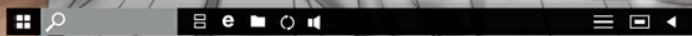




Magical★ EXPLORER

8

Reborn as a
Side Character
in a Fantasy Dating Sim



Iris

ILLUSTRATION BY
Noboru Kannatuki

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Magical★explorer

Reborn as a
Side Character
in a Fantasy Dating Sim

8

Iris

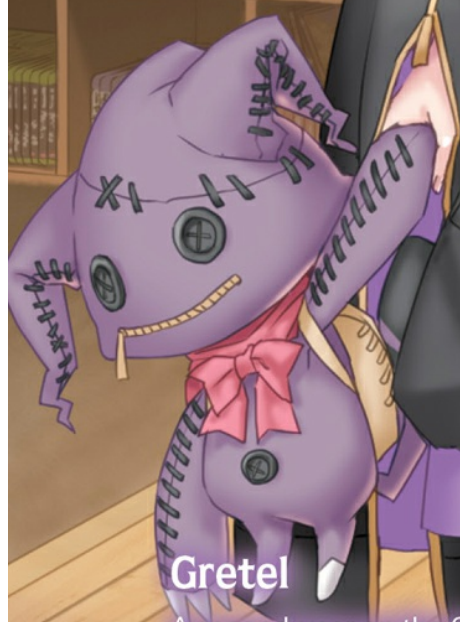
ILLUSTRATION BY
Noboru Kannatuki

“Sheesh, Takky!
You’re being such
a hippity-hoppity
stranger!”

Ivy

Head of the *Tsukuyomi Academy Newspaper*. A rabbitfolk girl who’s always fired up. Knows the roles the Three Committees play.

“Takioto... You
like games?”



Gretel

A second-year on the Ceremonial Committee. A video game-loving shut-in. Seldom speaks and is reluctant to do anything, yet she's surprisingly considerate of underclassmen.

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“I-I’m counting
on you...♡”

Shion Himemiya



Yukine Mizumori



Iris

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New York

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Magical★Explorer

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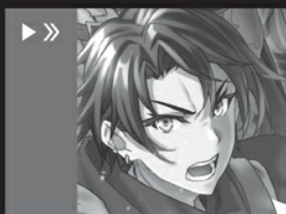
Yen Newsletter

Illustration: Noboru Kannatuki

Graphic Design: Kai Sugiyama (Tsuyoshi Kusano Design Co., Ltd.)

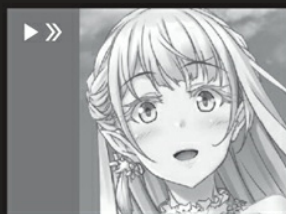
Characters

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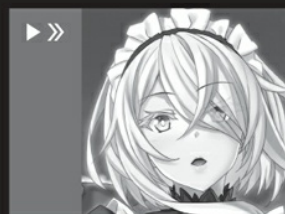
Kousuke Takioto

The best friend character from *Magical★Explorer*. The soul of a Japanese eroge aficionado dwells within him. Possesses a unique ability.



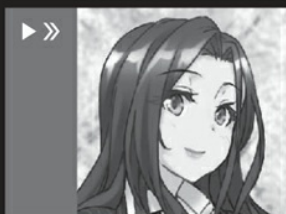
Ludie

Ludivine Marie-Ange de la Tréfle. Highborn second daughter to the emperor of the elven Tréfle Empire. A main heroine who appears on the game packaging for *Magical★Explorer*.



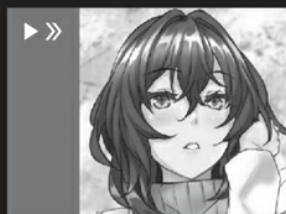
Nanami

A maid created to assist Dungeon Masters. Belongs to the angel race, who are few in number.



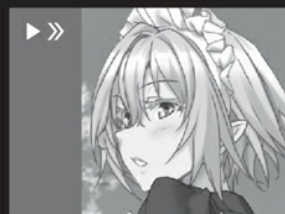
Marino Hanamura

Principal of Tsukuyomi Magic Academy, the game's main setting. Receives limited screen time in the game, so she's shrouded in mystery.



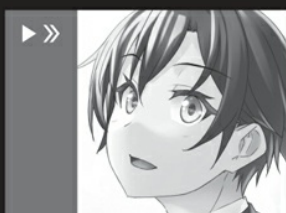
Hatsumi Hanamura

Marino Hanamura's daughter and Kousuke's second cousin. Generally very quiet and reserved. Teaches at Tsukuyomi Magic Academy.



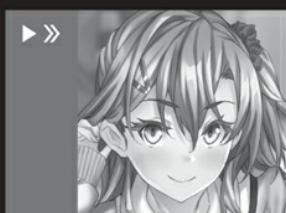
Claris

Elf who serves as Ludie's bodyguard and maid. Serious and devoted to her mistress, she has a tendency to beat herself up over her failures.



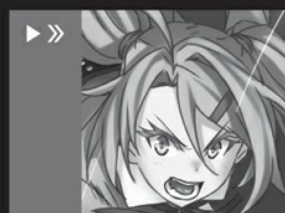
Iori Hijiri

The main character in the game version of *Magical★Explorer*. Ordinary in appearance. When developed, however, he becomes the strongest character in the game.



Yuika Hijiri

Iori Hijiri's younger stepsister. A main heroine who is featured on the game's box art. Transferred to Tsukuyomi Magic Academy.



Rina Katou

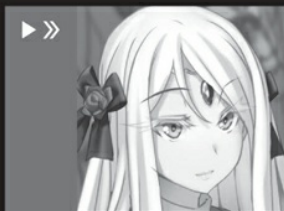
Katorina. One of the main heroines present on the *Magical★Explorer* box art. A competitive spirit who is sensitive about her meager bust.



Monica

Monica Mercedes von Mobius.

The president of the Student Council. One of *Magical★Explorer's* Big Three and a main heroine who features on the game's packaging.



Stef

Stefania Scaglione.

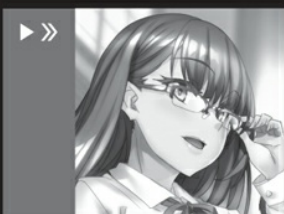
Serves as the captain of the Morals Committee. The Acting Saint from Leggenze. Although she is beautiful, compassionate, and popular with the students... is there more to her than meets the eye...?



Benito

Benito Evangelista.

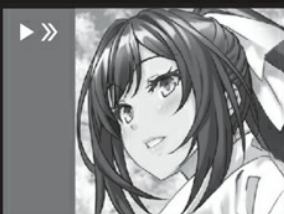
Serves as the ceremonial minister, the president of the Ceremonial Committee. Despised by the students of the Academy, but beloved by eroge players.



Fran

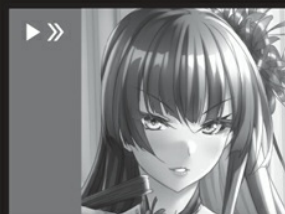
Franziska Edda von Gneisenau.

Serves as vice president of the Student Council. An extremely earnest and diligent girl. Sees Yukine and Shion as her rivals.



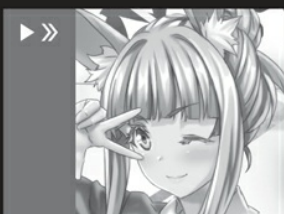
Yukine Mizumori

One of the officially recognized overpowered characters who are collectively referred to as the Big Three of *Magical★Explorer*. Lieutenant of the Morals Committee.



Shion Himemiya

Serves as ceremonial vice minister of the Ceremonial Committee. Always clad in a kimono instead of her uniform. Her strength is on par with the other main heroines'.



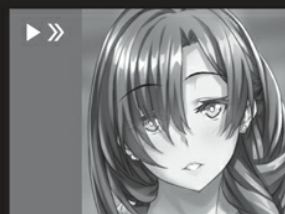
Ivy

Head of the *Tsukuyomi Academy Newspaper*. A rabbitfolk girl who's always fired up. Knows the roles the Three Committees play.



Ms. Ruija

Instructor at Tsukuyomi Magic Academy. Loose with money and indebted to the Hanamura family. Was Hatsumi's senior during their student days and challenged dungeons alongside her.



Rue Sakura

Tsukuyomi Academy's librarian. Has cared for many students over her long tenure at the Academy. In truth, she is an angel.



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim —*Benito's Perspective*— “Benito, do you seriously think that?”

Monika was sending a cold glare my way.

“That I do.”

“I, *we*, should be the ones to resolve this. Even were we to tell them, it would be several months down the line.”

“No, no. I think we should tell them now.”

“Looks like we agree to disagree. This is getting nowhere. Stef, what do you think?”

Fed up and exasperated, Monika looked at Stefania, who sighed.

“...I’m fine either way. But if I had to choose...”

She glanced at me. And then— “I’d side with Benito, I suppose.”

In an unexpected twist, she’d agreed with me.

“Benito, why exactly do *you* look surprised to hear that?”

A dubious look came to Stefania’s face. Why, *of course* I was surprised.

“I was convinced you would say you didn’t care. That it didn’t interest you.”

“I figured you’d say that, too.”

When Monika agreed with me, Stefania flashed us a look of annoyance. A very Stefania response if I ever saw one.

“...I’ll correct myself—I don’t care. I vote you do whatever you want.”

Stefania had amended her last statement, but Monika wasn’t convinced.

“Majority decision or not, I’m not changing my stance here.”

Monika thought that I had an extra vote on my side. Though really...

“With how Miss Stefania’s acting, the ‘majority’ is still a three-way split.”

When I finished my joke, I could tell it had angered Monika.

“I’m being serious here.”

“I’m just as serious as you are, promise. Let me say it clearly then: I think we need to fill in the first years, too.”

Monica stared daggers at me.

Her mana overflowed and flickered around her, creating a mist almost like a heat haze. This often happened when she grew angry.

This haze gradually swelled, and the atmosphere in the room began to feel a bit heavy.

I don’t think she was doing this to intimidate me. It simply came across that way. I would have backed down if the matter at hand would allow it, but I couldn’t today.

“I understand your consideration for the Three Committee first-years, Monica. But, this year, I think it’s better to tell them the truth. After all, they’ve got *him* in their grade.”

Yes, him. The boy who’d resolved my sister’s troubles, quelled Rue Sakura’s uproar, and had even started solving problems in other schools as of late.

“...Kousuke. Kousuke Takioto,” Stefania murmured.

“I’ll admit he’s a bit unique. Or perhaps I should say his circumstances are unique.”

Kousuke Takioto was abnormal. Even Monica agreed on this point.

“But he’s still got a long way to go. He can’t beat me. Even you must be confident about beating him in a fight, Benito.”

“I mean, yeah, I would win. I think even Shion would beat Takioto, *as he is now*, anyway.”

“As he is now?”

Monica repeated my wording.

“Yeah, because he possesses something extraordinary. That’s why he’ll probably surpass me. Though, you also have that very same thing, Monica.”

“You have an awful habit of beating around the bush, Benito,” Stefania said,

admonishing me.

“...So what’s the thing Kousuke has, then?” Monica asked me.

“Potential.”

Kousuke Takioto had the power to bring things out of people. And this didn’t apply to just his own power, either. He was bringing out the strength of the students around him, the three of us, and even the general student population.

Compared to the average year at the Academy, the current student body was quite high in power level. If not for Kousuke, that certainly wouldn’t have been the case.

Whenever he discovered a new dungeon or training location, he would always spread the word so others could take advantage of them, and his eccentric solo dungeon runs inspired his peers to push themselves.

There was no doubt he’d had an effect on his fellow students.

If anyone could be entrusted with solving the huge problem gripping the Academy, it was him.

“That’s why we should be honest about it. Not about shaping the students through the Three Committees rivalry, or our totally meaningless public-facing duties, but about the *true role* of the Three Committees.”



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim “Master, why don’t we make a new unit?” Nanami proposed out of the blue. I’m pretty sure I responded by staring at her in confusion and blinking.

I mean, that was how Yuika reacted as she chowed down on the last few cookies, which she’d won off me in an intense game of rock-paper-scissors. So I figured my reaction was pretty similar.

“Where did that come from?”

“Oh, I just thought it would be for the best to make a new unit.”

Welp, I could tell this circular conversation was going to give me a headache. I had no idea what Nanami was talking about, so I thought I should confirm things first.

“Hold on, before I start riffing off your latest nonsense, let me get one thing straight. What ‘unit’ are we talking about here—a squad of people or a unit of measurement?”

“I believe you have heard about the activities of the Maid Unit already...”

“Uh, nope. First I’ve heard of it.”

“Huh. So you’ve been getting up to things, Nanami?”

It sounded like it was Yuika’s first time hearing about this, too. Seriously, though, what the hell was a “Maid Unit”? What does a group like that even do?

“I’ve heard about the Maid Unit. They’ve been doing good work in the shopping district.”

Sis was next to enter the ring, just finished with the milk she had been chugging.

“I should have known word of our activities would reach your keen ears, Miss Hatsumi.”

Uhhh. Why did Sis know? What had the Maid Unit done in the shopping district? And where had she even heard about this in the first place? There were so many things to poke holes in that I didn’t even know where to start.

I glanced at Yuika, and she shook her head. Then in a whisper, she said, “*We should just let it go.*”

She was worried that if we played along, the conversation would go on far longer than we wanted. I felt exactly the same way.

“With that in mind, I was thinking about making a new unit separate from the Maid Unit.”

When we each refused to throw in any retort, Nanami continued on with the topic. Guess she really did want to make a new unit.

“...Don’t ask why, but I can’t see this going anywhere good. So, what sort of unit will this be?”

“It’s simple. Think for a moment, and you should immediately arrive at the answer. Here’s a hint: What kind of person could rival a maid?”

Someone who could vie with a maid? Uhhh, and that would be...?

“Takioto! I’ve got it!”

Yukine jumped in. A smile came to her face while her nape—a borderline-legal erotic body part—was freely on display.

“When you talk about maids, there’s another role that pairs with them, right?”

Pairs with maids? Maid, maid... Oh, right.

“I’ve got it! Butlers! It’s gotta be butlers, right?!”

When there are maids, there are butlers. Both are a type of servant. Butlers must be able to go toe-to-toe with maids.

“Wonderful.” Nanami clapped and smiled. “That’s absolutely right, Master and Miss Yukine. I knew you would get it. Yes. Only a dark antihero can stand up to a maid!”

“Uh, that doesn’t line up in the slightest with what we said, so what’s the clapping for?”

“I was pretty confident in my answer, too...”

Yukine smiled self-deprecatingly. She really didn’t need to get too depressed

about this nonsense; nobody could've gotten the right answer.

"That's why if there's anyone who can go up against the strongest of the thankless workers, the Maid Unit, it's the second strongest of the unsung, the Antihero Unit."

"I see you're making maids out to be the strongest there," Yuika said as she placed the remaining cookie into her mouth.

"Oh yes, but of course. Our unit defeated the Bifurcated Banter Buffalo Bouncing 🦋."

"Uh, Takioto. What exactly is Nanami fighting against...?"

Yukine's question was shared by us all. Also, what a tongue twister of a name, huh.

"No need to fear, we've already obtained a research lab that can serve as their hideout."

"Yup, Nanami isn't listening to us at all. This whole thing is moving way too fast. What are you actually doing? Better yet, where the hell did you get the money?!"

"Well you see, Nanami Channel, the Maid Unit, retail, real estate, and services are all running quite smoothly. So the bank came to me looking to invest."

"Are you supposed to be the president of some *Fortune* 500 conglomerate? But wait, is Nanami Channel seriously that popular?"

"Ah, Takioto. I actually know the answer to that one. Her subscriber count has been skyrocketing lately."

If Yuika was saying this, then it had to be the truth. But seriously, what on earth was Nanami up to?

"Now then, let's get back to the topic at hand—the Antihero Unit."

"Maybe you should stay off-topic."

Nanami tried to get back to what she was talking about, but as far as I was concerned, she would've been better off forgetting all about it. For real, what the hell was an "Antihero Unit"? I had a terrible feeling about all of this. I wasn't

imagining things, was I?

“The name of the team is basically set in stone. I added in a bit of Master’s name to the mix and settled on ‘the Nanami Rangers.’”

“I knew you were just gonna make it about yourself! Honestly, it’s a bit of a relief.”

Since she never included me in these name schemes of hers, it would throw me for a real loop if she actually did for once, y’know? Nanako...*hrngh*, my head.

“Okay, now let’s figure out who’s on the team!”

“Excuse me?”

“Awha?”

“Hm?”

Yuika, Yukine, and I all reacted at the exact same time.

“Master, what are you so surprised about?”

“Er, well, I figured this was all a joke.”

Usually, Nanami would say her nonsense and then just abandon the topic altogether, right?

“Your humble Nanami is ever and always serious. I have already put out a call for members on Nanami Channel and elsewhere.”

Her version of “serious” sometimes just meant “seriously joking.” But anyway...

“How many people have jumped on the offer? Zero, right?”

Yuika’s curiosity appeared to be piqued as she joined the conversation.

“Despite making the conditions quite stringent, there were more applicants than I could have imagined.”

“That many?”

“Given the sheer numbers, I made the heartbreaking decision to screen the applicants. There were only a few who really seemed willing and able to work

for Master's benefit."

"I really can't place it, but I'm still getting nothing but bad feelings about all this."

"Hmmm, I'm guessing it'll be a hand-picked selection of weirdos."

True. Yuika was spot-on.

"All right then, let's cancel the interviews."

"But Master, they're on their way to the interview venue as we speak."

"You sure don't waste time. Between this and the whole Amaterasu Girl's Academy affair, why are you always so quick on the draw with this weird crap?"

So wait, some people were heading there? Canceling at the last minute would be a bit of a jerk move. I didn't have anything planned for later anyway, though a part of me felt like Nanami had anticipated I would be free and slammed these interviews in the timeslot.

"Takioto, they're coming out for you. Making a brief appearance is the least you could do, right?"

I supposed Yukine had a point. I couldn't see myself telling them all to hit the road after coming all this way to the venue. I decided to check it out.

The interviews were being held in one of the Hanamura Group's buildings. I'd assumed they would ordinarily take place in a research lab (?), but Nanami said something about how it was still being refurnished and wasn't ready.

Though, honestly, none of that even mattered.

"We're really gonna hold interviews, huh...?"

There was a rectangular table in the room we were using, with a single chair on one side and four chairs on the other. The applicants would sit in the lone chair and speak with the interviewers: myself and Nanami; Yukine, with her good eye for character; and Yuika, who'd tagged along because she had nothing better to do.

"You didn't believe me?" Nanami asked.

I mean, Nanami was always spouting nonsense, right? There was no way to tell the truth until I saw things with my own eyes, so I'd thought maybe there'd be some kind of miracle. There wasn't.

"Now, allow me to send the documents for all the candidates to your Tsukuyomi Travelers."

Looking at her Tsukuyomi Traveler, Yuika spoke up.

"Wait, there's only one?"

"I decided to build a bit more tension and give you only a single person's data at a time right before the interview."

"So basically, once we finish the interview for the person you just sent us, we'll be able to see the next person's data?"

Nanami affirmed Yukine's request for clarification. Hearing that, I couldn't help throwing in a retort of my own.

"An interviewer doesn't need any thrills or tension, c'mon. Can't you send them to us all at once?"

"Well, that would spoil things."

"Y'know, I don't think interviews even *have* spoilers!"

Yuika, please, lay into her more. Wait, but she should've handed over these documents a lot sooner, right? The fact that she hadn't made me suspect that there was quite a lineup of people waiting for us.

"Allow me to show in the first candidate."

Nanami took out what looked like a walkie-talkie and said, "First candidate, please enter." Based on this, there had to be a waiting room connected to where we were.

About thirty seconds later, there was a knock on the door.

The first interview candidate was a man plump enough to be a sumo wrestler. Excusing himself with a crisp tone, he tried to enter the room.

However, he was repelled. His stomach was so huge that the door rebuffed his entrance.

“Oh, whoops, my apologies... Hmm, a rather narrow door, isn’t it?”

Uh no, dude, your stomach’s just massive. The door was at least as wide as a train station turnstile.

Yuika opened and closed her mouth again and again, looking just as ready as I was to make a quip. Now she was taking deep, steady breaths.

“Nrmph, hyah!”

The man summoned up his strength to try and squeeze through. Little by little, he lodged himself through the door until he came out on the other end, as though his plump form had propelled him through.

“Now then, please take a seat.”

Despite witnessing all this, Yukine directed the man to sit with her usual demeanor.

“Nrmph, excuse me. Oh, what pretty flowers,” he said before sitting down in the chair, prompting a loud scream-like creak. Also, what was this *nrmph* business?

“Please then, can you introduce yourself?”

“My name is Michael Brown. Body enhancement magic is my forte, and I’m quite confident in my physical strength,” he said, raising his arm up slightly and flexing his biceps. Indeed, he did appear strong.

“I see, then please tell us what a shortcoming of yours might be.”

“A shortcoming...*nrmph*. Let’s see. While I myself don’t consider it to be a shortcoming, I’ve been told by others that I’m overly enthusiastic. My burning heart must compel me to act that way,” he replied as his stomach jiggled.

The man must have noticed where our stares were focused. He put a hand to his stomach before saying, *“Nrmph, quite the splendid stomach, isn’t it? This chubby body of mine is one of my most charming features.”*

After hearing him boldly assert this with a smile, me and the others were at a loss for more questions.

“You are very capacious, I see. Now then, what would you like to ask

Master?”

Nanami sent the interview my way, but how could I have any questions when I didn’t even understand what this group was for in the first place? In any case, I came up with something to ask the man.

“Why did you apply to be part of this team?”

“My girlfriend is a fan of Nanami’s channel, and as I was settling into my role as the house mascot character, she sent in my resume without my knowledge.”

It sounded like the reason why guys would end up at a talent agency for male idols. A lot of times, it was the mother or older sister who sent their application in.

But what was a “house mascot character”? A new subspecies of jobless shut-in?

“To be perfectly honest, I wasn’t even familiar with Mr. Kousuke Takioto at first. However, when I looked into him, I was profoundly moved by his theory of world peace. From then on, I decided I would work for him at any cost.”

Yuika sent a sidelong glance at me. Obviously, I hadn’t discussed how to achieve world peace at all.

From there, Nanami and Yukine asked the man a few things before it came time for the final question of the interview.

“If you end up as Takioto’s assistant, you’ll have to head into dungeons. On such occasions, what can you do when forced to confront a mighty enemy?”

“Should I need to battle, I can serve as a shield. I can withstand any blow, no matter how strong, and if a party member is in grave danger, I can make time for them to be healed.”

“...I see. Thank you.”

After the man departed, leaving the room the same way he’d come in—jamming his body in the frame and popping out the other side—Yuika and I heaved a heavy sigh at the same time.

Exceptionally exhausted, Yuika lay her face on the desk.

I could empathize. The whole thing had left me feeling drained, too. Probably from having to keep our quips and retorts to ourselves the entire time. Seriously, I was beat.

“I think I’ve had my fill of all this. Can we just call it here?” I asked.

From beside me, Yuika replied with her head still on the desk.

“I bet you aren’t nearly as full as that guy just now.”

“You come up with some great jokes, you know that, Yuika?”

As we spoke, Yukine showed us her Tsukuyomi Traveler with a strained smile.

“C’mon now, there’s still more candidates, so let’s try to keep it up, okay? The next person’s almost here. Umm, according to the data Nanami sent, they’ve got quite an amazing resume.”

True, by the looks of their resume, they did appear to be incredible. They’d discovered new dungeons, earned gold at a magic tournament, and had found new spells. Someone with honest-to-goodness credentials.

“Why do you think they applied in the first place?”

Yuika asked the all-too-obvious question.

“Maybe they applied accidentally, thinking we were Tsukuyomi Magic Academy itself?” I answered offhandedly, and Yukine nodded.

“Hm. That’s a serious possibility, but they might just be a big Nanami fan.”

“There’s definitely a chance.”

“The interview will make all of that clear, so how about I call them in?” Nanami said before summoning the next applicant.

A man in his late forties appeared in the open door.

He was adorned in the classic robe and pointed hat of a wizard, and in his hands was a large staff, the kind that the Master R**hi or G**dalf the White carried with them.

He also wore square glasses, and his skin was pale, like he didn't see the sun much. It was impossible to say for certain because of his full-body robe, but I was practically convinced he had a slender physique.

"...Pardon me," he said before entering. His voice was low and quiet, and at first glance, he looked like a gloomy loner cosplaying as a wizard.

"Please take a seat over there. You can leave your staff on the table. Okay, please introduce yourself."

"My name is Makoto Douteiji. I am skilled at mid-and long-range magic, and in previous dungeon expeditions, I have attacked from the backlines."

As I listened to the man's introduction, I looked at his resume. It was then that a rather strange number caught my eye.

I took another look to be sure, only to find I had read it right the first time. It said here he was thirty-three years old. I immediately looked at the man's face. I didn't know if it was the wrinkles or his gaunt features, but he easily passed for forty.

"Please tell us one of your shortcomings."

"I don't like to use magic, and if possible, I don't wish to use it at all."

"...What do you mean?"

Yukine's question was only natural. Why in the world was a wizard saying that he didn't want to use magic? If he wasn't able to cast spells, he could hardly call himself a wizard, now could he?

Hearing Yukine's question, the man lifted his face to reveal a saddened expression.

"Hmm, how can I put it? He looks like he's standing in front of the grave of his recently deceased pet," Yuika quietly murmured in my ear.

It was a very unique simile, but also rather brilliant. After hearing it, the only thing I could see in his face was the look of someone mourning a beloved pet.

As the two of us conversed, the man touched his pointed hat with a trembling hand. After a moment, he began to explain.

“My magic is powerful. Too powerful. That’s why, when I use my magic...”

He stopped mid-sentence.

What, the whole *My magic’s too powerful and I end up hurting other people* deal, was that it? This scenario pops up in manga all the time—a character’s power is so great that they damage people nearby when they use it. So that was why this guy was so scared to use— “When I use my magic, my hair falls out.”

“...Excuse me?” Yuika asked, letting out her natural voice.

“Like I said, my hair falls out. Every time I cast a spell, I lose, on average, ten strands of hair. Always from the dead center for some reason.”

The man took off his hat and placed it on the table.

“Scared” didn’t even do it justice. The situation was dire.

He already resembled a fugitive samurai with his topknot shaved off.

Unable to believe what he was saying, I looked at the man’s head. I saw his reflective dome, then glanced at his robust arm hair, then glanced back at his lonesome scalp.

Yet no matter how many times I looked, I could only see a disgraced samurai.

“I see. Master, shall we have him put on a demonstration to prove this to us?”

C’mon, don’t be ridiculous, Nanami, he’d basically be whittling his life force away! How could I possibly ask him to do that?!

“Nah, let’s leave it be. He’s already proved his achievements loud and clear.”

Despite saying this, Douteiji shook his head.

“I’ve mentally prepared myself for this, so allow me to demonstrate.”

“Nope, nope, we’re all set, thanks,” I said, urging him to sit back down as he went to stand. Normally, it would make sense to ask him to use his magic here, but it would have pained me to watch his hair actually fall out.

“Well, I was already able to confirm his skills for myself prior to the interview, so I am sure it will be fine.”

Nanami! If you already tested him, then say that first! Don't try putting him through something like this again.

"All right, time for the next question. Why did you apply to join this team? I can understand why you don't want to use your magic, but there's a chance that this team will still be involved in clearing dungeons," Yukine asked.

The man quickly replied, "The sixth article of Master Kousuke Takioto's theory of world peace says it doesn't matter if you have hair or not. Reading that truly saved my soul. I wish to bring about the world he speaks of. Simple as that."

Yuika shot an incredibly forceful look my way. Douteiji was staring hard at me. I'd never actually commented on such a topic, but I did share the opinion regardless.

For the time being, I decided to nod.

"...It was then I thought, I wouldn't mind losing all my hair if it was for Takioto's sake," Douteiji concluded.

I kinda wanted to know what would happen if he tried casting a spell once all his hair was truly gone, but I obviously couldn't bring that up.

"Finally got through the second person... The second person?"

Despite having only interviewed two people, I'd already had more than my fill of the whole thing; it felt like my stomach was going to burst. Unfortunately, however, there were still more candidates to get through.

The next person to be interviewed was a beastfolk.

When the door opened on her, the first thing that caught my eye was her fox ears.

Her features placed her at barely ten years old, and she had the height to match. There was also a large tail growing out from around her butt.

One thing that had me curious was her strength. With the previous two, I could basically measure their abilities from the mana that enshrouded them, but there wasn't any mana coming from this girl. Completely and totally absent. It felt a bit creepy.

She bobbed over to where we were sitting and then said— “Nanamin, it’s been ages!”

— before energetically waving her hand. Very cute.

“Tama, good to see you again.”

Nanami greeted her just as casually. After the fox girl hopped up onto the chair, which was slightly too high for her, she stared at me. Then she smiled at last— “Well, well, so you’re Kousuke Takioto, eh? Looks like Nanamin wasn’t lying about you.”

—and started off by saying that.

“Uh, why do I feel like *I’m* the one getting interviewed here?”

This girl was scanning me from head to toe.

“You’re just imagining things, Master. Well then, Tama here has passed the interview, so you’re free to head back home.”

“Woohoo!”

“Okay, seriously, what the hell did she show up for, then?”

I couldn’t help but retort in my usual voice.

“Master, think about this carefully. Tama has the most proven strength among all the interviewees we have seen today, she’s over one thousand years old and of legal age, just looking at her heals the soul, she’s a loli, she has her own school swimsuit, and she’s a loli...”

Yukine nodded along as she listened.

“I see, it does sound like she passes, then.”

“Uh, hold on a sec, Yukine. Was it just me, or did Nanami bring up some really weird things in her spiel?”

“What’s this, you thought I would lie, did you? Well, I do speak some nonsense, mind you, *hwoh-hwoh-hwoh*.♪”

Lie or not, the phrases “one thousand years old,” “legal,” “loli,” “school swimsuit,” “heals the soul,” and “loli” were all bizarre as hell! Why was “loli” in there twice?!

“Incidentally, Tama also has a recommendation from Ms. Sakura.”

“That Saraquel. Went off on her own and got into all sorts of mischief, didn’t she? She’s smarter than me, so I bet my ears that she concluded it was the best way to go about things. Personally, I think I would feel lonely doing all that.”

I couldn’t hold out much longer—Douteiji had just barely left enough time for me to get a word in edgewise, but this girl was mentioning way too many things to keep up with. And what was this about a recommendation from Ms. Sakura?

“I get it, Takioto, but her skills are the real deal. I probably would lose if I fought her.”

“Wait, *you’d* lose, Yukine?! For real?!”

Yuika’s eyes bugged out as she stared at the fox girl. Given how creepy it was that I couldn’t get a read on her abilities, I agreed that Tama must be very powerful.

“Okay, sure, I get that she’s capable, but her age... Oh, wait, if she’s over a thousand years old, I guess that’s not a problem.”

“Of course. There’s no need to fret. I shall do a proper job. Here, have a treat I got from the Empire. These elf forest cookies melt in your mouth. Matcha-flavored, too,” she said before placing a box on the desk. On the outside was an illustration of an elf savoring a green cookie.

“Well now, I shall be counting on you, Kousuke... Hmm, if I’m serving you from here on out, Master Kousuke would be more fitting, yes?”

“Um, you can just stick with Kousuke, I don’t mind. You seem to be my elder anyway.”

“You got it, laddie.”

The third interview ended without much interviewing at all, and the fox girl waved her hand vigorously as she departed the room.

“A truly wonderful individual, isn’t she, Master? An arrogant thousand-year-old loli fox girl grandma—what more could you ask for?” Nanami spouted off,

looking very pleased. It felt like the words “arrogant thousand-year-old loli fox girl grandma” would be interpreted very differently by the average person and an otaku. To me, of course, it sounded like the highest of praise.

“Ummm, Nanami? I’d really love to get back home and sleep, so how many people do we need to go through?”

When Yuika raised this question, evidently finding this whole process irritating, Nanami looked at her own Tsukuyomi Traveler.

“There are two more candidates.”

This prompted a sigh from both Yuika and me.

“There are still two more...”

“Really wish there wasn’t.”

Seeing our reactions, Yukine forced a smile.

“C’mon, just look at it this way: We’ve already gotten through more than half of them. Call in the next one.”

As she said this, data arrived on our Tsukuyomi Travelers.

This reminded me of something, actually...

“A little late to ask, but what are the people we’re interviewing going to be doing?”

“A wide range of things, from clearing dungeons in Master’s stead, to obtaining items, to joining in when you lack the party members to head into a dungeon yourself, to protecting the town peace.”

“Takioto, what’s the point in asking that now that half the interviews are already over?”

Yuika had a point. I should have asked about this right from the start.

“I mean, I can use that information with the next person, so no harm in asking, right? Anyway, on to the next one.”

When Nanami announced that it was her turn, a girl immediately came right in.

The simplest way to describe this next candidate was that she was a gal. Her hair was curled, and she was wearing a miniskirt and tights. A pair of sunglasses was hooked onto her shirt. She had a slightly intimidating air about her, but she was beautiful and cute. Her boobs were on the large side.

“Oh, Nanamiiiin!”

She raised her voice in delight as soon as she saw Nanami. Then she stretched out her hands and excitedly high-fived her.

“Nanamin beeeeam!” the two said as they each struck a double peace-sign pose, before they turned to us and headed over to the desk, as if finally satisfied. Once she was right in front of me, right across from the desk, she furrowed her brow and brought her pretty face close to mine.

“I don’t, like, approve of you at all, ’kay? Got it?” she said before letting out an indignant huff as she sat down in the chair.

From there, she crossed her arms and legs, staring straight at me with a look of displeasure on her face. So hey, what are you doing? You’re in a miniskirt. Those thighs of yours are weapons of mass destruction, you know!

“Did you do something to this girl?” Yuika asked me in a whisper.

Obviously, I didn’t remember anything of the sort.

“Let’s start with an introduction,” Yukine said, and the girl nodded.

“I’m Rosetta. I can use most thief skills, basically? I’m not that great in a scrap, but I’m sure I’m better than the average person.”

Thief skills, huh. Assuming all the people we saw today passed the interview, they would make a pretty balanced party.

“Hm, so why did you apply to this position, then?”

When Yukine asked this, Rosetta looked at Nanami.

“Cause I wanna work with Nanamin. I wanna be at her side, that’s it.”

So she was a Nanami fan, and nothing more.



“Absolutely fantastic, is she not, Master? May I assume we will bring her on?”

When I gave a strained smile, making it clear that Nanami was being far too arbitrary about all of this, Rosetta clicked her tongue.

“So, like, do you have a problem or something?”

As it struck me that this girl was cute when she got all belligerent, Yuika spoke up.

“Um, so the thing is, Rosetta, you’d get to work with Nanami, but you’d still have to serve Takioto. You understand that, right? Is that okay with you?”

Rosetta stared at Yuika.

“Uh, who are you supposed to be? This guy’s flunky?”

I caught Yuika’s face twitching for a moment.

“All right, all right, Yuika—”

“Oh, so you’re name’s Yuika? I mean, this guy you hang out with is, like, a style disaster, but I’ll admit you’ve got some taste. That outfit of yours is cute. I kinda wanna copy it.”

“...Uh, I guess you’re honest?”

Yuika sighed. From there we asked several questions, but from start to finish, Rosetta was hostile toward me and friendly with Nanami.

“*Tsundere* really are the best,” Nanami said with delight after the interview finished and Rosetta left.

Except this girl had given me nothing but *tsun* hostility? And it didn’t seem like she’d show an affectionate *dere* side anytime soon? Was that because she was always affectionate with Nanami? Ah well, forget it.

“She resembles Miss Yuika in some respects,” Nanami said.

Yuika furrowed her brows.

“Whaaat? Am I really like that?”

“...Anyway, are you sure we should have someone who hates me on the

team?”

“It should be fine since Miss Rosetta owns a school swimsuit.”

“I wanted to ask this earlier, but what the heck’s with the school swimsuit thing? Is it some all-powerful item or...?”

Now, if you asked me whether I liked school swimsuits or not, I would have to confess to owning almost a terabyte of videos and images dedicated to the subject.

“Takioto? Don’t even bother trying to get through to Nanami, just hurry up and get to the next candidate.”

That was a fair point.

“All right, I shall call in the next person.”

At practically the same moment Nanami announced the next candidate, their data arrived on our Tsukuyomi Travelers. According to her profile, she was a super-muscular woman with the strength to beat a dragon one-handed.

“This is someone we can expect good things from. I’d gladly have a go with her,” Yukine murmured gleefully, looking at the data. From my perspective, I found it dubious that a grizzled fighter like her would want to join such a team.

After a short moment, there was a knock on the door. When Yukine told her to come in, the candidate entered.

“Pardon me.”

The girl was dressed in the uniform of a popular pizza chain. She had a pizza in one hand and what looked like a cell phone in the other.

“...Do you have the wrong room?” I asked.

The girl looked at me with confusion. Then she began to check something on the device in her hand.

“Hmm. No...this should be the place.”

Wait, then who was this girl?

“Pardon me then, are you Amazoness Fighter Ms. Meteor Shower? The lady with super-powered muscles who can beat a dragon one-handed?”

“I’m not an Amazoness, a fighter, or a meteor shower... Um, do I come off that way?”

Not in the slightest. All I could see was a hapless college girl working a part-time job. Her slightly unsophisticated and diligent look was cute.

“Then why are you here?”

“I heard an announcement, and a maid showed me in.”

At the word “maid,” we all turned to Nanami. She walked over to where the girl was standing and took the pizza from her.

“In truth, the candidate scheduled for the interview had something urgent come up and couldn’t make it, and I simply ordered a pizza to replace them. The Maid Unit is quite capable, wouldn’t you say?”

“Wait, so this girl’s just a regular person who has nothing to do with any of this!”

Why had Nanami sent us the data for someone who wasn’t even coming in the first place? Also, what the hell was the Maid Unit thinking? What would ordering a pizza delivery do for us?!

“Now, now, it’s fine. Fate works in mysterious ways, so how about we interview her anyway?”

Nanami urged her to sit, and the girl walked over to her seat looking confused. Nanami opened up the pizza box and produced plates from underneath her skirt like a stage magician, divvying them out among us.

“Where in the world did those plates come from?” Yuika quipped, but naturally, Nanami ignored her.

“Please start off by introducing yourself.”

“Er, my name is Shiori Asayama. I attended Konohana College.”

Hmmm. Yup, I’d never heard of that school before.

“Well, it would be pointless to ask about why you applied, so could you please give your first impression of Master?”

Asayama looked mystified to hear the word “Master.” Sorry, Nanami was

talking about me.

“Gaud—um...he’s got a really big scarf on.”

She was about to call me gaudy, wasn’t she? Well, she wasn’t wrong.

“What are your strengths?”

Nanami continued asking questions.

“My strengths... Cooking.”

“What would you say is your specialty?” Yukine asked, hopping into the conversation. I had thought this for a while, but Yukine was great at adapting on the fly.

“Uhh, *omurice*, probably. Egg dishes are my forte. Oh, I can make pizza, too.”

“Wonderful,” Nanami exclaimed. “*Omurice*, you say? I see, yes, yes. I think I can say you have passed for the most part. Is there anything you’d like to add, Master?”

“I have no clue what part of that exchange makes her pass, and I don’t have any questions, either.”

If anything, passing Asayama would only put her in a really awkward position.

“Now then, allow me to field some questions in Master’s stead. In the process of doing this work, your body will be getting wet in the rain, and from doing work in rivers. Nevertheless...,” she said, placing a hand inside her skirt, “the work must still be carried out. As such, you will need a specific item.” Then Nanami took out a navy-blue piece of cloth.

“Do you own a school swimsuit?”

Nanami had taken out a school swimsuit.

“Goodness, they were a wonderful group of people, weren’t they?” Nanami said with a beaming smile, looking pleased from the bottom of her heart.

“Pretty sure they were weirdos by basically any metric...”

“Seriously, we only saw a fatty, a baldy, a loli, a gal, and a pizza girl. You really

sure about all of that?”

C’mon, Yuika, you can’t just come out and say it!

“Well, everyone was powerful and skilled, and I bet they’d make a real interesting party together.”

“Yukine, we’re not trying to build a comedy troupe here. Heck, one of them outright hated me, too.”

This team was supposed to support me, so why were we letting someone in who actively disliked me? Also...

“And wait, the pizza girl was just a regular person, not even a magic-user, right?”

Incidentally, she apparently did have a school swimsuit. Isn’t that something you were supposed to dispose of once you graduated? If she sold that online, she’d probably walk away with a hefty sum.

“Now then, to conclude things, am I safe to assume we will be bringing everyone on?”

I’d had an inkling this ordeal would turn out this way. But there was one thing I had to mention. All jokes aside.

“I’m begging you, Nanami, leave the poor pizza girl out of this.”



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim I was heading to the Moon Palace at Minister Benito's behest— "Sooo, Takioto? This is a bit off-topic, but..."

—when Yuika spoke up.

I did want to continue waxing on about the greatness of cutlet bowls and cutlet curry rice, but apparently, she didn't care much for that line of conversation.

"What's up?"

"That place is basically a hangout for offbeat free spirits, right?"

She was probably referring to the Ceremonial Committee, whose headquarters we were walking over to. Though really, the only other hangout for unconventional types that I could think of was the Hanamura House.

"I mean, I won't deny it. Things are definitely a bit too lax there, sure."

"Quite," Nanami agreed from behind me.

"Do the members of the Ceremonial Committee *ever* get together all at once?"

"What are you talking about? There's gotta be some times when we do... Not that I've seen it happen."

"Wait, so you haven't seen it, either! Benito said that he wanted each and every member to do their best to attend this meeting, didn't he? I wonder if everyone will show."

I had a feeling that they would, barring anything unforeseen. That being said, Anemone was basically the definition of a free spirit, so I wouldn't be surprised if she didn't show.

"The fact that someone on the Ceremonial Committee will probably ditch the meeting is wild in itself. I could see Anemone or you doing that."

"Why single out me and not, say, Shion? C'mon."

Just going off appearances, she was the likeliest to skip out of anyone, right?

Actually, I take that back—there was a girl in a maid uniform right behind me.

“Benito and Shion are pretty diligent at heart. But with you, if there’s something you find more important than the Ceremonial Committee, you’ll go off and focus on that, right?”

“I couldn’t have said it better myself, Miss Yuika. Master *does what he wants*, no matter the risks.”

“Ha-ha-ha... Got me there.”

I couldn’t deny that. Though I’d been trying to let people know what I was up to lately, so I wish she’d let me off a bit.

As we walked and talked, we eventually arrived at the meeting spot, a room inside the Moon Palace.

“Wait a moment,” Nanami said, stopping me. “Master.”

She tugged on my shirt with a serious look in her eye.

“What’s wrong?”

“I can’t say for sure yet, but...”

I had already made sure to tell Nanami to be careful of *her*—was it finally time for her to make her move?

Even if Nanami couldn’t say for certain yet, it would be best to keep our guards up.

“Got it. Do you know what Yukine’s schedule looks like?”

“I have not inquired directly, but it appears that she’s going to meet with Miss Shion and Miss Fran after the Morals Committee, as part of her personal investigation.”

Now that she said it, I vaguely remembered her mentioning something like that.

“Why do you even know that?” Yuika said. “You sound like a stalker. Wait... don’t tell me you know *my* schedule, too.”

Nanami grinned slyly when Yuika looked at her.

“Uhh?”

Yuika turned from Nanami to me. She looked very uneasy.

“She doesn’t, don’t worry.”

For now, I needed to talk about things with Minister Benito. Ah well, I could wait until this current matter was settled.

“Anyway, let’s go,” I said, opening the door to the Ceremonial Committee room.

“Heya Takioto, Yuika, Nanami.”

Minister Benito welcomed us.

He was just as dashing and suave as ever. Seriously, the way he winked at us with a cup of tea in his hand was charming as hell. I wish I could have been born with a face like his.

I took a look around the room and found that all the Ceremonial Committee members were present and accounted for. That explained why Yuika seemed slightly surprised.

“Hello, hello, I’ve been waiting for you!” Anemone said to me. She must have been doing some sort of experiment, as she was holding a round-bottomed flask filled with a purple liquid.

“Kou, come and take a seat. You too, Nanami and Yuika.” Shion called me over, and I sat exactly where she told me to. Yuika took a seat beside me, but Nanami insisted on standing at my side.

“You must have had a tiring walk over here. Here, drink this,” Anemone said, before placing a round wooden tray down in front of us. Then she put the purple liquid—which was now boiling, bubbles popping off its surface—on the tray.

“This is a new tea I’ve developed. It’s delicious.”

No way was this tea. If there was any tea out there that was thick like oil and gave off steam in the shape of a skull, then it was news to me.

“This definitely isn’t tea, is it?” Yuika said before pushing back the entire

wooden tray. Nanami took out a cork, put a lid on the vial, wrapped it in a cloth, and tucked it away in her pocket.

“What did you make this time?”

“I just told you, didn’t I? Tea.”

Despite my question, Anemone was insistent on the identity of the liquid.

Minister Benito smiled as he watched along, before standing up and turning on the electric kettle. Judging from the teacups laid out next to it, he was likely brewing some black tea. Nanami went over to where he stood and whispered something quietly in his ear.

“Got it. Thanks for taking care of the tea, Nanami.”

“Certainly. This way he’ll be none the wiser, so it will be quite easy.”

“All right, what the hell are you trying to slip in there?” I quipped back at her.

“Er, I’d prefer regular, normal tea, thanks,” Yuika said before Minister Benito headed over to us with a smile. Then he came next to a girl sitting across from us, who had been playing games on her phone the entire time.

Yuika must have been surprised to see this girl when she first walked in. I’d been a bit surprised myself.

Her appearance was, in a few words, that of a young girl carrying a doll. Dressed in baggy clothes, she had only briefly glanced at us when we entered the room before quickly turning back to her game.

She seemed to have no interest in us.

Nanami placed the cups of tea in front of us, and Benito began to speak.

“You three haven’t met Gretel yet, have you? She’s a second-year member of the Ceremonial Committee.”

“I’m Gretel. Hi.”

Yuika, Nanami, and I all briefly introduced ourselves to her.

It turned out that Gretel didn’t care about us after all. Halfway through our introductions, she returned her eyes back to her phone and began tapping away at her game.

“This is just how she is. She treats everyone like this, so don’t let it ruffle your feathers,” Shion chimed in.

While I was looking at Gretel, I suddenly recalled the incident with Ms. Sakura.

“Oh right, I actually wanted to thank you for something, Gretel.”

When I said this, she took her eyes off her game.

“I heard that you fought together with Minister Benito during the uproar Ms. Sakura caused.”

According to Minister Benito, everyone really had given it their all, and even Gretel fought hard without any concern for danger.

“Thank you for that.”

I bowed to her, as did Nanami.

“Don’t mention it. I just went ’cause Benito and Shion made me.”

“What’s this?” Shion murmured after hearing Gretel’s reply. “That would be a bald-faced lie. You helped out because you learned your underclassmen were in a real bind, and you know it.”

“*Mrm*, but you told me to come.”

“Ah, *right*. Of course you did,” Shion replied, seemingly ignoring Gretel’s protests.

“Now, now,” I said, chiding the two of them. “Whatever the case, you still came and helped out with our fight, and I wanted express my gratitude for it.”

Actions spoke louder than words.

No matter what Gretel said or thought, at the end of the day, she’d helped out during the battle.

“So I wanted to thank you for that, Gretel,” I said once more.

She let out a big sigh, as though spitting venom.

“...It’s no biggie. I was just doing what an upperclassman should,” she said, before she turned her gaze back to her game once again.

As much as she tried to make it seem otherwise, Gretel was a pretty caring girl who would lend a hand when needed. And since she was very strong, I imagined I'd be asking her to help out in the future.

In fact, I might need her if I wanted to keep getting stronger.

"You underclassmen don't need to be so polite with me. I'm not the Saint, so it rubs me the wrong way," Gretel said while continuing to play her game.

"Got it," Yuika replied. "That said, you really like games, don't you... Wait."

Yuika murmured as she glanced over at the game screen.

"Now that I think about it, you play video games every once in a while, don't you, Takioto? I remember you babbling about effort values and natures and stuff."

Nothing gets past Yuika, does it? I haven't been able to make time for them, so I haven't gamed much lately.

"Takioto... You like games?"

I absolutely loved them. I had just been busy, and magic was a ton of fun, so I hadn't been playing them too much. I used to play games almost every day. Mainly eroge, though.

"I do, I just don't have much spare time, so I haven't been playing them too much."

Gretel basically never showed interest in other people, but she would open up a great deal to those who shared her interests. I played what games I could to ensure things didn't get awkward between us going forward.

"Hmmm, a gamer," she said before dropping her eyes back down to her game.

"Now that everyone's acquainted, let's get into the topic at hand, shall we?"

"Wait, introductions weren't the main reason we came here?" Yuika asked.

"Not exactly. While I did want everyone to meet in person at some point, the main issue today is different. There's something that I just had to fill you all in on."

“What’s that?”

“Truth is, I got in a bit of a fight with Monica! It’s getting harder for us to cooperate.”

Minister Benito chuckled. However, everyone else remained silent, myself included.

A fight? Were we going to be okay?

“So what happened, Benito? Did you also make perverted comments at her?”

“He’s not you, Anemone, so I doubt that’s what’s going on here.”

Yuika, Anemone didn’t *technically* assert that she’d made any sexual remarks herself. Though I guessed there was about a 99.9 percent chance she had, too.

“Pray tell, why did you fight?” Shion asked.

“About that, well, try not to get too shocked by this, but...” Minister Benito said before pausing, with a broad grin on his face. Then...

“I can’t actually tell you why! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Benito cackled with glee. Anemone joined him for some reason. Shion and Yuika flashed icy glares, annoyed that the dramatic buildup had amounted to nothing. Meanwhile, Gretel continued to game unperturbed. Nanami handed me another cup of tea. Delicious, thank you.

“Enlighten us, then,” Shion said. “Why broach the subject when you can’t discuss it?”

“I can’t talk about it because Monica and I got into an argument about whether or not to talk about something we can’t talk about.”

“That’s quite a confusing issue, what with all this talking and not talking.”

If Benito couldn’t mention it to the Ceremonial Committee, then it must have

touched on *that*.

“Simply put, we had a disagreement on which direction to take.”

Hearing this, Yuika sighed.

“*Haah...* Bickering like bandmates, it sounds like. But wait, are you sure it’s even okay to mention that there’s this secret you can’t tell us in the first place?”

“Hehe, I’ll probably get yelled at for it.”

Minister Benito seemed to be having the time of his life.

“To clarify, this is something you are keeping secret from us as well?”

Benito nodded at Shion’s question.

“Yeah. Oh, but Anemone knows about it. Right?”

“Hmm, yes, I do. However, I still don’t know the secrets of the female form.”

“...She brought up that last bit like it’s related somehow, but there’s no way, right?” Yuika said, turning to me.

“Yeah, probably not.”

Anemone just came here to sow confusion.

“Yeah, that doesn’t have anything to do with it. Anyway, let me tell you where things stand. I believe we should discuss the secret with you all—the second-years, Shion and Gretel, and of course the first-years, Takioto and Yuika,” Benito said.

“So I take it Monica believes you shouldn’t, then?”

Minister Benito nodded at Nanami’s question.

“That’s right. Monica is against it, and Lady Stefania is neutral, leaning toward my side.”

Saint Stef was leaning toward Benito’s position, huh? Interesting, so that’s how it played out.

“And what do you think of all this, Anemone?” I asked.

“It’s a complicated problem. Kinda like coming up with a plan to go to school in the nude.”

“Ah, I see. So it’s sort of like coming up with a plan to increase the maid population.”

“Uhhh, Nanami? Can you not make this any more of a headache for us? We already have plenty on our plates with Anemone here.”

“Now you’re talking, Nanami!” Anemone said. “The important point is that once you resign yourself to being caught, you can make it happen at any time.”

“Okay, so what exactly are you getting at, then?”

Yuika pressed Anemone for a conclusion.

“Now, getting back to the question of the secret... I agree that we should tell them. Though I imagine Hanzo will be against it.”

“Really...? In that case,” Minister Benito started before looking at me. “What do you think, Takioto?”

“...Why am I the one you’re turning to next?”

Seriously, why was I the one he was turning to? And did he have to ask like I already knew all about it?

Better yet, what was Minister Benito trying to accomplish by asking for my opinion? Did he suspect I already knew everything? Or was he trying to observe my reaction to figure out if I already knew or not?

“Hmm, I wonder why? I just got the feeling that I had to make sure to ask for your input, too.”

I mean, I *did* know the secret, but how was I supposed to answer him?

“No comment.”

All I could do was evade the question. Though, a “no comment” answer was often taken to mean a “yes,” so maybe I’d failed here? Even if he interpreted my response that way, it was probably a bit too late to worry about it. Everyone at the Hanamura House had probably picked up on it to some degree.

“I see... I also wanted to ask for everyone else’s opinions, too.”

Minister Benito stopped talking and looked into the other members’ eyes one by one.

“Assuming the Three Committees were keeping a secret, would it upset you to learn that it was being kept from their members? Would you want to know?”

Shion was the first to answer.

“Though I’m intrigued, don’t go to such lengths to fill us in. Tell us if you want. I leave the matter in your hands.”

“Honestly, I don’t care,” Gretel said, her eyes still glued to her game.

“Hmmm, like, I knew from the start you were hiding something from us. But there’s been a lot I’ve wanted to do lately, so I wouldn’t want this to be a whole thing,” Yuika said.

“My opinion is that of my Master’s,” said Nanami.

Shion appeared somewhat interested in the secret, while Gretel couldn’t have cared less.

And then there was Yuika. She had previously voiced suspicions about the Three Committees, so she had probably sensed that something was being kept secret, even if she didn’t know what it was about exactly.

Listening to everyone, Minister Benito brought his hand to his mouth and chuckled.

“Minister, what exactly is so humorous?” asked Shion, seeing his reaction.

“Oh, it’s just that I couldn’t have asked for more fitting responses. I can’t speak for the Ceremonial Committees of the past, but I’d wager you all are the textbook definition of what this committee is all about.”

“And what, pray tell, do you mean?” Shion asked.

“The regular students perceive the Ceremonial Committee as dangerous or quirky. Maybe that’s it?”

“That’s true. Anemone definitely fits that description,” I said, agreeing with Yuika.

The same went for Gretel, Yuika, and Nanami. What a lineup of unique and charming women. Personality-wise, Yuika was a bit of a normie, but her lineage and mental state were absolutely out there.

“Hrm, personally, I don’t think I hold a candle to you,” Anemone said, looking at me.

“Anemone said it perfectly. Why are you talking like you aren’t just as out-there, Takioto?”

Huh?

“There, there, Master. Don’t let it get you down.”

“Nanami, you are quite bad yourself, I say,” added Shion.

Minister Benito laughed for some time as he watched our back-and-forth, then exhaled.

“*Whew*, well, I imagine I’ll be telling you the secret before long. If you’re able to lend your strength, then I’ll be sure to ask when the time comes.”



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim The Ceremonial Committee was the nemesis of the student body.

Their modus operandi was riling up their peers and getting them to think, *I'm going to work hard to make sure I don't lose to these assholes.*

One of the things they did to accomplish this was showing off in the pages of the Tsukuyomi Academy Newspaper.

The periodical contained a bevy of useful information and was delivered to the Tsukuyomi Travelers of every student, so it was widely read. Even Orange kept up with it.

Apparently, there were no shortage of students who, after opening the school newspaper to find the members of the Ceremonial Committee tooting their own horns, grew inspired to work hard and beat them.

The meeting to go over what would be printed in the paper was usually handled by Minister Benito, but I'd convinced him to entrust me with the task this time.

That was because I had some business with the Newspaper Club.

"Comiiing! Oh, Takky! Hiya!"

When I knocked on the door, Club President Ivy came out to greet me. She gave me a big smile, her rabbit ears standing on end.

"Hello, Ivy," I replied.

"Good day, Miss Ivy," said Nanami, who I had brought along with me.

"My bad for springing this on you outta the blue. Are you all right with it? Oh, you are? Thank goodness. Go ahead and give Benito a good smack for making you take over for him last minute. Ivy says it's a-okay ♪!"

"I haven't said a word, but sure, answer for me."

Welp, it appeared I had permission to punch Minister Benito. Maybe I could get about ten in?

“Oh, that’s all fine and dandy! C’mon, come in, come in!”

I wasn’t sure what was “fine and dandy,” but Nanami and I were shown inside the club room.

“Oh, you have quite an interesting collection in here,” Nanami said after entering and carefully scanning the room.

The best way to describe the place was that it resembled a small office. There was a large, oblong table in the center with several chairs around it. Atop the table were laptops, tablets and tablet pens, labels, notepads, and voice recorders. It was far from tidy.

On the left side of the table, there was what appeared to be a monitor about the size of my arm span displaying a newspaper article mid-edit.

The walls of the club room were plastered with previous editions of the paper, as well as a chart of the club members’ schedule.

“Sorry for the mess! Here, take a seat ♪!”

I sat down in the chair she gestured toward and looked at the writing on the tablet laid out close to me.

“‘Stand Up to the Tyranny of the Ceremonial Committee,’ huh?”

“Looks like they’re doing a good job of disparaging the Ceremonial Committee and praising the Student Council.”

I nodded at Nanami’s comment. They were doing great at selling that angle.

“Thanks for waiting! Here, drink anything you’d like!” Ivy said, putting out several different plastic bottles.

“Alrighty, let’s get right into the interview for our next artic……. Wait! I had something to say before that!!”

Ivy clapped her hands, nodding to herself.

“Sheesh, Takky! You’re being such a hippity-hoppity stranger!” Ivy said, as if remembering something and slipping in a bunnyish turn of phrase. Usually, this rabbit-speak only came out when she was going to say something weird.

“What do you mean?”

“Ivy here knows the whole story, okay? That you went to the famous high-society girls’ school, Amaterasu Girls’ Academy.”

Ivy leaned in toward me and flashed a nasty-yet-still-somewhat-cute grin. She prodded me in the stomach with her elbow.

So, a troublesome character like her had found out, had she?

Actually, compared to the person I least wanted to find out about this—Anemone, aka Sexy Scientist—Ivy wasn’t anyone to worry about. I guess it was fine for her to know, since the whole thing was behind me.

“If you had only told me sooner, I would’ve slipped you a high-powered camera, y’know?! Oh well, it’s fine. More importantly...”

Uh, what was I supposed to use a high-powered camera for? The question might have come back to bite me, though, so I decided not to ask.

“Hey, hey, so give me the deets, Takky! How many high-class schoolgirls did you get to fall for you? You can tell your nice upperclassman Ivy, right?”

Now she was talking like a neighborhood busybody or the best friend character in an anime.

“I didn’t make anyone fall into a hole.”

“Oh c’mon Takky, don’t play dumb with meeeee! Fall in *love* with you, silly. Understand? I’m talking about *love* here, L-O-V-E, looove ♡! Sheeeeeesh, Takky, you and your harem ♪!”

What the heck was she so worked up about? As I vacantly watched Ivy carry on, Nanami answered for me.

“The number of hearts he conquered, hmm... I believe it’s somewhere around the total school population. I was relieved that it was less than I had anticipated. Right, Master?”

“I didn’t get anyone to fall for me. And hang on, what do you mean the total school population was less than you anticipated? That’s the maximum amount possible!”

“I thought that the lovestruck young girls might bite other girls, infecting them with their affections.”

“That won’t transmit anything! What the hell are you talking about?”

“The only thing infected here is that brain of yours! In a sense, that’s even worse than actual zombies!”

She was reminding me of *R*sident Evil* or *The W*lking Dead* here.

“The whole school, I’m speechless!” said Ivy. “If anyone could do it, it was you, Takky, but to actually win the hearts of the whole school? Well, I’ll be sure to write about it in the paper, okay ♪? Oh, don’t bite me, though.”

“You aren’t listening to me, are you? Please don’t write about it.”

“But everyone looked like they were having a ton of fun in the photo that’s going around?” she said, handing me a tablet. I took it and looked at the picture it was open on.

It was a photo of Nanako Takioto eating at Amaterasu Girls’ Academy.

“...How did you get your hands on this?”

“Ha-haaa! What, you don’t know, Takky? Allll the girls at Amaterasu have a copy of this photo!”

I had heard there were pictures of Nanako Takioto making the rounds. Hmm, so that was how she’d gotten a hold of it.

To be honest, I would have preferred these pictures be wiped from the face of the earth entirely, but unfortunately, that was impossible.

“Hmm, you have some very good pictures in here.”

Next to me, Nanami worked the tablet.

A photo of me, Iori, Hana, and Chris together.

Another photo of Milena, Satomi, myself, and several classmates.

A photo of Iori with a bashful look on his face.

“You’re right... Might be a good idea to save them.”

I made sure to send them to my Tsukuyomi Traveler. Especially the ones of Iori.

“There’s photos from here, too.”

Nanami rapidly swiped through the photos until the uniforms in the pictures changed over to those of Tsukuyomi Academy. There were pictures of gallant President Monica and Vice President Fran, of Shion and Minister Benito guffawing, of Saint Stef smiling lightly, and of Yukine standing tall with a serious look on her face.

“Yup, yup, though it’s pretty much just the Three Committees!”

They must have all been for the Newspaper. Most of the pictures were of members of the Three Committees, but...

“There’s some shots of the teachers, too.”

Sis staring vacantly into the distance, and Marino standing up in front of the students. There was also one of a winking Ms. Ruija.

“Miss Ivy, would you be willing to send these to me, too?”

“For you, Nanamin, sure! Use them as much as you want. Thank you for everything you share with us ♪!”

“Hmm, sharing. Wait. *Sharing?*”

Something about the word sorta gave me a bad feeling.

“Master, these are very clear pictures of Ms. IOU, and I think we can make good use of them. How high should we set the bounty?”

“The hell are you planning on using them for?! She’s not a wanted criminal or anything!”

Ms. Ruija was no pirate or lawbreaker. If anything, she was a *victim* of criminals.

“Oh right, this is a bit of a non sequitur, but Takky?”

“What is it?”

This was a pretty good picture of Ludie. I would have to get Ivy to send it to me later.

“Sooo, have you heard all about *that* from the president and the other leaders?”

“Hm? About what?”

“C’mon, y’know, the Three Committees’ secret thingy...right?”

My mind instantly switched gears. Ludie...had Yukine with her, so she’d be fine, right?

“What are you talking about? The fact that the Three Committees aren’t hostile toward each other?” I said before flipping to the next picture.

“Ohhhh, got it. Ah well, don’t worry about it, ’kay? Once you’re finished looking at those, let’s get this interview rolling!” she said before taking out her materials for the interview.

I didn’t even need to consult with Nanami on this. They were bound to act soon.

While I had lost something from my time spent at Amaterasu Girls’ Academy, I had gained some things as well.

The most wonderful of them all were the memories of my shared moments with the students there, but next after those was the fabulous item I’d acquired—the Golden Lucky Cat.

Ludie had flipped her lid at the Golden Lucky Cat due to my poor explanation of it, but it was, in fact, an extremely useful item.

Its effect boosted item drop rates, raising the odds that enemies would leave behind rare and useful items upon their defeat. Anyone who had played video games would understand the value of that effect.

It might be best for me to get items and weapons for myself first. Using these more powerful weapons, I could increase the speed at which I defeated monsters, letting me farm more efficiently and grow even stronger.

But there was a problem. I didn’t know how hard I needed to work in order to get my hands on said weapons.

I knew the drop rates for items I’d collected during my speedruns. However, I was fuzzy on everything else. When you got to carry over all your items between playthroughs, was there any reason to go out of your way to memorize the drop rates?

There was also the event problem as well. In which case, it might be okay to wait until afterward.

With all that in mind, I'd entrusted the Golden Lucky Cat to Vice President Fran, so the students in the Three Committees could use it. I'd figured that if even I didn't use it myself, there might have been someone else who wanted to.

But if you asked me whether I wanted to carry such an invaluable and priceless item around with me, I would have to say I really didn't want it on my person. If I ended up losing it, I wouldn't be able to eat anything for a while.

All told, now that I'd decided that I wouldn't focus on item gathering for the time being...

"I'm not sure what to do, really."

"Hm? Kousuke, what are you worrying about?"

Ludie came up to me, dressed in her pajamas. She sat down beside me and gazed into my eyes.

Her beautiful, symmetrical face leaned in toward me. Her skin was sublime, unbelievably smooth. Makeup would have ruined it. She was stunning without it.

"Just trying to sort out what I'll be doing next."

She must have just finished her bath, as I caught a whiff of her favorite shampoo in her hair. There was also a faint warmth coming off her skin.

"There you go again with that stuff. You need to take a break every now and then."

"I feel like I'm getting plenty of rest. "

"Well, it doesn't look it. No wonder everyone says you only think about dungeons twenty-four seven," she said, before taking the fruit juice I'd been drinking and glanced at me.

"Go ahead," I said, and she placed the straw between her lips. The orange-colored liquid went up the straw and flowed into her mouth.

"Oh, that's yummy."

“Anyway, thinking about this stuff is fun for me. And I’m taking some breaks.”

It had been the same in the game, too.

I would come up with a plan about what I needed to do to get the ideal outcome and then test it out. After that, I would do a postmortem review, and if things didn’t go as well as I’d expected, I would think about what to do differently next time and implement the changes.

That by itself was already fun, but then when I would get really good results or beat a boss at super low levels, it would feel that much more enjoyable. That being said, speedrunning pure RNG games or other god-awful titles felt like self-flagellation.

“Hm, I figured you would say that.”

She then changed the subject.

“Oh that’s right. Kousuke?”

“What?”

Ludie let out a small sigh and stared hard at me. Her pretty, slim lips pursed into a straight line.

She rarely made this face unless she was fighting a very important battle. I could surmise that this was going to be a fairly serious conversation.

“I’ve gotten strong.”

“Yeah. Very, very strong at that.”

When we’d first met, both Ludie and I had been weak. After going through several crises and adventures, we had grown strong enough to be chosen to join the Three Committees, a selection of the Academy’s most elite and powerful students.

“You have something to tell me, don’t you? Isn’t it about time?”

Ludie knew. It probably wasn’t just Ludie either, but all the people around me who knew.

“...I have a lot to tell, actually.”

“I’m not really that interested in the Three Committees’ secret, though.”

Had she talked about the secret at the Morals Committee? I couldn’t imagine the Saint had touched on it, but maybe Minister Benito had said something to her.

“You’re not?”

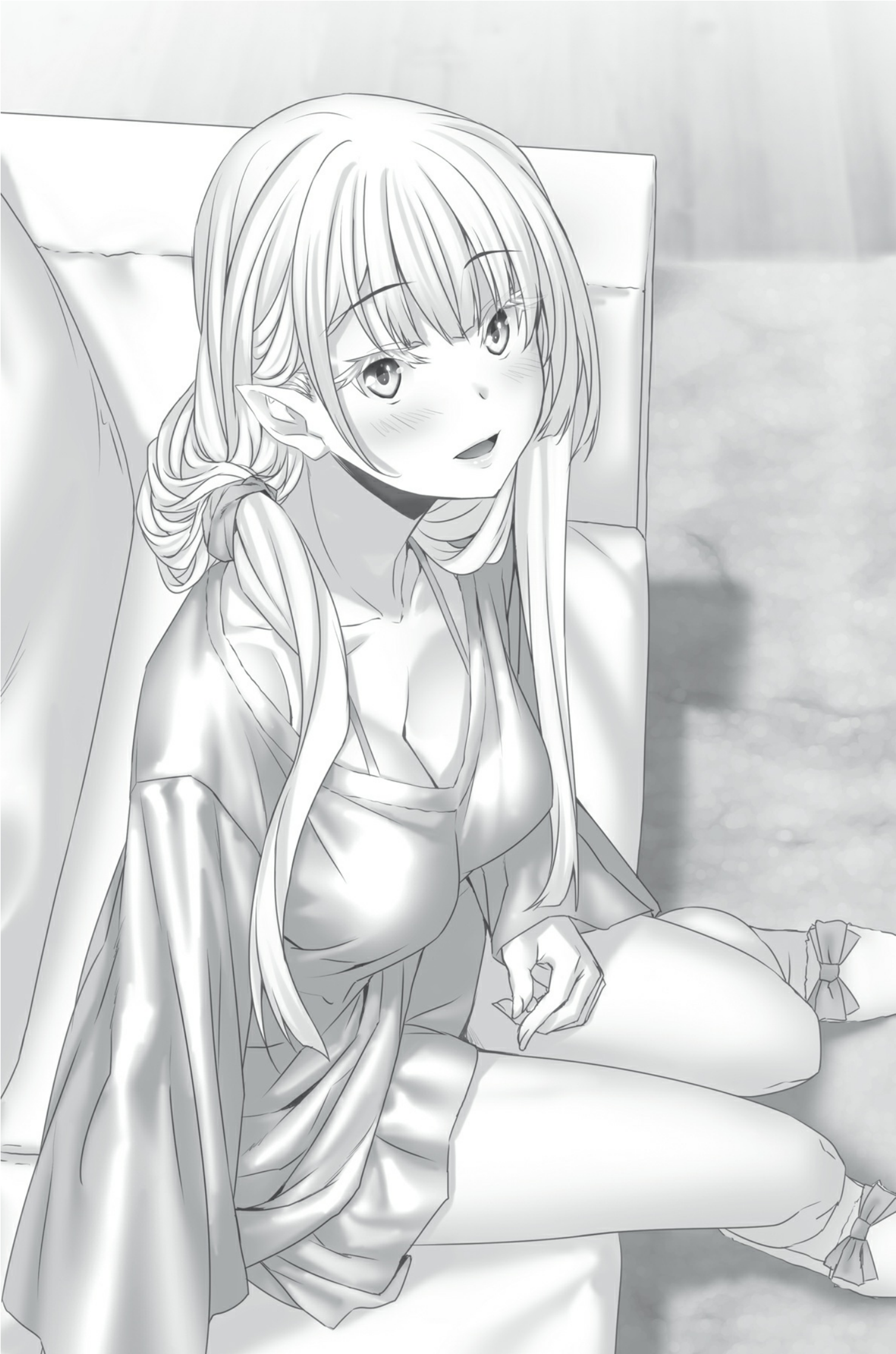
“Nope, not at all. But.” She paused a moment and took my hand in her own.

“I am interested in you, Kousuke.”

I gulped loudly.

I didn’t really know why, but there was a sweet, mysterious smell wafting about her. A scent that felt like it would intoxicate me if I kept sniffing it.

While she looked ready to accept anything I told her, I still couldn’t reveal everything to her. No matter how things ended up down the road, though, I would probably need to explain things little by little. In which case, it would be best to start with the stuff that was the closest at hand.



“I spoke about this with Yukine, but I think there’s the possibility that you’re being targeted.”

“Me?”

“I can’t say for sure, but there’s a chance that a follower of the Church of the Malevolent Lord will make a move.”

“A follower of the Church? Where are they?”

“If I’m right, the Newspaper Club.”

“Really.”

“You’re not scared?”

“Well, if I had to say one way or another, then yes, I’m scared. But...,” she trailed off for a moment.

“So what?”

She smiled.

“You’re here. You’ll protect me, won’t you? Still, there’s one thing I want to tell you.”

“What’s that?”

“The thing I wanted to do most after joining the Student Council.”

“What you wanted to do?”

“Yes, while I obviously wanted to improve myself, there’s something even more important than that to me.”

“And what would that be?”

“Protecting you.”

—*Ivy’s Perspective*— “Hmmm, what a surprise! What a surprise indeed!”

When I said this, our assistant editor and club vice president Laretta (aka Laretty) nodded.

“I agree. I thought that Takioto would’ve been in the know.”

I nodded.

“Takky’s involved with the Hanamura family and all. But it turns out he really is clueless.”

“What in the world is it, do you think? This secret the Three Committees are hiding,” Laretty mused, adjusting her glasses.

“Gooooo question.”

The Three Committees made it look like they were at odds, but in fact, they colluded with one another. And the Ceremonial Committee seemed like it was filled with students who have bad attitudes and worse personalities, but that wasn’t true at all. Okay, it was true for Anemone.

However, the Three Committees were hiding something beyond that. Something that even the three second-year vice presidents didn’t know about.

“Hmm, if only select members of the Three Committees know, then it’s gotta be a real secret among secrets... And it seems like they’re taking great pains to guard it, too.”

Nevertheless.

“But now, we finally have the chance to get one over on them. Sure has taken a while.”

“Who would have thought that the heads of the Three Committees would be quarreling amongst one another... Definitely not me. Especially knowing what they’re like behind closed doors.”

The three heads of the Three Committees all got along great ‘n’ all—not that the regular students had a clue about that.

“Welp, we may not know what they’re bickering about, but we can’t let this

chance hippity-hop away from us. How're the preparations going, Lauretty?"

"Smoothly..."

"I guess the rest is up to me, then."

"Are you sure you're all right? Last time, you got all excited over that weird frog decoration and failed, remember? They even gave it to you afterwards, too."

"Do you not understand how amazing that thing was?!"

"Of course not. That incident's made me a bit worried about all this."

"I'll be fiiiine. Just rest easy and leave it all to me. Heeheehee, nyah-ha-ha-ha-ha! I can't wait to hop to it ♪!"

Hopefully...this would be my opportunity to help them, too.

The plan was going into action tomorrow.



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim Getting into the Student Council room was easy for members of the Three Committees.

All they had to do was show their Tsukuyomi Traveler and student ID upon entering the Moon Palace. In other words, Three Committees members could enter it at will.

However, there was one person *outside* the Three Committees who could still easily get inside. Me.

“Bless the Newspaper Club.”

I had gotten from the Moon Palace entrance to the Student Council room through the orthodox methods, but that wasn’t an issue. We wouldn’t have been able to put the plan into action if the Student Council members were still here, but I had timed my infiltration to happen during the student assembly, when they’d all be gone. Nothing left to chance.

“Chief, the president started talking. Hurry.”

I heard Lauretty’s voice through the radio.

“Tee-hee-hee. Leave it to me!”

The speeches that Monica gave at student assemblies were concise and ended rather quickly.

I figured that this was a result of the president’s open dislike of Principal Marino Hanamura’s long-winded speeches.

The regular students were probably glad that her speech was short, but right now, it was a major pain in the butt for me.

“Oh well, that’s fine. Now then, somewhere suspicious...,” I said, looking around for an area that fit the bill.

I knew for sure that the secret President Monica and company were hiding was somewhere in the Moon Palace. I had gained that information mainly from the Ceremonial Committee and Morals Committee, which were easy to wiretap.

“But everyone always speaks evasively, so I never figured out exactly what

they're hiding."

There was no doubting that the third-years on the Three Committees sometimes got together by themselves to do something. Occasionally, they would be holed up in the Moon Palace for several hours. The longest of these meetings would stretch past a whole day.

One area that stood out to me as especially suspicious was a room managed by the Student Council.

It was also the one place I wasn't able to investigate.

Normally, I would've liked to gather information via a variety of avenues, but that was rendered impossible by the presence of a single person—Hanzou.

He was a ninja, like me, and he possessed superb espionage and trap-detecting abilities. If I did try to eavesdrop from the doorway, he would probably sense my presence, and even if I set up some wiretaps, he would likely discover them.

That was why this time, I'd listed out the areas I wanted to search in advance and had planned to investigate them thoroughly.

"Hmm, nothing in the president's desk, huh. I hope she'd have a note or something laying around."

Monica's desk—and the Student Council room as a whole—was extremely well kept. Perhaps that was down to the influence of Vice President Fran, a known neat freak. Anyway, the desk was very easy to riffle through, but there wasn't anything worthwhile in it.

"If Hanzou's the guy who hides it, this'll be tricky."

His Thief skills—Detect Trap, Pick Lock, and Enemy Search—were top class among all the Academy students, on par with my own. That would probably make him good at hiding things. Though, I hadn't ever seen him squirrel away anything before, so I didn't know for certain.

"Lauretty, I didn't find it."

"Understood. We expected that, though."

"Yup, and I don't think they'd set up traps somewhere where Frannyfran

comes and goes a lot, either.”

I’d determined that Vice President Fran didn’t know the secret. I doubted that they would purposefully hide something from her in a place she visited often. I wouldn’t have done that.

“This has been bugging me for a while, but don’t you think your nickname for her is weird?”

“No way! And who cares about nicknames right now! I’m gonna hop on over to the next room. Odds are it’s the one, right?”

Inside the Moon Palace, each of the Three Committees was allocated a certain number of rooms for their use.

This was the one I had pegged as strange. The Student Council was usually in charge of it, but the Ceremonial Committee and Morals Committee would sometimes use it, too.

At first, I thought it looked normal, but for some reason, Hanzou kept an awfully tight watch on it. I believed Nanamin and Katorina had probably sensed it, too. Those two really had a thief’s intuition.

I had spied Benito and Anemone here as well. But since everyone was bickering right now, they wouldn’t be taking time to come out here. Thank God for that argument, seriously.

With this thought, I moved into the room, where something caught my eye.

“Waaah!”

“What is it?”

“Sorry, Lauretty. I found something kinda amazing, so I’m gonna hang up for a sec. Just give me three, no, five minutes.”

“What?! Wait, what happened?!”

I cut off the radio connection and looked at the time.

Oh, I had found it now.

It was sitting right there in front of me, atop what appeared to be a home shrine, an area often found in the average Wakoku household that enshrined a god.

“I must be dreaming...!”

It was a Golden Lucky Cat.

The rare item that maverick Kousuke Takioto, aka Takky, had obtained. An item that boasted the incredible ability to boost drop rates.

An item that sounded valuable enough to set you up not just for one, but several lifetimes if sold.

But that didn't matter. There was something about this thing that was much, much, much, *much* more important than drop rates and money.

“I can't believe...how hip-hopping cute it is!”

It looked amazing!!!!

Whatever ability it had didn't concern me at all. Who cared about an increased item drop rate? Its appearance enthralled me, the world, and everything else in it.

The cat statue had enviably golden skin, a buxom outline that made you avert your eyes, impressively angled paws, a head that demanded petting, and a huge gold coin that made you want to twirl it in your hair like Goldilocks.

Its face was maximally cute in every way, transcendently beautiful, and breathtakingly cool.

I fell for it at first sight.

Had anything in my life made my heart dance like this before? My heart was fluttering far more than when Benito treated me to high-class sushi and top-class A5 wagyu beef. Those dishes melted in my mouth, but this object seemed like it was going to melt *me* from my brain to the tips of my toes.

What a wonderful Lucky Cat—Hm? Lucky Cat?

That was rude of me. It would have been strange for such a cute creature to be nameless. In which case, I would christen it. I needed to think up the best possible name that could be worthy of him.

A name that was both cute and stylish. Hmm...*Pikahiko*. Yeah, *Pikahiko*!

“From today on, you’re *Pikahiko*!”

Staring hard at the Lucky Cat, I began to drool.

This was bad. My front teeth tingled.

A powerful impulse assailed me. I really wanted to bite it. This was always how it was; whenever I was really fond of something, I got the urge to bite it. I wanted to nibble, chomp, and gnaw at *Pikahiko*.

Even just the slightest little lick...

No, no, I wanted a bite after all. Would a nibble on the tip of his ear really be so bad? Just look at him—clearly, *Pikahiko* was crying out to be bitten!

Under normal circumstances, I could have fought back this urge, but now I couldn’t suppress it.

“J-just a little bit...should be fine...”

I reached out and grabbed it with trembling hands.

It was far heftier than its size had led me to believe.

“D-dang, he’s heavy! Wait, wait, no way! Is this made out of pure gold?!”

It was the only explanation I could think of for how it weighed so much. I slowly brought *Pikahiko* toward me.

As I did, I got the feeling that some sort of paper amulet had ripped, but I didn’t care about that at all.

“Jeez, *Pikahiko*, just look at how graceful you are! And so silky smoooooth!”

I stared hard at *Pikahiko*. I could hear him—he was saying we’d be friends forever. What a kindhearted little guy. But I couldn’t endure just stopping at being friends!

I swallowed my spit.

I parted my lips ever so slightly and began bringing them toward PikaHiko. I'm sure PikaHiko was thrilled about this. Getting bitten by a beautiful young rabbit girl was quite the treat.

Just then, a strange light filtered out from the shrine.

I stared at the altar while I held PikaHiko in my arms.

"Wha-wha-wha-whaaat?!"

Why were there all these specter-looking things pouring out from the altar?!

"I-I might be in a biiiit of trouble here."

I needed to do something about those specters, and fast. Was this happening because the talisman had ripped? How did it get torn to shreds like that?

Gluing it all back together wasn't going to magically put things back to normal, was it?

As I wondered what to do, the present situation wasn't getting any better at all. In fact, now there seemed to be some person's face floating in the air?

I wasn't the type to figure out how to overcome something on my own. That seal was written in the ancient language, so resealing seemed impossible. If anything, when it came to the ancient language, Laurretty was a lot more knowledgeable than me, but...

If I asked her for help, she would definitely chew me out for this...

No, no, I had to grin and bear it. I turned the radio back on at once.

"Chief, what happened?"

"Laurretty, these vengeful spirit thingies are popping up left and right!"

"Huh?!"

Laurretty showed up about ten minutes after I called her for help.

"You came to rescue me?! My saaaaavior!"

Arriving out of breath and panting, she looked at the state of the altar and PikaHiko in my arms, then covered her face in her hands. That must have been enough for her to figure out what I had done.

“What do you think you’re doing, Chief?! Quit picking stuff up and focus on the mission!”

I thought she’d be mad at me if she found out, and it appeared I was right.

“But, but, PikaHiko—”

I tried to explain, but she sighed.

“I get the urge to use or sell that thing, sure, but there’s more important things to prioritize. Now our plan is ruined!!”

“Use? No, never, I just wanted to try biting it a big...”

“Excuse me?”

“Sorry.”

“...*Gaaah*, okay then, so what’s the situation?”

“Hmmm. Actually, it seems like it’s calmed down somewhat compared to before... Anyway, it seems like a vengeful spirit is popping out every now and then?”

Oh, one just did. Lauretty started walking toward the shrine with a look of displeasure on her face.

“All right, all right. I’ll check the shrine for now,” she said before examining it. Then she pointed to where the talisman had been.

“What are we going to do if they find out about this and beef up the security in here? Thanks to Hanzou, we basically had no chance of getting this far again... Wait, is this what I think it is?”

I heard the sound of something coming untied. Lauretty unraveled some kind of scroll and began to read it.

“Wait, it can’t be.” She began to murmur to herself. “Seriously? Huh? Here, of all places?!”

She had turned her attention from the vengeful spirits coming out of the

shrine to the scroll in her hands.

“There was one at Amaterasu, which means there’s also one here at Tsukuyomi, too? It’s definitely possible.”

Right as I wondered what exactly she was mumbling about, she suddenly burst into laughter.

Not only that, but she was cackling in a voice that I had never heard before, an octave higher than usual.

“Wh-what is it, Lauretty?”

“If this all failed, I thought I would have to take more drastic measures, but I never expected *this*. If I’m going, then the sooner, the better. I can use the people I just gathered for another project for this.”

“Uh, Lauretty?”

“When I saw the Lucky Cat, I thought we were finished, but it worked out surprisingly well.”

“Huh?”

Lauretty turned to me and smiled. The scroll was in her hand.

“Thank you very much, Chief. This is a big upset.”

“Hm? Hmmm?! ”

“Oh, right, Chief. Can you buy a little bit of time for me?”

“Uh, what?”

I was utterly bewildered, with no clue what to do. While I stood there and panicked, Lauretty began to approach me.

“Scratch that. This was happening whether I got your permission or not.”

The instant I heard her words, I was assailed by an intense drowsiness. This must have been Lauretta’s magic.

“Huh? Lau...re...tta.”

At that same moment, I took a blow to the head.

“Sorry, Chief.”

My consciousness faded away.

—*Takioto's Perspective*— It was unexpected.

In the game, there's an event that's triggered from Ludie joining either the Student Council or the Morals Committee. Followers of the Malevolent Lord, at the command of the Newspaper Club's vice president, Laretta, try to abduct Ludie.

However, this didn't exactly mean that the Newspaper Club on the whole was in the wrong. The editor-in-chief Ivy had been dancing in the palm of Laretta's hand to begin with. Ivy was generally a victim here, but depending on how you looked at it, you could say she bore some blame, as her actions had brought about the development.

"It appears Miss Ludie is all right...," Nanami reported to me at my side.

"Really? Thanks... For now, let's head over there, I guess."

The Newspaper Club editor-in-chief's attempt to get her hands on the Three Committees' secret is all part of the established course of events. After that, she gathers the Three Committee members together, including President Monica, Saint Stef, and Minister Benito, to sort of blackmail them, but in the middle of it all, the followers of the Malevolent Lord at Laretta's command make their move.

The Malevolent Lord's followers hidden within the Academy then start to fight the other students with magic. Fights between students are generally taken care of by the Morals Committee. Since they are dealing with Ivy at the time, only a minimum number of members are sent to respond, including Ludie. If Ludie joins the Student Council instead in your playthrough, the story develops in a slightly different way, but the gist is the same.

When Ludie goes to stop the fighting in the game, she is surrounded by hidden Church followers and left in a dire situation. To counteract this, I had told Ludie that the Church of the Malevolent Lord was closing in and also alerted Yukine of the possibility that Ludie would be put in danger. I was also

planning to do something about this myself.

However, there was one problem to address before all this.

“Why did you get captured...?”

Ivy, who should have blown the lid off the Three Committee’s secret, had been captured instead. She’d gotten tied up and everything.

However, Ludie and Yukine were both safe and sound.

To be honest, as long as Ludie was safe, I didn’t care if Ivy got captured or not. I still had concerns, though.

The Church of the Malevolent Lord.

If the Church was enticed to make their move here, like they were originally supposed to, then just what were they going to do?

“Nanami, can you keep tabs on Laretta for me?”

“As you wish.”

I’d known that Laretta was a follower of the Church, so I could have captured her at any time if I wanted.

Except, if I actually did that, then the undercover no-name Church followers wouldn’t spring into action like they were supposed to, so I’d have no idea what they would try next time.

That was why I’d thought it would be better to leave Laretta at large and scoop up all the followers at once, but...

“It’s not gonna go that smoothly, is it...?”

First, I needed to hear what happened. For the time being, I made for the Student Council room.

When I entered, the important members were already present and accounted for.

The president, Vice President Fran, Iori, the Saint, Yukine, Ludie, Minister Benito, Shion, and Anemone were all there. Finally, I laid eyes on Ivy, wrapped up in a rope and hanging upside down in the way you only ever saw in cartoons.

“Oh no, we weren’t waiting long. Sorry about all this,” Minister Benito said.

“No problem. So, I heard that you captured Ivy here, but what exactly happened?” I asked, staring at Ivy. Anemone was right next to her, tormenting the rabbit girl by bringing a glass flask filled with a purple liquid close to her face.

“This,” President Monica said, glancing at the item atop the table, the Golden Lucky Cat.

“Huh? The Golden Lucky Cat?”

“Apparently, Ivy tried to steal it,” Ludie said, clarifying President Monica’s words. Had she, now? But hold on...

“That’s the one I gave to you, right, Vice President Fran?”

“It is. I placed it in a shrine thinking it would bring some divine help... Forgive me.”

“It’s nothing you need to apologize for. Ivy’s the one at fault for trying to steal it.”

When I glanced over at Ivy, she was writhing in an attempt to escape the approaching flask. The concoction made everything it touched smell of sweat, like rotten week-old socks. Yikes.

“But, I said to let everyone use it, right?”

I hadn’t planned on monopolizing the Golden Lucky Cat for myself.

That was the whole reason why I’d asked Vice President Fran to put it somewhere accessible. So why had she placed it on a shrine altar dedicated to revering Tsukuyomi instead?

“It must be because it would fetch a hefty price if sold, yes?” Shion remarked. She had a point. In the game, Ivy loves money. She had been born into poverty, so it wouldn’t have been outrageous for her mind to go straight to selling it. She never comes off as even slightly inclined to steal it in the game, though.

“Getting the Golden Lucky Cat was a dreadful experience, but its effect is incredible, yes. I can’t imagine how expensive it would be.”

Ludie mentioned something I didn’t want to remember. We’d done unspeakable things to come by it.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk, you’ve got a long way to go, Ludie.”

Ivy was rolling along on the floor, though I had no clue how she’d gotten that far while tied up. Anemone was chasing after her, a grin on her face, and a dagger with a pink blade in her hand.

“Effect? I don’t care two hops about that!! As soon as I laid eyes on that lovely, gleaming specimen, I absolutely had to have it for myself!”

Hearing this, I stared hard at the Golden Lucky Cat.

I looked away and took a deep breath. I visualized a field of flowers in my mind to give my thoughts a reset. Okay, okay, it was time to give it one more look.

“It has a revolting grin on its face, huh? Like it’s up to something.”

“Whaaaaaaat?! Takky, you can’t say that! But you went and said it!!”

It did have a kind of arrogance to it that was popular with the newly moneyed, but I found it pretty unappealing.

“Poor taste, I must say.”

“Poor taste all right.”

“Downright awful.”

Shion and the Saint shot Ivy down. Oh, I didn’t notice until now, but Gabby had joined us as well.

But whatever. None of that mattered.

“Why did you try to steal this thing? You asked me earlier if I knew anything about the Three Committees’ secret or not, so I was convinced you had come here to look into that.”

When I brought this up, Ivy’s whole body shuddered.

“Guuulp!”

Even her mouth reacted.

“.....”

President Monica approached her in silence. Ivy wriggled like a caterpillar to try to flee, but of course, she wasn't going anywhere.

“Where, exactly, did you hear about that? How much do you know?”

Monica easily caught her. Though I guess she was already caught.

“Heh-heh-heh. You think I would spill the beans on this colossal scoop?!”

Despite being bound, for some reason, Ivy wore a triumphant smile. However, as soon as mana resembling a heat haze began to appear around President Monica, Ivy turned around and slammed her forehead on the floor.

“Wiretapping, I had you wiretapped!”

“That’s an outright crime, you know.”

Vice President Fran sighed with a look of disgust.

“So then, how much do you know?”

“Ohhhh well, see, I actually don’t know a single thing about any of it! All I’ve been able to nail down is that there’s something inside the Moon Palace! I *did* notice there’s this suspicious place you all go in and out of a lot, but I obviously never once thought about checking it out for myself, nope!”

“So that was your plan, then,” Ludie remarked.

Hearing this, Minister Benito stepped in between President Monica and Ivy.

“Monica, let’s just let Ivy off the hook here. She’s clearly reflected on what she’s done, too. Besides, don’t you think now’s the perfect time to fill everyone in?”

“Benito, don’t tell me you instigated this girl’s little scheme.”

“I would never do something like that. Not when I could just lay it all out myself.”

“I guess I could see you doing that.”

“So, what do you think? Why don’t you just tell them?”

When Minister Benito said this, President Monica heaved a sigh.

“...Is this really the right moment to talk about that?”

“Now’s *exactly* the right moment. Everyone’s here. Even Takioto.”

“Good point. Now that it’s come to this, it might be better just to come clean about it.”

Saint Stef offered her agreement. Taking in her support, Benito continued.

“I know that you’re concerned about the other students Monica, bu—”

“If you know that, then you can understand what I’m doing,” President Monica said, interrupting Benito.

“Yeah, I can understand. But we should still broaden our possibilities even further. I think Takioto and Iori here are the key.”

“What will you do if something happens, then? Did you forget about how hurt she got?!”

“I get it, I know. But whatever they do after we lay everything out will be voluntary and at their own risk. It’ll mean that she’ll have to take responsibility for what happened.”

“Unbelievable. Do you seriously think that?”

“She did what she did knowing the risk. The same goes for me and Anemone. And it’s just as true for you, Monica, isn’t it?”

President Monica looked at me. Then she heaved a deep sigh.

“See, I thought you’d be the one to do it. But, the more I learned, the more I realized just how difficult it would be. So I figured, even if it’s too early, it’ll work out.”

President Monica turned from Ivy and Minister Benito and took a seat.

A tense silence enveloped the room. As everyone stood there in silence, Ivy spoke up from her position on the ground.

“Umm, even I get that I proooobably shouldn’t be here, so can I go? It’s gotta

be about time to untie these ropes, right?" she asked before crawling like a caterpillar.

"Oh, right," Benito replied, cutting her bonds with his sword.

"Whew, thanks a bunch, Benito. Sheesh, that Lauretty, where did she run off to after coming all the way here, I wonder?"

"She came here, then went somewhere else?"

A question floated into my mind. Lauretta had come here to save Ivy, yet had gone off somewhere else?

What had she really come here to do?

"Sure did!! Really mean of her, right? She put me to sleep, wrapped me up like a sushi roll, and then ran off somewhere. When I came to, I was here, and Anemone was sticking that weird flask in my face."

"Well, I saw a rather amusing rabbit on the floor. You mentioned stealing the Golden Lucky Cat, so I was having my fun, too," Anemone said.

"I just picked up the Golden Lucky Cat because it was super-duper cute, that's all. I was supposed to be here searching for the secret of the Three Committees."

"I get what happened. You couldn't say that you came looking for that secret, so you said you came to steal the Golden Lucky Cat instead," Iori said, convinced.

It seemed like the event had been proceeding right on track. But then Ivy had thrown everything off.

"Wait, why did Lauretty leave Pikahiko behind? She even moved me to a different room. I guess that must've been because she didn't want it getting out that we were looking into the secret?" Ivy said, looking at the Golden Lucky Cat. What the hell kind of name was "Pikahiko"? Hmm? Wait, did she just mention something super important there?

"Hold on a minute, uh, let's start from the beginning. You said that Lauretta came here, Ivy? What happened between you two?"

"Well, I ripped up some sort of paper talisman thingy when I took Pikahiko. I

called Lairetty to check to see if that was cool or not, but once she got here, something seemed to come to her mind, and she ran off.”

“Something came to her mind?!”

Huh? Wait, did Lairetta come up with the plan to abduct Ludie? But that didn’t make any sense—Ludie was here, gazing at me with that awfully cute face of hers.

“What’s up, Takky? Ohhh, you’re trying to win Lairetty over to your side, aren’t you? Sorry, but she’s a very important member of the Newspaper Club, thank you very much!”

Yeah, no, I didn’t care about any of that. There was something much more important.

“So, where did Lairetta run off to? What came to her mind?”

“Sooooorry, I don’t have any idea about that stuff!”

Okay, this really wasn’t the time to be screwing around. Though as of this moment, nothing had happened on campus yet that would make the Morals Committee spring into action.

So that Church of the Malevolent Lord hadn’t started anything?

In that case, just where did Lairetta go, and to do what?

Ivy spoke up again. “I wanna know where she went, too. She took one look at that shrine altar and got all weird, then knocked me out and tied me up...”

“Shrine?”

Wait, a shrine?

Where would she go after seeing a shrine? Was there something about the shrine that was connected to an event?

...There was. But it shouldn’t have been triggered at a time like this, and it was supposed to be lori who found it, not the Church...

Hang on. If the Church of the Malevolent Lord found out about this, that would be *really bad*, right?

If Laretta saw the shrine and ran off somewhere, did that mean she'd picked up on something?

"...Vice President Fran. Can you come with me to look at the shrine area?!"

"S-sure."

Right as I went to leave the room with Vice President Fran, I got a message on my Tsukuyomi Traveler.

It was from Nanami.

"Master, Laretta appears to have entered the Tsukuyomi Dungeon with several people."



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim How had it come to this?

I couldn't help but put my head in my hands. The seal on the shrine altar had been broken. I didn't know a thing about these seals, but a paper talisman in the back had been torn to shreds, and one of the jagged white streamer papers that you'd usually see attached to a *shimenawa* straw rope had turned pitch black. Part of the tree was even cracked in places.

I brought my hand to the wall where the paper talisman had been affixed.

It was a hologram. My hand passed through it.

The seal was broken. The scroll that was supposed to be locked away within the shrine had been pilfered as well. Not only that, but the absolute worst person possible had laid eyes on it—Lauretta, vice president of the Newspaper Club and follower of the Church of the Malevolent Lord.

I couldn't keep up with this disastrous turn of events. For something like this to happen, everything would have had to go wrong.

"I'm sorry."

The sudden apology made me turn my head. Looking at me, the vice president seemed to believe she had done something truly awful.

"Don't be. You aren't to blame for any of this, Vice President."

"...I was convinced the shrine was just a replica."

"That's what anyone would think. Heck, even I forgot about it."

There was still plenty of time until the event, and I assumed it wouldn't be triggered without me doing something to kickstart it first.

"For now, let's head back to the others."

No matter what we were going to do, we first needed to sort out the information we had. I wanted to meet up with Nanami, too.

When we then returned to the room where everyone was gathered, I found more people in it than when we'd left. Katorina and the others were here, too.

“Oh, Takioto! We were waiting for you. Hurry, over here,” Yuika excitedly said to me. Since Iori and Anemone were beside her, I surmised she was happy to have found someone to pawn off on Sexy Scientist.

“Yuika’s here, too... What happened to the President?”

“She’s on a call with the principal,” Yuika said, turning to look at Fran.

“Is that true?”

President Monica was talking about something on her Tsukuyomi Traveler. Next to her, Minister Benito was crossing his arms, a conflicted expression on his face.

When the call ended, everyone turned their eyes on the president.

“I got word from the principal. Apparently, there’s something strange going on with the Tsukuyomi Dungeon. Powerful monsters are appearing on layers where they shouldn’t be.”

“In the Tsukuyomi Dungeon?!” Iori exclaimed in surprise.

“A group of teachers are already dealing with it, but she requested that the Three Committees take action, too.”

“Hmm, with this many members all here, we should be able to split up and go in groups.”

Shion’s words prompted Vice President Fran to nod.

“That’s true. But why has this happened? What exactly is the cause of this whole thing?”

“I feel like we’re not gonna be able to solve this unless we deal with the source of it all,” Iori said in response to Fran’s comment.

Why had these monsters begun to appear? In the game, this is easy to figure out, as when Iori triggers the event, he obtains an item that gives a hint at how to deal with the situation.

But in the game, it’s Laretta who gives him the item. That meant the only people who had a full grasp of what was going on right now were me and her. Though there was a chance someone like Ms. Sakura knew, too.

For now, I needed to explain what was happening, but...how was I supposed to do that?

I guess it would be best to prepare for anything to happen.

I took out my Tsukuyomi Traveler and sent a message to Marino. Once it was finished sending, someone tapped my shoulder.

Yuika was the culprit.

“Uhhh, Takioto? I’ve got one lllittle question.”

“What’s that?”

“Do you think there’s anyone inside the dungeon right now?”

The question was on my mind as well.

Most of the students would have been on campus for the assembly. There were only a few students who, like me, would be in the dungeon at this time.

Perhaps there weren’t any students there at all.

“...There might be someone in there.”

“Yeah, that makes sense. If we find them, we’ll make sure to save them then. But if there isn’t anyone...obviously that would be for the best, but then I wonder how Marino fits into all this? Maybe it’s better if I don’t say this sorta stuff to you, but I thought it might be good to ask.”

She was being vague about what she wanted to say, but I heard her loud and clear.

Since I had the same doubts on my mind.

If there wasn’t anyone at all in the dungeon, then I had to wonder how Marino had been the first to know that powerful monsters were appearing inside.

Why had Yuika told me this? Maybe she believed that I would know the answer. Lately, I had been doing too much, too often, since I knew stuff that

normally no one else would.

So it made sense that Yuika might think, *There's a chance Takioto would know*. Perhaps it would seem even more probable to her this time around, since my own relative was involved.

“Sorry, forget I said anything. Honestly, just what am I blabbering about here? Ha-ha-ha.”

“No, I think that’s a really good question. That was bothering me, too.”

In all honesty, I didn’t think there was anyone inside the dungeon. Which meant...

“I was thinking I’d ask Marino about this myself. You can come along with me when I do, but just be ready, since there’s a ninety-percent chance she’ll brush me off.”

When I said this, another girl approached us.

“*Hmm*, I see, I see, very perceptive.”

It was Anemone.

“Anemone? Were you listening to us?”

“Sorry, but an intriguing topic happened to reach my ears. Ha-ha-ha.”

She didn’t seem at all apologetic as she laughed. Well, it wasn’t like we were upset at her for overhearing.

“...Well then. You see, when I’m spending time on campus here, occasionally—and I do mean only once in a while, okay?—out of the blue, I’ll feel like I’ve stepped foot into an abyss. Sort of like I’m inside it, like the abyss itself is slowly tainting me without my realizing it.”

For most of the students, this description would be too abstract to fully grasp. However, Yuika nodded. She must have had her own doubts, just like Anemone.

Thanks to my knowledge of *Magical★Explorer*, I had a decent grasp on the abyss.

However, even though I had played the game, I didn’t think I knew all there was to know about it. The same was true for Marino, for Nanami, and for the

campus itself.

“Oh, but the abyss isn’t simply a metaphor for the love between teacher and student, okay? I do know of two such examples, though,” Anemone said, changing the subject. She must not have seen any value in continuing to speak on such an abstract concept. I decided to go along with her comment.

“...Part of me thinks teacher-student relationships are like an abyss in a way, too, though.”

Hm? Despite my response, the truth was that in this world, it might be totally fine. I mean, Ms. Ruija was still a sub-heroine and all. Even in Japan, as long as both parties were eighteen, it was technically allowed, too. Heck, high school wasn’t just all right—it was the damn setting in some games.

Anemone stared hard at me and grinned.

Ohh, now I get it.

This was just a guess, but she seemed to be counting myself and Ms. Ruija as one of those examples. Best to ignore her, then.

“Well, part of me feels like you’re an abyss yourself, Takioto.”

“Master is certainly deep.”

Startled by the sudden voice, I jumped to the side.

“Whoa! Oh, Nanami. When did you get here?”

At some point, the maid had managed to sneak up next to me—her thief skills were seriously leveling up. Maybe she was already on Ivy’s level when it came to spying? Nah, she couldn’t have gotten *that* far yet.

“I know you were about to start bragging about me, but it is a bit embarrassing.”

Nope, I sure wasn’t!

“You sure you weren’t listening to a conversation from another space-time continuum? Though, I am proud to have you as my maid.”

“Ohhkay, yeah, that’s enough of the maid-master comedy bit, thanks.”

Hey now, she was talking about us like a married comedy duo, wasn’t she?

That wasn't important, though.

"Well, how did it go?"

"Exactly as you anticipated, Master."

"...Gotta be sure to tell President Monica."

Before that, though—

"Ivy."

"Yeeep! What now, Takky? Hit on me all you want, I'm not biting!"

"Er, no, I was just wondering if you were all right."

"What d'ya mean by that? I got captured, didn't I? But I'm still doing just fine."

"Be sure to brace yourself, okay?" I said before calling out to President Monica and the others.

"I reported as much to Marino just a moment ago, but I've figured out what's going on."

"Really? Well then, tell us."

"Simply put, I believe that someone is heading into the Tsukuyomi Academy Dungeon in order to get an item that will undo the seal on the Malevolent Lord."

"What?!"

"Huuuh?!"

I heard the shocked voices of several people.

President Monica sighed while pressing down on her head with her right hand.

"What do you mean?"

"The truth is that there's an item that can be used to unseal the Malevolent Lord, and it's within the Tsukuyomi Magic Academy Dungeon."

“Does such an artifact truly exist? Personally, I was convinced the Malevolent Lord itself was hogwash dreamed up by its Church.”

“No, the Malevolent Lord does exist. It’s been sealed away. This fact has been acknowledged not only by the Hanamura family, but countries with long histories, like Leggenze and the Empire.”

Leggenze actually had picture books on the topic. Along with the topic of the Founding Saint.

“Regardless, I believe there’s something of higher priority than looking into the existence of the Malevolent Lord, wouldn’t you say?” Minister Benito chimed in.

“Right. Sure, we might need to talk about the Church of the Malevolent Lord a bit, but if monsters are showing up, we’ve got to handle them first,” Iori said, siding with Benito.

“There is one thing that I find curious,” Anemone began, after listening to the conversation. “Tell me, Takioto. You’re bringing up this item for releasing the Malevolent Lord out of the blue, almost as if to say it has something to do with this latest incident.”

“That’s right. The Church of the Malevolent Lord is almost certainly involved. As for why...”

I glanced at Ivy. She wasn’t showing it on her face, but she appeared to be having a tough time mentally.

She must have known. Coming out and saying it clearly would probably deal her a heavy blow. I didn’t want to talk about it if we could get through this without mentioning it.

But I had to. It was too dangerous to leave things as they were.

“On that shrine altar is a scroll that’s required to obtain the Yata no Kagami mirror, which is needed to unseal the Malevolent Lord.”

“Wait, on that shrine altar?!” Iori shouted in surprise.

“The Yata no Kagami alone can’t undo the seal itself, but it would be bad news if it was taken. Also, as for the culprit...”

Yukine picked up from where I left off.

“I see, I didn’t know the shrine held an item like that. So a girl who happened to be there tied up Editor-in-Chief Ivy and fled...”

She looked over at Ivy. Before long, everyone was staring at her.

“You’re right on the mark, Yukine. The culprit is the assistant editor and vice president for the Newspaper Club, Laretta.”

“Hold on, Kousuke. If you’re saying she was after an item that can unseal the Malevolent Lord, then that has to mean...”

I nodded at Ludie’s words.

“Yeah, she’s part of the Church. Truth is, I had her pegged as suspicious for a while, and I had Nanami tail her today. Turns out, she went into Tsukuyomi Academy Dungeon—which contains the Yata no Kagami.”

“...It appears you have found our answer, then.”

“Hold on, Takioto. I get what you’re saying about the Church of the Malevolent Lord. But how exactly is that at all related to the strong monsters appearing in the dungeon?” Vice President Fran asked.

“It’s a mechanism to protect the Yata no Kagami. Like for example, in dungeons, there are traps or monsters guarding treasure chests to prevent you from opening them, right?” It was the same idea here. “With the Yata no Kagami, if you bring the scroll needed to obtain the mirror into the Tsukuyomi Academy Dungeon, monsters will appear on certain layers that are far stronger than normal for their location.”

It was basically the same thing as what had happened at Amaterasu Girls’ Academy.

“I get it. So the monsters are like guardians that protect the Yata no Kagami.”

“Exactly, President Monica. The only thing is, they’ll still attack people without the scroll...and in some cases, they might spill out from the dungeon, too.”

When I said this, Shion sighed.

“Now *that* is dreadful indeed.”

“So let me propose something. The Ceremonial Committee will pursue Laretta, and the Student Council and Morals Committee will take down the guardians throughout the dungeon.”

“And why should the Ceremonial Committee be the one to pursue her?” President Monica asked in response to my suggestion.

“Assuming that Laretta took off with the entire scroll, then I’m the only one who can chase her down. Also, it would be best if the Ceremonial Committee isn’t seen openly protecting the students. Works out conveniently in a few ways.”

“I’d prefer that, too,” Minister Benito chimed in.

“The Newspaper Club is also a subsidiary club of the Ceremonial Committee. We should be the ones to clean up their mess.”

President Monica thought this over.

“...I’ll leave that to you, then.”

That should have been when we all adjourned to prepare ourselves and head to the dungeon.

But that was when someone spoke up.

“Please wait. Hey, Takky?”

Ivy.

“Let me go with you.”



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim —*Ivy's Perspective*— “Live life with a smile. When you live with a smile, happiness will come your way.”

My mother would often say that when I was little.

I loved my mother's smiling face. She was the type of person who could make me happy just by flashing her carefree, innocent grin.

She wasn't a particularly smart woman. Nor was she particularly wealthy. In fact, she was poor.

The place we lived, Leggenze, contributed to our impoverished conditions. Human-supremacist thought was popular in Leggenze, and the country was said to treat its beastfolk and elf citizens the harshest of all nations.

It was because of this that humans severely harassed us.

Since the rabbitfolk possessed no special abilities of their own, few places would hire a woman like my mother. That was why she always had to look hard for work. Even then, no matter how much she labored, her wages would be low. Despite how unsafe it was, we had no choice but to live in the slums.

Even though our family finances brought nothing but pain and difficulty, Mother always made sure to speak to me with a smile.

Perhaps if Father was still alive, we would have been able to have an easy life. But he had died by the time I was born.

Due in part to all this, I began to spend my days scavenging for valuables from the areas where regular citizens lived.

Around this time, I learned how to pick pockets.

The residents of the slums taught me, convincing me I would need to steal to survive.

I didn't realize it at the time, but apparently, I had a knack for it. Stealing from people was a breeze, but when Mother caught me doing it one time, she gave me such a sad look that I basically stopped doing it from then on.

But because of my impoverished upbringing, I ended up developing a weakness for all things valuable. I especially loved things that were gold.

I lost my family at ten years old.

A friend of my mother's told her about a job opportunity, and my mother left the house for work.

However, this friend had actually tricked my mother. Ultimately, my mother injured herself and became bedridden.

The person who tricked her eventually fled the country, having apparently deceived several others. I hated them. Yet my mother never did.

"These things happen," she said, with a sad smile.

This swindler had also looked after me quite a bit, which had made it all the easier for Mother to trust them and head out for the job.

After that, I could no longer tell who I could trust for a time.

Then, right as I threatened to give up faith in other people entirely, my mother said something to me.

"My friend had their own reasons for tricking me, too. Besides, there are still so many wonderful people around, and you need to trust them."

She was covering for the swindler. But she was also right that there were many trustworthy people. Our friends in the slums carried my mother back home after she was no longer able to move, gave us food, and brought people to us who were capable of healing magic.

Even now, I clearly remembered the countless denizens of the slums who'd grieved for my mother when she died.

"Seeing her smile would always cheer me up."

"I still can't believe that she's no longer with us."

Around a week after my mother's passing, a lone man came to visit me. He was dressed in a navy-blue coat.

I was living a self-destructive life. My memories from around that time are very vague, and so I can't even say for sure if it had only been a week or longer.

The man showed me a message.

To summarize what was written, it was a request for the man to help my mother send me to school. It had been sent several years prior.

Apparently, he was scheduled to come a year later, but with my mother's passing, the message got to me earlier than intended. After doing a lot of thinking—*really* thinking over all sorts of things—I decided to go.

Everyone in the slums told me not to do it, and there were some who viewed this outsider with hostility.

But for some reason, I felt like I could trust him. Of course, it was also possible that I'd simply been apathetic to everything at the time. I don't remember much from this period of my life, and the things I do remember properly all come from after I went with the man to Wakoku.

When he brought me to a village in Wakoku, I was shocked by several different things.

In the slums, I had been the strongest of the other kids my age.

I'd never once been bested in a contest of speed, and while I might've been lacking physical strength compared to other beastfolk, I could get by in scraps if they never managed to land a hit on me.

But in the village in Wakoku, I was bested by a child younger than me. Despite my speed and strength advantage, she overcame me with her technique.

I think that this worked really well in my favor.

It taught me that I was weak, and it lit a fire under me to kickstart my studies.

The girl was younger than me, so why was she stronger and smarter? My desire to win drove me to start training, and the fact that she was studying encouraged me to do it, too. My studies arose from an urge to beat her, but I discovered I enjoyed learning things that were unknown to me and grew to love it.

During that time, I also started attending school and making more friends and rivals. I think I became a lot cheerier.

It was around then that I started smiling all the time, developing my hyper personality. When I grinned with delight, I got to see everyone else smile back, too.

I thought that this must have been why my mother had said, “Live life with a smile. When you live with a smile, happiness will come your way.” My mother’s personality and smiling face brought a lot of happiness to the people of the slums, and that was why everyone helped out right before she’d died and shed tears when she’d passed.

Thanks to my years of training, I had gotten remarkably stronger.

Apparently, I had a knack for stealth. Before I knew it, I had surpassed the girl I saw as my rival and could use ninjutsu with ease.

The fact that I had a high amount of mana, even among beastfolk, steered me in the right direction, too.

People ended up calling me the most talented child in the village. Some people told me they wanted me to compete against the child prodigies in the other ninja villages.

A number of years passed from there until I reached an age where I needed to choose the path I was going to take.

I had grown even stronger, and I wanted to study more. As such, I was torn between continuing my education at either Susano Martial Arts Academy or Tsukuyomi Magic Academy.

One of the reasons I decided on Tsukuyomi Magic Academy was that it was located in Wakoku.

It was the highest-level school in this country I had grown accustomed to.

I also chose it because a ninja prodigy from another village was going there. His name was Hanzou, and he was super strong, just as much as the rumors made him out to be.

Nevertheless, the main reason I chose Tsukuyomi Magic Academy was that it was the alma mater of the man who'd brought me to this country. I could never thank him enough for teaching me ninjutsu.

One day, the man called for me, saying he had something to tell me before I left for school.

"You have weaknesses. First, you're a sucker for valuable items."

I couldn't have done anything about that. Although he was wealthy, the man forced me to live a frugal life. That was why I couldn't help but reach out for something that looked valuable. I always did a double take when I saw something gold.

"Another is your poor strategizing skills. That's why if there is someone you think you should trust, you should serve them. A *shinobi* can grow even stronger if they have someone to serve."

I could sort of see that myself. I was definitely skilled at ninjutsu and had good physical abilities. However, I wasn't especially smart or decisive.

"Offering up everything you have to serve someone when you find them is one path you can take. Should you find an appropriate person, don't let them out of your grasp."

I nodded.

"Have fun."

He told me this before sending me off to Tsukuyomi Magic Academy.

Minister Benito was one of the people I could trust.

Though initially, I shunned him, as he was a Leggenze aristocrat.

The first thing I associated with Leggenze aristocracy was the oppression and mistreatment of beastfolk. He wasn't like that at all, though. He was a member of the Evangelista line—practically the aristocracy of the aristocracy—and particularly close to the pope, yet he never discriminated against me.

Not only that, but he even defended me when some other Leggenze nobles were hassling me.

He boasted ability, charisma, good looks, intelligence, and status all in a single package, so he was obviously popular. Since Monica and the Saint were in the same grade as him, their year was said to be a miracle unlike any other.

After enrolling, I enjoyed an average school life. I studied, went into the dungeon, and occasionally had some fun.

My impetus for joining the Newspaper Club was a recommendation from Benito. I had always enjoyed gathering information and the like, but I never thought it would be such a perfect fit for me.

I learned about the secret work of the Newspaper Club after Benito had joined the Ceremonial Committee.

When he joined, his position at school completely reversed.

He went from being the star of the student body to their nemesis. Similarly, my role was now to expose his wrongdoing in the newspaper, at least on the surface.

Thus, I went on the side of the general student population, including the other Leggenze nobles, uniting to square off against our shared enemy in the Ceremonial Committee. Behind the scenes, however, I lent them a hand.

With how clumsy I was, Benito saved me countless times. President Monica also kindly came to my aid, too.

What truly surprised me was Saint Stefania. Despite occupying a position that was practically synonymous with human supremacy, she also helped me.

Though she was *pretty* curt about it.

Now that I think about it, there had been rumors in the slums that she was actually from an impoverished background herself, originally living in a shelter; perhaps they had been right all along. I never asked Stef about this, so I didn't know for sure.

I wanted to return the favor and do something for the three of them. Help

them out more and more. I had felt that way ever since I was a second-year student.

When I mentioned this to Lauretty she came up with a plan.

“Let’s act like the Newspaper Club should and blackmail them for a scoop.”

Lauretty was a very kind person. She would correct my mistakes, grumbling the whole time, and would always hear out any favors I asked of her.

That was why I was stunned at first when I heard the word “blackmail,” but when I listened to the whole story, I was convinced.

The Three Committees are hiding something. What you need to do, Chief, is find out what that is and threaten them, demanding to let you work with them. Say you’ll expose everything if they don’t.

Lauretty had figured out that the Three Committees were hiding something. I had sensed as much myself.

Also, judging by the members who would secretly gather together, I could tell that they would need powerful and capable people to deal with whatever this secret was.

I was confident in my thief and combat abilities, so I should be able to help.

That was what I thought. So I carefully laid out a plan and made my move.

I was truly doing it out of good intentions.

But I’d made a huge screw-up. The Golden Lucky Cat dazzled my eyes, and I made a mistake.

This was just a guess, but Lauretty must have been using me to get a hold of some information to threaten the Three Committees.

She had been saying things to that effect.

I had been betrayed by someone I trusted. Almost exactly like Mom had.

Oh, shoot.

The events of that time flickered over and over again in front of my eyes, bringing me back to that moment.

I had been betrayed. Betrayed. Gaaaaaah!

No, no, no. Stop, calm down.

The more I thought about it, the more things about Lauretty became suspicious.

Moreover, now I understood why she hadn't become editor-in-chief herself—she didn't want to stand out much.

That had to be it. But, Lauretty... Lauretty. Lauretty?

Why?

Lauretty.

Why then?

When I made a mistake, you pulled an all-nighter with me to help out. You came with me to fight powerful enemies in the dungeon, and you shared meals with me.

So why, Lauretty?

Please, tell me. Why did you do all that?

"Let me go with you," I said to Kousuke Takioto.

All these different emotions were whirling around inside me, making a mess.

I wondered if it was the sadness I felt over being betrayed, as well as the guilt I harbored for causing everyone so much trouble.

But at the same time, I had my doubts.

And the only way to resolve them was to come along.

“You sure you can handle that right now?” the Saint asked.

I nodded.

“Fine, then.”

She wasn’t ecstatic about me coming along. Still, she hadn’t rejected me, either. She just tapped Takky lightly on the shoulder and stared at him.

Under her gaze, Takky then looked at Benito. Given his position within the Ceremonial Committee, he must have been confirming things with the guy in charge.

“Decide for yourself, Takioto,” Minister Benito replied. However, before Takky could say anything, someone else chimed in.

“Now, now, can we hold on a minute here?”

Anemone had joined the conversation.

“Can we really trust Ivy? Or rather, don’t you think she might still be getting manipulated?”

I was aghast when I heard her words.

The fact still remained that I had snuck in here to obtain an important secret. And I couldn’t deny the possibility that I was acting as someone’s puppet, if not Lauretty’s.

I needed to say something, or they were going to leave me behind. But what? Ah, what was I supposed to do...?

“It’ll be fine.”

Takky asserted this before I could say anything.

“Really?”

“I mean, you’re not even suspicious of Ivy, are you, Anemone?”

“...Well, yes, that’s true. Otherwise, I would be carrying out some live beastfolk experiments right now instead of playing around with this girl.”

Would Anemone have forced me to drink that toxic-looking substance from before...? What actually was that anyway? I would have rather eaten a hundred cockroaches than drink a drop of that stuff.

“Besides, Minister Benito will take responsibility for her. He said that he would before, too.”

Minister Benito laughed when Kousuke Takioto said this.

“Ha-ha-ha, so *that’s* where I come in, then? Hee-hee, I suppose I have no other choice. I’ll take responsibility.”

“That’s a bit too much for you to bear on your own, so I’ll be responsible, too,” President Monica added. After she said this, all eyes in the room turned to Saint Stef. However, she didn’t say a word.

Instead, her lieutenant Yukine spoke on her behalf.

“Hrm, it appears Lady Stefania will take responsibility, too.”

“Um, Yukine? Since when did you start talking about me like that? Is this that idiot’s... Is this Kousuke Takioto’s influence?”

“Miss Stefania, please do not treat Master like an idiot. A pervert, on the other hand, well...”

“Don’t treat him like a pervert, either!”

The maid and lori continued the conversation.

As this happy and harmonious scene began to unfold, President Monica addressed me.

“Ivy, I know you’re trying your best. So I’ll overlook things this time.”

Takky approached me and smiled.

“I won’t hold back just because you’re an upperclassman, okay?” he said. “I’m going to make you work hard to make up for everything you’ve done, so I hope you’re prepared.”

“Of course.”

“...Great. Everyone, we’ve settled on a plan. Go get ready.”

Everyone dispersed at President Monica's orders. I also needed to get going. Just then, however, I heard a voice call out to me from behind.

"Oh, Ivy, can you hang on just a second?"

It was Takky.

"If anything does happen, everyone on the Three Committees is on your side here, okay? You can trust us."

His statement seemed to imply he knew everything about my past.





CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim —*Takioto's Perspective*— Our plan of action was set.

The Morals Committee and Student Council would go through each layer, searching for powerful guardians that had appeared. Meanwhile, the Ceremonial Committee would head to a secret floor to search for Lairetta and the Yata no Kagami.

The students participating in this operation had gotten together to go through things in more detail.

Almost every member of the Three Committees was here.

“Master, are you fine with acting separately from Miss Ludie?” Nanami asked at my side, looking over toward Ludie. She was talking something over with Yukine.

“Yeah, I don’t think I’ll need to be with her this time.”

I purposefully wanted Ludie to act separately.

The followers of the Church of the Malevolent Lord must have been after her. However, since they had found the Yata no Kagami, something of even more importance than her, they had turned all their attention to that.

However, I couldn’t deny the possibility that they would change their minds and try to get Ludie. Obviously, the chances of that were slim, but if I was to cover all my bases, then it would be best if Ludie wasn’t with us when we faced off against the Church.

All that said, I was worried about her. I knew that she would have the members of the Morals Committee with her, including Yukine and the Saint, but...

When I looked at her with these worries on my mind, Ludie heaved a big, huge, and exaggerated sigh. Then she said something to Yukine, and the two of them walked over to where we were standing.

“Okay, Kousuke, seriously?”

“What?”

“That face.”

“My face?”

I touched my face. Nanami seemed to have noticed something about my expression, too. She nodded while letting out a knowing murmur.

“You’re obviously worrying again, aren’t you? Because the Church is involved. You even thought about telling me to wait here. I’m right, aren’t I?”

I mean, I definitely thought about saying that.

Ludie created a light-green wind orb in her hands.

It looked like nothing more than a small ball of wind.

But in reality, the wind was being compressed under a tremendous amount of power. A direct hit from it would tear it open and desolate the area with fierce storm winds. And since the wind was under such tremendous pressure, there were even crackles of electricity around it. If she used this electric charge, she could probably transform it into a lightning spell instead.

I definitely couldn’t imitate the feat, in part due to my poor magic compatibility—it was an attack that required a great deal of skill. Yet she’d conjured it like it was nothing.

“I’ve gotten strong.”

Suddenly, I recalled what she had said to me before.

It was when she had talked about her reason for joining the Morals Committee. This was what she had said: *“Protecting you.”*

The Morals Committee would often side with the Student Council, but they were technically in a neutral position.

To put it in contemporary terms, they were the judiciary, or the police.

Because of that, one might think, *Then why didn’t they arrest the Ceremonial Committee, the bitter enemy of all the students?* But things weren’t that simple.

Generally speaking, the Ceremonial Committee's main form of provocation was haughty remarks. Did the police have grounds to arrest you for trash-talking? Of course not. This was why the Morals Committee basically didn't crack down on them.

Of course, if the Ceremonial Committee, as part of their ruse, sent a magic attack at the Newspaper Club, the Morals Committee would immediately be on the scene and enforce the rules as a type of warning.

Thus, they were generally neutral.

In order to stay that way, when the regular students would attack the Ceremonial Committee, the Morals Committee would protect them and reprimand the students.

Basically, Ludie was saying that she had joined the Morals Committee to use its position to protect me, a member of the Ceremonial Committee, which regularly provoked the ire of the general student population.

A tsunami of happiness had welled up inside me when the girl I was trying to protect turned around and told me that she was protecting me, too.

As I recalled all of this and basked in the sentimentality a little, Ludie dispersed her wind magic.

"Listen up, Kousuke. You know, I'm not just sitting here being sheltered. I'm trying to protect you in case anything happens, too, okay?"

I did more or less understand that Ludie had gotten stronger, and I'd been thinking that I could leave more things up to her.

Except, a lot of that sentiment never left my head. Deep in my heart, I might have still seen her as someone who needed to be safeguarded.

That was why I found myself being overprotective of her even now, even though she was heading to a relatively safe location instead of the floor housing the Yata no Kagami, where the Malevolent Lord's followers were heading.

I'd been disrespectful, plain and simple.

Ludie was pushing herself to build up her abilities. Having been together with

her, I understood that. What I needed to do now was trust that she would pull through on her end of the operation.

“I’m going to say it again: I’ve gotten stronger.”

“...You sure have.”

Ludie gently lifted her hand. I did the same thing, and the two of us high-fived.

She was going to be just fine.

“Hm?”

Suddenly, I noticed Yukine had raised her hand behind Ludie.

“Ahem.”

Yukine cleared her throat. It appeared that she wanted to high-five as well.

It was easy to get a cool and badass vibe from Yukine, but she still had many adorable qualities.

“Thank you for your help, Yukine.”

“You best be careful, too, Takioto.”

I high-fived Yukine.

“Ludie, I’m counting on you.”

“That’s what I should be saying, silly. Nanami, take care of him.”

“You have my word.”

No matter what happened, I knew I could depend on them to see things through.

When we gathered with our respective Committees, we confirmed what our formation would look like.

Apparently, while I’d been talking with Ludie and company, the other members of the Three Committees who were joining the battle had come together. Seeing Gretel talking with a game in one hand and her doll in the

other, I knew all the Ceremonial Committee members would be participating.

“After discussing some things for a bit, we decided the Morals Committee will leave several people back on campus to deal with anything that might come up. We can’t ignore the possibility that there might still be Church of the Malevolent Lord followers in the Academy, for one,” Minister Benito said. He was certainly on the mark there.

Personally, however, I had a feeling that since they had discovered such a paramount item, something needed to revive the Malevolent Lord, they would be putting everything they had into retrieving it.

However, I couldn’t say this for sure. The truth was, I hadn’t seen any of this commotion coming.

When I glanced over at the Morals Committee, I caught them right as they began to move out.

Around Saint Stef were Yukine Mizumori, one of the Big Three, Ironwall Esmeralda, main heroine Ludie, and main heroine Katorina. Alongside them were other capable and proven students. The members of this lineup were capable of playing huge roles all the way to end-game. They were definitely strong enough.

Yukine and Ludie looked over here, so I waved at them. They returned waves of their own. That reminded me of something.

“Katorina.”

“Yeah, what?”

From what I had heard, Katorina had earned the Saint’s trust in the battle against the Book of Raziel.

Now that I thought about it, apparently Orange was even getting summoned by the Morals Committee and Student Council to help out from time to time. It was sorta funny, honestly.

“We’re counting on you guys.”

“Like I need you to tell me that,” she said, turning her back to me and waving me off. “Oh, right,” she then said, glancing back behind her. “You better work

hard, too.”

After the Morals Committee departed, only the Ceremonial Committee and the Student Council were left.

Keeping an ear on Minister Benito, I looked over at the members of the Student Council, wondering what was going on with them.

There, I saw President Monica give a speech to raise her committee’s morale.

“We stand at the top of Tsukuyomi Magical Academy and will wipe out all who dare bring harm to our students. Time to move out!” she said before walking off, presumably heading for the dungeon.

Monica excelled at choosing the right words to inspire people. This must have been because she was impossibly strong and possessed so much confidence in herself.

She swept up people in her determination and strength. A necessary skill for bosses, CEOs, and team leaders.

Iori and the others followed along behind President Monica as she calmly departed.

“Yuika, Kousuke, I’ll go on ahead.”

“Be careful, Big Bro.”

“Do be sure to take care of yourselves. If you will excuse us, then,” Gabby said, turning her back and starting to walk off, before I remembered something.

“Oh, right, Gabby.”

There was something I had to tell her.

“What is it?”

“Sounds like you’ve been working real hard lately. I heard you’ve been growing at quite the clip.”

Vice President Fran and Iori would talk about Gabby’s progress quite often. Though, apparently her occasional out-of-control episodes were the fly in the ointment.

“Heh-heh. Oh, but of course.”

Gabby put her hand on her waist and puffed out her chest.

She was the kind of person who improved the most when complimented. That was why I wanted to be sure to sing her praises and get her motivation nice and high.

Well, really the biggest reason was she was so damn cute when I did. I wanted to protect this smile of hers.

That reminded me, there was a certain group who mocked her being so easy to deal with, despite how cute she was.

The people mocking her were the real idiots. That’s what was so adorable and charming about her. Who wouldn’t feel happier after hearing that gleeful, haughty laugh of hers?!

“Ohhh-ho-ho-ho!! At this rate, it’s only a matter of time before I surpass you!”

“Oh yeah? Go ahead and try, if you can.”

“Forget Takioto, I’m not going to fall behind, either,” Yuika said, jumping into the conversation.

“Heh-heh. Bark while you can, Yuika. I’ll have you groveling in front of me before long, so I suggest you come up with your words of repentance now!”

Gabby departed together with Iori as she let out a haughty “Ohhh-ho-ho-ho.”

“The strongest of all, is it? Well, Monica and the others all left, so now what? Should we do something to get ourselves psyched up before heading out?”

“Nah,” Gretel replied instantly.

“Indeed, that’s quite unnecessary. We already have enough enthusiasm,” Shion said, following suit.

“Too bad, Benito. Want to do that with just the two of us?”

“Hrmmm, *that*, huh. I feel like Takioto and Yuika would go along with us, but let’s just save it for next time,” Minister Benito said with a smile before walking off.

“So, we’re after the guardians protecting the Yata no Kagami. I do hope they put up something of a fight. Wouldn’t you agree, Gretel?” Shion said from behind Benito.

“I don’t care about that. I want to finish this quick and get back to gaming. That’s it,” replied Gretel.

“Hm. This is a golden opportunity. I should test out my new drug.”

Anemone made a truly terrifying comment.

“Y-yeep! Wh-why are you pointing that drug at me?!” Ivy yelped, racing to Minister Benito’s side.

“Okay, Takioto. We should get going, too,” Yuika said, looking at me and Nanami.

“Indeed, Saturdays are when eggs are on sale, after all,” Nanami said as a silly remark.

“Where do you think we’re going here? Today’s not even Saturday.”

I started walking, and the two of them followed behind me.

After Minister Benito glanced back to confirm we were all following him, he grinned and faced front.

“Monica said that her group was the strongest here, but I beg to differ.”

He didn’t say anything more than that. Nevertheless, everyone knew what he was trying to imply.

Minister Benito, Ivy, Shion, Gretel, Anemone, me, Yuika, Nanami.

Confidence was brimming on all of our faces.

“Our objective is the Yata no Kagami and Lairetta. Everyone’s ready, then?”

Everyone on the Ceremonial Committee knew one thing: That we were the strongest of all.

“Ceremonial Committee, move out.”

There were several hidden passageways in the Tsukuyomi Academy Dungeon.

One of them was located on the twenty-third floor.

Although the entrance appeared to be a dead end, if one went there while holding the scroll, a seal would become undone, opening a path forward.

“Yup, it’s open, all right.”

When I arrived at the location and looked around, the first thing that came to me was the conviction that the events were occurring exactly as I imagined.

If this path was open, then the Church members, led by Laretta, had undoubtedly passed through here and headed in to secure the Yata no Kagami.

“Is this the place?”

I nodded at Minister Benito’s question.

“Yeah, from here on out we should prepare to face powerful monsters that usually only appear past the fiftieth layer,” I said.

“That means Ivy and I should take point now,” Benito said.

Ivy nodded with a solemn look, having changed from her uniform into her battle outfit. I wagered that she was probably more raring to go than anyone else here.

“Okay, leave the traps to me,” she said.

“Shion, Gretel—can I leave the rear to you two?” Benito asked.

“Understood.”

“Takioto, I want you to follow me and Ivy. And Yuika, I get that you might want to fight on the front lines, but I need you to focus on healing and support. Nanami, please back up everyone as needed.”

“Okaaaay.”

Nanami glanced over at me. When I nodded, she told me she understood her instructions.

“Hold up, Benito. You’re not forgetting about me, are you?” Anemone asked, having not heard her name.

“Go ahead and do whatever you like. Or at least, that’s how I would lay it out

—what do you think Takioto?”

“A perfect battle formation, I’d say.”

I thought it would be good to have Minister Benito, who was still stronger than I was at this point, and Ivy, with her honed trap-detecting skills, on the front lines. The first-years being in the middle would ensure the second-and third-years could protect them if something cropped up.

“If anything, I’ve always thought that you should generally be the one to take command, Minister Benito. You have a lot of combat experience and wonderful spur-of-the-moment judgment.”

“Truly? Why, you’re embarrassing me.”

I was simply saying what was on my mind, so why exactly was he getting so bashful? And why was Anemone gleefully talking to Nanami? Anything was fair game for that girl, so she better not have gotten any weird ideas.

We advanced a bit from there before we all stepped into a spatial magic circle. After looking around to where we had been transported, Shion sighed with wonder.

“Well, this is quite a nice ambiance.”

Put simply, we had been warped to a moonlit bridge. The moon and stars stretched out across the sky, and under our feet extended a large wooden bridge. It was so long that we couldn’t see where exactly it ended.

“It’s a really intriguing place, isn’t it?” Minister Benito said, checking the ground at his feet.

It looked to be a wooden bridge, exactly as expected, and we could hear the hollow knocking sound of wood. Even when he stamped his foot down hard, it showed no signs of breaking. While it appeared that a jump wouldn’t be enough to break the bridge, there was no telling for sure until we fought.

Anemone moved from Benito’s side to the bridge handrail and threw something circular and slightly jagged. It stopped in midair and let out a yellow light before changing into a sharp-tipped rock.

“Hey, Takioto? Is that some kind of sigiled stone?” Yuika asked, staring at

Anemone just like I was. The object did react much like a sigiled stone, but it was slightly different.

“No, that’s an item that Anemone developed herself. Think of it as an improved version of a sigiled stone.”

“Huh,” Yuika idly replied, seemingly convinced.

In the game, Anemone is a mage, an inventor, and an item-user. She has an aptitude for using items, so they are more effective in her hands than anyone else’s. She’s also capable of wielding several exclusive items, and while they don’t bring her up to par with the Big Three, they’re powerful enough to let her stand toe-to-toe with the other main heroines.

The only caveat is that making full use of her abilities unfortunately also means making full use of one’s wallet. She can’t reach her potential unless you have extra cash.

“Hmm, there’s liquid below the bridge. Though it does appear to be just regular water.”

The sharp rock Anemone launched had embedded itself into the soil at the bottom of the water. Ripples were extending out from the spot.

Anemone must have used the item to determine the identity of the liquid beneath the bridge. She tied a string around a mug, and then threw it toward the water. Adjusting the angle of the cup, she scooped up some of the water. After she did, Ivy came over to Anemone’s side of the bridge.

“It doesn’t appear to contain any poisons or the like.”

Ivy came to this conclusion after speaking with Anemone.

Judging by what the rock looked like when it fell, even if we were to fall into the water ourselves, it would only come up to just above our knees. If that was the case, then it seemed like falling in wouldn’t be a problem.

As we stared out at the lake, Yuika heaved a sigh.

“Anyway, it’s a pretty lake, isn’t it?”

I agreed. It was certainly pretty.

If I had to describe it, the atmosphere was similar to Monet's *Water Lilies*. Leaves and flowers floated atop the surface of the lake, which reflected the moon and the stars, and when I strained my eyes, I could make out vivid koi fish.

"If only this was a date spot instead of a dungeon. The atmosphere's perfect, right?" Benito said with a wry smile.

"Benito, look at how many beautiful women you have here with you. You can just pick one and continue on pretending this is a mock date," Anemone said as she continued to investigate the bridge.

"No thanks, Benito and I have nothing in common," Gretel responded. She shifted her grip on her doll and stretched lightly. When she did, she spread her mana all throughout her body, extending it even to her doll.

"A mock date, hm? One with Kou wouldn't be too bad."

"I would be overjoyed to accompany you on a date, Shion."

"Oh really? How exciting indeed ♪!"

"Master, Miss Yuika is growing jealous, so I would leave things at that for now."

"Uhhh, excuse me? Could you not make up these wild conspiracy theories of yours?"

We all quipped back and forth as we began to take our weapons and reapply our enhance magic.

"Well, it looks like everyone's ready. Ivy?"

"From what I can tell at a glance, there aren't any traps nearby."

Benito nodded.

"Shall we, then? We need to catch up to Lauretta."

After heading a bit further in, we saw a humanoid figure standing watch on the bridge.

It appeared to be an armored samurai carrying a large katana. The only difference was it was ink black.

An ink samurai.

This ink samurai held what looked like paper in its hand.

“Hrm, is he planning to confiscate our swords, then?”

Did this world have similar legends to those in Japan?

I was sure there were some who would look at this scene and immediately think of Musashibo Benkei. He was said to steal swords from anyone who passed him on a bridge, or something to that effect. The tale goes that Minamoto no Yoshitsune came across him while disguised as a woman and bested him in combat, prompting Benkei to become Yoshitsune’s follower. Though some people claimed this was all made up.

By the way, both Benkei and Yoshitsune showed up in this world as enemies, but they were so bizarrely strong, it made me wonder if the developers had made an error in adjusting their stats.

If we continued further, we would eventually end up fighting *her*. I trusted we would be all right, though.

But yeah, disguising oneself as a woman. *Hrnk*. M-my head...

“Master, are you all right?”

“It’s nothing. Looks like our opponent here is about to make a move.”

The ink samurai flung the paper in its hands, and from it appeared another ink samurai just like it, along with another that was armed with a bow.

The instant the freshly materialized ink samurai drew his sword, Ivy shouted.

“Shishi, they’re behind us, too!”

I turned back around and saw that several pieces of paper had appeared on top of the bridge, from which spanned several ink samurai.

On top of this, I could see a group of bird-shaped shadows flying ahead of them.

Shion looked back while waving her fan, summoning crescent-shaped black

blades that flew off in front of her.

The blades made direct contact with the bird shadows. The monsters were larger than a normal hawk. The birds scattered their black feathers after being hit while slowly falling down into the lake.

Before these black hawks descended, both we and our enemies began to move.

Ivy was first to jump out onto the front lines. She took out a kunai, affixed a paper talisman to it, and threw it.

Although her projectile flew straight at the ink samurai on the right, the monster repelled it with its katana.

However.

“Fire Escape!”

Flames burst from the kunai the moment it was deflected. Ivy had loaded the talisman with one of her ninja arts. The flames were large enough to completely envelop the ink samurai’s upper body.

She jumped over the head of the burning ink samurai. It looked like her target was the monster staying at long range, a bow-wielding ink samurai.

Meanwhile, Minister Benito was attacking the other ink samurai, preventing the creature from disrupting Ivy’s attack.

Now then, what should I do?

“They left me with the easiest one.”

I closed in on the ink samurai recoiling from the Fire Escape attack. Although it waved its katana in my direction, parrying an attack executed without proper footwork was child’s play.

I parried the strike with my Third Hand, then took another step forward. I had plenty of mana stored up in my sheath. I could already see the line I was supposed to slash, too.

The only thing left to do was draw my katana.

Disregarding the ink samurai, who was frozen on the spot, I checked how

everyone else was doing.

I didn't need to watch Benito in the first place.

The ink samurai were absolutely no match for someone of his caliber. He overwhelmed them in strength, speed, and technique. In fact, I got the feeling that he had grown even stronger since we had last fought together.

What about Ivy?

As I was turning my head, I kicked the ink samurai I had just cut through. It severed cleanly in two and fell to the ground. Only a matter of time before it disintegrated into magic particles.

Ivy had taken out her *shurikens* and was throwing them at the archer. They were all aimed at the hand holding the bow.

The monster must have known the attack was coming. The ink samurai immediately fired an arrow and blocked the *shurikens*. But Ivy didn't let up or falter whatsoever. Even as the arrow came within inches of her face, she maintained her stride.

She had extremely good kinetic eyesight. Her spatial awareness was brilliant as well.

That was probably why she had known where the arrow would fly. She didn't dodge at all as she pushed forward.

She unsheathed her straight sword and jumped high in the air.

Then, spinning around, she cut through the ink samurai.

Our victory was assured. What about Shion and Gretel? I headed over to Yuika, who was watching them fight.

"Wait, the doll moves?!" Yuika shouted in surprise when she looked at the doll Gretel held in her hands.

Gretel ignored Yuika's shock and estimated how many monsters had appeared.

"They're still coming. Shion, leave the ground to me. You take the sky."

“Understood. Nanami, may I leave our nine o’clock to you, then?”

“Of course.”

Shion turned up to the air and waved her fan. Nanami also fixed her aim on the hawk-like monsters flying through the air, drawing back her bow and firing.

Gretel pointed ahead of her, and the doll that had been dancing where she stood dashed off toward the ink samurai she’d indicated.

I didn’t really understand why, but while the doll’s expression hadn’t changed at all, it almost seemed like it was gleefully laughing.

When the ink samurai swung its katana, the doll repelled the blade with the claws growing out of its left hand. Then as it jukeed to the left, it slashed with the claws on its right hand.

“Hrmph.”

A grunt of displeasure escaped Gretel’s lips. The ink samurai twisted its body and blocked the attack with its armor. Evidently, she’d objected to this.

She moved a finger on her right hand, and the doll responded by moving as well.

The doll took another step toward the ink samurai. It jumped into the air, evading the monster’s kick. From there, it was entirely one-sided.

Right hand, left hand, right hand, left hand. The doll began attacking its foes in a series of fluid movements. It had gotten in so close that the ink samurai couldn’t draw its katana.

“Incredible...I never thought a doll could move like that,” Yuika murmured.

“You could search the whole world and probably not find anyone else like her,” said Minister Benito, having defeated his opponent and come up beside me and Yuika.

“Wait, but Benito, earth magic’s your specialty, right? Are you not that good at controlling golems?”

“Oh no, Gretel’s doll is a bit different from a golem. I could make a golem move, sure. But they can’t move like that. You can’t give them a lot of different

commands in the first place. Tell one to fight and yes, it'll fight, but that's all."

"I see. So you couldn't tell it to, say, knock a shield away and aim for a weak point, or to aim for the feet as necessary, then?"

"I'm sure an all-time golem master could throw in more commands at once, but that's basically about it. Anyway, Gretel can pull off a technique that's even more shocking than this, though she didn't use it this time."

The ink samurai tried to attack with its sword hilt, but Gretel's doll dodged this attack, too. The doll then, of all things, jumped up and landed on the hilt, using it as footing to shoot even higher into the air...with its claws raised.

Its hand pierced the ink samurai's throat.

"Round two," Gretel murmured.

When she did, the doll charged off toward a freshly materializing ink samurai.

"She can manipulate that doll like it's an extension of her own body. As for why she's capable of such a feat, it's because she's a bit like Takioto—she has an aptitude for a unique type of non-elemental magic."

Yuika and Minister Benito looked at my stole.

"Personally, I think Takioto's stole is lot closer to Gretel than a golem."

"True, her ability to manipulate it at will is a lot like Takioto's relationship to his stole."

Gretel's doll had already driven the new ink samurai into a corner. Knocking down its katana with its claws, the doll kicked off the ground to launch itself into the air.



“Right? It’s plain to see that this fighting style is unique to Gretel and Gretel alone. That’s why we call her Gretel the Puppeteer.”

Gretel’s doll thrust its claws at the ink samurai’s face.

It happened right as she defeated the monster. A newly summoned ink hawk soared right up into the air, and then headed in a straight line down at Gretel.

I went to her side to defend her and bashed the bird with my stole.

She glanced at me. There was a doll in her hands. The one that had been fighting was still running toward us, so this was a different doll entirely. However, the new one looked identical to the first.

Since the hawk had fallen right near the other doll as it was dashing back toward us, Gretel ordered it to deliver the finishing blow.

“Sorry for cutting in.”

“It’s fine. That’s some fighting style you’ve got. It’s just as interesting as people made it out to be,” Gretel replied, touching my stole.

“This is the first time I’ve ever seen someone fight the way you do, too, Gretel.”

Though I did know about how she fought from the game.

Shion and Nanami appeared to have shot down all the hawks that were still in the air. Together with Ivy, who had come back around at some point to help out, they slowly walked over to us.

“That was quite the show,” Anemone said, clapping.

“Stop gawking and fight,” Shion said in rebuke.

“Oh sorry, sorry. But there is something I figured out from watching. These creatures are probably made out of some black ink-like substance.”

“Ink?”

“That’s right. Did you watch how they change after you defeat them?”

“I did,” nodded Gretel.

“After I killed them, they transformed into some liquid and turned to magic

particles.”

“Right. I was convinced they were darkness-aligned like Shion, but they wouldn’t have undergone a change like that if they were. More importantly, Benito used light magic on them, and they didn’t seem especially weak to it. That said, they don’t appear to be water-aligned, either. They’re likely non-elemental.”

“Huh, I was sure they must have been darkness-aligned,” Yuika said, looking impressed.

“Unfortunately, that’s the extent of what I’ve figured out. So, why don’t we ask Takioto about the rest, shall we? He’s familiar with this monster after all. Aren’t you?”

Anemone was trying to suss out information about me.

“Yes, I do know. I read about them in a reference book.”

Given the situation, I figured it was best to accept it and face her head-on.

“A reference book, hm? Right, a reference book. Sure, of course. Well, just what sort of monster is it, then? Your lovely upperclassman would like to know.”

“As you observed, all the monsters we fought were made out of an ink-like substance. Lampblack ink, to be precise. An ink similar to the kind used in Wakoku and other countries for centuries, would be a good way to think of it.”

“Oh, oh, oh! My talismans are written with that type of ink! Apparently, it’s easier for mana to pass through it,” Ivy said, showing one of her talismans to us. So, these were written in lampblack ink, were they? This was the first I’d heard of that. Ah well, that wasn’t important.

“Their bodies are made out of this ink, and as you surmised, they’re non-elemental. I can get into the details as we keep moving. I’d like to hurry.”

“Right, that’s a good point,” Minister Benito said before we all forged ahead, keeping our guards up. While we were walking, Benito brought the conversation back to the monsters.

“So, can you continue what you were saying?”

“Right. These monsters are a variety of pictorial beast, creatures that are ink drawings given form.”

“That would explain the paper, then.”

“That being said, what’s got me personally worried is how little paper there was here.”

“The lack of paper?”

“This is all just my estimate, but I think the church followers haven’t gotten as far ahead as we thought.”

“Really? Why’s that then?”

“Because there’s not a lot of paper.”

“A tight spot to be in if one was on the toilet. Or perhaps a golden opportunity?”

Anemone was spouting some weird nonsense, so I ignored her. Though seriously, what the hell kind of opportunity was she talking about? Shoot! Here I was, mentally preparing a retort despite myself.

“There should have been a lot more paper here, spawning a massive group of monsters. This dungeon’s the type to overwhelm you with numbers.”

“Kou, you mentioned a strength on par with the fiftieth layer and beyond, but...those monsters did indeed roll over quite easily.”

“And why would that be? I’d guess it was probably because someone preceding us had only just defeated them, and they haven’t respawned yet.”

Either the followers of the Church of the Malevolent Lord were proceeding with caution, or they weren’t very strong and were having a tough time moving forward. That was about where my simple deduction landed me.

“Hmm, I see. Then we should pick up the pace a little.”

“Yes, if my prediction’s on the mark, then we should be able to catch up to them soon.”



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim —*Ivy's Perspective*— When we continued along the big bridge, we saw a group of three students and two adults. In the middle of the students stood a girl I recognized.

They immediately noticed our arrival.

“Lauretty!” I shouted.

They all readied weapons and raised their guards. They looked a little bit worn out, probably from rushing over to this section of the dungeon.

“Oh hey, Chief. Benito’s with you, too? What brought you all here?”

“Is that truly all you have to say for yourself?” Shion asked.

“Hold on there. Despite how I may look, I’m still a third-year. Is that how you talk to your upperclassman?” Lauretta said, flashing the ribbon that displayed her third-year status.

“I would say you aren’t deserving of manners, wouldn’t you agree?”

I could tell that Shishi’s mana was mounting. Not just hers, actually—everyone was getting ready for a fight.

Upon closer inspection, the adults looked vaguely familiar, too. There were a bunch of different facilities on campus, so they might have belonged to one of them.

“Well, have you found the Yata no Kagami yet?”

Takky’s question made Lauretty’s breath catch in her throat.

“...Well, well, you knew about it, did you? No wonder you chased after us.”

Lauretty must not have expected that anyone would chase her down. The average person wouldn’t intentionally seek out a dead end on a random floor of the dungeon.

Plus, the Yata no Kagami’s location was only written down on the scroll Lauretty had stolen.

“That’s the Hanamuras for you. Such tricky tanuki. Or maybe foxes,

perhaps?”

“Ohhh, are you introducing yourself? You certainly have the face and personality to match.”

Lauretty sucked in her cheeks at Yuika’s frank comment.

“You Hanamuras and your lackey have quite the mouth. Well, that’s neither here nor there.”

“Yes, yes, that’s right. You’ve got a point; that stuff doesn’t matter at all. The one thing we can say for certain is that you all are with the Church of the Malevolent Lord and are trying to harm the Academy,” Anemone declared.

“So our true identities *were* exposed. But how?”

She glanced at me. Then she looked at Takky.

“Oh well, whatever,” Lauretty said, before raising her staff and beginning to chant an incantation. Takky and the others readied their weapons. The whole situation was a powder keg, ready to blow. And at that moment...

I realized I needed to get everyone to stop.

“Wait!”

I put away my weapons and brought out my arms, standing in front of Lauretty. She seemed to be casting a spell, but nothing happened. Had I stopped her? I thought I saw the magic stone on her staff flash black for a second.

She’d done me a huge favor by halting her incantation.

“Please don’t attack Lauretta! Please just wait a bit longer!”

I needed to use this time to get to the bottom of things.

“Ivy.”

Benito called my name. He didn’t put down his sword. He kept it poised and ready, directed at me, and Lauretty behind me.

To ensure he could attack at a moment’s notice.

Takky and the others, too. None of them dropped their weapons; they were

ready to fight at any time. The same went for Lauretty's group as well.

Spells could start flying from both sides at any moment. To be honest, I was scared. But I wanted to know the truth. That was why I directed a question at Lauretty.

"This has to be some sorta mistake, right, Lauretty? I want to hear it in your words. Is someone threatening you into this...?"

Lauretty didn't say a thing. Yuiyui spoke up as she began to lose her temper.

"Uhhh, Laurettaaaaa? I'm pretty sure you have something to say here."

Lauretty looked at me. Stared me all over with her cold, emotionless eyes. Then, she opened her mouth...

"Gosh, you're *such* an *idiot*! It made it so much easier."

"Ah..."

The words wouldn't come. She purposefully inflected her voice and said it once more, wholeheartedly belittling me.

"Such an idiot. Soooooooo *dumb*. I was tricking you into doing exactly what I wanted, but you never even had a clue. You went along with everything, wearing that goofy smile. I almost pitied you, really. I thought to myself, *At this rate, she's going to wind up dead.*"

A black fog began to choke the area around me. Then my mother flashed into my mind. She, too, had been manipulated by her close friend.

My mother, who had died with a sad smile on her face...

An aching pain rushed to my head. This wasn't the time to remember that. I understood that. Not right now. Yet, for some reason, I couldn't help but recall everything.

Lauretty's voice echoed inside my head.

"*You're just going to be betrayed again anyway.*"

I was confused. Lauretty's mouth wasn't moving, yet I could hear her voice directly in my head.

"Like I betrayed you."

Betrayed? I was? By who? Benito? Monica?

But they would never—

"They'll betray you, all right. I mean, you trusted me just as much or more, and look what happened."

They won't betray me, right? Huh?

"Then you'll lose yet another person you treasure. All while getting the people around you wrapped up in it all, too."

"I'll be betrayed and lose someone?"

"Then you'll be tossed aside and end up dead yourself."

"Ivy."

"Honestly, you should just hole up at home and never step outside again."

"Ivy..."

"Ah hah hah hah hah hah hah hah, hah hah hah hah hah hah!"

"Ivy."

When I came back to my senses, Takky was right in front of me. Wait, the atmosphere seemed a bit different from a moment ago...

Lauretty was talking to Minister Benito about something. It seemed like she was disparaging him?

...Wait, but I should have still been in between Benito and Lauretty. Yet for some reason, Benito and the others were standing in front of me.

Why?

Oh, Lauretty just glanced at me. Did she have a pained look on her face? Why was that?

"Takky? Something's weird, right? Or am I the one who's off here?"

I was being deceived, but I was also being weird? Hmm, wait. I didn't really know why, but my emotions and thoughts were all muddled together...

"Ivy, calm down and listen to me closely. The followers of the Church of the Malevolent Lord will sometimes use dark magic to psychically attack you. Please, don't let them fool you."

"Psychic attacks?"

Now that Takky mentioned it, the Lauretty from a moment ago hadn't felt that real.

"That's right. The same thing happened at Amaterasu Girl's Academy. They'll dredge up and replay your past before your eyes or exploit a sore spot."

Something similar had happened at Amaterasu?

"In your case, however, you can avoid it really easily."

"I can?"

"You just need to believe. In me and your friends."

"Believe? But, huh?"

I'd be betrayed if I believed in others, right? Wait, but I had a feeling that wasn't actually true. What was going on?

"First, I want you to trust me."

Takky squeezed my hand tight. It was like a samurai's hand, far more rugged than it should have been on a young person, likely from swinging his sword so much. He squeezed my hand tight.

Then he addressed me with a dead-serious look on his face.

"I absolutely won't betray you, Ivy. I won't abandon you."

"But if someone I really care about dies, someone other than me, then..."

"I'm not going to let anyone close to you die. I won't let it happen."

"Takky..."

But they *would* die. After all my mother... No, hold on. Had I ever mentioned... that my mom was dead before? No, I was pretty sure I hadn't.

Takky glanced over to Benito and murmured, “Shoot.”

“A fight’s going to break out at any moment... Ivy, this is important, so I’ll say it again,” he said. “I’ll stick by you through thick and thin. No one is going to die. Not you or anyone else.”

“Um, Takky—”

“If anything does happen, I’ll protect you with my life.”

Saying this, he got in front of me and blocked the spell flying at us.

There I saw his dependable back, seemingly ready to shoulder all of the anxieties in my chest.

—*Takioto’s Perspective*— The important part of this battle against Lauretta and her group of Church followers was avoiding their psychic attacks.

This battle normally has the protagonist fight alongside Ivy to keep Ludie safe. But the crucial person, Ludie, wasn’t here. As such, all we had to do was to work together with Ivy and defeat them.

However, there was still something I needed to be wary of. The followers’ dark magic.

The Church of the Malevolent Lord would launch psychic attacks at Ivy during this fight. I’d spoken to her just now to avoid this.

If Ivy could withstand their psychic attacks this time, she would obtain a resistance to them. Against the Church, who she was likely to battle again later down the line, this was an extremely beneficial skill to have.

They must have forced her to remember about being betrayed, or the trauma of her mother’s death. By overcoming this, she would gain the ability to withstand psychic attacks.

Truthfully speaking, a dark magic specialist like Shion, or someone of holy blood like Yuika, could block psychic attacks, too. However, I’d asked them not to interfere, even if they noticed them.

Down the line, we would need the skill Ivy could gain here. She would fight

against the Church, sometimes without myself or Ludie with her. This Lauretta incident was one such encounter, and it wouldn't be long before her father broached a certain topic with her.

Of course, I'd also asked them to interfere if things truly took a turn for the worse. Yuika was also keeping an eye on me and Ivy as she stood on guard against the enemy.

The rest was up to Ivy. This time, we couldn't do anything more than offer her our support.

Now, the remaining problem was Lauretta.

The students with the Church of the Malevolent Lord had aimed their attacks at Ivy. I stepped out in front of them and blocked the spells with my stole.

The battle had begun.

Lauretta took aim at Minister Benito first. She had a feud with his family, the Evangelistas. Though to be precise, the source of her hatred actually lay with another family on good terms with the Evangelistas, the Canossa family.

The two adults took out black stones and threw them. The stones created a magic circle in midair and began summoning monsters that resembled black feline carnivores.

These items must have been gifted to them by the demons who were working alongside the Church. The followers of the Malevolent Lord used them often.

Gretel, Shion, and Anemone moved in to handle them.

A long-haired and a short-haired male student turned toward me and Ivy. One had a longsword and one had a rapier, and when they closed the distance, they began attacking in perfect sync with each other.

First, the short-haired student sent a fireball at me; immediately after that, the long-haired student came in from the side and swung down his longsword on me. When I blocked them both with my Third and Fourth Hands, the short-haired student's rapier slipped through the opening, coming straight for me.

Nevertheless, I easily parried his weapon with my katana. When I launched a spinning kick to counter him, the long-haired student got in front of me and blocked with his sword.

For second-years at the Academy, they were skilled. For second-years, at least.

“Is that it?”

I used all my strength to send the student flying with a kick. Unable to halt his momentum, he and the short-haired rapier-wielder behind him were both slammed back-first against the handrail of the bridge.

I had been training day in and day out with the strongest the Academy had to offer. Parrying an attack like that was child’s play. Yukine’s blows were far and away more powerful.

“Takky, I can fight, too.”

I heard a bold voice next to me. Ivy seemed to have shrugged off the dark magic psychic attack and was now ready to battle. She was probably going to get hit with the same attack several more times, but for the time being...

“Yeah, let’s do this.”

The battle was completely in our favor. Naturally.

For starters, everyone here was the *crème de la crème* of the student population. A regular student would never stand a chance crossing swords with us.

Still, our opponents must have understood this as well.

“I brought this with me thinking we’d use it against the boss here, but...”

Lauretta produced something from her pocket. It was black and spikey... Uh-oh.

“Guys, don’t let her use that thing!”

“You know what this is, do you? Too late, though!” Lauretta yelled. Then the tips of these black blades stabbed her and her compatriots.

Yuika and the others looked on with shock at the Church of the Malevolent

Lord followers. And rightfully so—the blades had pierced through vital areas.

“It hit their hearts and necks?!” Shion murmured, recoiling.

“Graaaaauugh!”

The Church follower in front of me yelled. His voice sounded as if everything from deep inside him was being squeezed out. The blade that had pierced him glowed crimson before it crumbled like sand, disappearing before it hit the ground.

Then the student began to undergo transformation.

He slowly turned black, and his body grew a whole size bigger...until a pair of horns sprouted from his head. His eyes turned red as well, and his mana was boosted to a level far greater than it had been before.

“They can’t be demons, right...? No. It doesn’t look that way.”

The transformation had ended halfway.

“Couldn’t completely transform, then?” Anemone spat.

It wasn’t only the student in front of us who had transformed. That also applied...

“Lauretty!”

...to Lauretta, too. Ivy tried to go to her side, but Lauretta launched a spell at her feet.

“...How long are you going to insist on calling me that stupid nickname?” she said before pointing her staff right at her. Ivy instantly froze. She must have been hit with an intense psychic attack.

Minister Benito went over to help her, but one of the followers attacked him.

“Yuika, Nanami, take care of this one for me.”

Shion, Gretel, and Anemone were all fighting against someone, so it fell to me to help Ivy.

Surprisingly, Ivy was fully conscious and alert. Lauretta’s attack had barely affected her.

“...I’ll be betrayed? Nah, I won’t. Takky reassured me he won’t. Oh, there you are, Takky.”

I was sure of that because she clearly recognized me. Her eyes were properly focused, too.

“All you do is get in the way,” Laretta told me.

“Funny, from my perspective, it’s like all you do is give me trouble.”

Normally, this dungeon comes much later in the narrative. That was why Laretta’s group was having such a difficult time with it, and why we’d caught up to them quickly.

“Takky, listen. Um, can you say it to me again?” Ivy said to me, wiping off her sweat. What did she want me to say to her? The answer was obvious.

“I’ll stick by you, Ivy.”

Ivy beamed. As I stared at her adorable, somewhat innocent smile, I broke into a grin myself.

It was the same smile as her mother’s—one that brought happiness to everyone around her.

“!”

Laretta’s staff began to tremble.

Then the magic stone on its tip began to shine before it crumbled to dust.

“Takky, please stay out of this.”

Ivy got in front of me. She had dispelled the effects of the psychic attack.

“...Will you be all right?”

“Of course. I was the strongest *kunoichi* in my village, you know,” she said, puffing out her chest.

“...If things get seriously dicey, I’m going to jump in, okay? Leave the riffraff to me.”

“Thanks.”

She turned to Laretta.

Meanwhile, I couldn't let anyone interrupt their battle, now could I?

"All right, come get me."

I decided to wait and fight the feline monsters nearby. When I challenged them, a few went toward Anemone and Gretel's doll, while a few came for me.

The monsters' speed and strength appeared to have increased, likely an effect from their casters'—the two adult followers—half-demon transformation.

Of course, this wasn't limited to just the monsters, and I could assume that the speed of all the Church followers had doubled. However, they didn't seem to have complete control over their abilities. But even if they'd had full control over them...

"Did you really think you could best us?"

I had grown stronger to ensure that all the heroines got to see their happy ending. Nanami and Yuika, fighting alongside me, had grown in power, too. And since I had shared my knowledge of how to grow stronger, the members of the Ceremonial Committee had all powered up, too. Everyone on the Three Committees had.

That was why I had managed to defeat the Book of Raziel, which was almost always a second playthrough event, my first time through.

Fully transformed demons would be one thing, but there was no way we would lose to these shoddy imitations.

I slashed through a nearby monster.

"Have we just about wrapped things up?"

Minister Benito and the others were almost finished as well. They'd barely exerted themselves.

Now, for Ivy...

It looked like Laretta thought that she was pushing Ivy to the brink with her rapid-fire magic attacks.

However, she hadn't yet realized that she was the one being cornered.

"Chief!"

The spell flew right as Laretta shouted this. Ivy couldn't dodge it. And there wasn't any need for her to evade it in the first place.

The moment the spell hit, Ivy disappeared, and a log with a talisman stuck to it appeared in her place.

"Substitution Jutsu?! Impossible!"

That Ivy had been a fake all along. The real one was already behind Laretta.

"Got you!"

Ivy held a kunai to Laretta's throat.

A silence fell. Everyone else's fights had finished. Obviously, we'd thrashed them.

Laretta looked around and let out a small sigh. She slowly relaxed her hands and dropped her staff.

"...I had an inkling things might turn out like this," Laretta said, lowering her eyes to the ground.

"I wanted revenge... On the Canossa family and the Evangelista family...the aristocrats who put an end to our family back then."

Ivy took the kunai away from her throat.

"I really did, sure, but...I never wanted it badly enough to harm people who didn't have anything to do with it."

Laretta slowly lifted her face. She was crying.

"Laretty... Do you mean you didn't want to do any of this, either?" Ivy asked.

"I just couldn't turn back. All of us, really. We all had our reasons we couldn't turn back," Laretta affirmed. "See, I committed crimes before I even came to this school. Lots of them."

She looked down at her half-transformed hand.

"At first, my desire for revenge on the Evangelistas and Canossas was so strong that I didn't think anything of my misdeeds. But..."

Lauretta looked at Ivy. Then at Minister Benito.

“It was both physically and mentally difficult to harm you, Chief. Both Benito and Gabriella are part of the Evangelista family, but I knew deep down that they aren’t bad people. I mean, how could I after they were so nice to everyone, so nice to me?”

Minister Benito balled his fist and gritted his teeth.

Lauretta continued.

“I can’t do it anymore. After I came to the Academy, all my aggression and anger melted away. I was actually told to either kidnap or kill Princess Ludivine, but I probably couldn’t have done it if I tried.”

“You were trying to kill Ludie, Lauretty?”

Lauretta nodded.

“But you screwed things up and ruined the plan, Chief. Part of me thought it was a bit of a lucky break, but the horrible state of that shrine was no joke.”

“Lucky?”

“The Yata no Kagami. I thought if I had one of the items needed to revive the Malevolent Lord, then I could ignore Princess Ludivine entirely. That way, I could get through it all without killing anyone. I don’t think I’d be able to murder someone myself, no matter how hard I tried. So the only option would be to get someone else to do it for me. I know that makes me just as much of a criminal as the killer, but I couldn’t do the deed myself.”

“Lauretty... Then, why don’t you atone for your crimes? You’re not cut out to be an evildoer.”

“That’s impossible. I’ve committed so many misdeeds. Fraud, abetting crimes, all sorts of stuff. My parents are dead. I don’t have anyone. Just look at this hand. It’s the same as me,” she said, showing us her own hand. The one that had been half-transmogrified into a demon’s.

“I’m just like this imperfectly transformed hand; unable to fully become a follower of the Malevolent Lord, unable to kill anyone, yet unable to stop, everything I do incomplete and half-hearted. What can I even do with a hand

like this? All that's left for me is to die a miserable, lonely death."

Before I could open my mouth to tell Lairetta that wasn't going to happen, someone spoke up.

"That's not true."

It was Ivy.

"You're not alone, Lairetty."

"What?"

"I'm your friend. I'll always take your hand, no matter how it looks."

Ivy smiled, engendering joy in anyone and everyone.

When she did, Lairetta flashed a weak grin. Ivy approached her and wiped away Lairetta's tears.

"You really are an idiot, Chief."

"Yeaaah, I know."

"Chief, I'm sorry, but can I ask you for a favor?"

"...What sorta favor?"

"According to the scroll, several powerful guardians have appeared in this dungeon... Can I ask you to settle this for me?"

Ivy winked.

"You're always cleaning up after me, so for today, it's my turn."

From there, we consulted as a group and decided on restraining Lairetta and the other followers. Gretel would bring them back to the dungeon entrance with a returning stone. They were being interrogated by Anemone, Nanami, and Minister Benito at the moment, but they would likely be sent back soon.

I hadn't mentioned it yet, but the truth was that with Yuika's saint powers and Ms. Sakura's knowledge, it was possible to reverse the half-demon transformation.

I couldn't guarantee it, since I needed to confirm this with Ms. Sakura, so I

didn't say anything. Still, I would undo it for them later. If they used up too much power in that state, it would shorten their lifespan.

More important, though, was Ivy. She was very plainly agonizing about something.

She was probably thinking about the Church of the Malevolent Lord right now. About what she needed to do to ensure another case like Lauretta's never happened again.

"Ivy, were you thinking about the Church for the Malevolent Lord just now?"

When I addressed her, she puffed out her cheeks into an exaggerated pout.

"Sheesh, Takky, don't you know you shouldn't be reading a young lady's mind like that?!"

I mean, her whole body was screaming, *I've got a lot on my mind*. She was even hemming and hawing to herself. Ah well, none of that really mattered. More importantly...

"Please don't push yourself too hard. When it comes to the Church, both me and Marino, and even the Tréfle royal family are all pursuing them. So please, talk to me first. I promise I'll be able to help."

I stopped to take a deep breath before continuing.

"I'm sure you realized with this incident, but not all members of the Church of the Malevolent Lord are the same. There are some like Lauretta, who are manipulated by their desire for revenge, and some who have been forced to fight because the Church has taken their loved ones hostage. Someone I want to save is among these followers."

"Takky, are you saying you've already fought the Church?"

"A few times now, yeah."

I was going to clash with them several more times from here on out, too. Risking my life to do so.

"Hey, Takky, tell me. Just what are you fighting for? To take down the Church of the Malevolent Lord?" Ivy asked me, narrowing her eyes.

Why was I fighting? That was a no-brainer.

“Defeating them is one of the things I want to do, sure. But I’m really fighting because there are people I want to save, and people who I want to find happiness.”

I was fighting to protect Ludie and the rest of the heroines. That included Ivy, of course.

“That’s why I’ll take on any opponent to help the people I care about. Regardless of whether they’re with the Church of the Malevolent Lord, or Leggenze, or whoever else.”

The two big turning points that were on the horizon. I had to win no matter what. I couldn’t afford even the slightest misstep. After all...

“I’m greedy, so I want to save everyone. I want everyone to be happy. But I’ll need a tremendous amount of strength to make that happen.”

Indeed, I needed power. I looked at my hand. I still lacked the strength.

“That’s the whole reason I’m aiming to be the strongest. No, that’s not right.”

No matter how painful, how hard it would be, I needed to obtain strength that surpassed President Monica and Iori’s.

“I *will* become the strongest.”

And then, I would protect everyone to the end.

When I glanced at Ivy, she was staring vacantly at me, her mouth half open.

“Ivy?”

“Oh, um... I was just thinking that I can’t afford to fall behind. That’s all. Yeah, that’s it, okay?” she said before running off toward Laretta.

We entrusted Laretta and the other followers to Gretel and continued forward. Although we had several fights along the way, we eventually arrived at our destination.

“The bridge ends?” Minister Benito asked.

The bridge that had stretched on endlessly until now abruptly cut off.

“I’ll take a look.”

Ivy kept her guard up as she headed to the edge.

“It almost seems like we’re supposed to hip-hop into the water and continue from there.”

The single wooden bridge inclined downward and extended into the water for some reason. It came to an end at the bottom of the lake.

Ivy squatted down and dipped her index finger in the water. This created a ripple, as small as the ones made by a water strider.

“Is this truly our only path forward?”

Shion wore a look of displeasure. She must not have wanted to get her kimono wet.

“Miss Shion, I do have a school swimsuit, if you would prefer that.”

“Why the hell do you have something like that?”

“Please, put your mind at ease. This item was tailor-made to fit you perfectly.”

“Pray tell, why is my name written on this with the penmanship of a child?”

Shion took the swimsuit from Nanami. Perhaps by some miracle she would actually put it on. It would look great on her (without a doubt).

However, Shion immediately gave the swimsuit back to Nanami, who then held it out to me for some reason.

“There’s no telling what might come up, so please hold onto it, Master.”

This was *never* coming up.

For the time being, I took the swimsuit from her. But wait, why exactly had she thrown in another one labeled YUIKA? Yuika, I wish you wouldn’t look at me like I was some dangerous weirdo. A shiver ran down my spine. Hmm, just what was this strange emotion welling up inside me?

While we quipped back and forth, Anemone threw a rock. It ballooned to a massive size and fell on top of the water with a loud splash.

“Hmm, it’s not that deep.”

Judging by how the rock had landed, the water level came to just above my ankle. Minister Benito and Anemone both took a step into the lake.

I went into the water myself. It was cold, like a footbath.

“I just realized that all the plant life from earlier has disappeared.”

Nanami followed in right after me.

“It’s still super pretty, though. A little cold, but still pretty.”

A moment later, Yuika descended from the bridge and into the water herself.

I looked ahead and saw that the moon and the stars were reflected on the water’s surface, almost like a mirror. Depending on the angle, I might get an upskirt... Nope, no dice.

“Yeah, let’s keep going.”

“Look sharp, everyone! Something’s coming this way!”

An anomaly appeared on the water’s surface.

“What’s that thing? Well, whatever it is, it creeps me out... *Bleh.*”

The black liquid flowed along the surface of the lake and closed in on our position. It looked almost like cooking oil floating over water. Turn that oil black, and you’d have a similar situation on your hands.

When I considered that this mass was the enemy we were about to fight, I put two and two together.

“That’s gotta be ink.”

“Ink, hmm? Judging from all the fights to get here, I have a very bad feeling about this. Hah-hah.”

Minister Benito smiled even as he mentioned his unsettling premonition. Was he a masochist? I would’ve guessed Anemone standing next to him was one as well. Though she could be plenty sadistic at times, too.

“It is not coming toward us. Perhaps the sight of a maid frightened it away.”

“But isn’t the substance forming into some kind of shape?”

Yuika ignored Nanami’s stupid remark and strained her eyes.

The liquid didn’t come all the way up to us. Instead, it gathered in a single spot, before it finally coalesced into a two-dimensional shape.

Everyone readied their weapons and stood on guard against it.

It transformed into the shape of a horse.

“A horse?” Yuika murmured. However, she was mistaken. That’s not what it was.

“No, that’s not a horse... It’s a Kirin.”

It just wasn’t my day. Out of all the bosses that had a chance of showing up here, we’d ended up with one of the seriously strong ones. This dungeon was already high-level as it was, too. The sole saving grace was that we’d avoided the worst possible outcome.

“Takioto, you know what that thing is?”

I nodded at Anemone’s question.

“That’s an Inkwash Beast. These monsters are a bit unique—they can transform into different shapes mid-battle. You fought something a bit like this before, right, Yuika?”

“Shape changing... Oh, you mean like those slimes? Of course, I remember.”

As we conversed, the black liquid finished painting the Kirin. On top of that, it gradually started physically materializing.

The two-dimensional picture floating on the water’s surface changed into a three-dimensional creature with an actual form. Oh, if only this was happening to a beautiful 2D girl instead.

“Inkwash Beasts are painted monsters, and I know what type of Inkwash Beast this one is,” I said.

“What do you mean by ‘type’?”

“Oh, you mean like how we’ve got a bunny-eared type, an angelic maid type, a little sister type, a Wakoku type, a hunky type, and maybe a mad scientist type here?”

Nanami was referring to us, wasn’t she? In any case, I supposed that in a broader sense, she wasn’t exactly wrong?

“That’s not right at all, but it also sort of is? Let’s see, there are spirits, birds, ogres...”

There was a chance that either a spirit-, bird-, ogre-, or dragon-type Inkwash Beast would appear here. Furthermore...

“Out of all the possible forms it can take, this one is pretty dangerous.”

Though it was still better than a dragon, at least.

The materialized Kirin’s mana was growing stronger. This was having an effect on the water at its feet.

Despite the fact that the Kirin hadn’t moved an inch and there was no wind to speak of, a ripple moved across the lake, as though an object had been dropped in it.

When the ripple passed through us all, I felt like I’d been hit in the back of the head. Of course, I wasn’t the only one who felt this; everyone experienced for themselves just how formidable our foe was.

“So, what type is this Inkwash Beast, then? I love to tantalize, and be tantalized, as much as anybody, but it doesn’t seem like the time for either, does it?”

Anemone took out a squid-shaped flask, removed the cork, and poured its contents over herself. Then she reapplied her enhancement magic. She’d felt the enemy’s strength firsthand and had kicked things up a notch.

“That’s a Mythical Beast. A Mythical Inkwash Beast.”

“Mythical? That really seems a bit unnecessary, wouldn’t you say?”

A strained smile came to Minister Benito's face.

"Takioto, that slime had an element it was weak against, didn't it? What about that thing?"

I shook my head.

"It basically doesn't have one."

"Excuse me?"

"It doesn't have any weaknesses. The slime from before did, but this one doesn't. It's just that depending on the form it takes, there are parts that are harder to land an attack on."

"Conversely, that means that anything will work on it, right? Everyone, get ready to fight...though it looks like you all are already."

"But of course! I'll be the early bird to catch the worm."

Shion fluttered her fan several times. Crescent-shaped black blades appeared before her and flew straight at the Inkwash Beast.

There were three blades total. The Inkwash Beast took a step and casually dodged two of them, then deflected the last one with the horns growing from its head. It didn't seem to take any damage.

Just then, I remembered something.

"Oh right, Shion, Anemone. Be careful, poison won't work on it."

"Oh, that's too bad. I had a concoction I was looking to test out, too," Anemone said without taking her eyes off the Inkwash Beast.

"Well, I guess I'll have to settle for that *kunoichi* over there."

"Nope, nope, no thanks! I'm going first, Benito. Ninpo: Water Spider!"

Ivy made signs with her hand and jumped where she stood. Shockingly, she reappeared on the surface of the water.

"Something's seriously off with ninjas," I couldn't help but murmur. One of the privileges they enjoyed was that they didn't have to worry much about the terrain. Thanks to their powerful jumping abilities, they possessed mobility on par with the flying characters, and on top of that, one of their Water Escape

Arts removed their limitations on moving through water.

Incidentally, if Nanami and Iori fulfilled the right prerequisites, they could learn these ninjutsu skills. What the hell was with those two?!

Ivy bounded off the water's surface, heading for the Kirin. Minister Benito marched forward behind her.

"_____!"

Right as the Kirin let out a cry like nails on glass, black jagged objects appeared in the air around it. These bolts of lightning then shot toward Benito and Ivy.

Ink lightning. The Inkwash Beast hadn't launched just one, either. It had sent over ten bolts at each of them.

Ivy dodged them by stepping side to side.

"They're that slow...? Wait, I lied! Too fast, too faaaaaaaaast!"

As one bolt after another launched at Ivy, she continued to dodge as best she could, her face lacking any and all composure.

"Hold on, do those things double their speed?"

"It looks like it! And the farther away they are, the more dangerous they become."

The lightning bolts started out slow but grew faster as time passed. This acceleration could continue ad infinitum.

"Trying to kill us from long-range, then," Nanami said as she let loose her arrows.

"It would seem the power of the bolts increases with the distance as well. The only upside is that they can only approach in a straight line."

Shion, skilled at long-range attacks like Nanami, looked just as troubled by the trickiness of these attacks.

"Hmm, they've got quite the heft behind them, don't they?"

Minister Benito was dodging the bolts that he could dodge and using his sword to stop the ones that came close to hitting him. Meanwhile, for any of

the bolts that threatened to strike us...

“Stone Wall.”

He would summon a stone barrier to block them. As I watched this, something occurred to me.

“I should be out in front.”

If these attacks got more powerful the farther they traveled, then it would be better for me to get up close and block the creature’s incoming attacks. As for offense and healing...

“I’m counting on you to cover my back, okay? I’ll ask for everyone else’s help, too.”

“Leave it to me.”

“Be careful out there! I can’t use any big healing magic spells, got it?!”

...Nanami, Yuika, Shion, and Anemone had that covered.

“Okay, Kou. It’s difficult to push forward, no? Allow me to deliver you,” Shion said, sending a shadow at my feet. I crouched down while covering my front with my stole, and Shion made the shadow materialize.

“Please be gentle.”

“Oh, but of course. One full-power pitch coming up.”

“Wait, are you sure about that? That’s too danger— Nah, Takioto should be fine.”

Hold on Yuika! I definitely wasn’t fine!

“Hahaha, hahahahahaha! Enjoy the ride!”

“Bwaaaaaaaugh! Shion, not so haaaaaaaard!”

Shion laughed as she launched me with the force of a ballista.

I’d had Ludie do something similar for me once before, but back then, I’d just been trying to get somewhere fast. This time, I also needed to attack.

I felt a bit like a human cannonball. As I approached the Kirin, I added more solidifying power to my stole, making it even harder. Then I scored a direct hit

on the Kirin with it.

“No way!”

But I was the one who ended up getting sent flying. The creature easily stomped me with its horns, then threw me away.

I immediately readjusted my stance and landed in the water. But the Kirin had already launched its next attack.

“—————!”

Yet more ink lightning. Several bolts that had appeared in the air around the beast came flying in my direction.

Nevertheless, if they really did get weaker at close-range, then...

“Guess I’d better charge on in.”

I decided to move forward. Nanami and the others were behind me. The farther ahead I advanced, the more easily I’d be able to obstruct the Kirin’s attacks, taking the heat off my companions behind me. If there was one thing I was afraid of, though, it was that the Kirin would try to bash me with its horns or legs while the lightning was still coming for me.

When I moved ahead, thinking about how best to defend myself, Minister Benito went to slash at the Kirin.

I had created a fair bit of breathing room for myself, but was Minister Benito going to be okay?

The truth was, this thing’s scariest attack came from up close.

The Kirin jumped up where it stood, rotating around. A back kick.

It was an attack that herbivores would launch at lions and other carnivores. These kicks had so much force behind them that they would occasionally kill a lion on the spot.

But this thing was no herbivore. They weren’t comparable at all.

It was a Mythical Kirin.

Benito created a makeshift shield with earth magic and tried to block the kick.

However, he wasn't able to fully absorb the blow.

The Kirin smashed Benito's shield like a bar of chocolate, continuing straight toward him without losing any momentum.

"Benito!!" Ivy shouted as she threw her kunai. There was no way it would make it in time, of course. On top of that, a bolt of ink lightning shot the kunai down, then flew straight at Ivy.

A roaring explosion. That was what the Kirin's kick sounded like as it destroyed another of Benito's shields and landed a hit on him.

Sent flying, Minister Benito flipped around in the air, landing in the water.

"...I don't know if I've ever seen an attack this strong before."

Benito limply lowered his hand and dropped his sword. The tip sank into the water.

It appeared that he had guarded with his sword and then killed the momentum of the attack by flying backwards.

Even after dampening the force, he'd still taken a hell of a blow. I didn't want to think what a true direct hit would look like.

"Rin, Pyou, Tou, Sha, Kai, Jin, Retsu, Zai, Zen!"

Ivy was blocking the lightning bolts coming at her. She was using a move called Swift Nine Hand Seals. She looked like she was managing.

Can I also take an attack like—huh?! What's that?!

"Shoot, a big one's coming. Everyone, stay back!"

The Kirin was building up a tremendous amount of power in its legs and horns. So much power that if it put it into a spell, it would be enough to send several whole houses flying.

"_____!"

The Kirin aimed its horn at me. Then it kicked the ground and charged straight for me.

"It's too fast!"

It didn't even need a full second to close in.

The horn shot straight for my heart...

"Whooooooooah!"

I dodged the attack by jumping to the side. Not even my stole would have been enough to block it. If I'd tried, I would have been chunks of meat right now.

Everyone else was a fair distance away from me, so they'd been able to avoid the attack. Nevertheless, the Kirin continued to charge unabated.

It kept running even after Shion and Anemone hit it with magic.

Once the Kirin sprinted all the way to the center of the lake, it immediately leaped into the air. The instant it fell back down, it sank into the water. No, it wasn't that it was sinking—it was liquidizing its body.

"Transforming, is it? This might be the second most troublesome foe I've ever fought in my life," Anemone said. She was right to have called this the second-toughest fight of her life—the first was her own family, after all.

Now liquified, the black beast separated just as it had when we first encountered it, like oil and water. Then it created a picture on the lake's surface. An image of a tortoise with a massive shell...

"Genbu."

In a sense, this lake served as a giant canvas. I would have loved to rip it to shreds, but unfortunately, ripping apart water was totally impossible.

"I guess since it doesn't have a snake tail, it's not quite up to par with the real Genbu."

The Kirin and Genbu of this world, which the Inkwash Mythical Beast modeled itself after, existed as bosses in other locations. Naturally, the real Kirin and Genbu were stronger. In Genbu's case, it had a massive snake entwined around its shell, but it appeared the Inkwash Beast had forgotten that part somewhere along the way.

If only it had forgotten the shell, too.

I hastily returned to Yuika and the others. As I did, Genbu continued to get bigger and bigger.

Comparing its size to a bear or elephant didn't do it justice. It was far, far larger than that.

"Wheew, now that is *huge*. I hope I can live in a house that size someday."

Yuika raised her head and snarked as she looked at the jet-black Genbu.

"That'd definitely be one hell of a place. Two floors, four bedrooms, give or take."

I would love to build a Genbu-sized house in a primo residential district. Anything bigger, and the upkeep would be a pain, though, so no thanks. But the Hanamuras did employ maids and butlers, so maybe that wouldn't be a factor at all.

"Sounds wonderful. Be sure to include a room and lab for me, too," Anemone said, butting into the conversation.

"I feel like the whole house would turn into a laboratory, if anything."

Nanami had suggested a very believable scenario. In Anemone's case, I wouldn't be surprised if she rigged the whole place with surveillance cameras. Maybe if I quietly invited her to... No, couldn't do that. I'd never get away with it.

As we continued talking nonsense, Genbu raised its leg, took a step forward, and then...

"Hrnaaaaugh...gwooooooooooar!"

...released an earsplitting roar.

"Eeeeeeeek! Has everyone else here gone hip-hopping mad or something? How can you stay so calm in the face of a super tough enemy like that?!" Ivy asked as she returned to where we stood.

"Good question, honestly. I guess I'm used to it? It's basically always like this."

I agreed with Yuika. It really was like this most of the time, huh. Besides...

"Honestly, the Book of Raziel's presence was way more intimidating than this

thing. Compared to that, it looks like we can get through this fight with just a death or two.”

“Eeeeeep?! You’d still be dead!”

“Okay, everyone. I hate to bother you while you’re escaping from reality, but here it comes,” Minister Benito said, readying his sword.

Ink Genbu was walking toward us, creating waves and large pillars of water as it went. Oftentimes, the bigger something got, the slower it moved, but this thing...

“Surprisingly fast, isn’t it?” Nanami said before pulling back her bow and firing three arrows in rapid succession. The arrows traced a yellow arc as they flew toward the shell, face, and claws of the monster with blinding speed. As soon as they hit their target, there was a huge flash of light, and a booming sound split the area.

“Lightning, huh.”

The arrows had been enhanced with lightning magic.

Bow-users in *Magical★Explorer* could use the power of lightning to launch electricity-imbued arrows, which were faster and more devastating than their normal counterparts. I had no clue why lightning let them shoot faster, though.

Since the arrows were so fast, they were extremely difficult to evade and were almost guaranteed to hit their mark. Nanami had gotten a proper hit on Genbu, of course. However...

“Takioto, let me ask you—does it look like the monster took any damage to you?”

“I hate to say it, but it seems unharmed.”

Nanami had probably wanted to check which areas of its body were its weak points. By hitting its shell, face, and claws with her attacks, she could see how it would react.

What she learned was...

“Half-hearted attacks do not appear to be effective,” Nanami said as she changed her arrow.

“I assumed that its shell was impervious to damage, but I never thought its face would have high defenses, too.”

Even in-game, the Inkwash Beast becomes abnormally durable when it takes on its Genbu form. I would have characters without any strong attacks of their own use healing and enhancement magic in this fight. Though with the Big Three or Iori in my party, I could bring the pain regardless of its defense. Just what was with those characters, seriously?

When Genbu had gotten closer, it bent its legs and crouched down slightly.

“Uh-oh, I think it’s readying for a body press.”

The moment those words left my mouth, Genbu jumped high into the air.

Everyone immediately shifted to an evasive stance. Nanami and Yuika had powerful legs, so they would probably be fine, and Anemone was a bit farther away, so she would be okay. I picked up Shion in a bridal carry and used my stole to kick off the ground, fleeing from my position.

“My, my, this is a surprisingly comfortable ride, I must say.”

Shion wrapped a hand around my neck to stabilize herself, then waved her fan with the other.

“How’s this for a parting gift!”

Genbu descended a moment afterward. A huge pillar of water shot up, and the area shook with tremors on par with those of an actual earthquake.

While I was glad that no one had gotten caught beneath the monster, we could be sure that a direct hit would turn anyone into a pancake.

Although there were no people in its wake, Shion’s magic certainly was. I watched as jet-black spikes appeared behind us right after we left.

In the exact spot where Genbu’s face was going to land.

“Nggaaaaugh!”

Genbu roared. The magic spikes stabbed into Genbu’s neck area and snapped.

“*Hmm*, I took extra care to make them harder and sharper, yet it would appear they didn’t penetrate too far.”

Genbu shook its head and swept away the spikes. From its wound spilled gobs of what resembled ink.

The monster had fallen on the spikes with all its weight behind it, not to mention the momentum from its fall, so how come it had barely gotten stabbed? How? Its hide must have been seriously tough.

“Eeeep, that looked painful,” Ivy said as she clutched her neck. I would hate to have my neck end up like that, too. But more importantly...

“Shion, does it look a bit angry to you?”

Oh yeah, it was pissed, all right. Not angry—*enraged*. Genbu was roaring, stamping its feet in frustration and glaring right at us. Its eyes locked on Shion.

All of a sudden, I felt her grip grow stronger around my neck.

“Kou, the two of us will always be together,” Shion said before flashing a seductive smile. Oh yeah, this girl was doing this on purpose, knowing full well she was the one being targeted here.

I was seized with the urge to toss her aside for a brief second, but there was no way I would ever waste such a wonderful moment.

“How could I ever let go of a beauty like you? I hope you’re ready, ’cause you’re following me to the depths of hell and back.”

Shion cackled with glee at my comment.

As much as I would have loved to savor my time with Shion a bit more, that wasn’t going to happen. Genbu had already jumped into the air yet again.

But this time, it flipped upside down and retreated into its shell... Upside down?

“I wonder what will come at us next?” I heard Yuika say.

“A round of fireworks would be nice, wouldn’t it?” Minister Benito replied.

I could say one thing for certain.

“It’s definitely not going to be fun.”

The shell began to slowly spin in place. Soon, it began picking up speed, steadily growing faster and faster. The wind and waves picked up from the force

of its spinning.

Then, spinning as fast as a blender, the monster plunged toward me with ferocious speed.

The enormous shell rotated as it closed in. It jumped like a skipping stone over the water as it surged closer.

Sure, there were fireworks that would rotate rapidly like this, but I mean, this was a shell, so there really was only one comparison, right?

“Oh, I know what this is. This is like that plumber racing game, right?”

There were a few points that were different, like how massive and hard the tortoise’s shell was, and the fact that it was going after people instead of a racing kart. This was basically instant death.

“Shion, hold on tight.”

“Right.”

I used my stole like a spring and retreated from where we stood. Fortunately, Genbu was nice enough to come at us in a straight line.

I thought that would be the end of it. However, the attack wasn’t over yet.

In fact, with a massive *bang*, the shell changed its angle.

“Hey, wait a damn minute! Why the hell is it bouncing off of thin air?!”

It didn’t make any sense. As I stood there in bewilderment, Nanami cleared things up.

“Master, there appear to be dungeon walls in this area that are invisible to the naked eye.”

Invisible walls were a thing? You’ve gotta be kidding me. But, if a dungeon maid was telling me this, I guess I had to believe it. Invisible walls, huh?

...Oh wait, yeah, invisible walls were totally a thing.

I’d experienced them myself. In that sexy costume. Why the hell had I needed to wear one of those, too, dammit?!

“Takiooooooto, you better not, and I mean ab-so-lutely better not, send that

thing over this way, okaaaay?” Yuika said, waving.

“How do you expect me to do that when I can’t even tell where the stupid walls are?!”

“Kou, here it comes!” yelled Shion.

I jumped, springing off my stole and dodging once more. Needless to say, the shell bounced again, and headed in the wrong direction... Oh no—Yuika!

“Ugh, Takioto, are you serious?!”

Yuika looked ready to blow. I’d thought that her comment just now had been a bit of a red flag, and sure enough, things had played out exactly as she’d said.

Also, yeah. This was totally *M*rio K*rt*. It felt like a green shell had launched at us on a narrow strip of road, all right.

“Maybe we can knock it away with an attack,” Nanami said before aiming an Arrow Bomb at Genbu. It flew in a straight line and hit the surface of the water near the shell.

The concussive blast and shock wave reached all the way to us. It had been a pretty big explosion, but was it enough?

“The shell appears to have shifted somewhat.”

Just as Shion had said, it looked like its direction had been diverted slightly. Yuika quickly dodged the shell.

As I put Shion down, I looked around.

The frontline characters—Nanami, Yuika, Ivy, and Minister Benito—could likely dodge the shell, but for Anemone... Well, Benito was close by, so she was likely fine.

“Benito, there’s something I’d like to try,” Anemone said.

Minister Benito stood in front of her and chanted a spell. Then, when the shell had shifted its trajectory a few times and headed toward Anemone, Benito activated the incantation.

It was a sloped...wall? No, wait...

“What is that, a hill?”

“More like a jump ramp, maybe?”

It looked a bit like a ski jump made out of earth magic. The shell climbed the slope, likely just as Anemone had anticipated it would, flying into the air over Minister Benito and the others. Then it hit one of the invisible walls.

“Eeeeeek! Now it’s even more dangerous, c’mon!!”

It dropped down near Ivy as she screamed.

“Ha-ha-ha-ha, whoopsie. Sorry. But this means if we surround ourselves with these slopes, we might be able to avoid its attacks,” Anemone said, laughing. She was right that Genbu didn’t seem able to make any sudden stops, so this method might be useful. Still, I had the feeling it was bound to change its form. Just look— “Its spin is slowing down.”

Just as Minister Benito observed, the rotation of the shell was starting to slow, and the speed of the shell’s advance was starting to decrease with it. Then, when Genbu stopped completely, a magic circle formed beneath its claws. This magic circle must have been Genbu’s doing, as it activated immediately, and Genbu returned to its normal form...or not. Sticking its face out, the creature plunged into the water like an Olympic swimmer diving into a pool.

“A vexing enemy, no? It changes form right when we get used to its movements.”

Genbu liquidized as it hit the water. Then it formed itself into a new shape on the water’s surface again.

Coming over to us, Yuika cursed the enemy.

“Could this thing be any more obnoxious? Also, it’s *seriously* hard to move with all this water at our feet. How are you managing to do it so smoothly, Takioto?”

Much like how hard it was to move one’s body in a pool, the water of the lake was hindering our movement. As for why I was still able to move normally, I had Yukine to thank for that.

“Oh, that’s because Yukine and I spar under a waterfall all the time. More

pressingly, though, it looks like the Inkwash Beast is settling on its next form.

It's next form...was a slightly annoying one.

"What is it this time? It has wings, and it looks like a bird to me."

"Its wings seem to be on fire. Then that would mean...it's a phoenix, a firebird, Suzaku, or something of that nature?"

I nodded.

"You got it, Nanami. It's Suzaku."

It was the shape that would also be the hardest for me to deal with. I took a deep breath.

"Everyone, this time it's Suzaku! A flying form!"

I shouted loud enough for everyone to hear.

"It flies? I'm not exactly the best at dealing with those kinds of monsters."

Minister Benito smiled with a wince. The Suzaku drawn on the water surface materialized and instantly flew up into the sky.

"How magnificent."

The pitch-black bird calmly flew through the starry moonlit sky. Its wings flickered as though they were made of flame.

"Here it comes!"

Suzaku stuck its beak out in front and descended in a straight line. Once it had plummeted a decent distance, it changed positions, pointing its legs at us.

It was aiming for...Ivy, who was all by herself.

The great bird swiped at Ivy with its sharp claws and powerful legs.

"Ivy, don't let it grab you, no matter what! If it does, it'll hold on until it crushes you in its grip, burns you alive, and slams you down on the ground!"

Suzaku's goal wasn't to scratch with its claws. Its aim was to snag her in its large talons. It would take the chance to set her on fire, then slam her into the ground for a nice three-deaths-in-one package.

"I'll pass on the cornucopia of pain, thanks!"

Ivy managed to barely avoid the attack with Water Spider. However...

“I don’t really think I’ll be able to reliably avoid that thing,” Yuika commented.

Due to the watery footing, she couldn’t move like usual. She wasn’t the only one whose mobility was impaired, either. Ivy and I were probably the only people here who could dodge with any certainty. Oh, and also Nanami, whose movements didn’t seem impeded at all for some reason. Minister Benito looked capable of evading by using earth magic to create a footing for himself.

“Heeeeeeey, be careful over there! It’s dropping something,” Ivy shouted as she dodged the attack.

Suzaku flew up into the air once more, but as it did, it dropped something from its wings.

Jet-black fire.

Countless flames descended toward us.

“Next up is carpet bombing?”

The flames, likely more than a hundred at once, were heading our way.

Nanami and Shion eliminated them all with feverish vigor.

“Fortunately, these are surprisingly easy to dispose of.”

Nanami fired one lightning arrow after the next. They went straight for the black flames and made contact, annihilating them with a loud explosion. Shion also generated a great many arrows with her dark magic and launched them rapidly.

While none of us held a candle to these two, everyone else except myself could use long-range magic, so they began extinguishing the flames, too. I used some sigiled stones to chip in.

However, no matter how hard we tried, we couldn’t extinguish them all. Though once the number of flames had dwindled, dodging the stragglers was trivial.

“Hmmm. At this rate, we’ll just run out of mana,” Minister Benito remarked.

“Shooting them down is hard enough but dodging them is just as trying.

Genbu may have actually been the easier match,” Shion said before shooting down one of the flames approaching her.

“It’s coming back.”

Soaring high up in the air, Suzaku was already in its swooping position.

“Takioto, doesn’t that thing have a weakness somewhere?!”

“It does. The Suzaku form should have paper-thin defenses!”

The Kirin form was balanced, the Genbu form was about defense and offense, the Suzaku form was about speed and offense, while the remaining Seiryuu form we had yet to see was focused on magic and defense. Thus, if we were going to go on the attack, the Suzaku form was supposed to give the best chance with its low defense, but...

“Our foe is too far away. Perhaps our only option is to target it mid-descent.”

It was high up and moving quickly. Targeting it from the ground would be difficult.

When Suzaku accelerated its descent, it stuck its legs out just like before and closed in.

Everyone began incanting their long-ranged spell of choice. Nanami, Shion, Benito, Anemone, along with Yuika as well, generated light arrows to attack. However...

“It’s not stopping, is it.”

We all broke off our offense and focused on dodging. I moved over to where everyone was and waited on standby, ready to shield them if anything happened.

At that moment, it happened.

“I can’t say for certain, but...this might work. I’m going to go try something, everyone. Sorry if it doesn’t work out!” Ivy said, beginning to throw her kunais at the water’s surface for some reason. They went under the water and lodged into the bottom of the lake. She’d done this not with one but two, three, four, five kunai in total.

Ivy then began to recite a spell, making several hand signs as she did.

To my surprise, a white light passed between all the kunai, making a pentagram symbol. The pentagram started to shine brighter and brighter.

Suzaku was still headed toward us, vigorously swooping down.

Ivy watched for her chance and activated her spell.

“Water Escape—Rising Dragon!”

Water in the shape of a dragon materialized from the magic circle. The liquid beast flew skyward and slammed right into Suzaku as it was reaching for us with its claws.

Suzaku’s attack was interrupted. Its trajectory had been diverted upward.

“Yay!”

I went over to Ivy’s side as she rejoiced. There, I helped her up, as she looked on the verge of collapsing.

“Huh?”

“You used up too much mana. I’ll transfer some of mine to you.”

That move was strong in-game as well, but it consumed a lot of mana. Ivy had been using a slew of different ninjutsu skills nonstop today. After a massive attack like that, she must have had almost no mana left in the tank.

I placed my hands on her body and sent mana to her.

“Thanks, Takky! This feels...great? Wait, what’s happening? *Ngh*, n-no way!! T-Takky... I-I’m not, I’m not ready for something, like... B-but, *aaaaaaaaaahn!* *Hngh!*”

“...Sorry, try to bear with it.”

Ivy started to flush. Why did my mana donation sessions always end up like this? Shortly after, she stood up on her own.

“...I kinda feel like I’ve had a first taken from me.”

The mood grew awkward.

“Master! My apologies for interrupting your fun, but the monster is transforming.”

Nanami’s voice brought me back to my senses.

When I turned, I saw Suzaku right as it dove into the lake. It immediately liquidized and began to form a new shape. However...

“Personally, I’ve had my fill of this one already.”

Shion winced, looking at the creature.

It was a familiar silhouette. Since it was the same monster we’d just seen.

“This one again...? Can’t catch a break.”

The shape flew up from the water’s surface. It was Suzaku again.

Just as I was lamenting that I would’ve had a plan if it had turned into Seiryuu or Kirin instead, I suddenly realized something. We had Anemone here with us, didn’t we?

“Anemone, listen!”

“What is it, Takioto? Interested in my body, are we?”

“Uh, this *definitely* isn’t the time for that, okay?”

I wouldn’t deny it, though. A mature, sexy dark elf? Who wouldn’t be interested in that?

“Well, what is it? Look at the situation. If this isn’t something important, I’ll have to eat you up, got it?”

Though part of me would have loved the privilege, this wasn’t the time.

I asked Anemone if she had a certain item on her. While looking at Minister Benito.

“Oh, that sounds fun. Why not...? Everyone, can you buy us some time?! Hey, Benito, it’s time for the real fireworks.”

I only asked if she had it with her, but she picked up on what I was getting at.

“Buy time?! Any other crazy requests while we’re at it?!”

Yuika poured a liquid over herself as she reapplied her enhancement magic. I assumed the liquid was a mana restoration potion.

“Can you handle it, Ivy?”

If we needed to buy time, Ivy’s Rising Dragon was the surest way to do so. Still, it also meant she would have to push herself again. I’d definitely need to back her up.

“Leave it to me!”

She threw her kunais again just like before. Except this time, they were thrown in various directions. There were more than five, too. Much, much more.

“You sure you can handle this many?!”

She must have consumed a significant amount of mana simply preparing to activate her spell.

Yet she smiled.

“This is basically the only way to cover every direction at once. Besides...”

She looked at me.

“You’re here, aren’t you? I trust you, Takky.”

For some reason, seeing her smile brought one to my own face. I couldn’t help thinking that it would all work out somehow.

“If anything happens, you can leave it to me!”

I immediately channeled my mana to her. She started sort of writhing in agony, but I needed her to bear with it.

Now, Rising Dragon was a powerful move. If this happened to fail, I estimated she would be far too exhausted to dodge at all.

If anything bad came up, I would handle it somehow. I had to.

She was giving it her all, so how could I not do at least that much?

Suzaku was swooping down. I supported Ivy with my stole and brought my hand to my katana.

She constructed a magic circle in line with Suzaku's position. Then...

"I did it!"

With perfect timing yet again, she successfully activated the spell.

While everyone else joined in with attacks of their own and dispersed the carpet of flames, I sent my mana to Ivy. Then I murmured, "What's Anemone's side waiting for...?"

If this keeps up, we'll just exhaust ourselves. Anemone needs to hurry...

It happened right as this thought began to cross my mind.

"Okay, thanks everybody. We got things ready on our end!"

It was Minister Benito who said this.

There was a large orb floating in front of him. Rocks began to gradually collect around it. Not yet, it still wasn't ready.

"A golem?! Is that round thing supposed to be its core?" Yuika said, looking at it. She was exactly right; Benito had created a golem. Not only that...

"It is so big...even bigger than Master, I would say."

Nanami, could you not phrase it quite so suggestively? Actually, maybe that just sounded suggestive to my filthy mind.

"Well, well, how magnificent, indeed."

Rocks continued to gather, faster and faster. The stone construct was already more than thirty feet tall.

Minister Benito created a colossal golem.

"He-he, even I have some cool tricks up my sleeve."

Yuika's eyes sparkled as she looked at it.

"That's incredible! My opinion of you has improved slightly!"

"...Did you really hold me in such low regard in the first place?"

It was okay, Benito, you had no need to worry. Your reputation with us eroge aficionados was quite high.

But anyway, that golem of his, though.

Simply put, it was cool as hell. It had a misshapen and unrefined vibe to it. Like something from an old-school mecha anime. If this were an anime, this would've been the moment when the special background music started playing to let the audience know that victory was in the bag.

The golem began to take heavy, sturdy steps.

Suzaku seemed to recognize the golem as an enemy. It swooped down at it, shifting its position to extend its claws.

The golem put both arms out in front of itself to stop Suzaku's attack—but couldn't manage.

To make matters worse, it started rising into the air...

"Wait, all that, and it just got carried off like nothing?!"

"Hahahahahaha! Haaaa-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Yuika was incensed, while Benito watched the golem and laughed, as though he was enjoying every minute of it. The golem desperately flailed its arms, but they didn't hit Suzaku at all.

If Suzaku's attack patterns were the same as they were in game, then...

"If it drops the golem, we're the ones who're gonna get pancaked!"

It would likely slam the golem down on us. However, Anemone and Minister Benito were laughing.

Why?

"Just as planned, then."

Because they'd anticipated this.

"I managed to come up with quite an incredible one thanks to you all."

Benito nodded, looking pleased.

"Hee-hee, time to show you my masterpiece. Everyone, be sure to use your

protection spells,” Anemone said, raising her hand. Then she snapped her fingers.

A blinding flash enveloped the area.

For a second, it seemed as if the golem had swelled up to an impossible size, but it turned out not to be a trick of the eyes at all.

The golem exploded. The blast was massive, huge, tremendous.

The sound arrived with a slight delay after the blast. The concussive noise was loud enough to split eardrums.

“Whoooah!”

I used my stole to shield myself from the rocks violently raining down. I warded off a stone flying down near Ivy as well.

Anemone was an inventor. Tentacles and aphrodisiacs weren’t the only tools in her arsenal. She also had bombs and self-destructing items. In fact, in-game, the attack of hers that dealt the most damage was a bomb. What was this, the *At**er* series?

That was why I had asked if she had a golem core that could explode on her. The higher quality a golem was, the more powerful an explosion it produced when instructed to detonate.

For that reason, I’d tasked Benito to make a golem with his stellar earth magic, then make it self-destruct. If Vice President Fran were around, then I might’ve been able to ask her to do it, too. Exploding golem cores was made for her in the first place.

“Hm, I’m glad it was a success. That is a prototype, after all.”

Anemone chimed in with a terrifying comment.

“While I am glad it was successful, there is some unfortunate news as well,” Nanami said looking up at the sky.

The monster was still alive and well.

“...It survived that explosion?”

The Suzaku was alive. Gobs of thick black liquid were pouring from its body, but it lived. It slowly descended toward us. Then, about nine feet in front of me, it landed in the water.

Suzaku spread out its wings as ink oozed from its body. It was already absurdly large as it was, and now it was spreading out its wings, each one larger than its own body.

Seeing it like this, I suddenly recalled something.

“Ivy, I once saw a video way back.”

“What sort of video?”

“A video of a hawk and snake fighting.”

The footage showed a hawk spreading out its large wings, bigger than its body, to intimidate a cobra.

“The snake was beaten to pulp. The speed of the hawk’s claws and beak was unreal.”

“...Uh, Takky, we aren’t the snake here, are we?”

I shook my head.

“Oh of course not, I just remembered it, that’s all. Think about it carefully—we’re humans, right? Let’s teach this bird which of us is higher up on the food chain here.”

“Master, tonight’s dinner will be grilled chicken skewers.”

“I take them salted or marinated, so prep ’em any way you like.”

“Perhaps I shall partake as well.”

“I already feel heartburn coming on, so I’ll pass... I’d rather take a bath.”

Hearing all of us banter, Ivy giggled.

“I wonder why, but it feels like when I’m with you, Takky, my common sense starts to go totally haywire.”

“Master *is* the embodiment of absurdity.”

“I don’t want to hear that from you, Nanami,” I said while glaring down Suzaku. The bird glared right back. A few seconds passed.

It was an abrupt movement. Suzaku flapped its wings.

“Wind magic?!”

It was an attack pattern unlike anything we’d seen until now. Not only that, but the gust likely wasn’t the intent behind the attack.

“Eep!”

“Gngh!”

Suzaku created a tornado. The raging winds sent my companions flying. I used my stole and both hands to grab the ground, just barely hanging on. However, everyone else was scattered in all directions.

Then Suzaku flew inside the tornado and took aim at one of the girls. It was... Ivy.

Ivy used her nearby kunai and started saying the Rising Dragon incantation once more. Yet Suzaku didn’t back down. Had it resolved to take her down with it?

“Ivy!”

I used my stole as a spring and headed to where Ivy was. Still, I couldn’t make it in time.

Ivy’s movements were dulled after the massive attack. Although she’d spent her leftover mana on the Substitution Jutsu, she was now essentially out of mana.

I figured that after Suzaku passed by Ivy, tearing apart the wooden log from her jutsu in its claws, it would fly up in the air, the same pattern as before.

But it didn’t. Suzaku landed on the ground, spread out both wings, and threatened Ivy.

I finally caught up to her and got in front of her. Sending my mana spilling out

of my body, I put my stole out in front, and returned Suzaku's intimidating aura with my own.

"...Run, Takky."

With almost no magic left, Ivy was worse for wear. She wouldn't even be able to cast her enhancement magic in this state.

Suzaku suddenly flew backward and created yet another tornado. Nanami and the others tried to help us, but the hurricane barred their path.

"It looks like our opponent's pretty hurt itself."

A massive amount of ink was spilling from Suzaku's body, our sole consolation.

When it finished casting its spell, Suzaku landed again. Right in front of us.

"It must really like you, Ivy."

Was Suzaku like one of those crazy girlfriends? Eroge was one thing, but that was definitely not the type I'd ever want to have it bad for me in the real world.

The Rising Dragon must have really pissed it off, since it was totally fixated on killing Ivy. I could tell Suzaku's mana was powering up.

"Guess there's no running, then."

There was about thirty feet between us. Suzaku had enough leg strength to close the gap instantly. If I tried anything funny, those talons would run us through.

"Please, Takky, leave me and run," Ivy said, watching the power build up in Suzaku.

She must have thought I wouldn't be able to block the attack.

"There's no way your stole can stand up to that thing! It can't dampen the blow."

She was right that I probably couldn't guard it with my stole. No, I definitely couldn't. Still though, fleeing wasn't an option.

Not with her at my back.

“I don’t want you to get hurt, Takky.”

Assuming that I was unable to block my foe’s attack, what was my best course of action? Why, I just needed to cut them down.

“That’s funny, I feel the same way.”

“Huh?”

“Wait, didn’t I tell you?”

I built up power in my katana. Accumulated more and more, pushing my focus to its absolute limit. More concentration, I needed more. Good, good. Everything around me moved in slow motion.

“See, when I mentioned that I wanted to make some people happy, I counted you among them, Ivy.”

“.....!”

If I failed here, it wouldn’t be just me who died—she would, too. That’s why I had to do something to come out on top.

And what I had to do was simple. Just slash.

Suzaku spread its wings, raised its legs, and glared at me.

I gathered power in my sheath and stared right back at it.

The fight would be decided in a single attack. My foe was covered in wounds. I had no way to defend myself, and Ivy was behind me.

“I’ll protect you no matter what.”

My opponent’s level was higher than mine. Still, it didn’t feel like I would lose.

I could see the line I needed to slash.

Aiming at Suzaku’s talons, coming straight for me, I drew my katana.





CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim As I watched Suzaku change into magic particles, something hit me from behind.

“Takky! Um, uh... Thank you.”

Ivy looked at me with doe eyes. Her face was bright red.

“Ivy, are you—whoa!”

As I stood there, captivated by Ivy, she suddenly hugged me.

“Takky, Takky, Takkyyyy!!”

And shouted.

“Ivy, just clam down. Please don’t shout in my ear.”

“*Waaaah*, Takkyyyyyyy!”

C’mon, don’t cry in my ear!

As I soothed Ivy, I suddenly noticed that there was a square object in front of me. If memory served...I recognized this item drop. However, I would need an unlock spell to open it, wouldn’t I?

Was this thanks to the effect of Golden Lucky Cat? I hadn’t thought about it until now, but we had actually brought it along with us.

“I’ll talk with everyone later about what to do with this,” I said, putting the item away for the time being.

Then as I sat there patting Ivy’s head— “Ha-ha. I’m glad you two are all right.”

—Minister Benito came over to us. Behind him, everyone else began to gather one by one. Yuika walked up to us while casting healing magic.

Shion and Anemone had sustained some injuries.

Right around when Ivy calmed down, we felt it.

“What’s that? An earthquake?” Shion asked.

The ground began to shake. Shion grabbed onto my stole. Yuika did, too. Had they mistaken me for a support pillar?

Then the water parted, just like the story of Moses, and a bridge appeared in the middle. This bridge was different from the wooden one before, as it was constructed from stone and tile. And waiting at the end...

“Is that the Yata no Kagami?”

“That’s right.”

There was an altar, atop which rested a single mirror. But...

“A mirror? Is it just me, or does that not look like a mirror at all?”

It was natural for Anemone to react this way. After all, the mirror’s surface was pitch-black.

“That’s just how it’s supposed to be. We should grab it quickly, though. The Student Council and Morals Committee are still busy fighting the guardians.”

“Right.”

Minister Benito started walking toward it, along with Anemone, who was making grabby hands. The mirror must have intrigued her greatly.

Ivy continued forward, hopping along as she went. I wondered why exactly she was moving like this, then realized she was only touching the off-color tiles. I used to love doing that back in elementary school, too.

“How old are you, exactly?” Shion quipped, walking nearby.

“There aren’t any traps or anything, right?” Yuika said next to me.

“Nope, we can keep on walking just fine. C’mon, we’re getting left behind,” I said, and we began walking down the bridge when Nanami trotted over to us.

“Hold on just a minute, Master,” she said, lowering her voice. “This just crossed my mind, but...there is a very important point I would like to confirm with you.”

“Really? That important?”

“Indeed, perhaps a matter of life or death. Miss Yuika, you come over here, too.”

“Hm? What is it?”

Life or death? What exactly would that be?

“Think about how things usually go. There are times when we are transported to an eccentric floor once we’ve finished a dungeon, yes? Places we can only leave by putting on weird costumes, for example.”

“Aaaahh...”

Yuika held her head, looking terribly displeased.

“Does this dungeon have one of those floors, too?”

Nanami must have lowered her voice to protect my reputation. Otherwise, she would essentially be telling everyone that I had cleared a slew of erotic dungeons. I didn’t want to imagine what would happen if Anemone got wind of that.

Nanami was wonderful. Such a marvelous show of consideration.

Now, as for whether or not there was such a floor...

“Yup. There is one, but it’s fine.”

“Uhhh, excuse me?!”

“Hold your horses, Yuika, let me finish. Only a kid would end up there. Honestly, even they would have a hard time stumbling into it.”

“Why would that be, Master?”

“Okay, so, this bridge we’re crossing right now has something to do with it.”

“The bridge?”

“That’s right, the bridge. C’mon, look at your feet—does anything come to mind?”

“I mean, it’s a pretty normal bridge...”

“Well, yeah, but... I’ll give you a hint—look at the tiles.”

“They’re differently colored. Wait, as in...”

“Yup, you’ve figured it out, Nanami—if you step on only the off-color tiles as you cross, then spin around three times and thrust your fist in the air once you’re on the other side, you’ll be transported to that floor.”

“I see. Even a child would be unlikely to go that far.”

“Walking on the off-colored tiles, sure, you see kids doing that sometimes, but...to then spin around three times and thrust a fist in the air? I’ve literally never seen someone actually do that before.”

Like there would be anyone who’d act like that. While you’d have to go down that road in the game to collect all the CG, doing all that with one’s normal presence of mind? Yeah right, lol.

“Then there shouldn’t be anything to worry about! ♪”

“Indeed. It would be embarrassing to do that in front of everyone. Though, it does appear that Miss Yuika is willing to come back with you at a later date.”

“Like hell I will! Why would I go that far just to shave years off my li— Hey, Takioto?”

Yuika’s expression changed, and she looked forward. Nanami and I stared at Yuika’s face, followed her gaze, and then noticed.

“...Uh, Takioto. Don’t you think Ivy’s movements are a bit, well, strange?”

“She couldn’t be—no, actually, you’re right.”

There was no mistaking it: She was only stepping on the off-colored tiles! I’d already noticed that she was hopping around a lot, but... She kept it up the whole way?!

Okay, just think for a moment—would Ivy really spin three times? And throw a fist in the air?

I didn’t know why, but I couldn’t shake the feeling she would. Gabby had made an unbelievable blunder before, too, and Ivy had already screw up tremendously with the Golden Lucky Cat. The possibility the worst would happen wasn’t zero.

“Nanami, Yuika, let’s hurry. We have to stop her no matter what.”

“Don’t ask the impossible, she’s almost finished crossing!!”

We three were about halfway across the bridge, while Ivy and Shion were about to reach the other side. Meanwhile, Minister Benito and Anemone had

finished crossing already and were investigating the altar.

“Master, hurry.”

I rushed toward Ivy and Shion, full speed ahead. This might just have been the fastest I’d ever run, faster than I had in any boss battle.

“Ivy, stop!”

“Hm, Takky? Hold on just a sec! I’ve almost made it to the finish line!”

No, no, I’m telling you *not* to reach that damn finish line!

“What are we going to do, Takioto?! She’s going to make it!”

“Wait, it’s still too soon to panic. Think for a moment. Just who in the world would then spin around in place like...*Gaaaaah?!?*”

“Master, um, I do believe Miss Ivy is beginning to spin in place.”

Arrrrrrrrrrgh, come ooooooooooooooooooooooooooon!!

The only option at this point was to tackle her. I had to take her down and stop her.

I used my stole like a spring and jumped at Ivy. However, I didn’t make it in time.

“Yaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaay!”

She cleanly spun around three times and thrust her fist into the air.

The next instant, a teleportation circle appeared at Ivy’s feet.

Ivy, standing right over it, and Shion, standing nearby, both disappeared. How unfortunate that there was collateral damage.

And then, just as a ball won’t stop once it’s in midair...

“Whaaaaaaaaaaaaah!”

...I also went flying into the magic circle.

Could I have foreseen this happening? No, of course not. Who the hell spins around three times and raises their fist in the air like that? This was awful. I should have stopped Ivy when I'd first seen her hopping around.

All right, enough self-reflection. I could stay laid out on all fours with my head hanging low forever. Okay, okay, we needed to wrap this up and head home fast.

I steeled myself and raised my head.

My eyes fell on two confused ladies.

"Wowie..."

"What is this place...?"

Their surprise was understandable. Just a moment ago, we had been in a fantastical dungeon interior, and now we were in front of a strange manor.

I got to my feet and checked to see if Shion and Ivy were hurt.

Well, obviously, they weren't. Why would they be? Generally, the only wounds you had to worry about in erotic dungeons were of the emotional variety.

First, I let Minister Benito and the others know that we were on a hidden floor, and we were safe. Also, since they were bound to be worried, I promised I would meet back up with them quickly. I didn't even need to check to know that we weren't going to be able to use any escape items on this floor.

Anyway, I still didn't have the courage to tell Shion and Ivy about what this erotic dungeon had in store for us.

"I suppose we'll have to proceed through this estate?" Shion asked.

"Y'know, I could see you living in this sorta Wakoku-style place, Shishi," said Ivy.

The dungeon did indeed resemble a Wakoku mansion. Except its size...was about on par with the Heian Imperial Palace back in the Heian Era. On the order of seventeen million square feet or something, right?

"I can't see the whole thing, but it definitely isn't *that* big."

“Well, we won’t accomplish anything just looking at it, so might as well head on in. Right, Takioto?”

“Exactly... Hm?”

I heard a voice next to me that belonged to neither Shion nor Ivy. Given the speaking style...

“Wait, why are you here, Yuika?!” I asked, bewildered.

“Simply put, I lost at rock-paper-scissors.”

“...What are you talking about?”

That was a bit *too* simply put.

“I talked with Nanami. We figured that since we wouldn’t be in physical danger, one of us should come help you out, and the other should explain the situation to Benito and tell them to go stop the guardians.”

“And that’s when you decided who would be doing what with rock-paper-scissors.”

They were really putting their lives on the line with that match. If it was me, I would’ve held my head in my hands and screamed. Was this really something that should be settled with rock-paper-scissors?

“I pushed for us to both stay behind to explain, but Nanami insisted that someone needed to go, for your sake.”

Was this Nanami’s idea of doing her utmost to serve me, or was she just trying to mentally torture me? In any case...

“Sorry ’bout all that. But, I’m glad you came. I was pretty nervous, to be honest.”

Explaining an erotic dungeon to people who hadn’t experienced one before by myself would have left me broken and racked with guilt.

“...Well, I guess I was worried about you, too. Only a little, though. Just the tiiiiiiinest bit of worry,” she said, using her thumb and pointer finger to make a C. Hey, your fingers are practically touching!

“Besides, you’ve helped me out a bunch, and I guess if it’s you with me, I can

sorta pull through,” she said, looking away slightly. The last part of her statement had come out in a whisper.

“...Honestly, it’s reassuring to have you here, Yuika. Seriously, no joke. Thanks.”

Yuika’s face turned red under my gaze.

“Oh, er, Yuika, that’s not...”

“I do hate to disturb your little tête-à-tête, but I would appreciate an explanation.”

Shion’s voice brought me back to reality.

“For starters, I’m guessing this means we don’t have to worry about the guardians?”

Yuika cleared her throat and nodded as she bashfully adjusted her clothes.

“So what is this place, then?”

“Hmm, well, let’s see... How do I put it? It’s kind of like a penalty game?”

For the eroge players out there, it was more like a must-visit bonus stage, though.

However, from our current standpoint...

“Yeah, a penalty game, basically.”

“What, pray tell, does that entail?”

“How about we just head inside for now. I’m sure there’s going to be something that will help explain there.”

Yuika did make an excellent point. That would make the explanation go a lot faster and lend credibility to the absolutely insane things I was about to say.

“Quite dark, isn’t it?”

The inside of the manor was a little dim. The only lights were candles, and

balls of fire that looked like will-o'-the-wisps.

“This place gives me the creeps... But I’m not sensing any enemies.”

“Ahh, Ivy, you don’t need to be so guarded,” I said, trying to assuage her caution. She didn’t need to be vigilant yet.

“That being said, what *is* this?” Shion asked, poking a doll that was hanging by thread with her finger. It was dressed in a white cloth and a triangle-shaped headband.

“Ohhh no, this sucks...”

Picking up on something, Yuika pushed me to the front of the group and grabbed on to my clothes. She’d realized what this dungeon was themed after.

A haunted house.

This dungeon consisted of a trip through an erotic haunted house. The corridor we were walking down looked like that of horror-themed Japanese-style inn.

A short while later, we arrived at what appeared to be a reception desk.

The reception counter had a hologram that displayed an information plaque. Shion looked at the information plaque and squinted.

“...Can’t read any of it.”

Unfortunately, it was written in the ancient language, and there was no one here who could read it. If only Nanami or Anemone were here.

“Yup, there’s no reading that...,” Yuika agreed.

However, there was a chance that something nearby would help translate the text for us...

“Why don’t we look around a little?”

Searching the nearby area was a good place to start.

Besides, there was a chance that we had landed on a different floor than the erotic dungeon I was thinking of. If some miracle on par with the oceans all drying up at once could happen, we might be saved.

A short while later, I found a small hologram display near the desk. It had a button reading JAPANESE, so I pressed.

“Oh, Takky, it looks like we can read it now! Let’s see...a haunted house?”

“I’d figured as much from the atmosphere. It appears I was correct.”

“Ughh, this seriously sucks. I hate it!” Yuika griped. She couldn’t handle horror very well. Still, that should have been the least of her worries; there was another part of this whole thing that would truly make her despair.

“Hm? Are you scared of ghosts? But you defeat monsters well enough, don’t you?”

“I don’t really care about fighting grotesque-looking monsters or whatever. Zombies, spirits, none of them bother me. Besides, I’m in battle mode when I face off against them. I’m just not great at dealing with things that attack the human psyche. That, and I can’t fight back in a haunted house.”

Yuika didn’t like things that were made specifically to prey on the mind. I got where she was coming from. I didn’t give a second thought to fighting zombies in dungeons, but *R*sident Evil* was still scary. The VR version would probably make me piss myself. If it were a VR eroge, on the other hand, I’d be shooting something else out instead.

“A simple haunted house hardly seems like much of a penalty game...”

Well sure, it wouldn’t be bad if it were a *simple* one, but this was anything but. To be honest, there weren’t really any haunted house elements here at all.

After a short pause, the screen changed.

“Hmm, what’s this? Change our clothes? What does that mean?”

The screen showed a picture of a human mannequin being dressed in different clothes. It was visually telling us to change out of our current outfits.

Oh, some words popped up. *Please get changed to proceed*. See, what did I say?

Yuika watched the screen with a super cold look in her eyes. Perhaps an old wound of hers was flaring up. Back then, it was a magical girl outfit tha— *Urgh*, there go *my* old wounds.

“What prompted that look of disgust, you two?” Shion asked.

“Oh, I was just losing the will to live a bit. Oh, the screen changed.”

Everyone turned to the hologram.

It showed a picture of a female character in shrine maiden outfit attaching a talisman on a cracked rock. The words SEAL THE ROCKS SUMMONING THE GHOSTS appeared as well. This was followed by an image of the female character leaving the manor, a smile on her face.

“This must be the requirement to get through. We have to clear the floor by sticking talismans on these rocks.”

When Yuika said this, the display changed once more.

There was an X mark over a picture of someone speaking. As well as a picture of an X over someone hitting an object and making a racket.

“Hmm, it must be telling us to proceed quietly, yes?”

“And it looks like there’s a penalty for anyone who doesn’t. I wonder what *that* could be.”

“Also, we apparently get a fabulous reward if we clear with a high score.”

The display changed to an illustration of air coming out of a person’s butt. This, too, had an X above it.

“Takioto?”

Yuika’s voice, an octave lower than usual and filled with contempt, pierced my very soul.

The next moment, the hologram displayed an arrow and crosswalk sign. It was telling us to go this way. By the looks of it, the rest of the details would be explained there.

“Takioto?” Yuika asked, her every syllable the same tone. If she spoke to me like that a few more times, I would end up throwing myself on the ground and groveling. Hell, I already wanted to.

Yuika stared at me with reproach, accusing me of knowing what was going on.

“L-let’s go.”

All I could do was to urge us forward.

Up ahead in the next room was a chest of drawers, a large mirror, and another hologram display. The hologram was telling us to open the chest of drawers.

“I must say, that’s a splendid paulownia chest.”

“Doesn’t have any traps, either.”

The explanatory floors never had any traps. Aw, who was I kidding—we’d essentially gotten caught in a trap just by coming here. I wanted to hurl.

As Ivy and the others investigated the chest, I touched the hologram. This brought everything home. It wasn’t a surprise so much as it was confirming this place was exactly as I had anticipated.

How on earth was I going to explain this?

“Hm? What’s with these clothes? A shrine maiden’s... *Huuuuh?!*”

I turned around when Shion shouted. She had frozen in place with something in her hands.

Ivy was also looking at Shion and the item with wide eyes. She was at a loss for words, too.

Yuika went to Shion’s side and glanced at the clothes, glanced at me, and then, with a look of contempt, gazed back at the clothes, looked at me again, and sighed.

I timidly went up to Yuika and looked down at the outfit.

It could be described as a shrine maiden costume, albeit one that preserved only the bare minimum of the usual design. It consisted of a red miniskirt that seemed like it would provide a peek from the slightest incline, a top that was like a swimsuit, with armpits and side boob on full display, and a pair of detached robe sleeves.

If not for the red-and-white color scheme, it would be indistinguishable from your standard fetish outfit.

I mean, it was pervy as hell even with the right colors.

“Wh-what, no!!”

Yuika noticed something and picked it up from the drawer.

A red string attached to a strip of white cloth—an unreliable last line of defense.

“A st-string thong.”

G-string panties. Yuika collapsed to her knees and stared dumbfounded at them.

“Y-you’re telling me I have to wear *this*?!” Shion wailed, her voice cracking slightly. I didn’t think I had ever seen her like this, Man, was she cute or what? (I say as I try to escape from reality.) “Th-this is all a joke, right, Takky? I-I can’t put this on! I’m not weird like Anemone.”

Unable to bear their desperate, clinging gazes, I averted my eyes. We couldn’t move on without wearing this stuff.

“In a similar dungeon... Yuika and I...*hrnk*!”

“No, inconceivable... Please, tell me this is all a joke.”

“It’s not. He’s telling the truth, and this probably isn’t the only humiliating thing we’ll have to do, either. Right, Takioto?”

I nodded at Yuika’s words.

There was no way a scenario in *Magical★Explorer* would end with a mere change of outfit. The eroge faithful held the game in such high-esteem precisely because of its willingness to go the extra mile.

“Well, what is it this time? I’m ready for anything. Are our clothes going to go see-through again?”

“See-through clothes?!” Shion shouted.

“That can’t be right. She’s lying, right, Takky? Right?!” Ivy asked.

“No, the clothes went seen-through before, but this time’s different. Depending on the situation, it might be a lot worse...”

“Then, um... I heard about this from Ludie but...does it have something to do with breast milk?”

“Huh? Breast milk?” Ivy repeated, not understanding what Yuika meant.

“Apparently, Ludie went through a dungeon that makes you lactate, pregnant or not. She said it was like witnessing hell itself, or something.”

“B-b-bre—breast miiiiilk?!”

“Whaaaaat?!”

Shion and Ivy both went red in the face and covered their chests. Adorable. Still, that was a memory I didn’t especially want to relive, thanks.

“Nope, we won’t have to deal with breast milk.”

“...I mean, I assumed as much. I’m sure that illustration we saw at the start has something to do with it, right?” Yuika said apathetically. Then with a gentle smile, she patted me on shoulder.

“Don’t worry. I know that you didn’t do anything wrong or anything. If the person who made this dungeon were here, I’d curse him out...and slip one in for you while I’m at it.”

“You’re still cursing me out either way!”

“Oh, don’t get so upset! I’m just joking, duh. C’mon, just fill us in and make it easy on yourself.”

I walked over to the hologram and slid my hand across it.

When I did, an illustration appeared of a ghost slipping inside a woman’s body after she’d made some noise.

Beside the picture was also a right-facing arrow.

The arrow was pointing at an illustration of a woman, her eyes rolled back, her mouth gaping, her tongue hanging out, and her hands making two peace signs.

“

“

“

Time stopped. The three of them turned to me in spurts, their heads jostling like a rusty machine. I prostrated myself on the floor. I hadn't done a single thing wrong, yet my conscience was killing me.

I had to say it now.

"Well, um, see, if you make any noise, a ghost will possess you."

"And then?"

Yuika pressed me to continue. Her voice lacked any emotion or intonation.

"When the ghost possesses you, well... You'll roll your eyes back into your head and stick your tongue out."

"Huh? What? Say that again, in a way that's easier to understand... Out with it."

I rubbed my head against the ground. Then I cried out:

"You make a disgraceful *ahegao*!"

There was a moment of silence. Yuika was the one to speak up first.

".....Excuse me? *Ahegao*? What is that? Okay, Takioto, I'm going to ask you one more time, okay? What the hell is an *ahegao*? Explain to me why an *ahegao* even exists at all."

Uh-oh, when Yuika got like this, nothing I could say mattered. I had to tiptoe around the question, avoiding the topic somehow.

"Er, well, an *ahegao* is, let's see, a sort of expression you aren't supposed to let others see, when you're really lost in pleasure and lose your sense of self. Yeah, something like that, um..."

"Oh I get that—just looking at that stupid picture explains everything—but that's not what I'm asking about here!"

"Yes, yes, sorry, sorry!"

Yup, that's what I thought!

“I-I’ll have to make a face like that...?”

Shion looked at me with pleading eyes. However, there was nothing I could do. Usually, the cool and composed characters were the ones who took the most damage from erotic dungeons. Shion, along with Yukine and Vice President Fran, took an exceptional amount of damage, which absolutely ruled.

“C-can’t we escape from here somehow?!” Ivy said as she frantically took out a magic returning stone and tried to use it.

“Nope. Gabby and I tried absolutely everything we could when we were stuck in a similar dungeon. Just give up. More importantly—”

The image on the display changed while she was talking.

“That picture. I want an explanation for that.”

Yuika touched the hologram. The picture displayed a mass of air coming out of a butt... A picture of someone farting.

“Why? Please, enlighten me. Why would they make sure to include a picture of someone breaking wind, hm?”

Given her usually sharp intuition, Yuika must have already surmised the answer. She was exactly right.

Did I...did I really have to say it?

“So, actually, Yuika. About that picture. Well, you see, there are traps in this dungeon...”

I didn’t want to say it...but I had to.

“...And getting caught in one causes gas to build up in your intestines that desperately tries to break loose.”

“Why are you phrasing it in a way that’s so hard to understand? Just come out and say fart, break wind, pass gas! Just say fart! Wait...hold on just a second.”

Yuika had already picked up on it.

“Passing gas makes a sound. Does that mean that farting will force you to make an *ahegao* face, too?! Huh?! So that X mark over the picture of farting...!”

Yuika was way too perceptive. She had already parsed the most insidious

aspect of this place before I could say anything.

At Amaterasu Girls' Academy, the equation had only been traps equal an urge to pee, which equaled wetting oneself. And obviously, that dealt an immeasurable amount of damage in its own right, sure.

In this dungeon, traps, farting, possession, and *ahegao* all came as a set. On top of that, in order to fix the *ahegao*, we would need... Nope, nope, I was never going to say it.

Just then, the picture on the display changed.

It showed a whole new world, where a man and woman were joyfully farting on each other. The creepiness of the illustration left everyone else stunned, speechless. I held my head in my hands.

“Ahaha. Look, they’re farting on each other with big smiles. Ahahahahahahahahaha, isn’t this the worst thing you’ve ever seen? Ahahahahahahaha!”

Yuika laughed, as if finally broken.

This was awful. I assumed that the “Fart Enhancer Patch” that came with an eroge magazine had been applied to this world already. The patch made passed gas even more destructive, but they wouldn’t know if I stayed qu— DON’T MISS OUT! FOR A LIMITED TIME, FARTS ARE 100% LOUDER, 200% MORE FRAGRANT, AND 1000% MORE STIMULATING!

Now why did those words have to go and splash across the screen? We aren’t in a supermarket here! Don’t list it all out like they’re the weekly specials!

This was the Fart Enhancer Patch, which the developers had made as a joke. It included an extra picture of the heroines suffering even more embarrassment from their farts.

Players opinions on the patch generally ranged from, “well this is stupid,” to “funny,” to “there’s gotta be more important stuff to add in, right?” But in the end, it was surprisingly well-received. The sexy art and writing were top-notch.

Still, that wasn’t how it was going to play out in real life.

“...Okay, I’ll *generously* concede that the one-hundred-percent louder farts

makes some sense. But what's this? Two hundred percent more fragrant?! Fra-fra-fra-fragrant?! Ahahahahaha, two hundred percent more fragrant?! Screw all of this! Is there any idiot out there who'd be *happy* their farts were smellier?! Even calling them fragrant is crazy to begin with!" Yuika moaned.

She didn't understand. Just didn't get it.

First of all, we lived in a world where a pretty girl's farts were more valuable than natural gas. Everyone would be happier if they were smellier!

Imagine a super cute girl. Well, I guess Yuika would work, since she was super cute. So, take Yuika here. If Yuika were to sell her used panties, which would fetch a larger price—visibly pristine panties or vaguely soiled panties?

The soiled panties, duh!

Basically, the gap here was what was important, okay? The gap! When you thought about how that fresh, true-to-life stain or odor came from a cute girl who always smelled wonderful, you would go, *Ehehe, so this is Yuika's*— Wait, what am I trying to explain here?!

Anyway, it was the same for farts, too. A drop-dead beauty's super stinky concussive gas blast was way better than a disappointing, odorless breeze! Also, letting out a stinky fart was bound to make Yuika turn beet red and look ashamed.

And if they stank, that made it all the more embarrassing!

All of it is great, you big dumb idiot! (This was totally misplaced anger.) They ruled! Farts were awesome!

But there was nooooooooo way I could say any of that, now could I?!

"My apologies..."

"Why are you saying sorry, Takioto? You haven't done anything, have you?"

"Hey, what's this about one thousand percent more stimulating? I sorta don't get it."

Ivy, a ninja, was asking this? I was almost certain beyond a shadow of a doubt the writer was paying homage to ninjas here.

“That’s, well... It’s saying you’ll feel things more intensely, and it’ll be easier to feel pleasure,” Yuika said, as if struggling to get the words out. Uh-oh, I needed to jump in with some support fast.

“C-calm down, Yuika. One thousand percent is a big scary number, but it just means ten times more.”

“Uhhhhhhh hello?! What. Are. You. Talking about?! This isn’t just double, okay, but *ten times*. Just the slightest touch will be enough to... *Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!*”

“Forgive me!”

In the land of erogé, three thousand times the sensitivity was totally possible, so my sense of scale was out of whack, but yeah, ten times was definitely problematic enough!

“And then there’s this *ahégao* situation. Is there any method to keep us from having to do that?”

Technically, there was. As for whether it was actually possible or not, that would be more difficult. I definitely couldn’t bring it up.

“Takioto.”

However, Yuika picked up on my hesitation. I had no choice.

“Please calm down a second and hear me out... So, first off, when you get hurt, you apply ointment, yeah?”

“Well, sometimes you use healing magic, but I suppose you’re right. What about it?”

“If it was your butt that got injured, you’d spread ointment on it, right? Makes sense?”

“Hold up, where’s ‘butt’ coming from?!”

Yuika was angry. And it was because she was angry that she was figuring out where this was going.

But, listen. C'mon. I don't exactly know what I'm supposed to say here either, okay?!

Dammit, if it had come to this, then screw it all! I'd just come out and say it!

"You can stop the *ahegao* and the farting by shoving a suppository into someone else's butt!"

"Excuuuuuuuuuuuse me?!"

Yuika let out her loudest shout of the day.

"Why the butt? Just administer the medicine orally! Why does it need to be through the butt?!"

"Um, well, it's not as effective, and doesn't work immediately. So that's why going through the butt is the only option."

"Oh come on! You can't be serious!"

Shion looked as though her soul had left her body, her mouth half agape. To be honest, if there was anyone I'd want to give a suppository to, it would probably be Shion. That ass of hers was pure poetry.

Meanwhile, Ivy was smacking the hologram like a TV from the sixties and mumbling, "This can't be right," over and over again. This hologram wasn't broken, though. The only thing broken here was the scenario writer.

Shortly, a new illustration showed up on the hologram. The picture depicted a girl with an *ahegao* getting a suppository and going back to normal. Apparently, there was a case with the medicine inside the chest of drawers.

Ivy collapsed to the ground where she stood. Yuika kicked the hologram in her stead.

But kicking it wouldn't do anything to change reality.

I needed to find something, anything, to say to them to cheer them up. Y-yeah.

"Oh, b-but, not only does this medicine recover your health a little bit, but it's

also supposed to make you feel good, too. Just one dose is enough to get you hooked.”

“So you’re saying it’s a narcotic?! It’ll synergize with the sensitivity boost and make the situation even more heinous! What’s wrong with you?!”

It wasn’t a narcotic, just a suppository! Though, sure, some of its effects were definitely narcotic!

Yuika heaved her shoulders and sighed. It was useless at this point. I decided not to say anything more.

A short while later, Yuika calmed down and apologized to me.

The only way to escape from here was to move forward, and with that in mind, everyone changed. Unfortunately, that included me as well.

“Who the hell even wants to see me dressed in this?”

There had once been a time when I was unfamiliar with wearing women’s clothing, but that time had long passed.

The problem was that the crotch area protection wasn’t only unreliable, but also dreadfully lacking in total surface area. If I had a loincloth, that would be one thing, but unfortunately I’d only been given a string and a pitiful strip of fabric. Since it was magical clothing, the size adjusted to my body, but I couldn’t help wondering why it had adjusted it to fit like *this*.

As such, I couldn’t afford to let anyone infringe on my absolute territory by flipping up my miniskirt.

“Takky, we’re all set.”

Shortly after I finished getting dressed, the girls called me over.

“!!!”

I found myself on consecrated ground. There stood three sexily dressed shrine maidens.

“Hmph, well, Takioto? You have something you want to say, don’t you?”

“Um, well, all of you...look great. Very cute.”

Yuika had circled back around to being defiant and resigned, just as before.

She was ungrudgingly exposing her fair, healthy skin. A white bikini. A red miniskirt. Some weird and nonsensical decorations on her arms. And finally, her poignant side boob.

Yuika noticed I was staring at her chest. Her face went red, and she said: “Pervert.”

But for some reason, her scolding merely sent a tingle through me.

Next was Ivy. She must have found the same inner resolve as Yuika. She was even making a peace-sign pose in her outfit. If she farted, then she’d add another peace sign and her eyes and tongue would... Best to just forget it.

Actually, Ivy might not have understood this, but the armpit area was a kind of holy ground of its own, and very arousing. She could have easily charged money for a peek, and here she was freely putting it on full display—basically, it ruled. Thank you very much.

“You look really great.”

Ivy had a great figure, just like Yuika.

Her best points were her legs and butt. As a rabbitfolk, her thighs were sturdy and well-built, to the point where I wanted her to squeeze me between them and toss me. Heck, I would have settled for a kick, too. Her butt was nice, too, with her cute and fluffy tail sticking out from it.

“T-Takky. It’s a little embarrassing to have you stare so much...”

Ivy scratched her head bashfully. Her armpits and side boob were fantastic.

“Erm, uh, you look good too, Takky.”

Stop, no, don’t make me remember.

While these two seemed to have resigned themselves to the situation, Shion was a different story.

She was fidgeting with her back to me, likely from overwhelming embarrassment. And what a beautiful back she had. Gorgeous feminine curves

and fair skin.

The sight was more beautiful than the sun rising over the Pacific. She transcended nature.

“C’mon Shishi, just give up.”

You fool, obviously Shion hated this. Do you have any idea what you’ve done? Sheesh, just look, Shion is panicking. Great job!!

“Oh, Shion...”

Compared to the other two girl’s firm physiques, Shion’s body was a little plumper. Naturally, she couldn’t compare to Sis’s curves, but the sight was still powerful enough to leave me completely awed.



*

Yeah, this was paradise after all.

To be honest, I would have loved for the three of them to exorcise me.

Any spirit haunting me would be bound to pass on to heaven, and I'd probably ascend in my own way with them.

"Um, w-well. It suits you. There's this cute gap between how you are now and you're normal self."

Normally, Shion wore a modest kimono, so just seeing her expose so much was already arousing enough.

The truly dangerous part was her talisman-style bikini. The bikini, designed to look like her nipples were being sealed away by paper talismans, elevated her sexiness several levels all on its own.

I would have loved to be sealed away by those very same talismans. The depraved thought rushed through my body.

"Uh, your skin is very pretty, too. More beautiful than an ocean sunrise."

"F-fool. More beautiful than a sunrise? What is that nonsense?"

"No, really, that's how pretty you are."

I wanted her to squeeze me tight and pat my head and tell me how much of a good boy I was. That's the look she had.

"O-oh shut up, I get it already, so, er... D-don't stare at me so much. It's mortifying!"

How the hell!!! Could I not!! Look?! If you say that to me while fidgeting, that just makes me want to look even more, dammit. Hell, I could've stared at her forever. I wanted to gaze at her until I finished counting out the numbers of pi. A beautiful eternity.

Still, was I capable of doing something I know would bother Shion? If there was anyone out there who could, I would've punched them into next week.

I had no choice but to avert my eyes. With heartrending reluctance, I turned away from her.

A short while later, I gave everyone a more in-depth explanation of the dungeon. After I had finished laying things out somewhat, we checked our belongings and got ready to forge ahead.

“Oh right. Takkyyyy! I don’t know if we’ll use them, but I’ll hand out the suppositories. Everyone should at least have one with them, right?”

Hearing this, I took out the case with the suppositories. There were about ten of them. Though, that being said...

Yuika stared hard at the suppository in her hand and murmured, “Aren’t these sorta big?”

The suppository in her palm was about the size of a man’s finger.

“...So long as we don’t use them, that won’t be an issue.”

Shion was right—as long as we didn’t mess up, we wouldn’t have to use them.

“Yup. Alrighty, let’s go then! We all get the rules now, so I’ll head in first to check things out,” Ivy concluded. She headed over to a gate labeled ENTRANCE.

The teleportation gate must have been similar to an A**where Door. The instant she went in, she disappeared. Nevertheless, she returned quickly. Then, putting up a hand to stop us, she went through it once more. She returned just as quickly a second time...holding her head in her hands.

“...Yikes.”

Ivy gave her concise appraisal. Yup, I knew it. The world on the other end of that gate was going to surpass any of their expectations, in the most unfathomable of ways.

“Then I shall go in and see.”

This time, Shion was the one to go through. She, too, soon returned.

“...That place wants us dead,” she murmured as she hugged herself, trembling. She squished her boobs together, sucking my heart into her cleavage along with it.

“Okay, I’ll go this time.”

Now it was Yuika’s turn. She, too, turned back almost immediately after entering. Then, she pulled on my bikini breast.

“Yeah, there definitely was this ghost watching me.”

Her grip began to tighten, harder and harder.

“Ow! Cut it out, or my nipples will fall off!”

Yet Yuika’s hands didn’t slacken.

“Why? Why does a haunted house need acupressure foot mats? In what world do you lay out acupressure mats in a stupid haunted house?! Well?!”

She was absolutely right. The truth was, the inside of this haunted house contained not only acupressure mats, but a wide variety of items that would make a racket.

“If they have those mats, they’re *definitely* trying to kill us.”

“And did you see the trees growing on the sides? They’re cedar.”

“Does anyone have seasonal allergies? If so, we’ll need to rush on through all at once.”

Fortunately, the silver lining was that no one here had any allergies. Seriously, that was huge.

“They’re trying everything they can to make us humiliate ourselves. We can’t lose—no, we lose, and it’s all over.”

Yuika psyched herself up once more.

Ivy was first to take the plunge. This was in part to search for traps. Then Yuika, Shion, and I followed.

We could see several spirits floating about on this floor of the dungeon. These things had extremely sharp hearing and would slip into our bodies if we made the slightest noise, possessing us and exposing our *ahegao*.

As long as we kept quiet, we could ignore the ghosts flying around the area.

First, we needed to contend with our footing below.

Ivy slowly took a step forward.

“.....!”

Stepping on the acupressure mat didn't seem to hurt Ivy. She swiftly continued forward. Although she wasn't quite as stoic as Ivy, Yuika didn't show any signs of being in much pain, either. It was thanks to how fit and healthy they were. A little foot acupressure wasn't enough to bother them.

However, there was one other person who was taking in the damage—
“&%■#*~▲%*&X\$~#)*&*#!!”

Shion.

I tiptoed over to Shion, standing still.

She was wearing a hideous expression. She likely wanted to scream from the intense pain, but since she wasn't able to do so, the agony was showing on her face.

Meanwhile, I wasn't feeling a thing. They say that an unhealthy lifestyle can make one hurt more readily, but...Shion?

She took another step forward. Pain seemed to surge through her. She started moving like a punk girl headbanging at a concert.

Just then, a thought came to me. For the time being, I pulled her by the hand and brought her over to an area without any acupressure. Then I turned around and kneeled down.

When I looked back at Shion, her eyes were sparkling, as though she was looking at her messiah. Adorable.

Moving slowly to avoid making any noise, she approached me and brought her body against mine. Just then, I remembered.

This was dangerous.

I had totally forgotten, but I was lightly dressed here, as was Shion. Things were different from when I'd bridal-carried Shion while she was wearing her kimono. Our skin was directly touching, clinging fast to one another.

She must have been sweating from the intense pain. Her slightly moist and damp skin stuck to mine. On top of that, her slightly elevated body temperature was amplifying her body odor.

She wrapped her arms around me and pressed her chest into my back. As the distance between us approached zero, my endurance meter suddenly shot through the roof.

Ah, this was extremely bad news. What would happen if my little Kousuke reacted to this?

Although this outfit was adjusted via magic, it had been close to slipping out from the very start.

Now it might stretch and really fly out. Hell, something *else* might come rushing out, too.

If this was a level path, then it might not have been visible, but we were on a downward incline. The other two would probably be able to see up my skirt.

“I-I’m counting on you...♡” Shion whispered that in my ear.

I wasn’t sure if it was because she was whispering, or if it was due to the damage she’d incurred from the foot acupressure, but her voice sounded filled with heart marks to me.

That was a close one. That remark had put me in all kinds of danger.

I hurried along the acupressure path. For some reason, Yuika was staring at me with cold, unamused eyes. Meanwhile, Ivy looked up at my crotch from the bottom of the slope.

It was fine. I was all right. It was just a teensy bit bigger than usual. It wasn’t bulging. Please, just stop looking, I’m begging you.

After getting through the acupressure hell, we next came upon a passageway. Since there weren’t any ghosts here, I summoned the courage to speak.

“Are we good?”

Nothing weird had happened, and I sighed with relief. We seemed to be all

right.

“Seems like we’re fine here.”

We all took a breather.

“That was a terrifying floor to get through. I bet it’s hellish for some people.”

True. For Shion or anyone with allergies, it must have felt like a waking nightmare.

Meanwhile, I felt like I had been bouncing back and forth between heaven and hell.

“Kou, thank you for helping me. I owe you my life.”

“Y-yeah, sure. I’m just glad I could help you out.”

As I recalled the smell and touch from moments prior, my voice accidentally cracked.

“Shishi, don’t you think you should cut back on the sweets and exercise some more?”

“That certainly isn’t happening...”

“I’m wondering how many floors there are to this place, though. If that was the first one, then it’ll only get harder from here, right?”

“Yup.”

“Oh, I don’t even want to imagine...”

It was going to be extremely difficult to get out of here unscathed. The last floor was especially heinous, and we were unlikely to get through it one piece.

If this were the game, we could’ve just booked it through the whole place, flashing non-stop *ahegao* and occasionally administering some suppositories along the way. The fact we couldn’t was making this extremely difficult.

“Let’s rest for a bit before heading to the next floor.”

From there we managed to persevere through two more floors. Then we arrived at the final floor.

After taking a peek to check out what lay in store for us, we backed up a little to hold a strategy meeting.

If I had to name this level, it would be something like *The Tickling Lotion Floor*.

The goal of this floor was a cracked rock. It was surrounded by a *shimenawa* rope, and next to it, there was a projected image of a person sticking a talisman to it, so it was clearly the finish line.

To reach the stone, we would need to climb up a slope covered in a clear, viscous liquid. A lotion incline.

In the opposite direction of the goal were a set of lotion stairs leading to a small altar, where a talisman was floating in midair. Which meant...

"First, we'll head to the altar and get the talisman. Then we'll turn back, head down the other route, stick the talisman on the rock, and be home free."

But the lotion wasn't our only enemy here.

For some reason, there were ghosts floating around, carrying feathers to tickles us with. Gimme me a freaking break. Even variety show challenges didn't go this hard.

Of course, if we failed, we would be subjected to the most humiliating experience imaginable. This was going to be a bitterly fought battle, no question about it.

"...So, I'm actually pretty ticklish, but how about you three?"

When Yuika said this, Ivy and Shion both lowered their heads. I was in the same boat as well.

"This is just a guess, but it seems like there are way more traps on this floor. We might need to be even more careful than before."

Tripping a trap meant farting. If we were unlucky, that could trigger the golden combo of trap, fart, possession, lotion-covered *ahegao*, and a suppository. That was something we needed to avoid at all costs.

"We'll go slow and leave the trap checks up to you, Ivy."

“...We won’t have much choice in terms of speed. Trying to move quickly through that lotion will leave us on our backs.”

We all steeled ourselves and began to move forward.

Ivy was the first one to plunge ahead, of course. She carefully moved along while checking for any traps. When we all stepped out onto the floor, they came.

Creatures whose heads were covered in white cloth... Ghosts.

A specter approached each of our sides and tickled us with the feather in its hands. We somehow managed to fight back our desire to laugh, along with the urge to rip the cloth off the ghosts’ heads and burn them to a crisp.

Ivy, Yuika, and Shion would all frequently stop moving. Their faces turned bright crimson from the laughter they were trying to hold back.

The slimy floor at our feet was another factor that enhanced the cruel brutality of the tickling. We couldn’t really plant our feet down firmly.

As I endured the onslaught of tickling, one of the ghosts by Yuika suddenly took out a tissue. Then, of all things, it twisted it into a thin string and sent it toward her nose.

Yuika picked up on what it was doing and turned around, but the ghost followed right after her. Then it stuck the twisted tissue up her nose.

Dammit! The bastard was trying to get her to sneeze!

This wasn’t a ghost anymore but a demon. A demon from the deepest pits of hell.

Yuika closed her eyes, and her mouth began to frantically open and close.

Uh-oh, she was going to blow.

I immediately went over to her and pushed her face into my body. I was trying to protect her nose. It ultimately meant I was embracing her, but that was better than an *ahegao*, right? All I asked was for her to bear with me.

I barely managed to save Yuika. But then, a different disaster occurred.

“?!”

Ivy had failed to pick up on a trap.

She gave us a truly sorrowful look.

No, Ivy, it's okay. It was unavoidable. You did great picking out all those other traps while enduring the tickling attacks. If anything, I thought it was a miracle we'd managed to get this far completely fartless. Even in-game, the *ahegao* and farts were a given. Though, really, I came here just to see them.

I had to do something to cover her. With this in mind, I went to Ivy's side, but I was too late.

A large white cloud of smoke in the shape of garlic appeared. It immediately went around behind Ivy. Then, shockingly, the smoke *slipped inside her butt*. It isn't obvious in the game, but apparently, the smoke was injected directly.

And then, the cloud of smoke headed in our direction for some reason... Wait, why? This trap wasn't limited to just one person?!

Yuika must have seen what was happening. She began thrashing around in my chest. If she could speak right now, she would unquestionably have some quip about the situation.

Something like, "*Why would the gas be shaped like garlic, the king of stink? Why is it coming in through the butt, and why is it heading toward us, too?!*" I felt the same way.

I tried to reject the gas by frantically clenching my anus. Yuika and Shion were probably doing the same. Both their chests were puffed out, and they had adopted stances that made clenching easier.

However, it was all in vain.

The very first sensation I felt was, surprisingly, pleasant.

As the gas entered into my butt, I drowned in a sensation that was tantamount to every part of my body being massaged at once.

Simultaneously, my stomach swelled slightly, and a desire arose within me.

I wanted to fart.

The urge was incredibly strong, like the thirst you felt when dehydrated in a desert. But I couldn't do it. Passing gas was a one-way ticket to *ahegao*.

It was at that moment. The ghost began to tickle us again, as if it had found its perfect opportunity.

I understood with the utmost firsthand clarity—this was such a deeply and despicably base dungeon.

Thanks to the ten-times sensitivity boost of the gas, an even stronger pleasure and ticklishness assailed us. Was it even possible to endure ten times the tickling?

Yuika must have been at her limit. Her face and skin were bright red, and she was sweating enough for her hair to stick to her forehead. I had to do something to get her to safety. At the same time, I wanted to continue clearing the floor.

I slowly picked up Yuika in a bridal carry and fast-walked across the floor. Yuika wrapped sweaty hands around my neck and pressed her face into my chest. I felt her hot breaths.

Under normal circumstances, I would have been overjoyed right now. However, now all her breathing did was make me feel overstimulated and ticklish.



I overtook Ivy and thrust forward toward the talisman. I tried my best to avoid the ghosts and stay on my feet. Our only choice was to pick up the talisman fast and clear this floor as soon as possible.

Yuika understood this and reached out to grab the talisman, but apparently, this floor wasn't going to make things that simple. With the worst timing possible, a ghost placed a feather up to Yuika's armpit. Right in her armpit. Her steamy sweaty armpit. Ah, Y-Yuika's scent.

She trembled in my arms. I could hear her let out "ah," "hngh," and the like, but the sounds seemed to be just barely quiet enough for the ghosts. As far as my crotch was concerned, however, she was almost too loud.

The instant Yuika grabbed the talisman, I immediately dodged and went to the right. It looked like Shion and Ivy had both managed to avoid a flatulent fate as well.

However, everyone was reaching their limits. All their faces were bright red, and they were walking with their butts pulled back, looking ready to cry.

We were done for. The only option was to use my last-ditch, ultimate technique. I slowly and quietly put Yuika down and put some space between myself and the girls.

Then, steeling myself, I shouted loudly.

"The rest is up to you three! Over here, ghosts! Come and get me!"

I dove into an area where the lotion had pooled into a pond. It sent out a loud splashing sound.

"I'll show you everything I've got!"

And fart while I was at it!!

A resounding rolling rumble. Ahh, farting felt *amazing*. The sensitivity increase was part of it, but the sound was great, too. That 150-percent louder part lived up to its promise. Though it was stinky...

After that, all the ghosts on the floor gathered around me, drawn in by the noise I had made.

Just then, I had a thought.

I was in a pond of lotion right now, right? Maybe the lotion would interfere with the ghosts and make it impossible for them to grab me?

Nah, no dice. Those things didn't give a damn about any lotion.

The spirits scrambled over each other to enter my butt. I squeezed my ass tight with all my heart and soul, but the ghosts wrenched it open little by little.

It was at that moment I realized something. When I lifted up the cloth over the ghosts, and looked at the body inside...

Wait, now that I got a better look, all these ghosts were cute girls!

It came the instant my ass unclenched. I was assaulted by a tremendous feeling of pleasure.

What the hell was all this? It was a pleasure roller coaster. How could I possibly fight against this?!

"M-my hands, are moving on their own...!"

They contorted into peace signs. A double peace sign, of course. Then, my eyes began to spasm, turning upwards...! I couldn't fight back. I was unable to resist. But a part of me didn't want to either.

My last glimpse of the world was Yuika and the others going up the stairs and moving to stick the talisman on the rock.

When I opened my eyes, I saw three sexy, sticky beauties peering back at me. What was happening?

"Is this, heaven?"

"Takky!"

Ivy energetically hugged me. It appeared we had cleared that hell (?), and they had laid me down on a different floor. Behind them was a hologram that read CONGRATULATIONS.

I chided Ivy and made her get off me before I sat up. When I did, for some reason, something about my butt felt off.

“Upsy-daisy. Hm? My butt...?”

Yuika suddenly lunged toward me.

“T-Takioto, I’m so glad you’re all right!”

“Gwaugh!”

I got a good hit on the chin and now it was my chin’s turn to hurt.

Shion was flustered for some reason, her face beet red. When I looked at Yuika again, I saw that her face was a bit flushed, too...

“W-we were able to clear the floor thanks to you, Takky! Also, it was much bigger than I’d thought it would be...”

“The rock! The rock we sealed was really big!!”

I heard Yuika’s scream right against my ear, and suddenly, it came back to me.

“Don’t shout in my ear... Right, we cleared it all? But wait, I don’t remember what happened at the end...”

“Who cares about the details! We’ve got bigger things to think about! We’re getting a bonus reward for getting through here!! Isn’t that exciting?!”

I was overawed by Yuika’s vigor.

The bonus reward? Ohh, right. We had managed to get through the dungeon all without almost any farting. So, we were getting compensated for our efforts.

“Takky, look at that.”

Ivy pointed to the hologram. It did in fact read, ALL PARTY MEMBERS WILL RECEIVE A SPELL AS A BONUS REWARD.

Then, when I read the sentence, it all came back to me.

Wait, wasn't the bonus reward absolute depraved insanity?

Yuika and the others excitedly wondered about what sort of spell they would be getting.

As I went to get off the floor and think over what to do, Yuika pulled me up by the hand.

"Thanks."

Now then, how was I supposed to explain this? Heading back without accepting the bonus...wasn't really an option, given how much these three were looking forward to it.

While I was turning things over in my mind, we ended up walking right in front of the hologram.

When I swiped my hand in front of it to control it, the screen changed over.

It was a picture. A picture of someone inserting air into someone else's intestines.

"Uhh?"

"Hrm?"

"Hop?"

The three girls had likely figured it out. I wanted to run away. I couldn't.

Yuika silently glared at me.

"So, uh, this is probably...you know, the stomach swells up, or more like, the intestines swell up, I guess..."

"Oh yeah?"

Overpowered by the pressure, I could only prostrate myself before them. It wasn't like this was my fault, but I had this strange need to apologize.

The looks they were giving me stung at my heart for some reason; it was as though they were staring at a piece of human trash. Just as mysteriously, my butt stirred, too.

“I’m sorry, but the bonus is a spell that generates gas inside someone’s intestines! Forgive meeeee!!”

“Ohhhh, I see, it makes gas build up in the stomach. Huh, I didn’t know there were spells like that. That’s just fart magic, isn’t it?!”

“Must they continue to torture us with this flatulence nonsense?!”

“Who’d even be happy to get this?!”

I mean, we eroge connoisseurs were certainly happy about it. After all, the spell allowed you to make your favorite characters fart, and you bet your ass I collected those CGs. The spell was just an eroge gag, so you couldn’t use it offensively by, say, making your opponent’s gut burst from gas buildup. None of that really mattered right now, though.

“There has to be something better than that!”

In the end, even Shion blew her top. For the time being, I needed to calm everyone down.

“W-wait, just hold on. There’s one more, it looks like we’ll get one more spell!” I said, changing the image on the hologram. The illustration depicted two people, an image of someone moving the gas from inside their gut into the intestines of another.

Oh right, there was this other unhinged spell, too. At this point, all I could do was embrace it all, and shout, “This spell transports the gas you’ve built up in your intestines into someone else’s!”

“Ohhh, sending gas into someone... This is just more fart magic, are you kidding me?!”

“Injecting another person with your gas?! I don’t even want to imagine!”

Seriously, why would anyone get joy out of putting their own intestinal gas into someone else?!

But, see, the thing is, though!! Among the eroge aficionados, the spell got rave reviews. They hailed it as a “revolutionary and unprecedented idea even a genius wouldn’t come up with!”

Just imagine it. The immoral act of directly transporting your own natural gas

into the intestines of a beautiful girl. The dumbass brigade spouted nonsense about a beautiful girl's farts being natural gas or whatever; they even said it themselves. They claimed this technology could change the world.

They called it the third energy revolution.

Piss off, more like a third energy *revulsion*.

Third energy revolution my ass. Sure, a beauty's farts would be much more tasteful and higher-class than natural gas, and if I had to choose between a gas field and fart magic, I'd, reluctantly mind you, choose the fart magic!

Wait, so it really was an energy revolution?

"Wait no, that doesn't matter."

"What do you mean it doesn't matter?!"

Oh my, Yuika was quite angry. Yikes, I'd accidentally said what I was thinking, there.

"S-sorry."

We could all tell that some sort of power was working its way inside us. This was proof that we had acquired the fart magic.

An illustration showing us how to use it showed up on the hologram.

"Honestly, this spell's way more dangerous than ancient magic. If anyone in the world appeared who could cast this... It'd be like hell, right?"

"If there was such a character out there, I certainly don't want to imagine the consequences..."

"Nope, I definitely don't want to think about it. Though, well, we did get it... Why don't we give it a shot? If it really is awful, we can seal it away and forget this ever happened," Yuika said, looking at me. Shion and Ivy both looked at me as well.

"Oh."

I figured it out. I got what was going on here. They were planning on turning me into the guinea pig. Well, I understood that I was the only real option here, but, see...

Normally, yeah, I'd hate that, thanks.

I was against it, except, I also sorta felt that part of me wanted them to see me fart.

That being said, though, I don't think they would be able to use it. I mean, these spells...

"Hold it. Judging by the hologram, this magic uses an enormous amount of mana, right? This is gonna be impossible for anyone without an inhumanly massive mana pool."

These spells consumed a large amount of mana, more than was possible to even possess before the second playthrough. Even Iori isn't able to use it on the first playthrough.

"Inhuman amounts of mana, you say?"

The girls' eyes began to turn colder and colder.

Wait, so uh, m-m-m-me? I got the feeling even Takioto couldn't use it until the second playthrough, but maybe... Actually wait, I'd never even made Takioto use it in-game before, so I had no clue.

Was it really going to work? There was no way.

"I-I'll just give it a try, then."

I looked at how to use it and incanted the spell. For the target, well, Yuika would work. Though, man, this sure was taking away a ton of mana. Was this really going to...

"Huh? T-Takioto?"

.....Uh-oh.



CONFIG

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim After we returned from the dungeon, things were already being cleaned up.

The Student Council and Morals Committee had been able to defeat their enemies without much trouble. But that was hardly surprising—their foes should have been a step below the Mythical Inkwash Beast anyway. Each committee was full of powerful students, so I had figured there was virtually zero chance of them losing anyway.

This was a given, but Ludie was safe and sound. Depending on how things had transpired, I'd feared that the Church of the Malevolent Lord might have attacked her, but my worries were unfounded.

Instead, she looked on at our completely exhausted group with gentle eyes and patted me on the back without saying a word. Yukine, too. She made sure to tell us we did a good job.

Nanami was standing next to her, so they must have known that I was all right, and that we'd cleared the erotic dungeon, too.

However, the other two didn't know the details. Know that we had donned shrine maiden costumes that scarcely covered us up, had trudged through lotion pathways, and had endured tickling with 1000-percent increased sensitivity. Nor did they know that I had let out a fart with a 150-percent sound boost, had inhaled its 200-percent smellier odor, and had thrown up a double peace sign as I exposed my *ahegao* to the world.

Nor did they know that at the very end, I created a revolting energy revolution. Nor that the other three girls fled to the corners of the room while chewing me out.

However, even if they didn't know, after enduring similarly unfortunate encounters with me several times before, Yukine and Ludie understood.

Understood just how harsh and painful it had all been.

However, I couldn't let what happened in the erotic dungeon drag on forever.

There was still the Laretta situation to take care of. And so, I went to pay a visit to Ms. Sakura, bringing Nanami and Yuika along with me.

I was unsure if I should bring Ivy with me too or not, but she was worried about Laretta and probably wanted to stay at her side, so I didn't have her join us.

Yuika had grumbled, "Why do I have to come, too?" but I needed her power. The power of her saint lineage.

In a rare turn of events, Ms. Sakura wasn't in the library. According to Sis, who was dozing off in the librarian's room, she was using up the rest of her paid vacation. Sis had been busy dealing with the appearance of the guardians herself and had grown sleepy. Except, this wasn't a nap room, right...?

So Ms. Sakura was taking some paid time off, huh? Given how she had been unable to leave the campus, it must have been her first vacation in several decades... I wondered how she was feeling.

I let her know we were coming before I made my way to where she was.

"Come on in, I was waiting for you."

Ms. Sakura was in her apartment. Her place was in the building I had been named the owner of out of the blue.

Despite the sudden visit, she gladly received me.

"I found some super tasty snacks. Here you go."

She even went and prepared tea and snacks for me.

"Oh man, they look delicious! Thank you very much."

"Don't worry about it. So, what brings you here?"

When I briefly went over what had occurred that day, she immediately understood the circumstances.

Ms. Sakura was someone who knew about the Malevolent Lord in great detail. Not only that, but she must have also been looking into what futures she could view with her Future Sight.

“I get it. So you must want medicine, then?”

I nodded. The medicine that would turn Lairetta’s body back to normal.

“Yuika’s here, so I could make that,” she said. “But while the followers might get their appearance back, the damage to their bodies can’t be reversed.”

“...That’s fair. They probably understand that... Actually, they’re prepared for their fate, anyway, so they’ll just have to deal with it.”

“Ummm, Takioto? What are you talking about?”

Eating chocolate next to me, Yuika must have had a boatload of questions. Had Nanami figured out what I was insinuating?

“Yuika, that item the followers used? It gives them access to demon power. The thing is, that’s not something normal humans can control. So their bodies changed to make it easier to bring out that power.”

“...That’s why Lairetta’s group transformed halfway into demons, then?”

“Yup, that’s right. If they had some aptitude for demonhood, had some unique powers or demon blood in their veins, they may have managed a full transformation, though.”

I was sure it would happen, but depending on the circumstances, Iori and Katorina might also end up fighting against the real deal, not these half-transformed imitations.

“But even after transforming and making it easier to release that power, normal humans still lack the muscle, the mana—well, the energy basically.”

“So that is how it works, then. I was familiar with something similar and thought that might be the case,” Nanami said. She had surmised as much herself after all. Yuika seemed to have somewhat picked up on it, too.

“It’s just as you’re all thinking. The followers used their life energy—their lifespan—to compensate. Theirs must have shrunk somewhat. They didn’t use the transformation for very long, so I don’t think it’s decreased by too much.”

At this point, there was nothing that could be done about this. I just wanted to do what I could.

“Ms. Sakura, could you make that medicine for me?”

“Sure, of course... Sorry, Yuika, can you come over here?”

“...Why me?”

“Please.”

Yuika sighed and went over to where Ms. Sakura was. Wearing an awkward smile, she spoke to me.

“It’s been like this ever since the Book of Raziel stuff, hasn’t it? You better tell me everything at some point.”

“...I promise I will.”

“Okay, then. Let’s begin.

A day went by, and peace had returned to the Three Committees and the dungeon.

I heard that everything with Laretta and the Church followers proceeded without a fuss.

Laretta was arrested, and various things were done to her under Marino’s orders. Marino said she would do whatever she needed to do, so I knew that Laretta really did go through a lot.

Laretta was confined to a heavily guarded facility.

The question of how to handle the followers of the Church of the Malevolent Lord was a difficult one, as they had also antagonized the Tréfle Imperial Family and Leggenze.

Marino said she wouldn’t mistreat Laretta. However, I didn’t know how the public would view it.

Ivy had comforted Laretta by assuring her that no matter what happened, she would still be her friend.

However, it seemed Laretta was of a different mind.

“I’m really happy to hear that, but at the same time, I don’t want her to get

involved with me,” she told us when we went to go ask her some questions.

These must have been Laretta’s deepest feelings toward Ivy. She was worried about her. That was why I responded— “If any sort of animosity gets pointed in Ivy’s direction, I’ll handle it.”

—and reassured her.

“I am sure Master would be able to do something about it as well.”

Nanami agreed next to me.

“Hearing that from a Hanamura is reassuring,” she said with a slight smile.

We heard all sorts of things from her. Information that hadn’t been clarified or brought up in the game.

“So, the Church knows that are three devices needed in order to revive the Malevolent Lord, right?” I asked her, and she nodded.

“Yeah, they know, all right. I heard they obtained the first one at Amaterasu Girls’ Academy. I never would’ve thought one of the devices would be right here.”

It was definitely understandable why she wouldn’t. There wasn’t a single bit of folklore or legend about the devices’ exact location.

“Then what about where the last one, the Ame-no-Murakomo-no-Tsurugi, is located?”

“I have no clue. Oh, you don’t already know, do you?”

“I do. No idea if it’s actually there or not, though.”

Technically, someone could have already gotten ahold of it, by some miracle. Though, the likelihood of that was basically zero.

“Just what are you, anyway? Are you sure *you’re* not the real Raziel or something?” Laretta asked.

“I don’t have *that* much knowledge, and I’m not some gifted prodigy or whatever. I wouldn’t mind walking a day in her shoes, though.”

“Oh, but didn’t you once already? As Nanako Takioto.”

“True... Shall we fuse together one more time?” said Nanami.

That was just the gender part; I was after the knowledge here! Nanami, you didn’t have to jump right on it, either. Though actually, we’ve been becoming Nanako every now and then for a few reasons.

“...You seem a lot more relaxed than I thought,” I said to Laretta.”

“I mean, I’m just sort of accepting the hand I’ve been dealt. Growing defiant is all I *can* do... Sometimes I do start wishing I was dead, though,” Laretta said, mournfully looking down at her half-transformed hand.

“Well, is that it for the questions?”

I turned to look at Nanami, but she shook her head. She appeared to be out of questions, too.

“This is all thanks to you guys. Thank you, and take care of the chief for me. Be sure to keep her on a short leash, okay?”

“I think she’ll be fine even if I don’t, though. Either way, leave her to me.”

“That girl will seriously make a mess of things sometimes, I mean it.”

When I turned around, I suddenly remembered something I had forgotten to tell Laretta.

“Oh, right. I’ll try to do whatever I can, okay?”

“You mean for the chief, right? I’m counting you.”

“No, I mean for you,” I said before taking out a dose of medicine. This was...

“Something I asked Ms. Sakura...the angel Raziel, that is, and a certain girl, to help me make.”

I passed it to Laretta, urging her to drink it. She stared at the shocking-pink medicine with a look of disgust before glancing at me, then back at the liquid.

“This sucks.”

She gulped it all down in one go. Then she wrinkled her face and shut her eyes tight like you did when eating a sour pickled plum.

There was an immediate change in her body.

“Ivy would be real sad if anything happened to you. So, please, don’t do anything rash. All right, we’re outta here.”

Lauretta appeared to notice the change in her body. She opened her eyes, looked at her hand, and felt all over her body, as if she couldn’t believe what happened.

Her body had reverted back to its pre-transformation state.

Nanami and I rose from our seats.

“I don’t know how much I’ll be able to actually do, but I’ll protect you as best I can,” I said before we exited the room.

“Master, I think you should build a castle.”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

“Well, I feel that you would make a suitable king. At this rate, I worry that all the apartments in your building will get filled.”

“What do you mean?”

“I suppose we can worry about that when we run out of rooms. More importantly, the items to break the Malevolent Lord’s seal. You know where the last one is located, yes? Where is it?”

What did she mean about running out of rooms? I would have to let it slide for now.

“First, let me ask you, do you have an idea of where it might be?”

Nanami closed her eyes and let out a small sigh. Then...

“Susano Martial Arts Academy.”

She gave the name of Wakoku’s famous academy.

“That’s right. The last device, the Ame-no-Mukumo-no-Tsurugi, also called Kusanagi-no-Tsurugi, is located at Susano Martial Arts Academy. By the way, what made you think so?”

“When you think of storied and exemplary academies in Wakoku, the three

that come to mind are Tsukuyomi Magical Academy, Amaterasu Girls' Academy, and Susano Martial Arts Academy. Given that items to revive the Malevolent Lord have already been discovered at the first two schools, that would only leave the latter unaccounted for."

Yeah, that was normally what one would think, right? The people playing the game also guessed the final location once they got two of the others. For me, the Yata no Kagami was the last one.

This meant the Church of the Malevolent Lord must have been thinking the same thing.

"However, did the Church of the Malevolent Lord actually learn that the Yata no Kagami was here at Tsukuyomi Magic Academy? The followers who were undercover here have all been arrested."

"But there's a chance that someone other than Lauretta could have reported back about it, right? The thing is, the Church doesn't know for sure if we actually found the Yata no Kagami or not. But I know that it's here. This is a big advantage."

"Indeed. If I was the Church, I would undoubtedly begin to investigate Susano Martial Arts Academy. And, at the same time..."

Nanami stared at me.

"Target the person who holds the Yata no Kagami."

"...Yeah, fair. I'd probably do that, too."

In the aftermath of the incident, the question of what to do with the Yata no Kagami was an extremely problematic one.

In the game, Iori hangs onto it, but in this situation, there were several avenues we could take. I could force Iori to take it, or I could leave it with Marino, or I could even hand it over to one of the heads of the Three Committees. Though, if an unexpected event occurred, I would have the easiest time responding if it was with me. And so, I'd pleaded and pushed Marino to let me hang on to it.

This was the one time that Marino had responded to a request of mine with a

warning about the risk I was taking, instead of a casual “sure.” But I remained stubborn to the end, so she eventually came up with a compromise. In exchange for being allowed to hang onto Yata no Kagami, I was to start a rumor that it was in Marino’s possession.

I would definitely be attacked if word ever got out that I had the mirror. On the other hand, Marino was quite cautious and guarded, and she wielded powerful magic, so there was less of a chance she would be attacked.

The only people who knew about this arrangement were me, Nanami, Marino, and the residents of the Hanamura house. They were all people I could trust.

“Well, if anything should happen, please allow your humble maid Nanami to take care of it.”

“I’m seriously depending on you, okay? Let’s head over to see Ivy. She’s probably worried.”

“True. Miss Ivy wanted to come here herself, after all.”

Ivy apparently posed a security risk, but I’d used the sway of the Hanamura name to land me and Nanami a visit. The Hanamuras were scary powerful, seriously.

“I’m worried about how she’s doing. Let’s hurry over and talk to her.”

I let Ivy know we were leaving the facility where Laretta was locked up. Then I headed for the Newspaper Club room.

She was waiting for me there, despite class being in session.

“Takky! Nanamin! How was Laretta?!”

I patted Ivy on the head as she hugged me and looked up at me with worry in her eyes.

“She looked just fine.”

When I said this, she smiled with joy.

“Laretta bestowed Master with the right to use Miss Ivy however he deems fit.”

“Huh? I mean, as long as it’s Takky...I guess I’d be fine being used like that? I sorta planned on that anyway.”

“Uh, no, I didn’t get any such permission. Please don’t humor Nanami.”

If I was given free rein over Ivy, I feel like I would lose my mind. With the likes of Ludie and President Monica around, Ivy didn’t get much attention from the academy students, but she was more than cute enough to be heralded as the cutest in the whole school. Her ears felt amazing, too.

“A-ah, T-Takky. You’re tickling my ears.”

“Oh, sorry.”

I sat her down, and briefly talked to her about Laretta’s situation and how she was doing. I waffled about telling her, but ultimately mentioned what Laretta had told me: That she was happy Ivy considered her a friend but didn’t want Ivy to get involved with her because of the trouble she’d bring her.

At this, Ivy gave a lonesome smile.

“Really... Thanks. I get it.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m still Laretta’s friend in the end. So, I’m going to go see her. That’s it, I guess,” she said before smiling again.

“Oh, right, Takky, I’ve got kind of an important thing to talk with you about,” Ivy said while looking over at Nanami, who let out a very forced “Oh, right.”

“I just remembered some urgent business I need to take care of,” she said, exiting the room. Just remembered, my ass.

“Okay, Takky, I’ll get right to the point.”

She stood up. Then...

“So, the thing is, I’ve got a pretty good selection of skills I can use, and I think I’ve got a decent body, too.”

“...Are you trying to use your Sexy Jutsu on me right now?”

“No, no, I’m being really serious here,” she said before closing the curtains. “I heard from Nanamin that you were already being targeted by the Church of the

Malevolent Lord, but from here on out, there's a chance you'll be exposed to even more danger."

"...I mean, I guess so. I'm with the Ceremonial Committee for one thing, so I'd say she's right on that point," I said, slightly shifting the focal point of the conversation.

"Listen, so... When I think about what you're trying to make happen, the Ceremonial Committee doesn't have anything to do with it."

Well, that was true. I needed to fight against Leggenze and the Church of the Malevolent Lord if I was going to save the Saint, and those girls as well. It was going to be pretty diffic— "Wait, what are you doing?"

Ivy was taking out all of her weapons, one at a time, and placing them on the table. Kunai, a straight sword, rope, *kusarigama*, caltrops, *shuriken*, talismans.

Just then, I realized what she was doing. Now that I thought about it, a similar event happens in the game.

When she finished taking out all of her weapons, she stood in front of me and began taking off her clothes.

"H-hold up, I get, I know that you don't have any more weapons on you, okay?!"

Despite what I'd said, she still took off her clothes. Then, neatly folding them up, she fell to her knees in front of me in nothing but her underwear.

"This is all of me."

She had removed all her weapons and clothes and now was almost completely naked.

"I may be a bit stupid, but I want to fight together with you, and I want to fight *for* you. So..."

She lowered her head down as she remained kneeling.

"Lord Kousuke Takioto, please take me as your *shinobi*."

"P-please, Ivy, could we just calm—"

"You don't have to be so formal with me."

“But you’re still my—”

“Please!”

“Got it, fine. Listen, Ivy, are you sure you’re okay with me? I don’t know much about ninjas, but this is a really serious decision, isn’t it?”

I only knew what was laid out as part of the game’s worldbuilding, but I remembered it being a fairly important thing for a ninja.

“Yeah. This is a really important thing for me, and it’s a part of what my master taught me. He told me that if I ever met someone I was meant to serve for the rest of my life, I was supposed to devote myself to them, even if it meant antagonizing the ninja village.”

“The whole village, really...?”

“I thought, y’know, maybe I’d be fine becoming their enemy. That’s how much I mean it right now.”

Her eyes were serious. They showed a conviction to do anything I asked, even attack and kill her comrades.

“I want you to use me. I can gather intelligence, and I can fight, too. For you, Lord Kousuke, I wouldn’t even mind using my sensual grappling skills...”

Sensual grappling skills, hmm?! What would those entail exactly?!

“Um, well, uh...”

As I freaked out over what I was supposed to say, Ivy jumped in.

“Hey, Takky. You remember, right? What you told me in front of the Suzaku.”

In front of the Suzaku? I believe it was...something about how Ivy was one of the people I wanted to make happy.

“I’m convinced that serving you will bring me happiness.”

I held my head in my hands. I suddenly remembered that Nanami had told me something similar once.

“...What would you do if I was scheming to do something evil?”

“I would offer you my counsel, but if you so ordered me to, I would commit

any crime you ask. If my lord tells me white is black, then black it is.”

I could tell that she possessed a firm resolve.

Still, was it really okay for me to make her go along with my goals?

“...The thing I’m going up against is mighty strong. Do you get that?”

“I do.”

“Really? Do you truly understand? Superficial feelings here would honestly just bring me trouble.”

First, if I was going to bring Yuika, the Founding Saint, and current Saint to their happy ending, a battle with Leggenze would be unavoidable.

“I’m picking a fight with Leggenze here.”

I needed to guide Katorina to her happy ending.

“One day, I’ll have to fight against powerful demons.”

I needed to save Ludie and that girl mixed up with the Church of the Malevolent Lord. In order to crush the Church, internally a mixture of various intentions and ideas, I would need to deal with the event at Susano Martial Arts Academy, but above all— “I might end up duking it out with some seriously scary members of the Church of the Malevolent Lord.”

There was another matter, too: the Three Committees’ secret and the academy’s problem. The darkness that Ms. Sakura and the Book of Raziel foresaw. The being I would need to work together with Iori to take down no matter what.

“I could end up battling against something far more powerful than any demon or member of the Church, an entity that transcends our own knowledge and understanding.”

When I thought about the other heroines, I realized I would still need to battle other foes besides what I had mentioned here.

To accomplish all this, I had undergone arduous training and risked my life in narrowly won fights. If Ivy was really going to come with me, she would need to be completely dedicated, lest she weigh me down.

“Are you prepared for all that?”

Having Ivy on my side would be huge. With her useful skills, she’d definitely be someone I could rely on. So, if I was speaking openly, I wanted her to join me.

Still, I was fine with her turning me down, too. The path I was going down was truly dangerous. Instead of sticking with me, she could simply fight against the Church of the Malevolent Lord, who she actually had a bone to pick with.

“I am.”

However, she remained unshaken. She wasn’t swayed by my attempts to intimidate her.

Ivy was truly serious about becoming my *shinobi*.

“No number of lives you could give will be enough, you understand?”

“I will protect you even if it should cost me my life,” Ivy said without any hesitation. However, that...

“That’s not going to fly. I mean, I want you to be happy, too, Ivy.”

Her expression shifted ever so slightly at my words. An adorable, blank look.

“If you’re going to protect me, then I’ll do just as much to protect you. Even if I have to put my life at risk, okay?”

Obviously. I wouldn’t bend on this point. This was one thing that was non-negotiable.

“If you’re fine with that, then I would like you to become my *shinobi*.”

“...As you wish, Lord Takioto.”

—*Ivy’s Perspective*— Monica called for me after I finished eating lunch. Did she find out that I’d secretly pilfered her snacks? The thought crossed my mind as I headed for the Student Council Room.

Monica and Hanzou were waiting for me there.

“Hiya, Monica. Is this about your snacks?”

“What are you talking about?” Monica wondered aloud. It seemed she hadn’t noticed.

“...No. We wouldn’t bother summoning you over that.”

Though it looked like Hanzou was aware.

“I don’t know about this snack stuff, but this is different. I haven’t told Benito this, but I’m planning on telling everyone. The truth about the Three Committees, that is.”

I couldn’t help but let out a gasp of surprise.

“What? Monica? Are you serious?”

“Do you know who’s to blame for this?”

She stared at me. Uh-oh.

“*Ah ha ha*, who could that be...??”

Monica sighed at my forced reply.

“But I can’t talk about it right away. My condition is this: clearing the sixtieth layer of the Tsukuyomi Dungeon. I’ll arrange the chance to reveal it to anyone who can achieve that.”

“...The sixtieth layer? Do we really need to be that strong?”

I had cleared that far once before. There were several third-years and even second-years who had accomplished that same feat. They were almost all Three Committee members.

“That’s right. We’ve already had several members get heavily wounded, and there’s some who still haven’t returned to school. I’ve heard about some fatalities in the past, too.”

Still haven’t come back... She was probably talking about *her*.

“From the Morals Committee?”

“Yeah, you know who I’m talking about. That’s why I still can’t tell the first-years yet.”

Couldn’t let the first-years know, huh? Hearing that brought *him* to mind.

“I see. I doubt it’ll take Lord Kousuke long to accomplish that.”

When I said this, the two Student Council members went wide-eyed in shock, like deer in the headlights.

“...‘Lord’ Kousuke?”

“Yeah. Lord Kousuke.”

Hanzou appeared to understand the significance of the title.

“Hmmm. Found who you’re meant to serve, have you?”

“Yup. I did, and I know there isn’t anyone better.”

When I said this, Monica grinned.

“Oh really, even better than me?”

“Yup. I thought the same, too, at first. I assumed there wouldn’t be anyone who would surpass you, Monica, at least in terms of raw strength.”

“There’s a lot of that statement I take issue with.”

“Well, I mean, Benito has you beat in a lot of areas, too. Right, Hanzou?”

The ninja didn’t say a word in response to my question. He didn’t back me up at all.

“...Hanzou?”

Monica pressed Hanzou in a low voice. It was really funny to see Hanzou getting cornered.

“*Ah hah hah hah*. See, what did I say? Though, well, Benito doesn’t matter.”

Yeah. He didn’t matter. Takioto was more important.

“Since Lord Kousuke has a ton of something that you and Benito don’t have.”

“What would that be?”

I mean, it was hard to narrow it all down like that.

“A lot of things, but I guess the biggest would be the way he’s valiantly and single-mindedly advancing toward his goal.”

Yeah. Bravely moving ever forward. That was the best way to describe him.

“There’s a lot about how Lord Kousuke thinks, and how he lives his life, that made an impression on me. That’s when the thought hit me. I wanted to serve him. Knowledge, strength, spirit—he has it all. I know that I’ll grow from being with him, too,” I said, looking at Hanzou. “So, I’m gonna end up being stronger than you Hanzou, sorry.”

“...Hmph. I’d like to see you try.”

“Yeah, well, I will. You should start preparing yourself, too, Monica—you get what I’m trying to say, right? I mean in regard to Lord Kousuke, not me.”

“Oh, sure, I understand. Yukine said the same thing.”

“Really, Yucky said the same thing?”

Well, she had been at his side this whole time and all. It made me a little jealous.

“Listen, Ivy. What you’re trying to get at here? It’s wrong. I mean, I’m not going to back down to anyone.”

Monica glared at me sharply. Still, it seemed almost comical to me.

“I wouldn’t say that sorta stuff if I were you, Monica. It’s just going to embarrass you later.”

Considering Kousuke’s goals, he had to be able to do it. No, he absolutely was going to do it.

But, even if. Even if he wasn’t able to do it, I would take him that far, and realize his goal.

No matter what methods I needed to use.

So, Monica was number two. She didn’t seem to get that yet, so I needed to come out and make it clear to her.

“Lord Kousuke is going to become the strongest in the world.”





CONFIG

Afterword

Magical★Explorer

Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim Good day, everyone.

I'm still hanging in there somehow.

—Acknowledgments—

Kannatuki, thank you as always for your wonderful illustrations.

Gretel's character design rules. Her fantastic design so outdid all my expectations, that just looking at the line drawing gets my creative juices flowing and makes words pop into my head. Thank you, truly.

Thank you, Higa. I am grateful for the wonderful manga adaptation. All the characters really are super cute. I'm excited to see it continue from here!

Above all, though, to my editor: I apologize for all the trouble...and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

—Everything Else—

I'm always trying to think up material for gags and jokes, but sometimes they'll just pop into my head completely out of the blue.

However, both me and the people who know me acknowledge that I have a terrible memory. By the time I finish doing something, like my shopping, for example, I'll have forgotten the material I came up with.

I'm sure that when the idea came to me, I must've thought, *Oh wow, that's so funny!* Except, all I'll remember is that it was so funny, and the original joke will be long forgotten. I do tell myself to just try hard to remember the damn joke, of course.

That was why I felt I had no choice but to start keeping a notepad near my desk or in my crossbody bag. Except, that created a different problem.

My handwriting is so messy, I can't read what I put in it.

I know what you're thinking: *It's your own damn handwriting, lololol!* But for real, I can't read it at all. It's really that messy. Honestly, I don't even want to do autographs, either. To the point that I seriously debated hiring a ghostwriter just to do my autographs.

Anyway, because of that, I gave up on the paper notepads, and instead took down these notes on my phone, but that created another problem.

Before I outline it, though, please allow me to preface it with something.

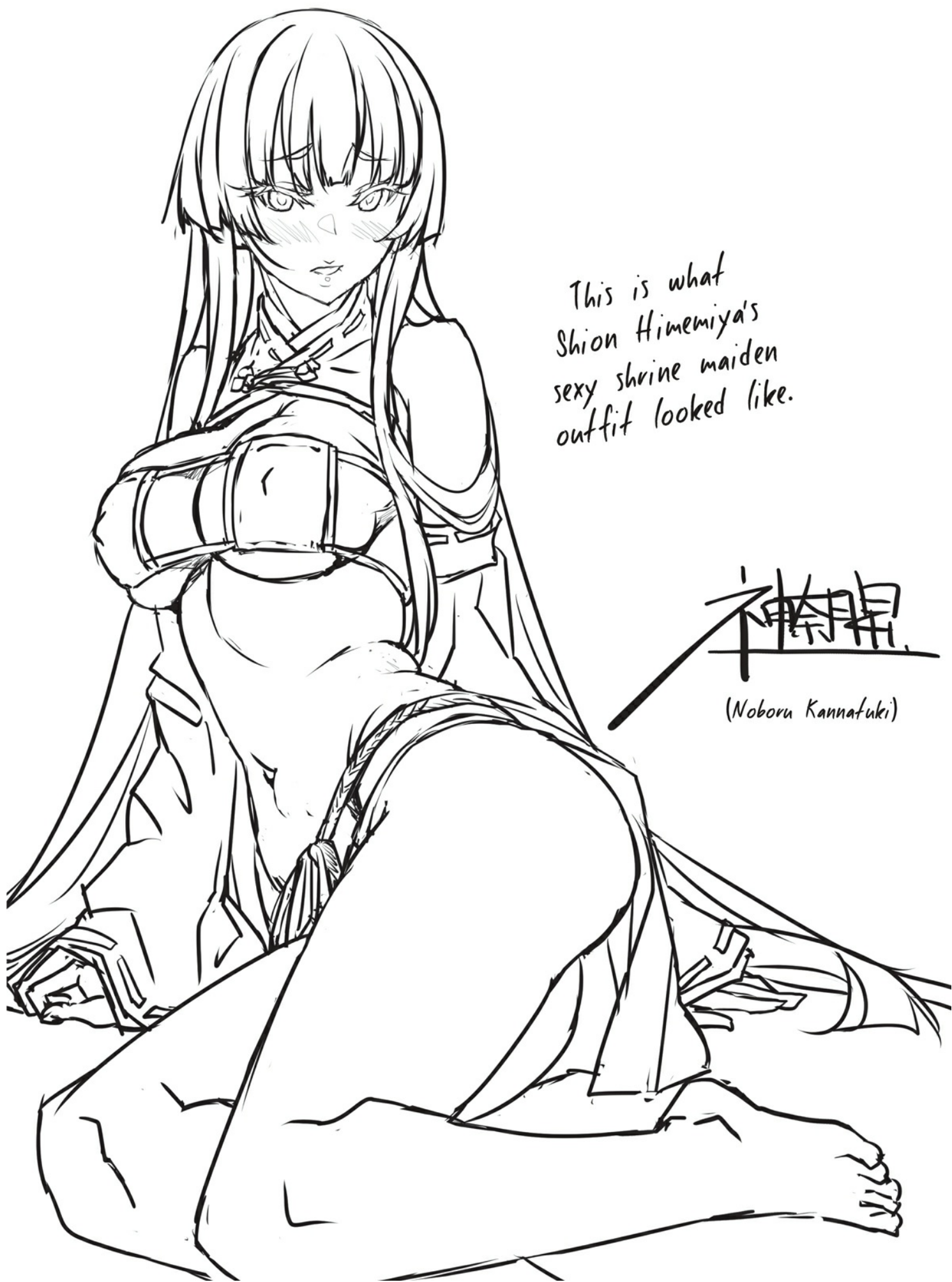
When I read mystery novels, there will very rarely be a certain phenomenon. There will be times when I know who the culprit is. I don't know if it's intuition, but I'll be absolutely convinced I'm right, "in the name of my grandfather," "there is only one truth," that sorta thing.

Then, when I read to the end, it'll hit me: Oh wait, I've read this book once before. I mean, of course I'm gonna know who did it, right? I've already read the damn book.

What I'm trying to get at here is that I'll even forget about the details of a book I've read before. Hell, I've already forgotten about the afterwords I've written in the past. That detail, about forgetting what I've written myself, must have been enough for you to pick up on where I'm going with this.

What I'm trying to say is, even if I jot down an idea, I'll forget all about the details surrounding it.

Now I wonder what I was going to use the "gaming condom" idea for...



This is what
Shion Himemiya's
sexy shrine maiden
outfit looked like.

神皇

(Noboru Kannafuki)

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Magical★Explorer: Reborn as a Side Character in a Fantasy Dating Sim, Vol. 8

Iris

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MAGICAL★EXPLORER ERO GAME NO YUJIN KYARA NI TENSEI SHITAKEDO, GAME CHISHIKI TSUKATTE JIYUNI IKIRU Vol. 8

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