship’s normal structure, but its fundamental design was still that of a levitating ship. The long and narrow prow that was shaped like the monster’s head was in fact the same figurehead as a regular levitating ship’s. But because it was molded into a drake’s head, from up close it looked like a half-human, half-drake monstrosity. Dorotheo was currently inside the drakehead’s cockpit, surrounded by speaking tubes that connected to other areas in the ship, from which one of his men gave a report.

“We’ve confirmed the presence of the enemy on the ground. It looks like they’re preparing to intercept us.”

“Lower our altitude; we’ll start with a bombardment.” Dorotheo shouted his order through the tube, and his men managing the Etheric Levitator at the center of the ship repeated his orders and got to work.

“Start our desceent! Dilute the Etheric Levitator... Lower our proportional etheric altitude to fifteen relative to the ground. We will be entering air-to-ground combat!”

“Good. Close the wing sails. Stop the Blow Engine. Transition to high-speed combat form!”

Immediately after, the sails that spread out to either side of the ship started to close. They had an inner skeleton that was connected to the Blow Engine. These “bones” made the vessel even more batlike.

“Storage of the wing sails is complete. We are ready to transition to high-speed combat.”

“Let’s go! Light up the Magius Jet Thruster. Then continue to maintain combat

speed.”

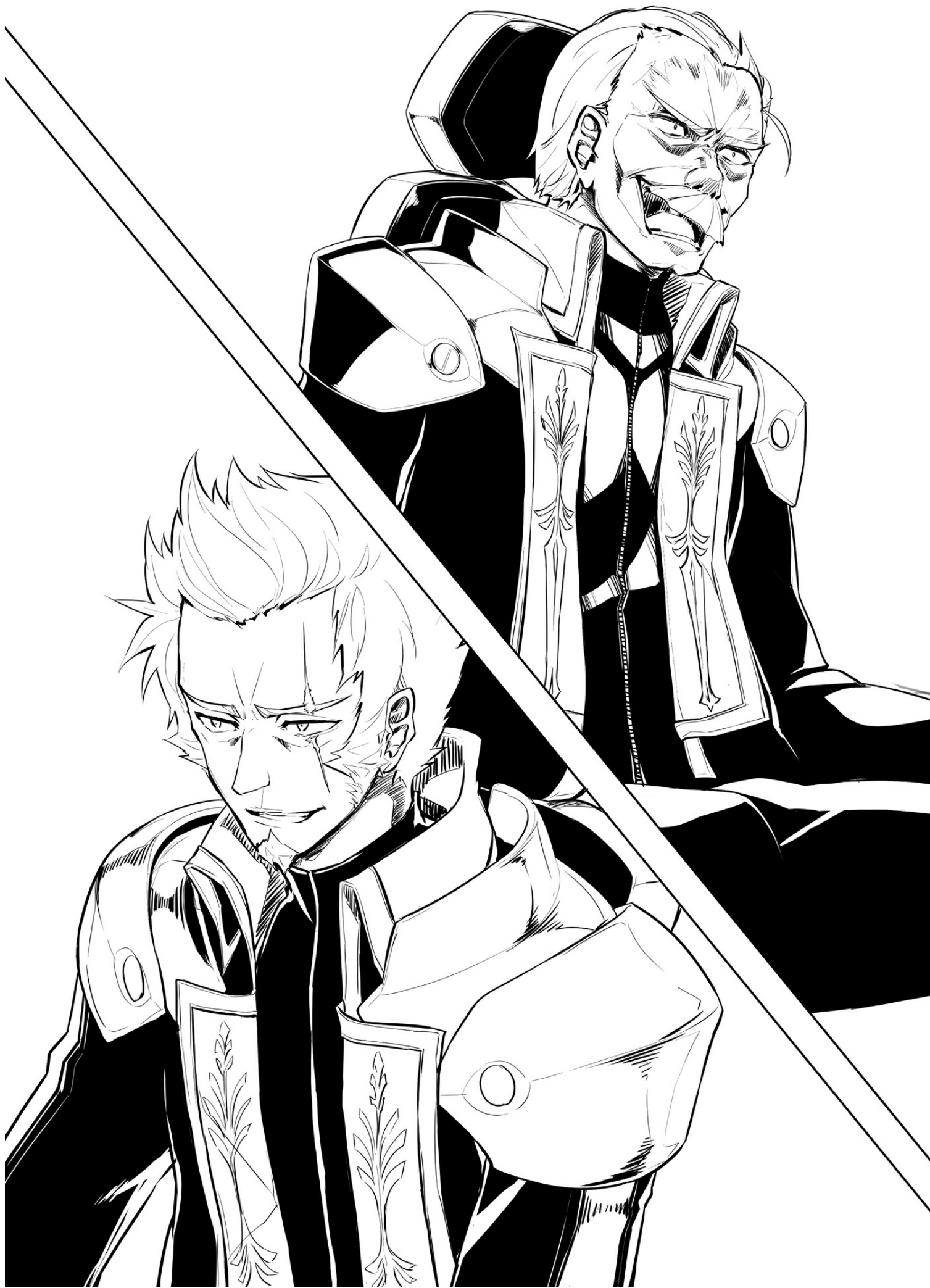
A levitating ship’s mobility had been derived from its Blow Engine, a sort of silhouette arms that created wind. However, this ship was larger and more armored than normal, which also made it much heavier. It could no longer move well enough with just wind. In order to solve this problem, Horacio Kojass introduced his newly made propulsion system—the Magius Jet Thruster.

The explosive overspell rumbled, and the power of raging fire granted the large ship a corresponding amount of thrust. Unfortunately, the Magius Jet Thruster had its drawbacks—it took a lot of mana. That was why the ship couldn’t use it all the time and instead used its wing sails for cruising, saving the Magius Jet Thrusters for propulsion during combat alone.

A shimmering gout of flame spurted out behind the large drake, violently accelerating its enormous body and the armor protecting it. This strange ship pointed its fangs at the New Kuscheperkan Army. Dorotheo glared through his holomonitor with bloodshot eyes. This fight was essentially a test run—he needed to prove that both he and this ship had the power necessary to defeat the aberrant knight that had killed his lord.

“So this is the completed combat levitating ship... Vouivre, show me the extent of your power!”

Meanwhile, unrest began to spread through the New Kuscheperkan Army as the drake-shaped ship folded its wings and began to accelerate. They’d come up with strategies to counter a levitating ship, but they’d never accounted for one modeled after a drake to come attacking them like this. The knights were bewildered when Baron Mascaran shouted orders from behind them.



“Grk! It looks more intimidating than it is! Viede squad, prepare to fire! Hit it as soon as it draws near!”

The squad’s leader shoved down his agitation and roared. Though about half the soldiers had yet to calm down, they still aimed their weapons to the sky as one and started firing. Meanwhile, Vouivre flew straight toward the tightly packed formation of the forward interception force. It had come low enough to scrape the silhouette knights’ heads. As it flew, spellfire-specialized silhouette knights called Ankyulorsas seemed to grow out of it, immediately starting their ground bombardment. These Ankyulorsas had progressed a step beyond just being mounted in levitating ships, becoming one with the ship themselves.

“Damn you, Jaloudek... How disgusting! That is no longer anything like the legendary drake. Have they gone mad after losing their commander?!”

It was clearly an effective design. But the way those silhouette knights looked—their upper halves seeming to grow out of the ship itself, as they were placed all over its hull—filled the knights of New Kuscheperka with indescribable revulsion. On top of that, their intense firepower was doing quite a lot of damage to the ground. Though it was just a single ship, it boasted far more than just one Ankyulorsa.

“Whaaat?! Impossible! The enemy is just one ship! It’s unthinkable that it could unleash such destruction by itself!”

Conversely, the spellfire coming from the tower knights was not very effective. Vouivre’s armor was tougher than it looked, and it could easily repel a moderate amount of spellfire. It flew over the heads of the forward interception force as it continued bombarding the ground, but it immediately started to turn around. It was terrifyingly weighty, but it flexed its stern and prow like a living thing as it described a tighter turn arc than any normal levitating ship. The way it moved no longer resembled a ship in any way; it was more like a silhouette knight.

With the first exchange of blows over, Vouivre stood essentially unharmed while reaping a great toll on the army of New Kuscheperka. Satisfied with the effect he was having on the enemy, Dorotheo ordered the next attack.

“Next, we’re going to try melee combat. Deploy the Draconic Claw! We’re

going in from the front. Give me more thrust!”

At his orders, a giant armlike appendage unfolded from the bottom of the ship—a gigantic drake limb, bigger than a silhouette knight by itself. This was the biggest difference between Vouivre and a regular levitating ship: a melee armament that allowed the ship itself to attack.

“Th-The monster’s coming back!”

“Wh-What is wrong with it? It’s so fast! Is that really a levitating ship?! Agh, turn around! Aim for where it’s *going* to be; this time we’re going to shoot it down!”

The forward interception force hurriedly turned around, once again furiously attacking the drake-ship. A large vicious-looking set of claws at the tip of the unfurled limb opened wide. It used the speed from its Magius Jet Thrusters and its overwhelming weight to rake the ground-bound knights into pieces like dead trees.

“Damn it! This is insane! A ship with a claw?!”

“Shit, look at how easily it’s dispatching our Laevantias! It’s like they’re showing off how it’s an avatar of a real drake!”

Those that were far away from it threw their spellfire uselessly, while those near it were pulverized by its claw. After Vouivre passed through, all it left behind were the miserable corpses of Laevantias. The difference in their speed was also insurmountable; Vouivre was too fast to allow a counterattack. It simply cut out a swathe of the enemy and left. Furthermore, as it passed by, it had actually grabbed one of the Laevantias in its claw.

“Ah! Ahhhh! Someone, anyone, save me—”

The next instant, the Laevantia was crushed inside the claw’s grip. The Draconic Claw wasn’t just large—it was also packed full with strand crystal tissue, so it had far more strength than even its size suggested. It could easily crush even powerful weapons like silhouette knights. After the knights were ripped apart by these oppressive claws, a neat, long wake of destruction was left behind in the middle of the New Kuscheparkan detachment.

“Oh, no... All silhouette knights, retreat to the fortress! At this rate, we’ll just

be its prey... Those claws could even rip apart the fortress walls!” The baron ordered retreat in the face of Vouivre’s overwhelming power.



“Hmmm, so they plan to barricade themselves in. I will teach them that it is meaningless in the face of this drake’s claws.” Dorotheo was satisfied by the Draconic Claw’s performance, so he was finally ready to finish things up.

“Raise altitude to comparative ether level 30!”

“Yes, sir. Starting ether supply to the Etheric Levitator. Density rising!”

While continuing to reap its toll among the enemy army, Vouivre rose up in the air and circled back around, seeking another attack that would deal the finishing blow. Its aim was not the silhouette knights, but the fortress city itself.

“The prow will be unleashing the Incinerating Flame. Prepare to fire!”

The long head—prow—that stretched in front of Vouivre ended in a drake’s head, which opened its jaws wide. It truly looked like a drake in that moment, complete with armor that resembled uneven teeth, as it exposed a deep black cavity inside the head. A large amount of mana flowed into the Emblem Graph carved inside and ignited a flame within the space. This flame built up momentum and size as it was pushed forward, until finally it was a raging torrent unleashed upon the ground.

“A...drake’s breath! N-No way!”

Incinerating Flame was a superlarge-scale silhouette arms only possible because it was being used by the silhouette knight acting as Vouivre’s head. It was actually a large-scale explosive spell used repeatedly in quick succession, which pushed the gouts of fire outward.

After the flames licked over every surface of the walls, only a hellscape was left behind. While silhouette knights were covered in steel armor, they were still piloted by knight runners—humans. And while Lesvant Viedes had their wall robes, such defensive measures seemed to be meaningless. The raging flames melted and blistered the outer skin, either baking or directly burning the humans inside. Just one instance of this fire had decimated the squad atop the walls. The charred Viedes fell on the spot, with some wiggling and writhing as

they melted. Those who had just barely managed to stay out of the flames scattered and ran without any semblance of order. But the Viedes, given their specialization, were even slower than Tyrantors. Thanks to that, they were nothing but convenient prey for the drake's flames.

Having taught the defenders how useless their walls were, Vouivre turned back around, this time to bathe the city itself in fire. The running Laevantias were set ablaze, as were whole buildings. Fortress walls and stone buildings alike put up no resistance against the intense torrent of fire. After several rounds of this, Vouivre took another lap over an utterly destroyed city.

"This power is even more than I expected," Dorotheo muttered to himself. Vouivre was the world's first supersized siege weapon, and even he couldn't help but shudder after seeing the results of its virgin battle. "I'll leave the cleanup to those on the ground. I'm going back."

Now that it had destroyed its enemy, the drake-ship shut off its Magius Jet Thrusters and raised its altitude. It didn't take long for it to reach its target altitude, after which it unfurled its wing sails and reactivated its Blow Engine, returning to cruise mode. With this quiet return to the sky, the drake-ship left the battlefield.

Because it was so large, Vouivre was good at the large-scale elimination of enemies, but bad at the detail work of picking off individuals. With the New Kuscheperkans decimated, its job was complete.

"This is amazing... With this much power, not even the fierce god will be able to escape unscathed. Your Highness Princess Catarina, I will surely take revenge for my lord."

This weapon of a new generation, born from the unusual perspective of Horacio Kojass, disappeared among the clouds as its large sails fluttered in the wind.

And, as if they were switching out, Sword Man and the Tyrantors following it entered the fortress city. Gustavo looked around at the still-burning remnants and complained, "Come on, old man. There'll be nothing left to use if you cook the whole damn place! I mean, it really was stronger than expected, but it's looking like we'll have to be careful *how* we use it."

He was at a loss now that the settlement had been rendered utterly useless.



Vouivre, with its first win under its belt, happily made its way back to Dervankhul. It had taken basically no damage during the fight, but this *was* its first battle. Anything could happen, so it was decided it would go in for maintenance afterward. So, Dorotheo and his men welcomed the weapon's creator, Horacio, after touching down at the air-port.

Horacio opened his arms wide to express the utmost welcome with his entire body. "Ha ha! How was it, Lord Maldness? Was Vouivre powerful? Judging from the way you're acting, you managed to make quite a splash."

"Indeed I did. Those refugees that call themselves New Kuscheperka were burned to charcoal by the drake's flames. It was truly impressive! Allow me to congratulate you on your outstanding work."

The appreciative nod and accompanying words were more than enough to satisfy Horacio. Up until now, levitating ships could only contribute to battle by transporting silhouette knights or otherwise having some stationed on them. Their only actual weapons were the terribly ineffective Catapults. They were still revolutionary despite this, but as a result of the rapid pace of anti-air technology development, they were no longer strong enough to stay on the battlefield. That was why Vouivre had been given such high combat capabilities. This ship had been designed purely for battle, and it was exactly what Horacio was aiming for—the complete form of a ruler of the skies.

"Very good," Horacio said approvingly. "That means it can fly freely through the skies without anyone else getting in the way. Now then... Let us go. Her Highness Princess Catarina is waiting impatiently for your report, my lord."

Horacio had come to the air-port because he'd been rather impatient, but he'd also been entrusted with a message on the way. So, he led Dorotheo and his men to the audience chamber, talking excitedly about Vouivre all the while.

"With Vouivre's power, silhouette knights might as well not exist, no matter their number. Even that fierce god cannot compare," Dorotheo declared. "Still...I regret that it couldn't be used to save Prince Cristobal. If only it had been finished before the battle of Micilie... No, such talk is fruitless, and far too

late besides.”

“Mm-hmm. By the way, I should tell you that this ship was designed from the start to fight others in the air.” Horacio sounded like he was distracted by his good mood, but his words were a big shock to Dorotheo. The fact that the father of the levitating ship had always expected air-to-air combat was big news.

“What? Just who are you expecting to fight?” Dorotheo couldn’t help but ask.

“We’re the only ones with levitating ships today, but the technology has already leaked to our enemy. It is always best to consider these things beforehand. I was thinking of how much armor and firepower a pure combat levitating ship would need to be called the king of the skies. It was quite a difficult question, I tell you. It couldn’t stay as a ship, but it needed to be distinct from a silhouette knight. So I used some connections to learn about devices and mechanisms made to imitate monsters.”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit...too extreme? But the way you talk about it... It sounds like something like Vouivre already exists.” Dorotheo’s voice carried a bit more sharpness to it this time.

Horacio responded by scratching his head sheepishly, attempting to get through the moment with a smile. “Yes, you’re right. But, well, it didn’t go too well when I tried to make it. It was so heavy it could barely move. That meant it was extremely bad at long-range combat, and the entire idea was shelved.”

In the midst of his shady expression, his eyes alone shone with a strong light. He certainly had confidence as the father of the levitating ship.

“Unfortunately, the Steel Wing Knights are nearly defunct. But the lessons and experience they’ve left behind will be used to make up for the weaknesses we’ve discovered. With the addition of a powerful propulsion system and the Ankyulorsa, we’ve created the strongest ship.”

“I suppose...without that battle, it wouldn’t have come into being.” What Horacio said was reasonable, but it still sent Dorotheo into a wave of dejection. “Then Vouivre’s true purpose is yet to come. I will use its strength to avenge His Highness, without fail.” His depression only lasted a moment, as he psyched himself up for his mission. Dorotheo lived for only one thing, and his sights were

forever set on the object of his enmity.

That was when Horacio, who was walking in the lead, stopped and turned around with a thin smile plastered on his face. “You’re right. There’s no more to be said about Vouivre’s strength. But—and I must say this—if you do end up fighting that rumored fierce god...and if even Vouivre’s power is not enough...”

Dorotheo’s eyes shone with strength. The angry gaze of this battle-hardened veteran only deepened Horacio’s smile and, repulsively, twisted it further. “Go to the highest peaks. Fly high, higher than anything. The sky will surely provide its ruler with both power and protection.”

“Fine. I will remember that advice.” With that, Dorotheo passed by Horacio, his feet quickly carrying him into the audience chamber.

Behind him, Horacio muttered, knowing his voice was inaudible to him. “My drake is the only thing permitted in the sky. No matter how strong that fierce god is...no matter how much madness it contains, those who do not understand the laws of the world and try to reach the heavens will inevitably be destroyed by the world itself.”

His low laugh echoed through the hallways.

Chapter 41: The Fierce God and the Drake Meet

“Hey, now... What’s the meaning of this?!” Emris groaned, facing a spread-open map; several X marks were spread across a large area, so fresh the ink was still wet.

A stream of reports had been carried all the way to Fontanie. The marks on the map denoted a string of events that had happened in very quick succession, each one resulting in the loss of a stronghold on the front line.

“Jaloudek’s army has switched out of their defensive stance, and they’re now on the attack. Hrm, how unpleasant. But... That’s fine. The problem is how many losses we’re taking! And each of these places were stocked with Viedes and Laevantias too!”

Each one of the lost strongholds had held a generous complement of the newest silhouette knight models, and even Jaloudek, with its impressive military might, should have found them difficult to conquer. These incomprehensible events had shaken the leadership.

“Damn those Jaloudekians! Did they send out a massive force? Actually, maybe the wide spread of these incidents is because of levitating ships... Still, just throwing in some extra ships wouldn’t push us to the brink like this anymore. I don’t get it.”

The current army now had a fair amount of experience in fighting levitating ships. Jaloudek’s basic strategy of sending in Tyrantors with levitating ships would no longer lead to any large gains. On top of that, this apparent skirmishing strategy shouldn’t have been working against fortified positions.

“We should have gotten back on our feet after the victory at Micilie. In fact, we did, since we even got as far as reviving the kingdom. But now we’re once again facing invasion. I think this is a very serious situation,” Martina spoke with a feeling of urgency.

Eleonora followed up, her expression clouded. “These places were all essentially annihilated. There were very few survivors from any of them.” This was war, so she knew that sacrifices were to be expected, at least in her head.

But part of her still refused to accept that. Those around her hesitated somewhat to remind her, seeing her face steeped in melancholy.

In the midst of all this, someone boldly cut right through to the meat of the matter. Ernie, naturally. “If there are survivors, then we should have some clues as to the enemy’s tactics, shouldn’t we? The longer we take to figure this out, the more losses we’ll suffer.”

Eleonora let out a chastised squeak. “R-Right... They all say that it was as if the legendary drake had reappeared. That it was a bizarre levitating ship. It spewed fire, burning the towns, the fortresses...everything.”

The threat this enemy posed was extreme, and all its victims had been almost completely annihilated. Of course, the causes of such destruction had been investigated thoroughly. However, all the survivors talked of a ship resembling the legendary fire-breathing drake. Their testimonies were nonsensical. As things stood, New Kuscheperka’s leadership could only assume they were confused, which only served to further their own bewilderment.

Even the Order of the Silver Phoenix seemed baffled. Ernie folded his arms and sank into thought. “But it is clear that the enemy has some sort of new levitating ship. Still, assuming it’s modeled after a drake... Would it really get so much stronger and more threatening in one go?”

“Is the fire part pointing to some sort of silhouette arms? Maybe it’s one of those new levitating ships with the spellfire-specialized silhouette knights,” Dietrich suggested.

“Is there even a silhouette arms powerful enough to burn an entire town? Even if there was, it would eat so much mana that even Ikaruga wouldn’t be able to use it,” said Edgar.

Both company commanders had crossed their arms and shook their heads, pondering along with Ernie. Even the Order of the Silver Phoenix was finding it impossible to pin down the identity of this enemy with just the provided intel.

“We don’t have enough information. Instead of throwing out random guesses, let’s first try to think of a solution using what we know about its abilities,” suggested Ernie.

“Hmph! You’re right. It’s an enemy, so we’ll have to take it down anyway. Let’s just do something about it instead of sitting here worrying!” Emris exclaimed.

“I believe it would be best for you to worry a little more, young master,” Ernie shot back.

But Emris wasn’t the only one raring to go. Dietrich, Edgar, Helvi, and the rest of the order were all focused on battle already. They did not fear this unknown threat.

Beside them, Ernie gently ran his finger along the surface of the map. “I don’t know what this enemy is using, but judging from the position of our lost strongholds, it doesn’t seem like it’s trying to penetrate through the front lines, at least. If we head to the front ourselves, we’ll encounter it eventually. I’ll have the Order of the Silver Phoenix prepare to sortie.”

“You’re going to go out there personally, Sir Ernesti?” Eleonora asked hesitantly after noticing how confidently they’d started to take action.

An unknown but terribly powerful enemy had appeared. Having their strongest force head out to stop it would be a great boon.

“It’d be a great favor to us,” she clarified. “But it’s dangerous. Are you sure about this?”

“Well, we’re the ones that’d be able to respond best to an unknown enemy. I can’t promise we’ll put an end to it, but we can at least create an opportunity.”

The other members of the order who were present nodded in agreement.

Eleonora straightened up. “We have no choice but to leave this to you for now. Good luck, Order of the Silver Phoenix.”

“Hmph. To think they’d come out with their next move so soon after such a big loss. They may be our enemies, but they sure have proven they’re capable enough to be a major power,” Emris said begrudgingly. “Okay, Helena, leave it to us! We’ll go break them in two!”

“About that... Sorry to stop you when you’re so clearly raring to go, but you’ll be staying here, young master,” Ernie said.

Emris pitched forward, his arm still raised from his declaration to Eleonora. Then, he turned around with his eyes bulging. “Whaaaat?! Hey, Ernesti, you can’t do this to me, not after all we’ve been through! I’m going to crush their petty ambition with my Goldleo!” Emris was baring his teeth, not even bothering to hide his overflowing will to fight.

But Ernie bluntly shot down the second prince’s bit of selfishness, shaking his head. “Right. I don’t know how impressive the enemy’s flying drake is, but given how much damage it’s done, a fierce fight is inevitable. Think of your position, young master. Also, though I don’t think this will happen, they might aim for Fontanie next. It wouldn’t do to leave this city and Her Majesty too defenseless.”

For a while, Emris grumbled and groaned, unwilling to relent, but in the end he folded and agreed to stay in Fontanie.

Next, Ernie turned to Kid. “You should stay here with the young master, Kid.”

“No, Ernie! I’m a member of the Order of the Silver Phoenix! You can’t leave me out!”

Kid saw Ernie’s smile and noticed the slight teasing hints, and he let out a dissatisfied sigh. So, Ernie came up and whispered into his ear. “You have an important secret mission, Kid. On the off chance Fontanie is attacked and is going to fall... You need to use your Tzenndrimble to take Her Majesty and the young master out of there and protect them.”

Kid glared at Ernie, a stern expression on his face. “That...seems like I’d face a lot of pushback from the young master, though maybe not from Helena.”

“This is something only you can do, Kid.”

Though he still hated the idea of being left behind, Ernie seemed serious about this, so Kid couldn’t refuse. In the end, the two would stay behind in Fontanie to guard the queen while the rest of the Order of the Silver Phoenix would head for the front.

Ernie and the others left to prepare. As Eleonora saw them off, she muttered to herself, “I feel like we’re relying on everyone from the Order of the Silver Phoenix too much. They may be from a friendly nation, but we should be

standing up for ourselves first... I guess in the end, I'm still powerless."

"Ernie said he'd do it, so there's nothing to worry about."

But not even Kid's attempt at consolation could lift the weight from her heart.



The Order of the Silver Phoenix made their way to their workshop to prepare to sortie.

"Now then, Ernesti... You seem rather motivated, but let's hear your intentions out loud, shall we? What are you planning?" Dietrich asked on the way there while looking down at Ernie's head. The suspicion currently contained within his gaze had been gained over all the experiences he'd had thus far.

"Right. Well, I'm just happy, since we managed to succeed in analyzing the enemy's technology to a certain point. So I think it's about time I take Ikaruga out for a spin." Ernie nodded, sounding completely serious.

"Silhouette knights aren't pet dogs, Ernie. They don't need to burn off energy," Helvi said as she stroked his hair.

Behind them, Dietrich looked up to the sky, praying for help. "I figured that was the case... Jeez..."

Even though they'd expected his answer, Ernie was acting so true to himself that those around him couldn't contain their sighs. Not that they had any choice but to indulge their captain's hobbies.

"Still, if you're going to take action, does that mean we have a chance at winning?" Dietrich asked.

"Who knows? We'll just take as many missile javelins as we can with us and hope for the best."

"Ernesti... I know we're just helping out a friendly country, but don't you think this plan is a little *too* crude?" Up until now, Edgar had been content to just listen to the conversation as it went, but he dove in once the subject turned to their strategy as a knight order.

"You're right, but that doesn't mean we can just leave this matter to New

Kuscheperka,” Ernie replied. “They’ve already taken huge losses, and we still don’t have a clear picture as to what we’re facing. Unfortunately, they have their hands full just learning how to pilot the new models.”

Edgar groaned. He knew how right that was, as someone who had fought with their allies.

“From the beginning, levitating ships have been the symbol of Jaloudek’s superiority,” Ernie reasoned. “It wouldn’t be surprising if they were to make a new, more cutting-edge ship, just like how we created the Eastern Type silhouette knights. Though it did happen faster than expected, and the result seems to be stronger than expected as well. Given the damage dealt to these bases, this new ship probably has a weapon with high firepower that hits a wide area. Assaulting it with a large force would actually be a bad idea. So, we should limit our numbers, and that means we are the most suited to taking it down. Don’t you agree?”

While they talked, they reached the workshop where the silhouette knights of the order were arrayed. Their knightsmiths had prepared these machines to the highest degree of perfection. Gazing upon these large humanoid weapons, Dietrich adopted a fierce smile, as if he just couldn’t wait to spring into action.

“I do understand how you feel somewhat, Ernesti,” Edgar said. Though he lifted an eyebrow skeptically, it didn’t seem as if he wanted to argue that point.

“We have Third Company’s mobility,” Dietrich said. “And since we have missile javelins, I believe we are the best suited for this job.”

“Leave it to us. We’ll carry all of you anywhere you need to go,” Helvi said confidently.

While they talked, the group reached the center of the workshop. There, Ernie waved his arms around and raised his voice. “Everyone over here, please!”

Then, using a nearby blackboard, he gave a simple rundown of the situation. “And so, the Order of the Silver Phoenix will be deploying with our full load of equipment. As for our destination... As you can see, the enemy is crushing our bases along the front lines. However, this foe is elusive, and we can’t read where it will attack next. So we’ll split into two groups and search.”

Their planned routes were drawn on a map. Ernie pointed toward the northbound route before turning around. “First Company and Third Company will team up to take this route. The only sure thing we know about our target is that it’s a powerful levitating ship. Third Company will be taking Blue No. 2 antiair equipment and will be using a formation with that in mind. First Company should be prepared for battle at all ranges.”

Edgar and Helvi nodded solemnly. Behind them, the boss—David—silently scratched at his chin as several knightsmiths ran off to prepare.

“Hm? So that means we’ll be going on foot? And what will you be doing, Ernesti?” Dietrich said, confused, as he looked at the remaining route.

“I will be going with you, Dee. We’ll make up for our lack of antiair capabilities with Ikaruga,” answered Ernie.

“Well, well, that’s almost overcompensating.” Dietrich shrugged.

“Me! Pick meee! I want to go with Ernie!” Beside him, Addy energetically raised her hand.

This time, it was Dietrich and Ernie’s turn to share a look.

“So, Addy and I will be accompanying Second Company,” Ernie said.

“Understood.”

With their groups decided, Ernie once again turned to face everyone. “First Company will end up with much greater mobility, since they’ll be with Third Company. It’ll probably be a toss-up as to which group happens upon our target first. So, Edgar, in the worst case—if the enemy is too powerful to handle—do anything you can to withdraw and bring back information.”

“I understand. Being reckless isn’t our only strong suit.” Edgar gave a look to Ernie and then Dietrich before nodding—the look on his face suggested that everyone should be more concerned about *them*.

“Good. As for us, we’ll be a little slow since we’re going without Third Company. Still, that won’t be a problem as long as we take down the enemy,” said Dietrich.

“Given that we don’t know the full scope of our target, you probably can’t

guarantee that you'll win. You're a company commander too, so you need to think of a plan B..." Edgar said, gradually slipping into a lecture.

Beside them, Ernie looked around and came to a conclusion. "All that's left is to arrange our supply trains. Once our preparations are done, we move out."



The Tzenndrimbles of Third Company lined up, their hooves beating a heavy rhythm. They towed carriages behind them, all loaded with heavily equipped Kardetolles. Even though they were carrying silhouette knights, Third Company still had room. The remaining Tzenndrimbles were equipped for surface-to-air combat, with Vertically Launched Javelin Throwers and extra missile javelins in their carriages.

One Tzenndrimble stood somewhat separated from the group—Addy's machine. She was also equipped for surface-to-air combat, but half of her load was taken up by normal supplies.

That was when Second Company appeared as well, having finished their preparations. Seeing Ikaruga, who had been waiting with the Tzenndrimbles in full gear, Guairelinde deftly shrugged.

"Even though we're going with Ernesti in his Ikaruga, it still feels like we're lacking in anti-air capabilities without Third Company," Dietrich said. "So I had some of ours go with a javelineer style of equipment."

Several of Second Company's Kardetolles had rail arms instead of back weapons and were ready to launch missile javelins. Because normal VLJTs were too big for a silhouette knight, these only had a single rail each. This type of loadout was referred to as going "javelineer style." Ernie looked around at his order and nodded.

"Jeez, if the enemy ends up being a regular levitating ship after all this, I hope they at least come with numbers to make it worth the effort," Dee said.

"You shouldn't let your guard down, Dee," Edgar replied. "This is similar to monster hunting. We need to know our enemy, hit their weak point, and bring them down. If we go in without a plan, we'll just get eaten."

"So you're saying it's like a smart, flying monster. Oh, man..."

After that short farewell exchange, the Order of the Silver Phoenix departed from Fontanie. No matter how powerful they were, they needed to be cautious against a mysterious enemy that had destroyed several fortresses. The companies split into two, each with their own route.



Ernie and Second Company were going on foot, so they headed west.

Silhouette knights were about six times the size of a human, so their stride was similarly large. They were still quite fast, even while just walking, but they couldn't compare to the speed of Third Company's Tzenndrimbles. Since First Company was going with Third Company, they were able to go to many more bases.

Soon enough, the group approached their destination. The terrain was filled with gently sloping hills, so it wouldn't favor anyone in particular. If anything, it was easy for a large force to march through, so it was actually harder to defend. However, this was supposed to be deep inside Kuscheperka's lands, so it would normally never see such combat in the first place.

"Put another way, this would have been perfect for Tzenndrimbles to run across, you could say," Ernie said.

"And perfect for levitating ships to fly freely over," Dietrich replied.

"It might be a little troublesome to fight in an area with no cover. Let's be careful."

Ernie and his friends chatted as they walked on. Addy trotted beside them in her Tzenndrimble.

Up until now, she'd been quiet, but suddenly she pointed her machine's spear up. "Hey, Ernie, look! Is that...?"

Ernie turned and saw a line of smoke rising into the air far away. The cause was obvious—there was no need to ponder what it meant.

"Oh, wow... It looks like we've hit the jackpot already. I suppose we should hurry."

"Agreed, Captain. Second Company is ready. Advance!" Dietrich shouted.

Second Company ran forth, thoughts of preserving their strength far from their minds. Behind them, Ikaruga awakened its dormant Behemoth's Heart. The reactor inhaled air greedily, sounding like a monster's howl. Once Ikaruga completed its transition into a combat state, it activated the Magius Jet Thrusters all over its body, taking to the sky with a trail of fire.

Second Company climbed over a hill, and the entirety of the fortress city came into view. There was a smattering of trees which were overshadowed by towering gray walls. And, in the blue sky that took up half of the scene, was an undulating object—a massive one, given its relative size to the fortress city.

“Wh-What the hell is that?! Is that thing really the new levitating ship?! It's much weirder than I thought. I can't believe it was really shaped like a drake!” Dietrich exclaimed.

Accompanied by swirling wind with large sails like wings to either side and a wriggling tail, it looked exactly like a monster, complete with a snakelike head—it was indeed reminiscent of a drake. However, at the same time, it was no monster. It was clearly man-made, with an outer skin and sails for wings. Not to mention, there were silhouette knights that seemed to grow out of it; this thing was far from natural.

“Hey, look! Its m-mouth... Its mouth is open!” A Kardetolle pointed from beside Guairelinde. Ahead of them, the imitation drake had turned and opened its mouth, pointing it at the fortress city.

The next instant, a shining red flame jetted out from its dark maw. The torrent was too large to even be compared to silhouette arms, and it poured liberally upon the fortress. The solid walls, meant to repel enemies, were completely useless against an attack from above. In fact, the walls served to keep the fire concentrated within the structure.

“Damn you, Jaloudek... What kind of monstrosity have you created?!” Dietrich cried. After seeing the fortress be consumed by fire, Second Company, widely known for its dauntlessness, stood dazed. But Dietrich, keen-eyed as he was, noticed something else. “Hm? Oh, that's bad.” Soldiers and silhouette knights had run, scattered, from the burning fortress city.

“There's survivors! We need to...save...them.” Instantly, an old memory came

to Dietrich's mind. One of a giant division-class monster attacking a bunch of students on a training trip, but also one of a single silhouette knight standing in the face of that huge manifestation of death to protect the frantically fleeing children.

Dietrich let out a seething grunt. "I'll never let that happen again!" Without any hesitation, Guairelinde took off, followed by the rest of Second Company. No words needed to be exchanged; they understood each other.



Unfortunately, the fortress city was a frustratingly long way off. They were totally out of spellfire range as well as missile javelin range. They needed to get closer to destroy the large ship. Unable to do anything but run, Dietrich couldn't help but gnash his teeth.

Meanwhile, the mechanical drake turned around, seemingly dancing through the air, as it locked on to its next targets on the ground. Compared to the speed of a levitating ship, a silhouette knight might as well have been standing still. There was no chance they could get away. The “legendary beast” showed clear intent to kill, as its huge claw swung toward the ground.

“Damn it!!!” Guairelinde's outstretched hand grabbed nothing.

Just when it looked like the drake's claw would inevitably rip apart the pitiful New Kuscheperkan soldiers, a brightly burning, scarlet lance interrupted the action. It was far more powerful than a standard bolt of spellfire—a lance made purely of roaring flames. It boasted strength even beyond an overspell, and it was also longer ranged. The drake, which had up until that moment been trampling over its target at its leisure, turned to evade for the first time. Fire lances continued to fly in, and the draconic ship gave up on attacking the ground forces in favor of turning toward the sky.

“That's from a Bladed Cannon... Ernesti! Nice, things were about to get bad,” Dietrich muttered.

An explosion rang out above the fleeing Kuscheperkans. Ikaruga had circled around its enemy, leaving behind a fiery trail. It returned to the front of Second Company once it had made sure the fleeing soldiers had escaped the drake.

“Dee! Gather the remaining survivors and get them out of here. That thing has a levitating ship's mobility and a monster's offensive strength. If they stay here any longer, they'll just die.” Ernie immediately ordered their retreat.

Dietrich hesitated for a moment, but he still nodded. “Okay. I'll pull my men back. Of course, we're abandoning that fort too. Messenger! Send your swiftest horse to the bases behind us and tell them to prepare for our arrival. Have them prepare for surface-to-air combat, just in case!”

A mounted messenger that had accompanied them hurried to carry out

Dietrich's order. While they prepared, the flying drake swam through the air before turning its attention back to the ground once more. As if responding to that, Ikaruga ignited its Magius Jet Thrusters. It clearly was moving to intercept.

Anything that Ikaruga faced was its prey. Given that this was a fight with giant robots, there was no way he'd retreat. While he had expected this, Dietrich still had to ask. "Are you really going to go?"

"We can't let that thing turn its eyes toward the ground. So we have to fight it in the air to allow everyone to get away. The only one who can do something like that is me with Ikaruga."

Dietrich clenched his teeth hard. Once again, Ernesti was heading off into danger, and all he could do was watch. But he knew his own capabilities. He knew that there would be no room for him in a fight between that flying drake and the fierce god of the battlefield. "Understood, Captain. Don't worry about anything that happens on the ground. Beat that drake black and blue."

"Thank you. Heh heh, this is going to need Ikaruga's full power..."

The explosive noise suddenly rose to a fever pitch, and Ikaruga shot up into the sky. It turned into a shooting star, flying straight toward the drake.

"Now then... Given that levitating ships exist in this world, I expected battleships to make their appearance as well, but this far exceeds that. At this scale, it's more like a giant mobile weapon. I understand the intent of it, but I never would have expected them to come up with something like this immediately. What caused this?" A shiver ran through Ernie's whole body. It wasn't fear—not in the slightest.

As if it were only natural, he was feeling a wild sort of joy at the thought of a humanoid weapon like Ikaruga fighting a much larger mechanical foe.

"Heh heh heh, it's definitely worth the effort. My Ikaruga won't lose so easily!"

As if switching in for Ikaruga, the New Kuscheperkan soldiery rendezvoused with Second Company. Guairelinde stood up front, shouting commands and somehow managing to keep order.

"To me! We're retreating! Hurry! At this rate, we'll just be in the way of our

dear captain.”

The New Kuscheperkans, with their base burned down and on the verge of destruction, had no one else to rely on. They came under the command of Second Company, formed up, and started to withdraw from the battlefield. It was unclear how much of a rampage Ikaruga would go on, but while it was buying time, Second Company had to get the New Kuscheperkans to safety.

“Okay, Second Company. We’re going to escort... No, wait. What kind of signal is that?!” Dietrich had just happened to turn and look at the drake, and he couldn’t help but raise his voice in doubt.

The ship that was made to look like a monster seemed to have strong lights shining from every part of it. They were flashing on and off in a definite pattern, and it was clearly a signal warning of something.

The answer would become clear in a moment.

Several more levitating ships appeared, flying over the burning remains of the fortress city. These weren’t battleships, but normal ones with cargo space.

“A separate force! So they had a follow-up. Meanwhile, we have no choice but to walk. It looks like we won’t be able to get away.”

Indeed, it was a detached force. Why had they assumed the flying drake was the only enemy present? A normal levitating ship would certainly have been accompanied by a ground force for support. As soon as the reinforcements caught sight of the fleeing New Kuscheperkans survivors, they gave chase as one.

The sound of wind being whipped up by the levitating ships resounded through the skies. The New Kuscheperkans survivors were already falling into confusion, and to push them even further, the ships dropped the silhouette knights they were carrying. Of course, these were Tyrantors. But there was one different silhouette knight among them. It had a rather average build and was covered in swords.

“Don’t stop! Just focus all your thoughts and efforts on running for now!” Guairelinde had been fleeing with its new charges, but now it stopped and turned around, unsheathing its swords. It pointed them at the approaching Tyrantors. “Second Company! We’re the rearguard. Protect our friends, and

fulfill your duty as knights. And to do that, we need to defeat every one of these enemies chasing us!”

“Yeah! Let’s get ‘em!” his men replied immediately and with reassuring vigor. Each of them took hold of their weapons and protected the retreating New Kuscheperkans. The Tyrantors, seeing some of their prey stop, charged into combat without hesitation.

The drake and the fierce god fought in the sky, while the ground was about to play host to a clash between the Black Knights and the Order of the Silver Phoenix’s Second Company.



The flying drake turned its neck around, surveying the battlefield.

On the ground, the Tyrantors deployed by the levitating ship reinforcements were chasing down the New Kuscheperkan survivors. Their stronghold was now a flaming wreck, and there was no help in sight. While the ground battle was chaotic, the sky only had one incongruous stain.

“That’s...” Dorotheo muttered to himself.

He was looking at a single silhouette knight that was moving toward him while spewing fire. It had no Etheric Levitator, much less wings, and yet it still flew as if it were picking a fight with the laws of the world. While silhouette knights were small and insignificant, it still flew straight toward Vouivre—the flagship of Jaloudek’s Emerald Drake Order and a giant drake-shaped battleship besides. It did not show even a speck of fear in the face of Vouivre’s ability to burn an entire stronghold to the ground.

“O-Ohhh... That’s it! There it is!” In the cockpit of the drakehead located at Vouivre’s prow, Dorotheo spat out as he stared, fixated, at the shadow displayed on his holomonitor. The flying silhouette knight—as far as he knew, there was only one such aberrant existence in the world. “Oh fierce god, my master’s killer...and my hated nemesis! To think we would meet so quickly! Vouivre was made to bury you. So taste the strength of its flames!”

The fierce god—as it was referred to by many—was the culprit behind the retaking of Kuscheperka’s royals from Fontanie, the sinking of Dorotheo’s

levitating ship, and the death of Dorotheo's lord and master, Cristobal. To Dorotheo, it was a sworn enemy that he could not suffer to let live. His excitement rose all at once, and he cast aside his veteran soldier act, becoming a rage-fueled avenger instead.

"Shift to high-speed combat mode! All hands, hold nothing back. Don't underestimate our enemy just because it's a silhouette knight. If you do, it might even eat our Vouivre!" Dorotheo's orders thundered from the drakehead, and the flying drake-battleship immediately shifted to its high-speed combat state. The wing sails were stowed, and fire jetted from its stern. With the explosive propulsion lent by this fire, it forced its huge mass to accelerate.

Ernie stared intently at his enemy as it achieved a speed far higher than a normal levitating ship. "That fire! That acceleration! I see, so they figured out the Magius Jet Thruster!"

Ernie's slim fingers danced across the keyboard, changing the distribution of mana within his machine. Most of the mana created by Behemoth's Heart poured into the Magius Jet Thrusters as he prepared for high-mobility combat. The roar of the thrusters grew louder as Ernie looked at his opponent with a serious expression.

"I don't know why that imitation drake seems to be glaring so intensely at Ikaruga and me. It's not regular hostility, right? After all, it immediately turned toward me instead of trying to pursue our ground forces... Does it know Ikaruga?"

Of course, Dorotheo's rage and battle cry hadn't reached all the way to Ernie's ears. Still, the boy picked up on something, and he grinned fearlessly. "I see. So it's saying that only one can rule the skies. After all, whoever made it was passionate enough to make such a large-scale weapon! No need to worry, Ikaruga and I will challenge you with everything we have! Our Magius Jet Thrusters, Bladed Cannons, Rahu's Fists—all of it!"

The Magius Jet Thrusters roared, and Ikaruga accelerated as if it were stabbing through the sky. The thoughts and feelings of each pilot in this battle had sadly passed each other like ships in the night, but they still had unbeatably

high fighting spirit as the drake and the fierce god met in battle.

Ikaruga and the flying drake-battleship closed in on each other. Ikaruga's Bladed Cannon boasted extremely long range, but it only got more accurate the closer it was to its target. Meanwhile, a silhouette knight was too small a target for Vouivre. Both sides needed to get closer to be able to make the best use of their firepower.

"Prepare to fire! Box it in with spellfire and crush it!" Dorotheo took the initiative with his order.

Ankyulorsas seemed to *grow* all over Vouivre's hull, and they trained their back weapons forward. Each weapon glowed with the light of mana, and it didn't take long for them to start unleashing brightly burning bolts. It seemed like Ikaruga would try to shoot down the incoming attacks with its Bladed Cannon, but it shifted to evasion after firing off a few rounds. The drake was continuously pouring out spellfire, so if Ikaruga tried to intercept each one, it would never get a chance to counterattack. Its Magius Jet Thrusters roared as Ikaruga flew in a complex weave of trajectories. Doing so scattered and threw off the attacks, creating gaps in the curtain of fire.

"You aren't the only one who's good at spellfire," Ernie said.

The silhouette knight stuck out its Bladed Cannon as it flew through the sky. The blade opened up, and an immense amount of mana flowed into the silver plate engraved with an Emblem Graph. This translated into an overspell, which shot out a shining scarlet projectile.

This high-powered attack burned through the sky, but Dorotheo did not flinch. "I know the strength of your spellfire all too well, fierce god! Don't underestimate me and think the same thing will work against Vouivre. Ready the Zafar Nama and sweep that aside!"

As soon as he gave his orders, the Ankyulorsas stowed their back weapons and brought up the silhouette arms they held in their hands. These were created to cast a lightning spell—Zafar Nama—and looked as if several short swords were growing out of a base. These weapons manifested lightning and unleashed it at the approaching spellfire.

Flashes of lightning hit the incoming firebolts, causing explosions to bloom

midair. The lightning bent horizontally like a whip, perfectly protecting the ship. Not a single bolt of fire reached the drake's hull.

It was an attack that negated attacks—a completely new innovation. And it excited Ernie even more. “So a mere exchange of fire won't budge you! I heard it used lightning to defend, but I never thought it would be so powerful. It looks like I'll have to move onto rule number two for destroying giant weaponry!”

Ernie gave up on a long-distance shoot-out and ordered Ikaruga to advance. Ikaruga seemed to disappear with the thunderous sound of an explosion, leaving nothing behind but a wavering shimmer of heat. It had fired its Magius Jet Thrusters at full capacity and turned into an arrow.

The strange silhouette knight wreathed in fire flew in with unbelievable speed, but Dorotheo was neither surprised nor frightened. He simply smiled fearlessly. “Now that you've realized that a bombardment from range won't work, you're coming in close. But that was a foolish move! Ankyulorsas, smash it with your Zafar Namas!”

In the span of a breath, Ikaruga was already right in front of the drake and slashing with its greatsword. However, before it could fully bring down its blow, a thunderclap resounded across the sky. Zafar Nama wasn't a silhouette arms meant only for defense—it could destroy anything that came too close with lightning, including silhouette knights.

“So that was an option, huh?!” Ernie had spotted the signs of lightning coming from all over the drake, and right before they'd struck, he'd deployed his Bladed Cannon. While spinning its Magius Jet Thrusters to brake hard, Ikaruga launched a haphazard barrage of spellfire. The lightning whips that assaulted it were flooded by these attacks, which were made of explosive magic. The moment the lightning made contact with these overspells, they burst, turning the area into a large flashy fireball.

“Damn you, fierce god! How is it possible to dodge at this range?! But you've just staved off our attack. Vouivre has yet to show its true power!” Dorotheo yelled.

Ikaruga once again changed the direction of its thrusters, threading through a small gap in the time left open until the lightning weapon could fire again. Once

again, Ernie lifted his machine's Bladed Cannon to attack the large hull of the drake filling his holomonitor.

"Can you dodge at this range with your size?!" Ernie shouted.

"Don't underestimate me just because you managed to get in close!" Dorotheo yelled, as if in response.

Ernie was still operating under a misunderstanding. Up until now, levitating ships had just been ships—though they did travel through the air—and they had no options for close-range combat. However, Vouivre's design concept was fundamentally different. This ship, which had been designed with close combat in mind, had a high degree of freedom with its hull. It flexed its hull like a whip, turning it into a massive blunt weapon. In short, the drake came forward in a tackle.

"Whooaarrghh?! So I guess it looks like that for a reason!" Ikaruga once again fired its thrusters at full blast, barely managing to slip past the attack. The fierce god and the drake intersected for a moment before passing each other by.

"With this much of a size difference, simply crashing into it will hurt a lot. I can't believe a levitating ship would end up able to handle melee combat..." Ernie complained as he deftly manipulated his thrusters, changing Ikaruga's facing.

In terms of maneuverability, the smaller Ikaruga still had the advantage. Ernie figured that even though Vouivre was much more mobile than a normal levitating ship, it would still have a hard time responding to him. He attempted an attack from behind, but the drake showed a surprising response.

Regular levitating ships manipulated wind with their Blow Engines, catching said wind in their sails to change direction. But due to problems with the engines' output, among other things, levitating ships couldn't be called fast even as pure flattery. However, this drake used its unique shape to the fullest and moved using a completely different method. Its propulsion system spewed out behind it, and its entire body seemed to form a circle as it quickly turned around. The movement was similar to its earlier tackle.

"Whoa, that's quite dextrous," said Ernie. "Which means it plans to charge at me again."

Once Vouivre finished turning around, it accelerated on jets of fire. It was clear it indeed meant to charge its enemy.

While each dodging through their exchange of fire and lightning, the fierce god and the drake closed in on each other. While the drake was charging in at full speed, Ikaruga changed course to the side. The faster something went, the harder it was to make tight maneuvers. Ernie was trying to make a large circle around Vouivre to evade the tackle. That was when the drake-battleship showed a new move.

“That was naive of you! Ready the Draconic Claw! We’ll rip it apart!” Dorotheo shouted.

Vouivre started to deploy the equipment it had folded into its underside, and the brutal weapon that had eviscerated many a silhouette knight showed itself—the ship made to imitate a drake didn’t have only one close-combat option. The drake’s freely moving claw attempted to swipe at Ikaruga as it tried to get away. At the sight of the gigantic set of claws, so big it could grab an entire silhouette knight, Ernie’s hair stood on end. The next instant, Ikaruga changed the direction of its shoulder thrusters upward, pointing the silhouette knight’s vector downward.

With the propulsion of Magius Jet Thrusters added to gravity, Ikaruga shot down. It managed to slip out of the claw’s grip before employing its thrusters to stabilize its flight.

In his pilot’s seat, Ernie let out the breath he’d been holding. “Heh heh... Heh heh heh heh heh heh... What a strong opponent. It’s fast and hard to chase down because it operates so high in the sky. It’s protected by lightning so spellfire doesn’t affect it, and it can even engage in melee combat. Even Ikaruga can’t carelessly get close. This is pretty troublesome... It’ll definitely be worth conquering.”

Though what he actually said made things sound hopelessly disadvantageous, Ernie’s expression didn’t seem troubled at all. In fact, it was shining, filled with joy. The reason was simple: He was crazy. Being together with his partner Ikaruga turned any trial he was facing to joy—unfortunately, the harder something was, the more motivated he got.

As if responding to his excitement, Ikaruga's thrusters growled, and it once again gained altitude. Just like the drake, which was composedly making its way through the skies, the fierce god had a bottomless fighting spirit.



The crossing exchange of lightning and explosions painted a ridiculous picture in the sky.

It was like a child's scribbles, only each new flash of color was fatally powerful. The fight that spread across the sky seemed otherworldly, and below it, Gustavo in his Sword Man seemed unable to keep himself from complaining. "Man, this is spooky. That fierce god or whatever is crazier than the rumors, to be able to fight against my old man's drake. Hm... I wanna try fighting it too."

In the face of the drake, which was able to easily burn an entire battalion of silhouette knights to cinders and render a stronghold's defenses meaningless, a single silhouette knight was holding its own. It was an unbelievable sight, but he had to believe it, since it was happening right in front of him.

"Either way, it's impossible for Sword Man to do anything for that fight, so I'll just focus on my own job!"

He could see the New Kuscheperkan survivors desperately fleeing through his holomonitor. After the drake's attack, their entire fortress city had been put to flame, and their situation was hopeless. He just had to chase them and take as many out as possible. Gustavo thought that this kind of job was utterly boring, but he thought the same thing every time. It couldn't even be considered a hunt; it was basically like weeding a garden. In short, it was an utter chore.

But that wasn't the case right now. There was another group acting as rearguard, protecting the survivors. Even in such a disadvantageous situation, they didn't lose their discipline, and they deftly switched places on the battlefield with the New Kuscheperkan army. Gustavo's expression twisted with joy. He was clearly quite mad in his own right, to be feeling happy to see an obstruction.

"Oho! Good, good! That's the way! Otherwise this wouldn't be fun!"

The rearguard comprised silhouette knights that were different from those

employed by New Kuscheperka. They were mostly bare of any decoration and thus looked quite plain. Silhouette knights, while definitely weapons of war, were also a way for a country to flaunt its strength, so each nation tended to at least somewhat decorate its silhouette knights. However, these rearguards had no identifying markers other than a red cross. Gustavo was assaulted with a feeling of déjà vu, but in the next moment, he saw the unit at the center of the formation. His eyes widened.

“Hey now, come on... That red one... Isn’t that the twin-blade?! Heh! Heh heh! I didn’t think I’d see you here, awesome! Hey, that red one’s mine! You guys take care of the others!”

With that, Sword Man stopped keeping pace with the Tyrantors and charged ahead. It leaped into Second Company’s formation and immediately threw itself at Guairelinde without even looking at any of the others.

“Take this!” Gustavo shouted.

Out of the myriad swords all over its body, Sword Man grabbed a dagger and threw it with blinding speed. A dagger to a silhouette knight was still a giant lump of metal. The weapon sliced through the air with a heavy whoosh, the blade pointed at Guairelinde with pinpoint accuracy.

Though its pilot was surprised by Sword Man suddenly leaping into his company’s formation and making an immediate attack, Guairelinde responded swiftly. It shifted slightly, putting a sword in the way of the dagger. Any careless, large swing would ruin its stance and make it unable to recover fast enough afterward. So, it chose to stop its enemy’s attack with the smallest amount of movement possible. Right afterward, the dagger hit the flat of the sword as planned, bouncing off with a high-pitched ting. In the mere moment it took to move the sword, Sword Man had already closed in on Guairelinde.

“Hah haaaa!!! Heya, twin-blade! I didn’t think I’d be seeing you in a place like this—it’s making me emotional! Let’s continue from where we left off!” Gustavo yelled.

“It had to be you, of all people! *I’m* not happy about this!” Dietrich shot back.

Sword Man slashed, putting all its momentum into it. Guairelinde looked to be about to block it, but it suddenly tilted its blade, shifting the trajectory of its

enemy's sword aside and diverting as much of the impact as possible. They then clashed swords, and the two silhouette knights switched places furiously, as if they were dancing in a circle. The momentum from their spinning was put into their attacks, resulting in slashes just as heavy as Sword Man's initial strike.

Both sides deflected the other's swords twice, then three times, all while switching places at dizzying speeds and exchanging blows over and over. The furious dance of attacks made it impossible for anyone around them to approach.

Beside this fierce storm of swords, the Tyrantors finally clashed with the rest of the rearguard, having finally made it into range.

"Charge! Chaaarge! Don't let the enemy get away! Smash them to pieces!"

Using its weight to add force to a charge was the Tyrantor's specialty. Such a charge boasted enough power to crush Lesvants, of course, and Laevantias as well. Unfortunately, they were facing dyed-in-the-wool fighting fanatics who would face such a fatal charge head-on.

"Bring it! You guys don't have a monopoly on charges!"

The Order of the Silver Phoenix's Second Company deployed their back weapons and fired while countercharging. Sparks flew as both sides clashed. Second Company was specialized for the attack, and each one of them had their own powerful weapon. Not even Tyrantors could ignore these, and as a result, both sides were entangled in a melee.

"Agh, so it really came to this. I guess I should just be happy they didn't try to break through us..." Dietrich muttered.

"What's wrong, twin-blade?! Do you really have the time to be looking elsewhere?!" Gustavo taunted.

Dietrich had been checking on what was happening around them, but he was forced to click his tongue and jump back with great speed. Immediately after, a slash came sliding into the spot he'd just been in. The attack was so fast that the tip of the sword sliced through the air, leaving behind a wavering image. Sword Man's strike made a shrill scraping sound and let out sparks as it grazed Guairelinde's armor. The scarlet knight swiftly adjusted its footing, smoothly

sliding into a skillful counterattack as soon as it dodged its enemy's blow. But Sword Man had expected this. It easily received the strike, and the roles switched.

The battle between Guairelinde and Sword Man, two knights who wielded dual blades, was a never-ending torrent of attacks. Though the particulars were different, they were both extremely specialized for offense. Naturally, the fight became about how each one could make its sword reach the other.

"Grah, you're so *energetic*! At this rate, my machine's going to run out of mana," Dietrich grouched.

After a particularly strong clash, both machines separated, as if this had been arranged beforehand. The silhouette knights that made use of strand crystal tissue all used a lot of mana to move, though there were some differences between models. Thus, moving around without any rest like they had been doing had expended a massive amount of mana. Both units' mana pools were running dry, and their ether reactors were operating at full force to recover. The air was filled with the intense sounds of intakes running.

"Jeez, you're pretty damn tough for a sword freak," Dietrich jabbed.

"Aw, don't get your panties in a bunch, twin-blade," Gustavo shot back. "Swords are great! As long as I have a sword in hand, I'm unbeatable. In fact, I honestly think you're pretty amazing to be able to keep up with me like this. I expected this to be over already."

Dietrich wasn't happy about that, but he kept silent. Gustavo's reply seemed insulting, but the fight so far proved that he wasn't all talk. He was extreme in his love for swords, and because he refused to use anything but, Gustavo was rather isolated among Jaloudek's army. The reason he was able to stand on the battlefield like this was purely because of his overwhelming skills. He quite literally got himself here on the strength of his sword. But Dietrich was not to be outdone by such a ridiculous man—he had also survived many battles by relying on his sword. Still, fighting and winning were not the same thing.

"Well, thanks for the compliment. But unfortunately, we're both stuck." Dietrich looked around while making sure to keep an eye on Sword Man.

Second Company was fighting well against the Tyrantors, but because they

were protecting the New Kuscheperkan survivors as well, they weren't able to move about as they pleased. They were succeeding at stopping the Jaloudekians, but a rearguard needed to be able to withdraw while fighting. As things stood, they would just lose to attrition.

"We need to withdraw too. We can't afford to take this slow... I guess I'll need to go for the win." Dietrich quietly resolved himself and deployed his back weapons.

Guairelinde was equipped with Shotel silhouette arms, which exhibited their true, impressive power at short range. Dietrich had been holding back on using it to conserve mana, but now he judged it necessary.

After a small break, both sides had recovered some mana. Guairelinde took a stance, about to attack, but Sword Man was faster on the draw. It had produced weapons before Dietrich had realized, throwing some daggers in the blink of an eye.

It had aimed for Guairelinde's shoulders instead of its torso. In other words, the attack was aimed at the silhouette arms. Because the weapons were so fragile, any direct impact would break them. Dietrich barely managed to ward away the daggers, which allowed Sword Man to close in once again.

"Hah! Hah! Hah! Sure, those toys are convenient, but you're being too obvious about it!"

Guairelinde, having given up the initiative, was driven into a painful position. Sword Man's swordplay was like a storm, requiring Dietrich to have incredible concentration. He couldn't even find an opening to use his silhouette arms. Once again, he was dragged into a melee swamp, one in which both sides were expending a lot of mana.

Second Company was slowly retreating as they fought, but the New Kuscheperkan survivors had yet to gain enough distance. They couldn't allow the enemy to get behind them, so they were forced into a defensive battle, which dulled their movements.



On the ground, Second Company and the New Kuscheperkan survivors were

engaged in a bloody retreating battle. Meanwhile, Ikaruga and Vouivre were slowly moving away from this ground conflict. Those two were battling in the air using their Magius Jet Thrusters, their speed far oustripping anything that was possible for the ground-bound silhouette knights. Every clash between them resulted in a large shift in position.

“Gah, they’re both so fast! But I finally caught up.” Addy had been making her Tzenndrimble run continuously after the aerial battle. Though her machine was fleet-footed, that was only by the standards of normal, pedestrian silhouette knights. The fight between Ikaruga and Vouivre had started in the air, and if they hadn’t dropped their speed, it would have taken even longer for her to catch up.

Addy glared at the reticle on her holomonitor, activating the weapon mounted on her Tzenndrimble. “Now then, my javvies, we’re going to help Ernie! You’re on target... GO!”

The Tzenndrimble’s largest weapon was a VLJT. In order to help Ernie, as well as make use of her powerful antiair capabilities, she aimed this weapon at the drake-ship. The loaded rail arms unfolded and unleashed missile javelins that traveled on tails of fire. These missile javelins flew out in a large spread for a while before Addy guided them to converge on Vouivre.

These flame-spewing javelins, launched from the surface, stood out. Vouivre’s lower lookout immediately noticed them.

“Agh, javelins? What a bother! Have the lower Ankyulorsas intercept and shoot them down!” Dorotheo shouted, obviously irritated at having his fight with the fierce god interrupted.

Ankyulorsas immediately appeared on the bottom of the ship and activated their Zafar Namas, unleashing lightning at the missile javelins and striking them down.

“Well, I guess it wouldn’t be that easy, since that can stop shots from Ernie’s Bladed Cannons too. Hurry with the reload!” Though Addy’s brow furrowed after seeing the missile javelins be continuously destroyed, she wasn’t terribly shaken. She’d seen how the battle between Ikaruga and Vouivre had been going, so she’d expected this much.

Then, a pained reply came back from the silhouette gears that were in the carriage her Tzenndrimble was towing. “We’re trying, but the reload is going to take a little longer. Wait... Hey, look at that! Isn’t that thing moving weird, Addy?”

The silhouette gear was pointing at Vouivre, which was clearly acting in a way it hadn’t before. It should have been focused on the sky and Ikaruga, but all of a sudden it had turned to look back to the ground.

“Yeah, uhhh, is that...bad?” asked Addy.

“Did you really think an attack like that would make Vouivre flinch? Still, you’re an eyesore,” said Dorotheo. “You damn fake horse! If there’s only one of you, then I’ll just brush you aside first!”

Addy’s bad feeling turned out to be right as Vouivre lowered its altitude. It was going after the Tzenndrimble, who hurriedly turned around and began to flee, and the Ankyulorsas all over it had started their bombardment. Destructive bolts of scarlet fire rained down around the Tzenndrimble as it sped away at full tilt.

“What an incredible bombardment!” Addy exclaimed. “But don’t underestimate Tzenny’s speed!”

“Do you really think a mere horse could escape a drake?!” Dorotheo shouted.

Vouivre descended until it was nearly scraping the ground and extended its giant claw. The spellfire was limiting the route the Tzenndrimble could take, allowing the drake to use its Draconic Claw to end its target in one blow.

The claw glinted with a ferocious light as Vouivre attacked. Fire spewed from the ship’s propulsion system, which allowed it to drag the claw along the ground, digging up furrows and making a terribly loud noise.

“Waaaghhh, it’s coming! It’s gonna hit! We’re gonna get crushed, aren’t we?! Go faster, Addyyyyyyyy! It’s going to hit us, it’s right there!”

The silhouette gear team was making a huge fuss in the carriage as they watched the storm of spellfire fall around them and the drake’s claw coming ever closer. If either found their mark, they would be dead for sure—even if the Tzenndrimble survived.

Addy ran along a snaking path to dodge the spellfire, but that also made her slower, which was why the claw seemed like it was about to hit her. As things stood, the Tzenndrimble wasn't fast enough to get away. The silhouette gear team shivered in terror.

However, Addy was smiling fearlessly in her cockpit. "Hah! So you stopped paying attention while fighting Ernie. That's what people call a mistake!"

Ernie most likely hadn't actually heard her, but with perfect timing, a spear of raging flames slammed into Vouivre from the side. It was obvious what had launched the attack: Ikaruga and its Bladed Cannon.

"I thought you'd come, you damnable fierce god!" Dorotheo roared. "But it's no use! Just watch as I crush your lackey!"

The Ankyulorsas quickly responded. Zafar Nama whips flew from the drake-ship, intercepting the spellfire. Vouivre wasn't being operated by just one person. Dorotheo was piloting from the drakehead, but there were also knight runners in the Ankyulorsas and crew controlling the Etheric Levitator at the heart of the ship. Though small surprises like what Ernie had just pulled off could happen, there was no catching it completely unawares.

"Your spellfire won't work against Vouivre... What?! What are those?!" That was as far as Dorotheo's composed smile lasted. The flame lance that had struck his machine was not alone. Ernie fired them in volleys, continuously, over and over. It was as if he was issuing a challenge as he continued to persistently pour spellfire on his enemy. All traces of composure instantly melted away from Dorotheo's face.

Ikaruga descended to the surface a little ways away from where Vouivre was chasing the Tzenndrimble. With both legs planted firmly on the ground, it held up a total of four Bladed Cannons distributed between its normal arms and the ones on its back. Using these, it ceaselessly shot flame lances in rapid succession.

"Why? Why can you put out so much spellfire?!" Dorotheo shouted. "How are you doing this?! Were you hiding your trump card?!"

He had made a mistake when he had underestimated Ikaruga, assuming that Zafar Namas could block its spellfire. There were two ether reactors supporting

Ikaruga. Both originated from the hearts of gigantic monsters, and they produced colossal amounts of mana, but even they couldn't support this much spellfire and the Magius Jet Thrusters at the same time.

But the solution was simple: Just don't use both at the same time. Since Ikaruga had landed, it could now pour all of its mana into the Bladed Cannons, turning it into a weapons platform exceeding any wizard-style silhouette knight.

Each shot was several times more powerful than a regular shot from a silhouette arms, and they came in like a storm until Zafar Nama finally reached its limits. Burning lances of fire pierced through the explosions and resultant swirling flames, reaching Vouivre's hull. These impacted the outer skin and burst into intense explosions. The impacts shook the ship, forcing Vouivre off course. And shots continued to come in, destroying an Ankyulorsa as they did.

"Grrr! Advance! Aim for that fierce god! We must not let it run free!" Dorotheo, unable to stand for this, gave up on the ground-bound enemy.

Vouivre's Etheric Levitator increased the density of ether within it, raising the ship's altitude as the fire spewed by its Magius Jet Thrusters grew a size larger. The drake-ship rose through the sky and accelerated, now attacking Ikaruga with its spellfire instead. Ikaruga responded by lifting off again, and the dogfight resumed.

"Damn you... While it's an eyesore, I don't have the leeway to be paying attention to the horse. Raise the density within the Etheric Levitator—we're going to get above it! We must never let that fierce god stand on this world again." Dorotheo steeped in his regret as he felt the inertia of his machine's movement.

Letting Ikaruga act freely *was* a mistake, but so was going so low to the ground to chase the Tzenndrimble. Because Vouivre had gone low enough for spellfire from the ground to reach it, Ikaruga could pour on as much spellfire as possible, leading to large damage.

"We can't afford to lose any more Ankyulorsas. We will end him here in the sky," Dorotheo declared. Vouivre still had the advantage in a dogfight. While watching the remaining Ankyulorsas intercept incoming attacks with their Zafar Namas, he started planning his next move.

“Heh heh heh! Now’s the time. We’re going to slam another round of javvies at it!” Addy exclaimed.

“You got it! Reload’s done! The way you’re using these things is way nastier than your cutesy nickname would suggest, though.”

Meanwhile, on the ground, the Tzenndrimble had finished reloading its VLJT. They’d been able to quickly and safely reload now that the drake was no longer paying attention to them. They also had the leeway to wait for the perfect chance to attack as Ikaruga and Vouivre clashed fiercely in the sky.

“Now!” Addy shouted.

Ikaruga and Vouivre crossed by each other, and she took that chance to launch her VLJT’s payload. Ten missile javelins rose in the air, aiming at the drake on trails of flame.

“Javelins from below! They’re coming!”

“Don’t panic. Have the lower Ankyulorsas take care of it,” Dorotheo commanded. “That fierce god is o— No, that bastard! So it was waiting for this to happen!”

As soon as the missile javelins were up in the air, Ikaruga clearly changed its behavior. It had been managing the distance between them while weaving in shots with its silhouette arms, but now it was charging ahead full force. So, while the missile javelins were attacking Vouivre from the ground, Ikaruga was attacking from the sky.

Pincered between missile javelins and flame spears, Zafar Nama was overwhelmed for just a moment. Ikaruga aimed for that moment, instantly closing the distance.

“They... They’re not able to intercept it all!”

“Don’t fuss over it!” Dorotheo shouted. “Just spread the spellfire wide! Churn the waters!”

The Ankyulorsas immediately gave up on using their Zafar Namas to intercept everything and changed tacks to just firing wildly to keep the attacks in check. Despite this, Ikaruga managed to weave through with minute adjustments of its

jets to get to its target. Vouivre's huge form wielded overwhelming defensive and offensive strength, but Ikaruga beat it in maneuverability. Given how much power Ikaruga had, if it was able to directly access Vouivre's hull, not even the drake-ship would be guaranteed to withstand its attacks.

The sounds of its flight almost seemed like screams as the curtain of spellfire got denser. The knight runners in the Ankyulorsas trying to shoot it down were feeling more and more pressured by the bizarre, demon-faced silhouette knight the closer it got.

"What a passionate welcome!" Ernie exclaimed. "But now I've arrived!"

Ikaruga used its Bladed Cannon to wrench open a hole in the torrent of spellfire. Finally, it was in range for the Rahu's Fists to be effective, and they took flight, slicing through the air audibly to stab into Vouivre. Reeling in the wires at high speed, Ikaruga sped up. At this extremely close range, Vouivre no longer had the ability to resist—but as soon as Ernie thought that, Dorotheo came out with an unbelievable move.

"All hands, brace yourselves! We're turning around!" Dorotheo twisted the control yokes and stomped on his stirrups.

Ernie was reeling in the wire, trying to board the ship, when he suddenly felt he was accelerating faster, giving him some doubts—but he soon noticed the drake's shocking movements.

The approaching surface of the ship suddenly flowed sideways. Vouivre was using all of its crystal tissue, creaking from all over, as it tried to spin on the spot. This maneuver would have been impossible for a normal levitating ship.

"Oh, crap!" Ernie couldn't help but let out. "The Rahu's Fists are still stuck in it..."

Since it was still attached, Ikaruga started to be dragged along in the spin. Heaven and earth tumbled over each other as Ernie was flung around by centrifugal force. He had no choice but to grit his teeth and bear it.

"You sure think of some incredible things... But!" To Ernie, this violent aerial maneuver was his bread and butter. He quickly recovered from his initial shock and started to counter the move.

He released the Rahu's Fists from the ship's hull, and fired his Magius Jet Thrusters in small bursts to stabilize and right Ikaruga. Right side up once more, Ikaruga again attempted to go on the attack.

"Damn, so you let go!" said Dorotheo. "Then take this!"

As if to cut off its next move, a giant claw came at Ikaruga from the side with terrible speed. The spin hadn't purely been a defensive move. Dorotheo had brought the Draconic Claw to bear at an impossible angle with that maneuver and was pointing it squarely at Ikaruga.

This was an unprecedented attack, made in an unexplored field of combat: one between a flying silhouette knight and a combat-specialized levitating ship. The fight between these two machines, each crystallizations of the greatest technology of the time, consisted entirely of moves that defied common sense.

"A two-stage attack! Impressive!" Ikaruga fired its Magius Jet Thrusters powerfully for an instant and seemed to disappear as it moved at high speed to narrowly escape the claw. Meanwhile, Vouivre had righted itself and, seeing its chance, committed to a follow-up attack. The Ankyulorsas unleashed their spellfire at Ikaruga.

Ikaruga blasted away any attacks that seemed like they would hit with one of its Bladed Cannons, and its thrusters roared as it accelerated. Every time it had to slow down, a large burden was placed on Ernie's body. A silhouette knight's Physical Boost helped protect the pilot inside, but the inertia from Ikaruga's explosive accelerations was too much for the boost to completely block. Ernie looked slender and weak, but his body was still inhabited by a crazed soul that lived and died for robots.

He gritted his teeth and endured the acceleration. The fierce smile never left his face even in this predicament. "This drake is truly...a powerful weapon! And the pilot is also first-class! It's pretty hard to find a weak point."

Ikaruga, exposed to ceaseless attacks, had been forced to focus completely on evasion. Every once in a while, it unleashed a bolt as if it had remembered it needed to attack, but it was always immediately intercepted by lightning.

"What's especially notable are those new defensive silhouette arms. They double as both a defense for long-range attacks while being absolute killers up

close. If I had to categorize it, Ikaruga would be a close-range combatant—a warrior-style machine, so to speak. This disadvantage is inevitable.”

And after one got through all of that, the close combat capabilities of the ship itself awaited. Given the general concept of a levitating ship, these abilities bordered on the unfair.

Though it had taken damage from a surprise attack, it wasn’t so easy an enemy that it would allow the same thing to happen again. It was strong enough that Ernie was starting to wonder if it would be impossible to bring it down right now.

“But, you know, magic isn’t all-powerful,” said Ernie. “And that is surely...your weakness!”

Even though he had no choice but to evade and run from the giant flying battleship’s attacks, Ernie hadn’t given up on victory. He simply focused on evasion, waiting for his chance to come.



The Order of the Silver Phoenix’s Second Company was continuing to fight a retreating battle while acting as the rearguard for the New Kuscheperkan survivors.

“Knights with more severe wounds should withdraw first! Damn these Tyrantors, they’re coming at us again!”

“Hit them! Push them back! Their armor is nothing compared to the monsters we usually fight!”

Second Company’s angry voices resounded as they struck back in response to the Tyrantors’ charge. They possessed a mountain of weapons, but not much in the way of defensive equipment like shields. So in order to send the Tyrantors packing, they needed to strike back. But their offense was limited, since they were serving as the rearguard—their retreating allies were like shackles.

“The enemy isn’t losing any momentum,” said one of the company members. “I guess they *wouldn’t* hesitate with so much prey in front of them. Oh, well—most of our allies have retreated by now. I think we can do something.”

After pushing the enemy back for the moment, Second Company surveyed the state of the battle. The New Kuscheperkan contingent here was half destroyed and retreating slowly but surely. Second Company was putting up a tenacious fight, and that was starting to bear fruit.

“Whoa there, Commander Dee! This is bad! The battle over there’s going *weird*.”

In the midst of this, their company commander, Dietrich, and his machine, Guairelinde, had their hands full with the same opponent they’d been fighting all this time: Sword Man. He’d had no leeway to pay attention to his surroundings, and so the two units had ended up isolated from the rest of the battle.

“I want to help, but that thing’s so strong! As things stand, the commander’s going to be the only one left!”

Both Dietrich and his enemy were highly skilled, which was why the others couldn’t easily help or interfere. Now that the New Kuscheperkan survivors were making good on their retreat, the possibility of them being left behind had become a real fear.

“What the hell? How are these guys so persistent? We shoulda crushed ’em already!” Gustavo spat as he looked around, his irritation clear.

Among the rearguard, Guairelinde stood out in both its coloring and combat strength. Gustavo had thought that as long as he was holding Guairelinde down, the rest of the rabble would easily fall to the Tyrantors. But that had been proven wrong, as while the Tyrantors had pushed them back at first, the rearguard had put up a good fight and stopped them.

“Tch! Letting this chance go just because of these guys is so lame! I guess I can’t afford to relax too much. Hey, twin-blade, I’m gonna start taking this a little seriously!” Gustavo shouted.

Oddly enough, Gustavo’s thoughts lined up with Dietrich’s from just a little while ago, as he came out with an even fiercer set of attacks than before. The quality of Sword Man’s attacks changed. The intensity stayed the same, but the trajectory of its sword strokes were unshackled. It was unclear what Gustavo was seeing, but he was able to squeeze his sword into gaps so small they

couldn't even be called openings, forcing Dietrich on the back foot as he tried to defend against these attacks on a moment's notice.

Sparks flew ceaselessly from Guairelinde's armor, and it was taking more damage by the moment. The scarlet knight still stood because it had extra armor for close combat, but any normal machine would have long since been destroyed.

"So he's been playing this entire time?! Grk, I'm being pushed back by a sword?!" Dietrich grunted.

This battle, dense with action, saw their mana pools empty in a flash. Would they run out of mana and be rendered immobile? Or would one of them be fatally wounded first? Either outcome was just a matter of time.

"Hmmm. You were a good sword user," said Gustavo. "You managed to satisfy me. But I'm done. Just go down already."

Sword Man's merciless attacks continued. While he was slowly being cornered, Dietrich noticed that, oddly enough, he wasn't disheartened. In fact, the situation was just making him burn brighter with the will to fight.

"You want me to fall...to lose?" he replied. "No! I haven't and I won't. Me and Guairelinde are still here!"

Memories of his past loss welled up in the back of his mind. He had experienced utter defeat before. And it wasn't because he fell in battle. No, he'd *run* from it.

"Guairelinde's telling me that our road doesn't go back! It wants me moving forward! Got it?!"

The surrounding sounds faded away. He stopped caring about the incoming sword strokes and all the resultant sparks. All Dietrich heard was a low rumble like from a powerful torrent of water. This was a state that the company commander had recently started to achieve—he was totally calm.

He wasn't afraid because a potential loss was so close. It was the opposite—a pure red ferocity had started to burn within him. At some point, a smile had formed on his face. Guairelinde could have been called his other self, and it wasn't just good at attacking. In truth, there was a brutal "will" inside it, and all

its hidden weapons were for the sole purpose of destroying enemies.

Guirelinde's movements changed just a little. It had been on the defense this entire time, but now it took a step into Sword Man's attacks. Was it suicide, or just recklessness? Sword Man happily welcomed this move with its blade. Guirelinde had been damaged many times over by now and seemed like it could fall over at any time.

Guirelinde decided to take the incoming sword swipe not with its own sword, but with its arm. The arm armor screamed and warped, but that was all. Guirelinde was equipped with thick armor for melee combat, which was able to take one hit, at least. While this wasn't a move that could be used repeatedly, it was more than enough to create an opening in the enemy's guard. A metal mass burst out from inside Guirelinde's warped gauntlet with an audible noise. It was Guirelinde's Lightning Flail—a hidden weapon that now bared its fangs.

After gaining speed with an explosive spray of force, the Lightning Flail crashed into the enemy's defenseless torso. The hard sound of this impact—an impossible thing with spellfire—resounded throughout the surroundings. Broken shards of Sword Man's torso armor went flying—or so it seemed. Unfortunately, what actually went flying were swords and scabbards that had been attached to it. The foolish act of attaching swords all over his machine, brought on by the pilot's absurd obsession, had protected Sword Man in this case, acting like additional armor. Even if they hadn't been drawn, swords were still swords—Gustavo's signature weapon. He went on to show his fearsome reflexes, immediately regaining his machine's footing as it was on the verge of falling over from the impact. He even used the momentum from that to strike back.

“Heh... Ha ha... Ha ha ha ha! That one made me panic!” Gustavo shouted. “That was close, but in the end, my swords have claimed victory!!!”

Guirelinde, with its arm thrust forward, was fatally slow to react. Sword Man struck out with a counter, which seemed to almost get sucked into Guirelinde's side. The cutting edge bit deep, producing sounds of crystal snapping and shattering.

Gustavo was sure of his victory. With the torso tissue gouged out, his enemy would no longer be able to properly fight. The scarlet knight was now in checkmate.

Or at least, it should have been. This surety came with a small lowering of Gustavo's guard, but Dietrich's advance had yet to falter. Heedless of the sword digging into its side, Guairelinde stepped forward. Gustavo's smile fell from his face. He realized Dietrich's intention, and hurriedly tried to fall back, but Guairelinde reached Sword Man before that could happen.

"Wha— *You bastard!* Damn, you're persistent! You still haven't given up?!"

"Of course I haven't!" Dietrich shot back. "I'm never giving up so easily again! I refuse to go down! I'm going to fight!"

Guairelinde had grabbed its enemy, and now it responded with a ferocious headbutt. The impact must have messed up Sword Man's eye crystal, as Gustavo's holomonitor began to glitch out. "Damn it! What is he, an idiot?!"

Gustavo was confused by this attack, which seemed to have no thought put into it. Dietrich was an even bigger fool than he had imagined. Sword Man and Guairelinde were both offense-specialized units, carrying as many weapons as they could pack on. However, Guairelinde had a trump card its enemy didn't: a set of Magius Jet Thrusters. With Sword Man in its arms, Guairelinde's shoulders and waist lit up with scarlet fire. The roar of directed explosions pushed both units into the air in an instant before they came crashing back down.

"Whoaaarghwhagh— Aaghh?!" Gustavo screamed.

Both sides were tangled together, rolling on the ground. They were tossed around in their cockpits, and neither had the leeway to right themselves. However, Gustavo wrung out all the effort available to him to grab his controls; then he made Sword Man let go of the sword that was inside Guairelinde, got its legs in between them, and kicked Guairelinde away. Now that it was approaching its limit, Guairelinde didn't put up much resistance, and so they separated.

"Y-You're crazy! What the hell..." Gustavo tried to stand Sword Man up. It'd been damaged in the charge and the subsequent crash to the ground, but it was

far from out of the fight.

With a sudden thought, he turned to check on the state of his enemy and was greeted with a fearsome sight. Once again, the light of fire was glinting from Guairelinde's thrusters, and it stood up while spinning like a top. With the muscles in its belly destroyed, it couldn't move properly anymore, but it still stood.

"Wh-What's wrong with you...? WHAT ARE YOU?!" For the first time, Gustavo felt real, pure fear. He was afraid of these moves that defied common sense and his enemy's cutthroat obsession with victory.

Sword Man had yet to get up, but Guairelinde was already closing the gap. It was true that it couldn't move properly anymore, but it used its unsteadiness to lean into the attack. There were no martial arts forms or anything of the sort involved—this attack relied purely on mass and momentum. Gustavo was confused in the extreme, but he still managed to respond. However, he then realized a fatal truth. Sword Man no longer had a *sword in hand*. Its blade was still in Guairelinde's side.

Now swordless, Sword Man stopped in a daze. Guairelinde mercilessly attacked, its twin blades severing Sword Man's arms. It'd now lost most of its combat capabilities.

"My sword— How could I lose?!" Gustavo said in disbelief.

Still in the follow-through pose of its strike, Guairelinde activated its back weapons. The Shotels fired at point-blank range, where there was no possibility of dodging, and blades of atmosphere swirled forth. Sword Man took a direct hit, and it fell, pieces of armor and crystal scattering as it did. Then, it stopped, never to stand again.

"No way, Sword Man lost?!"

The combo of Gustavo Maldness and his Sword Man were famed as nearly the strongest in Jaloudek's army. The sight of them *losing* to—not even drawing with—the enemy dealt the rest of the Jaloudekian force a strong shock. This translated into a huge chance for Second Company.

"Commander Dee's done it!"

“Awwwright! Now’s our chance! Get ‘em! Beat them down so hard they won’t be able to chase us!”

Their morale rose instantly, and the Kardetolles mounted a fierce attack on the Tyrantors. Even though the shock lasted only for a moment, the Tyrantors were late to react and ended up taking Second Company’s assault. What’s more, with Gustavo down, their own discipline was in shambles.

“Okay, let’s make like a leaf before they recover!”

“Hey, what should we do? Commander Dee’s fallen over.”

Indeed, though it had defeated Sword Man, Guairelinde was also in bad shape. The wound in its gut was especially bad, and it could no longer stand properly. It was currently on one knee, using its swords as supports. There was no sign of it moving anywhere.

“I’ll let you have the title of the strongest swordsman... But I’m taking this victory.” Dietrich let out a long breath inside the dimness of his cockpit. Guairelinde’s mana pool was empty now, and it couldn’t move a finger. Suddenly, he remembered that they were supposed to be retreating, and his face spasmed heavily.

“Agh, whoops. I think I may have...gone too far.”

A silhouette knight without mana was basically an ornament. He would soon be surrounded by the enemy.

“It looks like...I’ll have to abandon Guairelinde.”

This was no time to wallow in sentimentality—he could hear heavy footsteps coming from behind his machine. Unable to turn Guairelinde around, Dietrich started to panic. He couldn’t bear to leave his beloved silhouette knight behind, but neither did he want to die. Now was his only chance to escape.

“Don’t you think you pushed yourself a bit too hard, Dee?!” In the midst of his conundrum, a familiar voice came from behind. The footsteps had belonged to Addy’s Tzenndrimble.

“Yeesh, to think I’d end up getting that warning from you of all people, when you’re the poster child for pushing it. But, Addy, what are you doing here? What

happened to Ernesti?”

“Well, y’see... Ikaruga and the drake thing flew off at full speed, and it was impossible to catch up, so I just came back.”

Ikaruga and Vouivre had taken full advantage of their thrusters to continue their incredible battle. If Addy had followed them too far, she would have been completely isolated, so she’d had to reluctantly give up the chase.



“Oh, well. Ernesti’ll probably be able to make it work no matter what happens,” said Dietrich. “I need help more right now.”

“Got it,” Addy said somewhat flippantly. “For now I’ll just haul your Guairelinde around with Tzenny.”

“Much obliged.”

The Tzenndrimble shot the towing anchor out behind it and attached the anchor to Guairelinde.

“Don’t worry about it!” she exclaimed. “Ernie’d be really sad if I left it behind, after all.”

“Ah, yeah, I guess. But couldn’t you be at least a little worried about *me*?! What an awful junior you are, jeez.”

With that, the Tzenndrimble took off, and the vibrations caused by Guairelinde being dragged along the ground reverberated all the way into the cockpit.

Dietrich, unable to stand the intensity of the shaking, shouted, “Gaaah— Wai— Come on, this is crazy! It’s gonna brea— I’m gonna break!”

“Guairelinde’s already in tatters, so just a little more damage won’t matter. Don’t worry!” replied Addy.

“What do you mean, it won’t matter?! What if something gets torn off on the way back?!”

Tzenndrimble continued to tow Guairelinde away, with Dietrich complaining loudly all the while. Second Company chased after them, and that was how they started their retreat in earnest.



Let’s rewind time back to before Second Company started their retreat: The battle between Ikaruga and Vouivre was reaching an important turning point, just as the ground battle had.

Vouivre was continuously attacking Ikaruga with a ferocious combination of melee and spellfire. However, Ikaruga had yet to let more than a few of those

attacks hit, and it was still dodging without any degradation in its movement. Dorotheo was gradually getting more and more irritated. That was when the crewmate who was watching the reactor made a melancholic report.

“Captain, our mana pool is lower than expected. It’s down to below thirty percent... The supply from the ether reactor isn’t keeping up.”

“Grrr, so we’ve been exhausting ourselves that much... And yet, that damn fierce god hasn’t slowed for even a moment. What kind of reactor can store that much mana? No, maybe the loss of one of our Ankyulorsas has affected us more than I thought.” Dorotheo’s tone was as grim as his subordinate’s.

In the midst of their battle, one of Ikaruga’s powerful Bladed Cannon shots had destroyed an Ankyulorsa. The Jaloudekian silhouette knight had suffered a direct hit, which heavily damaged everything from its intake and exhaust mechanism to its silver nerves, making it unable to supply mana. It was fatal for the unit, and they probably wouldn’t be able to repair it in the middle of battle.

“I didn’t treat it like a regular opponent—I was even prepared for some damage. However, losing one ‘life’ against that fearsome thing has hurt us deeply.”

Vouivre was over ten times the size of a silhouette knight—far too large for something made by man. The Physical Boost spell supporting it needed unimaginable amounts of mana to maintain. A normal ether reactor was perfectly sized for a single silhouette knight, so one or two of them had no hope of supporting Vouivre. In order to make up for that, they would have needed the heart of something like a certain large monster. However, such a method was impossible in the Occidents, where almost all monsters had died out. This was a fatal problem that Horacio had run up against in the past.

But eventually, he’d stumbled upon a new technology that could solve this problem in the battlefield that was Kuscheperka: the so-called “wizard-style” silhouette knight. This type of silhouette knight took its spellfire bombardment capabilities to the extreme, and one of its signature characteristics was a large amount of capacity frame, which was originally in the form of a wall robe.

So, Horacio thought, *If multiple silhouette knights share the same wall robe, would it not give them access to an even bigger mana pool?* And as the father of

the levitating ship, Horacio thought of a ship's hull, and his idea reached its ultimate form. Vouivre had Ankyulorsas lined up in all primary directions, which combined with the drakehead for a total of thirteen silhouette knights. These shared a sort of ultrahuge-scale capacity equipment, connecting all thirteen into one. Ankyulorsas were an important source of defense and offense as well as hearts that kept the ship going. This was the secret behind the mechanical drake's "lives."

And now, one of those had been lost in the fight against Ikaruga. It had twelve "lives" left. That might have seemed enough, but the difference was huge. In addition to the mana required by the machine's Physical Boost, there was the mana consumed by the continuous use of the Magius Jet Thrusters, the unending spellfire, and the furious melee combat. The drake's full power greedily ate mana at every turn.

"I suppose we chased it too far." Dorotheo squeezed his control yokes hard. He'd gotten a little too fired up in the face of his sworn enemy. Vouivre was powerful enough to be called this age's strongest weapon, but that also meant no one knew its limits.

No matter how fortified the stronghold or how many silhouette knights faced it, the drake-ship was far from running against those limits. It needed to fight against history's worst and strongest enemy, Ikaruga, in order to see how far its power could reach. That was why now was the time that limit was exposed.

"There is no other choice. Everything is for naught if the drake cannot move," Dorotheo admitted. "Raise our altitude. We must recover our mana."

Vouivre dropped speed and unfurled its wing sails, returning to cruising mode. It needed to stop using its Magius Jet Thrusters to keep mana expenditure down. With the loss of its speed, one of its strongest features, it had no hope of fighting properly with Ikaruga. The Etheric Levitator at its core was getting ether pumped into it as fast as possible. As the ether inside rose, its rainbow glow grew stronger. At the same time, the Levitating Field buoying the drake grew stronger as well, and it rose quickly through the air.

Ernie would never miss such a change in tactics. "It seems the time has come. I knew it would come down to mana pools; that is the weakness of magic. I

needed to sacrifice the heart of a behemoth to maintain Ikaruga's power while it flies. What did you offer up for your machine?" Ikaruga flipped over midair, lined up its Magius Jet Thrusters, and flew forth directly at Vouivre.

In terms of mana expenditure, Ikaruga was also a terrible glutton. However, Ikaruga was just a silhouette knight. Its basic mana needs were low, and its upkeep was much more reasonable than the drake-ship's. Even so, it had a pair of powerful hearts that surpassed all thirteen of Vouivre's "lives." This insane mana output had created the opportunity to turn this situation around.

That was why the knight runner named Ernesti had aimed for a battle of attrition. There was probably no need to bring up the example he'd made in his fight against the behemoth. He was perfectly capable of fighting insanely protracted engagements for the sake of victory. He controlled the vicious humanoid weapon that was Ikaruga and accelerated heavily, forcing him to endure the g-forces. For him, anything involving robots was fun. This was a feat only possible because of his eccentricities.

"Now, I can't afford to let this chance go. I'll make a feast out of you right here and now!" Ernie declared.

"Damn you! I knew you'd give chase!" Dorotheo growled after hearing the report from the ship's bottom lookout. The drake currently had some distance from its foe, but Ikaruga would likely catch up given its speed. However, Vouivre did not enact any countermeasure—it simply continued to try to rise as fast as possible.

Dorotheo was supported by what Horacio had said to him before he set out. *If even Vouivre's power is not enough... Go to the highest peaks. Fly high, higher than anything. The sky will surely provide its ruler with both power and protection.* He hadn't gone into any details, but he'd left with just those mysterious words.

But now, Dorotheo had no choice but to believe. "If it will harm the fierce god, then it is my ally. I will not hesitate to even use a demon if I must."

The Etheric Levitator was now full of ether. Vouivre rose higher and higher, until its limit. It went up to the clouds and continued rising until, finally, it broke through into the blue sky beyond.

“So this is...the world above the clouds,” Dorotheo breathed. “How beautiful.”

The moment he broke through the gray clouds, a dazzlingly bright white world jumped out to greet him. Given how the Etheric Levitator worked, ascending this high was a huge waste of ether. As such, this was the first time Dorotheo had gone above the clouds. For a moment in the midst of this battle, Dorotheo was entranced by the view before him. It only lasted an instant, in which Vouivre continued to rise, casting its shadow on the clouds below.

Ikaruga followed suit as its target disappeared among the clouds. “I suppose this altitude is a bit difficult for Magius Jet Thrusters. It seems like the end is near.” This game of tag couldn’t go on forever. When Ernie had researched the levitating ship, he’d gained knowledge on the Etheric Levitator.

It was an extremely useful device, but it had one large drawback: The Levitating Field’s output was bound by how much ether it had.

It was impossible to go infinitely high with it. There would always be a limit.

“Considering its size along with the capabilities of the levitating ships we’ve seen thus far, it should be close to its limit once it breaches the clouds.” Ernie sighed. “It’s about time to put an end—”

Suddenly, he felt that something was off. His breathing was erratic, and his vision was blurry. What’s more, it felt like something was pressing down on his chest, pushing his body down. This was a serious change in his condition, which got him to furrow his brow.

“What...is this?” He panted. “I...can breathe. I know about *air pressure* problems. I furnished Ikaruga with a script to pressurize the cockpit, so this should have been taken care of. Is it something else?”

Ernie took the opportunity to check his machine before his condition worsened. He was connected to Ikaruga through Full Control, so he understood how Ikaruga was doing better than his own body. He looked for any minor changes in the responses given by the script, and before long, he found a large one.

“The mana supply is...growing?”

The two large reactors that granted Ikaruga vast amounts of mana, Behemoth's Heart and Queen's Coronet, had outputs that far outstripped any normal reactor. Because of this, it was easy to miss that the supply of mana to the machine had grown larger than normal. This increase in mana supply might look good at first glance, but it carried with it a serious problem.

"The amount of airflow hasn't changed. Given the drop in air pressure, I would have actually expected it to decrease." Ernie panted again. "Which means...the amount of *ether* has increased?"

It was the same principle the ether supplier worked under. If the amount of ether being taken in increased, the amount of mana being output by the ether reactor would also increase. However, in all this time, there had been no change that resulted in an increase of mana output large enough to be felt.

The main symptoms were a burden on the heart and abnormal breathing. That marked a change in Ernie's own body, as well as the activity of the ether reactors. And when he remembered the side effect of the ether supplier, the truth suddenly flashed into Ernie's mind.

"The higher I ascend, the thinner the air gets." He panted. "Instead, the ether gets denser... Which means... Oh, no!"

Ether was the foundation of all this world's phenomena and thus a very important substance. But for beings and ether reactors that were adapted to the thin ether of the surface, this environment of high-density ether wasn't tolerable for long. The fatal flaw of the ether supplier was now fully exposed to Ikaruga and Ernie.

Meanwhile, Ikaruga continued to rise until it, too, finally broke through the clouds. In the midst of this pure-blue sky, Vouivre could be found even higher. Ernie glared up at it as it seemed to slide over the sea of clouds spreading below them. Ikaruga lifted up its Bladed Cannons and took aim, but it was no good—the shots wouldn't reach. Ernie didn't fire, and Ikaruga turned away, averting its gaze as it started to descend.

Ernie continued to think. His knowledge from Earth was telling him that beyond the sky was vacuum—space. That was when the laws of this world combined inside him to spit out a single realization.

“I see... So in this world, beyond its skies is most likely...another sky of pure ether.”

As atmospheric pressure lessened, ether density increased. The realization Ernie had was something anyone would realize quickly, as long as they knew the formula. “Vacuum” in this world was most likely just space filled purely with ether.

“The influence of ether should be the same for everything. That drake clearly rose into the sky knowing about this change. Which means... I see, they have some sort of countermeasure.”

Ikaruga descended, eventually coming out below the clouds again. Ernie was relieved as his breathing calmed down, and cracked a smile.

“As it is now, Ikaruga can’t reach those heights. I’ll admit it, you won this one. But I understand your trick. There won’t be a next time.”

Manipulating its thrusters, Ikaruga turned around. It then withdrew, going to regroup with the New Kuscheperkan forces.



“Agh, damn it all, I lost,” Gustavo grouched as he looked up vacantly at the sky, sitting on his Sword Man’s open torso armor.

Sword Man’s arms had been destroyed, and it was otherwise damaged all over. Almost all of its swords had been broken too; it was truly on the verge of death. If Guairelinde hadn’t gone down with him, Gustavo would probably have been finished off along with Sword Man. Him being able to space out like this was truly a godsend.

“It’s so quiet. I wonder if my old man’s battle is over too?”

He couldn’t see the fight between the fierce god and the drake-ship by looking up at the sky. Their battle had likely reached a conclusion, just as the battle on the ground had. He didn’t think that Vouivre had lost, but he was a little worried when he thought about how fearsome the enemy’s combat prowess was.

Heavy footsteps rang out behind him. When he looked back, he saw that a

Tyrantor had come to retrieve him. Gustavo listlessly waved his arm, letting the soldier know he was unhurt.

“What do I do now? Well, I guess I’m just lucky I’m alive.”

His beloved Sword Man, his other self, had been thoroughly destroyed, and there was nothing to be done about it. It wasn’t just him—the Tyrantors had also taken a fair amount of losses. They’d been forced to give up on their pursuit of the New Kuscheperkans.

That was how this series of battles involving a fortress city ended. The result was that the Jaloudek Army had suppressed the fortress city and won.

The New Kuscheperkan survivors had managed to retreat before they could be totally annihilated. The Order of the Silver Phoenix had appeared to support them and suffered the blow of having their company commander fall. Meanwhile, the Jaloudekian side also suffered significant losses. However, that was ignored in the face of the greater victory.

On the other side, the fierce god that had so far proven invincible and undefeatable on the battlefield had been forced to bend the knee to the rules of the world, realizing its own weakness thanks to its battle with the drake-ship. This chance encounter between each side’s greatest asset ended in something like a draw.

This battle was significant. The fact that New Kuscheperka’s trump card and spiritual support—the Order of the Silver Phoenix—had lost a battle was a big shock. It was enough to cast a shadow over all the battles to come after.

The year was 1282 O.C.

The season was turning to fall, pregnant with an ominous air.

Part 10: Retake the Capital Arc

Chapter 42: Preparations for Battle

Some time had passed since the mutually painful clash between the Order of the Silver Phoenix and the Emerald Drake Knights.

Since that clash, the Grand Storm of the West entered a quiet period, like a lull between waves. This was because the greatest piece on both sides had been blunted.

Meanwhile, skirmishes between the two sides continued. The knights of New Kuscheperka bravely went forth to reclaim their land, but they were repelled every time by Tyrantors focusing on defense. The front lines didn't move much, and nothing anyone did affected the general situation. Eventually, they came to understand that the storm would start once again when the two sleeping beasts woke up.



The air-port on the outskirts of Dervankhul had been made by basically just clearing out some forest, and it was where the Emerald Drake Order was based. Dorotheo was the captain of this order as well as the captain of Vouivre, and he was currently looking upon his ship, the only one moored in the air-port.

Then, he shot a question to someone behind him. "So how go the repairs?"

"Well, the damage to the ship was pretty light, so it'll be fixed by just switching out some parts. But the Ankyulorsa is a bit more difficult. Anyway, the most important thing is that if nothing changes, we'll face the same mana shortage when we next fight that fierce god." The reply was light in tone. It was Horacio, who answered while flipping through documents on the repair's progress. In front of them was Vouivre, resting on its side.

Blue sky was visible on the other side of the ship. There was no building in the world that was big enough to contain Vouivre's hull, when it was so much

bigger than a normal levitating ship's. That was why, despite being a top secret weapon, its repairs were being done in the open. The surrounding forest was the only thing hiding it from the outside world.

The sound of a silhouette knight's footsteps passed by beside them. It was a Lesvant that had been requisitioned for work, and it was ferrying materials. Constructing and repairing levitating ships was a very large task, one for which human strength was not enough.

Horacio let out a heavy sigh. "Jeez. For this drake, with its crazy mana output after linking thirteen ether reactors together, to still be short on mana... It's nothing but a nightmare."

"I don't want to hear your complaints. No matter how impossible it seems, we must overcome this," Dorotheo said brusquely.

Horacio simply shrugged his shoulders. "Fine with me. I *do* have a plan, after a fashion. Well, just to warn you, it's still in its trial stages. I wonder if we really have no choice but to use it."

"What? So you do have a good countermeasure. What is it?" Dorotheo turned to fix his gaze upon Horacio, which led him to notice something being carried in on a rack. It was about half as big as a silhouette knight, and it was as heavy as its size implied. The silhouette knight that was carrying it was only barely able to do so.

"That's an ether reactor."

"Hm? If so, it seems quite different than normal. The reactors I'm familiar with are no larger than a human."

The thing Horacio claimed to be an ether reactor was fitted with an excessive number of additional pieces, swelling it to a distorted shape. Of course, as a knight runner, Dorotheo had some knowledge of a silhouette knight's innards. So he knew that what he was seeing was a great deviation from the norm, and he couldn't help but fix a suspicious gaze upon Horacio.

"You are correct. This is a prototype ether reactor adapted to high concentrations of ether. I call it the Drakesblood Grail." Though Horacio didn't seem very energetic, an eerie light shone from deep within his eyes. He spread

his arms wide and started an explanation that nobody had asked for. “I’m sure you know that a normal ether reactor degrades when exposed to such high concentrations of ether, and that if kept in those circumstances, it will eventually cease to function entirely. That is the fatal flaw of our useful ether suppliers. However, that is only because our reactors are built for the thin ether of the surface. That is why I have taken advantage of a certain technology derived from our secret—the Pure Ether Effect theory. By building a reactor on the premise of using dense, high-purity ether, it will allow us to maintain high mana output without having the reactor degrade.”

“What?! Lord Kojass, if such a convenient thing exists, why haven’t we been using it?!” Dorotheo’s expression instantly turned stern.

In contrast, Horacio sighed listlessly as he shrugged his shoulders and replied nonchalantly. “Yes, well, not everything is sunshine and rainbows. It’s essentially a nonfunctional lump here on the surface. The only way it would work would be...let’s see...if we were constantly feeding it with ether suppliers. That would do it.”

Dorotheo tripped over his next words. That alone was enough to make him realize the big problem with this new reactor. “The etherite on board is precious fuel to adjust the ship’s altitude. Not only that, but Vouivre doesn’t have much extra room, so we’re already short on storage space. If it will eat into our reserves, no matter how much mana it puts out...”

“I knew you’d catch on quickly,” said Horacio. “That’s why I told you it wasn’t complete. However, the mana it creates is on a whole other level. On that, I will stake my name.”

“Grrr...”

Vouivre boasted extremely powerful combat capabilities, but because its construction was rushed, it had a lot of problems as well. It wasn’t hard to see that if the Drakesblood Grail were to be installed, these issues would become even more pronounced. All of Dorotheo’s instincts as a veteran warrior were already telling him that the reactor was just finished enough that it was possible to coax it into working. Trying to do anything more with it would likely just result in an inestimable burden on Vouivre’s controls.

Still, though, he did not hesitate. “Fine. If I cannot deal with something of this caliber, I would be unable to face the fierce god anyway.”

Just a single silhouette knight, Ikaruga, held more power than anyone could imagine, and it was an enemy. Even Vouivre, bringing all it had, could not defeat it. In order to bring it down, they also needed to break through the limits of common sense.

“I understand. Then I will take responsibility and guide this drake to even greater heights.” Horacio bowed.

Dorotheo nodded back before turning to leave. He got a few steps away when he suddenly turned and asked, “What do you think is the source of that fierce god’s power? It overtook that drake’s thirteen lives just by itself. What would have to go into such an insane thing?”

Horacio replied with a single short snort of breath. Then, unashamed, he spread his arms wide and looked up to the heavens. “I would gladly sacrifice anything to solve that mystery and be able to do it myself.”

After a long pause, Dorotheo replied, “Hm... I suppose obsessing too much over the unknown would bring no benefit. All we must do is bring the drake’s power to bear and defeat it. Next time, for sure!”

The large reactor was being implanted into Vouivre’s belly. A large number of knightsmiths and silhouette knights were working hard, and Dorotheo ground his teeth as he watched them.



While the Kingdom of Jaloudek was hurrying to repair Vouivre, New Kuscheperka was preparing for the next battle as well.

At the center of the current capital, Fontanie, stood Castle Raspede. Queen Eleonora fielded many reports here every day. Of course, not everything was reported straight to her. The contents were sorted through, and her aide, Martina, would collect the reports that should be given to the queen and bring them to her.

“As expected, everyone is worried,” said Eleonora.

“Unfortunately, our country is still at a disadvantage,” Martina replied. “And we suffered a loss in the midst of that. Not only that, but the effect is all the more pronounced because *they* were involved.”

Eleonora sighed and looked up from the report. She knew painfully well how lacking in experience she was, so she made it a point to look through as many opinions as possible on top of the war reports. Recently, many of the same opinions had been expressed.

She looked around until her gaze rested on a certain knight standing bored in the corner of the room and turned to him. “Sir Archid, may I have a moment of your time? There is a matter I’d like to discuss with you.”

“Huh? Me? Uh, ah, yeah. Sure. I... I’ll do anything within my power?” Kid, who was serving as a guardian knight directly under Eleonora, stayed right next to her like any guard would do while he was working. Any stuff about knights or knight runners aside, he was rather oblivious about politics, which was why he sounded so unsure. He’d never expected her to ask him about anything like this.

“I would like to know how the Order of the Silver Phoenix...no, how Sir Ernesti has been spending his time. Is he...dwelling on the result of the battle?” Eleonora asked.

Though he didn’t know why she was asking, Kid didn’t hesitate to reply. “No way. Ernie’s totally fine. True, he might have lost or failed in his mission, but he’d never be depressed about it. In fact, I’d bet he’s happily plotting away with the boss about the rematch. I bet it’s not gonna be anything good.”

Should that really be called trust? Eleonora and Martina wondered, but neither had the answer. Either way, it was plenty clear that whatever was happening was normal to Kid.

Eleonora thought for a little while. “May I meet with Sir Ernesti? I’d like to talk to him.”



Ernie immediately made his way to the queen’s office upon receiving word of his summons. “I, Ernesti Echevalier, captain of the Order of the Silver Phoenix, have arrived in response to your summons.”

“Thank you for making the time in your busy schedule,” Eleonora replied.

Though she’d been worried about him, Ernie seemed to be the same as always at first glance. He wore his usual buoyant smile, and strangely, he looked like he was having fun. But it was also true that she couldn’t tell what he was thinking.

“As you may have expected, I would like to talk to you about your battle with the drake the other day,” Eleonora opened. “We lost the fort despite the presence of you and your order, Sir Ernesti. The men are shaken.”

The fact that the Order of the Silver Phoenix and Ernesti had lost dealt a large shock to the New Kuscheperkan army. After all, Ikaruga was ridiculously strong—enough to defeat a battalion of Tyrantors by itself, a frankly unbelievable notion. It was understandable that the men had optimistically believed that Ikaruga would come out on top, no matter how strong the rumored drake was. That, in turn, made the fact that the fort had been taken weigh all the heavier on them, even if they had avoided total annihilation.

“I see,” said Ernie. “It’s understandable, since we’ve been on the front lines all this time. Protecting that fort was a difficult prospect, even for us. Furthermore, the drake was more powerful a weapon than expected—especially its flames. I never would have thought such a powerful siege weapon existed. That thing is no longer a simple levitating ship, nor is it a silhouette knight. We should consider it a completely new category of weapon.”

“Do you not stand a chance, even though your Ikaruga is so powerful it is referred to as a fierce god, Sir Ernesti?” Eleonora asked. “I am worried, and many of the soldiers are as well. So please, share your thoughts with me, Sir Ernesti. What kind of enemy is the drake? And if you were to fight it once again...could you win?”

Ernie did not seem saddened by the timid question. In fact, he answered with a happy smile. “I lost that fight because I didn’t know about a certain law of the world and suffered from ether intoxication—but that will not happen again. Also, even the drake has its weaknesses, but...they will likely have implemented a countermeasure by next time. If the same method won’t work twice, then I think Ikaruga would likely struggle alone. That’s why I’m planning to bring

sufficient forces with me next time.”

“Um, Sir Ernesti... What do you mean by ether intoxication?” the queen asked, puzzled.

“The higher you climb in the sky, the more dense the ether gets,” Ernie explained. “Since we live on the surface, we can’t withstand such high concentrations of ether for long. It will gradually affect the body. I’ve coined these symptoms ‘ether intoxication’ for convenience’s sake.”

Eleonora wasn’t alone in her confusion, as Martina and Kid hadn’t encountered this term before either. They had no choice but to believe Ernie’s words, since he was the only one to have reached those heights, but that still didn’t wipe away their doubts.

Martina groaned. This conversation led to a rather unhappy conclusion. “I heard that the drake easily flew at those heights. That means that not only is the enemy large, it has also adapted to this law and made it its ally. And it was already a force to be reckoned with...”

“You’re right. As one might expect, their knowledge and skills concerning the skies above are a step or two ahead of us, starting with the levitating ship. However, if this is limited to combat, there *are* ways to deal with them. In essence, we just need to not let the drake ascend.” Ernie spoke as if it was nothing, but no one else had any idea of what would have to be done to accomplish such a feat.

Martina’s expression grew more and more grim. They needed to defeat the drake, or their kingdom would never be able to breathe easily again. “I don’t doubt your power, Sir Ernesti. But can such a dangerous foe really be fought?”

Unlike Martina, who was only thinking in terms of the war between their countries, Eleonora had spoken as if honestly worrying about a friend. It wasn’t very fitting for a queen to do so, but that might just have been one of her good points.

“The only ones capable of keeping up with you and Ikaruga would be the Order of the Silver Phoenix,” Martina continued. “However, I have heard that you have many injured after that battle. Will you be able to cope?” As far as she knew, no silhouette knight was Ikaruga’s equal. If it needed help, then she had

no idea what kind of form that help would take.

“The battle with the drake will take place in the sky,” said Ernie. “That would be too much even for the Order of the Silver Phoenix. That’s why I would like to make use of the levitating ship we captured in the battle for Micilie.”

“But, Ernie, we only caught a regular levitating ship. Wouldn’t it be useless against such a powerful weapon?” Kid jumped in.

“Indeed. That’s why I’m going to work with the boss to modify it so it’s capable of fighting first. It’s precious because it’s our only one, but it must be done for the sake of victory.”

Kid paused for a moment, surprised. “It sounds like you’re going to transform it into something completely different.”

Eleonora was also surprised, but in a different way. Ernie and the Order of the Silver Phoenix had, no matter the hardship, never wavered, never lost heart, and never stopped moving forward. They’d helped reclaim land taken by Jaloudek, and they hadn’t been cowed by their first sighting of the levitating ship. They had produced an unbelievable amount of power for the new kingdom, and they’d crushed all sorts of troubles that had lain before them.

A genuine question came to Eleonora’s mind and flew straight out of her lips. “How can you continue to fight so hard for so long...? Haven’t you ever felt afraid, Sir Ernesti?”

In terms of apparent age, Ernie wasn’t that far removed from Eleonora. However, there was a fearsomely large gap between them that couldn’t just be chalked up to gender. Ernie didn’t stop, even when facing a foe as mighty as the drake alone, nor when the laws of the world itself rejected him. It was as if he didn’t know how to be disheartened. Even now, Eleonora had so many worries and felt so powerless, and he seemed to be the exact opposite. So she wanted to know what drove him to be like that.

Seeming to have sensed something, Ernie tightened up his expression and answered seriously. “Making, piloting, and fighting silhouette knights is my hobby, and entirely what I live for. As long as this life of mine continues, that will never change. The more formidable that mechanical drake is, the higher the wall I must surmount, the higher my own silhouette knight must rise. There’s

still room for improvement! The moment I think that, the more fun I start to have, and any troubles fall by the wayside. Don't you agree?"

"No, absolutely not." Immediately, Kid shot Ernie down without mercy.

Ernie seemed unhappy, but his true motivation was very hard for others to understand.

In the midst of the rather awkward atmosphere that followed, Eleonora was the only one who seemed to be earnestly considering his words.



Though New Kuscheperka's morale was declining, some were still as burning with motivation as ever. Or, more accurately, some were too busy to feel depressed.

"Hey! Anyone who's finished their adjustments should take their places! We're activating it!" shouted the boss, David.

In the temporary "levitating ship workshop" next to the air-port built on the outskirts of Fontanie, the knightsmiths of the Order of the Silver Phoenix had already made the building their own and were working hard day and night to research and modify the levitating ship. David was reclining in the captain's seat at the moment.

"Everyone's taken their places, boss!"

"Good... Then let's get a test going. Pump in the mana!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" Batson and the other knightsmiths gave a spirited reply as they turned to face the various instruments installed on the bridge. Though this part of the bridge was originally just used to send messages via the speaking tubes, it had changed quite a bit in a short time.

"Injecting ether into the Etheric Levitator!"

While staring at the instrument readouts, they pressed all kinds of buttons and carefully manipulated the steering wheel and various levers. The readings rose slowly, and once they reached a certain point, the order's knightsmiths were enveloped in a strange feeling.

"Density increasing. We've entered the Levitating Field!"

“Great,” the boss shouted into a speaking tube. “Reel in the anchor! Tell the figurehead not to activate the Blow Engine just yet!”

His men placed around the ship responded. They reeled in the anchor, and the ship started to slowly float upward.

The boss relaxed a bit and wiped off some sweat. “Okay, looks like there are no problems. Man, this Etheric Levitator thing is so delicate. If you’re even a little rough with it, it just starts to sulk.”

Those words, spat out to relieve his tension, were filled with his real feelings—they’d nearly crashed more than once during testing, after all. The Etheric Levitator’s structure might have been simple, but the behavior of the Levitating Field it created was not. Depending on human effort to control it required a lot of experience in adjusting it. Still, that was all in the past.

“This thing’s working properly, which means the magius engine we connected to the Etheric Levitator is doing good work,” the boss said.

The innovative modification they’d made was to automate the control of the Etheric Levitator. Previously, the levitating ship was controlled entirely by hand. That stretched from adjusting the density of ether in the Etheric Levitator to even the control of the Blow Engine. The Order of the Silver Phoenix had wanted to simplify that drastically. At the same time, they’d made it so the ship could be controlled almost entirely from the bridge to cut out having to relay orders through the speaking tubes. All the levers and buttons now installed in the bridge were the result of these modifications.

“I don’t think this’ll solve everything, but it will make it usable with our numbers.”

“It was a lot of work getting it to move, wasn’t it?”

The order had made these changes because they’d found it difficult to control the ship. Part of it was due to a lack of skill, but the biggest reason was a lack of numbers. Levitating ships required a certain number of crew stationed in every section. That would be difficult to achieve considering their size.

The answer to this problem came in the form of a magius engine. They’d developed a specialized script—well, Ernie did, of course—for controlling the

ship, and the engine was connected to each part of the ship using silver nerves.

Ernie had been extremely gleeful when he'd first gotten onto the levitating ship—at the very least, that was what it looked like to those around him—and he'd run all over inspecting things, until finally he'd ended up messing with the Etheric Levitator's adjustment lever repeatedly. The *acrobatic* maneuvers done by the ship that day were still on the minds, but not the lips, of everyone who'd experienced it.

At any rate, this magius engine reflected the experience they'd gained back then. That said, though the script was “automated,” it was in no way omnipotent yet. It was only capable of making the ship easier to control.

“Hmmm. It's gotten less fussy, though. Maybe down to a *kinda* selfish brat, I'd say?” That was how the boss expressed his impressions. In other words, the possibilities for this device were exciting now that the controls were simplified.

After the experiment ended with success, they immediately brought the results to Ernie. While perusing the report along with the boss, Ernie groaned. “We expanded the control system of the figurehead's magius engine. That let us strengthen its integration with the bridge, and we were able to reduce the number of minimum necessary crew. Now, as expected, we need to tackle the propulsion system. If we're to change out the Blow Engine... As I thought, we might need to give it Magius Jet Thrusters.”

“Sure, that's about the only thing I can think of too,” said the boss. “If we're trying to send this huge thing flying with it, then we'll need to make it as powerful as the one on Ikaruga at the very least, and the mana supply won't be able to keep up.”

“That's a problem. And it's not like Ikaruga and I want to spend our time as ferrymen.”

In order to assist Ikaruga in its fight against Vouivre, the first step was to modify the levitating ship. It would be putting the cart before the horse to have its modifications tie Ikaruga down in the process.

“The propulsion system is important, but so are the weapons,” noted Ernie. “We need to think of something powerful enough to strike down that drake. I'll need your help for this, boss. We'll decorate this thing with the best stuff so

that next time we meet, I can give that drake the *best* welcome.”

“What the hell’re you planning on stuffing into the ship, kid...?”

Ignoring the boss and his bewilderment, Ernie started pondering—though nobody knew what, exactly. His imagination flew far, and it was clear to anyone he was having fun. But behind all that blazed the fires of obsession.

“That drake sounds like a pretty insane thing. We all know you’re incredible, but it’s still amazing that you and Ikaruga managed to fight it alone. So was losing seriously that unacceptable?” The boss asked the question that popped into his mind when he saw how uncharacteristically insecure Ernie was acting.

Ernie replied with a slight tilt of his head. “The loss is part of it, but more than that, I cannot allow that thing to exist. Because of how big it is, specifically. It should require a hefty Physical Boost spell to support it, but there are very few ways to support such mana that I know of.”

The methods were to either install a large reactor or to link multiple reactors in parallel. This problem was solved by the existence of monsters rather than technology, and it was hard for Ernie to believe that Jaloudek had any large reactors like Behemoth’s Heart. That was why he found it more natural to assume that the drake was using many reactors at once.

This idea was familiar to the Order of the Silver Phoenix, but to the world at large, it was still strange. Yet it wouldn’t be surprising if others were to reach the same conclusion after the order had stirred up the world as much as they had.

“Running a large amount of ether reactors in parallel would be what turned the drake into a powerful weapon. The problem here is that the drake concentrates all its power into one platform. What if it proves stronger than any silhouette knight can muster, since they can only have one reactor? Then giant weapons like this thing might get more common. Which would make silhouette knights less popular!”

Of course, whether it be a silhouette knight or Vouivre, all practical weapons had a required maintenance cost. Vouivre was without equal in terms of pure power, but it was also far out of the realm of any knighthood’s normal repertoire. That was why it was incredibly expensive to use, and it was treated

as a final resort or trump card to finish a battle.

Meanwhile, a silhouette knight's strength was that they were well understood, and it was a very stable platform. Even if more giant weapons were to appear in the world, while silhouette knights might decrease in overall number, it would take a long time for them to fall out of favor completely. Still, Ernesti could not bring himself to allow even a possibility of this happening.

"I will put an end to that thing so that silhouette knights can continue to be the center of this world. In this age in which I live, it's simply *unneeded*," said Ernie.

"O-Oh... Sure." The boss knew Ernie well, but even he was a little freaked out. Still, they would definitely face the drake again someday, so he figured the higher the boy's fighting spirit, the better, and he decided to ignore what had just happened.

Thus both the drake and the fierce god determined that the other's existence was unacceptable, and they each swore to be the end of the other. This battle would only end when one of them was destroyed.

Spurred by the selfish motivation of the captain, the silver phoenix was terribly active once more, as its members continued to modify the levitating ship.



The war's sleepy silence broke suddenly.

Both countries were preparing for the inevitable rematch of their greatest forces, but the one to finish first was Vouivre. Once again, the borders of New Kuscheperka that acted as the front lines of the war were exposed to the drake's grave threat.

Another fortress was swallowed by fire, and the news quickly reached Fontanie. The nobles immediately gathered at Castle Raspede to think of a countermeasure.

The meeting room seemed to reflect the state of the nobles' hearts. It was filled with a terribly heavy atmosphere.

“Gah... Again! Their drake burned another fortress... It burned our soldiers!”

“If we only had more Laevantias and missile javelins, surely we’d have nothing to fear?”

“As if that would be enough! Even the Order of the Silver Phoenix had trouble with it. Can we even hope to win?”

The meeting started with everyone in a pessimistic mood. The gathered nobles exchanged their opinions, but they were far from making a decision. That indecision made them even more negative. It was a vicious cycle.

Ernie was sitting in on the meeting, and now he spoke up, summarizing the situation in an attempt to change the mood. “The enemy’s strategy was the same as before, centering on the drake. A small number of ground forces accompany it, transported via levitating ship so as to avoid being surrounded. They go around and aim only for our strongholds, bringing them down. This strategy makes great use of the drake’s firepower and the levitating ship’s mobility.”

It was a simple strategy, but it was difficult to deal with because Vouivre was involved. New Kuscheperka’s army, in its current state, would find stopping them very hard.

That was when one of the nobles suddenly gave voice to a question. “But why are they going around destroying our fortresses at such a leisurely pace? If the drake is truly so overwhelmingly superior, wouldn’t they come for Fontanie straightaway? What is their aim?”

The assembled nobles exchanged looks, but silence reigned, as no one had an answer.

A bell-like voice broke the silence. It was Eleonora, making a rare answer to the question. She hadn’t been tutored in military matters, and she didn’t have any special talent in the field. That was why up until now, she hadn’t been very assertive when the subject was strategy and tactics. “The drake is afraid of the Order of the Silver Phoenix... Rather, it’s afraid of Sir Ernesti. After all, he can fight it single-handedly. If our forces were added to that...”

That statement changed the mood of the room. Though the previous battle

hadn't ended with anyone being destroyed, Ikaruga and Vouivre still had managed a draw. Though it had been forced to retreat, it wasn't as if Ikaruga had been a punching bag.

The nobles had seen the light of hope, and now they were bursting with enthusiasm.

"Then let's concentrate our forces and attack the drake before it causes any more damage! The Order of the Silver Phoenix can lead; if we send in all of our forces, victory is assured!"

"If we do that, the Tyrantors arrayed at our borders will freely prance across them. Also, the drake probably won't attack us then. I'm sure it would happily hang around all the territory we've left empty, acting as if it owns the land." Ernie's muttered comment had the collective nobles pale and quiet down.

Though it was easy to forget, the drake wasn't their only enemy. The Tyrantors were no small threat either. New Kuscheperka had to overcome both these problems at the same time.

That was when Martina opened her mouth to speak. "We must keep the Tyrantors in check. Let us continue to protect our lands while defeating the drake alone. That is the convenient solution we need. As expected...the only ones who can make such a thing possible are the Order of the Silver Phoenix."

"Now that we've fought once, and I've come to know the enemy's hand, I don't plan on losing," said Ernie. "Still, it will likely be a hard fight. That lightning guard the drake uses won't be easy to break through, even with Ikaruga's power. Once we finish modifying the ship, though, we should stand a better chance at winning."

The order's knightsmith team was working frantically to make the modifications to the levitating ship, but they still needed a little more time to finish.

"Then... How should we intercept the drake and the Tyrantors following it? It's causing tremendous damage as we speak. If this keeps on, we won't have the ability to properly defend our borders. I can't even tell how many more losses we'll suffer before the Order of the Silver Phoenix finishes their preparations..."

While the order was preparing, New Kuschepka had no effective means of defending themselves from Vouivre. The only thing that had managed to damage it, Ikaruga, had only done so enough to make it retreat. They didn't feel like they would stand a chance no matter how many Laevantias they amassed.

"You have that backward," said Ernie. "If we keep playing passive, our losses will only mount. So we need to be the ones to strike at their weak point instead."

"You want us to aim for...the Central Protectorate Government...for Dervankhul, don't you?" The reply to Ernie's proposal came immediately. It was Eleonora once again, and now the nobles were looking at her with astonishment. She was no longer looking downward. Her head was raised and kept there with a strong will.

"We don't have many choices left to us. Either we let ourselves be burned by the drake's fire and lose everything, or we take back the capital before that happens and drive Jaloudek out," said Ernie.

The nobles couldn't stop themselves from getting excited. Certainly, this idea could get them out of this deadlock they found themselves in. However, the risk they'd be shouldering would be incredible.

"My queen, what he says is true. However, it is too dangerous a bet. We would be aiming for the enemy's center! Who knows how many Tyrantors are stationed in Dervankhul?! We would essentially need to send our entire army to have enough strength to take the city. And if we do that, how are we supposed to protect Fontanie?!"

"And yet, you still intend to gather the entire army, don't you?" Eleonora asked.

"Yes," Ernie answered after a pause.

After hearing their exchange, the assembled nobles were filled with questions. They had just been told that assembling all the military might available to them in one place was foolish, after all.

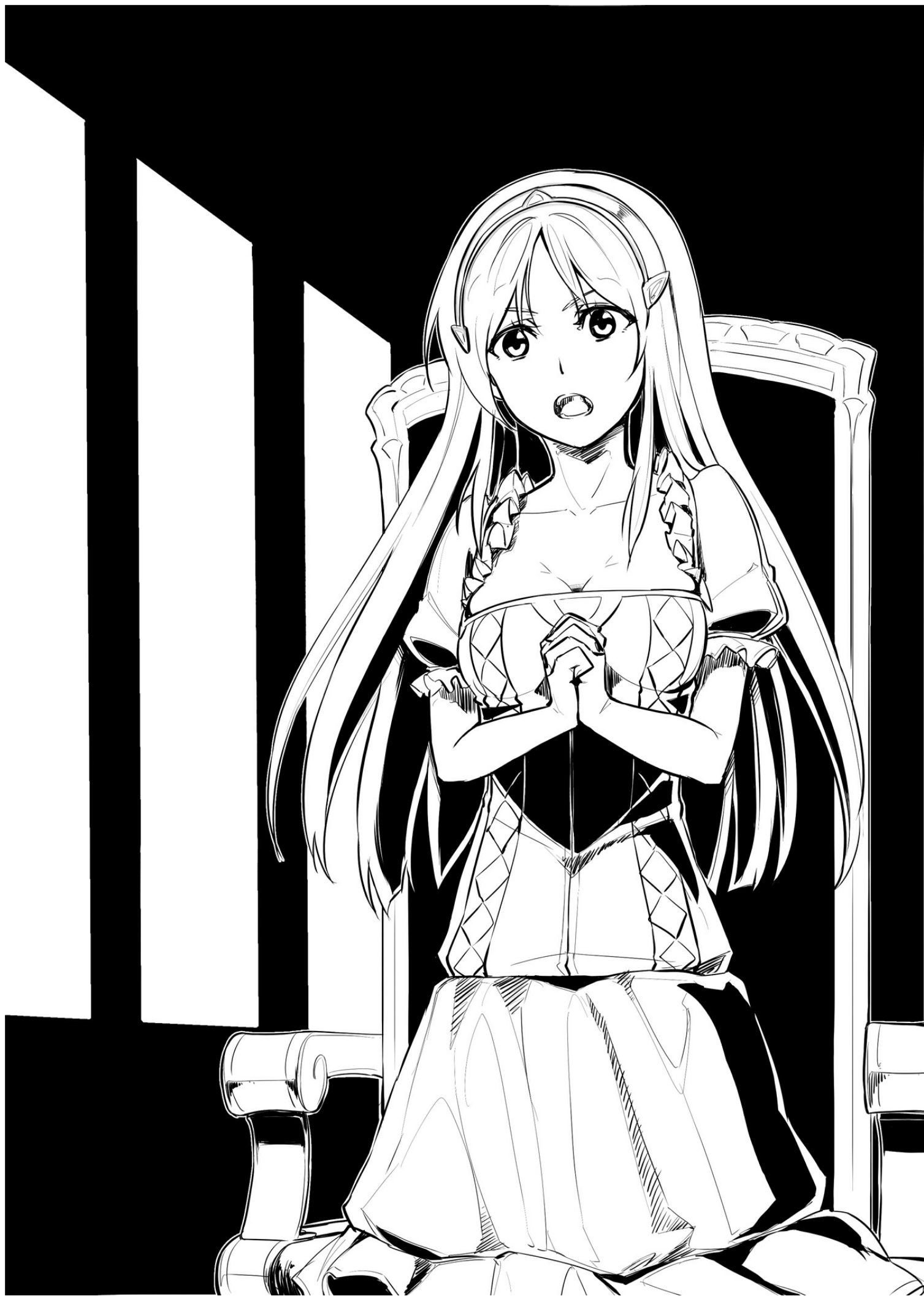
"The only reason Fontanie must be protected is because I am here," explained Eleonora. "So...I will come as well. That way, we will be able to attack with all

our might.”

The nobles were all lost for words. Their queen wasn’t well-versed in military matters. They thought that this was why she could say such a stupid thing. But, terrifyingly, when they thought about it calmly, her declaration wasn’t that far off the mark. If they could only amass their strength for either attack or defense, then they needed to go on the attack to break through their situation. Either way, some sort of gamble was unavoidable; that was how far they’d been pushed.

There was only one problem left: that the risk being taken by this bet was the queen herself. Common sense said that, even before matters of disrespect, this bet was too dangerous—they couldn’t allow it to happen.

However, Eleonora herself *smiled* as she handed down her decision. “I’ve made up my mind. In the past, I could not fight against the danger I was exposed to, which led to many sacrifices. I never want to repeat those mistakes. Before I lose any more knights, we must take Jaloudek’s Central Protectorate Government... No, we must retake Dervankhul!”



All the nobles were floored by their young queen. Even though they were originally minor in rank, they were still hardened veterans of many battles. And though they respected their queen, they'd still underestimated her somewhere in their hearts. They'd considered her just someone there to lend them legitimacy through her blood. But this changed all that. The queen had shown them the way to completely return New Kuschepërka to its rightful glory. That was the effect of her decision.

"With that in mind, I would like to request something of you, Sir Ernesti," she continued. "We will now be challenging Jaloudek to a decisive battle. When that happens..."

"The drake will surely make an appearance," Ernie finished.

Eleonora seemed a little hesitant, but she still nodded clearly. "Even if we retake the capital and bring down the Central Protectorate Government, we will still be in danger so long as the drake exists. This will be the same as Micilie... We will be acting as decoys."

Though she said that, this situation was actually very different from the battle of Micilie. Back then, Jaloudek had been conceited, and there had been a weakness for the Kuschepërkans to exploit. But now, things were different. They would be going for their enemy's headquarters, which would likely be fiercely defended. This gamble was rigged against them from the start.

Even so, Ernie did not hesitate. "I understand. Everything will be done as you will, Your Majesty. Since that's the case, I will be using the levitating ship. I believe using a large force against the drake would be a bad plan, so Ikaruga and I will be facing it with a small force."

"Will your levitating ship make it in time for the battle, Sir Ernesti?" Eleonora asked.

"I swear I will make it so, on the Order of the Silver Phoenix's name, even if we have to work while we fly," declared Ernie. With that, it was decided that the order's knightsmiths would be seeing hell.

Eleonora nodded, but then her expression clouded slightly. "As the ruler of Kuschepërka, I...have no choice but to entrust the fate of this country to you, a

boy from another nation... It is shameful.”

“Please don’t mind it, Your Majesty.” Ernie had the most dangerous and most important role in this. Even so, he smiled a smile like a blooming flower, as if the situation had nothing to do with him. “I need to prove that my Ikaruga and my silhouette knights are better than some levitating ship. That is why I wish to see that thing sink as well. I will put everything I have toward making it drop from the sky.”

A fanatic zeal seeped through his smile. It was enough to make even Eleonora, who was asking this of him, feel some fear. She felt some out-of-place relief all of a sudden, thinking that it was lucky that his madness and her nation’s aims were in accord.

That was how New Kuscheperka put into play their unprecedented strategy of *not* protecting their own lands.



After the meeting ended, an excessively happy Ernie called his order to assemble.

“Okay, it’s time for the decisive battle! From here on out, we’re going to be busy with preparations! All of the knightsmiths will have to work especially hard. Also, Kid, Addy, I have an important job for you two and your Tzenndrimbles. Please come with me.”

“Roger! Leave it to us!” Addy responded happily.

Kid, however, took a lot longer to give a rather unenthusiastic grunt of assent. He wasn’t looking at Ernie, but rather behind him. There stood Eleonora, and their eyes met. He nodded slightly, to which Eleonora responded by bringing her hands together in a praying motion. Kid then turned to Ernie and gave a much more reliable nod. “Understood. It’s about time for us to beat down every last one of those cocky invaders!”

With that, the hearts of the Order of the Silver Phoenix were united as one and pointed toward the final battle that was to come.

Chapter 43: The Queen's Expedition in Force

Steel footsteps rang out as the ground shook with the movement of heavy objects. This noise, so loud it seemed like it would destroy the hearing of anyone too close, was repeated hundreds of times over and almost seemed like an earthquake.

At this moment, in front of the gates of New Kuscheperka's capital of Fontanie, a large force of silhouette knights was assembling. Some were Lesvant Viedes, spellfire-specialized silhouette knights also referred to as tower knights. Some were Laevantias, the kingdom's cutting-edge silhouette knight and the main backbone of its army. These two models were the core of this assembled force, a knight order serving Kuscheperka's ruler—in other words, they were the royal guard.

This force was so large it completely covered the land along the city's walls. Anyone seeing this scene would never assume that the kingdom was backed into a corner. The improvement of knightsmith skills and technology granted by the implementation of silhouette gears allowed them to manufacture things much faster, allowing this force to approach the size of old Kuscheperka's army.

Eventually, the flood of silhouette knights ended. The land stilled, leaving only the silhouette knights' gentle exhaust. The softly flowing wind swept away the dust thrown up by their movement. Brilliant light shone from the orderly lines of these machines. Behind them was another that had calmly passed through Fontanie's gates—the royal silhouette knight, the king's unit that was once thought to have been lost. To be more accurate, though, it wasn't the actual royal knight. The original had indeed been lost when the previous king died, so the one here was a recreation: a successor named Cartoga Ol Kuscher II.

The silhouette knights knelt at once, taking parking positions. Their torso armors opened up, and the knight runners inside revealed themselves, standing up straight atop the platforms created by the open armors. In response to the knights who came out to greet their lord, Cartoga Ol Kuscher II stopped with a dignified air and opened up its torso armor as well. Everyone's gazes gathered toward the royal knight—on the figure that appeared from it. The royal knight

existed purely for the nation's ruler. So it was natural to assume that the one inside would be Queen Eleonora.

The knights stared intensely at the queen, who indeed appeared from the opening. Yet the girl before them did not seem like she had been raised like a flower in a greenhouse, there only to be loved and cherished. She wasn't wearing her usual luxurious dress but something clearly meant for combat: light armor that was likely the same as that worn by knight runners, intended to soften impacts. Her beauty, likened to that of an exquisite flower and praised throughout the Occidents, had been cast in a shadow brought on by all the fear and worry. However, in its place was a strong, newfound will. She was like a wildflower, blooming proudly in nature with all its supple strength. There was no longer any sign of her previous weakness—of the powerlessness that had led her to hang her head and cast her eyes downward.

Eleonora took a deep breath and looked around at the gathered knights. "Knights of Kuscheperka... We have been given a multitude of trials. Ever since that night, when Dervankhul, our beautiful capital, famous throughout the Occidents, was enveloped in fire...we have been forced to face our own powerlessness and feel the sting of defeat. While our invaders are craven and utterly despicable, they are a force to be reckoned with. We have had much taken from us, and lost much more besides...including my beloved father, who...for the Kuscheperka we all love—" She paused, overcome with emotion. "Excuse me. The curtains were drawn for both our country and my predecessor."

The megaphone mounted in the royal knight spread the queen's voice to every corner of the gathering. The knight runners gradually clenched their fists harder and harder during the course of her speech. The fall of the old capital had represented the start of the invasion of their lands as well as their kingdom's fall.

"However, with the help of our friends, we have managed to pull ourselves up once more. Our new shields do not falter before their knights in black, and our new swords can pierce through their strong armor. We have managed to claw back a portion of our country and revive it. But now, once again, we are being threatened, this time by a flying drake. The drake is...too strong for us. As things

stand, we will see a second coming of the tragedy of that night.”

It was impossible to tell whether the heat that made the air shimmer was from the silhouette knights or something brought on by the collective will of the assembled knight runners. Even in the face of another defeat, they showed not an ounce of fear. In fact, it seemed like they were waiting eagerly for what was to come—to be given the order to retake their land. Much like a bow being drawn, their muscles were taut with even more strain now as they readied themselves.

“But we will never make the same mistake again. We are resolved. We will not simply protect ourselves by shutting ourselves in our defenses. We will take back our kingdom with our own hands. I order you now, in the name of Eleonora Miranda Kuscheperka, queen of New Kuscheperka...”

There were no more tears in Eleonora’s eyes. She had shed the cowardice and shyness she’d had when she was nothing but a princess raised in a gilded cage, and she had moved forward. Cartoga Ol Kuschere II drew its sword. It caught the sunlight, its tip glinting like a guiding beacon.

“O knights of Kuscheperka, march forth! Take back this kingdom! Take back our stolen capital! Claim victory with our own hands!”

The ground shook with the knight runners’ resounding bellows, which was further strengthened when the assembled giant knights stood once more. With that, the march to retake Dervankhul had begun. New Kuscheperka had chosen to throw their entire royal guard—essentially their entire army—into the fight. This force rivaled Jaloudek’s original invasion force in size.

As mentioned, this host did not consist solely of Laevantias—Lesvant Viedes were also among their number. While Lesvant Viedes were extremely slow because of their weight, this problem was very simple to solve. Almost the entirety of their bulk lay in their wall robes, so they simply removed those, disassembled them, and stored them in a caravan of horse-drawn vehicles that would accompany the army to ensure their speed. However, because the crystal tissues in these wall robes would very quickly release their stored mana when cut off from their ether reactors, they needed to be reassembled and reattached before battle. Even so, this was an extremely valuable solution for

long marches.

Behind the main host of silhouette knights was the fully packed supply train. This was where the regular knights in silhouette gears were.

This march took the form of a staggeringly long line, at the center of which was an especially dense concentration of knights surrounding Cartoga Ol Kuschere II. Walking alongside the royal knight was another lavishly gaudy knight plated in gold—Goldleo, piloted by Emris.

“Hah! Hah! That was a great speech! You’ve become quite queenly, Helena!”

“R-Really? I wonder... I am still immature, so it’d be nice if I really was acting in a way that didn’t shame my title, but...” The reply that came from Cartoga Ol Kuschere II was vaguely embarrassed and unconfident.

This was followed up by a different voice. “You thought up those words yourself, Hele—I mean, Your Majesty. It will be fine. You are already doing a splendid job carrying out your duties.”

Eleonora turned around in her pilot’s seat, looking behind her. “It really feels wrong to have you acting all formal like that, Isadora.”

“We can’t keep acting like we did in the past. You are now truly our queen.”

Eleonora was not alone in Cartoga Ol Kuschere II’s cockpit—she shared it with her cousin, Isadora. Normally, only the ruler was allowed inside the royal knight. However, Eleonora had absolutely no training in piloting a silhouette knight, and she found it hard to even make one walk. Thanks to that, the machine was haphazardly converted to a two-seater at the last minute. Because it didn’t have the extra space for this like the Tzenndrimble did, the cockpit now felt terribly cramped.

“More importantly, I should apologize, Isadora. You ended up having to come to the battlefield because I’m so useless...” Eleonora sighed heavily as she distractedly watched the scenery pass by through the holomonitor.

“It’s fine. You decided to participate in battle, Helena, so I’ll help. I want to retake this kingdom too, after all.”

After hearing her cousin use her nickname like she used to while making sure

it wouldn't be heard by those outside, Eleonora gave a small smile before using the megaphone. "Also, Prince Emris, we... Cartoga cannot fight at all. But still, we must be here, even if it's only as decoration. So please, protect us."

In order to have enough men to take back the capital, they couldn't leave behind anyone to protect their own territory. That was why Eleonora, who couldn't even pilot a silhouette knight—let alone lead an army—was here. But as someone who held no more meaning in this battle than as a symbol known as a "ruler," she had a role only she could fulfill.

While the retaking of Dervankhul was an extremely dangerous gamble, it was also necessary—for the hearts of both the nation's knights and its civilians.

A young, beautiful, and weak queen was the perfect person to encourage the soldiers. The fact that she had lost her father, the former king, at the beginning of the war also garnered much sympathy from the soldiery. While the queen was in no way a great CO, there was no better person to rouse the men.

Furthermore, the fact that the new queen had led the expedition that took back the old capital would be very important later on down the road. Thus the royal knight's presence on the battlefield was necessary for many reasons, even if it had to be forcibly made into a two-seater.

Emris, knowing all those reasons, grinned and bared his teeth in Goldleo. "Hm... On the battlefield, the king is the unit at the head of the army—and the one in the most danger. After all, it's obvious the enemy will be coming for the king's head! But I will never let either Isadora or Helena face any danger. Goldleo and I are here."

Goldleo turned its head, looking around. They were surrounded by royal bodyguards. These were the best of the best, but that wasn't all. A fleet of centaur knights towing carriages, and two companies of knights—colored red and white—were there as well. Behind all of them was a demon-faced, six-armed fierce god. This was the entire fighting strength of the Order of the Silver Phoenix.

"On top of that, we have the protection of the Order of the Silver Phoenix. Even if the drake shows itself, there's no need to fear!" Emris declared.

Behind Goldleo, the silhouette knights of red and white silently took up their

weapons and struck poses. Eleonora couldn't help but smile. "Yes, you're right. I believe in everyone."

That was when a large shadow appeared overhead—a single levitating ship making its way leisurely through the sky. Its hull was large and emblazoned with the crest of New Kuscheperka as well as a silver phoenix spreading its wings.

"So that's Sir Ernesti's ship..." Eleonora breathed.

"Yeah. The boss and the others did something to it, though. Jeez, I can't even imagine what kind of nonsense they got up to," said Emris.

If what they'd heard was true, that ship would be their trump card against the drake. And Eleonora's knight—Kid, who was conspicuously missing—should be on it too.

The ship continued on, as if guiding the New Kuscheperkan army. Beneath it, the large force bearing Kuscheperka's standard walked on.



The scene shifts to the eastern border of Jaloudek-held Kuscheperka.

While the words "eastern border of Kuscheperka" used to mean the Auvinier Mountains, now that the nation was under Jaloudek's grip, it meant the eastern territory now known as New Kuscheperka. Because of this change, the central territory now had a new role: propping up the border.

The border here was recognized as the line demarcated by fortresses erected while old Kuscheperka was still extant. That showed how important the defensive value of a fortress was to those in power. War was essentially a territory-taking competition revolving around these fortresses.

On Jaloudek's side, as anyone would expect, the ones taking up the defense of these fortresses were Tyrantors. These black knights, with their slow movement but heavy armor and great strength, were very well suited to defending strongholds.

The knights placed atop the walls of one such fortress were looking out warily at their surroundings. Silhouette knights, standing around ten meters tall, were essentially lookout towers all on their own. They were perfectly suited for the

role, and the knight runners inside stared cautiously at the scenery displayed on their holomonitors.

It had been a peaceful morning as always. But then, they saw wavering figures coming through the morning mist.

One lookout gasped and shouted, “Sound the alarm! It’s an attack!”

The knights acted quickly and appropriately to the unusual event. The Tyrantors on watch made piercing noises with their alarms, which were quickly joined by the sound of ether reactors growling as if in response. Tyrantors on standby all around the fortress activated and started to prepare for the attack.

“So they’ve once again come to struggle futilely against our defenses. And so early in the morning too! What hard workers.”

“As long as we’re here, they’ll never get th— What?! What the heck is that?!”

The Tyrantors stationed around the fortress watched on as silhouette knights flooded out of the forest in front of them. They bore the flag of New Kuscheperka as they approached the fortress.

The moment the Tyrantors saw them, they were hit with a terrible shock. Their enemy was far too numerous—not something that would be sent to take a stronghold of this size. There were so many that the Tyrantors stood no chance, no matter how good at defending they were.

“It looks like they’re *really* serious about taking this base.”

“No, wait. Something’s off... Right! Their own defenses must surely be lacking with how many silhouette knights they have here. Unbelievable... Are they making a suicide attack?!”

The Tyrantors then reached a chilly realization. They had heard that New Kuscheperka was being cornered thanks to the efforts of Vouivre. That must have been why this force, which seemed like all the strength New Kuscheperka had available to it, had been committed to such a reckless strategy. On top of that, they then noticed one silhouette knight among the New Kuscheperkan army that reflected the sunlight brightly, and they yelled in unison.

“Is that the royal knight?! On an *expedition*?!”

With that, their chilly realization was solidified as reality. This overwhelmingly large force was being accompanied by the royal knight, assuring them that their morale would be unfaltering. Now the Jaloudekians knew that their detachment wouldn't even be allowed to resist. The New Kuscheperkan army attacked the fortress, and it wasn't long before their banner flew over its walls.



The report of what had happened reached Dervankhul in the blink of an eye.

Princess Catarina, who was in charge of the Central Protectorate Government, listened expressionlessly to the messenger who had almost tumbled into her audience chambers.

"...Furthermore, the New Kuscheperkans are taking every fortress in their path! We estimate that they number more than an entire brigade—that's more than one hundred units!"

"Isn't that essentially their entire military might?! Wait... That means they're completely defenseless right now. If so, this would be the perfect chance for us to attack Fontanie and flatten them completely once and for all..." A knight captain voiced his thoughts, making himself smile.

However, Catarina irritatedly waved her hand. "That won't be as easy as you suspect."

The knight captain seemed doubtful, so Catarina relayed the recent report. "It seems that the royal knight is marching with them."

"That can't be! I heard that their royal knight was destroyed by His Highness Prince Cristobal at the start of the war."

"It could be an imitation... No, I suspect they rebuilt it," Catarina said. "Actually, it doesn't matter where it came from. What's important is who's inside it." She didn't have so much an *idea* of the pilot's identity, but more of a simple guess.

The knight captain quickly caught on as well, gasping and looking at the princess when he did. "It can't be...the queen herself?!"

"Can you conceive of anyone else being in there? They've mobilized their

entire army, abandoning the defense of all their towns and even their capital to attack. I'm sure they did this thinking that as long as they have their queen, they'll be able to restore the kingdom." Catarina let out a low laugh. Though New Kuscheperka's attack seemed utterly devoid of any logic, it was a frustrating move for Jaloudek.

Even if they'd left their lands completely empty, it was unlikely that Jaloudek would counterattack the New Kuscheperkan towns. Jaloudek's goal was to take complete control of Kuscheperka's territory. They would suffer as well if settlements were needlessly destroyed, as their desire was for control. In the end, the best method of accomplishing such a goal was to eliminate the rightful line of succession—all those belonging to Kuscheperkan royalty.

"How bold. But there's no doubt that this attack is a huge gamble. If they are planning to seize victory, then the only conceivable target for them is here," Catarina muttered, pointing down at her feet. She was referring to Dervankhul—and Jaloudek's Central Protectorate Government. No one thought their target was anything else.

"In fact, we could consider this a good thing. They've saved us the trouble of luring out their queen," said Catarina. "Go and intercept them. Will hegemony over this land be claimed by us or them? Let's grant their wish and decide things once and for all."

The queen making a personal appearance on the battlefield was something they should welcome. They'd been saved the trouble of sending Vouivre and their Tyrantors to attack her, after all.

Out of nowhere, Catarina felt a pang of worry and raised her head. She then called over a messenger. "Send someone to Lord Maldness with all haste. Give him this order: If our enemy amasses their forces, then that only saves us the need to pick them off one at a time. Burn them...queen and all."

"As you will."

Vouivre should have been busy attacking bases in New Kuscheperka even now. They couldn't hope for their strongest weapon to join this battle if it wasn't informed. With those orders dutifully received, the messenger ran out. Catarina's subordinates also left the audience chambers to prepare for the

upcoming battle. She tapped the throne's armrest with her fingers as the chamber emptied.

"An attack... I thought that queen was a little more cowardly than this," she muttered to herself. "Fine. I'll admit that you are another enemy I must defeat. Now we just need to finish our preparations by the time Vouivre returns."

After that, she summoned a certain influential person to continue her plans.



"I have arrived in response to your summons. What is it you need of me?"

The one who had been summoned was Gustavo. His voice didn't carry an ounce of respect, but this was the usual for him. It didn't bother Catarina at this point.

"I'm sure you already know what it is I've summoned you for, Gustavo Maldness. I will bestow upon you a new silhouette knight. Our army needs excellent knight runners right now, and we cannot afford to let you play around."

Gustavo took a moment to take that in. "Sure thing. I'll humbly accept."

The other day, the Emerald Drake Order's ground contingent had given chase to the New Kuscheperkan forces they were attacking with Gustavo in the lead, and though they'd damaged the survivors somewhat, Gustavo himself had lost his Sword Man by the hands of the Order of the Silver Phoenix. Sword Man's wreck had been recovered, but it was damaged beyond repair. So, rather than wait for the knightsmiths to work a miracle, it was faster to just give the knight runner a new machine, since he himself was perfectly fine.

As long as he had a silhouette knight, Gustavo could return to the battlefield. Even so, he was bitter. Jaloudek's main silhouette knight was the Tyrantor. These slow silhouette knights with their heavy armor were a far cry from the characteristics Gustavo preferred.

After all, despite its looks, Sword Man was essentially custom-made. No matter how excellent a knight runner he was, he still needed a machine that could bring out his strengths. Gustavo was worried that his new silhouette knight wouldn't do that.

Even if they'd found a machine that wasn't heavy like a Tyrantor, it would at best be a captured Lesvant from Kuscheperka. But in a modern battlefield overflowing with Eastern Type silhouette knights, using an obsolete Lesvant was a difficult prospect.

"I will show you your silhouette knight personally. Follow me." Catarina didn't seem to care about Gustavo's lack of enthusiasm as she started to walk.

She led him straight to the deepest section of the castle's workshop. There, a single silhouette knight solemnly sat. Catarina pointed to it, and not even Gustavo could hide his surprise.

"I am giving you this unit," said Catarina simply.

"Y-Your Highness!" Gustavo shouted. "Th-This is...err... Isn't this an Arkelorix, the personal unit of royalty?!"

This was a silhouette knight of the highest quality, an Arkelorix, which had been developed specifically for Jaloudek's royal family. The machine was a pure white, with edges hemmed elegantly in gold, and it looked down at them quietly.



“It is indeed,” Catarina replied. “It is most likely the highest class of single silhouette knight we have. It should suit you more than a Tyrantor would. However, your piloting style is rather unique. I will assign a team to you later—adjust it to your liking.”

Gustavo was lost for words. Certainly, this treatment was extraordinarily good. However, his heart held more doubt than joy. “This... Was it Cristobal’s?”

The question was asked hesitantly, and Catarina responded by slowly shaking her head. “Arkelorix is not our royal knight, but as a model specifically for royalty, it was made to be close. Of course, my brothers weren’t the only two given one... This is—was—mine.”

Including Carlitos’s, there were a total of three royal-exclusive Arkelorixes made. One of them was currently in front of Gustavo.

“But as you know, I am not very talented as a knight runner,” Catarina said. “While this was given to me since I am a member of the royal family, if I were to use it, it would at best be a decoration on the battlefield. In practice, this is just a spare machine for my brothers. But now...Cristobal is no longer with us. The one who should have used it is no longer here.”

There was no way for Gustavo to know what she was feeling in that moment since Catarina had turned her back to him.

Catarina continued. “You are one of our army’s best knight runners. But at the same time, you are very idiosyncratic and terribly suited to taking action in a group. Also, you are not used to piloting a Tyrantor. So take this—my white sword. I’m sure Dorotheo will avenge my brother for me. So please, strike down Kuscheperka’s royalty and bring us victory in my stead.”

There was no longer any need for questions or hesitation. Gustavo shook all that off and went down to his knees, bowing his head. “Leave it to me! My sword will cut down all of our enemies—both our country’s and your own, Your Highness.”

When Catarina heard those words, she nodded, satisfied.



Catarina left, but Gustavo stayed, gazing up at the Arkelorix. Then, as if switching in with the princess, a team of knightsmiths arrived.

“We’ve been informed of the princess’s plans. So...what would you like to do?” they asked, seeming strangely happy.

This team of knightsmiths was assigned specifically to the Arkelorixes, and after Cristobal’s death, they’d suffered a severe lack of things to do. This was the first job they’d had in a long while, so naturally they were quite excited.

But this good mood only lasted until Gustavo opened his mouth. “Her Highness told me I could do whatever I’d like with this thing. So I’ll be equipping it with this.”

“As you wish. Wait...a sword? It already has one...”

Gustavo had pointed to a line of swords among the weapons assembled in the building. Arkelorix already had a sword hanging from its waist. The knightsmiths saw no reason to add more, so they couldn’t help but be confused.

Gustavo laughed and shook his head. “That one’s not enough. I want all the swords there too.”

“All the swords... Wait, all of them?! Are you in your right mind?! There’s got to be at least thirty swords there!” It was understandable that the knightsmiths would parrot Gustavo’s words in confusion. They utterly failed to understand what need there was to load that many swords onto the Arkelorix. In the first place, they couldn’t even imagine what the machine would look like afterward.

But, without any concern at all for their confusion, Gustavo nodded with conviction. “Yeah. In the end, I can’t hack it without these. But you know, you can’t just stick them on any way you like. I’ll need more power this time, so I won’t lose to that twin-blade.”

Gustavo changed Arkelorix as he pleased. Wildly. Greedily. In the end, his demands continued until the machine’s original form had almost disappeared.

“There’s no way this counts as proper equipment. I can’t believe you’d be able to actually control it with all this stuff...”

On top of the extremely inefficient equipment, Gustavo had added even more

unreasonable requests, and the knightsmiths had to voice their disapproval. However, Gustavo's will was stronger than iron, and he wouldn't be convinced, so the knightsmiths had to fold. They'd given up, and accepted that this thing was doomed.

So, as a last-ditch effort, one of them asked something. "Well, we understand what you want... But since you've *customized* this machine so much already, how about you give it a new name too? I'm sure you've got a good idea or two in your head."

To the eyes of the knightsmiths, the resultant silhouette knight was no longer an Arkelorix. The question had been produced by the last dregs of their obstinance, but Gustavo took the question honestly and nodded with grave seriousness.

"Yeah. I've already decided on a name. This sword that I'm taking up was given to me by Her Highness Princess Catarina—something that was supposed to go to the late Prince Cristobal. So there's only one possible name. I'll call it...Dead Man's Sword!"



New Kuscheperka's army made good speed toward their old capital.

This land was originally theirs. That meant they were familiar with the terrain, and they were able to avoid paths that would lead them to fortresses that might prove difficult obstacles, saving as much of their fighting power as possible. Even if they sometimes had to take very roundabout detours, it still saved them time.

Now, Dervankhul was before them, and they faced a very grave problem.

Several nights had passed since they had left Fontanie. While setting up camp and taking a rest, the New Kuscheperkan army's leadership gathered, putting their heads together. They were examining a map of the area surrounding the capital, and their main problem was already marked near Dervankhul.

"This is our target—the old capital. And this...is Shield Nerrak, a group of fortresses built as its last line of defense." Eleonora pointed with a thin finger, indicating a group of four strongholds located in the four cardinal directions

around the capital.

Shield Nerrak was the reason Dervankhul wasn't very fortified, despite being the capital of a major power. It was built covering all the main roads into the capital and had been given the role of repelling all enemies.

"And now, this fortress...is in *our* way. It is our last and largest obstacle," said Eleonora.

The problem they were facing now was a good indicator of just how unfair the levitating ship was, as it granted the ability to completely ignore standard tactics. In the end, this group of fortresses, which Kuscheperka took so much pride in, had proven useless against Jaloudek's new weapon. Ever since the capital had been attacked, and its ruler defeated, Shield Nerrak had been in Jaloudekian hands. Ironically, now that it was under the control of the enemy, it was actually doing its job.

After Eleonora finished talking, Isadora spoke up. "Getting through on land will be extremely tough. Any siege would last quite a long time. I'm sure that Jaloudek's army has mustered quite a force within its walls."

The New Kuscheperkan army wanted to avoid a time-consuming siege, since they'd been on a forced march to get all this way. What's more, the more time they took, the worse the situation would get for them.

"Hmph. And if we waste time, that drake will come and attack us from behind, won't it?" Emris growled as he slammed his fists together.

When they'd left New Kuscheperkan lands, Vouivre had still been roaming near the border. It was unclear when it would return to Dervankhul. This was the biggest of the gambles the New Kuscheperkan army was taking. Allowing the drake to appear while they were still in siege against Shield Nerrak was the worst possible outcome.

"Though it doesn't match up to Shield Trider, naturally, Shield Nerrak is still plenty tough. The most troublesome point is the river that flows around the fortresses and the drawbridge gates that allow traversing that river. In times of emergency, they raise the bridge so no one can get inside."

Silhouette knights, being the giant humanoid weapons they were, had weight

to match their size. They were also bipedal because they were modeled after humans, so fording rivers tended to be a large weak point for them. The water would quite literally sweep their legs out from under them, slowing them down greatly. Immobile silhouette knights would be no different from practice targets to the defenders. And even if the attackers managed to safely get across, all that awaited them was a sheer wall.

“These gates were built with silhouette knights in mind. It would take more than a smattering of spellfire to make them budge. Breaking them will require getting close with siege weaponry...”

Some examples included the Tyrantors’ battle rams, or sledgehammers that required several silhouette knights to use. Every one of these weapons was heavy, and of course not suited to being carried across a river.

“Which means...we have no choice but to somehow open the gates and cross the bridge, no matter what,” Ernie noted.

“Indeed. But it’s not like we can just ask them to open up.”

No one would undo their defenses for the sake of an enemy. They needed to either somehow lower the bridge or destroy it, but neither option would be easy.

“The gates are supported by iron chains that draw it up. It’s made so that the rest won’t snap even if we break a few. Not that we’d be able to get at the chains from the outside, anyway. That’s why, in order to lower the bridge, we need to operate the opening mechanism inside,” Isadora explained.

A flash of inspiration came to Ernie. They had soldiers that were perfect for infiltration and sabotage.

“I see,” he said. “Then this is a job for the silhouette gear corps.”

Isadora and Eleonora nodded. This would be essentially the same operation as when they’d been rescued.

“We know the lay of the land, so the silhouette gear corps can take a detour through the forest behind them to infiltrate,” Ernie suggested. “Their highest priority will be to open this gate, allowing us to match their timing and break through with our entire army. Now then, this silhouette gear team will consist

of—”

“We’ve already gathered the men. Please leave this to us,” replied Ernie’s chosen leader.

With the general plan decided, Ernie had turned to forming the team that would carry out such a plan. The leader was a familiar face: Nora Frykberg of the Order of the Indigo Falcon.

Then, Dietrich, who had been keeping quiet and listening up until now, whispered to the boss, who was beside him. “Hey, boss... How’re Guairelinde’s repairs going?”

“Huh? Sorry, but they aren’t,” he replied. “We’ve got our hands full with the levitating ship modifications. And it’s not like we can leave a company commander’s unit in the hands of the people here.”

If it were a Kardetolle belonging to a rank-and-file order member, they could’ve just left it to a Kuscheperkan knightsmith, but a company commander’s unit—especially Guairelinde—had too many unique mechanisms hidden inside that they couldn’t let be exposed. Thus the machine’s repair was delayed until, in the end, it was still broken even now.

“So m’sorry, Dee, but you’ll hafta borrow a Laevantia to fight...” the boss muttered with a somber expression.

Meanwhile, Dietrich seemed to be lost in thought. But then, apropos of nothing, he raised his hand. “I understand. Then, Ernesti, will you let me into the silhouette gear team?”

“Oh? I’m fine with it, but are you sure?”

“I’m fairly proficient in handling a silhouette gear. And it’s not like I can really fight, what with Guairelinde unable to move.”

Now it was Emris who was lost in thought. The thought only lasted a short while, though, before he suddenly stood up, seeming to have hit upon a good idea. “Okay! Then I’ll be borrowing Second Company! This is perfect! I was in need of some men I could freely command!”

The members of Second Company exchanged looks.

“What do we do? The young master’s even more of a musclehead than Commander Dee.”

“Hmmm, but since he’s also a musclehead, doesn’t that mean not much will change?”

“And it’s not like we can get in silhouette gears too. This’ll be fine, right?”

The members stealthily consulted each other, before coming to the same conclusion.

“Understood, young master. We’ll follow your orders.”

“I’m not quite happy with how you came to that decision, but...” Though Dietrich was disappointed, Second Company’s role was now decided.

With their plan set, the Order of the Silver Phoenix and New Kuscheperka’s army continued their march, intent on retaking Shield Nerrak.

Chapter 44: Sortie! The Assault of Shield Nerrak

A section of Kuscher Road stretched through the central region of the former Kuscheperkan territory of Jaloudek Kingdom that led to Dervankhul, where the Central Protectorate Government was located. The Melbarri River, which ran from the Auvinier Mountains, cut across it partway down the road. Shield Nerrak, which used to be the final line of defense for the capital, had its eastern fort built along the side of this river.

The wall was built to take advantage of the riverside cliff, providing a powerful defense against intruders. Normally, a bridge spanned the river, but it was currently drawn up and blending into the wall.

East of the river lay the Coderlier Plains. This completely open area, with no obstacles at all, seemed like it was tailor-made for silhouette knight combat. The Jaloudek Army had gotten reports of the New Kuscheperkan Army's movements and stationed a great number of silhouette knights in this area as well as inside their fortifications. Both forces had formed up on either side of the plains and were now facing off. This would be the biggest battle of the struggle to retake the capital, and it was what kicked off the fight for Shield Nerrak.

Jaloudek made the first move, advancing their Tyrantors in a standard wall formation. Because they were such heavy units, this wall was especially large—a mass of black that took over Coderlier Plains. In response to Jaloudek's advance, the Lesvant Viedes of the New Kuscheperkan Army came up to the front. The advantage given by the initiative was immeasurable, but these tower knights were specialized for spellfire.

Tyrantors sported both heavy armor and high strength output from their strand crystal tissue, so they were very powerful in melee combat. Yet they were inferior to the Lesvant Viede at range. Because of that, the Jaloudek Army stopped just before entering silhouette arms range. The tower knights had always been slow of foot, so this distance would not shift easily.

Just when it seemed like things on the ground would devolve into a staring match, a low growl came from above as the sky itself seemed to shake. A

shadow spread like a stain through the sky as large, black-painted ships emerged. This fleet of levitating ships' sails were filled with wind created by their Blow Engines, and they advanced steadily. They slid through the sky toward New Kuscheperka's line of tower knights, adjusting the output of their Blow Engines and aiming to arrive directly above the enemy formation.

During this time, a soldier on observation duty on the ground noticed this abnormality and cried out. "Levitating ships! We have an incoming enemy fleet! Bearing south-southwest... Ten of them!"

A loud trumpet that could be heard even through the din of battle sounded. The Lesvant Viedes that had been glaring at their foes responded to that and started hustling.

"Viede squad, prepare for antiair combat! Don't let those levitating ships get close to us!"

The levitating ships had continued to approach as the New Kuscheperkan Army revised its formation, and they cruised just a little outside of silhouette arms range, pointing their flanks at the enemy. Small ports opened up in the hulls of each ship, revealing wooden platforms. Right after these were revealed, their mounted Catapults started spitting out rocks.

Right away, the New Kuscheperkan Army responded in kind. The tower knights unleashed dense curtains of spellfire, which intercepted the flying rocks. These boulders were only moderately sized, so shooting them down midair was a hard feat, but this was made easier through sheer weight of fire. Each time the magical and physical projectiles clashed midair, the rocks were pulverized. Even so, several slipped through the storm of spellfire to land within the New Kuscheperkan formation, throwing up large clouds of dirt.

One of the levitating ships' captains wasted no time after hearing the results of the initial bombardment from his observation officer. "Close into silhouette arms range! Prepare the Ankyulorsas for attack!"

"Aye, aye, sir! Approaching and lowering altitude! Diluting the Etheric Levitator!"

The ship's figurehead whipped up some wind, inflating the sails and pushing it forward as it lowered itself nearer to the New Kuscheperkan line. These

levitating ships had been modified after the Nightmare of Micilie. They now sported lumps on either side of their hulls that had silhouette knights lined up on them. The figures of these machines looked thorny with all the silhouette arms they bore, and they were protected by wall robes that made them heavily resemble the tower knights. They were named Ankyulorsas, developed by Jaloudek's Central Development Workshop led by Horacio Kojass.

These Ankyulorsas also each had a set of four wriggling back weapons, their tips pointed squarely at the ground. As soon as the weapons were ranged in, all of them started firing all at once. The levitating ship fleet traveled a loose circle around the New Kuscheperkan Army as they bombarded their enemy. Meanwhile, the tower knights fought back bravely, and the air was quickly filled with spellfire.

With their numbers, the New Kuscheperkans' volley was more overwhelming, but they were also stationary on the ground while their enemies were flying through the air. This resulted in a difference in damage taken that gradually built up before it became apparent, and after a while, the casualties taken by the New Kuscheperkan Army only stood out more and more.

"So our Viede squad alone won't be able to suppress them! Agh, there's no other choice. We need to make use of the Laevantias...of our Javelineer squad!"

The messenger ran off, practically screaming the appeal. This was met with movement from New Kuscheperka's cutting-edge, mass-produced Laevantias, which then took to the front lines. They wielded large shields made to defend against aerial attack, and they took aim from the gaps between their shields. As they did, the weapons on their backs activated. Normally, they would have back weapons—sub-arms carrying silhouette arms—but these had been swapped out with rail arms carrying a javelin. These were identical to what was being carried on the Tzenndrimbles of the Order of the Silver Phoenix: VLJTs.

The knight runners who piloted Tzenndrimbles were each able to make use of several of these weapons at once, but that was only thanks to their amazing skill. Even the most talented of New Kuscheperka's knight runners could only use one.

This loadout, which saw the unit swap out its back weapons for single-shot

VLJTs, had been given the designation of “Javelineer Style” for categorization’s sake.

“Javelineer squad, prepare to fire! Ready... FIRE!” Under their company commander’s order, the javelineer squad fired their missile javelins all at once. These missile javelins flew on tails of scarlet fire, rising through the sky and accelerating toward the levitating ships.

“Javelins from the ground confirmed! Port-side Ankyulorsa team, intercept with your Zafar Namas!” The soldier on observation duty in one of the levitating ships shouted a report through the speaking tube, his tone revealing the increased pressure he was feeling. That just went to show how big a threat missile javelins were—they could be guided midair and were capable of sinking a ship in one blow.

Because any defense against these weapons needed to be mounted quickly, the Ankyulorsas took immediate action to the warning without waiting for official orders. Up until then, they’d been using their four back weapons to continuously bombard their targets, but now they lifted up the twin silhouette arms they held in their hands, pointing them toward the incoming javelins. The javelins were still accelerating toward them, correcting their headings as they did so, and they would eventually reach the limit of the attached silver nerve—at which point they would break off.

A loud tearing sound rumbled through the area as they fired their Zafar Namas, and the writhing light unleashed by these weapons hit the incoming missile javelins. These weren’t the conventional fire-type weapon most carried, but a lightning-type weapon. Lightning spells were powerful but hard to aim and tended to be rather short-range. Because of that, they weren’t well suited to use by silhouette knights and weren’t very common. But because the lightning would automatically be attracted to metal—say, like a javelin—there was almost no need to aim at all. One of their weak points had been turned on its head, turning the lightning overspell into a perfect CIWS against missile javelins.

The overspells traveled at the literal speed of lightning, destroying many of the incoming projectiles. A few still slipped through, however, going straight for the ships’ centers of mass. As a result of research into the levitating ship, New

Kuscheperka now knew they had to aim for the center of the levitating ship—its Etheric Levitator—to sink it.

Unfortunately for the ships, they had no line of defense after the Zafar Namas. Some Ankyulorsas sacrificed themselves to protect the cores of their ships, while other javelins were stopped through sheer luck by what little armor plating the ships had.

While enduring the sound of armor being gouged through as well as the shaking of his ship, a captain shouted from his seat on the bridge. “Don’t panic! First, report the damage!”

“We’ve taken several hits to our port side! The overall damage to the ship is light, but we’ve lost two Ankyulorsas. Our defensive strength has dropped!”

“Prepare the Catapults! Give those javelin throwers a present, then we’re retreating for now!”

After a volley of rocks thrown at their enemies like a souvenir, the ships fell back. After taking some distance, they once again started to circle and would participate in battle on the right flank.

The Tyrantors on the ground started to advance as the fierce aerial battle unfolded. The tower knights of New Kuscheperka had to deal with the levitating ships in the air, so they had to lessen their pressure on the Tyrantors. Naturally, this was seen as an opening to be exploited, so the Jaloudekians did. The melee-focused traditional silhouette knight—now thought of as warrior style—would be able to crush the spellfire-focused silhouette knights once they got close.

These Tyrantors, already heavy units, were even heavier thanks to their large shields. Their equipment made them mobile fortresses, and they were able to advance even under heavy fire. The levitating ships noticed this movement and continued firing on the New Kuscheperkan forces to support the push by splitting their enemies’ attention.

This took quite a long time because the Tyrantors were so slow, but the head of their formation finally got to grips with the tower knights. They seemed too impatient to hold up their shields and wield their weapons as they instead simply tackled their enemy’s front line, pulverizing the orderly row of tower knights. At such close quarters, the tower knights were just sitting ducks. The

New Kuscheperkan front line started to gradually fall apart.

“Oh, no! Have the Viede squad fall back!”

The Laevantia squad had stowed away their rail arms and proceeded to move forward, refusing to let the Jaloudekians just toss them around. Missile javelins were powerful weapons, but in order to exhibit that power, they needed some time to build up enough speed, which made them bad in close quarters. They were even worse against heavily armored foes, like these Tyrantors. The Laevantias drew their swords and slashed at their enemies, while the Tyrantors responded in kind with their heavy maces. Immediately, the front line devolved into a confused melee.

It had been a few hours since the conflict began, and the battle was now chaotic on all fronts. The melee between the Tyrantors and Laevantias spread as the Viedes continued to fire in order to keep the enemy in check. Meanwhile, the levitating ships continued to circle overhead, looking for an opening to press even among all the spellfire and javelins coming for them.

The sounds of steel clashing with steel, of explosions caused by spellfire, and many others reverberated throughout the plains, even reaching New Kuscheperka's headquarters located far to the rear of the formation. At the center of this headquarters was Cartoga Ol Kusphere II, surrounded by royal guards.

“I knew it. We cannot get through this without many casualties, can we?”

“You must endure it, Helena. They are fighting to retake the country and protect you. You're here to witness them, aren't you?” Isadora reminded her.

Eleonora clenched her fist hard from inside the royal knight as she listened to what was going on around her. Even though she couldn't directly see how the battle was going, the sounds were enough to paint a vivid picture. For the first time, she felt frustration at how she didn't have the ability to lead her people to victory. She then clasped her hands together tightly and abruptly looked up.

“Th-That's right. We should send the guards here to help...”

“Calm down, Your Majesty. We absolutely mustn't lower our guard here. What happens if someone comes for your head? If you fall, our nation will lose

its pillar of support once again... You know what happens to a kingdom without a king, don't you?"

Eleonora sank back into silence. Isadora gave thanks internally, realizing how lucky it was that the royal knight had to be made into a two-seater, and that she'd been given the controls. If Eleonora were piloting, she would likely have been agitated into a reckless move, and it would have been backbreakingly hard to stop her.

After a moment of silence, Isadora spoke up again. "But you're right that we can't take too much time here."

Isadora pushed down the uneasiness that had lodged itself in her heart. But nothing proves more prescient than a bad feeling. At that time, in the midst of the deepening chaos of the battlefield, the abnormality had already snuck its way in.



"I can hear the sound of the wind. Powerful, truly powerful..." Emris said.

The first one to notice this abnormality was Emris, knight runner of Goldleo, who was standing beside Cartoga Ol Kuschere II. The place was filled with the sound of battle, and picking out such a faint omen from among all that noise was difficult in the extreme. He'd sensed it using his sharp battle instincts, and he made Goldleo turn around. The sound of swirling wind was steadily intensifying. By now, the royal guards had picked up on the approaching threat and were making a fuss. Everyone knew what was causing these signs.

"So it really has come. Harden the defenses, royal guards!" Emris shouted. "It's most likely..." The royal guards swiftly shifted their formation in response.

"Ris! We—" Isadora yelled.

"As promised, leave this to us. You just sit there," said Emris.

Isadora cast aside her agitation as the source of the wind continued to approach the New Kuscheperkan Army's headquarters. This, too, was a black levitating ship that flew through the sky. However, it struck the New Kuscheperkan soldiers speechless when they laid eyes on it.

“So that’s Jaloudek’s flying drake-ship! I see now! It certainly does look like a drake. And it’s even big for a monster!” Emris exclaimed.



The giant form flying through the air cast a clear drake-shaped shadow on the ground.

It was far removed from the normal levitating ships used by Jaloudek's army. Though levitating ships had always been large, this one was twice the size of even those formidable weapons. A prow stretched out of it complete with a vicious jaw, and its wing sails looked nothing like the sails of a normal ship. Even Emris, famed for his boldness, couldn't hide how shaken he was by the sight.

"If what I heard is true, then that thing should have a siege weapon. If it's able to use that to burn our headquarters to cinders, everything is over. Hrmph, this is bad..."

The New Kuscheparkan Army was marching for Shield Nerrak. The headquarters, where the queen waited, was in the rear of their formation. Vouivre had appeared from behind the New Kuscheparkans. Naturally, it would come straight for the headquarters.

"But that's why we're here! Third Company, give the drake a big greeting!" Emris ordered.

"We're ready, young master!"

Emris had predicted this, and so he'd kept the Order of the Silver Phoenix near their headquarters. The Tzenndrimbles responded to Emris by activating their VLJTs. These were the most powerful antiair weapons of the age, and they were pointed straight at the drake.

"Fire!" Helvi, their company commander, shouted her order, and the missile javelins launched. Each one scattered through the sky before changing direction toward Vouivre and accelerating. Right before they hit, Ankyulorsas mounted to Vouivre's underside fired their Zafar Namas.

"So they're defending with lightning, just as we heard. But with this many javelins, losing some won't change anything!" exclaimed Emris.

"No, something's off. Look at that lightning! It wasn't that powerful before!"

As the knights watched, the flying javelins spread out threateningly. The drake fired lightning out all around it, which moved in a strange pattern. The lightning

seemed to intertwine with itself, almost looking like a net that surrounded the drake.

A beat later, the missile javelins rushed into the barrier of lightning. The javelins, which could even pierce through a silhouette knight, were all brought low by the lightning and smashed to pieces without accomplishing anything. The volley made by the entirety of Third Company hadn't managed to get even one javelin through. After the lightning disappeared, Vouivre was completely unharmed. It continued its leisurely advance, and a collective shiver ran through the New Kuscheparkan forces.

"Fire off signal rounds. Red." Emris's tone was stiff. "Hurry."

The drake's lightning was far more powerful than what was used by the levitating ships. Now that Third Company's full volley hadn't done anything, they no longer had any options. Emris realized right away that the only one capable of fighting the drake was...



"Lord Kojass gave this his full attention, and it shows. The flying javelins you're so proud of will not work, New Kuscheperka. Even if your fierce god attacks alongside them, our lightning shield will strike it all down!" Dorotheo smiled fearlessly from the cockpit in Vouivre's drakehead.

During Vouivre's one maintenance session, Horacio had taken the opportunity to further strengthen his creation. He'd deemed it necessary in order to defeat the fierce god. Dorotheo was now convinced of his victory after seeing its massive success against the missile javelins compared to the previous sortie.

With absolute composure, he surveyed the situation on the ground. His eyes stopped on one spot, and after a moment of shock, his mouth curved up into a smile. "That flag... That machine! I'd heard the reports, but it truly is the royal knight. To think that little girl would come out onto the battlefield. She looked like she'd shatter into a million pieces with just a glance, but I guess I was wrong."

The princess he'd laid eyes on in Castle Raspede had seemed as fragile and ephemeral as spun glass. She hadn't seemed to know even the first thing about war, but now she had ascended to the throne and was even leading an army.

The change was striking. Dorotheo considered the possibility that a body double was piloting the royal knight, but he shook his head; even if that were true, it wouldn't change anything.

“Whether or not that's the real thing, I still have to burn it to the ground. In fact, the only thing I need to worry about is the fierce god, which has yet to show itself. There's no way it isn't here; it's probably just waiting for an opportunity. I can't let my guard down, but...”

Dorotheo only wavered for an instant before making a decision. The jaw of Vouivre's prow opened wide, revealing its most powerful siege weapon.

“I can't let this chance slip by. Prepare the Incinerating Flame. We will burn away all the scoundrels aiming for Her Highness Princess Catarina's head with our fire!”

A massive amount of mana rushed into Vouivre's prow. This mana was guided by the Emblem Graph, transforming into intense fire. Once this fire was unleashed, the ground would be blasted into a hellscape.

But before the drake could spew its flames, a false star shot into the sky from the surface. The bright ball of light twinkled a deep red, as if signaling the drake like a stoplight. With that, a new levitating ship made its entrance onto the battlefield.

“Hm?! Who is controlling that ship? I haven't sent a signal to my order. No, wait... Something's off.”

The ship had come from a different direction than where the Emerald Drake Knights led by Vouivre was waiting. The moment he saw the ship, Dorotheo was assaulted with a sense of discomfort. It was an irritating feeling; something was missing.

Before long, he figured it out. The ship had no sails. Instead, flames spewed out from behind it, and it flew forth as if sliding through the sky.

“It's wrong... We're wrong! That isn't a Jaloudekian ship! It's an enemy! Then —” Right away, Dorotheo knew the ship was wrong. The only Jaloudekian vessel with Magius Jet Thrusters was Vouivre. Given the mana requirements, the device couldn't be mounted on any other ships. After that, everything was

obvious. The only other faction with the device was the technology's originator—Dorotheo's bitter enemy.

"So you're here, fierce god! So you've employed the levitating ship you captured. Damn you! How much will you have to mock me to be satisfied?!"



The Order of the Silver Phoenix's levitating ship cut through the air, and Ikaruga stood imposingly on its upper deck. It stared intently at Vouivre as Ernie howled in his cockpit. "Heh heh heh! This is the Air-to-Air Assault Levitating Ship, Type Four Flight Equipment... Agh, that's too long! Let's just call it the Silver Veil! I've prepared the best reception possible, drake-ship. I won't let you get away this time! I'll make sure to fully chew you up! Full speed! Charge!"

This ship used to belong to the enemy general, Cristobal. And now it was being used by Dorotheo's bitter enemy, who must have had full knowledge of what they were doing.

Once it had fallen into the Order of the Silver Phoenix's hands after Micilie, they had used it to understand the workings of levitating ships before heavily modifying it to combat Vouivre and sending it into battle. It was now bigger than before, had lost all its sails, and had a more pronounced prow with more armor. They'd also modified its propulsion systems, so it now had flames spewing out behind it thanks to a set of Magius Jet Thrusters. Their output was low, but the ship still moved at a speed comparable to Vouivre because it was lighter than the drake.

The jet of fire increased in size as Silver Veil accelerated even faster. It was aiming, of course, for Vouivre.

"So you're coming with a ship, fierce god. Let's settle this then, as you wish. But make no mistake—don't get cocky just because you put thrusters on it! Trying to face Vouivre with just a levitating ship is the height of absurdity! Messenger, prepare the Magisgraph. Send a message to our consort ships—we're leaving the ground to them!" Dorotheo ordered.

Immediately, a magic lantern installed in Vouivre started to emit light. It flickered on and off at set intervals for long-distance communication, and two ships appeared from behind shortly after.

Unlike normal levitating ships, these newcomers had extra armor. This was used to protect their cargo, making them specialized for delivering their charges to the battlefield. Now that the levitating ship had been diversified with the introduction of the spellfire-focused silhouette knights for ground bombardment, these models that focused on transportation were referred to as landing ships.

The air seemed to shiver as the landing ships advanced. Their thick armor repelled all incoming spellfire as their underside hatches quickly opened. The silhouette knights inside dropped one after the other, accompanied by the sound of extending chains. This was a small force, but they were close to the New Kuscheperkan Army's headquarters. In other words, New Kuscheperka now had a blade pointed at its throat.

A ferocious drake danced in the air while new Tyrantors had appeared behind New Kuscheperka's lines. Needless to say, they were quite shaken.

"Don't falter, royal guards! Just don't let them near Helena. Calm down, stop them, and kill them all!" Emris shouted, his voice reverberating throughout their headquarters.

Because New Kuscheperka was a gathering of minor and middling nobles, while they had a fair amount of military strength, there were some problems with their chain of command. That was why Emris, with his royal standing and great strength, was being treated as a general despite being from another country.

"Tell the front line not to worry! Ikaruga will surely bring down the drake in the sky, while we will protect our headquarters. And now the enemy has shown their hand. We just have to defeat them!"

While those words were mostly baseless blustering, Emris had the talent to be able to say it with his chest puffed out and head held high. No matter the situation, the general must never show a lack of composure. So the sight of him filled with confidence gave those around him relief; they trusted he could take care of it. *As expected of Ambrosius's grandson*, they thought. The unrest that had spread through the New Kuscheperkan Army started to settle.

The front line, which had devolved into a confused melee, now saw the New

Kuscheperkans reconstructing their formation. They aimed to tear down the wall of Tyrantors and break through the center.

Baron Mascaran stood in a section of the formation and shouted as he looked up to the sky. “The Order of the Silver Phoenix is fighting the drake! Its captain will surely avenge our brethren who have been so cruelly burned by the drake’s flames! So we must do our duty as well. Do not falter, comrades! Have no fear! Advance and cut open the path to Shield Nerrak!”

The road to Dervankhul was still long and rife with obstacles. However, the high morale of New Kuscheperka’s army never faltered in the face of so many continuous attacks. In fact, they only continued to pile on more pressure.

Meanwhile, the Jaloudekians also roared in excitement, as their guardian, Vouivre, had shown itself. Their stronghold was also intact behind them, so the odds were still in their favor.

“Hear this, glorious Black Knights! Our guardian, Vouivre, has appeared! The drake will soon make the sky bow to its might! Once that happens, New Kuscheperka will be burned in a single breath! Now is our time to stand! Fight hard, Black Knights!”

The battle cries of the knight runners did not stop as those on Jaloudek’s side raised their shields, resolved to blunt the momentum of New Kuscheperka’s charge.

Second Company had been waiting behind Emris, watching as the royal guards changed formation in response to the enemy attack, but now a voice spoke up. “What should we do, young master? If we’re going to break through, now would be the time.”

Emris crossed his arms and surveyed the battlefield as he considered the advice. The battlefield was still confused, but now both sides were starting to separate, turning the battle once more into an exchange of clear-cut offense and defense.

Losses from the drake’s appearance and the enemy reinforcements had been kept to a minimum by Ikaruga’s interference. Gradually, they were making progress toward Shield Nerrak. At least, for now.

“No, not now. Don’t make a move just yet,” Emris replied. “The bridge is still up. Bite into them when their throats are exposed—not a moment before.”

No matter how close to the fortress they got, the walls of Shield Nerrak still stood in New Kuscheperka’s way. As things were, they were in for a staring match across a river. Second Company’s powerful breakthrough capabilities were needed for after the bridge was down.

“You’re savage in a different way from Commander Dee, young master.”

“Oh, fine then. I guess I’ll save my strength for when we can finally go wild.”

“Still, we have to contend with that fortress after we’re over these plains. I wonder how many enemies are inside?”

“You sure complain a lot. Doesn’t that just mean we have a lot of prey? Let’s make a complete mess of it!”

If the bridge didn’t come down, the New Kuscheperkan forces would be backed into a corner. They didn’t have the time to waste being stuck across a river from their target. It was obvious they would lose a war of attrition. As long as Shield Nerrak remained standing, its impregnability would slowly but surely eat away at the New Kuscheperkan Army.

“Those walls are really becoming an eyesore. Where’s the good news from our infiltration team?!” Emris muttered, his expression turning grim. While he looked calm and composed on the outside, on the inside he was starting to panic.



The aerial battle continued as the silhouette knights clashed on the ground.

Jaloudek’s levitating ships were positioned to envelop the New Kuscheperkan Army. The Emerald Drake Order and Steel Wing Order, Jaloudek’s aerial wings, had numerical control of the skies—but one ship flew right into this encirclement. It was flying Kuscheperka’s flag and was emblazoned with a crest of a silver phoenix. Its name: Silver Veil.

The ship flew at full speed, with Ikaruga standing on its upper deck, straight toward Vouivre. It was far faster than Jaloudek’s levitating ships. This was

natural—the ship had fire jetting out behind it and was using the recoil to move. This propulsion was incomparable to the wind-based Blow Engine.

“So its speed is comparable to our drake’s. Combined with its bulky prow, it must be designed for ramming,” Dorotheo said. Silver Veil’s prow jutted out and was obviously covered in especially thick armor. There wasn’t even a question as to its purpose.

“But if they’re the ones who made it, a simple charge cannot be its sole aim.” Dorotheo was almost sure of that. The fierce god and its compatriots were on the cutting edge of silhouette knight technology. There was no way they would use their only levitating ship as nothing but a ram.

But the enemy ship was showing no signs of doing anything but charging straight ahead, so he decided to try to shake them to see what they would do. Vouivre’s Ankyulorsas started their bombardment. The spellfire cut through the air, emitting shrill sounds as it rushed toward Silver Veil. As one would expect, the ship didn’t just silently plow through the attacks; it shifted its heading diagonally.

Either because Silver Veil was so fast or because there was still quite some distance between them, the spellfire largely missed its mark. Dorotheo opened up a speaking tube. “Increase the intensity of the bombardment. I’m going to get closer!”

Though the enemy ship had taken a little detour, it was still steadily approaching Vouivre. Now, it was Dorotheo’s turn to advance, and the two ships approached each other on a spiraling trajectory. The closer they got, the more accurate Vouivre’s attacks became, and Silver Veil took an increasing number of blows.

“What’s wrong, fierce god?! Are you really just going to let yourself be eaten up by spellfire?!”

Eventually, Silver Veil changed course, acting as if it could no longer stand the attacks. Now it was trying to get away from Vouivre at high speed.

“Perhaps they aren’t used to piloting it yet? If so, what comedy! But I shall not let you escape. Ready the Thundering Cataract! Activate it at maximum strength—we’re going to tackle them! We will pulverize that ship along with the fierce

god!”

The Ankyulorsas on the ship wriggled and writhed, bringing up the Zafar Namas in their hands. The collective script for these weapons had been improved now, so the lightning they summoned would weave together and envelop Vouivre’s body. In this cocoon of lightning, Vouivre accelerated and charged toward Silver Veil.

In terms of speed, Vouivre’s max was higher. The distance between the two ships steadily shrank, but in the process of chasing Silver Veil, they’d gotten quite far away from the ground battle.

“I’ve been waiting for this moment.” Ikaruga turned its head, the scenery captured by its eye crystals displayed on the holomonitor inside. After confirming that Vouivre had chased them away from the battle, Ernie smiled deeply.

“I can’t use my new weapon above my own friendlies, after all,” Ernie said. “But now I don’t need to hold back!”

Small sails deployed on either side of Silver Veil. These acted as air brakes, slowing the ship down.

“Now then, drake-ship, the time has come. I’m sure you’re invincible in a dogfight, and there are no enemies worthy of you. A simple levitating ship with extra armor is likewise nothing in the face of your might. But... That confidence is your weakness. Because that’s why you allowed my ship to come so close!”

The roars of the two reactors within Ikaruga rose to a fever pitch, the intense intake resulting in massive amounts of mana. However, Ikaruga’s frame actually ceased moving and fell asleep. Ernie had no plans to fight Vouivre with Ikaruga.

There were countless silver nerves deployed around Ikaruga’s sleeping form. These nerves were connected to the inside of the levitating ship. He was using the vast amounts of mana produced not for his silhouette knight, but for something else.

“Awaken, Vespiary.”

Ernie’s script was communicated through the silver nerves, sinking into the ship. The surface around Ikaruga immediately started to open up like a bud. The

now-open covers revealed a mass of rail arms from VLJTs that had been tightly packed into the ship's upper deck—128 javelins in all.

The greatest superpower Ernesti took pride in was his processing ability that allowed him to master so much magic. This ability that allowed him to pilot Ikaruga, said to equal a hundred knights, was what had informed this weapon.

There was no way to describe his ability but to say that it was nonsense, and all of it was put into this rain of metal javelins. This was Silver Veil's latest and greatest weapon.

"Now...to start our own personal festival. Let's ring the starting bell and smash it to pieces!"

All 128 missile javelins were fired at the same time, and the sight of it was simply magnificent. In fact, the fiery wash of all the javelins' exhaust played a heavy symphony that threatened to burn away Silver Veil's upper deck. The collective trail of flame as the weapons rose into the heavens was like a big, fiery tree trunk. But before long, the projectiles started to split apart as they gently curved down toward their target. Much like the branches of a willow, these javelins spread into individual trails that were all aimed at Vouivre.

This scene, which could only be described as irrational and absurd, was able to strike the courageous, battle-hardened Dorotheo speechless. This minor discomposure created an opening, which the metal javelins aimed for as they accelerated.

"Simply ridiculous!" Dorotheo exclaimed. "But that was too naive of you, fierce god! Did you really think you could force an attack through with just numbers? Don't underestimate us! Give it all you've got, men! Activate the Thundering Cataract at full power!"

While Ikaruga had a mass of javelins, Vouivre had its lightning defense. The Ankyulorsas attached to Vouivre all poured their mana into their weapons to try to defy the rain of projectiles.

A torrent of lightning enveloped the drake, becoming an umbrella that would repel the oncoming storm. The javelins were broken and repelled one after another. The pieces still rained upon Vouivre, but they were no longer a threat.

“A futile effort! Everything you do is useless as long as the linked silhouette arms—Thundering Cataract—exists! No matter how many you send, none will reach us!” Dorotheo, from his position in the drakehead, had failed to notice the change that was happening around Vouivre. The Ankyulorsas’ knight runners saw the strangeness instead.

The pieces of javelin that rained down from above had bits of wood mixed in even though they were supposedly made of only metal and crystal catalyst. There were also sparkling droplets of some sort of liquid. They fell like rain and dampened Vouivre and the Ankyulorsas.

The knight runners were suspicious. The sky was clear—there was no reason for there to be any rain. Their questioning faces instantly paled the moment they smelled the scent that filtered in a little later.

“Th-This is...oil?!”

By the time they noticed, it was already too late. A large amount of oil had already soaked Vouivre. Then, a small light appeared above Silver Veil: a single scarlet magic bolt.

The knight runners gasped in shock, but it was all too late. They could neither run nor prevent what was about to happen. The fiery projectile burst, setting the spray of oil on fire, and thus the upper parts of Vouivre as well.

A bright fireball flared up from the ship’s surface. The flare was so violent it created an explosive blast that assaulted the drake and bent its armor. Its giant form, which had up until now been proudly soaring through the air, staggered and sank a little. It was quickly brought back up by the Levitating Field, though, and it went back to its original altitude.

The whole ship had been tossed around by the intense blast wave and deafened by the accompanying noise, but the drakehead at the prow was the most affected. All the shaking and being tossed around had Dorotheo confused, but he was still a veteran knight runner. He managed to right himself and punch open the speaking tube. “Wh-What happened?! What is all this fire?! Agh, I need a damage report! Give me a damage report! Hey, someone, anyone?!”

He only got an eerie silence in response.



After seeing the creation of that fireball, Ikaruga stood once more. It shook off the silver nerves connecting it to Silver Veil and grabbed the weapons set around it. Ernie's will to fight filled his partner as mana cycled through it as well.

"I've figured your lightning defense into my calculations," Ernie said. "Considering the possibility of that being strengthened, no amount of missile javelins would deal appreciable damage. But that was the trap. I made weapons with the intent of having you *break* them."

The missile javelins packed into Silver Veil were all specially made. In each javelin, a wooden barrel was attached near its metal tip. The barrels were filled with monster oil, an especially flammable liquid.

Their previous skirmish had introduced Ernie to Vouivre's Zafar Nama defense. That was why he'd made it look like he was trying to attack with sheer numbers when he was really trying to soak his enemy in oil by breaking the barrels above it. It was a two-stage attack.

"I made these special javelins just for you, so how do they taste? I call them detonation javelins. Come on, that fire was just the starting signal! The real thing is yet to come."

Silver Veil's upper deck plating closed and returned to its original form. Ikaruga started to run across it, the roar of its Magius Jet Thrusters intensifying as it accelerated and took to the air.

Wreathed by fire, the fierce god of destruction flew toward the unsteady drake-ship.



"How could this...happen?! Damn you, fierce god! My Vouivre... My men! I swear I'll make you pay for that!" Dorotheo didn't have even a speck of his usual composure left. His expression was twisted into that of a violent and vengeful fiend.

He'd thought he was being cautious. He'd known that the fierce god would have some sort of trick. But that trick had exceeded anything he could have imagined. Creating a volley of javelins so large it blotted out the sky just as a

diversion was the kind of thing a madman would think of.

“It used fire! It’s making fun of us... Fire is *our* weapon! We’ll never lose to this paltry flame!”

The drake was still burning—monster oil was famous for being hard to put out. But Dorotheo was far from calm; he couldn’t accept that his enemy had used fire—which was supposed to be Vouivre’s domain—on them, so he struck out with a terribly reckless move.

Vouivre’s entire body creaked, but not out of pain from the damage. It was the sound of its remaining crystal tissue flexing. It twisted its body, performing a surprisingly abrupt loop the loop. The rush of airflow and intense centrifugal force this caused whipped off the oil and put out most of the fire. One wrong move, though, and the hull would have broken to pieces.

Now that most of the fire had been extinguished, the voices of his surviving men finally reached Dorotheo in his maddened state. “C-Captain... Are you okay?! You managed to get rid of most of the fire somehow. But...it’s no good...the other Ankyulorsas, they—”

This was a great shock to Dorotheo’s boiling head. The blast wave and intense fire had been fatal to the Ankyulorsas on Vouivre’s surface. Five of the six stationed on its upper half had stopped functioning.

“Captain... The situation is awful. As things stand, our mana supply is...”

There was no need to point out how the man’s voice was shaking. Vouivre had gained its overwhelming power by greedily consuming mana. It was so hungry that it would eventually reach its limit even with thirteen lives feeding it. With five of those lives gone, the drake would start to eat heavily into its own mana pool. At this point, it was basically checkmate.

“No...not yet. We’re not done yet. We still have a hand to play.” With bloodshot eyes, Dorotheo looked at a feature that had been sealed. The controls for it were right there. Vouivre still had a trump card. It was the Drakesblood Grail—the crystallization of the secrets of ether that Horacio Kojass had installed. The reactor was a product of madness that could support the drake by itself.

“We’ve taken too much damage... But as long as we can regain our mana supply, Vouivre still has a chance. Yes... That’s right. Now that I think about it, there’s no way it could use that attack more than once.”

Dorotheo’s thoughts, boiling with rage, had been cooled all at once by the recognition of their current situation. Having regained his composure, he realized the downside of the fierce god’s earlier attack—its uniqueness.

It was simple: The missile javelins were physical projectiles, unlike spellfire. So in order to make the same attack again, they needed the same number of javelins. Dorotheo figured that, given the size of the enemy ship, such an attack would no longer be possible.

“We still have hope for victory. But the Drakesblood Grail is...”

Even so, he hesitated. Activating the Drakesblood Grail meant using the Etheric Levitator’s fuel—etherite, which they needed to make the ship float in the air. That meant only one thing: They would no longer be able to escape high into the sky. They would be left with no other option but to defeat the fierce god, crush the New Kuscheparkan Army, and claim total victory.

Unfortunately, he didn’t have time. At that very moment, a great incident on the ground blew away his hesitation.

Chapter 45: Fate's Destination

While the back-and-forth of attack and defense on the Coderlier Plains was happening, a separate force of silhouette gears made a detour downstream of the Melbarri River.

If a giant silhouette knight were to try to cross the river, they'd stand out, but silhouette gears were a different matter. They split up into several groups and quietly crossed to the opposite shore in small boats. Ahead of them was a steep cliff and thick vegetation.

Dietrich helped to hide his boat, but he started complaining as he put on his silhouette gear. "Making moves with only silhouette gears is a pretty brute-force method. It only works because there're no monsters around, huh?"

"Yes. If we tried this back home, we'd just be risking our own lives," Nora answered in a light tone. Though maneuvers with only silhouette gears weren't quite *utterly* reckless back in Fremmevilla, they were still much more dangerous.

While all this was happening, the silhouette gear squad stepped into the forest. They ran nimbly through a pathless route, weaving between the trees. Silhouette gears, with their crystal tissue, were very good at dealing with bad footing from the untamed ground. They were also tough, so they were able to force their way through some obstacles. After a while of this, Nora gave the signal to stop.

"We're getting close. We'll need to start watching out for enemies while we go."

They slowed down from that point, moving through the shadows created by the thick vegetation. Before long, the forest opened up to reveal an area with evenly cut undergrowth. Clearly, human hands were involved in shaping this place.

"Now what? Do we go forward, making sure to kill anybody we come across?" Dietrich asked.

Nora shook her head. "No. We have a lot of information about this place, so

there's no need to take such risks. Our path lies there."

Nora had led them to a hidden but open cave in the forest. It looked natural and blended into the surroundings regardless of any work done to hide it or seal it away. No one would have visited this place if they didn't know exactly what to look for.

With a magic light in hand, the silhouette gear squad entered the cave. While it was all bare ground at first, after a while they started seeing man-made structures.

"So we're in a hidden passage? I see...perfect for sneaking in. True, silhouette gears can make use of this. *Kind of*," Dietrich said. The passage was made to be as small as possible, probably so it wouldn't stand out. Since silhouette gears were a size larger than regular humans, they were barely able to fit inside even after trying to squeeze themselves down a little.

"Running into any enemies here wouldn't go well, huh?" Dietrich said idly.

"Yes, now be quiet and walk." The short, sharp response that came from the head of the group had Dietrich immediately shutting his mouth. The voice echoed more than he'd expected in this cave. He didn't think it could be heard outside, but better safe than sorry.

After that, they moved in silence. Even though Dietrich was a knight of Fremmevilla and had trained hard to hunt monsters, everyone had their limits. He was feeling suffocated by this clandestine mission. In this regard, the members of the Order of the Indigo Falcon were able to endure much more; they looked perfectly fine.

After what seemed like an eternity of nerves and feeling cramped, they finally reached the end of the passage. There was a ladder in front of them which seemed to get sucked into the wall.

"Finally, we can say goodbye to this cramped place," Dietrich said.

"Indeed. I'm going to activate the final mechanism. Stay vigilant." Nora dimmed her light and deftly operated something in the shadows of the passageway. Some sort of mechanism activated, and as they'd been informed beforehand, an exit opened up at the other end of the ladder.

The Shadowrads made full use of their stealthiness and silently made their way inside. After checking their surroundings, they found that they were inside a warehouse. Just as their information had told them, they'd managed to infiltrate Shield Nerrak.

Nora waited for everyone to come up before taking out a new map—a floor plan of Shield Nerrak. This fortress was the linchpin of the capital's defenses, and it was forbidden to record the details of its structure. That was why this map had been created from the royals' memory, and thus was far from detailed. But it was better than nothing.

"Our next objective is to lower the drawbridge. First, we need to secure the power necessary to operate the mechanism," Nora said.

The drawbridge, which was big enough for silhouette knights to cross, was unbelievably heavy in exchange for its toughness. It was extremely difficult to move—so much so that even silhouette knights wouldn't be able to do it. That was why they used the flow of the Melbarri River by constructing a waterwheel so they could draw power.

"The exit of the hidden passage is here, and the room we're aiming for is here. The enemy's attention should be on our main force, but don't let your guards down. You all know the steps to operate the mechanism, right? Whoever gets there safely will be responsible for it." Nora and the members of the Order of the Indigo Falcon that she led had all memorized how to operate the power source. Now they just needed to get there.

"Now then, it's time for the real thing," Dietrich said.

With their final checks done, the silhouette gear squad moved out.

Though Shield Nerrak was extremely tough from the outside, with its walls blended with the natural fortifications around it, it wasn't nearly as impregnable on the inside. What's more, all Jaloudekian attention was on the New Kuscheperkan army in front of them, so they weren't paying much attention to what was going on behind. That was where the stealthy Shadowrads struck. They almost literally became shadows as they wove between blind angles in passages.

The Tyrantors fulfilling backline jobs inside Shield Nerrak were now waiting

eagerly for the order to deploy. They were surrounded by knight runners and knight smiths who were busily running all over, and their pilots' nervousness and excitement ratcheted up by the second. Their attentions were focused on their machines, and never in their dreams would they have thought enemies in silhouette gears were right next to them.

The shadows, communicating silently through signals, spread through the cold stone passageways of the fortress. They approached their objective without any encounters, likely because the Jaloudekians had all gone to their combat posts.

"The power room is just up ahead..." Nora and the others proceeded cautiously, regardless of the fact that they'd met no enemies. Eventually, they were only one section away from their objective.

"Heh heh heh... I thought you'd come."

Their covert action did not last until the end—an armed group stood in their way on the very last stretch.

A woman stood imposingly at the center of the group, wearing a lurid smile. It was Kerhilt Hietakannes, the captain of the Copper Fang Knights, along with her men.

"Heh heh hah! I've lost my men and my silhouette knights," she said. "I'm sick and tired of only being given jobs in the shadows!"

In the past, the Copper Fang Knights had attempted a night raid on the Kuscheperkan remnants in Micilie, but they were repelled by the Order of the Silver Phoenix. They'd sustained enough damage in that operation to put them on the brink of annihilation. That loss of strength, combined with the responsibility for failure, had erased them from the public stage.

"Forcing that gate to open head-on is difficult, to say the least. So I knew you'd try to open the gates a different way. I never would have thought you'd send these tiny silhouette knights, though! I hit the jackpot!" Kerhilt gloated, pleased that her prediction had hit the mark. "No matter where you infiltrated from, it was easy to stop you since I knew where you'd be aiming. All we had to do was lie in wait!"

With her voice as the signal, her men took up their crossbows and staves, aiming them at Nora and her group. They were in a straight hall, and if they jumped straight forward, they'd be riddled with holes.

"Of course they wouldn't just let us through," Nora said. "Even with silhouette gears, getting through this will be a little tricky."

The Copper Fang Knights had set up obstacles in the hallway and were hiding behind those as they aimed. Against that many crossbows, not even the silhouette gears' armor would hold up. But there was a chance some of them would make it, as long as they were prepared to make some sacrifices.

While Dietrich was wondering what to do, Nora gave her orders in a quiet voice. "We will act as shields. You go and lower the bridge."

"Hm? We may be in armor, but taking on that many enemies at once will still be dangerous," said Dietrich.

"Danger comes with the job," Nora replied. And with that, they started moving.

Immediately, they were exposed to a rain of crossbow bolts. There was no place to run; sparks flew off the Shadowrads' armor, shaving away at metal.

"Impressive! But I think you made a mistake assigning roles!" Dietrich yelled as he drew his silhouette gear's greatsword and kicked off the ground. He accelerated to a terrific speed, overtaking Nora and the rest in an instant.

Dietrich kept going as bolts cut through the air toward him. He was charging at max speed, so he couldn't dodge—but in reality, it was more like he didn't need to. Every bolt was swept away with a single swing of his greatsword. The weapon seemed to howl as it did so, after which he found himself between both forces.

He was a knight runner, but that didn't only mean that he piloted silhouette knights. True, silhouette knights needed a special skill to pilot, but it was another skill altogether to know *how* a silhouette knight should move to be effective. Powerful knight runners were all greatly skilled warriors without exception.

He was in charge of the Order of the Silver Phoenix's Second Company:

Dietrich Künitz, commander of the shock troops. There was no way he'd be lacking when it came to a head-on battle. Though he'd given up the initiative to a mass of projectile weapons, he'd pushed back with just one blade.

"We're switching roles. Swinging my sword suits me much more, in the end. Also, all of you are much better with your hands than I am. I'll leave the rest of you, but I still want a couple people to follow me." Dietrich's profile was that of a confident knight.

The members of the Order of the Indigo Falcon were definitely not weak in combat. However, because they spent time training for covert ops, they were a step behind true knights when it came to open, frontal battles. That went double for a company commander.



“Don’t just make that call on your own! You really resemble your knight captain in that regard. But...it does seem better to leave this to you. Good luck!” Nora made a prompt decision, and the two ran half the remaining distance together.

The sound of footsteps behind him confirmed that the other Shadowrads had begun to move, and Dietrich swatted away a second volley of crossbow bolts. He howled with a bright expression, as if he’d dispelled something that had built up inside him.

“At this point, there’s no need to sneak around! I’m going to go as wild as I want! Get ready!” Dietrich was already running before he finished.

The enemy’s crossbows wouldn’t be reloaded in time. Magic flew at him instead, but his storm of sword swings brushed those aside. A backswing saw the sword suddenly smash into the ground at his feet, allowing him to kick up broken pieces of floor in a scathing attack. These pieces, launched with the strength of a silhouette gear, were lethal. They smashed aside the obstacles the Copper Fang Knights had prepared.

“Grk, crap! Damn this guy!”

When the enemy faltered, Dietrich took his chance to jump into their formation. They stood no chance against a master of the sword wearing a silhouette gear the moment he got into range. It didn’t take long until all the enemies had fallen.

“That wraps this up,” Dietrich said. “Now to make a huge mess in this stronghold. Our objective is to confuse and disrupt them as much as possible now. Time to stand out a bit!”

Along with the knights who followed him, Dietrich started going on a rampage inside the fortress, attempting to draw attention away from Nora and those who’d followed her to the power room.

The Copper Fang Knights’ independence had worked against them in this case. They had not maintained an open line of communication, and this tactic had been their own independent call. So the Jaloudekian soldiers garrisoning this stronghold had no idea enemies were in their midst, and when silhouette

gears suddenly showed up and attacked, they went down without much resistance.

In the first place, the fort's interior was designed for humans—regular silhouette knights would never fit. In such an environment, silhouette gears were terrifyingly effective. Their defensive and offensive aspects made them almost too strong to use against normal humans. Thus the fortress was almost immediately lit up with intense confusion. Dietrich and his followers ran around as they pleased, worsening the situation.

"It sounds like they're doing well." Nora and her followers had now reached their objective. Even though there was a huge commotion going on elsewhere, they still had enemies to deal with—as one might expect from such an important area. They would have to deal with their own fair share of soldiers as they proceeded.

"The main force is waiting. Let's hurry." With that, Nora activated the mechanism to lower the bridge.



"Damn it... Shit! *Shit!* Why do they have to get in my way every single time?!" Kerhilt cursed profusely as she wandered through the passages of Shield Nerrak. When Dietrich had come charging in like a storm, she'd of course abandoned her men and run. She'd piled up so many failures that any part of her that had been worried for her subordinates was broken. All that was left was irritation that all her pawns had been used up.

At this point, there was almost no hope for her to make a comeback. She was the only remaining Copper Fang Knight. What could she even accomplish on her own? However, she had yet to give up.

"I'll take at least one myself, even if I have to do it by force." With that, Kerhilt made for the workshop.



Shield Nerrak's eastern section was built on the shallows of the Melbarri River, and it was a powerful defensive stronghold that protected Dervankhul. But now, its sturdy closed gate was open.

Immediately, the New Kuscheperkan Army burst into excited cries. The last obstacle in their way had been removed, and the strength of their advance immediately increased.

Dorotheo watched all this from the sky in Vouivre as he tried to shake off the rest of the fire.

“Impossible! Why is the bridge coming down?! They’re letting those New Kuscheperkans just flood straight in! What in the world are they doing down there—” Dorotheo paused as a bitter memory rose in the back of his mind. “I see... It’s the work of those pseudo-silhouette knights again. Damn those bastards!!!”

The Jaloudek Army had learned from its past defeats and adapted to many New Kuscheperkan tactics, but not silhouette gears. They’d had their hands full with the silhouette knights and levitating ships. Dorotheo had yet to know this, but the Copper Fang Knights *had* adapted to silhouette gears. Unfortunately, that countermeasure had come to nothing in the hands of Kerhilt, who’d wanted to monopolize the information for her own benefit.

Vouivre was wounded, and the fortress had fallen. They no longer had any leeway.

Dorotheo hardened his decision to unleash Vouivre’s sealed power. He opened a speaking tube and gave a quiet order to his surviving subordinates. “We’re going into Maximized Mode. Prepare to activate the Drakesblood Grail.”

Their path of retreat was now cut off. Dorotheo had always been resolved to sacrifice himself, yet he’d been hesitant to involve his men in this. But no longer. Now, if he didn’t do this, Jaloudek would be in grave danger. He couldn’t allow that.

“Withdrawal is no longer an option. Come, my friends...let us fulfill our duty.”

A dull clamor resounded throughout Vouivre’s insides. The crew had changed the flow of the atmospheric bypass. The etheric suppliers greedily consumed their etherite, creating a massive amount of high-purity ether. This traveled through the ship into the Drakesblood Grail. This, in turn, supplied the remaining Ankyulorsas.

“Etherite decay is progressing! We are continuing to supply high-purity ether to all reactors... Starting Maximized Mode!”

The Drakesblood Grail awoke with a strange and terrible noise. At the same time, all the other ether reactors started acting abnormally and producing an enormous amount of mana.

Maximized Mode was achieved by feeding the usually sealed Drakesblood Grail, along with all the silhouette knights on board, high-purity ether to elicit a sort of berserk state. As long as this state continued, Vouivre’s already impressive combat strength would reach heights greater than its limits.

“Even if we win with this, there’s no chance for Vouivre to survive.”

However, this was a double-edged sword. Ether reactors were created by people who lived on the surface. These reactors were thus made for the dilute ether of the surface and couldn’t withstand this concentrated, high-purity ether. According to tests once conducted by Jaloudek’s developmental workshops, reactors that overused ether suppliers would at some point suddenly and rapidly lose function until they were completely dead. Nothing would help this, and there was no choice but to dispose of these dead reactors.

Vouivre, now in its Maximized Mode, was now struggling with this problem. This power, gained by exchanging its path of retreat, was only good for a limited time. What awaited the drake now was inevitable death.

The ship’s hull raised a repulsive groan as Dorotheo started to feel a bizarre feedback from his control yokes.

“Hm?! To think it was this powerful... It is raging against me. I knew it—it is still nearly uncontrollable.”

Having gained an explosive amount of mana, Vouivre and its power were no longer controllable by human hands.

Each and every action was pregnant with intense power, and the drake’s body was transformed into a raging storm. The skills and technology accumulated by humanity were still too immature to control this much power. Its unruliness was even too much for Dorotheo, who was uncommonly talented as a knight runner.

“We can’t be slow about this. There was never any need to be in control! Just slam all this power at the enemy!” he ordered. His opponent was the fierce god—the wounded drake wouldn’t be able to match up otherwise.

“C-Captain! The fierce god’s left the levitating ship and is coming this way!”

“So it’s approaching us! Just what I wanted! Now we can use all our remaining weaponry. We won’t last long, so let’s burn it away in one breath!”

The behavior of ships that used Etheric Levitators was extremely unique. As long as there was no outside interference, they would maintain a set altitude in accordance to the strength of their Levitating Field (this was referred to as relative etheric altitude). That was why Vouivre looked so stable despite its terrible wounds.

“Let’s go. Deploy the Thundering Cataract!”

In that instant, Vouivre’s crew transformed into dead men walking with no avenue of retreat. The dead drake, filled with the determination to bring ruin and destruction, raised a terrible cry as it engaged the fierce god once more.



Now the scene shifts to a slightly earlier time, when the great bright ball of fire was created in the sky.

This fire, as bright as the sun, hit the drake hard with an intense heat and impact. The steel that made up the drake’s body flew off, and the ship creaked and groaned in agony.

The two armies fighting on the ground forgot they were in a battle for a moment as their attentions were taken by the events in the sky. The drake—mighty guardian to the Jaloudekians and huge threat to the New Kuscheperkans—was now a wounded beast. Even so, they saw that its wound was not fatal, and while it faltered, it was still in the sky. Still, the monster that had caused New Kuscheperka so much pain had now lost all its wonder and majesty.

“Yaaaah! The Order of the Silver Phoenix dealt a hard blow to the drake!”

“Hey, look at that! Look at the gates!”

Immediately afterward, a second, even greater cheer arose from the New

Kuscheperkan side. Shield Nerrak's gate, which had been shutting them out on the other side of the river's shore, had opened. The gate lowered to become a bridge.

The way was open. The greatest obstacle standing in front of the New Kuscheperkan Army was gone. The army let out a cry as they advanced. They ate through the wall of Tyrantors that had come together to try to stop them within the span of a breath, after which the vanguard stepped onto the bridge. They were going to flood into Shield Nerrak.

"This fortress was originally ours! We're taking it back!"

The New Kuscheperkans streamed in like a raging river. The Jaloudekian garrison that had remained inside would obviously appear to stop them—but oddly enough, only one silhouette knight came out of the fortress.

"What the heck? Do they not have anyone left?! No matter—there's no need to hold back. We'll be pushing through!"

A single silhouette knight stood against an army, but as this army approached, they realized how abnormal the silhouette knight was. Its armor was white with an elegant gold trim, but those looks were ruined by the mass of swords that had been haphazardly piled onto it.

There were way too many weapons attached, and they were all swords besides. No other equipment was visible at all. That decision, and indeed the silhouette knight itself, did not seem the product of a sane mind.

The silhouette knights in the New Kuscheperkan Army's vanguard suddenly felt a nagging tug from their memories. A fancy white unit with gold trim—it was the same as what Jaloudek's general had used. Given that, this situation didn't seem to make sense, but this was a perfect chance at the same time. After all, the enemy general was now alone in front of them—there was no better situation for taking the general's head. The New Kuscheperkan unit at the forefront readied a sword and continued running, prepared to strike.

Before anyone noticed, the enemy had a sword in hand. Yet the strange thing was that it had already been swung. Given the position of the sword, the unit at the forefront had been in the swing's path...

No one knows if the man ever realized that before his silhouette knight was split in two. Its upper half carried its momentum and slid forward, after which the rest of it lost its balance and fell into the river. A shudder rippled through the New Kuscheperkan Army, even though they'd been rushing forward with victory in sight.

This time, it was the Jaloudekian knight's turn to start walking. Although the New Kuscheperkans overwhelmed it in numbers, an inexpressible chill ran down their spines.

"This is nothing! It may be a little strong, but we just have to crush it under our weight!"

Given how this group of vanguards had charged straight into the enemy's midst, at least some of them had guts. The silhouette knights lined up, brought up their shields, and slammed into their enemy. No matter how powerful the lone silhouette knight was, all it had were swords, so the vanguard figured they could suppress it with shields.

But even against the oncoming tidal wave of Laevantias, the silhouette knight covered in swords stepped forward with no hesitation. Right after it did, one of the Laevantias bent backward out of nowhere. There was a knife buried deep inside its head; it was unclear when it had been thrown.

New Kuscheperka's knight runners didn't have the time to worry for their comrade, as the enemy had slid into the space left by the fallen unit and gotten within their shields. It held blades in both hands, which reflected the light. Each flash saw a Laevantia lose either an arm and the equipment it was holding or a leg, sending the machine crashing to the ground.

"Damn it! We won't just let it get away with this! There's only one enemy—as long as we can stop it from moving..."

Though the New Kuscheperkans attacked back in a panic, almost all of their attempts yielded nothing. Some were brushed aside by a sword, while others were stopped by a scabbard. Their strikes simply never reached their mark. Conversely, every single one of the Jaloudekian knight's attacks were lethal. The sword-covered knight breached through the encirclement when the last of the vanguard fell.

“Damn... What... What an absurd silhouette knight! It brought down the entire vanguard on its own!”

A hellish scene was unfolding atop the bridge. Many silhouette knight wrecks now lay either strewn at the sword-covered knight’s feet, or at the bottom of the river. Each one had been brought low by a single blow. At this point, the only accurate descriptor for this knight was “absurd.”

“So this is the strength of a leader’s machine. That martial prowess is incredible. It’s like the Silver Phoenix’s fierce god!”

Just one machine. Just one silhouette knight was enough to stop the entire New Kuschepinkan Army’s advance. It was like a nightmare.

“All forces, fall back for now! We can’t make use of our numbers on the bridge. I’ll take care of this!”

A shining white knight passed through the crowd of the halted New Kuschepinkans—Edgar in his Aldiradcumber. Its Flexible Coat stirred as it came to the front to protect the New Kuschepinkans.

“You all guard the rear,” Edgar ordered the rest of First Company, who followed behind and spread out to either side of him.

“Yes, sir! Don’t let your guard down, sir!”

“Of course. There’s no way I could take it easy after seeing this scene,” Edgar replied.

First Company took after their leader and were very good at defense. Some had shields, while others used Flexible Coats like Aldiradcumber.

The essence of their doctrine lay in effective positioning. First Company had split into two to support the New Kuschepinkan Army, which was starting to crumble now that their advance had been stopped.

The Jaloudekian side had allowed their enemy to break through their center, but before anyone noticed, they’d shifted their formation to now pincer the New Kuschepinkan Army. But before that could happen, First Company formed a white wall.

Edgar groaned as he observed the disaster on the bridge. “I see, so that knight

managed this by using the terrain. Still, doing all this alone can't have been easy." Even though the bridge was large enough to allow for multiple silhouette knights to walk abreast, there was still a limit. New Kuscheperka's army was big, but in such a situation they couldn't bring the full might of their numbers to bear. The sword-covered knight had the strength to deal with two or three units at once, which was why it had chosen to intercept them here.

"If we want to get past it, we'll need to bring it down with a small force."

Even though it had gotten to choose its battlefield, it was still strong enough to bring down several Laevantias at a time. No half-baked knight runner could fight it. The only ones capable of meeting it were the leaders of the Order of the Silver Phoenix. Since Dietrich and Guairelinde weren't present, that left Edgar and Aldiradcumber to pick up the slack.

The sword-covered knight, which had been walking forward at a leisurely pace, stopped in front of Aldiradcumber. Both white knights faced each other atop the bridge, and interestingly enough, they sported almost polar opposite equipment. One was covered in swords, while the other was covered in armor.

Now that he was so close to his enemy, Edgar saw how abnormal his opponent was, and he furrowed his brow. "A knight with many swords on it... Is this the one Dee mentioned? He said the pilot was a fearsome swordsman who managed to defeat Guairelinde. I see his praise was well-founded!"

Reality exceeded the rumors. After all, this pilot had stood against an entire army by himself. And even though his opponent didn't seem to be on his guard, Edgar couldn't find any openings.

"I don't care who you are. I'm going to have you step aside!"

Aldiradcumber made the first move as it ran forward. The sword-covered knight responded by dashing forward as well. Before they met in the middle, Aldiradcumber's Flexible Coat moved. This wasn't a defensive maneuver—it revealed the silhouette arms hidden on the underside.

This was naturally followed by a surprise round of spellfire, to which the sword-covered knight responded with a blast of wind from swinging one of its blades. The incoming spellfire was blown aside, and both knights closed in on each other, their momentum unchanged. This time, Aldiradcumber's Flexible

Coat deployed for defense to receive the blow, but the sword-covered knight quickly pushed the defensive equipment aside.

“My Aldirad will not lose in strength! And my coat, it’s...” Edgar had his machine jump back, creating some distance. He then looked around, noticing that the Flexible Coat was bent with crushed crystal tissue tumbling out. If he’d planted his feet and allowed the sword-covered knight to continue with its swing, he might have been destroyed even with his Flexible Coat. Intense tension flashed across his face.

Meanwhile, the sword-covered knight came for another attack. The two swords in its hands flashed, and Aldiradcumber tried to intercept with its own sword. One blade clashed with Aldiradcumber’s, while the other sword was batted away with Aldiradcumber’s shield. This exchange ended, and once again the two combatants put some space between them.

“Ah ha! So you’re different from the small fry, eh?” the sword-covered knight said happily. “You move like the twin-blade, even though you only have the one sword.”

He sounded foolishly at ease, which deepened the furrow of Edgar’s brow, but there was a part of that sentence Edgar couldn’t ignore. “Twin-blade? Are you referring to Guairelinde—I mean, the crimson knight? So you really are that weirdo he said he fought.”

“Oh? What’s this? So you really are a friend of his. It looks like he isn’t here, so I was just lamenting that I wouldn’t be able to get back at him for wrecking me before. But you’ll do as a replacement. I’ll leave you rusting in pieces with my Dead Man’s Sword!” Gustavo laughed loudly. As a battle fanatic, he was never more excited than when in front of a powerful enemy.

Edgar tried his best to block out the man’s cackling laugh as he looked straight at him with caution. “Nice joke, but I’m not letting you run rampant any longer. I’ll have you step aside for our victory.”

“Hah! Hah! Good, I like that. You’re strong, so if I beat you, I’ll completely stuff your army’s momentum!”

Edgar had been seen through. While his enemy sounded like he was joking around, he was surprisingly observant—that misconception stung Edgar. The

personal unit of the Order of the Silver Phoenix's First Company commander, Aldiradcumber, was unmistakably the strongest unit currently present. If he lost, the New Kuscheperkans would absolutely take a big blow to their morale. At the same time, taking this bridge was absolutely necessary for their victory.

"You're counting your eggs before they've hatched. All I have to do is win."

Aldiradcumber deployed its Flexible Coat and readied its blade, while Dead Man's Sword slowly shifted closer. Both sides measured the distance between them, aiming to gain the initiative. Edgar concentrated, not wanting to let a single move escape him.

That was why he noticed the change first. In the image displayed by his holomonitor, he suddenly noticed that a shadow was being cast on his machine's hands. He instantly realized what that meant.

"Gah! Reinforcements?!"

Aldiradcumber's Flexible Coat moved up to cover it from the sky. Edgar kicked down at his stirrups, making his machine jump backward.

As if to take Aldiradcumber's place, a black shadow had come down on its previous location. It immediately went on the attack after landing, which Aldiradcumber defended against with its Flexible Coat. After landing from the backward jump, Aldiradcumber retreated a further few steps. By the time Edgar noticed, he'd retreated from the bridge to the riverbank.

The black shadow slowly, menacingly stood. Edgar's expression turned grim. Dead Man's Sword alone was already a fearsome foe. With another enemy added to the mix, a hard fight would be inevitable.

But the two units he expected to be enemies took unexpected action. Dead Man's Sword had lowered its stance and watched the attack happen, but now it emitted a low growl of pure rage. "Hey, hey, hey, hey! I don't care who you think you are, Copper Fang, but you can't do that! I'm the one fighting here, so don't get in the way. I told you, didn't I? Next time I won't show any mercy. Don't think you're special—I'll cut you down!"

Dead Man's Sword pointed its blades at the black shadow, which should have been a friendly. But even though it was exposed to such rage, the black shadow

didn't turn around. "Hah! Stop talking nonsense. This place is littered with enemies. How much time are you planning to waste on this single ant? If you've got that much leeway, then hurry up and take the general's head! What did Her Majesty give you that gift for, huh?!"

Gustavo didn't respond for a while. "Tch! You sure can talk, I guess. Fine. If you're going to go that far, I'll leave that one to you."

His expression couldn't have been more sulky. His personal tastes bent strongly toward strong enemies, but his silhouette knight had been a personal gift from Catarina, so he couldn't prioritize his own desires. With that thought in mind, he reluctantly cooled off from his almost frenzied lust for battle. Dead Man's Sword walked off, as if it had lost all interest in Aldiradcumber.

"Wait! I won't let you go—" Edgar started. He stepped forward to try and get in the way, but he was interrupted by the black silhouette knight, which moved so lightly and nimbly it was hard to believe it was a machine.

"Whoa, there! No you don't!"

The acrobatic movements led to a sword swing, which Aldiradcumber repelled with its Flexible Coat.

"Come on, wait a second. I'm your opponent. I can't have you getting in his way." With that, the black silhouette knight continued attacking. Its quick and sharp swordplay didn't give Edgar the chance to counterattack. The black silhouette knight continued to keep Aldiradcumber suppressed as Dead Man's Sword easily passed them by. This was followed by more Tyrantors coming out of Shield Nerrak, all of which proceeded to attack the New Kuscheperkan Army.

"You're in the way. Move," said Edgar.

"In the way? That's my line. You people have gotten in *my* way over and over, no matter where I go! Even here, you just won't stop!"

That shout came with a fierce offensive, which Aldiradcumber endured with its sword and Flexible Coat. Edgar didn't understand the meaning behind those words, but they produced a question that nagged at the edge of his consciousness. He shook his head, shaking the question away, and put the enemy on his holomonitor square in his sights.

“It seems I won’t be able to move forward without defeating you,” Edgar said. “Then allow me to do so with full force!”

The roar of Aldiradcumber’s ether reactor grew in volume. The white knight stored power up to the limit and kicked the black shadow. This fight over the bridge above the Melbarri River was about to get even more intense.



The Jaloudekian force that had come out of Shield Nerrak crossed over the Melbarri River and kept going. As expected, the state-adopted Tyrantors formed the core of this force. At their head ran Gustavo’s Dead Man’s Sword.

“Let’s go, Dead Man’s Sword. We’ll make sure we’ll never face such a humiliating defeat ever again.”

Gustavo’s machine sheathed the longswords in its hands and drew a bastard sword instead. It was a large, thick, and clumsy sword that would have been very hard to wield if it weren’t for the unit’s strand crystal tissue.

His Dead Man’s Sword had been modified from an Arkelorix, the highest class of machine meant solely for royalty. It had strength rivaling the heavy Tyrantor while maintaining its more average body shape. He used his unit’s high strength to easily swing around the huge sword with no hesitation.

“Awright, you bastards, come with me! We’re aiming for that flag and the head of the royal knight! That’s all! Once we take that, it’s our win!” Gustavo shouted as he raised his large sword up like a ceremonial staff.

With that as a signal, the Jaloudekian force ran forth in unison. But the New Kuscheperkan Army hadn’t been wasting the time they took to prepare for battle.

“The enemy’s leader is running at the front of the pack!”

“I thought we just needed one more step to win, but then they turned around and attacked. They’re strong...but we can’t let them frolic about as they please! Third Company, prepare for a volley!” Emris in his Goldleo shouted orders to those around him, and Third Company’s Tzenndrimbles readied their VLJTs.

Once the missile javelins were loaded, the silhouette gears retreated and

scattered. Missile javelins weren't only effective on levitating ships. They were plenty powerful enough for ground targets—meaning silhouette knights.

“Aim straight forward at the enemy leader. FIRE!!!” Goldleo swung its arm down.

The Tzenndrimbles all fired their missile javelins at once. The projectiles took to the sky on tails of fire, changing their headings in response to detailed instructions as they accelerated rapidly. By the time the silver nerves reached their limit, these weapons would be able to pierce even thick steel.

Gustavo watched the incoming mass of missile javelins as he sent instructions to Dead Man's Sword with a ferocious smile. He wasn't the least bit afraid, even in the face of all those lethal attacks.

“Hah! As if those glorified sticks could bite into me! Who do you think I am?!”

Dead Man's Sword held up a pair of bastard swords and accelerated into the rain of javelins instead of trying to run away. Silhouette knights were giants of steel that moved under the instruction of their knight runners. Their reputation as humanity's strongest weapons didn't just come from their size or destructive might.

The missile javelins were flying at terrifying speeds, but Dead Man's Sword swept the first aside with a single slash. The next was already upon Gustavo and his machine, but he swept that one aside with the other sword. The same went for the next one, the one after that, and the one after that as well. Every swing of his blades smashed a missile javelin and brushed its remains aside. These javelins, which might even have destroyed Tyrantors depending on where they hit, were nothing to Dead Man's Sword's overwhelming bladework as it continued to advance.

The true essence of a silhouette knight was to enhance a human's skills and abilities by several times while perfectly recreating their movements. To the sword-crazed incarnation of battle and his Dead Man's Sword, this rain of weaponry barely served as an obstacle at all. It was essentially a miracle—a manifestation of the extraordinary.

“Follow our leader! Don't be cowed by some javelins! Show your pride as Black Knights!”

The Tyrantors rushed through the path cut open by Dead Man's Sword with their shields raised. These were elite soldiers picked out by Princess Catarina. Their thick steel shields would not falter in the face of the powerful missile javelins. Not even they could pierce those shields and a Tyrantor's thick armor all in one go. After many battles, of course the Jaloudekians had shared information and come up with countermeasures. As the force advanced, the storm of javelins eventually passed, and only the enemy remained before them.

"That's it?! Already?!" Gustavo shouted. "Then it's my turn next!"

A creaking noise arose from his machine's entire body. Its crystal tissue bent and snapped back, releasing explosive power. Dead Man's Sword pushed off the ground with enough power to gouge it out, sending the unit dashing off at a speed so fast it was like it was flying. It quickly separated itself from the pack.

Meanwhile, the soldiers of the New Kuscheperkan Army gulped. Missile javelins had a fatal flaw: the time it took to reload. This had to be done manually with silhouette gears, so the time was unavoidable. Also, because mobility was greatly restricted during this process, it lowered their defenses too. During this time, Third Company was essentially hobbled, losing most of its strength.

"Damn you, Jaloudek! As if we'd let you through... Grah?!"

"Don't get in my way, you damn small fry!" Gustavo shouted. "I don't have time to deal with the likes of you!"

Meanwhile, Dead Man's Sword pushed on with speed almost like a certain fierce god. The Laevantias in the way were all cut down, and the following Tyrantors flooded into the space that was cut open for them. Dead Man's Sword continued doing this, splitting the New Kuscheperkan Army in two.

"Th-The enemy leader is too strong! We can't stop it!"

The New Kuscheperkan headquarters could clearly see their men's distress. Emris clicked his tongue and quickly upped Goldleo's reactor output. "So it can cut its way out of that many javelins? Between that and the drake, Jaloudek isn't to be underestimated, that's for sure. Third Company can't move at the moment. Second Company, it's our turn! We can't allow the enemy to reach Helena, so we'll break them here!"

“Yes, sir! If it’s a head-on fight, leave it to us!”

Right at that moment, a trumpet sounded loudly throughout the battlefield. It was a signal, and with it a change came across the New Kuscheperkan Army’s formation. It quickly split into left and right sides, creating a road through the middle.

Dead Man’s Sword hesitated when the enemies blocking it suddenly disappeared, and it actually slowed down. The space that had suddenly opened up in front of the Kuscheperkan force led to the army’s headquarters, which had its flag raised.

As Gustavo’s caution was ratcheting up, a detachment of silhouette knights came running out of the headquarters. A shining golden unit was at the front, followed by knights bearing red crosses.

“Those are the twin-blade’s men! Which means they’re special. But that doesn’t matter anymore—I’ll tear anyone apart if they get in my way! Onward!” Gustavo yelled.

“Draw your swords, Second Company! Everything in front of us is an enemy! Go as wild as you like—just take them down!” Emris shouted.

Second Company didn’t hesitate, and they rushed the enemy as soon as they’d drawn their swords. As the Order of the Silver Phoenix’s assault detachment, they didn’t bother with cheap tricks. They simply swung their weapons to defeat their enemies.

Meanwhile, the Tyrantors threw aside their large shields to wield their heavy maces. Their incredible strength meant they were very good at melee combat. Both sides clashed, with sparks flying off their weapons and the sound ringing out like a war cry. Almost immediately, the battle devolved into chaos.

Goldleo had been running at the front of Second Company’s formation, and it met with Dead Man’s Sword, which had been doing the same on its side.

“So you’re the leader! Your strength is too dangerous—I’m taking you down here and now!” Emris declared loudly.

“Whoa, there, your gold is real flashy! You might not be the royal knight, but I bet you’re another leader!” Gustavo replied.

The swords on Dead Man's Sword jangled as it moved with surprising agility. It swung its two bastard swords in a fierce flurry of attacks. Goldleo wasn't lacking for offensive options either, though—it wielded its singular bastard sword with all its might, slamming it at its enemy.

These heavy masses of steel roared as they cut through the air and clashed. Every hit saw sparks fly. With the creaking of crystal tissue as accompaniment, and the screams of intake devices as the melody, the two giants danced while exchanging sword strokes.

“What's this?!”

The outcome of the fight was gradually growing clearer. Dead Man's Sword's offense had the intensity of a raging inferno. It used its two bastard swords skillfully, not showing even the slightest opening while putting out an astounding number of attacks. Goldleo, which should have been offense focused, was starting to be pushed back with its hands full defending.

Emris gritted his teeth. He was bravely swinging his bastard sword, snapping at the enemy, but none of his attacks reached his opponent.

Dead Man's Sword and Goldleo were both cutting-edge units made specifically for royalty, so there wasn't much difference in their raw abilities. Superiority in this fight was decided by the skill of the knight runner. The warrior instinct inside Emris felt this keenly.

“I shouldn't be surprised, considering you intercepted those missile javelins and cleared this path with only your blades! You're strong...most likely stronger than me. But that's all the more reason!” It was because Emris understood this that he gave a joyous cry at having encountered a powerful enemy. His predatory smile deepened as he made a beastlike roar.

Dead Man's Sword's attacks only got more intense. It moved with a smoothness that seemed impossible for a machine wielding two heavy bastard swords, no matter how powerful that machine was. It countered the recoil of swinging such big weapons with the unit itself, not stopping at all as it shifted positions and continued the exchange of attack and defense. As if the unit were trying to balance itself, its bastard swords never ceased moving. This was the secret trick that the sword maniac Gustavo had mastered; a way to attack

without leaving an opening for a counter.

This battle was just a trampling by sword, a pure tyranny of steel, as Gustavo's unit spread destruction and overwhelmed Goldleo. But behind all that, Gustavo was actually irritated. "Gah! This one's harder than expected. Its sword is pathetic, but it's so damn persistent!"

Goldleo had yet to lose power even while being subjected to Gustavo's furious assault, and it yet remained in his way. Frankly, Gustavo was surprised by this situation. As someone who had gone mad for swords and could only understand his opponents in terms *of* swords, he was able to gauge his opponent's strength after a few exchanges. From that, he'd ascertained that while Goldleo was powerful, the knight runner inside wasn't much. Still, his enemy was alive and kicking. And there was no way Gustavo would hold back.

Certainly, from his perspective, Emris was an immature knight runner. However, the man's dauntless courage and force of will meant Emris was able to step forward unafraid of the attacks he was facing, which was supported by Goldleo's abilities. If he'd made a half-assed retreat, Emris would have quickly been no more than rust on Gustavo's sword. His overflowing fighting spirit was keeping him alive and healthy.

"No matter how strong you are, I don't plan on losing so easily!" Emris yelled. "As long as I keep standing, the fight is not yet over!"

Gustavo's irritation only grew in the face of Goldleo's unexpected persistence. He'd even forgone the fight with Aldiradcumber to take the royal knight's head. Goldleo could be considered a strong enemy, relatively, but not enough to satisfy him. His battle maniac's heart made his dissatisfaction all the worse.

"This is so annoying. I don't care about you... *I don't care!!!*" Finally, Gustavo tried to end the fight with an all-out attack. Dead Man's Sword jumped with all its might, eliciting creaks from its musculature. The crystal tissue stuffed full to bursting under its armor produced incredible strength, making for a huge swing much heavier than anything else the unit had made. It was a move that could end any fight.

"I will take your strike head-on! GRAAAH!" Emris roared in the face of the incoming bastard sword. He was so foolishly straightforward that the idea of

evasion never even popped up in his head.

Goldleo's intake screamed shrilly as its reactor output ramped up. It bent slightly and gathered strength to launch its own all-out attack at the incoming bastard sword. Its strand crystal tissue exhibited explosive strength, accelerating the weapon at a speed that warped the air around it.

The instant both sides' attacks met, a shock wave shook the earth. The violent clash saw both their blades break. And it didn't just stop there—the steel giants bounced off of each other. For the first time since they'd met in combat, they'd created some distance between them.

"Tch, damn! I've gotta respect your guts for trying to endure that instead of dodging! You're pretty good, goldie. But now you've lost your weapon. Don't think your thin little sword can beat my blades!" Gustavo howled as they glared at each other.

Dead Man's Sword was still intact. The bastard sword was the most powerful of the weapons on the unit, but it still had many swords of varying sizes—more than it could actively wield.

Meanwhile, Goldleo wasn't without damage. True, its damage was light, but it had lost its main weapon. It drew its backup longsword, but it definitely seemed like it wouldn't be enough against the sword maniac.

"That certainly wasn't a great trade for me! Now, how to handle this situation..." Emris shot a glance backward. Behind him stood the New Kuscheperkan headquarters. The waiting Cartoga Ol Kuschere couldn't fight at all. Sure, it could swing a sword, but that wasn't really an attack, and it couldn't hope to fight. Emris sighed and lowered his machine's center of gravity. He wouldn't take even a step back. This was his firm resolve, and it suffused his stance.

Gustavo noticed the change in Goldleo, and he adopted a slight smile. "Oh? You've got a pretty good sword there, goldie. Your stance is fully fledged. Fine, I'll test you. How much of my sword can your determination take?"

"You sure can talk. But you've got the skills to back that up. At this rate, I'll lose..." Emris said.

Dead Man's Sword drew a new blade and haughtily approached. Meanwhile, Emris racked his brain for a way to win.



Ikaruga flew, leaving a trail of scarlet in the sky.

Behind it, Silver Veil moved separately. The one sitting in the captain's chair was the leader of the order's knightsmiths: David, the boss.

"Jeez, I'm a knightsmith, not a ship captain. I'm not qualified."

"By that metric, boss, no one in Kuscheperka or Fremmevilla is qualified to crew this thing either," Batson replied in an exasperated tone as he manned the ship's wheel.



They weren't alone. The bridge was packed with knightsmiths of the order acting as crew. The Order of the Silver Phoenix was a very specialized organization consisting of the few elite. Because of that, they didn't have the numbers to adequately crew the ship, and the knightsmiths who had worked on it became its crew.

"Just drop it. We should be figuring out what our next move is." A voice came through a speaking tube to the bridge. The origin was the rear of the upper deck, where two Tzenndrimbles were fixed in place. Kid and Addy were inside these. Speaking tubes had been jammed inside them to allow them to communicate with the bridge. Also, the bindings fixing them in place were quite strong, so as to prevent their machines from falling if things were to get turbulent.

Their role was to become the ship's mana source once Ikaruga was gone. Unlike a normal levitating ship, Silver Veil moved using Magius Jet Thrusters, and so it needed a tremendous amount of mana to operate. The two Tzenndrimbles had been connected to the ship to provide this.

"We should support Ernie!" Addy insisted. "Where are the missile javelins?"

"In the ship's hold. Everyone's hurrying to reload, but it'd be kinda hard to fire right away," Kid replied.

This ship didn't hold enough missile javelins to reload all the tubes, so there would be only one more chance for a volley. It would be hard to find another chance to attack unless they got really lucky.

"Basically, it all depends on what the kid does," the boss said. "If we get the chance, go with all you got." He followed the trail of fire left behind by Ikaruga with his eyes.



The drake came back to the skies above the battlefield with a loud noise, which shook the New Kuscheperkan soldiers advancing toward the bridge. They had no effective means of attacking the drake, which was why they'd focused on the ground battle. So it was natural for them to flinch upon seeing the drake flying at them with such speed while making such a great noise.

“Gah, so it’s going to attack us on the ground now!”

The drake had dropped altitude at one point, and it flew while bending its body upward like it was trying to rise. Its size and the momentum of its fall struck fear in its enemies’ hearts. To them, it was a manifestation of overwhelming power. The New Kuscheperkans couldn’t help but pause in the face of its strength, but they quickly gritted their teeth and faced forward once again.

“Don’t falter! The honorable knight captain will surely come to our aid with all haste!” Those words had just been spoken when Ikaruga flew above the New Kuscheperkans’ heads. Its Magius Jet Thrusters screamed shrilly, and the machine flew straight at the drake like an arrow. The knights on the ground cheered.

“Now let’s get back to doing our part! We won’t let it go like last time!”

Acknowledging the fierce god that was coming at it head-on, the drake moved like it had been waiting for this to happen. Its seething mana filled its surroundings with an intangible sense of pressure, like a soundless roar. This was how Vouivre called upon its trump card—Maximized Mode.

Instantly, the ship was covered by its Thundering Cataract. At the same time, it fired the rest of its silhouette arms. The ship accelerated like its Magius Jet Thruster gave it a kick in the pants, with the recoil being suppressed by an incredibly powerful Physical Boost spell.

It was a moment of pure devastation made manifest in the form of a drake. Vouivre had clad itself in this shaped magic and charged with its huge frame at Ikaruga. The avatar of lightning promised to destroy everything nearby, and even Ikaruga wouldn’t be able to avoid death if it was hit—yet Ernie didn’t even begin to think of retreat.

“I see. Your lightning defense has gotten quite the upgrade. And you’re using it in a tackle... A good strategy that makes use of your large body! But did you know? I don’t need to deal with *all* of that strength.”

As if to oppose the incoming drake, Behemoth’s Heart and Queen’s Coronet upped their output, creating a massive amount of mana that wouldn’t shame the name of the division-class monsters they were made out of.

“Ikaruga’s small compared to you, but that’s why I just need to pierce through one point!” Ernie’s hands danced nimbly across the keyboard. Instantly, Ikaruga’s Magius Jet Thrusters stopped. It continued to drift through the air on its inertia as it poured all its overflowing mana into the Bladed Cannon it wielded in both hands. The blade opened up, revealing the mechanism inside. Mana flowed into the Emblem Graphs on the silver plates, forming into an overspell.

“Let’s test what’s stronger—your conviction and Vouivre, or my hobbies and Ikaruga?!”

Ikaruga pointed its weapon at the incoming drake. A lance of fire burst out from the tip in a torrent, creating a halo of burning air around it like a ring of flowers in bloom. Ikaruga was gradually succumbing to gravity, but it continued its all-out attack.

The contest didn’t last long. The Thundering Cataract easily outscaled the Bladed Cannon. However, it was a shield that covered Vouivre’s entire body. Ikaruga’s attack was a lance of fire that hit only a single point continuously, which managed to drill a small hole in the lightning shield supporting the drake’s overwhelming rampage. Ikaruga reactivated its thrusters, unhesitatingly flying for the small but brilliantly shining breach carved out by the swirling fire.



Dorotheo saw Ikaruga infiltrate his lightning defenses while scattering the blooming fire, and his rage intensified so much he got a migraine. He couldn’t tell if the shaking he was feeling was coming from the ship or his own body. Either way, he gathered strength in his belly and gripped his control yokes strongly to shake the feeling off before snapping open his bloodshot eyes.

“So the Thundering Cataract is unstable thanks to the destroyed Ankyulorsas!” he shouted. “To think it would pry our defenses open... But you shouldn’t get too cocky just yet! In fact, this is what people mean when they say out of the pan and into the fire! This time, I will burn you to ash with my drake’s flames!”

Vouivre opened its jaws wide, aiming for Ikaruga now that it had punched through the lightning shield. It used its overwhelming amount of mana with

abandon, having prepared this move right before it charged. Vouivre' unleashed its greatest weapon, the Incinerating Flame, directly at Ikaruga.

Ikaruga had only carved out one small hole. Lightning still raged around it as the fire rushed toward it. It could only flee backward, and even if it did, it would have to do so faster than the fire.

Even the fierce god would have an extremely hard time running from this. With no other choice, Ikaruga was swallowed up by the flames. Even the fierce god could only sport silhouette knight-level defenses. Dorotheo expected the overwhelming destructiveness of the fire to burn it to death.

"A drake's fire, I see! But your siege weapon won't work on my Ikaruga!"

The fire from Ikaruga's Magius Jet Thrusters flashed into view. It had stopped feeding mana into its Bladed Cannon and poured all of it into its thrusters. The silhouette knight's moving parts groaned as it pointed the jets forward.

Ikaruga hadn't retreated at high speed. Instead, it had pointed all its thrusters toward the incoming torrent of fire. The two jets of flame collided and entwined in a mad dance.

The flames of purgatory wavered, creating a small opening that Ikaruga did not miss. It changed the direction of its thrusters, shifting vectors at a dizzying speed and sending itself spinning like a top as it advanced.

The Incinerating Flame was Vouivre's greatest weapon. However, Dorotheo had a slight misunderstanding of the nature of its strength. Incinerating Flame continuously sprayed out intense fire. This meant that in order for it to display its greatest effect, it needed to bathe its target in that fire for an extended amount of time. With Ikaruga's mobility, it was only exposed for a moment, which turned the weapon into little more than a slightly overblown overspell.

"This is my secret technique: fire climbing!" Ernie chirped. "Just kidding. But that was fun, I'll need to remember that move for later." Ikaruga maintained its spin, adjusting the facing of its thrusters with absurd dexterity to soar above the Incinerating Flame. It then continued up the stream of fire toward Vouivre.

Dorotheo finally released his grip on his sanity after witnessing the absurdity that just happened in front of him. The fierce god had displayed ridiculous

mobility, seeming to perform a strange dance midair as it escaped the fatal flames. And, while scattering the fire around it, it had finally approached the drakehead.

His mind couldn't keep up with what had happened. In fact, no one other than Ernie was able to accurately understand the situation.

“YOOOUUUUU MOOOOONSSSTEERERRRRRRRR!!!” Dorotheo roared, letting his agitation spill straight out of his mouth as his experience drove his body into a reflexive intercepting action. The drakehead stuck out ahead of the bridge, and it used this along with the horns at its tip to thrust forward. The horns became a spear that came at Ikaruga with ferocious speed.

Though he'd been driven to the worst scenario, Dorotheo's accumulated experience did not betray him. The fierce god's greatsword was intercepted by the drakehead's thrust. This pushed the sword swipe aside, successfully parrying the attack. Sparks flew and metal shrieked, and after this momentary exchange, the fierce god passed by to the drake's rear.

“It got through!” Dorotheo sucked in an alarmed breath. “Oh, no! The Ankyulorsas in the rear can't move properly!”

The Ankyulorsas on the topside of Vouivre had been partially annihilated by the detonation javelins. As things stood, the fierce god would be able to get into the drake's hull. Dorotheo regained his calm and stomped hard on his stirrups to prevent that.



Ikaruga stopped spinning after that clash with the drakehead, and it alighted on Vouivre's prow and ran down its hull. It didn't take long to reach the center of the ship.

“Now then, the Etheric Levitator should be around the middle... Whoa?!”

Ikaruga took another step, and then it tilted to the side. To be precise, *Vouivre* had suddenly tilted. This reckless movement saw the hull scream and creak, but Dorotheo ignored that to twist the drake's body. It twirled upside down, trying to shake off its unwelcome passenger.

Ikaruga was tossed into the air, but it calmly stabilized itself with its thrusters.

The moment it was about to try to get on the ship again, Vouivre's Draconic Claw assaulted it. The drake's flip had been to bring its close combat weapon to bear as well as shake off its enemy.

"Aha, it's your claw once again! But I've already seen this attack!" Ernie responded quickly. He'd had his hands full dodging when he'd been attacked by the Draconic Claw before. But now, he was calm, and he attempted to counterattack.

His Bladed Cannon's powerful flame lance slammed into the base of the claw. A fountain of fire jetted up around the weapon, blowing the tip and claws away.

The limb was still swinging at Ikaruga, but it slipped past as it readied its Bladed Cannon with the silhouette arms inside. Thanks to Ikaruga's massive power output, the weapon had an extremely powerful Physical Boost strengthening, which it used to overcome Vouivre's outer skin as it gouged chunks out of its enemy. Meanwhile, after flying past Ikaruga, the half-destroyed claw hit the ground.

Thus the fierce god dealt with the rampaging drake's final, desperate multistage attack.



Dorotheo and his subordinates lost all words, as they stood or sat in a stupor.

In the first place, a silhouette knight should never have been a threat to Vouivre, a weapon made to combat other flying weapons. What's more, its greatest attack was almost *too* powerful to be used against a single silhouette knight. It should have meant instant death, even for a levitating ship. But reality had defied their expectations. Their strongest attacks had all been defeated, and their ship had lost its only limb.

"What *are* you?" Dorotheo muttered.

From his and his people's perspective, the situation was rapidly losing its sense of reality. They should have been ready; they'd known the fierce god was a manifestation of danger. But there was a limit to their imaginations.

The fierce god was no longer in the realm of silhouette knights. Not only were its abilities absurd, the knight runner inside was worse. Even against Dorotheo

and his subordinates, brave veterans all, the fierce god stood far superior.

“So not even Vouivre can stand against it. No... It was my blunder for being too overconfident in the lightning shield and taking that fire!”

The damage they’d taken in the opening stages had been telling. Even if they’d gained a massive amount of mana from the Drakesblood Grail, Vouivre wasn’t able to exhibit its full combat capabilities because they’d lost the silhouette knights that were making use of it.

While they were busy being shaken by the situation with their attention lapsed, a sudden impact assaulted the ship. Vouivre was outfitted with a long tail protruding from its stern to help keep the ship’s balance. A foreign entity had grabbed it.

“Damn that thing! It’s still around?!”

The six-armed, demon-faced warrior with the warped greatsword was utterly unique and unmistakable—Ikaruga hadn’t left. Wires were extending from the arms on its back; the Rahu’s Fists had fixed themselves on the tail.

It had looked like Ikaruga had dodged the attack and slipped past them, but it had actually grabbed onto Vouivre’s tail. Then, it had waited for Vouivre to be distracted before it made its move.

The drake twisted to try and shake Ikaruga off and stop whatever it was doing. The fight between the drake and the fierce god was not yet over.



As the group of Tyrantors led by Dead Man’s Sword made their way to the throat of New Kuscheperka’s army, Aldiradcumber and the black silhouette knight faced off on the bridge above the Melbarri River.

“Don’t get in my way!” Edgar shouted.

“Hee hee! Aha ha ha ha ha! No. I won’t let you go so easily.” The black silhouette knight emitted piercingly loud laughter.

But Edgar didn’t rise to the taunt, instead observing his enemy closely and watching for how it would move. While he looked calm, he was actually panicking inside.

The existence of Dead Man's Sword, which was capable of mowing through entire squads by itself, was too much of a threat to the New Kuscheperkan Army. Even though Emris and Second Company had stayed back to protect their headquarters, Edgar couldn't relax. He needed to clean up the enemy in front of him as fast as possible so he could go help.

The black silhouette knight standing in his way was colored like a Tyrantor, but outside of the color it was completely different. It was thin—svelte, even. Only its back was strangely swollen, making Edgar suspect a set of back weapons.

The sight was strangely familiar to him, and it didn't take long for a wealth of information to bubble up from his memories.

"You're...from that night raid on Micilie?!"

The silhouette knight in front of him belonged to the same family of models as the ones belonging to the spies who had attacked Micilie that night, aiming for Princess Eleonora and involving the Order of the Silver Phoenix in the process. Both its shape and bizarre agility were the same.

"Hm? Yeah, you're right. You sure did a number on us back then..." Kerhilt of the Copper Fang Knights spoke, sounding both cheerful and deeply displeased at the same time before ending with jarring laughter.

Her machine was based off of the Vittendohlas that her men had used, but it was heavily customized. It was the captain's unit of the Copper Fang Knights, named "Veyloccinos."

The Copper Fang Knights had lost almost all of their silhouette knights in the counterattack after they'd failed in their night raid on Micilie. The only one left was Kerhilt's machine. At this point, Kerhilt's order had been eradicated down to its very name.

Her expression twisted in a jet-black madness inside her cockpit. "You're so infuriating. You always, *always* show up, no matter where I go! It's all because of you people that the Copper Fang Knights are ruined again! I spent so much time and effort rebuilding them... I'll never forgive you!"

Her behavior seemed somehow inhumane, and it bled into Veyloccinos's

movements. Meanwhile, Aldiradcumber had stopped for some reason. Edgar had finally realized the true nature of the weird feeling he'd been having all this time.

"You...that voice! I thought it was familiar." Edgar squeezed his control yokes tightly. This traveled through silver nerves into his machine, making the Flexible Coat over its shoulders waver.

"It's *you*! You're the thief from back then!!!" Edgar's rage-filled shout shook the ground.

But Kerhilt didn't seem to care. In fact, the anger seemed to make her feel good, and it was easy to imagine her twisted smirk. "Huh? Ohhh, that's so coldhearted of you. You only noticed now, even after all we've done to each other? Who would've thought things would turn out this way? You damn student knight! I should've finished you off back then. Gah, I'm so full of regrets!"

Veyloccinos dipped low and ran forth as its pilot shrieked. "It's not too late. My dream isn't over yet... I won't let it be! I'll keep it alive using your heads! Take your punishment here and now!"

"Punishment? Punishment, huh? A thief's nonsense doesn't bother me, but...I have a promise to fulfill. You're the one who will be punished. I will avenge Earlcumber and pay you back for the Tellestarle you stole, together with my Aldiradcumber!" The impatience and panic left Edgar's eyes when he realized he was standing in front of the enemy he'd been chasing all this time. Instead, they were now filled with the will to fight.

Aldiradcumber responded to its pilot's feelings, fluttering its Flexible Coat and revealing the silhouette arms hidden underneath. The spellfire that hit the ground created fountains of fire, which Veyloccinos had to dodge around as it built up speed.

"Oh my, so passionate! My heart just skipped a beat!" Kerhilt shouted.

As a modified Vittendohla, Veyloccinos's movements were astoundingly fast for a silhouette knight. It was quicker than a running monster, becoming a black shadow traveling across the ground.

After one giant bound, Veyloccinos thrust with its estoc. The attack was too fast for the eye to follow, but Aldiradcumber used its Flexible Coat to intercept. The attack was several levels sharper and more deadly than Edgar remembered.

When they'd fought before, Kerhilt had used a Tellestarle she wasn't familiar with. Even so, it had been enough to defeat Earlcumber. Now, she was using a machine made for her, so who knew how much strength there was hidden within that thin frame?

The defender was a little faster in this case, and the estoc slipped across the surface of the armor. Edgar immediately moved his Flexible Coat, trying to throw his enemy's arm and weapon upward. At that moment, Veyloccinos slipped past and retreated. No follow-up attack would make it in time. It was a perfect hit-and-run strategy—a choice made because of the overwhelming difference in their speed.

This repeated several more times, and no effective blow landed on either side. So, Edgar decided to try to change the flow of the fight. Using its Flexible Coat to its fullest potential, Aldiradcumber forced its way forward. It pushed Veyloccinos's weapon aside, and thrust back with its own sword once it got inside its enemy's guard.

"Ha ha! I don't hate that forcefulness either!" Kerhilt seemed strangely at ease as she watched Aldiradcumber's movements.

The next moment, Veyloccinos's back stirred. The strangely bulbous segment suddenly opened up, revealing a mass of arms.

These arms seemed like sub-arms, and they each had multiple joints. They looked like spider limbs with claws on the ends, and they were now growing out of Veyloccinos.

Immediately after, the strand crystal tissue inside the machine acted like a strong spring, and the imitation sub-arms shot out with intense speed. Their sharp claws glinted dully in the light, and they all rained down on Aldiradcumber.

Because the Flexible Coat had just been used to defend against an attack, Edgar couldn't move it in time. His reaction was faster than the speed of thought, though, as Aldiradcumber quickly twisted using its forward foot as an

axis. Edgar had realized he couldn't dodge, so he'd shifted and made the attack miss any important spots. Also, because its entire body had moved, Aldiradcumber's Flexible Coat had now been forcibly shifted into position to guard. Finally, the bizarre arms swarmed toward Aldiradcumber. Parts of its armor were shaved away in the assault.

The damage was severe, but Aldiradcumber had managed to avoid a fatal blow. It stood firm; it hadn't been knocked off its center of gravity. It made to strike back right away, but Veyloccinos had already jumped back out of reach.

"Tch! Your reactions are still as weirdly sharp as ever," Kerhilt complained. "I can't believe that didn't finish you off... But you have to admit that was impressive, right? These are my Stabber Striscias. They're quite nimble... Like so!"

Now that she'd revealed her hidden hand, there was no need to be shy about using it, so Veyloccinos ran forth with the arms spread wide.

Kerhilt hissed a snakelike battle cry as Veyloccinos charged with its spiderlike form bent low.

"Grk!" Edgar grunted.

The main body's attacks supplemented the attacks from the Stabber Striscias. Blows rained down from the sides, and Edgar skillfully used his Flexible Coat to defend against them. It was a fierce interplay between attack and defense—between a flexible extra set of arms and a flexible extra set of armor. While their natures were opposite, the characteristics of both machines were very similar. Their fight had reached a dangerous balance.

"Ah ha ha, doesn't this remind you of something?!" Kerhilt made rather forced taunts in between attacks. "This is the same as last time; you just hid yourself like a turtle then too!"

Edgar didn't respond, though. He silently defended against the attacks, waiting for his enemy to show an opening. However, the attacks Veyloccinos made proved to be protean, and there was no opening to be found.

In that moment, Edgar wondered if that was really true. He had his doubts; Stabber Striscia was a mechanism, but it was being controlled by only one

knight runner. Could she really control them all freely? He concluded that it would be difficult. As far as he knew, the only one capable of such a thing was history's greatest madman, Ernesti.

While it was *possible* for Kerhilt to rival Ernie, there was a simpler answer: The mechanism was fundamentally the same as the Flexible Coat on Edgar's Aldiradcumber. It had some preset moves, which it could switch between in response to the situation, making it look like it was moving freely. That seemed much more likely.

So, Edgar continued concentrating on defending while analyzing the movements for patterns. He'd been there from the start on the journey to make the Flexible Cloak practical. Once he figured out one pattern, it wasn't hard to extrapolate the rest.

Before long, he'd discovered several patterns. And Edgar wasn't such a shoddy knight as to be hit by attacks he knew were coming.

Kerhilt noticed that her enemy's evasion got better with every attack, and her face twisted. "No way. He's already figured out the Stabber Striscia in such a short time?!"

An indescribable chill ran up Kerhilt's thin body. She knew she was up against a scarily tough opponent, but still, he was figuring things out too fast. If the fight continued, she'd be the one on the back foot.

"This is dangerous...and he hasn't even lost a sliver of composure after all this. I thought the same back then, but he really is stupidly tough."

Kerhilt knew well from experience that Aldiradcumber was the type to focus on defense while taking advantage of even the smallest openings for a counter.

In their previous battle, she'd lost an arm to that move. She wouldn't make the same mistake now. She drew Veyloccinos back for the moment as she tried to come up with her next plan.

"He knows how they move... If things continue like this, I'll just be asking for a counter. I also refuse to be forced to stay here until my 'stamina' runs out."

It was a foregone conclusion that Veyloccinos would crumple first in the contest of endurance versus Aldiradcumber, who was built purely for melee

combat. Kerhilt wanted to avoid that and thus tried to change her strategy, but Aldiradcumber made the first move.

Its Flexible Coat opened up, revealing the silhouette arms hidden underneath, which it fired at Veyloccinos.

Kerhilt reacted quickly, having Veyloccinos duck and run forward in a low stance. The Stabber Striscias on its back writhed, stabbing into the ground. They pushed off in time with the machine's stride, allowing it to accelerate even faster. It looked just like a spider as it moved. Veyloccinos had transformed into an outrageous monster, crawling on the ground with ferocious speed.

"Hee hee hee! You're not giving me even a second's break, huh?! You trying to tell me you're more than just tough or something?!" Kerhilt shouted.

"You never run out of tricks, do you?! It's just one thing after another!" Edgar yelled in response.

Veyloccinos closed the gap in an instant, while Edgar shut his Flexible Coat and took a completely defensive stance. Once again the estoc and Stabber Striscias gouged out armor—or not. Veyloccinos, with its incredibly low stance, used all the crystal tissue in its body, pouring strength into its Stabber Striscias when it was right in front of its opponent to jump high into the air, leaving behind a trail of dust. This acrobatic move, unthinkable for a silhouette knight, allowed it to fly over Aldiradcumber while flexibly twisting its body and taking its enemy's rear.

"Aha! Hah! You're such a little fool!" Kerhilt scoffed. "Did you think Veyloccinos the same as some common silhouette knight?!"

Veyloccinos charged in, almost grabbing onto Aldiradcumber from behind with its estoc ready. Kerhilt was planning to end things with this attack; she knew that her tricks wouldn't work on Edgar twice.

Now that his opponent had used acrobatics to get behind him, Edgar was at a disadvantage. Before he could turn around, the Stabber Striscias were already attacking him, so he made a bold move.

Aldiradcumber's Flexible Coat flared open like a set of wings. They clashed with the attacking arms that tried to surround and entangle him, blocking

several. The arms struggled against the Flexible Coat, eliciting loud creaking. However, Veyloccinos itself hadn't stopped. The tip of its estoc aimed at a gap in its enemy's armor with lethal power and accuracy. Kerhilt's skill was made clear in this brief moment.

"It's not over yet! I still have options. Aldirad, show her your strength!" Immediately, Edgar flipped open a cover and pushed a button that had been added to his control yokes. This set off a single-use emergency measure. The machine's magius engine received this order and "released" a certain function. Specifically, it undid the Physical Boost spell on a part of the machine.

The part in question was the Flexible Coat. Now, the weight of the armor plates were too much for the joints, and the equipment came apart at the seams.

Now that the Flexible Coat was gone, the arms it was stopping were released, but their trajectories had been thrown off. Aldiradcumber, now instantly lighter, used all its strength to twist and avoid Veyloccinos's fatal thrust. The blow bounced off its tough armor, throwing sparks everywhere.

"Damn you! Agh, you just don't know when to give up!" Kerhilt grouched. Realizing her attack had failed, she had Veyloccinos back up immediately.

But Aldiradcumber wouldn't let that happen. Now that it had lost its armor, it was much lighter. Its speed now was incomparable to before.

The small shields on its arms became weapons, used to strike at Veyloccinos's head. The powerful strength of a warrior-style unit pulverized said head, taking away its enemy's sight. Veyloccinos crumbled to the ground, pieces of armor scattering everywhere.

"What do you think you're doing, you piece of shit?!" Kerhilt glared at her dark holomonitor as she struck out, attempting an immediate counterattack. She used the impact of that attack to add momentum to her Stabber Striscias. There was no need to aim well, as her enemy was close enough for them to hug.

Claws rushed at Aldiradcumber, aiming all over its body. They bit into its shoulder, arms, and even torso, but Edgar ignored all of that to strike out with Aldiradcumber's sword. Veyloccinos, with no sight and without its guard up,

couldn't avoid the blow. The sword pierced through its torso armor, and a shrill scream rang out. Oddly enough, this was the exact opposite ending to when Earlcumber had fought Kerhilt's Tellestarle.

“My Veyloccinos! Why? Why me?! Damn it all!!!” Kerhilt cried.

The thrust had pierced through the intake mechanism of Kerhilt's unit. Abnormal sounds of catching metal filled the cockpit, and she knew she had lost.

Without a supply of mana, there was nothing to be done, so she immediately took action with a click of her tongue. The torso armor of her unit opened up, and she jumped out with fearsome dexterity. Silhouette knights were ten meters tall, but the drop was nothing to her. She had to get away while her enemy was preoccupied with Veyloccinos. Now that she was on the ground, she ran off with singular focus.

But Veyloccinos was thrown ahead of her path, cutting her off. Kerhilt waved away the cloud of dust that was kicked up and looked back to see Aldiradcumber, armor bent and warped in places, looking down at her. No matter how light and nimble she was, now that a silhouette knight had its sights on her, escaping would be difficult in the extreme.

“Aha...aha ha ha... Hey, this isn't funny. Stop with the jokes. Would a great and honorable knight really swing that huge sword down on a helpless person?” Even in such a tight pinch, Kerhilt persistently looked for a way to escape. She put on a rather obvious pitiful act, begging for mercy even as she kept her eyes peeled. If she were able to affect her enemy even a little, she might find a way out.

But such hopes were dashed when Aldiradcumber unflinchingly swung its sword. “I told you I would get payback. That stolen Tellestarle is the cause of all this fighting, so as the one who failed to stop that...I will not hesitate to settle things now!”

But Kerhilt had already taken off, leaving behind only the sound of her desperate, elevated breathing. She was chased by a giant deadly sword. Crystal tissue was known to be strong, and the sword moved several times faster than a human while also being much stronger than anything a human could exhibit.

“Waaah! Agh! S-Stop! Agh, shiiiiit—!!!”

The sword strike gouged out the earth. The impact threw up a cloud of dirt and scattered rubble. Wind blowing across the battlefield wiped away this cloud, but there was no trace left of Kerhilt. There was no way for a human to retain their shape after taking a direct attack from a silhouette knight.

Aldiradcumber stayed in that pose for a little while, its sword stuck in the ground. Eventually, though, it stood up, its body creaking all over. Edgar’s face did not scream victory. He simply shook his head, switched tacks, and glared up ahead. “That’s only one conclusion reached. Please be safe, everyone...”

Aldiradcumber took off, using its battered body as best it could. Dead Man’s Sword was rampaging around their headquarters at this very moment. Now that he’d settled things with his own personal enemy, Edgar moved to help his friends.

Chapter 46: Drake's Determination

The battle for Shield Nerrak was reaching its climax.

Thanks to the efforts of the silhouette gears that had infiltrated Shield Nerrak, a hole had been bored through its defenses. The front gate was open, and a bridge was thus formed over the Melbarri River. The New Kuschepinkan Army gained a lot of momentum from this, and they surged forward on the attack. Once they got through Shield Nerrak, Dervankhul would be right before them.

The Jaloudek Army weren't just twiddling their thumbs in this unfavorable situation, though. With Gustavo and his Dead Man's Sword at the center of the ground forces of the Emerald Drake Knights, they assaulted the headquarters of the New Kuschepinkan Army. Their aim: the royal knight Queen Eleonora was in. The Order of the Silver Phoenix's Second Company stood in the way of this.

"Charge! CHAAARGE! Scatter them and advance! We claim victory once we tear down that flag!"

Tyrantors ran, their heavy footsteps throwing up clouds of dust and dirt. They relied on their heavy armor to do this, and it was clear they were determined to crush anything in their path like unstoppable boulders.

In the face of these avatars of destruction stood the Kardetolles of the Order of the Silver Phoenix's Second Company. As things were, if they clashed, the Kardetolles would be bowled over and destroyed. Even so, no one faltered.

As the gap between the two forces closed, back weapons were brought into play. The Kardetolles aimed for the upper torsos—especially the heads—of their enemies. Fearing the loss of their sight, the Tyrantors brought up their arms to cover their heads. The spellfire was repelled by their tough armor, and they weren't slowed down appreciably.

"Don't underestimate our Tyrantors' armor! Spellfire like that is useless!"

With their enemy right in front of them, the Tyrantors further solidified their stances, bracing for impact. The thick steel covering their bodies would prove their defensive strength once they bowled into their enemies, pulverizing them like siege hammers. However, this future imagined by the Tyrantors' knight

runners never came to be. The Kardetolles in front of them suddenly jumped to the side. The Tyrantors continued past, some only grazing their opponents.

The Tyrantors' knight runners panicked and hurriedly tried to follow up with an attack, but the momentum of their charge was too much for them to do so with no consequence. The Tyrantors' charge was lethal, so it was only natural for their enemies to evade. Despite this, the Jaloudekians had allowed it to happen. The reason for this was the Kardetolles' persistent spellfire. Their aim hadn't just been to destroy their foes, but also to blind the Jaloudekians during the charge.

Now, having slipped past their charging enemies, the Kardetolles were looking at the Tyrantors' unprotected backs. No one would let such a big chance go. The Kardetolles spun on the spot with their bastard swords and sliced into those backs.

Like all Eastern Types, Kardetolles had powerful muscles, so the Tyrantors couldn't just shrug off the attacks. The swords bit deep into their armor, eliciting strange noises. These large swords were heavy masses of steel, so they smashed more than they sliced. The impacts from these blows permeated deep through their armor, pulverizing the crystal tissue inside. The Tyrantors shed the crushed crystal as they wobbled unsteadily. The muscles around the waist had to support the entire body. To warrior-style units, not being able to properly hold a stance was fatal. This was even more pronounced for Tyrantors given their weight.

"Gwaargh, you bastards! How can you act like that?! A single hit from our Tyrantors would mean death!" The Tyrantors' knight runners were shocked. They thought it was sheer madness to not only fearlessly step in front of a fatal attack, but also to make a counterattack afterward. It couldn't be done without superhuman nerves.

"A single hit means death? The same goes for the monsters we fight every day! How could we be knight runners if that was enough to cow us?!"

Second Company's knight runners refuted their enemies' shock with a single line. To be fair, it was still rare for a knight runner from Fremmevilla to be so focused on the offensive, but unfortunately no one was around to point that

out.

While the Tyrantors were unstable, the Kardetolles continued their fierce assault. None could compare to Second Company when it came to being on the attack. Before long, the Tyrantors were brought low.

But Second Company wasn't done yet.

Another Tyrantor ran forth, using its massive strength to swing down a heavy mace. The fatal blow struck only the ground underneath. A Tyrantor's strength lay in heavy single attacks thanks to the output of its muscles. In this situation, where the battle was essentially a collection of one-on-one duels, they were surprisingly brittle.

While attacks from heavy maces were very damaging, they were hard to handle. Up until now, any exposed openings from a Tyrantor's attack were compensated for by its armor. However, attacks made from a Kardetolle were more than the Jaloudekians had bargained for.

The Kardetolle that stepped around the heavy mace readied its bastard sword in both hands. One hand gripped onto the blade halfway up, turning the tip of the sword into a spear as it thrust. The sword was pushed in, gouging out the Tyrantor's innards. The grating sound of breaking crystal tissue was audible as pieces fell out of gaps in its armor.

The Kardetolle used its shoulder to tackle the Tyrantor with its sword still inside, using the recoil from that action to withdraw, blade and all. With its belly destroyed, the Tyrantor staggered, unable to find balance. It tried to counterattack, but the attempted blow was clearly weaker than before. A Tyrantor's power was meaningless if it could not bring that strength to bear.

Now that the Tyrantor had lost its offensive strength, it was just a durable target. It was then exposed to several more attacks before it eventually fell.

Thanks to Second Company's efforts, the Tyrantors were being whittled away.



"Haah... Ha ha! This is terrible. I guess sacrificing my bastard sword was premature of me. This is kinda tough with just longswords!" Gustavo shouted.

Emris was leading Second Company, but he was having trouble dealing with Dead Man's Sword. Goldleo's outer skin was damaged all over, making it look like a human warrior covered in wounds. At this point, there were fewer places that *weren't* damaged. If it weren't for the fact that it was tuned to be more defensive—since its pilot was a leader—it would have long since been little more than rust on its opponent's blade. Seeing Goldleo in such a state, Dead Man's Sword rested its blades on its shoulders and let out a large jet of exhaust like it was sighing.

“Hah! Hey, come on, where's all your spirit from earlier? You haven't even been able to lift a finger. You may be a little tough, but it looks like this is it for you, huh?” Gustavo's words were filled with ridicule.

Emris adopted a smile filled with fighting spirit as he replied, “Hmph! I'm not done yet. Not me, nor my Goldleo. Far from it!”

“I don't hate all that bluster! But you know, that won't last forever either.”

Emris hadn't given up, not even a little bit. However, the more they fought, the slimmer his chances of victory got. Goldleo was taking more and more damage, and at this point it no longer had the strength left to turn the tables.

No, I have one option left. If I can just use Goldleo's trump card—Blast Howling! Emris thought.

Goldleo's Blast Howling was able to destroy a company-class monster in one shot. If a silhouette knight were to take a direct hit, there was no way it would survive. The problem was that the weapon used up a large amount of mana and also needed a long preparation time to fire. Against the mad swordsman, Emris wouldn't even be able to bring the weapon to bear, much less hit his mark. He couldn't help but think, *If only I could stop him somehow.*

“Oho, I'm being made light of, I see. Well, aren't you full of confidence, getting lost in thought right in front of me?!” Gustavo shouted.

Indeed, Emris had been distracted for a moment. Said moment was far too short to be called an actual opening, but by the time he'd noticed, Dead Man's Sword was already right in front of him.

“Grk! Moving like that *again*?! You've got to be joking!” Emris snapped into

action, but the situation was already grim even though he'd only been late by less than a beat.

Gustavo's attacks accurately targeted Goldleo's joints. Once those were destroyed, no amount of armor would help. Goldleo used the longsword it held in one hand to defend. However, Dead Man's Sword was dual wielding, so it still had one blade free.

"So what?! Swords aren't the only weapons out there!" Emris shouted. Goldleo clenched its fist and intercepted the sword with its gauntlet. Armor was shaved off in a shower of sparks, the pieces sent flying. Goldleo may have had excellent armor, but it wasn't invincible. Such recklessness would quickly see its arm destroyed.

"Oh, well done. That was a good effort."

Emris gritted his teeth after hearing Gustavo's amused voice. He'd stopped one attack by sacrificing his gauntlet, but he couldn't relax just yet. Dead Man's Sword's offensive wasn't over—both sides were still within range of each other. Dead Man's Sword used the recoil from having been stopped in its subsequent attack, throwing out yet another blow. The longsword returned, this time aiming for Goldleo's arm, and Goldleo wouldn't be able to defend in time.

It happened the moment Goldleo's arm was about to be severed. A bolt of spellfire suddenly flew in between Dead Man's Sword and Goldleo. It hit the sword that was about to stab into Goldleo, breaking it in half. Gustavo's eyes widened in surprise, and he immediately had his machine jump back, drawing a new sword.

"Oh, come on! Am I really being interrupted right now?!" Gustavo complained.

Emris grinned. "Ha ha! This is what I was aiming for! It's not a coincidence at all! But still, Edgar, you're late. So late that you really made this more exciting!"

"My apologies. I got tied up with an enemy we had history with."

Edgar in his Aldiradcumber had been the one to shoot that overspell. The vestiges of magic were faintly glowing at the tip of the silhouette arms his unit was holding.

“Heh! That damn Copper Fang girl... So she got got even after talking such a big game. Not that I care all that much!” Gustavo said. “I’m impressed you made it this far. But from what I can see, you’re on the verge of death too. Are you really planning to fight me looking like that?” Gustavo’s exasperation was understandable. Aldiradcumber had shown up as reinforcements, but it was just as damaged as Goldleo.

It had lost its most standout feature in its Flexible Coat, and the beautiful white of its armor was now black with countless holes. Even the silhouette arms it had in its hand had been pried from the Flexible Coat it had expunged.

“There’s no need for that. Aldirad can still move. That’s enough,” replied Edgar.

“Gah! Don’t get all uppity just because there’s two of you idiots now!” scoffed Gustavo.

“I don’t know about that. Double the people means double the options.” Edgar’s bluster wasn’t completely unfounded.

While Edgar was distracting their opponent, Goldleo quietly changed position so that they pincer Dead Man’s Sword. This was the most simple strategy to take advantage of their number advantage, but it was also terribly effective. Even masters of battle would find it difficult in the extreme to defend against simultaneous attacks from the back and front.

Edgar brought up his machine’s sword and pointed to their surroundings. “Also, did you really think we were your only enemies? Look around. While you were fighting in your own little world, what’s happened to all your lackeys?”

Gustavo gasped. The Tyrantors that had charged in with him had at some point been whittled down greatly—Second Company’s doing. The only Jaloudekian strength remaining in this area was Dead Man’s Sword itself and a very small number of Tyrantors.

“Damn it! You’ve done it now,” Gustavo cursed. “You’re all already dead! Get off your high horses! I’ll just cut all of you down with my Dead Man’s Sword! Every single one of you!”

Aldiradcumber took the initiative and slashed at Dead Man’s Sword first.

Emris psyched himself up and came in for an attack as well. Even though they were damaged, these two units were the pride of the Order of the Silver Phoenix, so defending from a simultaneous attack would be next to impossible for anyone. But Dead Man's Sword spun like a tornado, using sheer strength to repel them both.

Aldiradcumber and Goldleo were staggered, and Dead Man's Sword wasted no time in making a follow-up attack, throwing daggers on a very acute trajectory. It was as fast as usual, and both units were hit, further chipping away at their movements as the rampaging Dead Man's Sword closed in.

"Heh! Playtime's over. It's about time I finished both of you off!" Gustavo shouted. "Wooaarrghhh! Awaken, my blade!"

Gustavo's machine was covered head to toe in a mass of swords, which completely hid the unit underneath. Suddenly, though, all of their scabbards were flung off and away. Instead, whatever had been fastening these swords to its body grabbed onto the swords themselves and lifted them up, fixing them in place. These swords now jutted out all over, warping the contours of the unit's shape. Dead Man's Sword had always been a bizarre machine, but now it was even worse.

"What in the world?! Now it's like a porcupine! Are you insane?! There's no way you can swing a sword properly in that state!" Edgar shouted.

"This is perfect. I threw away the swords that were 'defending,' and now they're all swords for 'killing.' Now you'll experience whether or not I'm insane directly with your bodies!!!"

It was the logic of a madman. To Gustavo, the swords on his silhouette knight were both weapon and armor. By only throwing away the scabbards, Dead Man's Sword had changed to full-on assault mode. This was the manifestation of a deeply deluded madman with firm convictions. But that was exactly why he was able to exhibit his true power.

"HIIIIYAHHA AAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH!!!"

Dead Man's Sword ducked down a little before immediately kicking off the ground, exploding into action toward Aldiradcumber. Now that its entire body was a deadly weapon, this action was akin to swinging a sword. Aldiradcumber

intercepted the charge with sword and shield.

Shrill noise accompanied a shower of sparks as sword met crazed sword. Dead Man's Sword used every weapon on its body to repel Aldirad's blade. Aldirad's arms were knocked upward, allowing Dead Man's Sword to jump in close under its guard. The sword Gustavo's unit had in hand, as well as those on its arm, were slammed at Aldirad's belly. The blow pierced through its outer skin and sent it flying. It tumbled along the ground while leaking crystal tissue.

Dead Man's Sword howled at the pure-white knight. "HAH HAAA! That's one! Next... I told you already! Who do you think I am?!"

Without even looking, Gustavo had his machine spin around with a roundhouse kick. This intercepted Goldleo, who'd charged in to save Aldirad. Goldleo reacted, crossing its arms and catching its enemy's foot.

Gustavo instantly made an unexpected move. His unit used the many swords all over its body to catch on Goldleo's armor and try to pull it down. Dead Man's Sword's strength was incredible, so it easily won this struggle. Goldleo's stance crumbled, and Dead Man's Sword aimed a bladed knee at the golden knight. Before that could stab into his unit, Emris punched at the incoming leg. Though he avoided being stabbed, the recoil from the clash repelled Goldleo, and it crashed to the ground.

Dead Man's Sword let out a large jet of exhaust after defeating two silhouette knights in an instant. It had continued this full-power operation for a remarkably long time, and its abused body creaked as it moved.

"I knew it...that ate a lot of mana." The awakened mode Gustavo had activated exhausted a lot of mana in exchange for deploying all his weapons. His face twisted somewhat as he activated his ether supplier. The etherite hidden deep within his machine dissipated, releasing high-purity ether to the attached ether reactor, which roared abnormally as it fiercely churned out mana.

"Heh heh, you two were pretty good. You made me use this, after all! You can feel pride in that as you go to the afterlife!" Gustavo had Dead Man's Sword take off at a run toward Aldirad, which was unsteadily getting to its feet.

The white knight was essentially a sitting duck.

The swords all over its body clanging as it moved, Dead Man's Sword approached its target at speed—death was coming to Edgar in the form of a bladed beast.

Aldiradcumber had its hands full just trying to get up, so it would've been very difficult to try to dodge. But even in this unforeseen situation, it couldn't afford to take a hit from Dead Man's Sword and its prodigious power. Gustavo was considering all of this.

But contrary to his expectations, Edgar didn't even try to defend. Instead, Aldiradcumber advanced on unsteady feet, trying to crash into Dead Man's Sword. It was technically a surprise to Gustavo, but he simply attacked anyway. No matter what the pure-white knight was thinking, Dead Man's Sword's attack would still be lethal. It stuck its blades out mercilessly at the half-destroyed silhouette knight.

"Aldirad... It's do-or-die. Let's go!" Edgar shouted.

Before Dead Man's Sword reached it, Aldiradcumber took half a step forward and adopted a stance with a fist forward, as if it were going to try to punch its way through. Right afterward, the countless blades connected, biting into the dulled white armor. Outer skin was peeled away while the muscle inside was severed, and Aldiradcumber's outstruck arm was pulverized by its enemy's wild strength.

"Ha ha! Now you can't even swing your sword! If you're saying you're okay with being tormented to death, I'll oblige—?!" Gustavo gulped. Even with a destroyed arm and its torso damaged, Aldiradcumber took another step forward. The swords poking out all over Dead Man's Sword sank into the white knight one after the other.

Gustavo came upon a realization. The white knight should have taken a fatal blow. But actually, the part where the knight runner sat had been totally protected this entire time. That was when he hit upon his enemy's aim. The white knight had sacrificed itself to stop Dead Man's Sword from moving.

"Finally, you've stopped. Are you ready? Because this is your end," said Edgar.

“You’re bluffing! You managed to stop me, so what?! You can’t do anything with how damaged you are! I’ll tear you apart right away—” Gustavo was interrupted when he realized something, and he turned around stiffly. Aldiradcumber wasn’t his only enemy—

While the white knight had been fighting hard, Goldleo had bravely taken a stand.

“That’s right, we weren’t fighting alone,” Emris said quietly as he pulled on a trigger on his control yoke. Goldleo received the command, and the armor panels on its shoulders opened up to reveal the Emblem Graph inside. At the same time, it deployed its back weapons. The two linked up, and everything was fired all at once. They ate up as much of Goldleo’s mana as they needed to soon release a destructive roar.

“That thing still had silhouette arms?! Damn it!!! Seriously?! Get away from me, you bastard! Are you trying to kill us both?!” Gustavo now knew exactly what was going on, and he had his machine struggle as hard as it could to peel Aldiradcumber off. However, Edgar countered by shifting his unit’s center of gravity, turning Dead Man’s Sword right into Goldleo’s sights.

“See if you can take my Goldleo’s full might! Let’s go, BLAST HOWLING!” Emris shouted.

Thus Goldleo’s special weapon was unleashed. The overspells used here manipulated the air, and the atmosphere gathered around Goldleo in a swirl. The density bent light, creating a warped look. Soon after the air was gathered and compressed, it was launched forward as a violent shock wave. It surged forward, swallowing up Dead Man’s Sword as well as Aldiradcumber behind it. At the same time, Goldleo spent all its mana, so its magius engine triggered its emergency reaction to stop all function, and the silhouette knight slowly fell.

Meanwhile, the other two combatants could hear a dull roar as they were bounced around by all the compressed air before being slammed back onto the ground. Broken sword fragments flew from Dead Man’s Sword’s entire body. It rolled on the ground, carried by momentum, until it eventually stopped and moved no more. Ether leaked vigorously from gaps in its warped armor, melting into the air while emitting rainbow-colored light. Finally, Dead Man’s Sword lay

powerless. Because of Aldiradcumber, it'd been hit with fierce wind, sustaining heavy damage to its torso. This meant the intake and exhaust system was also damaged, which had broken the ether supplier mounted there.

Aldiradcumber had fallen behind Dead Man's Sword, and the sound of compressed air was audible from its torso. The warped armor was forcibly lifted despite catching on the armor around it, and Edgar poked his face out.

"As if. I refuse to die together with you. Still, it was certainly a dangerous gamble." He'd used Dead Man's Sword as a shield, just barely escaping from the attack with his life. But that had completely destroyed Aldiradcumber. The damage to its limbs was especially heavy, and it could no longer move.

"Good, you're okay, Edgar! I know it was our chance to finish him, but I was worried about you." Emris approached Edgar, his Goldleo also fallen. He was smiling and waving his arms around.

"It was a close call, to tell you the truth. You controlled the power of that attack wonderfully, young master. Well done." Edgar knew how strong Blast Howling could be. If it had hit at full power, he wouldn't have lived. That was why he'd thought Emris had held back, controlling the power of the attack. However, Emris was flustered by the compliment for some reason, averting his gaze.

"Ah, uh, sure? I mean, I was just out of mana... *Ahem!* I *was* awesome, wasn't I?!"

"Y-Young master?" Edgar groaned, aghast as Emris tried to laugh it off. His voice was carried by the wind across the battlefield.



"Awww, I lost again."

Surprisingly, Gustavo was also still alive inside Dead Man's Sword. Goldleo's lack of mana, combined with the durability of a silhouette knight originally meant for royalty, had saved his life.

He roughly handled the control yokes that were no longer responsive before eventually giving up and flopping back in his seat. In front of him, the holomonitor that had lost its power source was gradually darkening.

The fallen silhouette knight's eye crystal had the wide blue sky as its last sight. The color was gradually fading from the holomonitor's image, but Gustavo could see the drake trailing smoke from behind it, accelerating on a fierce jet of fire. He realized that the drake was flashing its Magisgraph as it accelerated; it was trying to communicate something.

"Old man... Sorry, it looks like this is it for me."

Now that Dead Man's Sword, their only hope for a counter, had been taken down, Shield Nerrak's defenses were practically shattered. Jaloudek was now left only with Vouivre.

"Sorry... I leave the rest to you. Kill my share of them too!"

Dead Man's Sword, now entirely nonfunctional, creaked and sank further into the ground. It had been rather forcibly modified, so now that its mana supply had disappeared, the precarious balance that was supporting it crumbled, and it started to collapse in on itself.

Dead Man's Sword had lost its transient life, reverting once again to just the dead. The light completely went out of the holomonitor, and the cockpit went dark as Gustavo sank back deep in his seat.



Vouivre snaked through the sky like a drunkard. It wasn't actually drunk, or even broken. It was being swung around by a silhouette knight that had a hold of its tail.

The silhouette knight in question was Ikaruga. Its Rahu's Fists were extended out, and it was reeling the wires back, pulling itself to its target. They were meeting in the middle, little by little. With how much they were being tossed around, Ikaruga couldn't proceed by fixing its own body in place.

Finally, it reached Vouivre's hull, and Ikaruga kept its Rahu's Fists embedded as it readied its Bladed Cannon to strike.

"A massive weapon that's like a chimera of many silhouette knights and a levitating ship... Certainly, its combat strength is incredible. However, in the end, it is just a lone unit. You were a little unguarded and reckless. Once I'm on you, you won't be able to shake me off." Ernie looked at Vouivre through his

holomonitor, and even though it was an enemy, he still stroked it on the screen affectionately.

“Seeking more firepower is a constant in weaponry. Still, you can’t just thoughtlessly make things bigger to do it. If I had to describe this, it would be...crude.” Eventually, he moved his fingers back to the keyboard, lightly tapping in a set of orders. Ikaruga deployed its Bladed Cannon, exposing the powerful silhouette arms inside.

“In the end, humanoid weapons are the best. They’re the most optimized shape—an expanded human silhouette. This world has arrived at such a wonderful answer already, so you shouldn’t just ignore that. Even if you insist on doing so, you should at least think more seriously about how the silhouette knights link up in this. In any case, thank you for the good lesson. It’s about time to end this. Your lightning shield can’t protect you from here. Fall.”

Ikaruga was on Vouivre’s hull—in other words, inside its lightning shield. It had a wealth of targets, as anything under its feet would be part of its enemy, no matter where it shot. So, it pointed its Bladed Cannon at a random spot and pulled the trigger.

Fire jetted out of the Bladed Cannon, violating the drake-ship’s hull. The fierce god of destruction had finally bared its fangs, signaling the end of this fight.

“Oaarghhhh! Gaagh!!!” Dorotheo screamed.

The spear of raging fire struck Vouivre, and the resulting explosion and fountain of flame made the drake’s hull lurch. Several bolts of spellfire from the barrage skated by the hull toward the front of the ship, hitting the prow where Dorotheo was.

Intense shaking assaulted the drakehead’s cockpit. The drake’s outer skin, which should have been reinforced by a high-powered Physical Boost spell, was easily bent and peeled away, falling in pieces to the ground. Vouivre’s heading was bent, much like it had been punched by a giant hand.

In the end, while the drakehead had taken some damage, it was still going strong. Dorotheo had been tossed around by the impacts, so he shook his head to clear it and shouted with wide bloodshot eyes. “Impossible... No, this mustn’t be allowed. Power that can so easily surpass this drake shouldn’t be allowed to

exist!”

After that intense round of attacks strong enough to shake even Vouivre’s huge body, Dorotheo’s subordinates were assaulted with feelings of unease and dizziness. He flourished his control yokes and once again sent Vouivre into a tailspin, trying to shake Ikaruga off. The plan was monotonous, but in the first place, Vouivre never had many options when it came to close combat against a foe that had gotten on top of it. It could only intercept prospective boarders with spellfire or with a melee attack using its huge body, but the Ankyulorsas on its topside were pretty much annihilated.

“Whoa there! So you’re trying to shake me off again. That won’t work every time!” Ernie sensed his machine’s footing start to tilt, so he immediately shot out Rahu’s Fists to anchor Ikaruga to the ship’s hull. The four hands did their job solidly.

Immediately afterward, the drake suddenly rotated, and Ernie’s vision spun. Ikaruga was assaulted with intense centrifugal force, but he gritted his teeth and endured. “I’m going to make you stop...before I’m thrown off!”

Ikaruga pointed its Bladed Cannon toward its feet. The blade split as the silhouette arms inside activated. Spellfire bored into the ship, and though it failed to hit the Etheric Levitator, it dealt heavy damage to the surroundings. Crystal tissue destroyed by the explosions scattered everywhere as detached armor plates fell to the ground.

Vouivre was finally unable to maintain its balance, and it started to list. It still struggled, but not much came of it because the crystal tissue it needed to move its hull was damaged. In the end, it just drifted half-heartedly through the air.

“Why, why?! Why can we not win against a single silhouette knight?!” Dorotheo shouted. No matter how much he thought and pondered, the answer to how they had come to this situation eluded him.

Vouivre and Ikaruga were, in a sense, two mirrored twins. But at the same time, they couldn’t be any more different. They were the ultimate endpoints born from an accumulation of a certain kind of technology, as well as manifestations of madness. This made them very alike, but they were also polar opposites.

The most decisive difference was that Vouivre achieved its great power by having many knight runners come together as a whole. Silhouette knights were able to fight more powerful enemies by forming squads. Vouivre was the result of concentrated power of numbers, which magnified their strength many times over.

Meanwhile, Ikaruga was without equal, but it completely relied on Ernie's abilities as an individual. Its greatest feature was the Full Control system. Usually, a pilot and silhouette knight came together as one using the script as an intermediary. However, Ernie was able to read the script, manipulating the magius engine directly for Ikaruga to interpret.

It required the absolute utmost of a knight runner's abilities while also magnifying those abilities to an overwhelming degree. Ikaruga was the fruit of Ernie's convictions, and it was one of the endpoints of silhouette knights as a whole. At the same time, without the madness of a person coming from a different world, it wouldn't have been able to exist, much less move. It was totally a product of insanity.

"Damn you! Not yet... It's not over yet!" Dorotheo gripped his control yokes tighter in order to shake off the fear binding his limbs. He stomped hard on his stirrups, ordering Vouivre into a stubborn advance.

A large jet of flame came from Vouivre's tail section. It poured its remaining mana into it, accelerating with maximum output. It flexed its entire body and thrashed about. If it didn't shake off the fierce god clinging onto its back and wreaking havoc, it would soon die. It had already taken serious damage, and it was already in danger of self-destructing.

With a roar of wind, the drake writhed as it swam through the air. Dorotheo in the drakehead, as well as his subordinates in their Ankyulorsas, all gritted their teeth to try and bear the inertia from the drake's thrashing. The Physical Boost spell supporting it also protected the crew inside. The spell wasn't able to suppress everything, but though they felt it, they refused to stop.

"The fierce god will not stay quiet... No matter what, we must find a path to survival..." Dorotheo muttered.

The fierce god was just as affected by inertia as they were, and it wasn't able

to move. Still, even if their thrashing was working for now, it wouldn't stay like that forever. After all, it was able to fly through the air under its own power.

Then, while Dorotheo was struggling in pursuit of a breakthrough to this situation, another obstacle appeared. "That's—!"

A single levitating ship was approaching from his peripheral vision, but no Jaloudekian levitating ship was fast enough to catch up to Vouivre. It was Silver Veil—one of the fierce god's friends.

"Not just the fierce god, but the levitating ship too. Not even Vouivre can..." An icy feeling seeped into Dorotheo's heart. Before long, the drake's Etheric Levitator would break, and it would fall. This extremely realistic prediction permeated his whole body, and it came with a feeling of fear that threatened to crush his soul.

The drake started to circle in the air. Its mobile keel was equipped with crystal tissue to allow the entire body to bend, which gave it a turning radius incomparable to normal levitating ships. It tilted as it turned, pointing its belly at the ramming ship. The Ankyulorsas on its topside were destroyed, but those on the bottom were essentially untouched. They were still perfectly capable of spellfire.

The lower Ankyulorsas fired, scattering spellfire into the skies. This served to check Silver Veil's approach and bought precious time.

"This drake's life is already at its end," Dorotheo muttered with a groan. "I admit it, fierce god. You've won." Though it wasn't a response, Vouivre's damaged parts creaked and groaned in that moment, which Dorotheo took as a cry of agony.

Half the Ankyulorsas had been destroyed by the detonation javelins, the Draconic Claw had also been destroyed, and even its strongest weapon, the Incinerating Flame, had its weakness exposed. No matter how much mana Vouivre had, none of its weapons would work on the fierce god. Furthermore, the enemy was completely healthy, including its supporting levitating ship.

The levitating ship was the world's first practical aerial weapon, and it was made to fly through the sky as its ruler. Vouivre had ridiculous combat capabilities even compared to these, having been designed to combat other

levitating ships. Its power wasn't just effective against other levitating ships, but against silhouette knights as well. Its claws could crush the steel knights like ripe fruit, and its flames could incinerate them by the squad.

There was no doubt that Vouivre was an extremely advanced and abnormal weapon for this age. Normally, it would have taken at least another decade before a viable countermeasure was made. At least, it *should* have taken that long—if not for the resistance put up by the fierce god.

“But even if you claim victory, we will not let you interfere with our role. As things stand, our loss will mean the Jaloudek Army's loss.” Dorotheo's words traveled through the speaking tubes and were met with audible gulps from the crew.

If the drake were to fall, the threat of the fierce god would fall right on the rest of the Jaloudek Army. Dorotheo knew of no one there that could oppose it. Neither could the knight runners in the surviving Ankyulorsas, nor the crew managing the reactors at the center of the ship. Once Vouivre was lost, the Jaloudekian army would follow.

The drake was a guardian, an ultimate weapon to protect Jaloudek. Yet even this ultimate weapon was now near destruction. As things stood, Jaloudek as a whole would lose, and there was no way Catarina would be safe.

Dorotheo's mind was cornered, and all that remained was a single, final wish. “That is the only thing that must not be allowed... I would be too ashamed to face His Highness Prince Cristobal and Her Highness Princess Catarina! I will deal New Kuscheperka a painful blow, even if I must trade this ship for it! Light up the Magisgraph! Report our resolution!”

A magic light on Vouivre's sails turned on and off at a predetermined rhythm. With this, their resolute decision should be communicated to the rest of Jaloudek's army.

“I, Dorotheo Maldness, will not go down quietly! Now that it's come to this...” His words were already steeped in madness. Vouivre poured all its remaining strength into one last explosive spurt of acceleration.

It gave up on shaking Ikaruga off as it shot forward in a straight line like an arrow. The damage Vouivre had accumulated made all its parts scream as it did

this, but those screams were ignored. At the same time, it ejected the ether inside, allowing it to steadily drop altitude.

Ernie had to clench his teeth and endure the sudden acceleration that made even Ikaruga creak. “As long as they don’t shake Ikaruga off, they won’t be able to win. They won’t be able to escape no matter how fast they go. Then...where are they headed—” Ernie gasped with realization. “I see, so that’s what they’re up to!”

Ernie stared in front of him as he pondered, and what popped up made his expression warp for the first time since this fight had started. Vouivre had turned into an arrow, traveling in a straight line forward...right toward the spot on the battlefield where New Kuscheperka’s flag flew.



The half-destroyed Vouivre continued its descent, aiming for the ground as it signaled its resolve. It was heading for the New Kuscheperkan Army’s headquarters. Dorotheo glared at the nation’s flag as he howled madly.

“The queen! As long as we crush the queen, they will lose their just cause and fall apart! Once that happens, even if we fall, Jaloudek will still claim victory!”

The ship’s Magius Jet Thrusters spat fire fiercely; it was pouring all the rest of its mana into them. Since the drake was so damaged, the massive strain of its own body made it seem like it would break at any moment. Even so, Dorotheo showed no signs of caring. At this point, he wasn’t planning on using the Draconic Claw or the Incinerating Flames; the half-destroyed Vouivre would become a weapon in itself as thoughts of bringing the hammer down upon the enemy consumed his mind. That was why he was able to so recklessly accelerate without a single thought to the future.

“I won’t let you...do that!” Of course, Ernie wasn’t going to just let that happen.

There was only a little time left, but with Ikaruga’s destructive capabilities, it could certainly sink Vouivre before it was too late. Ernie cast a Physical Boost spell to keep the inertia immobilizing him at bay as he had Ikaruga point its Bladed Cannon at its feet. Given its size, the Etheric Levitator should be around Vouivre’s center. As long as that was destroyed, the ship would have no choice

but to fall.

The moment fire was about to spew from the weapon, a bolt of spellfire flew at Ikaruga from up ahead. It flew straight for Ikaruga's chest, but right before it hit, it was intercepted by the Bladed Cannon.

Ernie let out a surprised noise. "You just don't know when to give up! You're really still struggling?!"

The drakehead had been the culprit. Dorotheo's skills allowed him to accurately aim a silhouette arms even while under the effect of this terrible inertia. He himself was also a highly skilled knight runner, after all.

"Grrkkhh... You damnable fierce god," Dorotheo cursed. "Even if I can't destroy you...I will not let you interrupt this—my greatest ambition. You're staying with me for what little time I have left!"

The manifestation of madness and murderous intent shaped like a drake continued to fire upon Ikaruga. The demon-faced knight defended against all of it, but that was what Dorotheo wanted. There was no need to defeat the fierce god; he just needed to buy time. And not even Ikaruga could afford to be hit by spellfire unguarded. Time slipped by slowly, and Ernie was beginning to panic.

"So you'll go that far to keep me from sinking you. But don't think Ikaruga's only good at destruction!" Ernie shouted.

While defending from the spellfire, Ikaruga used its legs and its Rahu's Fists to anchor itself further. Then, it fired its Magius Jet Thrusters at full blast perpendicular to Vouivre's heading. Its two large ether reactors supported this, the jets forming brilliant pillars of flame and thrust which pressured the drake.

Eventually, Vouivre, even with its large mass, started to be diverted.

"How could this be... How far will you go to get in my way?!" Dorotheo yelled. "But that will not be enough!"

Subjected to a force pushing it on a completely different vector, the drake became harder and harder to control. Inside the half-destroyed drakehead, Dorotheo let out a bloodcurdling scream.

He continued his bombardment on Ikaruga while wringing out all he had left

in his life, achieving an almost divine level of piloting skill. Thrust from the fierce god and the drake clashed, rocking their unstable heading like a small boat in a storm.



Those in the New Kuscheperkan Army's headquarters could see the drake raging as it approached at fearsome speed.

"Your Majesty...look! The drake... It's falling!"

A commotion ran through the royal guards protecting the headquarters, but it was no celebration. It was great that the drake, one of their most powerful enemies, was falling. Unfortunately, it was falling toward *them*.

Even a normal levitating ship would cause intense damage if it fell, but the damage in this case would be unimaginable. It was safe to assume they wouldn't survive.

"O-Oh, no! It's coming this way?! Hurry, have Her Majesty retreat to a safe place!"

Despite that shout, no one knew where to run. Confusion spread among the royal guard. Both Eleonora and Isadora stared at the growing form of the drake on the holomonitor inside their cockpit and paled.

"What do we do, Helena?" Isadora asked. "We have to run..."

"But where?" Eleonora returned. "And with that speed, we won't get away in time."

The drake wavered on its course, and it was hard to accurately predict where it would fall. And in the first place, it wasn't even clear if a silhouette knight could run away in time.

There was something Eleonora believed in more than the impending threat, though. There was a levitating ship chasing the drake with ferocious speed, and her own personal knight was on it.

"I believe," she said. "You'll protect me. And if it's strong enough for even you all to fail, then no one else would be able to stop it anyway..."

She brought her hands together in prayer as she fixed her steady gaze on the

sky.



“Start diluting the ether!!! Don’t worry about what comes after! Just pull up beside that thing! Give as much mana to the thrusters as you need!!!” David shouted from the captain’s chair of Silver Veil.

“Aye, aye! But we’re near our limit!” Batson replied in a desperate tone as he gripped the steering wheel.

For the past while, they’d been adjusting their ether density levels to match up with Vouivre. Furthermore, they were pouring nearly enough mana into their Magius Jet Thrusters to break them. Ikaruga’s efforts were slowing the drake-ship down, and they were also gradually closing the gap, but the time it was taking was agonizing.

“We need to stop that thing! Kid, let’s do it!” Addy shouted.

“Sure! We won’t let it keep going!” Kid replied.

The Tzenndrimbles were acting as Silver Veil’s reactors. The twins activated Vespiary from their cockpits. They’d gained control of the weapon after Ikaruga left. Because the detonation javelins had all been fired, they were now firing regular missile javelins.

The javelins were immediately launched toward the drake. Dorotheo was fighting with Ikaruga while also desperately trying to maintain his drake’s heading, so he didn’t have the leeway to dodge.

Not to mention the fact that their target was huge. None of the missile javelins missed; they stabbed into various sections of the drake, but they still didn’t manage to sink it. Vouivre’s outer skin provided much more defense than a normal levitating ship’s. Even with the full might of Vespiary, it wouldn’t be easy to sink.

“Hey, we can’t...stop it! Th-This is bad!” Addy screamed, her panic rising. The drake was getting ever closer, spreading its spine-chilling malice and sense of oppression. They no longer had a moment to spare.

“Just...a little more! We just need a little more to get there! There’s gotta be

some way!” Kid shouted.

Finally, Silver Veil pulled up alongside Vouivre. However, both ships were going at a very similar speed. It was a close call whether they had enough time to shift Vouivre away.

“There, on the drake’s back... I see something! Is that Ikaruga, fighting?!” Kid noticed a gout of flame sprout up over the center of the drake’s hull. Furthermore, the silhouette knight installed at its prow was throwing spellfire at the source of the fire—Ikaruga.

This sight was instantly comprehensible. Ikaruga was resisting the drake with its Magius Jet Thrusters, while the enemy was trying to stop it.

Immediately, Kid had a flash of inspiration. All they had to do was take down that enemy and free up Ikaruga. He knew full well how crazy Ikaruga’s firepower was. As long as it was freed from the unnecessary interference it was facing, it would certainly be able to swallow the drake whole. But he was shocked as soon as he realized their own situation. The missile javelins they’d just fired were the last of their long-range attack options. Of course, there was no time to reload.

He looked around, searching for something, *anything* that they could use to attack from a distance, when the lance that was leaned up near them came into view.

“Agh, damn it. I ended up thinking of something stupid,” Kid muttered in a dry tone.

He took a deep breath and immediately resolved himself, cutting away the lines that affixed his Tzenndrimble to the ship. Then, as soon as his machine was free, he had it stand up and grab the lance, running to stand boldly atop the ship’s deck.

“Hey, wait, Kid?!” Addy yelled. “What’re you doing?! What about the ship’s mana?!”

“Sorry!” Kid shouted back behind him. “Take care of it by yourself for a while, please, Addy. I’m going to go hit that ship and stop it in its tracks.”

The Tzenndrimble lowered its stance, building up power in its hind legs before

kicking off. As soon as Addy saw that, she realized what Kid was going to do—but she had no time to work up a panicked shout to stop him.

“DWWARRRGHHYAAAAAGGHHH!!!”

Kid’s Tzenndrimble took off once again with a loud cry. It ran right to the end of Silver Veil’s upper deck before jumping into the open sky.

Since the two ships were running in parallel, there wasn’t much distance to cover. The Tzenndrimble cut through the whipping winds of the air currents to land perfectly on top of the drake.

“What... Who?!” Dorotheo spat out. “No, if it came from that ship, it’s not a friend. So it doesn’t matter what it is—I will not let it get in my way!” His goal and the means by which he would achieve it were simple. There was no wavering now.

In fact, Ernie was the one panicking. “A Tzenndrimble?! Which one?! Never mind, what are you doing here?!”

“Isn’t it obvious?! I’m gonna punch it! I’m leaving the rest to you, Ernie!” With that one-sided line, Kid had his Tzenndrimble sally forth.

The drakehead turned its attention to the centaur knight, attacking it to prevent it from getting close. But the machine ran through the storm of spellfire.

The Tzenndrimble had its shield up as it swung its lance, batting away the spellfire. But it was unable to defend against all the attacks; several managed to land. The Tzenndrimble was obviously damaged, but it continued in a straight line without dropping any speed.

“Just a little more! Let’s go, Tzenndrimblleeeeeeee!!!” Kid shouted.

“I just need a little more, a little more time!!!” Dorotheo shouted too. “Stay back! Don’t get in my waaaaaay!!!”

Unable to stop its enemy’s approach, the drakehead finally turned all its attention toward the centaur knight—but it was already too late. The Tzenndrimble closed the distance and swung its lance without mercy in a headlong charge.

“Wh-What...is...that?!” Dorotheo struggled to get out.

The centaur knight dove right in, driving its lance right through the drakehead’s chest—where the cockpit of a silhouette knight lay. Of course, the drakehead was not an exception.

Dorotheo looked down in a daze at the giant weapon that pierced through both his machine and his body. He coughed up a dark glob of blood.

“Grhak! Gah... Y-Your Highness... It doesn’t seem like I’ll come to you...with good tidings. My...apologies...” Those were the last words of Dorotheo Maldness, sworn knight of Jaloudek.



The drakehead controlling Vouivre was destroyed, so now the drake was rudderless. The fires of its Magius Jet Thrusters disappeared, and it bled speed.

“Awwwright!!! The kids did it! Now’s the time—charge!!!” roared the boss, and Silver Veil came forth for a ram. It squeezed out as much thrust as it could as it tried to shift its target’s point of impact as far away from the New Kuscheperkan Army’s headquarters as possible.

“Urgh, this is bad. I’m not sure how much a single Tzenndrimble can hold up...” Addy muttered.

The ship’s Magius Jet Thrusters greedily ate mana, enough that a single Tzenndrimble was nowhere near enough to support it. Addy’s expression twisted as she groaned, but that was when a shadow jumped in.

“Ernie!” she exclaimed.

Kid’s reckless attack was easily visible from where Ikaruga stood. Now that he wasn’t being impeded by the drakehead, Ernie jumped into vigorous action.

“I asked Kid to take care of it, after all,” he replied.

As soon as Ikaruga leaped onto Silver Veil, it used its Rahu’s Fists to grab the silver nerves on the deck. Then, it once again connected itself and ramped up its mana output. The two large reactors howled, and a massive amount of mana flowed into Silver Veil. With that, the ship’s thrust increased instantly.

“You can’t do that, Jaloudekian drake. You don’t belong there! Go home!”

Ikaruga and Silver Veil exhibited their full might, finally changing the drake's heading significantly.

What used to be heading for the New Kuscheperkan Army's headquarters was now pointed at Shield Nerrak, and there was no longer any time to change the target further. With this, Dorotheo's plans had been completely foiled.

Silver Veil continued onward while pushing Vouivre. Eventually, the two ships were about to pass over Shield Nerrak, and Ernie had Ikaruga ready its Bladed Cannon. The mana being routed toward the ship's Magius Jet Thrusters was rerouted to form a powerful overspell.

The spear of hellish flame, far more powerful than a standard bolt of spellfire, stabbed into the drake's flank. Then, after it completely messed up the drake's innards, it ate through the opposite wall and exited out the other side.

Fire spouted from all over the drake as its outer skin was blown off and destroyed crystal tissue was scattered everywhere. The remaining Ankyulorsas were devastated, falling from their mounts one by one. Once the ship was entirely destroyed, the Etheric Levitator that had been keeping the drake in the sky finally broke.

Now that it had lost its Levitating Field, its hull lurched to one side before falling straight out of the sky.

"Ah, whoops. I did that on impulse, but I think, maybe...that was a mistake?" Kid said as he felt the ship start to fall. His Tzenndrimble clung to the drakehead, its lance still buried within the silhouette knight. Of course, the Tzenndrimble had no ability to fly.

As things stood, he'd share his fate with the drake, forced to accept mother earth's embrace. Though, if possible, he'd like to refrain.

"Kid! Abandon your silhouette knight and jump over here! Now!" came a voice.

Ikaruga, having finished destroying the ship, had rushed over to Kid. Vouivre's heading was trending rapidly downward, so as soon as Kid heard Ernie's shout, he jumped from his Tzenndrimble's cockpit with no hesitation.

The strong winds at their altitude whipped him around. But as Kid was being

thrown about like a leaf, Ikaruga extended its arm toward him.

“I’ve got you!” Ernie shouted.

With precise adjustments using its Magius Jet Thrusters, Ikaruga grabbed onto his body with extreme care. The control needed for such delicate movement was Ernie’s specialty.

As soon as Kid was secure, Ikaruga jumped off the drake’s prow and into the sky. This time, its Magius Jet Thrusters activated at full force, and it soared to Silver Veil’s upper deck.

“Jeez, that was reckless!” Ernie chided.

Ikaruga loosened its grip, revealing an exhausted Kid, who laughed dryly. The wind had mussed up his hair, and he looked up at the steel giant that saved him.

“Oh, I mean, I was just so desperate...” he muttered awkwardly. “Ah, also, um... Sorry, Ernie. I broke the Tzenndrimble...”

Behind him, Vouivre accelerated to the ground, having lost the protection of ether. Of course, the Tzenndrimble—left on the prow as it was—went with it. There was no way it would get out of this intact.

Ikaruga’s torso armor opened up with the hiss of pressurized air being released. Ernie slipped out from the cockpit, running across his machine’s arm to Kid’s side.

He stood imposingly above Kid, who was still lying on the ground. Kid tensed up a little, but then he felt a pat on the head.

“I would never get mad at someone for trying their best,” Ernie said. “I do think you were a little too reckless, though. We can just repair the Tzenndrimble too, even if the fall broke it to pieces. As long as you’re safe, Kid, none of that matters.”

As he spoke, Vouivre finally made contact with the ground.



Inside of Shield Nerrak’s walls, the Jaloudekian knights who were lying in wait for the New Kuscheperkan Army looked up at the sky in dazed shock.

Something was falling from the sky while trailing smoke—the corpse of their guardian drake, Vouivre. It had already ceased all function as it fell toward them, gaining speed as it went. Some Jaloudekians screamed and ran, but it was too late for all of them.

The drake slammed down onto the ground, throwing up a huge cloud of dirt. Fire from a silhouette arms was still spurting out from inside, going wild and visiting unlimited destruction upon its victim. The ship's Physical Boost spell had already stopped working, so it could no longer maintain its shape and fell to pieces.

The Jaloudek Army was caught up in drake's crash, creating a hellscape of agony. Nothing could resist getting crushed to dust after a direct hit from the drake. The broken fragments thrown about engendered even more destruction. Even Tyrantors with their vaunted durability were destroyed to a unit.

That was how the Emerald Drake Knights, who had been waiting as a rear guard, met their end along with Vouivre.



Silver Veil's duty was now complete, so it dropped speed and drifted at a calm pace. Ernie and Kid were watching the end of the drake in silence on their ship's upper deck when a shadow fell upon them.

"Ahhh! It's not fair that you're only complimenting Kid! I did my best too!" Addy jumped out of her Tzenndrimble, using a rather pointless cast of Physical Boost to jump onto Ikaruga's hand. Once she reclaimed(?) Ernie, she held on to him tightly, stroking his head with delight.

Around that time, Silver Veil's crew started gathering on the upper deck, cheering as they swarmed Ikaruga. For the next while, the deck resounded with celebration from the Order of the Silver Phoenix.

Eventually, the ship turned around to rejoin the New Kuscheperkan Army.

Chapter 47: Retaking the Capital

Vouivre's grand ending stole the words and attention from everyone on the battlefield. It wasn't just a regular levitating ship. It was the greatest threat to New Kuscheperka, but a guardian for Jaloudek. Because of that, most of the people who stood and looked up at the sky in a daze were Jaloudekian.

A frozen silence filled the Coderlier Plains until the queen's voice reverberated throughout. "Now is the time for us to cross Shield Nerrak. Go forth, knights of the new kingdom!"

Those words became a spark that lit a wildfire. While Jaloudek was succumbing to chaos and disorder, New Kuscheperka gained a lot of momentum all at once. After overcoming hardships, what was once a terrible situation had changed into a chance for victory, as if they were guided by a brilliant light.

"All forces, advance! Just a little more, and we'll retake our capital!" The royal knight raised its command staff, directing the army. Every knight belonging to New Kuscheperka responded with a war cry. The battlefield had come to a sort of strange equilibrium, but now that balance was being tipped over easily as one side gained strength.

While New Kuscheperka went on the attack under the queen's orders, Jaloudek did not have anyone capable of leading them. The frontline commanding officers tried their best to prop up their forces on the battlefield, but it was a useless struggle. Tyrantors fell in quick succession while missile javelins took out levitating ships as well. Their losses were quickly and steadily mounting.

"Damn...this is fruitless. Retreat! We don't stand a chance...so we should run and save as many units as we can!"

Jaloudek no longer had any real combat strength left. The rearguard left in Shield Nerrak had been destroyed by Vouivre's final fall.

They were on the verge of total collapse. Their forces had dwindled so much that this was hardly a battle anymore. Some Jaloudekians were killed, while

others escaped. In the end, the New Kuscheperkan flag flew over Shield Nerrak, flapping proudly in the wind.

The few surviving Tyrantors and levitating ships scurried away from New Kuscheperkan pursuit. They no longer functioned as an army—they were just scattered, lone elements in a rout.

“Pursue them! Chase every last one of those damned invaders out of our land! Long live New Kuscheperka! Long live the queen!” A shout of victory arose from the New Kuscheperkan side, rumbling across the Coderlier Plains.

A strike force built around Laevantias further pursued the Jaloudekian remnants, ranging even farther into enemy-held territory. Their final goal was to retake Dervankhul.

The old capital’s fall had served as a signal of the start of the Grand Storm of the West. Dervankhul was the symbol of Kuscheperka’s fall, and at the same time, the symbol of Jaloudek’s control. Retaking it was not only the dearest wish of Queen Eleonora, but of all of Kuscheperka’s people as well.

The Order of the Silver Phoenix’s Third Company ran ahead of the New Kuscheperkan Army. The carriages they towed held Kardetolles of First and Second Companies, and they trailed clouds of dust behind them as they went.

“Awright, we’re first! Open the way to the old capital!”

“Go! We must avenge Sir Edgar!”

“Hey! He’s not dead, even though his silhouette knight is, okay?!”

Each carriage was lively in its own right, moving along as they kicked aside any Tyrantors that stood in their way. In the face of a centaur knight’s charge, such sporadic defenses meant nearly nothing.

Meanwhile, chaos spread through Dervankhul in response to the encroaching New Kuscheperkan flag. The levitating ships that had remained in the city took off one after the other, heading west. This city had almost no defensive capabilities. There were also almost no Tyrantors left, so they had no real fighting force. Now that Shield Nerrak had been broken through, their enemy was unstoppable.

“It seems we’ve lost,” Catarina muttered. She languished lifelessly on the throne, watching the ships leave. She spoke as if this was happening to someone else.

A subordinate appeared in a hurry. “Your Highness! Shield Nerrak has fallen, and the Emerald Drake Knights have started their retreat! The New Kuscheperkan Army is already in the lower city! Please, Your Highness, you must hurry and escape as well!”

Her subordinate was gasping and panting, but Catarina didn’t show much of a reaction. Unable to understand why the princess wasn’t trying to escape, he felt a little irritated, and so he came forward, attempting to drag her out by force.

Then, the sound of an explosion came from outside the castle, causing him to freeze in shock.

The sound had come from the sky. One of the levitating ships attempting to leave Dervankhul had exploded suddenly once it left the city’s borders. Flames and a rainbow of light fountained from the ship as it fell to the ground and was smashed to pieces.

The source of this was obvious. A single silhouette knight was tearing through the sky, accompanied by a loud noise—Ikaruga. Its Magius Jet Thrusters roared as it flew freely, boarding levitating ships and suppressing them easily. At this point, the skies were under the fierce god’s control. It had slain the drake and become the mightiest weapon in the air.

“It’s useless. Why would they let me escape now?” Catarina had seen Vouivre’s fall from the castle, and so she already understood this. Against the fierce god of ruin, she had nowhere to run.



Cartoga Ol Kuscher II passed through Dervankhul’s gates surrounded by Laevantias and with further accompaniment of a wall-like line of Llevant Viedes.

“Finally, I’ve returned...father...”

The city was completely under the Order of the Silver Phoenix’s control—both its surface and the sky above. The New Kuscheperkan Army boldly marched

through the old capital with their chests puffed out and heads held high. As they went, the flags flying over the city changed one after another, telling all the people that the kingdom's original lord had returned.

As they proceeded to the palace, Eleonora announced something to those around her. "Jaloudek was using Dervankhul as the seat of its government here. Thanks to that, their royalty has come to rule this land. Once we reach the palace, I want to meet this member of their royal family."

A stir rippled out among the royal guards around her. Thinking back to Jaloudek's heinous acts, they had no idea what meeting their royal family would accomplish, or what would happen.

Winning wars was important, but so was how said wars were won. Capturing a member of a royal family alive necessitated the question of how to use them. Jaloudek was just as obsessed with blood succession as Kuscheperka was. Capturing a member of the royal family brought with it an overwhelming advantage in later negotiations.

"Please, Your Majesty, don't be rash."

"I know."

Then, Cartoga Ol Kusphere II reached the palace.



Having reached the palace, silhouette knights spread out through the grounds. Dietrich and Nora came out in silhouette gears to greet the queen and her knights. Once they exited their suits, they knelt.

"We've been awaiting your arrival. The captured Jaloudekian royalty is waiting in the throne room," Nora reported.

"Well done. I will go immediately."

The queen, surrounded by her royal guards, walked down quiet passageways. This place was familiar, as she'd moved through it countless times before. The Jaloudekians might have taken the palace, but it wasn't as though they'd changed it. The group unerringly made their way to the throne room.

The throne room was packed with silhouette gears belonging to the Order of

the Indigo Falcon. These suits of armor, which were a size bigger than normal humans, were keeping watch over a single figure at the center of their formation—a single young woman sitting on the throne. Even in the midst of so many knights in armor, she seemed unfazed.

Once the group entered the throne room, the royal guards split into two, clearing an avenue down the center of their group for Eleonora to walk through. At her signal, the silhouette gears also stepped back a little.

“I assume you are the daughter of King Bardomelo of Jaloudek?” she said.

“I am indeed, Your Majesty. I am Catarina, the first princess of Jaloudek,” the prisoner answered.

Catarina acted boldly, showing no signs of intimidation, and it was enough to make one think that their positions in this throne room were reversed.

If Eleonora had remained as weakhearted as before, she would never have been able to face this woman head-on. However, in the process of coming here, she’d become a true queen—one with a huge burden that strengthened her heart. She likewise did not flinch as she looked up at Catarina with strength in her eyes.

“Please allow me this one question: Did you not consider running when we were about to retake this city?”

“It would have been pointless,” Catarina answered. “You should know that. Even a child would understand if they saw what happened to that ship that tried to leave.”

Something adjusted its thrusters and landed on one of the castle’s roofs, the roar of its fierce flames clearly audible in the throne room. A demon-faced, six-armed warrior was standing tall on the other side of the room’s pillars.

“The fierce god. How would you expect me to run from that monster?” she continued. “Not to mention that you’ve already surrounded the city and captured every ship that’s tried to flee.”

Meanwhile, Eleonora was slowly approaching the throne. This could have been considered too unguarded, and nervousness spread through the knights around her. Then, once she was right in front of the throne, Catarina rose from

the chair and stepped aside.

“The defeated cannot remain in this seat forever. Here, I return it to you, Your Majesty.”

Eleonora didn't sit down right away, instead choosing to look up at Catarina. “You are now our prisoner. We will have you prove your worth in the upcoming negotiations with your kingdom. Of course, we will not treat you roughly.”

“How unexpected. You won't kill me on the spot? You must want to avenge your father.” Even though she was talking about her own life, Catarina's tone was terribly casual. She was even smiling. However, her gaze alone shone with a serious light as she appraised Eleonora.

After a moment's pause, Eleonora answered. “I do have my own thoughts about you and your kingdom's conduct. But I must act appropriately as a queen. Keeping you alive will be much more beneficial than killing you. So I will do no such thing.”

Catarina nodded obediently. “As you wish. I am prepared. This defeat is fatal to Jaloudek, so we must avoid further conflict. I believe this holds true for the both of us.”

With that, a pair of knights quietly came to Catarina's sides and led her away. Jaloudek's princess left the throne room under their guidance. After that, she would be confined while negotiations with the Kingdom of Jaloudek were ongoing.

Only after she confirmed that the captured princess had left did Eleonora turn to face the throne.

A little more than a year had passed since its former occupant, King Augusti, had fallen. Finally, this throne was returned to its rightful ruler.



This happened before New Kuscheperka's flags flew over Dervankhul.

A single levitating ship quietly took off from an air-port set up in a section of the capital. It was a regular ship, without even Ankyulorsas aboard. Most levitating ships nowadays were possessed by the Emerald Drake Knights and

had gone to the Coderlier Plains as part of Jaloudek's main force. This ship belonged to someone completely different.

A weak-looking man was on the bridge, controlling the ship, and he shot a question back to the person sitting sloppily on the captain's seat. "Was it really okay for us to run away, Chief? H-Her Highness Princess Catarina is still in Dervankhul! Not to mention we could see Shield Nerrak on fire... Um..."

The man who up until now had been sitting absentmindedly in the captain's seat—Horacio Kojass—responded with a very sleepy gaze.

His clothes and manner lacked the dignity that was supposed to come with his station, and he replied in an extremely unmotivated tone. "Well, maybe. Unfortunately, they're about to retake their kingdom. Or what, did you want to resist until the very end?"

"No, that's not what I was saying..." Some element of hesitation and indecision remained in the weak-looking man's young features.

Horacio saw that and sighed, annoyed. "There's no point in us engineers staying. We won't contribute to combat at all, and none of us are suited to accompanying them anyway. More importantly, our true purpose is to bring all our knowledge back home; that's what will best serve the future. This is a well thought-out move. Indeed, Her Highness Princess Catarina would have wanted this."

Horacio had a point. However, his subordinate was still somewhat dissatisfied, wondering if he felt any hesitation or shame over running away first thing in the face of a losing battle. Still, it didn't change the fact that he also wanted to survive, so the man shut his mouth.

While he idly watched the conflict in his subordinate from the captain's chair, Horacio's mouth curved up into a smile. "Still, this loss certainly hurt. *A lot*. What we'll do from here really depends on how our remaining prince—'His Highness' Prince Carlitos—feels."

An image of a man with sharp features came to his mind. Now that conquering Kuscheperka would prove extremely difficult, Horacio had no idea what the prince regent would do.

Horacio suddenly stood, snapped out of his daze. “But Vouivre! That was my greatest work! Even though it was rushed, I can’t believe it was defeated by a mere silhouette knight... It really did fall, didn’t it?”

The smile on his face twisted haltingly, like it was stiff and creaking against the strain. Behind all those words, his alleged regret at falling just short of his dream was nowhere to be found.

“My word, rising into the sky is hard. But this wasn’t a waste. I’ve learned my lessons,” Horacio muttered, his gaze pointing down at his feet. Below him—that was where the levitating ship’s hangar was located, where the fruit of his research was loaded. True, he’d run partially for self-preservation, but the biggest reason they’d left Dervankhul so hastily was to save whatever was in the hangar.

But if they were to simply run back to Jaloudek by themselves, it was possible they’d be punished for abandoning Catarina. Some sort of present would be needed to avoid that. So, the object in the hangar could be said to be his *everything* at the moment.

“Not yet. The sky is still a long ways off from being mine... Someday I’ll make the strongest ship, and no one will be able to stop it. But for now, I’ll just accept that I learned a lot this time.” Horacio’s disturbing mutterings disappeared into the noise of the rest of the ship. The figurehead raised its output, and the ship sailed even faster on its course due west.

After the ship left, accompanied by the loud drone of the Blow Engine, a cloud appeared above Dervankhul out of seemingly nowhere. The sky, which had been totally clear during the battle, was now darkening. Before long, a cold rain would visit the ground.

It would continue to fall, as if cooling down the heat built up from battle.



The nobles who had gathered in the audience chamber to give their reports suddenly fell silent.

This was the capital of Jaloudek, the audience chamber of the royal palace, and Carlitos Enden Jaloudek—the first prince and prince regent—listened to

reports with his fine face twisted into a fiendish expression out of irritation.

“Once the capital was retaken, revolts started all across the Kuscheperkan territories. The core of New Kuscheperka has slowed down, but it seems they’re just supplying combat strength behind the scenes to various areas. His Highness Prince Cristobal has passed away, and Her Highness Princess Catarina has fallen into enemy hands. The soldiers’ morale is at its lowest... At this point, I believe we have no other choice but to retreat...”

Every successive report was news on the troubles facing the Jaloudek Army. Every report made Carlitos raise his brows at a dangerous angle. When Carlitos’s already-sharp features were colored by displeasure, they looked like drawn blades—this greatly pressured his subordinates.

“Why? Kuscheperka should have already fallen. So what if a single princess managed to escape? What happened for our army to lose this badly?! We even sent in that drake-ship!” he shouted.

The comeback of New Kuscheperka had, quite literally, happened in the blink of an eye.

Jaloudek had spent over a decade preparing thoroughly for this war. Even so, New Kuscheperka had managed to produce a large number of new silhouette knights in a short time, eliminating the advantage the Tyrantors had in technology early on. Furthermore, even the supposedly untouchable levitating ships had suffered great losses, with even Vouivre sinking in the end.

More than anything, his little brother and the second prince of Jaloudek, Cristobal, had been killed, while First Princess Catarina was now a prisoner. With this, the invasion army had lost their leadership. Even Carlitos understood that it would be impossible to defeat New Kuscheperka for a second time from this position.

He could never have imagined so great a loss, thinking back to the heroic figures of the Black Knights when they’d first set off. The losses they’d suffered were enough to shake even a nation as large as Jaloudek to its foundations. The more Carlitos thought, the more he became dizzy with rage.

On top of that, the next person came with a report, the contents of which only further rubbed him the wrong way. “Your Highness, that is not the only

land you must worry about. At our southwestern border, four of the isolated Eleven Flags nations are gathering. There is also movement to our north, and it's too much for the Lead Skeleton Knights alone to cover..."

"Damn them! Every single one! They get carried away by the slightest change in fortune. What shallow vultures!" His irritation reached its peak, and he finally had to raise his voice and stand up. In a short time, the winds of fortune across the Occidents had violently reversed, and now the Kingdom of Jaloudek was being hindered everywhere it tried to go. "What do they think our nation is, an injured deer?! Such hubris from mere gnats! We must pay these fools back in kind!"

"But, Your Highness, we do not have the forces for that. Even if we pulled our men back from Kuscheperka now..."

With the news of New Kuscheperka's revival, the other nations in the Occidents that had been watching and waiting had taken sudden and fierce action.

The reason the other countries had settled for observing the situation carefully before was Jaloudek's sheer might. Kuscheperka's lands were hunting grounds to Jaloudek's black knights, and the other nations hesitated to send their knights only to make enemies of such a powerful force. Normally, a nation perpetrating an invasion would have their defenses at home lowered, but Jaloudek boasted enough soldiers to not have to worry about that.

Even if some other nation managed to strike while the invasion force was away and carve off some of Jaloudek's land, the black knights would eventually return, which meant no one could make a careless move. That was how the nations of the Occidents had been forced to twiddle their thumbs and watch with such ripe fruit hanging in front of them.

But with Kuscheperka's unprecedented victory, the situation was turned on its head. It was like setting free a pack of hungry beasts. To the nations that had been hesitating to make a move, fearful of retaliation by black knights, there was no better impetus to act.

"How... Just how did this happen?!" That day, Prince Regent Carlitos Enden Jaloudek fainted from apoplectic rage inside the royal palace of Jaloudek.



After that, things got worse day by day for Jaloudek. It started with border skirmishes, but it didn't take long for the other nations to start their invasions in earnest.

The Lead Skeleton Knights, who were protecting Jaloudek's lands, fought well despite their terrible disadvantage. However, because Jaloudek was such a large kingdom, it was impossible to deal with the many nations that were coming from every direction. In order to maintain an unbroken front line, they pulled back, shaving away at the land that could be said to be the meat of their nation.

In the midst of this difficult war, there was only one squad that managed to repeatedly stop and even push back any incoming invasions.

"Awww... In the end, I was the only one that survived."

At the head of this squad, hastily established within the Lead Skeleton Knights, was a strange silhouette knight covered in swords.

"Oh, well. I'll just have to swing my swords enough for everyone that's gone."

Thanks to this squad's self-sacrificing efforts, the ambitions of all the nations that tried their hand at invasion were stopped one step before fruition.



In the true capital of New Kuscheperka, Dervankhul...

Some time had passed since this city, which had served for a short time as Jaloudek's Central Protectorate Government, had been retaken by New Kuscheperka.

Due to the chain of battles that led to the conquering of Shield Nerrak and the retaking of the old capital, Jaloudek had lost both its most major base and the princess leading their forces at the same time. This, coupled with the invasion of their homeland, had forced their forces to retreat in full. This allowed those of New Kuscheperka to announce the relocation of their capital from the temporary posting of Fontanie back to Dervankhul. Their countrymen, who had been living in resignation, celebrated the new kingdom that had defeated the

invaders and taken back the capital, and their new queen, Eleonora. In fact, their joy was bubbling over.

The war saw the Kuscheperkans lose a lot. But now, the people of Kuscheperka were able to once again move forward with courage and hope.

A certain day saw many people gathered at the air-port on the outskirts of Dervankhul. Queen Eleonora was there, along with Martina, Isadora, and the nobles of New Kuscheperka. In front of this crowd, the Order of the Silver Phoenix was packing their things into their levitating ship, Silver Veil.

“Oh, man! This ship makes carrying our luggage so much easier. Hey, Ernesti, let’s just make this thing ours. I’m not givin’ it to anybody.” The boss, David, was in a very good mood, which was rare for him, and he was smiling as he looked upon the ship. The Vespiary, which had been installed during wartime, had been taken out, and now the ship had been reconfigured for transport and cargo.

The ship’s hold was filled with a mass of goods and materials. Part of it was the hearts of the silhouette knights they’d defeated, as well as the order’s silhouette knights that were still being repaired.

“Huh? We’re not gonna show the master?” Batson asked.

“Sure, we can show him, but we’re not handin’ it over. These are our spoils,” the boss replied.

“You really like this ship, huh? We could easily just hand this one over and make a new one, but... Well, the opposite holds true as well. I’m sure it’ll work out,” said Ernie.

He and Batson exchanged somewhat exasperated looks. After the boss had taken to the battlefield in this ship, he seemed to have formed a strong attachment to it. He was awakening to the path of what would be the world’s first *flying knightsmith*.

Once most of the packing was done, Eleonora stepped up to talk to Emris. “You’re leaving already?”

“Yeah. The queen’s back in the capital, and the Jaloudekians are no longer within Kuscheperka’s borders. There’s nothing left for warriors like us to help

with. After all, we're talking about Kuscheperka! In the end, you should be the one to take care of things, Helena."

The Order of the Silver Phoenix would be departing back to Fremmevilla today, and the New Kuscheperkans were here to see them off.

The nobles of New Kuscheperka gave slight objections, reluctant to let the Order of the Silver Phoenix go even as they were already packing. The order had played a great role in Kuscheperka's revival, and there could never be enough manpower during this time where they needed to stabilize their borders.

Still, the Order of the Silver Phoenix was borrowed from their ally, Fremmevilla. They couldn't stay forever, and neither could they be relied on forever. They'd completed their objective, after all. Still, this didn't quite go for every individual in the order.

One of the silhouette knight wrecks being packed was a size bigger than everything else. It was in such bad shape it was hard to tell its original form, but it had about double the number of parts as a normal silhouette knight. It was the Tzenndrimble that had fallen to the ground along with the drake.

Eleonora called out to a single knight that was watching said wreck be packed in a daze. "Sir...Archid..."

Kid gasped and came to once he heard the voice and turned around. Though she was the one who'd called out to him, Eleonora had no follow-up, and so she fell silent. It was as if she'd returned to the weak-willed princess from before.



Kid was looking for words as well, and his eyes wandered before he eventually made up his mind and opened his mouth. “I’m part of the Order of the Silver Phoenix, so...I need to go back home with them. Sorry, I know I swore to become your knight, Helena...”

Eleonora was looking down, hiding her face, but she trembled when she heard him. She held her hands together and muttered softly while still looking downward. “No...I know... You helped me when I was at my lowest... You gave me strength. You definitely fulfilled your role...as my knight...Sir Archid.”

Even after she was finished, she didn’t raise her head. She couldn’t, as drops of water started falling to the ground.

Kid took a step back and gave her a knight’s salute with as much respect as he could muster. The composition of this scene was the same as when he’d first sworn to become her knight, only the girl was now a queen, and the boy was about to leave. Even so, Kid wanted to help the girl just as much as he had back then.

“Your Majesty,” he said, “I pray that you may rest easy in body and mind forevermore. If you or your country are ever in need of aid, I will always come running.”

“Okay. I wish you well, Sir Archid. May you endeavor to be the best knight you can be, even after returning home. And, um...I’ll do my best to not have to trouble you.”

Finally, Eleonora raised her head, revealing the face of a queen filled with a strong will, not the frail girl about to shatter into a million pieces like before. However, a single wet trail down her cheek still remained, the last vestiges of who she once was.



Ernie was watching this exchange from a little ways away when Addy suddenly grabbed onto him from behind. She made no effort to hide her displeasure as she posed him a question. “Hey, Ernie, are you sure we shouldn’t leave Kid here?”

“That’s a pretty heartless line. But anyway, that’s not something I can decide

on my own,” Ernie replied.

Addy saw how troubled Ernie looked in her arms, so she turned to Emris next. “Then you should be able to, young master! Can’t we do something?”

“Okay, leave it to me! Is...what I’d like to say. But you guys answer directly to my dad, so I’ve got no power there. I’ll at least talk to him about it, though! Yeah, I have some sort of idea what to do, so just leave it for now. I won’t do you wrong on this.” Emris puffed out his chest confidently. Though, in his case, it was rarer for him *not* to be confident.

“Ris...”

Someone had come over to him. Isadora kept some distance between them, but Emris didn’t seem to mind, as he closed that gap easily. He noticed that Isadora’s expression was stiffer than usual, but before he could question that, she spoke up.

“Big Brother Ris... Thank you. You saved me, my mom, and Helena. I thought we were done for. Then, we really did take back our kingdom... I didn’t think that would happen.”

“You and my aunt took good care of me, after all! Of course I would come to save you!”

“As you said, Ris, we will rebuild our country ourselves. Just leave the rest to us. And...once things calm down, will you come again?” That was the true question. Isadora’s face was fraught with nervousness as she posed it.

Emris made a show of putting his hand to his jaw in a thinking pose, but he answered immediately, barely putting any thought into it at all. “I have no idea! After all, we have a mountain of gifts to bring back, so we’ll be busy back home for a while. But that shouldn’t be too much of a problem. It’s your turn to visit me, isn’t it?”

For a brief moment, Isadora’s eyes widened and she froze, but eventually, she loosened up and adopted a slight smile as she nodded. “You’re right. Then I’ll go see your country, Ris... I’ll do my best to make this place more stable.”

“Good, that’s the spirit! Let’s see, when you come, I’ll show you how we hunt monsters! There’re no monsters in the west, after all. I can’t put it into words—

you gotta see one for yourself!”

“Let’s not.” Isadora immediately rejected that idea.



Once everyone had finished their final exchanges, the members of the Order of the Silver Phoenix either boarded the ship or got on their silhouette knights. Silver Veil then took off with the group from Kuscheperka watching.

“Well, then,” said Ernie. “The Order of the Silver Phoenix will be leaving. Let’s go back home... We’ve got so many presents, after all!”

The levitating ship flew through the air while the Tzenndrimbles towed their carriages below.

The Order of the Silver Phoenix, the strongest order in the east, had won the war for Kuscheperka and was returning in triumph.



This war, which had started with the fall of Kuscheperka, ended with unrest in Jaloudek, causing the fires of war to spread throughout the Occidents. The various nations all aiming for Jaloudek were glaring at each other, but they then quickly stowed their weapons.

The trigger for this was a certain piece of information that spread across the half continent. This information was the secret behind Jaloudek’s newest and greatest secret weapon: the levitating ship.

The cause of this leak was thought to be these nations’ invasions into Jaloudek. However, many mysteries remained about the details of its spread.

Some said the information was leaked by Jaloudek’s engineers, while others claimed it to be the results of each country doing their own research into levitating ships. Some even claimed that each nation was sent a dubious document with the details of the technology in the confusion of war.

At any rate, with the spread of this information, the race to develop and construct levitating ships heated up. The usefulness of these vehicles was now common knowledge thanks to the Grand Storm of the West, and it was impossible not to abandon the fight to attempt this. Everyone knew how fatal

an imbalance in weapons technology could be, after all.

Of course, they wanted to know not just about the levitating ships, but also the powerful Vouivre as well. However, most of the key pieces to constructing the drake had disappeared along with Horacio Kojass, chief of the Central Development Workshop.

In the end, these nations were only taught about the Etheric Levitator and the fundamentals of levitating ship construction. However, that was enough to cause a revolution within the Occidents. The spread of levitating ships, which could move without the restraint of terrain, would greatly improve human mobility.

Before long, they would leave the continent of Setterlund. It would be the start of the second stage of the Grand Storm of the West—a new form of competition.

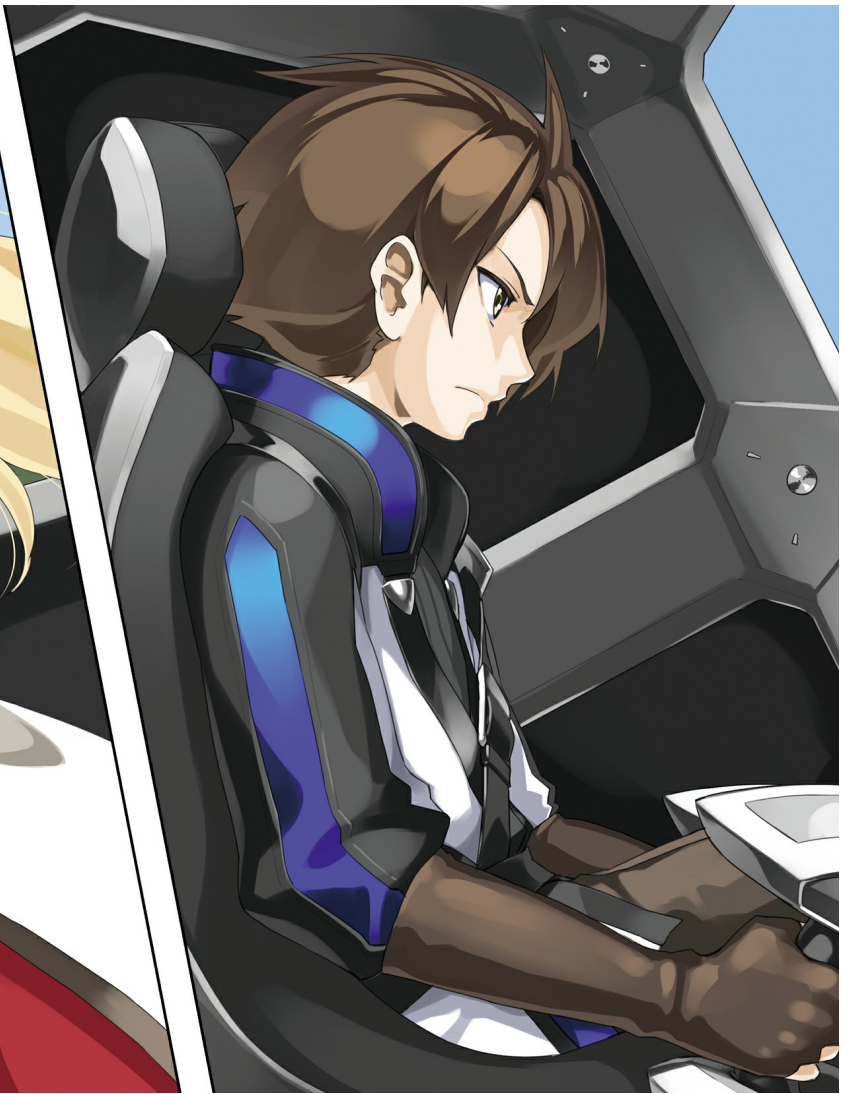
Later generations would call it the start of the Age of Aviation.

—[To Be Continued in *Knight's and Magic* 6]











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Knight's & Magic: Volume 5

by Hisago Amazake-no

Illustrations by Kurogin

Translated by Kevin Chen Edited by Lyn Hall

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