



I SAVED TOO MANY GIRLS AND CAUSED THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE

15

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**"Let's increase
our numbers."**

The only
power I had was
the heroines,
which meant it
was time to seek
them out.

Being
at a huge
disadvantage
was the norm
for me...



Hawks

Pacifists

AND SO
BEGINS THE
MISSION TO
SAVE THE
HEROINES
THAT HAVE
SPLIT INTO
FACTIONS!

Doves

THE LEADER
OF THE EXTREMISTS
???

Extremists



**"ENEMY
STRENGTH
CONFIRMED.
ELIMINATION
TARGET
ACQUIRED."**

*"Rekka Namidare,
I've prepared the
perfect opponent
to defeat you."*

"R?!"

When I called
her name, R
looked at me as
expressionless
as ever.

REKKA NAMIDARE

A high school freshman. Thanks to the Namidare bloodline, he keeps getting involved with girls that are in trouble.



A high school freshman. A space princess who's presently studying to be a bride on Earth.

IRIS FINERITAS GYPHERCALL



A high school freshman. She is the girl-next-door childhood friend, and heir to the Omniscient Magic.

SATSUKI OTOMO



A demi-material being sent from the future in order to get Rekka together with a girl.

R



A sorcerer from another world. She lives at Rekka's place and helps out with the housework.

HARISSA HOPE



**TETRA
METRA
PETRA**

Daughter of the mole people. After moving her people to the artificial world, she started a part-time job at Nozomiya.



A high school freshman. She works at her family's restaurant, Nozomiya, and practices her cooking every day.

**TSUMIKI
NOZOMINO**



A second-year high schooler. A relative of Rekka's who carries the Banjo bloodline.

**HIBIKI
BANJO**



Leviathan, the Strongest Beast. After losing most of her power, she's now living in human society.

LEA



A high school freshman. Also a centuries-old vampire. She has strong opinions about maids.

**ROSALIND
C. BATHORY**



A wandering treasure hunter. Currently acting as a go-between for Rekka and the head of the Margaret family.

**CHELSEA
MARGARET**



A research scientist. Sent to Earth with Fam and Rain to keep an eye on them.

**SHIRLEY
MADAGASCARWEL
BLOOD**



A former homunculus. Now a normal girl working as a maid for Rosalind.

SUZURAN



A second-year middle schooler. Princess of the merfolk who's come to Earth to broaden her horizons.

**RAIN
WATERCHILD**



A first-year middle schooler. Also a gremlin and a former space pirate. She's come to Earth to learn about education systems.

FAM



A second-year high schooler. The student council president. Her family runs a shrine, and she uses her powers to fight evil spirits.

**MOMONE
KIBI**



A second-year high schooler. President of the light literature club and an aspiring author.

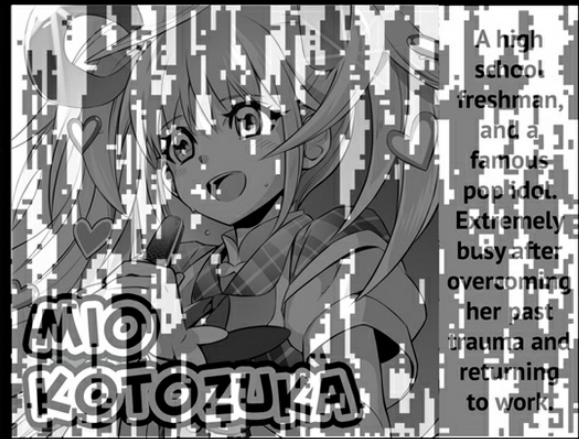
**MIDORI
TOKIWA**

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A psychic. Part of the newly reformed organization working to protect psychics.

ELICIA OTTO



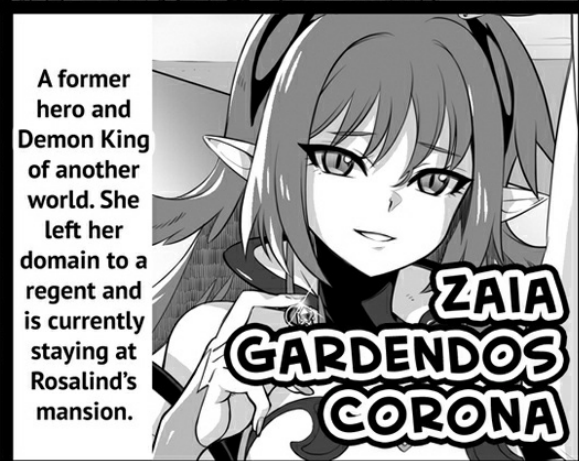
A high school freshman, and a famous pop idol. Extremely busy after overcoming her past trauma and returning to work.

MIO KOTOZUKA



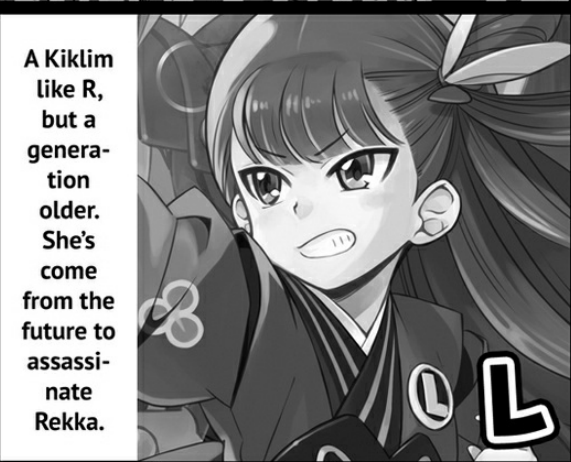
A greater wind spirit. Working with her little sister to help promote the alliance between spirits and sorcerers.

LYNN SYLPHEED



A former hero and Demon King of another world. She left her domain to a regent and is currently staying at Rosalind's mansion.

ZAIA GARDENDOS CORONA



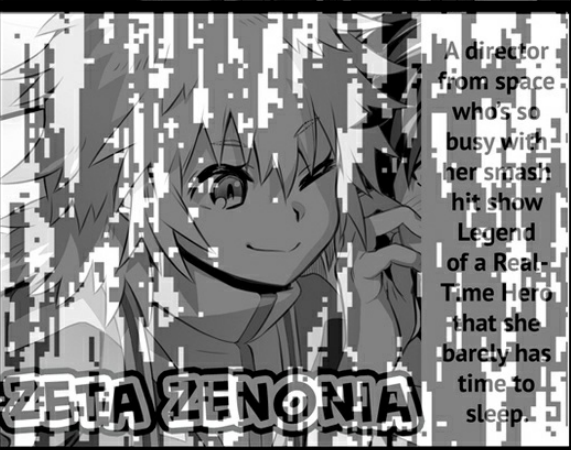
A Kiklim like R, but a generation older. She's come from the future to assassinate Rekka.

L



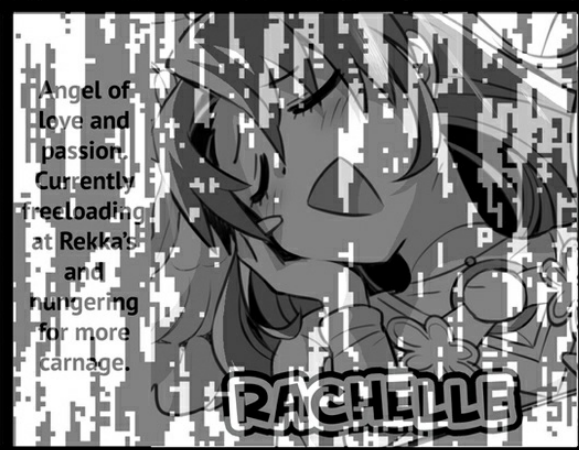
The kitten Rekka and Satsuki cared for as children who's taken the form of a nekomata. Currently living happily with the local yokai alongside the mole people.

AI



A director from space who's so busy with her smash hit show Legend of a Real-Time Hero that she barely has time to sleep.

ZETA ZENONIA



Angel of love and passion. Currently freeloading at Rekka's and hungering for more carnage.

RACHELLE

A nun/exorcist whose current mission is spreading the word of God at a church in Rekka's neighborhood.



YULIA



KIRI HAYASHIBARA

Third-year middle school student, superhero, and star of a Real-Time Hero.



CHIRIKA SHINOMIYA

A samurai from the past currently living at the Great Library of the Heavens after being dismissed by her master, Princess Izuko.

A fairy living a peaceful life in the woods near the campsite in the mountains. Loves to see people having fun.




POPPY

The former ruler of the Atlantians. After waking up from cold sleep, she's now staying at the Great Library of the Heavens.



NYANYAN ATLANTIA



SHERLYN DOTYES

The glorious phantom thief. She's moved in with Chelsea and has her eyes set on Rekka for her next heist.



TOUKO IWAZU

The mysterious fortune teller behind the string of strange incidents at the school festival.

A knight in the game world who makes her living hunting monsters with her massive hammer.



YORUN

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Prologue

In a world unlisted in the Akashic record, a girl was born with a certain fate. She was raised rapidly within that world in order to meet that fate. It was sometimes painful, sometimes cruel, and always heavy. But she never let it weigh her down, because she believed it was something worth doing. Without ever uttering a single complaint, she accepted her destiny.

Sometimes that meant fighting to the bitter end. Sometimes it meant helping others. Sometimes it meant clinging desperately. Sometimes it meant having to make a choice. It was by no means easy. No, it was cruel and harsh. There was never a relaxing moment, but there was happiness.

There were moments she received gratitude. Moments she was able to save people. Moments when they encouraged her. Moments they showed her great kindness. And those moments spurred her onward. All the pain she experienced gave her grit to endure just as the happiness drove her forward. That was how she lived.

She wasn't always strong, but her way of living tempered her like steel. And then, one day... A hole opened in the world. At the center of her broken world surged forth darkness and despair. But even then, she didn't give up.

Chapter 3: The Status of the Future

In repelling the army of giant robots that had suddenly appeared, we successfully defended my hometown for the time being. But if left alone, more and more enemies would continue to come from the future. In light of that, the doctor invited me to return to the future with her via the time translocator... in order to save the abducted heroines and, if possible, to catch the mastermind behind their kidnapping.

According to the doctor, the mastermind of this so-called radical faction might have some kind of connection to the War of All...

The War of All. In a way, it was the root of everything. Well, R had once said the real root of everything was me, but...

Anyway, a fight over me between the heroines had apparently erupted into a full-on war that spanned all known worlds and dimensions.

Really thinking about it, it just sounds so unrealistic.

Especially the “over me” part. I honestly couldn’t process the idea of being so valuable that so many heroines would seriously fight over me. I guess I shouldn’t say “me,” though... We’re talking about my future self here—future Rekka.

And as the doctor had just informed me, future Rekka had apparently been missing ever since the War of All first started. Who knew where I was or what I’d been doing? Especially at a time when everyone needed me the most...

It felt a little weird kicking myself for something I personally hadn’t even done—again, we were talking about future Rekka here. But whatever.

Future Rekka’s absence was actually what was causing the War of All to drag on. After all, the War of All was pretty explicitly about me. In essence, the whole reason for the war and the desired spoils from said war had gone missing. If this were a race, you could say the goal had up and vanished. And so the race would keep going forever... meaning ceaseless war with no end in sight.

Apparently, several of the future heroines believed I'd been captured and confined by another heroine. They all suspected each other, of course, making the fight between them even more complicated. All of that tension had reached a head, and that was how we ended up with the War of All.

"The time leap will be over soon," the doctor suddenly announced, pulling me out of my thoughts.

Right now, we were inside the flow of time, where sensory perception was altered in a strange way. I could hear the doctor's voice even now, but I had no idea where she was.

"And then we'll be in the future?" I asked.

"Yes. It's a little weird to say this while we're inside the flow of time itself, but in another minute or so."

"So, where will we come out in the future?"

"Agency headquarters."

"I see."

We were in the mountains just outside of town when we entered the flow of time, so apparently the time translocator could leap through more than just time? Or were we simply returning to agency HQ because that's where the time translocator was located? Well, as long as we knew our destination, it didn't matter to me.

"L, are you worried?" the doctor asked, now turning to her daughter.

L, however, only answered with silence. After helping us repel the giant robots, she'd followed me and the doctor back to the future.

Come to think of it, L must have mixed feelings about going back to the agency.

L was originally part of the agency too. She and R were both artificial lifeforms called Kiklim that were created by the doctor. L came first and was designed to be dispatched to me in the past, but when it was determined that more functionality was necessary for the mission, R was created to replace L. L was then decommissioned and put into society to live a normal life, but she wasn't

satisfied with that. She ended up defecting and worked with the radicals to try and assassinate me under orders from whoever is behind the hardliner faction. No matter how you looked at it, she'd betrayed the agency. It was safe to assume that her continued silence now wasn't just because she was nervous about going home.

"It'll be all right, L," the doctor said to reassure her.

"...What will?"

"I'll protect you, L. No matter what anyone else says, you are my daughter."

"D-Don't say such embarrassing stuff! Not while Rekka Namidare's here!"

Is she feeling shy?

I listened to their rather heartwarming exchange as I waited for the time leap to end.



At the end of the time leap was a rainbow explosion of color. I was dazzled and blinded for a moment, leaving me feeling a little dizzy.

"Whoa..."

It was bad enough that I staggered and kind of tripped over my own feet... Wait, my feet? Before I even realized it, I could feel them again. And that wasn't all. I could feel the warmth of my palms which I'd reflexively pressed against my eyelids, so it seemed I'd recovered the feeling in my body altogether. My perception was back to normal, meaning...

After blinking a few times, I opened my eyes to see the interior of a room. It was unfamiliar to me, as I'd expected, but it had sort of the same feel that the interior of Shirley's and Iris's spaceships did. It was definitely futuristic—technological, but with a metallic luster that was unlike anything I'd ever seen back home.

"Is this your headquarters?" I asked in awe as I looked around the room.

"That's right. Welcome to the agency," the doctor replied with a smile as she exited the time leap too.

“Hmm...”

So this was agency HQ... It was honestly smaller than I had imagined. Really, it was only about as big as my room at home. And when I looked around, it was pretty messy... Did someone live here? It certainly didn't look like some important facility. In fact, it looked more like someone's personal bedroom...

“Argh, good grief! You left your room a terrible mess *again*! Why are you so terrible at managing your own life?!”

L took one look at the tragic state of the room and suddenly started to yell angrily. The target of her anger was none other than the doctor.

“Ooh! It's been so long since I've gotten to hear one of L's lectures!”

“Don't call it a lecture!”

In the face of L's vicious rage, the doctor grinned from ear to ear. I see... Judging from their conversation, this was the doctor's room. Well, considering she was an important figure in the agency, it wasn't strange to think she had a residential space at their HQ. After getting to know scientists like Shirley, I kind of just assumed they were all diligent, fastidious people in all aspects of their life... But that apparently wasn't so with the doctor. L began to clean up the doctor's room as she continued fuming.

“Honestly, this is just... Ugh! You've just left your underwear on the floor after taking it off!”

“...!”

I restlessly shuffled my feet as I avoided looking.

“Uh... So, why did we come out in the doctor's room? Isn't there somewhere, um, more appropriate for the people of the agency to gather?”

If we were going to discuss our plans, a meeting room or something seemed like it would've been a better option.

“Well, let me start by explaining everything from the beginning,” said the doctor. “First, headquarters—that is, where we are now—was attacked by the radicals roughly 30 hours ago.”

Apparently it was a surprise attack with no sign of warning. There was some

damage to the facility and a few people were injured, but thanks to the doctor's defense system, the attacking radicals were driven away.

"But thanks to their attack, the agency was in complete disarray. Right up until the moment I departed for the past, the damage assessment had yet to be completed."

Even though the agency had fended off the attack, it was seriously compromised in the process. It could no longer function normally now, and its normal functions mostly centered around me. Like monitoring me to see if I was handling the heroines properly, which stories I was involved in, how any decisions I made affected the past, my general health, and... Wait, huh?

"What about my privacy?!"

"Well, to us, you're something of a historical figure. The facts of your daily life are simply research material to us."

"Aaaaah!"

It's true that historical figures like the great war generals of the Warring States period had all their habits and hobbies listed in textbooks only to be treated like light trivia by modern-day people, but still! Seeing me clutch at my head, a troubled look crossed the doctor's face.

"I-It's all right. It's not like we keep tabs on you while you're in the bathroom or right before you go to bed."

"If you did, I'd end myself right here!"

That didn't make me feel any better.

"All right already... Just keep going," I urged her to continue, my head still spinning.

"Okay. An emergency transmission from R indicated to me there was trouble in the past. Said emergency transmission, however, came over a private channel rather than an agency one."

"So...? Is that a problem or something?"

"Well, it meant that the only one who knew you were in trouble was me."

On top of that, the agency was under attack by radicals at the time.

“Naturally, I couldn’t share information like that freely. Moreover, the agency was expending most of its resources just defending itself, which forestalled any decision to act on what was happening in the past.”

I’ve heard people say that organizations become inflexible when they get too big. So, yeah, in the heat of the moment with that much chaos going on, I can see how it would’ve been near impossible for them to make a move.

“But, Doctor... You weren’t actually all that late when you showed up, you know?”

Though she hadn’t arrived with the kind of perfect timing you’d expect in a movie, she’d still showed up in time to help us all out.

“It was plenty late,” L said in a huff as she turned away.

The doctor then grimaced a little before continuing, “L’s right. I should’ve acted with all swiftness. But if I had gone through the proper procedures, I still probably wouldn’t have made it to the past even now.”

“Proper procedures? What do you mean?”

I had a feeling already, but asked anyway. The doctor then replied...

“It was my decision to bring you here to the future.”

“Whaaat?! You didn’t have permission to do that?!” L yelled in surprise.

“Legally, I’m probably in *a lot* of trouble.”

“Wait, wait, wait... How is this okay?”

“It’s not, but I made the call. As far as I’m concerned, this was the only option,” said the doctor. “The fact that the radicals attacked the agency and sent their minions after Rekka is already enough to completely distort the future.”

“That’s true...”

“On top of that, they’ve abducted the heroines of the past. No... If their move here was a distraction, their real goal was kidnapping the heroines, and they’ve likely brought them here. But I can’t predict what they intend on doing next or

what's going to happen now," the doctor said, turning to me. "It's possible that this moment is an important crossroad of fate. If there's anyone who can lead us in the right direction at this juncture, it would have to be a very special crossroads keeper. Like you, Rekka."

"..."

Her grandiose wording made me a little uneasy, but in the end, the doctor and I shared a goal. We wanted to save the heroines. If that so happened to be part of an even bigger, fate-deciding story... Then I'd just solve that too. I had no objection to getting involved. But one question still remained...

"That aside, why did you bring me to your room of all places, Doctor?"

"Well, to put it simply, I've been acting on my own without the agency's knowledge. So if they found out now, it'd be a bit of a hassle."

"I see."

"That being said..." Here, the doctor's tone of voice turned rather serious. "I don't believe we can accomplish much with just the three of us, so I've called in someone trustworthy to help out."

Come to think of it, while L was cleaning up her room, the doctor had been messing around with some kind of device.

"Okay, who is it?" I asked.

"Someone you know well, technically," the doctor replied.

"Someone I know?"

There shouldn't be anyone that I know in the future... Wait, was this going to be like what happened with the doctor? The doctor was the king of Laputa in the past, so maybe this was just the future version of someone else I knew in the past?

"Your life is already starting to take a different shape than that of the Rekka I know—future Rekka, if you will—thanks to the agency and R's interference. But sort of like with the king of Laputa and myself, it isn't entirely different. There are lots of commonalities, and plenty of heroines you both saved. The person I called here is one of those heroines."

“So it’s a heroine that both me and future me have saved before?”

There were so many possibilities that that didn’t really help narrow the options at all... But just then, there was a sharp knock at the door.

“Doctor! Let me in!”

That voice... It was a little different, but there was no mistaking it.

“Entry permitted. Come in, Satsuki.”

At the doctor’s order, a light above the door turned green, and the door slid open. On the other side of the it was a mature-looking woman who resembled Satsuki.

“...Rekka!”

“Wah!”

She ran over to me and embraced me tightly, giving me a bit of a startle. S-Something soft was...!

“Rekka! Oh, Rekka!”

“Is that you... Satsuki?”

“It is! It’s me, Satsuki!”



So this was future Satsuki, huh? Honestly, I was surprised. She'd really grown into herself as a woman... Even though I knew it was just Satsuki, my heart refused to stop pounding nervously.

"Hey, Satsuki. Don't you think that's enough?"

"Oh!"

She hadn't let go of me even after quite a long minute there, but the doctor's friendly reminder spurred her into finally releasing me in a hurry.

"S-Sorry. It's just been so long since I've seen him," Satsuki apologized with a red face.

"N-No, that's fine..."

I shook my head and told her it was all right, though my heart was still racing.

This is kind of weird. I know her, but this is the first time we've ever met. I have no idea what kind of relationship we have here...

She seemed to know, however. She did hug me out of the blue and all...

"Ahem, now..." the doctor said, forcefully clearing her throat. "I'm sure you don't really need me to introduce her to you, but this is the Satsuki Otomo of this time line. She's also a part of the agency like me."

"Um... It's nice to meet you?" I said, politely bowing my head.

"Likewise... Sorry about earlier. I know you're basically a different person, but seeing you conjured up so many emotions that I just..." Satsuki explained, hiding her blushing cheeks behind her hands. "It's been so long since I last saw you..."

"...!"

My heart stopped pounding and skipped a beat altogether. I knew she wasn't really talking about *me* me, but still...

The slightly awkward mood lingered in the room until the doctor cleared her throat again and got us back on topic.

"So what do we do now?"

“Let’s see...” The doctor paused there to think for a bit. “Before anything else, it might be best to give Rekka a simple explanation of this time period.”

“Oh, good point. Actually, I’ve been wondering this for a while now, but how many years in the future are we?” I asked.

“Stop right there!”

“Mrgh?”

The doctor suddenly threw her hand over my mouth, muffling my words. Contrary to my idiotic appearance, the doctor was dead serious.

“I almost forgot about that. First and foremost, there’s something you must be warned of.”

“Mrrrghgh?”

“Wait a minute.”

The doctor then turned and began rummaging through her room for something. As she did, L lectured her about cleaning up again, but about five minutes later...

“Here it is!” she exclaimed, pulling out something that looked like half a set of wireless earphones. “Here, Rekka. Put this in your ear.”

“Sure. What is it? A transmitter?”

“Nope. It’s a type of noise canceller that can block out certain information.”

“Noise canceller?”

That seemed rather restrictive... Not to mention the “certain information” part. But for now I listened to her and put the device in my ear. It fit perfectly, making it rather comfortable to wear.

“This device will automatically block out any audio data that mentions the year, whether by the Earth calendar or the Galactic one, as well as any other information pertaining to the current date.”

“I can’t know anything about that?”

All I’d asked was how far in the future we were...

“What gives?”

“Hmm, it’s kind of hard to explain...”

“Well, for my sake, please make it as simple as possible.”

“Let’s see...” The doctor pensively tapped her finger against her chin. “I know it’s weird to say this after bringing you here yourself, but the future is indeterminate to you, right?”

“Indeterminate? You mean, like... in the sense that we don’t know what’s going to happen?”

“Exactly. The future is always changing. And we here at the agency were attempting to change the future by changing the past—your past—based on that logic.”

“Hmm, I see.”

I could only just barely get my head around that, but I sort of got the idea.

“But that can only be done on the condition that the future remains indeterminate for you, Rekka.”

“Huh?”

“In other words, if this future—specifically this one where the War of All is taking place—is rendered in definite terms, then the future would no longer be indeterminate for you. It would go from an abstract idea to concrete knowledge.”

“Huh? But I already know that the War of All occurs.”

I had just come to the future where it was happening, after all.

“You only know that a war will occur in the future, not specifically when or where or what have you.”

“Is that how this works?”

“Yes. ‘The future’ could mean a year, ten years, or several hundred to you as long as you don’t know exactly when.”

Apparently, the War of All could remain indeterminate other than “possibly happening at some point in time” if we played things this way.

“O-Okay?”

I didn’t really get it, though...

“So what this means for me is that I’m not allowed to know what year it is right now, right?”

“Right.”

Even if I didn’t understand what was going on or why, I figured I could probably manage that much.

“Oh, and for the record, that canceller affects the electric signals of your brain, so any visual or tactile information that’s date-sensitive will also be imperceptible to you.”

“It can do that too? This device is incredible.”

“Hardly. But you need to watch yourself, Rekka. Make sure you don’t go asking how old Satsuki is or anything like that.”

“Wha?!”

Satsuki fell into a fluster when her name suddenly came up, her face reddening by the second.

“Don’t bring up my age in front of Rekka!” she yelled in rather genuine anger.

“What does it matter? It’s not like I said the number or anything. And what do you have to be worried about? I was several hundred years old when I first met him, remember?”

“You might not care about things like that, Doctor, but I do! And this Rekka is still a high school student, you know?! He absolutely doesn’t need to know!”

“Ah, by the way, Rekka... Satsuki can look up all kinds of magic with her Magic of Omniscience, so her appearance might not reflect her actual age. Sort of like me.”

“KYAAAAAH!” Satsuki grabbed the doctor, her face now as red as a tomato.
“Y-Y-You...!”

“Wait, my neck! You’re strangling me... I’m just doing my job, you know? We can’t have Rekka guessing your age and then fixating on that knowledge. It’s

date sensitive,” the doctor explained as she tapped at Satsuki’s arm.

The thought did kind of cross my mind...

She appeared to be roughly university age, or maybe in the “young working adult” bracket. Anyway, Satsuki continued to glare and fume at the doctor for a while before finally letting her go.

“A-Ahem, just for the record,” the doctor said after coughing a little. “There’s a plethora of anti-aging technologies in outer space, not to mention things like elixirs of life created from the sacred beasts of other worlds, as well as personality transfers involving clones—like what I did. With so many tricks out there, make sure you don’t try and guess the age of any heroine, okay?”

“G-Got it.”

Despite being rather overwhelmed by this conversation, I nodded readily. It was a scene I’d seen plenty of times in manga, but I guess asking a woman her age really was a bad idea... If R was here, she’d probably have some smart aleck comment right about now.

“...”

But instead, I had L, who was currently glaring at the three of us with an exasperated expression.

“Now, what were we talking about?” the doctor asked, rubbing the back of her neck.

“Something about the current situation of this time period, I think?”

“Ah, that’s right. I was briefing you on this time period.”

And so the conversation finally got back on track.

“If I’m to explain the current situation, after all, then I have to tell you a little bit about the start of the war.”

“The start of the War of All...”

“Yes, although it’s not like there was some large-scale event or single trigger that incited it.”

As the doctor began explaining things, Satsuki stood silently next to her,

taking it all in with a grave expression. The doctor continued...

“At first, I thought it was just the standard catfight over you. You had a lot of assertive girls around you, so scuffles were something of a daily occurrence.”

I was more than familiar with that myself.

“Usually you—and I mean future you, of course—would intervene and that would be the end of it, but... the heroines started to clash with each other more and more. It was just so gradual that no one realized anything was wrong.”

“...”

When I looked back on my own experiences, like with Satsuki and Iris, for example... They *were* always arguing. And I’d heard future Rekka had saved hundreds of heroines, so trying to imagine the chaos in my daily life on a much larger scale was kind of mind-blowing. I could see how genuine tension might have fallen under the doctor’s and Satsuki’s radars.

“And while the bickering was increasing, so too were disputes under the table. A present that one of the heroines had prepared for you would go missing and other such nonsense that was clearly someone’s dirty work.”

“...!”

Shocked into silence, I was speechless. I never thought that... Well, there’s no way to mince words. I didn’t think that there were any malicious people around me who would sneakily try and sabotage others like that.

“Er, allow me to clarify that this sort of foul play was unprecedented. It had never happened before,” the doctor quickly added.

She must have seen through my worry.

“Now, at any rate... Such incidents began to increase tensions to the point that the heroines were becoming hostile with each other without you realizing it.”

Future Rekka would always step in on conflicts between the heroines, but it got kind of out of control, huh? If future Rekka didn’t see what was going on, he wouldn’t have known to step in.

“And so tension continued to mount until two big things happened,” the

doctor explained.

“What were those?” I asked.

“First was a terrorist attack on the central council of the Greater Galactic Federation.”

“A terrorist attack?!”

I was shocked to hear something so violent had happened.

“But you said the Galactic Federation... Was Iris okay?”

“Iris herself is safe. But her father...” Satsuki answered in a low voice.

Though she didn’t finish her sentence, I could guess the end of it based on the look on her face. I had met Iris’s father once myself. He represented planet Finerita in the Galactic Federation. I didn’t know much about the central council, but if there was a meeting, I’m sure he would’ve been there. So in the terrorist attack...

“Of course, that was a huge incident in and of itself.” Though I was speechless, the doctor continued, “However, by unfortunate chance—or perhaps by some design—future Rekka was also participating in the council meeting that day.”

“Wha?! Wh-Why would I do that?”

“Iris took you along forcefully so she could show you off to her father and, well... try to get you to make a future commitment to her. Those are her words, mind you. I have no further comment on the matter.”

“Yeah, that does sound like something Iris would do...” I said with a sigh and a nod.

But seriously, how unlucky for me. Or... was it as the doctor suggested? Perhaps it *was* by some kind of design.

“As for the second incident, you—future Rekka—went missing in the middle of everything.”

“So that’s when my future self disappeared...”

Was I kidnapped? Or was I obliterated without a trace? I didn’t really want to

think about the latter.

“This is where things get complicated,” said the doctor.

“I can imagine...”

“After your disappearance, rumors quickly began circulating among the heroines.”

“Rumors?” I parroted.

“Yes. That someone had kidnapped you to keep you all to themselves.”

“!”

Come to think of it, she’d mentioned something like that during the time leap here. Something about the heroines of the future suspecting one of them was hogging me all to themselves, which had caused a lot of infighting.

“It wasn’t like everyone believed it without even questioning it, but it led to the tensions that had been building between the heroines all blowing up at once.”

And so a trivial catfight exploded into an all-out war. They each suspected one another, multiplying their suspicions exponentially. And, according to the doctor, a good portion of that suspicion fell on the grieving Iris.

“Why Iris?” I asked.

“Because she was there when you disappeared. Moreover, she’s the one who forced you to go to the council meeting that day. If someone had been plotting something, she was in the best position to do so.”

“That can’t be! That terrorist attack...! Her father...!”

“Indeed... And so I’m sure you can imagine Iris’s rage.”

Iris had flown into a fury when the other girls pointed fingers at her. She started to suspect the heroines who were trying to pin the blame on her and grew obsessive about searching for the real culprit. However, the heroines under Iris’s suspicion didn’t take that lying down either. And so the fight between the heroines hit the point that it was no longer any laughing matter. It was deadly serious.

“Wait...”

That was when something dawned on me, and my eyes drifted over to the so-far quiet Satsuki.

“Hold on. If you’re looking for someone, then don’t you have Satsuki and her Magic of Omniscience?”

The Magic of Omniscience was Satsuki’s heirloom magic that could access the Akashic record of this world—a record of everything that had ever happened here, from the dawn of time up until the present day. She should be able to locate me easily.

“About that... Well, you see...”

“Um...”

Both the doctor and Satsuki had strange looks on their faces.

“Huh? Did I say something wrong?”

“No, no. You’re not wrong. But...” Satsuki said bashfully.

As it turned out, Satsuki at the time had had the same thought I did and tried to mediate the peace in my place. However...

“Even with my Magic of Omniscience, I couldn’t find your location.”

“What?” I asked, my brow furrowed. “Is that even possible?”

“It shouldn’t be. But that was of no comfort to the distraught heroines.”

If future Rekka had saved hundreds of heroines, that meant he’d been involved in just as many stories. And with that many stories intertwining, I can see how things might get a little complicated. Planets from every corner of the universe, numerous other worlds, underworlds that people on Earth were wholly unaware of, lost civilizations, crazy technologies, ancient magics, and so on... There were all kinds of tremendous powers at play. And it wasn’t hard to imagine that something out of all that had the ability to hide future Rekka from the Magic of Omniscience.

“The Magic of Omniscience is magic, first and foremost. There are plenty of ways to protect yourself against magic, and even more to shield yourself from

divination magic specifically—either with technology or other magic. That is to say, if someone had thought about it ahead of time, it shouldn't have been all that hard to come up with a way to avoid the Magic of Omniscience.”

So basically we had a Devil's Proof situation on our hands. Satsuki could potentially look up every way she knew how to avoid the Magic of Omniscience and who could use it, but there were too many ways and too many heroines from too many different stories for that to be feasible. Moreover, there could be ways we didn't know about. And so, with the one thing that could put an end to the conflict missing, the conflict escalated and escalated... Heroine versus heroine became faction versus faction became world versus world.

“I see... I get it now. So that's how it became the War of All.”

It was a real heavy story... Especially the part about me being the cause.

When R said I caused a war, she must have tried to make it sound like a joke to soften the blow...

I finally understood that, despite sounding like a jerk, she was being considerate. Yanking my chain a bit made it a little easier to take than dumping all the gory details on me. I'm sure it being our first meeting had something to do with it too, but I was sure now that R was being thoughtful in her own way to avoid causing me too much stress.

“Yes. That was the start of the War of All, which brings us to where we are now.”

“The agency was established to stop the War of All, causing conflict between the pacifists and extremists?”

“Yup,” the doctor said with a nod. “So there's one thing... No, four things I'd like you to take away from this: the four factions that exist in this world.”

“Factions? Like the pacifists and extremists?”

“That's right. Actually, those are two of the four factions. What I want to brief you on is each faction's view of you and the War of All.”

“Their view of me?”

It sounded like we were in for another complicated discussion...

“There’s no need to be so tense. It’s not that difficult. First are the pacifists, who, as you know, wish for you to live and resolve the War of All by your own hand.”

I assumed she meant for me to make up my mind and settle down with a heroine.

“Next are the extremists, who you may know refer to themselves as hardliners. They are the radical faction set on preventing the War of All by killing you. They’re a faction that branched off from the agency, which is why they have the means to travel to the past, but they’re not very well known outside of here.”

The extremists had caused me enough grief already, so I wasn’t very fond of them. Not only had they targeted my life, they had tricked L, destroyed my hometown, and on top of that, kidnapped Satsuki and the others (which was a little confusing to say with future Satsuki standing right in front of me). But still... If their real goal was ending the war to achieve world peace, I couldn’t say they were all bad.

“Now come the two factions you don’t know, the first of which is the hawks. As you might guess by their name, they want the War of All to continue until it reaches its natural conclusion.”

“Why would anyone want the war to continue?”

“In a way, you and future Rekka are different people. There are heroines who don’t want the fate of their love to be decided by someone else.”

I see... That did make sense in a way. Future me wasn’t *me* me, after all. We had different personalities and had lived different lives. If I chose a heroine and settled down in the past, that would keep future me from even meeting a good deal of the heroines he’d saved. There must have been some of them who weren’t too thrilled with that idea. I didn’t think it was right to continue the war, but I wasn’t in much of a position to criticize their way of thinking. I had no idea what it was like to go through what they were.

“Last but not least is the doves. They’re ideologically similar to us pacifists, but they don’t necessarily support the agency’s methods. They do want an end to the conflict, however. You could say they’re rather close to a neutral faction,

but even they have pawns in the war.”

Pacifists and extremists. Hawks and doves. With the War of All going on, all sorts of principles, people, and ideologies had come into play. But over time, they’d largely settled into those four factions.

“But there are those who have joined the war without affiliating themselves with a faction. Those who have no idea that the war really started with a struggle over you. With everyone across all worlds embroiled in this conflict, there are surely some who have no idea why they’re fighting.”

“What’s with that? That’s so...”

“It’s a terrible thing, certainly. But as its name suggests, the War of All grew so big it encompassed everyone and everything with no end in sight. Of course it would lead to such tragedy...”

I couldn’t say anything to that. All I could do was clench my fists. The War of All that I had been hearing about since day one... To me, it had always been something far off in the future. Uncertain, almost unreal. Hearing the details of what had happened—what *was* happening—changed that. It was now very, very real to me. But here I was in the future, unable to leave the doctor’s room... Maybe that was for the better. If I went outside and saw the damage with my own eyes, everything I’d heard so far would probably weigh on me even heavier.

“...”

After everything the doctor had said, I had a much better grasp of the War of All. But...

“Well, that’s enough about the war. Let’s move on to talking about what happened in the past that needs to be rectified,” she suddenly declared, drawing a hasty conclusion to the topic.

If she was bringing up the past now, she must be talking about how my hometown was attacked by the extremists who’d kidnapped the heroines. Satsuki had already been filled in on that much because the doctor had messaged her about it when we arrived.

“For now, let’s try to do what we can. Satsuki, can you find out where Rekka’s

heroines are in this time period using your Magic of Omniscience?”

“I’ll give it a try,” Satsuki said, activating her magic.

Her blue mana glowed softly, filling the room with light that formed a pillar up through the ceiling, reaching for the heavens. That was how her magic connected to the Akashic record. After a while...

“It’s no use. Just like back then, the Akashic record doesn’t yield any results for their location.”

“I see. I had my suspicions, but this must mean the mastermind behind the extremists is involved too. We haven’t been able to find out anything about the mastermind via the Magic of Omniscience, so we can assume they have some way to hide from it or block it out...” the doctor explained to me with a quiet sigh.

“But you said yourself this practically confirms they’re involved with the kidnappings too, right? So why don’t we start by marching into the extremists’ headquarters?”

“We don’t have any other leads right now, though. And that’s no easy task, you realize? We only have the four of us.”

Okay, the doctor had a fair point there. Against an organization with giant robots at its disposal, it was reckless to go march on their base with just four people—three of which weren’t even really combat trained. But I wasn’t fazed. In fact, being at a huge disadvantage was the norm for me. And if I was lacking strength, then the first thing I needed to do was...

“Let’s increase our numbers,” I suggested.

“Increase our numbers?”

The doctor and Satsuki both cocked their heads at my suggestion.

“I don’t know how it is for future Rekka, but I’m generally powerless. I can’t do anything without someone else’s help. That’s why the first thing we should do is get some friends together.”

I knew that what had just come out of my mouth was ultimately pretty pathetic, but I couldn’t help it. It was the truth.

“Do you have any friends in mind?”

“Well, the only people I know I can rely on are the girls... So I’ll seek out their future selves here in this time line and *make* friends.” I continued, “I don’t know whether I’ll be able to get them on board or not, though, so it’s probably best to start with the heroines I know I’ll most likely be able to convince.”

I looked slowly at L, the doctor, and Satsuki in turn.

“There are common heroines between my story and future Rekka’s, right? I mean, Satsuki’s right here, and you guys mentioned Iris earlier.”

“Well, yes. There are others,” the doctor confirmed.

“Then let’s start with them. I know their stories, and we might have some sort of connection.”

My best shot here was probably to make the most of the fact that I was “the same but different” from the Rekka they knew. Tugging at their heartstrings a little would probably be the best way to recruit them.

“Let’s see... To start with, are there any common heroines that belong to the pacifist or dove factions you mentioned earlier?”

“Hold on. I’ll bring up a list for you from the agency database,” the doctor said, fiddling with a computer terminal in the room.

As I was waiting for her, I felt someone’s gaze fall on me... and I turned to see Satsuki with a faint smile on her face.

“You really are Rekka... I knew you’d come through for us all. I’m so touched I could just cry,” she murmured with misty eyes.

Chapter 4: Searching Out Connections

Now that we'd decided on a plan—recruiting the heroines of the future to help us—we had to put it in motion. And that meant going outside... which was a problem for me considering I'd been missing in this time line for a while now. Anyone who saw me would probably raise a fuss over it. The doctor had brought me here to the future without permission, after all. No one knew I was here. That meant I'd have to keep my identity a secret as we made our exit from agency HQ. And the same went for L, who was functionally a defector.

"Well, R and I hid the fact that L was working with the extremists, so that shouldn't be a problem," explained the doctor.

"Really?" I asked.

"Yes."

She nodded casually, but wasn't that a pretty dangerous game to play? I had to seriously wonder for a moment, but then it dawned on me that it was perfectly in character for the doctor and R.

"W-Wait a minute," interjected Satsuki. "This is all news to me."

"Oh, really? Then you stay quiet about it too, Satsuki," instructed the doctor.

"Huh... Well, all right," Satsuki acquiesced with a sigh. "But whose side she's on doesn't change the fact that she's been missing all this time, right? I was shocked to see her when I walked in."

"You sure didn't seem like it," L chimed in, eyeing Satsuki dubiously.

"Th-That's... That's because Rekka was here," Satsuki said, bashfully fidgeting with her fingers.

She'd apparently been so preoccupied with me that it overrode her reaction to L in the heat of the moment. It was... kind of embarrassing. But L only glared harder at me and my reddening face.

"A-Ahem... What I mean to say is that there are plenty of employees here that know L, so someone's bound to cause a commotion if they see her."

Yeah, I suppose that was the normal reaction to suddenly seeing someone who'd supposedly been missing. L and I were in the same boat in that regard, so we'd have to come up with some way to stay hidden.

If only Harissa were here, we could use her invisibility magic to sneak out quietly...

She was my go-to girl in situations like this. I really needed to find the heroines—my heroines—as soon as possible.

But just then, L said, “If it’s a disguise you want, I have something for that.”

“Really?”

“It’s a device that can alter your appearance with a hologram,” L said, pulling out a small gem. “You place it over your head like this.”

She held it over her head just like she’d described... and it started floating all on its own. It then flickered for a brief second. Suddenly L no longer looked like L, but a rather intimidating-looking yakuza guy.

“Yikes!”

“This is how it works,” the yakuza said with L’s voice.

It was kind of surreal, but apparently she could modify her voice in much the same fashion if she so chose.

“Wow, that thing does make for a great disguise. It’s really handy to be able to change your height and stuff.”

“That’s because I’m not wearing the disguise directly.”

Basically, the crystal floating above her head bent light to manipulate the way people saw the object or person below. L disappeared into an illusion—a hologram being projected over her. Her mouth movements and expressions were all preserved through facial tracking, so the effect was perfectly natural. The hologram also adapted itself to include any objects she happened to be carrying. She had to be careful about that, however. For example, if she fired a laser gun she was holding, the beam would still fire from where the gun actually was rather than where it appeared to be in the hands of her taller hologram. It could jeopardize her disguise since the hologram was purely audiovisual. And

the same was true about touch. If anyone physically came into contact with her, the jig would be up.

“That said, using doorknobs, operating consoles, and performing other close-range tasks isn’t an issue.”

Apparently simple things like that could still be covered by the projection from the gem. In other words, she just had to be careful about projectile weapons or anything else that might leave the range of her hologram.

“The hitch is that I only have one of these,” L casually announced after explaining how the gem worked.

“Shouldn’t you have opened with that?”

“Facts are facts; the timing doesn’t change the truth. I had another one as a spare, but that little gremlin girl broke it.”

“Gremlin... Fam, huh?”

Fam was a gremlin, a kind of monster known for putting delicate electronics on the fritz courtesy of a strange signal they emitted from their horns. Fam normally suppressed that ability with a special headband, but... I wonder what L had done to Fam? Whatever. L was right—facts were facts, and the fact of the matter here and now was that we only had one hologem.

“Well then, Doctor, Satsuki, do either of you have one of these hologem things?”

“I know where to get one, but it’s agency property. We’d have to fill out a requisition form, and there’s not exactly time for red tape right now. We could just try and take it, but that could backfire if we trip an alarm...”

“Hmm... I’d like to get outside as quickly and quietly as possible.”

I looked around the room. I was hoping to get a glimpse of things outside, but unfortunately there weren’t any windows in the doctor’s room.

“Say, Doctor, I recall you mentioning we were in space. Does that mean we’re on some planet?”

“No, this is a colony.”

“By colony, you mean one of those big spaceships just floating in space?”

A certain famous anime came to mind as I imagined that, and the doctor confirmed my imagination was more or less correct. The colony that comprised the agency headquarters was surprisingly not all that large. It was roughly one quarter the size of my hometown and housed just shy of a thousand workers.

“For the record, this room is within the colony’s employee residential block. The spacecrafts, both for personal and business use, are in the next block over.”

“Gotcha.”

Since we were on a space colony and not a planet or anything, we’d need space suits or some kind of spacecraft to go outside. My original plan was just to sneak me and L out of a window or something and then have the doctor and Satsuki come pick us up, but that was now, well... out the window. Based on the way the colony was designed, we’d have to make it to the next block over to board a ship.

“Then I guess we don’t have a choice...”

When I said that with a sigh, the three women in the room all cocked their heads. I had a backup plan in mind, but I considered it a last resort. I didn’t really want to do it, and I knew L certainly wouldn’t. But desperate times call for desperate measures and all that.

“So, L, hear me out...”

L must have sensed something was up, because she turned my way with an extremely disgusted look on her face.



We were now walking down the corridor to the bay with the doctor in the lead. The wall and floors here had the same futuristic look the doctor’s room did, making it feel all the more like Iris’s spaceship. There were still no windows in sight, and I was starting to think it was a little stuffy, when...

“Geh!”

“Hey, don’t make strange noises.”

“Ummm, L, you’re kind of strangling me. Please stop squeezing your thighs

together,” I whispered.

“That’s your fault for swaying,” she muttered as she relaxed her legs, which were currently draped over my shoulders.

“Rekka, L, we can still hear you, so try to refrain from needless chatter. From our perspective, it sounds like you’re talking to yourself.”

Oops. At Satsuki’s warning, I quickly shut my mouth.

But what else were we to do with only one hologem? In order to make it work, I’d suggested that L ride on my shoulders. This way, L could put the gem over her head and it could theoretically cover both of us. We had to adjust the motion tracking settings a little bit, but that was a piece of cake for the doctor.

L and I had taken the time to change out of our burnt and ripped clothes while she worked, but I guess that step wasn’t technically necessary since we had the hologram disguise. As for the hologram disguise, we’d “borrowed” the appearance of a random male employee at agency HQ whose work area was as far as could possibly be from the residential block. The doctor had pulled up his employee photo on the console in her room, and L had used that for reference to generate the disguise. Then we went on the move.

For the record, L was controlling the upper body of the disguise while I was controlling the lower. But Satsuki was totally right—people could still hear us. So when I talked to L like I just had, it probably did look and sound like this guy was talking to himself.



Actually, since L's the only one with vocal mimicry, I should just stay silent altogether.

I'd been careless earlier. Fortunately, however, no one walking down the corridor was paying attention to us. It seemed like they were all too busy to be bothered. I guess the aftermath of the extremists' attack was still unfolding, after all.

So this is the chaos the doctor had abandoned to come get me? If she hadn't moved so rapidly, I would still be running around being chased by the giant robots the extremists had sent after me. But now that they knew I was here in the future, they should at least leave my hometown alone. I guess you could say I'd saved the past in a way by coming here to the future, but there was still more to do. While I obviously had to save the kidnapped heroines, I also wanted to do something about what was going on here in the future too. If I didn't, incidents like this would just keep happening, and I wasn't going to stand for my hometown being destroyed over and over. I'd have to defeat the mastermind behind all this to put a stop to it no matter what.

“...”

After turning several corners and going down an elevator, we finally arrived at our destination: the spacecraft bay.

It's huge...

Perhaps I should have expected it, but this place was way bigger than our school gymnasium. I couldn't even see the roof unless I tilted my head back 90 degrees. Over 20 spacecrafts were crowded into the wide space that we could see, varying in size from the spaceship equivalent of speedboats to mega yachts.

“Pardon me. Do you have a moment?” the doctor walked up and asked the departure attendant.

“Yes, of course. Just one mome—oh, Doctor Laputa! Wh-What can I do for you?”

The attendant looked up from a pile of paperwork and panicked a little when she saw the doctor. It seemed even she was in the middle of handling all kinds

of things. There really wasn't an area around HQ that wasn't hectic right now...

"I received a call from XXXXX. I'm making a visit myself, so please prepare a smaller spacecraft for me."

The "XXXXX" part was a strangely pronounced word that I didn't understand. Probably some kind of space language. At any rate, saying she got a call was only an excuse. The doctor was just trying to net us a ship we could use.

"You're going yourself, Doctor?"

"It's related to the current incident, and I need to explain the circumstances. If we lose their support, we won't have a leg to stand on. So yes, I'm going myself."

"Understood. Just a moment, please."

"Make it one with a sublight speed warp drive."

"Understood." The attendant then rummaged in her desk for something. "Now, let's see... Who all will be boarding with Doctor Laputa?"

"Satsuki Otomo."

"And L—I mean, Dienz Ormando."

L almost gave her own name instead of the name of the male employee we were disguised as.

Whew, that was close.

A chill ran up my spine for a moment there, but the attendant hadn't seemed to notice L's slip of the tongue. She then finished what she was doing and handed the doctor the key to a small spaceship.

"Thanks."

"It's my pleasure, Doctor Laputa."

"See you then—"

The doctor gave a little wave to the attendant, and we began the descent into the bay, when all of a sudden the doctor froze up on the spot. Wondering what was wrong, L and I looked up ahead to see...

“Huh?”

Right there at the bottom of the stairs, coming up towards us, was a man. But he looked familiar for some reason. Like I’d just seen him recently... Wait, I had seen him recently!

Ack, it’s the real deal!

This guy looked just like the picture the doctor had shown us of Dienz Ormando. But what was he doing here? According to the doctor, he worked in a totally different block. I guess maybe the chaotic aftermath of the attack had agency employees juggling all sorts of tasks they didn’t usually. He must’ve had some kind of job to do here, but what were the odds?! This was bad news.

“Huh? There are two Mr. Ormandos?”

The attendant had now noticed what was going on too. We all froze, no one quite sure of what to do next.

Can we come up with an excuse? No.

We could try our best to talk our way out of this, but there was no guarantee that would work. There was too much risk involved, and we could end up blowing our only chance to make it outside. We had to get to that spaceship no matter what.

“Run!” I yelled, rushing forward to trip Mr. Ormando, who was still taken aback in shock.

“Wah!”

In his surprise, he fell backwards. I then put L down and turned back to Satsuki and the doctor, who had yet to move.

“Follow me!” I yelled loudly.

It was enough to make the two of them flinch before finally getting a move on. I let them go ahead of me and then brought up the rear as we all ran down the stairs.

“S-Someone!”

Behind us, I could hear the attendant yelling for help. An alarm then began

blaring all through the bay.

“R-Rekka! What do we do now?!” the doctor yelled in a panic.

“Ignore it! Which one’s the spaceship?!” I yelled back.

“Let’s see, 43, 43... I-It’s that one!” she shouted, pointing to a smaller spacecraft with a giant “43” painted on the side.

We made a beeline for it. The doctor tapped the keycard against the door panel, and it slid open immediately. Once we were all inside, the door slid back into place, and the interior of the ship automatically lit up. But we didn’t stop running until we hit the cockpit.

“All right! Now fly!”

“Don’t be absurd!” Satsuki yelled from the pilot’s seat. “The bay hatch can’t open until we’ve left the control room!”

“Ugh... Can’t we just fire a beam or something and leave through the hole we make?”

“If you did that, all the employees in the bay would be sucked out into space!”

“Ah, right. We’re in space.”

If we punctured a hole in the colony, anyone nearby would be sucked out in the depths of space. Which left us in quite a pickle as we were trying to escape.

“There’s an automatic emergency repair system in the outer walls of the colony, so the building itself should be fine. But the people here will still be in trouble, which is doubly an issue with the alarm going off. Security teams and all sorts of other people are on their way here right now.”

“That’s no good...”

Though this was an emergency, I didn’t want to get any innocent bystanders hurt.

“Satsuki.”

“What is it, Rekka?”

“Um, this spaceship has a warp drive, right? Could we use that to get outside?”

If so, then we could get out of here without even having to open the hatch. I thought it was a good idea, and the doctor seemed to think so too.

“That might be possible. Let’s use the short warp to get outside,” she said.

“Even the short warp needs a certain amount of acceleration, no? It’ll be impossible in here.”

“We should just be able to pull it off if we increase our speed by circling the inside of the bay.”

“You think I can pilot this thing like an acrobat?!”

“Do your best.”

“That won’t help!” Satsuki shouted, fiercely opposing the doctor’s suggestion.

“So, uh...” I piped up, trying to come up with another last-ditch-effort plan. “Why don’t we just go and explain things to everyone calmly? We can say the hologram disguise was just a trick of the light or something.”

“There are surveillance cameras in the corridors and here in the bay. It’d be impossible to fool them.”

“Then... was it a bad idea to run back there?”

That thought had been bothering me all this time.

“What’s done is done. And now we do what we have to. Move,” L said as she shoved Satsuki out of the pilot’s seat and took her place. “I’m taking over.”

“What? You, L? But you’re so clumsy...”

“Who are you calling clumsy?!” L snapped at me for being worried. She then grumbled, “Just so you know, I trip over a lot because this child-sized body has bad balance.”

She continued to grumble as she pulled a cable from her long kimono sleeve and connected it to the pilot’s console.

“I’m an artificial life form. I can pilot this type of spaceship electronically. With my calculation abilities, a short warp is a piece of cake.”

“A-All right... We’re counting on you, L!” I shouted.

“But let’s put our seat belts on for now!” the doctor shouted in turn, prompting me and Satsuki to take a seat and buckle in.

“Here we go!”

The spaceship started to move on its own, seemingly controlled by nothing other than L’s voice. I glanced outside the window to see agency employees gathered in scattered crowds. They were probably judging whether the moving spaceship was a danger or not as we rose higher and higher into the air.

Airplanes on Earth couldn’t lift off without gathering speed along a runway first, but this puppy could apparently move straight up even from a standstill. And once we’d gotten an appropriate altitude, L started to turn the ship around and lap the bay. As we gradually picked up speed...

“Ugh, I feel sick...”

“I think I’m gonna hurl.”

Satsuki and the doctor both held their hands over their mouths, their faces pale. I honestly felt a little queasy too.

“Tough it out! We’re leaping now!” L yelled.

We were already at the velocity we needed to enter warp, and L didn’t waste any time activating it. Not a few seconds after she gave us the warning, a strange light enveloped the spaceship as we leaped through space.

“Whew...” L exhaled quietly as she unplugged her cable. “So, where to now? Well, I guess we have until the warp finishes to decide.”

“Satsuki’s searching for the exact coordinates of our destination. Our first target is a heroine who has desperately maintained her neutral status without joining any faction since the start of the War of All—Lea.”



Three hours after we made our escape from agency HQ, our small spaceship arrived in the vicinity of a certain planet.

“Lea’s really here?” I muttered in something of a daze.

Said planet was already close enough to see plainly through the window, and

it... it didn't exactly look inviting. I'm not an expert on planets or anything, but it sort of looked like pictures I'd seen of stormy Jupiter. I couldn't say one way or the other about its size, though. When you're standing in front of them in person, all planets look ridiculously huge.

I was more concerned about how the entire planet was covered in brown clouds. Or maybe it was airborne sand? Either way, you couldn't see the surface at all because of it. Furthermore, the color wasn't uniform. You could see yellow spots amidst the brown here and there, which seemed to be swirling faintly.

"Those are probably sandstorms. The entire planet seems to be sandy, and with the weather like this, there likely isn't much light on the surface," said the doctor.

"How does anyone live here...?" I asked.

"For a normal human to live here without any specialized equipment, the whole planet would need to be terraformed. But with the right gear, we should be able to get down to the surface and explore just fine," the doctor replied, furrowing her brow. "Lea, on the other hand... Lea is known first and foremost for her power. If she put her mind to it, she could easily rival the military force of an entire planet. I suspect she sequestered herself somewhere inhospitable like this so that no one would try and use that power."

"...Let's just go."

"Hold on, Rekka," said Satsuki. "I'll look up more detailed information on Lea's location."

From there, we followed Satsuki's directions and entered the atmosphere of the sandy planet.

"Wow, it's really all sand..."

And we just so happened to come down in the middle of a terrible sandstorm.

"It's just barely bright enough to see without a light, but the sandstorm drastically reduces our visibility even more."

It was only about as bright as a really cloudy day on Earth, but like the doctor said, the raging sandstorm prevented us from seeing any more than a meter or

so ahead.

“Which way should we go?” I asked.

“First we descend straight down,” replied Satsuki. “She’s somewhere in this area.”

Satsuki continued to navigate for us, giving detailed directions to L in the pilot’s seat. I was grateful. Without her and her Omniscient Magic, there was probably very little chance we’d ever be able to find Lea here.

We gradually descended, bringing the hovering spaceship all the way down to the surface. From there, Satsuki used her magic again to determine Lea’s exact coordinates.

“Fifty meters ahead of us, there should be a small cavern,” she said.

And lo and behold, there it was. Rather than a natural landmark, however, it was more like a hollow bored into the side of a giant mass of rock jutting up out of the ground.

“So, Lea’s in there...”

“You’d better suit up before going outside.”

“All right.”

I heeded the doctor’s warning and put on a protective suit. It covered my body completely, but it wasn’t as bulky or hard to move in as a traditional space suit. If anything, it was more like a skin-tight drysuit with an attached helmet.

“It’s been ——— since I last saw Lea...”

Hm? Just now, it sounded like Satsuki blipped out for a second there... Ah, wait, that must be the canceller at work. I’d completely forgotten about the little device jammed in my ear. Judging by the beginning and end of her sentence, she’d probably said something about how many years it had been. The canceller had automatically cut that part out, so it seemed like it was doing its job to prevent me from knowing what time period it was.

“All right, let’s head out now.”

While I was thinking about that, the doctor opened the hatch to the ship and

led us all outside.

“Whoa!”

That was some wind! I had to brace my legs in order not to be immediately blown away, and I grabbed the doctor’s and Satsuki’s hand spur of the moment.

“It’s probably best if we hold on to each other,” I said. “We’ll get lost instantly if we’re separated.”

Even if we were only going to a cavern a few meters ahead of us, it’d be a disaster if we lost our sense of direction even for a moment. On a planet like this, it could cost us our lives.

“There is a distress beacon installed in the suits just in case, but... Yes, let’s hold hands too. Here, L.”

“I’ll be fine. Don’t treat me like a child.”

“There’s no need to play tough. The adults are holding hands too.”

“H-Hmph! Only because you insisted...”

And so the doctor took the fussy L’s hand. Meanwhile, Satsuki on my other arm seemed to be strangely stiff.

“Satsuki? Are you okay?”

“I-I’m just fine!”

“You sure? Then let’s go!”

The four of us proceeded forward side by side. The sand was almost like fresh snow, sinking beneath our feet with every step. If any one of us tripped, the wind would send us rolling. I’m sure it was hilarious to watch, but it was a rather precarious situation. We moved forward with extreme care and caution, eventually arriving at the cavern entrance.

“Phew...”

Stepping into the mouth of the cave shielded us from the whipping wind and sand, allowing us to see a little better. But without any light, the depths of the cavern were shrouded in complete darkness. And from the darkness, someone asked challengingly...

“Who’s there?”

The voice was familiar to me. I had no idea how far in the future we were, but it hadn’t changed at all since I’d heard it last.

“I don’t know who you are... but I’m not interested in taking sides. I only pray that everyone will cease their pointless fighting.”

“Lea, it’s me!” I called to the darkness.

“That’s...! You...!”

I could tell by her voice she was shaken.

“Yeah, it’s me. Rekka Namidare,” I called again to the darkness.

From the depths of the cavern then came a peculiar sound... Quiet, staggering footsteps. And slowly but surely, a redhead I knew appeared from the dark of the cave. She was wearing a long, veil-like cloak, presumably to protect herself from the sand, but she was otherwise the exact same heroine I knew... Lea the Leviathan.

“R... Rekka!”



Her long, disheveled hair swished behind her as she ran towards me, straight into a hug.

“Whoa!”

Lea was a little taller than me, so her face was much closer to mine than when Satsuki had hugged me. I could feel her breath tickling my ear.

“Why...? How...? When did you return? No, none of that matters... I’m just glad you’re alive.”

“Um...”

While I was indeed Rekka Namidare, I wasn’t the Rekka Namidare she knew. I wanted to explain that to her, but it was hard for me to say anything when she was sobbing like that...

Come to think of it, future Lea really did look exactly like the Lea I knew. Was that because she was Leviathan? While future Satsuki had clearly grown older, I felt a little strange looking at Lea who hadn’t seemed to age a day. But the doctor had asked me not to put too much thought into that, so I decided not to dig any deeper.

“Listen, Lea... I’m sorry to ask, but could you let that Rekka go?”

“Laputa... and Satsuki? You’re both here too?” Lea murmured as though she’d only just noticed them.

It seemed like she didn’t have eyes for anyone other than me. The doctor smiled wryly, as if she’d known that would happen.

“I know it may come as a disappointment, but would you listen to our story, Lea? I promise we won’t take up too much of your time,” she then asked.

About half an hour later...

“...”

While she was initially shocked to find out that I was Rekka Namidare of the past, hearing why we’d come to find her put a conflicted expression on Lea’s face.

“I understand your request,” she said with a small nod.

“Then...”

“But I want you to promise me something first.”

“What is it?”

“I don’t mind lending you my power, Rekka. However, I ask that you won’t use it to fight the other heroines. I don’t want to hurt the friends I spent those happy days with...”

By “those happy days,” did she mean the time she spent with the heroines in this time line? Thinking about it, Lea was always the most openhearted of the heroines... It was probably because of the thousands of years she’d spent sealed away and alone.

“Yeah, I can promise you that, Lea. This might be a different time period, but I don’t have any intention of hurting anyone either. I just want to save them.”

“Heh... I guess you are Rekka, after all,” Lea said with a smile. “You can count on my assistance.”

“Thank you, Lea.”

“That said...”

Suddenly, Lea blushed.

“Do you have anything to eat? I haven’t had a bite since I shut myself away on this planet,” she asked sheepishly.



“Now, where to next?” the doctor asked, handing me something.

It was a list of all the heroines that were common to both my past and this time line.

“Hom nom...”

Lea was happily munching away on space food in the back of the cockpit. I knew she was fine fasting for thousands of years since she’d done it once before, but she was also capable of eating endlessly when she wanted to. I let her savor her first meal in ages in peace.

“Hm?” Looking back at the list, I noticed something. “Come to think of it...

This list contains a lot of heroines that I saved in my first semester of high school.”

“Oh? Yes, I suppose it does,” the doctor said with a nod. “While your fate and future Rekka’s fate diverged thanks to the agency’s interference, you both inherited the Namidare bloodline on your sixteenth birthday. It’s not like your fate can turn on a dime, you see.”

When she put it that way, it made sense. While the agency’s interference—that is, R—made all the difference, both me and future Rekka had the same starting point. We were both teenage boys from rural Japan with the same upbringing and circle of friends. Meeting R was where things started to change for me, but it was a gradual change. So while future Rekka and I ended up in completely different places, we had the same origins.

“Speaking of...”

“Hm?”

“I’ve been wondering about this for a while now, so there’s something I’d like to ask,” I said, looking at the doctor, Satsuki, and Lea in turn. “Just how different am I from the version of me that you guys know?”

It’s not like hearing it would change anything, but I at least wanted to know how different we’d ended up. Mostly, I was just curious. But the three women looked at each other...

“That’s a tough question. How different? Hmm...”

“They’re the spitting image of each other outwardly.”

“I don’t know about the fundamentals, though.”

So... maybe I wasn’t all that different after all?

“Ah, but there is one thing—one rather big thing—that differentiates the two of you.”

“And what’s that, Doctor?”

“Well, you see,” the doctor began. “Rekka of the future is no longer human.”

“No longer... human?” I parroted back blankly.

What... What did that even mean? My head instantly filled with questions. I knew for a fact that I was definitely still human, but future me... wasn't? What on earth had happened?

"Sorry, perhaps that was a poor choice of words. More specifically, he quit being human."

"That's the same thing," I retorted.

"Really? I think it makes a big difference whether it was done willingly or not," the doctor replied, scratching her cheek.

"That's fair... But why did I give up on being a human?"

"That's obvious," the doctor said, pointing between me and the girls. "To save heroines, of course."

"..."

"Surely one or two examples come to mind, no? Stories where you had to surpass your human limits, stories where you were cornered into making an impossible choice."

"Yeah..."

When she put it that way, I saw what she meant. I'd been through so much... If I'd agreed to share Satsuki's magic, I would've become an Omniscient Contractor. If Rosalind had taken my blood, I would've become a vampire. I'd managed to save Rain's planet, but if I hadn't eaten Raul's immortal flesh, I would've succumbed to the mutations caused by Shirley's drug. If I'd lost to the Mask of Greed, I would've turned into a demon. If any one of those events had played out differently, I very well may have become inhuman myself. And when I thought about it in those terms, I realized how lucky I was to still *be* human.

"So what did future Rekka become? A vampire?"

"..."

At my question, the three women looked at each other... and started counting on their fingers.

"Part Omniscient Contractor, part vampire, part spirit, part demon sacrifice, part blood magus, and... Um, what other blood did he take in?"

“Part dragon, part undine, part nine-tailed fox, part oni, part both devil and angel, part fifth-dimensional alien, and part seventh-dimensional observer... What else was there?”

“Well, I don’t remember exactly which parts he had exchanged for cybernetic upgrades, but I also think he equipped himself with several ancient technologies...”

“Yeah, okay. I get it. Thanks.”

So future me had gone whole hog on the abandoning humanity thing. Wasn’t that a little much for just one person? How many part-somethings can one man be, anyway? And we’re talking about the same guy who went missing... Just who could kidnap someone like that? It would sure have to be more than a Demon King or ancient evil... And yet a mere terrorist attack had taken him out? Maybe that was a bad way of putting it, but I did have to wonder. Nevertheless, just spinning my wheels on it now wouldn’t get me anywhere. I had to concentrate on what was right in front of me.

“All right, let’s go get her next,” I said, spreading the list out and pointing to a particular heroine’s name.



In the future, there was special technology to travel between worlds. Apparently it had been created by some scientists from Earth and outer space with the help of a particular sorcerer. She’d used her specialty summoning and teleportation magic to set up gates between already known worlds and make stable paths to and from them. Unfortunately, once the War of All broke out, those gates became pathways of attack rather than trade.

But the sorcerer who’d made it all happen—Harissa Hope—was the next heroine I was thinking of recruiting.

“Why Harissa, though?”

“Hm?” At Satsuki’s question, I turned to face her. “There are two reasons. The first is because Harissa’s a dove. I suspect it’ll be easier to get her cooperation because of that.”

“What’s the second reason?”

“The second reason is her magic,” I answered. “I promised Lea that our goal is to gather allies, not to fight. Harissa’s magic will make doing that a lot easier.”

In addition to her summoning and teleportation magic, Harissa had really nifty spells like invisibility and healing. Her invisibility magic in particular had saved us tons of times in the past. It was great for moving around in secret and making stealthy escapes. But her magic aside, Harissa was the first heroine I had ever saved...

I figured the closer we got to my origins, the less difference there should be between me and my future self. In short, future Harissa and future Rekka should have met under very similar circumstances to the way Harissa and I did. The story should be more or less the same. Who knew what differences took place after that, but...

Anyway, the biggest obstacle when it came to negotiating with the heroines of the future was the fact that I wasn’t actually the Rekka they knew. Effectively, I was a total stranger. One misstep could spell a whole mess of trouble. So in order to alleviate that risk, I figured starting with the heroines I would know best—and the heroines that knew me best—would be safest.

Now, in order to set things in motion, we headed to the kingdom of Aburaamu, Harissa’s homeland. I mentioned earlier that pathways had been established between various worlds, but it wasn’t like just anyone could use them. Even on Earth, entering a foreign country required various customs and inspections. And if you tried to enter a warring nation, you’d be turned away at the door as a matter of course. In that regard, having the doctor with us was like an ace up our sleeve. She was a respected figure among the pacifists and had apparently been to Aburaamu on diplomatic missions before, so we had no trouble getting into the country.

“*This* is the capital of Aburaamu?” I muttered as I looked down at the city from the spaceship window.

The last time I visited Aburaamu... Well, I actually had no idea how long it had been since I didn’t know what time period it was, but Aburaamu sure had changed. From what I remembered, it was extremely medieval—stone castle and all. But the capital that stretched out before me now was more like

something out of a sci-fi fantasy. There were still wood and stone houses on the outskirts of town, but the heart of the city had been reformed to accommodate towering clusters of futuristic skyscrapers. And yet, the castle in the very middle of it all was still medieval-looking... What in the world was going on here?

“The city kind of looks like a hodgepodge mess.”

“That’s what happens when different worlds collide... But it’s not necessarily a bad thing, you know?” said the doctor. “Aburaamu has been receiving technology via trade with Earth and other planets. That’s why the level of development here feels so uneven. The castle itself embodies that perfectly—for the sake of appearance and tradition, its exterior is the same as it ever was, but its interior has been remodeled and updated quite thoroughly.”

“You don’t say...” I said, nodding.

“War is also a type of cross-cultural exchange, so this kind of thing happens.”

The doctor finished her explanation right around the time we landed our spaceship in the dock next to the castle. The dock had apparently been installed to help facilitate cross-cultural diplomacy.

“All right, L. I’m counting on you.”

“The situation being what it is, I won’t complain... But it feels like you’re giving me a ride on your shoulders, and I don’t like it. It’s humiliating.”

“That’s complaining, you know.”

L continued to grumble as she climbed up onto my shoulders. We then used her hologem to change our appearance and left the ship with the doctor and the others.

“Welcome, members of the agency. Right this way,” the gentleman who’d come to greet us said.

His outfit had the same sort of hodgepodge feeling the city did, but I guess that was just the fashion in Aburaamu these days? He led us into the castle, and the doctor wasn’t kidding—the interior had changed quite a bit. Wait... Oh my God, is that an elevator?! I remember visiting Osaka Castle on a field trip as a schoolkid and being totally shocked to see an elevator there. This was just as

bad, if not worse. But, well... since I was carrying L on my shoulders, seeing the elevator was actually kind of a relief.

Anyway, we made our way through the castle I'd visited twice before. While the interior of the building had largely been upgraded and remodeled just like the doctor said, it didn't look like the king's audience chamber had changed much. Was this one of those "balancing the old and new" type deals? I don't really understand that kind of stuff, so I decided not to put too much brainpower into thinking about it.

"Welcome, members of the agency," said the bald old man standing next to the king as we entered the room.

Why did he seem so familiar? Could he maybe be the grandson or something of the minister I'd once met here? Well, he didn't seem to recognize me—he probably had no idea who I was—so I decided not to worry about it. In response to his greeting, the doctor offered a polite smile.

"Do pardon us for visiting on such short notice. We've come today in hopes of asking an important favor."

"Oh?"

Hearing the word "favor" made the minister smile, but there was a glint in his eye. Surely that smile didn't mean anything good...

"I thought the agency's credo was to remain neutral and stay impartial with all political powers."

"You thought right. We would never seek to ally ourselves with any particular entity."

"Is that so?"

"Quite so."

"Then what business do you have with our kingdom?"

"As I said, the agency has an important favor to ask," said the doctor, finally cutting to the chase. "We seek to thwart the War of All by approaching Rekka Namidare in the past... That has been our goal for many years now, as I'm sure you're aware."

“But of course.”

“Our request concerns that goal.”

“And what might this request be, specifically?”

The doctor paused to take a breath before answering the minister’s question: “We seek the cooperation of Aburaamu’s royal sorcerer, Harissa Hope.”

“...”

“Naturally, it would only be a temporary measure. Embarrassing as it is to admit, the agency is experiencing a hiccup of sorts in its operations, and her assistance would be most appreciated in helping us overcome it.”

“Hmm... Yes, that’s terrible news indeed,” the minister replied, stroking his beard.

I couldn’t say exactly why... But for some reason, it felt like he wasn’t taking us seriously.

As I was thinking that, the minister replied, “Lady Harissa is our royal sorcerer, you understand. Letting her go would be most difficult, so we cannot answer you readily.”

“I understand the burden our request would place on you, but I do hope you’ll consider helping us.”

“Even so...”

“At the very least, if you would allow us to speak with Harissa herself...”

The doctor tried to negotiate a meeting with Harissa in person, but the minister swiftly shook his head.

“Lady Harissa is always busy, you see. Moreover, her life is under constant threat by outside powers. Unfortunately, we cannot allow her to meet with any foreign entities.”

“What?! You think we’re going to assassinate her?!” I yelled.

What the minister was suggesting was so absurd, I couldn’t help it. But my little outburst made the minister and the other officials in the room all turn their eyes on me... Oops. I was supposed to keep my head down while we were

here.

“Ahem,” the minister coughed, forcefully clearing his throat. “At any rate, I do hope you understand that Lady Harissa is a valuable asset we cannot simply let go of. If you insist on this matter further, then we would require you show evidence of your good faith.”

“...”

“Now, I’m sure you’re all tired from your journey here. We have rooms available in the guest house, so why don’t you stay here for the night? If there is anything more you wish to discuss, please come by again in the morning.”

“So be it... We’ll gladly take you up on your generous offer.”

And so our first meeting in Aburaamu came to an end without us even seeing Harissa.



After our not-so-productive meeting with the minister, we made our way to the guest house. It lay in the southern gardens of the castle grounds and, as its name implied, was a residence built to accommodate guests like us. The rooms were all lavishly extravagant, but that didn’t really improve my mood any right now.

“Argh! Damn that old minister!”

Of all the reasons he could have come up with, he had to go and imply we were trying to assassinate Harissa... While I could understand being cautious in times of war, I couldn’t help the rage that surged within me at the very idea.

“There, there, Rekka. Calm down.”

“Yeah, you’re right...”

I put my face in my hands and sighed, trying to cool my head. The doctor and Satsuki both took a seat, and L flopped face-first on the bed.

“Anyone want drinks?” Lea asked.

She was standing over by a rather large refrigerator, looking over her shoulder at the rest of us. Wait, a fridge in a world like this? There really had

been *a lot* of technological and cultural exchange in Aburaamu.

“Something sweet, please...”

“Got it.”

Lea tossed me a bottle made of a thin, aluminum-like metal. I guess they didn’t have plastic here? I removed the cap and took a sip. It was... grape juice. Nice and chilled, too. Lea handed juice out to everyone else before taking a seat on the bed next to the collapsed L.

“It seems we’re in quite a bind,” she muttered.

“Evidence of our good faith, huh? They’re outright demanding a bribe...” the doctor said with a sigh.

“But what do you think, Doctor? With the situation being what it is, perhaps we should humor them a little in order to get a meeting with Harissa...” Satsuki suggested.

“Well, I’d love to play along if it were an option. But you remember the ruckus we caused before leaving the agency, don’t you?”

“About that...”

“Moreover, the extremists’ attack left HQ in such shambles that I’m sure the accountants are still scrambling to come up with the capital to pay for all the necessary repairs. If I asked them to send money for a bribe now, they’d kill me.”

“They are rather fussy about funds...”

This time, the doctor and Satsuki sighed in unison.

“So what are we gonna do instead? At this rate, we’re just wasting our time here,” L said rather bluntly as she rolled over.

“If all hope is lost, shall we try another heroine?”

“I dunno. Giving up so easily is a little... I mean, we haven’t even seen Harissa yet,” I said, looking towards the castle from the guest house window. “Hey, Satsuki, Doctor, do you know where Harissa is right now?”

I asked the two of them because Lea had been living in absolute seclusion for

who knew how long now. I figured she probably wouldn't have any idea.

"Probably the sorcerers' tower, I suppose?" Satsuki answered.

"The sorcerers' tower?"

"That one there. See it?"

Satsuki walked over to the window and pointed outside. I wandered over and looked out to see a large tower standing next to the castle.

"Isn't that...?"

Back when I was searching for a way to return to Earth with Corona and the others, we'd had to come here to Aburaamu in order to gather material components for Harissa's connection magic. We specifically needed Red Thread as a catalyst, and we'd had to sneak into the castle's magical research facility to get some... And yeah, I'm pretty sure it was that tower right there.

"All of Aburaamu's magical research and refinement takes place in that tower. It's illegal to take anything from the premises, be it people or items. It's a measure to prevent any kind of leaks or espionage."

"And you think Harissa is there?"

"Harissa is the kingdom's preeminent sorcerer, after all."

"Come to think of it, my Harissa did invent a new teleportation spell all by herself..."

She really did have a talent for magic. But that left us in a pinch. Her talent had her holed up in the tower, which made it harder for us to get to her now.

"Is there any way we can sneak in?"

At times like these, I would normally rely on Harissa's invisibility magic, but...

"Hmm, I could search the Akashic record for a spell that would get us inside, but..." Satsuki paused there for a moment, looking troubled. "If I use magic to kidnap Harissa here, it'd be an interworld incident. The agency only has its neutrality to stand on, so that would be extremely problematic."

"I see..."

Thinking, I folded my arms and furrowed my brow. Satsuki was right. If we

snuck into the tower and left with Harissa, it would look like we abducted her.

“If we could just talk to Harissa... If she knew it was a request from you, Rekka, I’m sure she’d cooperate with us. But with that minister around, we won’t get to see her for free.”

“That’s it!”

Hearing Satsuki’s mumbling, a light bulb flashed on in my head.

“Did you come up with something?” the doctor asked, curiously turning my way.

“Yeah,” I replied. “If we can’t go see her, we’ll just have to get her to come see us instead.”



Ten minutes after we commenced our plan...

Knock, knock, knock!

Something suddenly started rapping on the window, attracting all of our attention.

“So *that’s* how she got here?”

This was the second floor. She’d probably used some spell to fly over. Or up, as it were. Lea, the closest to the window, got up to open it. A gust of wind blew in, bringing something rather large with it...

“Wah!”

I was tackled by said something, which knocked me backward onto the bed. It had jumped on me. Or, rather, hugged me overenthusiastically. That seemed to be happening a lot today...

Just as I was thinking that, it became apparent who the “something” that had tackled me really was. Indeed, when she dispelled her invisibility magic, I saw Harissa—future Harissa, that is. She was wearing the white robes of a royal sorcerer and looked like a mature version of the Harissa I knew. I had always thought of her as a little sister while we were living together, so seeing her grown-up like this was oddly flustering. I mean, her chest was... Yeah, let’s just

say she'd definitely grown.

"Sir Rekka..."

"H-Heya..."

Harissa wrapped her arms around me with tears in her eyes, refusing to let go. Our plan to lure her over had been a simple one: we used Satsuki's magic to let her know that I was here. We figured she'd come running if she heard the name Rekka Namidare, so it was going to be hard explaining that I wasn't really *her* Rekka Namidare. I felt bad. Really, we'd tricked her into coming...

"Um, would you be willing to listen to what we have to say?"

"Of course."

"Then could you maybe let go of me?"

"...Give me a little longer first."

About half an hour later...

There weren't enough chairs to go around, so we all sat in a circle on the floor and explained what had happened to Harissa.

"I see... You've been through so much, Sir Rekka of the past." After hearing our story, Harissa nodded with a doleful expression as she clutched her well-loved staff tightly with both hands. "I understand the position you're in, and I would happily lend you my power."

"Really?! Thank you, Harissa!" I nearly shouted, gratefully lowering my head.

"That being the case, allow me to go and receive leave from the king forthwith."

Harissa immediately stood up to make good on her word. I stood up too to see her off, and it was right about then that something occurred to me.

"Er..."

"Hm? Is something the matter, Sir Rekka?"

"I hope not. It's just that minister... I don't even know his name, but he was pretty opposed to us taking you with us. Are you really just free to go as you please?"

When I voiced my worries, Harissa giggled.

“That man is selling our kingdom’s magic technologies to other nations, so he’s actually leaning towards the militant hawks in terms of taking a side on the war.”

“Huh? Doesn’t that make things even worse?”

“It’s fine. The king, in comparison, is a dove. I’m certain he’ll consent if I say I wish to go. And if the king and I are in agreement, then no minister will be able to oppose us,” Harissa answered.

Man, did she ever sound confident and reliable right now. Seeing the little girl I once knew suddenly so grown in the blink of an eye was a rather strange thing.

“...”

Harissa stared at me silently for a moment before sidling over to me.

“You’re the Sir Rekka from when we only just met, right?”

“Hm? Yeah, I am. Well, technically speaking, I’m the Rekka from about half a year after that. What of it?”

“Nothing,” Harissa said, moving her hand held level from the top of her head to me and back. “What do you think? Our height difference has shrunk quite a bit since we first met, hasn’t it?”

“Ah, yeah...”

I’d noticed that the moment she first hugged me. But acknowledging it made Harissa’s lips curl up into a wicked grin for some reason.

“I may have been a little pipsqueak in the past, but look at how mature I’ve become!” she said, twirling on the spot. “So if you’re going to choose a heroine, you should choose one that gets better with age, don’t you think?”

“W-W-Wait! Stop! Hold it right there!” the doctor shouted, interrupting her in a panic. “Don’t go saying things to tempt or sway Rekka!”

“Hmph. I don’t see the problem. It’d be unfair if my past self wasn’t chosen just because I used to be childish.”

“If that’s allowed, then I—”

“No! It’s not allowed! That’s completely off-limits, you hear?!”

“Ngh... I’m at a disadvantage since I haven’t changed much at all.”

“I said *off-limits*!”

Both Satsuki and Lea were ready to jump into things too, but the doctor wouldn’t hear it. Meanwhile, Harissa was impishly giggling at the chaos.

“Does something seem a little different about Harissa’s personality to you?” I muttered.

“I can tell you exactly what it is—she’s matured into a little devil,” L snarked, crossing her arms.

The ruckus in the room continued for a while before eventually dying down.



“Now, I shall head straight to the king. The necessary procedures and formalities may take a day or so to complete, so please wait here for me until I return.”

“All right,” I said with a nod.

After that, Harissa left out the window exactly the way she’d come—invisible and flying.



We spent that night in the guest house, and Harissa came by the next day as promised to let us know her negotiations with the king and minister had been mostly successful.

“Unfortunately, however, they will not grant me leave indefinitely. I’ve been given a furlough of three weeks and must return afterward...”

“That’s more than enough time.”

From there we boarded our spacecraft, and Harissa’s colleagues saw us off as we made our exit through the gate back to our world.

“Now that we’ve recruited Lea and Harissa, what’s next?” the doctor asked.

“Hmm... Come to think of it, how strong are the extremists really?”

The abducted heroines were probably being held at their headquarters. My ultimate goal was to rescue them, but I still didn’t know exactly what we were up against. That made it hard to gauge how strong—and how well defended—we needed to be. Based on the group of giant robots that had attacked my hometown, I was guessing the extremists were a pretty serious force to be reckoned with.

“I wonder. You did destroy several of the independent armaments they sent to the past, and their resources should be somewhat depleted after their attack on the agency. I suspect they’re in a somewhat weakened state right now...”

As the doctor began hypothesizing, one of the panels on the ship’s command console started bleeping and flashing.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“A message. It’s from... the agency.”

“Bleh.”

“We’ve been charging ahead rather recklessly so far, so I guess we’re finally getting fussed at.”

The doctor’s tone was light and joking enough, but we really had caused some serious commotion back at the agency. Things were still in disarray at HQ, so they’d probably been delayed in getting around to dealing with us, but if the agency decided to take a strict stance with the doctor... Things could get ugly.

“If it’s that bad, you can always tell them I forced you all to act under my orders.”

I was a Namidare and they were heroines. If I said that I’d forced them to listen to me, it should sound convincing enough.

“I was the one who asked you to come to the future in the first place, so I wouldn’t do that to you. Now, let’s see...”

The doctor opened up the message with a laugh, but the smile on her face froze over when she began reading.

“What? What does it say?” I asked in a panic.

But the answer that came back was far more dire than I could’ve imagined...

“The Greater Galactic Federation has declared war on the agency.”

Chapter 5: Beyond a Billion Stars

“Declared... war...?”

I felt the back of my throat dry up as I repeated those words.

“Yes... And based on this timeframe, the Greater Galactic Federation’s main fleet will attack agency headquarters in 24 hours,” the doctor said in disbelief.

The Galactic Federation was the space government Iris was a part of. Why were they declaring war on the agency?

“I read the declaration, but...”

“What did it say?” I asked.

“To sum it up, they’re claiming that the agency has secretly been harboring Rekka Namidare,” she replied with a strained expression.

The agency was harboring Rekka Namidare? In this case, they surely didn’t mean future Rekka...

“Are they talking about me?”

“Probably.”

I was at a loss for words.

“This is all my fault...”

“That’s not true. Like I said before, I was the one who brought you to the future.”

The doctor was quick to shoot down my attempts to blame myself, but even if she had a point, it didn’t change the fact that the Galactic Federation was about to attack the agency.

“There must be... I know! You can just hand me over to the federation. That way I can meet with Iris.”

That would basically mean surrendering to the Galactic Federation, but it was better than war. And if Iris’s goal was to find me, it would give us a chance to meet and talk. I could hopefully explain things to her and negotiate her

cooperation in the process. The doctor, however, looked conflicted.

“That would be an absolute last resort because it would mean acknowledging your existence publicly.”

“I mean, I know we’ve been hiding my identity to prevent any unnecessary chaos, but... do we really have a choice now that it’s come to this?”

“There’s some merit to that line of thinking, but to be quite frank, you’re basically a walking trigger for war.”

“I’m a trigger...?”

Uncertain of what she meant, I cocked my head to the side.

“The Greater Galactic Federation is an extreme example right now, but the thought process is essentially ‘Rekka Namidare is with someone else’ giving way to ‘he should be with us, so let’s attack and take him.’ So if you’re with the federation, someone else is just going to do the same thing—turn around and declare war on them. It’s a vicious cycle.”

“Ugh...”

When she put it plainly like that, it made perfect sense. I was the cause of the War of All, after all. It had dragged on because my future self went missing, but if my whereabouts were discovered (even if I wasn’t the Rekka they were looking for), things would blow up all over again... just as the doctor was describing.

“I have to wonder where they got their intelligence, though...” Satsuki pondered aloud.

“That is indeed a problem,” the doctor said with a nod.

“Even if the agency analyzed their security camera footage and decoded the disguise hologram and figured out we had Rekka with us, I don’t believe they would spread sensitive information like that so recklessly.”

“Certainly not if it would result in a declaration of war from the Galactic Federation. I can’t imagine them doing such a thing on purpose.”

The doctor and Satsuki seemed to be on the same page there.

“What about Aburaamu, then?” asked Satsuki. “We turned off the hologem at the guest house, right?”

“I set up some magical precautions to counteract that.”

“When I went to talk to the king about taking my leave, it didn’t seem he or the others suspected anything,” Harissa added.

“The planet I was on was unpopulated, so the leak couldn’t have originated there,” Lea added too.

We all began stroking our chins. Just who had told the Greater Galactic Federation that I was with the agency? Nothing I’d done since coming to the future should have aroused any suspicion of my identity, and the doctor had just confirmed no one had been able to see through my disguise. That being the case, I needed to change my line of thinking. This wasn’t about me being exposed... It was about who knew I was with the agency.

“Hmm...”

Who knew that I’d made contact with the doctor? Who knew that I was in the future, or at the very least could figure it out? Who would know that I wasn’t in the past right now? There was only one answer to all of those questions...

“The extremists.”

“Huh?”

“The extremists know that I made contact with you, and they can probably guess I’m in the future since I left the past with you.”

There was a high chance at least one of the giant robots had seen me with the doctor. The extremists also had their own time-space translocator, so they could continue to observe what was going on in the past. They’d know I was missing and could easily put two and two together.

“You’re right. All signs seem to point to them. I can’t think of anyone else that checks all the boxes at the moment.”

That gave us our answer, but it wasn’t a pleasant one. Troubled, the doctor pensively looked up at the ceiling.

“If they’re our real enemy, there’s no point in asking them to relent or

withdraw. And since they're not a government, we can't take political action against them."

"Damn..."

What were we supposed to do? What *could* we do? The doctor may have said otherwise, but this war was my fault one way or another. And we're talking serious business here. Real serious. There has to be something...

"If it's come to this, is our only remaining option to meet with Iris?" Lea suddenly chimed in.

Everyone looked up at her in surprise. Unlike the rest of us, she didn't seem particularly perturbed.

"No matter how militant Iris has become, she wouldn't blatantly ignore what Rekka has to say. And even if she did, the hawks should readily acknowledge that this Rekka isn't the Rekka Namidare of this era. Once they learn that, they might back down without a fight."

"Huh." That made plenty of sense, actually. "All right, then—"

"It won't be easy."

Just as I was about to agree with Lea, the doctor interjected.

"According to the message, Iris is leading a whole fleet to storm the agency. That means we'll have to dodge battleship after battleship just to get to her," she explained. "Moreover, this small ship can't keep up with battleship speeds. We'll almost certainly be shot down before we reach Iris."

"Almost certainly, huh...?"

The doctor wasn't just saying that to shoot my hopes down, either. She'd already run simulations in her head, and that was the conclusion she'd reached. It was a warning: this mission would be suicide.

"But this ship has warp capabilities, right? What if we just warped to Iris's flagship?" I asked.

"Warps are actually rather easy to spot. Warping relies on spacial distortion, so the exit location is readily observable with a warp-detection radar. They'd be ready and waiting for us the second we came out of it."

“I had no idea...”

So warping wasn't as OP as it seemed...

“If we had a speedy battleship of our own, it would be one thing...”

“Doesn't the agency have any?”

“The agency has a nonaggression policy, so we don't have any vessels outfitted for combat.”

“Is there somewhere we can borrow one?”

“It'd be hard to find someone willing to stand against the Galactic Federation, not to mention lend us a warship on such short notice. Nobody wants the agency as an enemy, but no one really has a reason to go out of their way to help us.”

“Then could we hire one?”

“Same deal.”

The six of us continued to discuss potential options, but we couldn't agree on a good solution.

“Hey, I know! What if Harissa uses her invisibility magic on the spaceship so we can approach unnoticed?”

I offered up yet another idea, but the doctor again shook her head.

“Being invisible won't hide our heat signature. We'll still be easily detectable on radar. You'd have to wear a space suit and swim closer for something like that to work.”

“Right...”

Swimming through outer space between battleships to reach the heart of an enemy fleet? Even I knew that was a ridiculous plan. However...

“What if I went?” Lea volunteered, raising her hand. “I can function fairly well even in space.”

“Really?”

“Yeah. Oh, has my past self not revealed that to you yet?”

“Can’t say she has...”

What the hell had I gotten caught up in that would warrant sending Lea into space?! Calm down, Rekka... Stay focused.

“So, Doctor, would Lea be able to fly under their radar?”

“I do believe so... The main radar installed on battleships these days is designed to detect the heat of ship engines, so the heat from a living being shouldn’t be enough to register.”

Hearing that, Lea nodded.

“I can fly through space in my Leviathan form, so I should be able to approach Iris’s ship without issue.”

“That’s great! Then all we need to do is—”

I was about to celebrate our plan, but the doctor interjected again.

“No. Lea would still need to get within visible distance of Iris’s flagship. And the second they see her, they’ll do a more thorough scan of the area. They’d undoubtedly find us too that way, and we’d never get away in this ship.”

“R-Right...”

“Besides, there’s no point in sending Lea alone. Iris probably won’t listen to anyone other than you, Rekka.”

Iris’s flagship was the heart of her giant fleet. In order to reach her, we’d either have to actively avoid gunfire or actively avoid radar. Lea could avoid enemy radar, but she’d easily be in firing range by the time she was spotted. Worse yet, we’d be sending her in alone. Even if she managed to make it to Iris in one piece, there was no guarantee she would be able to convince her.

“Which means we need to figure out a way to get me to Iris. And without anyone other than Iris seeing me...”

“That’s right. In the end, we still need a ship capable of getting right up close to the enemy, not to mention a captain and a crew to pilot it.”

So this all came down to needing a ship. Too bad I didn’t have one in my—wait! I hurriedly pulled a piece of paper from my pocket. It was the list of

heroines the doctor had given me. I'm pretty sure they were on it...

"Yes! The answer's right here!"

Everyone turned to look at me when I suddenly raised my voice, and I excitedly showed them the list in response.

"Iris isn't the only heroine from space! There are other heroines with ships that might help us out!"

We didn't need massive amounts of firepower or political clout. All we needed was a quick way to get to Iris. So instead of looking for a way to save the agency, it was easier to find a way to save *me*.

"Based on the common heroines on this list, the ones I know right off who should have ships are... Fam, Shirley, and Rain."

Fam was a former member of the space pirates known as the Seageists. Rain was the princess of her own planet. And Shirley was a genius probably on par with the doctor. Between the three of them, surely one of them would have what we needed. The doctor patiently listened to my plan and thought it over.

"Yes... Maybe one of them can help," she said, eyeing a single name on the list of candidates.



We began the monumental task of using the Magic of Omniscience and warping... over and over again. The reason for that was because the heroine we were trying to track down wasn't sitting still in one place, but rather constantly moving around aboard her spaceship. It made it troublesome to chase after her, even with Satsuki's magic. One warp took several hours, so while we were warping, she was still on the move. Sometimes she was even warping too, which made things even more fun. But at the end of our little game of tag, we finally caught up to her. Perhaps I should say we were captured.

Surrounded by several ships from her fleet, we had no choice but to surrender. Apparently she'd realized someone was trying to track her down, and like the doctor had warned me before, warps were actually pretty easy to detect. They were waiting for us as soon as we exited. After that, we were escorted off our ship and taken onto one of theirs.

“Hey, is this really all right?” L whispered from where she was tied up beside me.

For the record, we’d all been apprehended and restrained with ropes and handcuffs. After that, we were moved to the lower half of what appeared to be the ship’s bridge. Above us in the upper half were pirates clamoring to get a look down at us. Behind them on the highest platform in the room was a grand chair that would surely be the captain’s seat, but it was currently empty.

“It’ll be fine, L. They’re pirates, and pirates always leave the inspection of prisoners to the captain, right?”

“I think you’ve been watching too many movies.”

“Urk...”

Unable to argue that, I fell silent. But despite L’s concerns, I wasn’t all that worried. In the worst-case scenario, our backup plan was to use Harissa’s invisibility and teleportation magic to get out of here. We’d actually allowed ourselves to be captured on purpose, hoping to avoid a fight. Our primary goal was to negotiate, and our business was with the girl who led this curious bunch of space pirates.

Just then, someone appeared on the clanking platform overhead.

“Are you lot the ones who’ve been chasing us all day?”

Said “someone” was a familiar green-haired girl with an ornate coat and boots on. She’d matured as much as Harissa had, but the headband covering the horn on her forehead was the same as it ever was.

“Fam!”

“Hah? How do you know my na...”



“It’s me, Rekka Namidare.”

“What?”

Fam narrowed her eyes and scrutinized my face for a moment. Then, her eyes gradually widened.

“No way...”

She mumbled to herself in disbelief, then jumped down from the platform with a thud. It was at least three meters in the air, but that didn’t seem to faze her.

“Brother Rekka!”

“Whoa!”

Fam suddenly leaped at me in a half-hug, half-tackle that knocked me right over.

“Guh, my stomach...”

“Brother Rekka, Brother Rekka, Brother Rekka!”

She didn’t seem to hear my groaning, however, as she bawled on top of me. She’d looked so mature just moments ago when she was looking down on us, but...

It seems she’s still got a childish side.

I was honestly relieved to see it.

“Sorry, Fam. But, uh... Your horn is stabbing me a little bit. Ouch!”

“Ah! I’m sorry, Brother Rekka!”

With that, Fam let go of me and stepped back. Still sniffing, she wiped her eyes.

“I had no idea you’d turned up again, Brother Rekka. Was it you who found him, Satsuki?”

“Well, not exactly... You see...”

Satsuki was unsure how to answer, so I shook my head and took over for her. After all, I should be the one to have to explain.

“Fam, the truth is that I’m not actually the Rekka Namidare you knew.”

“Huh? What are you saying?”

“Well...”

I gave Fam a rundown of what had happened leading up to this moment.

“I see... So you’re the old Brother Rekka...” Fam said forlornly after listening to my story.

“I’m sorry for tricking you like that.”

“No, it’s okay. It doesn’t bother me,” she said, managing a smile. “I’m happy to see you again too, Brother Rekka, so there’s nothing to apologize for.”

“Yeah...”

All I’d done since coming to the future was apologize and ask for forgiveness. I was using my identity as a bargaining chip to persuade the future heroines to help me, and deep down, I knew it was cruel.

Damn it...

The leader of the extremists, this mysterious mastermind... They just might be the one behind the War of All in the first place. Whenever I found them, whoever they were, I was going to make them pay no matter what. Not only had they stolen my future away from me, they’d left these poor heroines to suffer in a world of unending war. I had no idea what the mastermind’s motivations were, but that was unforgivable. Before I got to them, however, I’d have to get over the hurdles immediately in front of me.

“Fam, I know this is sudden and selfish, but I want you to do me a favor.”

“A favor?”

“Yeah. You’re the only one I can ask.”

I filled her in on the details of Iris’s attack and how it was all part of an enemy scheme against the agency. I told her it would be difficult to avoid further conflict unless I could meet with Iris directly. And I told her that in order to do that, I’d need her help.

“So that’s what Big Sis Iris is up to, huh?”

“That’s why I need you, Fam. Please. I need your help to stop her.”

“You haven’t changed at all, Brother Rekka...” Fam said with something of a forced smile. “But if I lend you a ship, I won’t just be putting myself in danger. I have my crew to think about too, so I can’t agree without conditions.”

“What conditions?”

“Basically, I want you to tell me your odds of success. To be honest, as fast as our ship is, charging into the middle of a giant fleet ain’t gonna be pretty.”

In space with no gravity, up, down, left, and right were all subjective. So to give fleets a relative sense of direction, they always flew in a spherical formation with a flagship in the center. Because of that, the closer we got to the flagship, the more gunfire we’d be taking from all sides. It would depend on the size of Iris’s full fleet, but even an experienced crew like Fam’s could probably only sneak halfway through it before things got too intense.

Which leaves us with the question of how to get through the second half...

If I couldn’t come up with an answer, Fam was out. And she was right to take me to task over this. No matter how childish she still might be on the inside, she was a proper captain now. The lives of her subordinates were in her hands. She couldn’t just agree to a suicide mission.

First things first, I had to organize my thoughts. I needed two things: a way to get the rest of the way to the flagship, and a way for at least one of us to make it to Iris personally. In order to achieve that, I had a few cards to play. I had Fam and her crew, although they were already doing enough just by getting us the first half of the way to Iris’s ship. I also had Harissa and her invisibility magic, although that wasn’t exactly effective when it came to avoiding detection via radar. Then there was Lea. By herself, she could fly through space at ship speeds, but if Iris’s spaceship wasn’t within view, it would be all too easy for her to lose her sense of direction and get lost within the fleet.

Those were the cards I had in my hand, so how was I going to use them to reach Iris? If I couldn’t figure out a way, this whole negotiation thing would be fail city. Think. Think, Rekka! That’s the only thing you’re good at...

I don’t have any special powers like my future self. I couldn’t do anything on

my own, which was why I had to rely on everyone else to save this story. Thankfully, Fam had already agreed to help so long as I could come up with a half-decent plan. But to her and all the other heroines here in the future, I was basically a stranger. They were only willing to help me because of my name and face. I felt terrible knowing that I was essentially just using the heroines, but I was deeply grateful for what they were willing to do for me.

Then there was Iris... She was a heroine just like the other girls, except she was currently being used by the extremists to cause pointless bloodshed. Normally, it would be the job of my future self to step in and save her. But without him around, that job fell on me. I *was* Rekka Namidare, after all. And playing my part was the only way I had to pay back the girls who were so generously lending me their power. That's why I had to think... I couldn't look at things in isolation. I had to piece them together and maximize any connections I could. It should all lead to one solution. I thought and thought and thought until...

"Hey, Fam! Everyone!" It finally dawned on me. "Listen to this..."



We didn't have much time left. We had a deadline of 24 hours until the Galactic Federation attack from the time we had received the message, and since then we'd spent half a day chasing down Fam. After negotiating with her, we had to choose the fastest ship she had and arm and man it appropriately. That meant changing out its armaments and carefully screening crew members, which took another two or three hours. Once all the prep work was done, Satsuki divined the location of Iris's fleet with her magic, and we spent another couple of hours in warp to get there.

"Phew, did we make it?"

The first thing I felt upon exiting the warp was relief that the fleet wasn't in view yet. If they'd already opened fire by the time we got there, it would be too late. Our goal was to avoid any fighting altogether.

"By my estimate, we'll be within each other's radar ranges in roughly ten minutes."

"So it's just about time..."

I took a deep breath. We couldn't afford to fail here. I had to convince Iris to call off her attack no matter what.

"Aye! That's a mighty long face ya got there, boss! Relax! We're here for ya, so ya got nothin' to worry about!"

Just then, a member of Fam's pirate crew tried to cheer me up. He was very clearly older than me, and had volunteered for the mission.

"Um, I'm not your boss."

"What're talkin' about?! Yer the guy who saved Big Boss Squallow, ain'tcha? We all owe ya a big one!"

"Ahaha... Right..."

Squallow, huh? That name sure brought back memories. He was the founder of the Seageists and basically Fam's foster father. My future self had apparently saved him for Fam's sake just like I had, which was a welcome development since it meant Fam's entire crew was happy to try and help me out in return.

"Just one thing though... You know I'm not actually the Rekka you guys know, right?"

"Don't sweat the details, boss!"

I tried to correct him, but he just laughed the whole thing off with a hearty chuckle.

Am I just worrying about it too much...? Oh well. I need to focus on the task at hand for now.

So many people were lending me their aid that I had to make sure not to let them down. For their sakes, I was going to give this my all. And just as I steeled my resolve, a number of flashing alerts popped up on the bridge's giant main screen.

"They're here!"

The alerts were notifications that the enemy fleet was now within range. It looked like there was an alert for each individual ship... And there were easily over a hundred of them.

“Captain! They’re in the standard spherical formation!”

“All right! Calculate their density!” Fam shouted, rattling off orders from the captain’s chair.

“They’ve sent a transmission seeking to confirm our affiliation!”

“Spam them back with whatever.”

“Aye, captain!”

“We’ve received a warning. It reads, ‘Move it already!’”

“Ignore it.”

I did what I could while watching the crew scramble about. If things went awry here, I was prepared to hand myself over to the Galactic Federation to prevent a fight from breaking out. But like the doctor had warned me, that would only lead to more fighting in the future. It would be an absolute last resort. Before it came to that, we’d give this all-or-nothing surprise attack our best shot. We had to.

“We’ve located the enemy flagship!”

“Calculating the shortest route... Got it!”

“Enemy vanguard is changing formations! Looks like they’re about to open fire!”

“Okay, men! Chaaarge!”

“Yeeeeeeaaah!”

When Fam rallied them, her entire crew roared in unison as the ship sped forward to meet the Galactic Federation fleet.

“Urk!”

I couldn’t actually feel how fast we were going from the bridge, but the stars whizzing past us were dizzying.

“Enemy has fired a long-range beam cannon! Impact expected in 15 seconds!”

“Evade it! Left blaster jet to maximum thrust! Seventy degrees!”

The ship trembled as it tilted to the right. A giant beam of swirling light then

went flying past just to our left where the ship had been sitting moments ago. So this was what space combat was like... It was basically a long-range showdown.

We knew where the enemy ships were thanks to the radar, but they were still 10,000 kilometers away. We didn't even have a visual on them at that distance. But that shot they'd fired just now... That definitely would've sunk us if it had been a direct hit.

Still, we had to get close enough to be able to see Iris's flagship at the center of the fleet. Beams like that would be flying the whole time we were trying to make it there... It was a little late, but it finally set in on me how ridiculous of a favor I'd asked Fam.

"It'll be fine, Brother Rekka!" Fam called out, turning to me with a smile. "If they were serious, we wouldn't stand a chance. But that's not gonna happen."

"Wh-Why not?"

"Because we're just a single ship. A midsize one with no long-range artillery, even. While they won't just let an unidentified ship sneak into their ranks, they know we're not a serious threat to them. They'll respond accordingly."

Fam knew the fleet's real target was agency HQ, which was notoriously defended by mechanisms of the doctor's own personal design. They weren't about to charge in recklessly. Of course, a pirate ship appearing out of nowhere was suspicious to them, but a ship that could only go fast was nothing more than an annoying fly to a fully-equipped battleship fleet. They would swat at us if we got too close, but they weren't going to waste but so much time and energy on us. Their battle lay ahead, so they would conserve any and all resources they could for the main event. Or, at least, that was Fam's theory.

And she seemed to be right. Slowly but surely, we made our way closer and closer to the fleet. They continued to fire at us, but at a rate that suggested they were trying to drive us away rather than shoot us down. That gave me a spark of hope, but...

"Now the real fun begins," Fam said suddenly.

"Huh?" I asked, stupefied.

Fam then turned to me and explained, “We’ll be inside their formation pretty soon. That’s where the party starts.”

“P-Party?”

“That’s right! It’s showtime!” Fam roared with a confident grin. “So you should get ready, Brother Rekka. Once we have a visual on Big Sis Iris’s ship, it’s your turn. Better get pumped!”

“Yeah, you’re right. Leave it to me!” I said with a nod as I pounded my chest.

While I was worried about Fam, now wasn’t the time for second guesses. If I wanted to honor the hard work she and her crew were putting in for my sake, I had to see this plan through. I had to make sure it succeeded.

“Let’s go, everyone!”

“Right!”

I gathered Satsuki and the others, and we moved through the ship following the instructions Fam had given us beforehand. The route led us to a small hangar where more pirates were waiting for us.

“They’re here! C’mon! Put these on quick!”

They gave each one of us a space suit similar to what we’d worn on the sandy planet where we found Lea. We quickly got changed, and the pirates checked us out to make sure everything was in order.

“And where’s your suit, lass?” one of the pirates asked Lea.

“I don’t need one,” she replied.

Lea closed her eyes and began concentrating while Satsuki, Harissa, the doctor, L, and I all finished getting ready. Once preparations were complete, the pirates who’d helped us get changed retreated from the hangar. Things were potentially about to get dangerous. We patiently awaited Fam’s signal, but all of a sudden...

Boom!

An impact rattled the ship, making the whole hangar shake.

“Kyah!”

“Eek!”

I had to grab Harissa and Satsuki to keep them from toppling over.

“What was that?! Is everyone okay?!”

Don’t tell me the fleet had actually landed a hit...

“Everything’s fine! It was just a scratch! They only managed to graze us,” someone suddenly declared from behind us.

When I whipped around to see who it was...

“Wait, Fam?! What are you doing here?!”

“I’m coming too. I’ve left orders with my first mate, and they’ll get the ship outta here once we depart.”

Fam, who should’ve been on the bridge, descended the ladder to the hangar floor. She was already wearing a space suit and everything.

“I’m pretty useful when it comes to navigating ships, you know? I also want to see Big Sis Iris again, so let me tag along.”

“F-Fine! Let’s just get a move on!”

The longer we stood around here arguing, the more likely the ship was to get shot down. It was a risk I wasn’t willing to take, and with that decided, I turned to Lea.

“Lea! We’re going!”

“Understood.”

On my signal, Lea began to transform. She went from adult woman to legendary beast.

“Get on, everyone.”

In Leviathan form, Lea’s serpentine body stretched roughly 12 meters long, taking up most of the hangar. When she telepathically let us know she was ready, we all climbed up on her back and fixed ourselves in place. Falling off would mean being set adrift in the cold darkness of space, which was something we all wanted to avoid. Once we were all prepared, Fam gave her crew a signal and the pirates from earlier opened the hatch in the rear of the hangar. There

was immediately a blast of what felt like strong wind, but it only lasted for a few moments. It didn't take long for all the air to be sucked out of the room. Lea waited for things to calm down, then took off.

“Ealim Nekram!”

Harissa then cast her invisibility spell on the seven of us, Lea included. Once Fam's crew was sure we were out of the hangar, they closed up and fled the scene. That was partly for their safety, and partly for ours. If they stayed in range and continued to volley with Iris's fleet, we might get caught in the crossfire. We were small enough that, out in open space, we were practically undetectable by radar. And thanks to Harissa's magic, we couldn't be seen either. That was a dangerous situation to be in on the battlefield when we were completely undefended.

Once Fam's ship had taken off and we were safely on our way to the fleet, Lea telepathically asked for further direction.

“Which one is Iris's ship?”

It was Fam that answered her.

“It's the giant battleship with the extra-large cannons installed on the front.”

A giant battleship with big cannons, huh? With that hint, I began scanning for it too. Using the equipped enhancement functions in the helmet of the space suit that someone had shown me how to use earlier, I zoomed in on the fleet. And hey, there it was! It was easy enough to spot the battleship with the huge guns on the front... Like Fam had said, it really was massive. If something like that fired a beam at Earth, it would turn the planet into a donut. That's just how big this thing was.

And Iris is in there somewhere...

I tightened my grip on Lea's back as we flew towards the flagship. The rest of the fleet was still firing here and there, but only at the fleeing pirate ship. They hadn't noticed us. High-powered battleship radars just weren't made to detect small living beings, it seemed.

“This sure would look stupid to any third-party observer!”

“Damn right!”

L agreed with me with a sigh. Nobody else ever would have come up with such a foolish plan. The six of us were clinging to the back of a legendary beast, charging into what was basically a suicide attack... But as foolish as it was, we were slowly getting closer to Iris.

“Almost there.”

No sooner had Lea said something than Iris’s flagship came into plain view. It was close enough to see without the zoom function in the helmet anymore.

“Search for any boarding hatch you can find.”

“Got it.”

Lea flew around the flagship and found a passenger boarding door.

“All right, just give me a quick moment.”

The doctor untethered herself from Lea and floated over to the door. She secured herself in place and took a small tablet out of the backpack she was carrying. She then ran a small cable from the tablet to the console beside the door.

“Could you give me a hand, L?”

“What? For hacking? You can do that much yourself.”

Despite her griping, L floated over to the doctor and pulled a cable from her sleeve that she plugged into the same console to assist the doctor. Between the two of them, it took about a minute for the red light on the console to turn green.

“It’s open now, but the door itself is quite heavy. Would you mind opening it, Lea?”

“Certainly. The rest of you should hop off first, though.”

Lea pulled up next to the door, and we all switched out tethers over from her to the uneven exterior of the ship the same way the doctor had. Once we were all in place, Lea returned to her human form and approached the door. She put one hand on the handle and wrenched the whole thing open with her

superhuman strength, unleashing an incredible torrent of air that came flooding out from the ship's interior.

"Get inside! Quick!"

"Easier said than done!"

The force of the wind was so strong, it was hard to move through it.

"I'll help."

Lea gave each of us a hand, basically pushing us into the ship one by one. There were a few close calls with a couple of us almost getting sucked back out into space, but we managed to hold on to each other. Once we were all in, Lea brought up the rear and closed the door behind her. We finally had a second to catch our breath.

"Hang here for a minute. I need to raise the partitions L and I just adjusted."

To more or less jury-rig an airlock, the doctor had closed partitions in the ship to isolate the passageway we'd be entering before Lea opened the door. Now that we were safely inside, she'd have to put things back the way she found them.

"I cut the emergency alarm beforehand, but there's no hiding the pressure drop we just caused within the spaceship. That's undoubtedly gotten some attention, so we should be careful going forward."

"Got it. All right, everyone, let's quietly stick to the plan."

We changed out of our space suits to make it easier to move around stealthily. The hallways of the spaceship didn't have their own gravity. That basically meant we were floating along, kicking off the walls for momentum. Thankfully, however, the hallways were rather wide, and we could move past other people without bumping into them. While we were invisible, we still had physical forms to be conscious of. Running into someone or otherwise accidentally touching them would give us away, so we had to be especially careful on that front. The extra-wide hallways made that much easier.

But just like the doctor had predicted, it seemed the ship's crew had detected the pressure abnormality. There were people running around in a fluster trying

to figure out what was going on, so we had plenty of targets to dodge. Progress was slow. We still had some time yet before the fleet was set to attack the agency's headquarters, but being stuck in a traffic jam like this really made me feel the pressure.

"Calm down, Rekka."

"Yeah..."

Fortunately, I had good friends with me who were helping me keep my cool. Being able to communicate telepathically on a stealth mission like this was exceedingly useful. Not to mention Harissa's invisibility magic. We made a great team for this. And so, bolstered by my allies' strength, I continued to move forward until we reached our destination: the command center of the flagship. The only catch was that there seemed to be no end to the stream of people coming and going.

"There's no real break in the foot traffic."

"We'll likely bump into someone if we proceed carelessly. Let's retreat to the corner for now."

"Good idea."

We followed the doctor's suggestion and moved to a corner of the hallway and observed things for the time being. As the nerve center of the entire flagship, the command room was constantly abuzz with activity. Reports were coming in, information was going out... There was no end to it. It seemed a bit over the top to me, but I guess that's just how things run on giant ships like this. To be fair, they'd just been taunted by a rogue pirate ship, and a boarding door had seemingly opened and closed for no reason. The latter was especially suspicious since it might mean intruders... Wait, who am I kidding? It *did* mean intruders. We were right here!

We'd actually passed several security teams combing the ship for intruders on our way to the command room. Moreover, this flagship was about to lead an all-out attack against the agency. There was an incredible amount of data coordinating going on without the trouble we'd caused. We'd only added to it, leaving the entire ship in a rather hectic state. It didn't seem like things were ever going to calm down, which meant we'd never be able to sneak our way

into the command room.

“Hmm... Should we whittle down our numbers to the bare minimum for the plan to work and force our way in?”

“If we force our way in there, it’ll be chaos. It would be terrible to get split up like that. Besides, if we get too far apart, Harissa’s spell might not hold up.”

“Ugh, good point.”

Unable to come up with a good plan, our only option was to wait and see if an opportunity would arise. But after a little while...

“Hey, guys?”

“What is it, Fam?”

Fam held up a finger and tapped it against her forehead twice... No, she wasn’t pointing to her forehead. She was pointing to her horn.

“If chaos won’t do, why don’t we kick it up to pandemonium?”



The plan Fam had suggested would indeed be pandemonium. It was a risky bet, but I couldn’t deny that it had its advantages. If we caused enough chaos at the flagship command center, it could slow down the entire fleet. And the longer we did that, the longer we could keep them away from the agency. Moreover, it would buy us time to negotiate with Iris. Granted, that would only be if things went our way... But even that flash of optimism was enough to break us out of our current deadlock.

“All right, let’s do this! Is everyone ready?”

Everyone nodded in response to Fam’s rally, and when they did, an electromagnetic wave surged forth from Fam’s forehead. Not a moment later...

Bzzt!

All the lights in the hallway went out.

“What?!”

“What’s going on?!”

“The lights!”

The crew members milling about were all taken by surprise. But while they were panicking, we kicked off the wall and slipped past them.

“Come in! Come in! Damn it... The comms terminal is out too!”

We could hear various curses in the darkness coming from the crew. Be it transmitters or terminals, nothing was working for them right now. And there was a reason for that—Fam. As a gremlin, her most notable feature was the horn on her forehead capable of releasing electromagnetic waves primed for messing up all kinds of electronics. The young Fam I knew had yet to learn to control it properly, but it seemed future Fam could use it on command without any issues. When I asked her why she still wore her wave-blocking headband if that were the case, she told me it was a fashion statement. But I also knew it was important to her. Squallow had given it to her, after all.

At any rate, things quickly deteriorated into absolute chaos. A spaceship was basically a giant hunk of sensitive electronics, after all. Communication systems, alarms, security devices... The entire ship was practically paralyzed, leaving it defenseless against intruders like us. The crew was mostly armed with optical weapons like laser guns, which were also rendered useless right now. That was another benefit to Fam’s plan as it significantly reduced the risk of us, y’know, getting shot. And thanks to that, we finally arrived at the command center door safely.

“Hmph!”

The door was an auto-open model. Its sensors were down thanks to Fam, but Lea didn’t have any trouble forcing it open. And once we had the chance, we all charged inside.

“What’s going on?!”

“I don’t know! Thirty percent of the ship’s control systems are down! The cause is unknown!”

“Did the pirates just now do something?!”

“It’s more likely to be the intruders! We found the space suits they discarded, so why haven’t we found them yet?!”

It seemed the inside of the command center was just as chaotic as the hallway outside. All sorts of angry shouting was flying back and forth. It wasn't completely dark in here thanks to some emergency lighting, but it was still quite dim. The brightest source of light was several monitors that still appeared to be working.

"Where's Iris?"

"I can see in the dark just fine, but there are so many people..."

Apparently Lea couldn't spot her immediately either. But just as we were all starting to wonder...

"Silence!"

A woman's voice roared overtop all the ongoing yelling. It silenced the room and got even our attention. And when we turned to look... There she was. She'd given up her twin tails and had her hair down, but there was no mistaking it.

"Iris!"

"Use whatever transmitters are still functioning to notify the rest of the fleet: we are temporarily suspending the march! Confirm the other ships aren't suffering the same issues! Leave the weapons check until later; prioritize regaining control!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

"Next, confirm the safety of all crew members! Send personnel to areas communication has been cut to!"

"Right away! We'll send someone immediately!"

"As for the intruders, give all crew members the green light to use force! Let them know they are authorized for combat, but prioritizing the checks comes first! We'll comb the ship afterward!"

"Understood!"

Iris fired off order after order in rapid succession, and the men beneath her responded immediately. They were intent to carry her wishes out to the letter, which kept them quite busy. That gave us a golden opportunity. While they were distracted, we could snatch Iris without anyone noticing. And in order to

do that...

“Harissa! Lea! Let’s do it!”

“I’m with you!”

“Likewise.”

At that, the three of us split up from the doctor and the others. We left them behind for now, carefully approaching Iris while avoiding the crew members in the command center. And once we were close enough...

“All right, Harissa! Work your magic!”

“Okay!” she replied, raising her staff. *“Ealim Nekram!”*

“I”

The moment Harissa cast her invisibility spell on Iris, Iris’s expression changed immediately. While the magic made her invisible to everyone outside of the spell, it also allowed her to see those of us who were already invisible under the spell’s power. That meant she could now see us.



“Harissa?! And you—”

Before Iris could say anything else, Lea moved around behind her and put a hand over her mouth. Iris struggled a bit, but not even her strength was any match for Lea’s.

“Lady Iris?!”

“Where is Lady Iris?!”

“Did anyone see where she went?!”

Without their commander, the command center fell into further chaos. But that was only fair. From their point of view, Iris had just vanished into thin air. However, even invisible, we’d eventually be discovered if we stayed in the command center. We’d have to get out of here before they stumbled upon us. First things first, I approached the still-thrashing Iris.

“Lea. Connect Iris to the telepathy too, please.”

Lea nodded and complied, all while continuing to restrain Iris.

“Iris?”

“I”

When I called out to her telepathically, Iris responded with a flinch. Whether she was surprised by me speaking directly into her mind or whether she was surprised because she finally realized who I was, I couldn’t say. But either way, she looked at me with wide eyes.

“What? No way...”

“Iris, there’s something I must talk to you about, but I can’t reveal myself to anyone other than you. Would you come with us so we can talk? Please?”

“...”

Iris hesitated for a moment, but then nodded silently.

“Okay, then let’s go somewhere quieter. Follow me.”

The rest of us all nodded at each other before sneaking out of the command center with Iris in tow.



We then made our way to a reserve storage room in the depths of the ship. It was a low-priority and low-population area, so the crew wouldn't come to search here until much later. Iris informed us it would be the perfect place to have a discussion, and we agreed.

"We'll leave the invisibility up just in case anyone walks in on us, but I think it's safe to talk normally for now."

"That's fine."

We were hiding in the back of the storage room, so I doubted anyone would see us even if they did walk in. Keeping Harissa's spell going was just a precaution.

"So... what did you want to talk about?" Iris asked, a little unhappily.

I guess she was in a pretty sour mood after hearing all that... And by "all that," I mean about how I wasn't really her Rekka, but my past self from a different time line. We'd already been through the established ritual where a heroine hugs me, thinking she's been reunited with future Rekka. Iris for one had embraced me so tightly that I had difficulty breathing, but that made it all the more important for me to explain that I wasn't really who she thought I was. This was the result... which was perfectly fair, really. I'd been lucky the other heroines had accepted me so readily thus far.

"Well, you see, Iris..."

"Don't talk to me like you know me."

"Okay then, um... Miss Cyphercall?"

I'd only ever called her Iris, so I had to think for a moment to remember her last name. But when I said it out loud...

"Never mind. Just call me Iris after all... Hearing your voice address me like that is just too sad," Iris said with a sulky face, averting her eyes.

Seeing her melancholy like this made her seem so mature. Her calm demeanor and her untied hair only enhanced that impression... Wait, no. Now's not the time to be thinking about that. I scolded myself and refocused.

Honestly, I knew that I hadn't made a good first impression on Iris, but I still needed to explain to her what was going on. At the very least, I needed to persuade her to call off the attack on the agency. That seemed within reach now. All I had to do was tell her the truth.

"Iris, the Rekka Namidare that the Galactic Federation heard was hiding at the agency is actually me. In other words... not the real Rekka Namidare that you're looking for."

It felt weird to be talking about myself like I was a fake, but phrasing it that way made things crystal clear. Iris was a member of the militant hawk faction, meaning she probably didn't care what the agency was up to. Her goal in coming here was only to find the Rekka Namidare that was the linchpin of the War of All. Once she found out he wasn't really around, I was hoping she'd simply retreat. I was *really* hoping, but...

"Well, I figured that was the case the moment I saw Satsuki with you."

"Then—"

"But I can't pull my fleet back so disgracefully at this point."

Iris predicted what I was about to ask her and cut me off with her answer—a decisive "no." Hearing it, I sat there agape for a long moment.

"...B-But why not?!"

"After mobilizing a fleet of this size, I can't simply call off the operation and say it was just a misunderstanding," Iris responded sulkily.

Dang it... I should be the one who's pouting!

"But it *is* just a misunderstanding! Why won't you stop your fleet?!"

"The simple answer is politics. With a group as large as the Greater Galactic Federation, there's... a lot going on that a high school boy wouldn't understand."

"Erk..."

Those words stabbed at me like a knife, leaving me at an absolute loss for how to respond. Ugh... But I couldn't just back down here. At this rate, the fleet was really going to attack the agency's headquarters. I had to stop that no

matter what!

“Yeah, sure, maybe I don’t get politics! But what’s more important than people’s lives?! That’s what’s at stake here, so please...! Please just stop!”

“If people’s lives are what’s important, then I can’t show any weakness to the people trying to drag me down either.”

“What...?”

“Satsuki and the doctor know what I’m talking about... Don’t you?”

Iris suddenly turned to the two of them, and I instinctively followed suit. When my gaze fell on the doctor, she was nodding with a rather bitter expression.

“I suppose... Retreating now would be seen as a failure, which would affect Iris’s position with the Greater Galactic Federation. That would indeed be troubling.”

“Why?”

“Let me explain it as simply as I can...”

According to the doctor, the Galactic Federation was part of the militant hawk faction. But when you broke it down, there were two camps inside the federation. The first was Iris’s, which was intent on seeing the war through to victory—in other words, taking back Rekka Namidare. But there was another camp with a much more troubling goal.

“They’re intent on seeing the war through to make a profit.”

“What? But that has nothing to do with the War of All...”

The War of All was an out-of-control fight between the heroines over me. I’d already heard about the various factions involved, but trying to make a quick buck off of people’s suffering? This was new.

“We fought for too long, you know...”

When Iris said that, I turned back to her.

“When the scale of the war grew, so too did the scale of people involved. Several third parties were brought on board, and somewhere along the line the

goals changed.”

“But...”

Come to think of it, during the first explanation I got about the War of All, there was talk of how some people with no knowledge of the origins of the war had gotten involved. I had assumed we were just talking about soldiers fighting for a cause they didn’t understand and other people who’d been dragged into things, but apparently it wasn’t limited to that.

“If you saved me in your world too, then maybe you know him. The head of the guys who want to make a business out of the war is called King Satamonía. He’s a real nasty piece of work.”

“Old toadface, huh?”

She meant the king of planet Satamonía, who she’d once been engaged to before I put a stop to it. Apparently he was causing even more trouble here in the future.

“But what about the blackmail material you had on him? Something about how he had been committing evil all throughout outer space... Can’t you use that to put him in his place?”

“Ah, that?” Iris sighed, pointing at herself. “You’re talking to the woman who’s technically the cause of the War of the All, you know? What leg do I have left to stand on in terms of accusing others of atrocity?”

“...!”

Seeing Iris’s expression made a chill run down my spine. I’d heard how she was deeply involved in the series of events that triggered the War of All, but I didn’t believe any of the responsibility should fall on her. I didn’t believe it... I didn’t believe it, but what did that matter? Iris had such a cold, tortured look on her face right now. It was a symbol of all the anguish she’d been through for this. What comfort would the opinion of a stranger like me even be to her?

“...”

Unable to say anything, I chewed on my lip.

“Well, that’s how it is,” Iris eventually said with a wave of her hand. “With me

out of the picture, there would be no one left to oppose King Satamonia. The federation would then start selling weapons and soldiers all over the universe at cutthroat prices. And once that arms racing starts, we'll have a whole new war on our hands."

"...Then how can we stop the attack on the agency?"

"Well," Iris said, stopping to think for a moment. "The main condition would be the complete and total surrender of the agency. Failing that, there are two options. The first is to bring you back to the Greater Galactic Federation as Rekka Namidare."

The doctor and I had already agreed that would be our last resort. By giving the federation what they wanted—me—we could at least avoid a fight.

"But to be honest, that would require a lot of acting to make it work after the fact. I'm not really interested in all that. And besides, even if things go well, it would only be a matter of time before word got out that we had you, which would inevitably mean other nations and powers would try and come for you."

"Yeah, the doctor warned me of that..."

In the end, just me being here was a problem. Even if we got through today... The instant my presence became public, there was going to be a fight.

"That leaves us with the second option, which is essentially the agency handing over all its proprietary technological assets... In other words, the doctor would have to be taken into custody."

"So it's come to that, has it?" the doctor asked, an eyebrow raised in disgust.

"Well, yeah. With your brains, you're a weapon in and of yourself. I suspect the only reason King Satamonia and his goons agreed to this mission was because of you. Otherwise we would've spent longer debating it and ultimately ended up sending a smaller fleet."

"But you know I only make defensive tools, don't you?"

"I do, but even those can be used as weapons."

"..."

The doctor fell silent. If she were taken in by the Galactic Federation, she

would most likely be forced to use her exceptional intelligence to develop weapons for them. That wasn't easy to swallow... But what were we supposed to do?

"In short, after engaging an operation of this size, you need to return home with something to offset the cost, right?" I asked.

"Essentially, yes," Iris replied.

The two acceptable payments Iris had suggested were me and the doctor. But if we couldn't hand over either one of us, then...

"Does the agency have anything else of high value?" I asked the doctor.

"Well..." she replied, glancing over at Satsuki.

"No, other than that."

I stopped her in her tracks. There was no way I was going to hand over Satsuki either.

"I know, I know. But in all seriousness, I don't think we have anything worth as much as the three of us. All of our funds have been put into research, so we're poor to boot." The doctor briefly looked up and sighed before looking at Iris again. "But it's not like you're seeking out war for no reason, right?"

"Of course not. I just want to find the real Rekka... Though I admit I was fooled this time."

"Let's leave that in the past. There's no point in stewing about it forever," the doctor said, forcefully advancing the conversation. "So, how much do you think we can get away with?"

"Get away with...?"

"Let's start with the battle against the agency. Assuming we have to fight at least once as you said, what happens if it comes to a draw? Would your fleet then retreat?"

"Like I said, King Satamonía and his ilk agreed to this, so my fleet is a rather large one. No matter how well defended the agency may be, I can't simply return and say, 'We just couldn't beat them.' They'd never accept it."

I see...

As I listened to the conversation between Iris and the doctor, something finally clicked. My approach to this was all wrong. I'd been assuming this entire time that the results of the war were more or less preset. But I was now realizing that even if one side won, there wasn't necessarily anything to be gained from it. So as Iris and the others were discussing ways for this to go down without us having to hand over anyone, my thoughts took a similar turn. What kind of story could we fabricate where a fleet of this size could fail to obtain their objective and no one would question it?

I at last had something specific to put my mind to now, but this was no easy problem to hash out. There were very few plausible reasons a federation fleet of this size would lose to anything. Especially the agency, as small as it was. It also wouldn't make any sense if Iris tried to claim the fleet won against the agency but didn't get anything about it. She'd have to bring back some kind of spoils for King Satamonia and the other warmongers to be happy.

Something... There had to be something. But what? What would allow Iris to return home empty-handed without anyone questioning it? What story would I have to tell?

Tokiwa...

The face of the light literature club president suddenly popped into my mind. She was always holed up her room writing, dreaming of becoming an author. Out of all the heroines I knew, she was the best storyteller. So if I told her I was stuck here, what would she say? Yeah, that's right... She gave me advice about writer's block once.

"When you get stuck... Sometimes you just have to switch things up a bit."

I just had to switch things up... But how? What was I supposed to change? There were certain elements in this story that I couldn't do anything about, like the cast. I couldn't change the fact that I was here, and I couldn't change the fact that Iris and her fleet were here. There was also no changing the premise to the story at this point: if the federation fleet attacked the agency, there was no way they wouldn't win unless there was some major upheaval. It would have to be something like a secret superweapon hiding at agency HQ capable of wiping

out an entire fleet... But we couldn't play that out without causing serious losses to Iris's fleet, which would put her in just as terrible a position upon returning home. We were right back to square one.

"Let's say the agency surrenders before the fight. Then you can come in to inspect and realize for yourself that the tip you guys got was bad. If there's no Rekka, there's no problem, right?"

"In that case, Doctor, we'd demand you come with us instead."

"Crap..."

The doctor and Iris continued their discussion, but they weren't making much progress.

I have to switch up something... But what? How?

There had to be a way for the federation to "win" without us having to hand over either me or the doctor. What could make a plotline like that reasonable? No, if reasonable was all we were going for, then we could just say the doctor and I ran away and leave it at that. But that would still land Iris in hot water...

Ah, damn it! Why can't I think of anything?! If only this were all some kind of mistake... Wait a minute. Was it?

"Hey, Iris?"

"Yes?"

Iris paused her conversation with the doctor and turned to me.

"There's something I'd like to ask if you can remember. The tip the Greater Galactic Federation received... What exactly did it say?"

"Hmm..."

Iris looked at me dubiously for a moment, but without any particular objection, she began thinking on it. After a while...

"The report we received was anonymous and rather vague. All it said was something about how Rekka Namidare's presence had been confirmed in this universe through various magics and technologies, and that you were being held by the agency—"

“Hang on,” I said, stopping Iris so I could ask a vital question. “The part of the message about the agency holding me... Did it say exactly *where* I was being held?”

“Huh? There’s only one agency, no?”

“I knew it!” I shouted, slapping my knees with my hands.

Iris looked at me curiously.

“What’s this about, Rekka?” the doctor asked, apparently also finding my behavior strange.

“It’s just like you said, Doctor. The extremists are an offshoot of the agency, but that’s not widely known.”

“That’s right.”

“Which means that to the outside, the agency is one unified organization. But in truth, it’s not.”

“Aha!” the doctor exclaimed, seemingly coming to the same realization I had.

“So... What? I don’t really follow. You’re saying the agency actually consists of two factions? What does that have to do with—”

“The extremists are the ones holding Rekka Namidare.”

“Huh?”

“That’s all you need to tell them.”

The agency was one organization as far as the outside world was concerned, but part of it had splintered off into a radical group that now functioned completely separately. They’d set up their own headquarters and everything. That gave us a chance to send Iris after the extremists—and she could still say she’d attacked the agency!

“Iris, you return to the command center after this and tell your people this: you found out that the people hiding Rekka Namidare are actually agency radicals. We don’t care if you win against them. But the doctor belongs to a completely different faction of the agency—the pacifists—so the federation can’t politically demand anything from her or the other pacifists, right?”

“I might just be able to get away with that... But by that logic, the pacifists and these so-called radicals are actually two different entities.”

Hearing this, Iris turned to the doctor for confirmation. She nodded and said...

“Indeed. We’re on very bad terms with one another and have diverging views on just about everything. It’s very fair to say we’re two different entities.”

“Hmm... And where might this radical base be?”

“Wouldn’t L know that?” I asked, turning to her.

“Well, yeah,” she said with a small nod.

At one point, she had been on the extremists’ side. Of course she would know where their base was. If the federation fleet was so certain to win, then we just had to change their target... This is what you meant by switching things up, right, Tokiwa? Maybe I was wrong and she’d just get mad at me for misinterpreting what she’d said, but right now I was thanking her from the bottom of my heart.

“All right. I will attack the radicals under the auspices that they are part of the agency. That information cannot be refuted with the information anyone has now, so not even King Satamonía will be able to challenge it. Moreover, the doctor does not have any ties to the radical faction, so we cannot rightfully demand anything from her regarding the radical faction’s actions.”

Iris summed up the plan for everyone, then looked up at me.

“Wh-What?”

“Nothing. It’s just...”

“Just what?”

“This brings back memories... The real Rekka that saved me, Satsuki, and Harissa was pretty much a regular human back then. He would squeeze out every last drop of wit to save us, just like this.”

“...”

I had heard how future Rekka had undergone a transformation that made him something superhuman. Surely that gave him more options when it came to

solving stories. He had a lot more to rely on than just his wit, after all. While it wasn't a question of which was better, seeing my old-school methods was clearly nostalgic for Iris.

"For now, we have our plan. All that's left is for me to return. I'll make up something about where I went and what happened with the intruders. Good luck to you all on your end."

"Ah, wait a minute..."

When Iris stood up, I hurriedly called out to her.

"What is it?"

"Um, there's one more thing I'd like to ask."

"What is it?" she asked, her arms folded.

"If possible, I'd like you to refrain from attacking the extremists' base too."

"Why?"

"My heroines might be being held there, so I'd like the time to rescue them," I answered honestly. "But I really don't want to see anyone die here."

In the end, that was it. And in response to my naive request, Iris said...

"You really haven't changed at all there."

She then poked my forehead gently with her finger and smiled.



Chapter 6: The Problem Right in Front of Me

“First, my fleet will surround the extremist base and demand surrender. Unless they have something up their sleeve, we shouldn’t expect much resistance. There aren’t many who would dare to stand against a federation fleet armed to the teeth, after all. And while that’s going on, you all should be able to move freely.”

The extremists didn’t yet know we’d made contact with Iris. The fact that they were holding the past heroines hostage was a big secret, so the first thing they’d do when Iris demanded surrender would be to try and hide or relocate the heroines. That meant that while Iris was negotiating with the extremists, we had to sneak in and figure out where they were keeping the girls.

“Shall we begin the operation?”

In order to sneak in to the extremists’ base, we borrowed a small spaceship from Iris. Harissa cast her invisibility spell on it, and we quietly departed from the midst of the federation fleet.

“Will we really be okay with just my magic?”

“Probably.”

In order to avoid radar detection, we’d specifically picked out a ship with high-spec stealth functions. If, between that and Harissa’s magic, the extremists still discovered us, then... Well, I was willing to cross that bridge when we got there.

Fortunately, however, all my concerns turned out to be unfounded. We safely arrived at the extremists’ base—which was really feeling like the final boss’s castle at this point—without issue. The base itself was on an asteroid that was roughly one quarter the size of Earth’s moon. The entire asteroid had been terraformed and had a proper atmosphere, so it looked like we wouldn’t need space suits once we got there. We stealthily landed some distance from the base and got ready before setting out.

“Lea, will you lend me your power again if we end up in a battle with the extremists?”

“As long as it isn’t a battle between heroines.”

“Hmm...” I turned to the doctor and Satsuki. “Are there any heroines in the extremist faction?”

“Not that I’m aware of, no.”

“I don’t know of any either.”

“Good. Thanks,” I said with a nod.

Our main objective here was a rescue operation, but there was no telling what might happen along the way. We could be in for a fight, but as long as any heroines weren’t involved, we could count on Lea to help us out there. As far as I knew, she was the strongest heroine there was, even here in the future. Well... She probably couldn’t use her full strength without Tsumiki’s dark matter, but she was plenty strong as she was. We might be in for trouble if the extremists had more of those giant robots they used to attack my hometown, but would they really whip out something like that when they were completely surrounded by a navy fleet from the Greater Galactic Federation? Maybe I was being a little optimistic in assuming they wouldn’t.

We were about to sneak into the extremists’ base, and there was no way those giant robots would be able to move around inside a building. I honestly didn’t think they’d be willing to destroy their own base just to trample us... But that being the case, that meant actually getting from our ship to the base would be the most dangerous leg of the operation.

“All right, everyone. We have to be extremely cautious from here on.”

“You’re the *last* person I want to hear that from,” L snarked as she set out.

Since she knew the most about the extremists, we’d decided it would be smartest to have her head the team. As a Kiklim, she also had every kind of sensor imaginable. She was the ideal candidate for discovering and dismantling traps, so we had her lead the way as the rest of us followed behind her. The asteroid was grassless, and the texture of the ground below my feet felt a lot like walking on dirt. The gravity here was also pretty similar to Earth, so getting around on foot wasn’t a problem.

“Stop,” L suddenly said, halting at the front of the line. “There’s an

electromagnetic wall here. If you pass through it, you'll get fried."

"Really? I don't see anything..."

"Your human eyes wouldn't," L said with a sigh. "I can force a hole open in it, but that'll set off alarms. It would be better to just find the proper door, so give me a minute to find it."

With that, L used her particle relocater and vanished from sight.

"Man..." I said, looking around.

The extremists' hideout was finally right in front of us. Whether my... Whether the heroines of the past were inside or not was the question now. Even if they weren't, however, there was still something I was hoping to find here: a hint. Some kind of clue as to the mastermind's identity. That was the bare minimum we needed to walk away with from this mission. Without it, we'd never get anywhere.

There's no way we'll leave here totally empty-handed, but... I'm still a little uneasy.

I couldn't help recalling the conversation between L and the giant robot pilot back during the attack on my hometown. L hadn't known the extremists were coming, and the extremists that did come were surprised at how L reacted to them. It was like they weren't on the same page. There was some sort of disconnect. An odd inconsistency. Had they received different orders somehow? If so, how did that end up happening?

It was possible there'd just been some confusion somewhere along the chain of command, but that didn't seem likely given the simultaneous attacks on the future and the past. The extremists were perfectly coordinated in that regard. That made it seem like L was really the odd one out, which was curious.

If she was the only one with deviating orders, then rather than there being confusion in the chain of command, it sounds like there was just someone acting of their own accord...

Granted, that may have been L herself. But either way, there was no immediate answer to my quandary. While I was thinking it over, however, L reappeared.

“I opened a gate that you all should be able to pass through over there. Follow me.”

L then led us to what was apparently a door of sorts in the invisible wall. We passed through it, and no sooner than we set foot inside could we hear a commotion. The extremist base was in absolute chaos. Apparently being surrounded by a federation fleet had caused quite a panic. The electromagnetic wall had blocked out all the shouting that we could now hear clearly—and it was a welcome sound. With this much of an uproar going on, it should be a piece of cake to sneak in.

“Lea, let’s use telepathy to communicate from this point forward. Can you connect everyone?”

“Sure.”

Lea nodded and began concentrating, linking our minds together with her magic power.

“Can you hear me?”

“Yeah. How about everyone else?”

Everyone else nodded in turn. It looked like we were good to go.

“All right. L, please take the lead again.”

“I can do that, but where do you want to go first?”

Hmm... I had to think for a minute about that.

“Is there any kind of confinement center in this building? Somewhere they might hold people?”

“Like a jail? There’s nothing like that.”

“I’ll have to keep thinking, then. If the heroines are being kept here, they’d definitely need somewhere to lock them up...”

“Your heroines... There were over 20 of them, if I recall correctly. That’s an awful lot of people to keep locked up in one place.”

“Right? It’d have to be a pretty big room.”

“Hmm... The office or the lab would work. The storage room is also rather

large, but that wouldn't make a great makeshift prison..." L said, cocking her head to the side. "Sorry, I can't really narrow it down."

According to L, even the building's office and lab were big enough to hold 20 people if they moved the furniture out. And the list of options was even longer if they didn't bother thinking about space and comfort. If the extremists were just treating the heroines like prisoners, then they may have shoved them all together in one tiny room. I was hoping they'd at least been hospitable enough to give the girls a decent size room.

"I guess there's no way of knowing..." I said with a mental sigh before looking back to L. *"Quick question, L. You said you'd never met the mastermind directly before, so how did you get your orders?"*

"Only a select few of the higher-ups have direct contact with the mastermind. They get orders and then pass them down accordingly."

"Hmm... So it'd be fastest for us to just locate these higher-ups," I mused as I rubbed my chin.

"Hang on a second, Rekka," the doctor suddenly interjected. *"Satsuki, can you locate Rekka's heroines with the Magic of Omniscience?"*

"What? Didn't we try that already?" Satsuki asked dubiously.

"Then what about the mastermind's exact location?" the doctor asked without missing a beat.

"I'm afraid that's a no-go as well... What are you getting at here?"

"What if you searched this building for places that you can't search? Anywhere you can't look into must either be the mastermind or the heroines."

"I-I'll get right on it!"

Satsuki quickly picked up on what the doctor was putting down and activated her magic.

She's right! If the mastermind and the heroines' locations are blind spots in her magic, then all we have to do now is find those blind spots!

Impressed with the plan, I waited for Satsuki to finish her search.

“...”

Since she was searching for blind spots rather than directly searching, it took much longer than usual.

“I found it... There’s a spot here where my omniscience is blacked out like an eclipse. That must be where they are. I can show you the way.”

“All right. Let’s follow Satsuki’s directions moving forward, L.”

“Yeah, yeah...”

“Please, L.”

“I said okay, Satsuki! Jeez...”

L turned away in a huff and took the lead again, this time following Satsuki’s directions. We made our way forward, unlocking doors, disabling security systems, and running through corridors while avoiding the extremists. We took several elevators, heading further and further down each time. The lower we went, the less people there were. And by now, we’d reached a rather deserted area. We took one last elevator and reached the bottom floor of the base. Or so it seemed...

“Huh? This is the lowest floor?” Satsuki asked.

“That’s right,” L replied with a nod.

However...

“That’s strange.”

“What is?”

“The area I can’t see with my magic is further below here.”

“Huh?”

“What are you saying?”

We all reflexively looked down. Naturally, there was nothing to see but the floor.

“Are there any other elevators that go down?” I asked.

“Nope. Not as far as I know, at least,” L replied.

The curious situation left us all scratching our heads.

“What about a secret staircase or anything else that might lead downward?”

“If there were, wouldn’t it be the elevator we just took? Maybe there’s a special switch or something to make it go down another floor...”

“Why don’t I break it and find out?”

“Please don’t, Fam.”

“Hold on. I’ll try searching again.”

“Thank you, Satsuki.”

Satsuki used her Omniscient Magic once more. This time her search was simple and precise. But...

“There’s nothing.”

“Huh?”

“There’s no physical way of getting further down from here.”

“What the heck?”

“Well... Perhaps we need some way to teleport there instead.”

“Oh, cool. We have L’s particle relocater for that.”

“Let me remind you that it wasn’t exactly designed for human use...”

“Is now really the time to be worried about that, though?”

“Rekka, why don’t I just open a hole in the floor?”

“Please don’t, Lea.”

“Why not?”

“Well, because if you do something that flashy, then the extremists will definitely know we’re here!”

And so on, and so forth... After getting this far, we’d hit quite a stumper. Fortunately, however, one person in particular seemed to have a solution.

“Sir Rekka, Satsuki.”

“Harissa?”

“Could you leave this to me?”

“Sure... Do you have something in mind?”

When I asked that, Harissa turned to Satsuki.

“Satsuki, the room that may contain the mastermind... Can you tell me precisely how far below us and how wide it is?”

“Certainly. I can search that up in a flash.”

“If you can, I can use that information to calculate coordinates for a teleportation spell.”

I was honestly a little surprised to hear Harissa sound so confident.

“You can teleport without Red Thread now?”

“It’s a newly developed technique. If I focus the spell on myself, I can teleport to a specific location without the need for any kind of mark or connecting object.”

“You can do that with just the magic of a single person?! And without the use of a warp machine?!” the doctor asked with wide eyes.

“Way back in the beginning, Iris’s warp watch once saved us all. That’s what I used as inspiration for this spell,” Harissa replied with a nod. *“Unlike with warp drives, there’s no time-space distortion upon warp-out with magic, so there’s no fear of being detected when we enter the room.”*

“But... are you sure about this? Isn’t leaking a powerful spell like that to outsiders a little compromising for a royal sorcerer? If you’re not careful...” the doctor fretted.

And hearing her say that made me worry a little too. But Harissa just laughed.

“It’s fine,” she said, glancing up at me. *“Putting our heads together and being resourceful like this reminds me of the old days. The Sir Rekka I knew back then accomplished great things by using everyone’s powers together.”*

Harissa was the first heroine that both me and future Rekka had saved. Of all the stories we had in common, hers differed the least. I could tell by the way she’d brought up Iris’s warp watch just now. Future Harissa was probably the

heroine closest to the version of herself that I knew. That was why... That was why she knew firsthand how hard I'd had to work to wring every last drop of wit I had to resolve her story. It was the same way I'd worked to solve all the stories back then—by combining everyone's powers.

"My magic... can no longer save everyone. That's why, at the very least, I want to save the past heroines and help put an end to this long war. That is my wish."

"..."

Her magic can no longer save everyone? I see... The horrors of war had spread too far. It was all Harissa could do to protect her own kingdom at this point. I had to think long and hard about that for a moment. The emotion in Harissa's voice when she said those words was gut-wrenching.

Compared to my future self, I was definitely much less capable. The heroines here probably saw me as a child with no power at all, and they were right about that. But even then, even so... I'll be damned if my name isn't Rekka Namidare!

"Leave it to me!" I shouted, thumping my chest.

"Shh, Rekka! Not so loud!"

"Oops!"

I was proud and eager to accept Harissa's wish, but the doctor's admonishment quickly snapped me back to my senses. I hurriedly clapped a hand over my mouth. And it was just about then that Satsuki joined the conversation again.

"All right, I'm done searching."

She gave Harissa the exact dimensions of the room below. She'd even determined the thickness of the floor separating us from it.

"Okay, I'm all set. Is everybody ready?"

Harissa looked to us all in turn, each of us nodding back. She then readied herself and cast her spell.

"Tri Teleatticate!"

A burst of magical light enveloped us all, and a short moment later, our vision

blurred. I got that strange floating feeling I always did when leaping through time and space, but it only lasted for a second. Before I knew it, we were in another room.

While we were only further underground, this new room was expansive and well-lit compared to the dim basement we'd been in just moments ago. For its size, however, the room was practically empty. There was only a small table and a chair with two people, one seated and one standing.

One of them's... a girl?!

The two people at the table were talking, and I was surprised to see one of them was a rather young girl. She looked about my age or maybe a little older. She had black hair, and was wearing a jacket and jeans with an oversized buckle. Even more unexpected was the fact that, at a glance, she looked like a human from Earth. Japanese, even... But that wasn't it. There was something about her that I just couldn't put my finger on. I was getting this weird sense of déjà vu, like I knew her from somewhere.

"Rekka?"

"Er... Sorry."

I'd gotten lost in my own head, but the doctor's voice brought me back to reality. The girl at the table was talking to a guy who appeared to be a humanoid alien.

"Lady Yuuhi! We've been completely surrounded by a Greater Galactic Federation fleet! Please give us your orders!"

"What are their demands? And how did they find our base in the first place?"

"I don't know, but they're demanding that we hand over Rekka Namidare... It makes no sense at all!"

We stayed quiet and eavesdropped on their conversation from across the room.

"Is that guy one of the higher-ups you were talking about, L?"

"Probably. I don't know each and every one of them personally."

"Seems like he's reporting to the big boss right now..."

Did that mean this Yuuhi girl was the mastermind? The same one who'd been orchestrating the mass abduction of past heroines and the attack on my hometown?

"Satsuki, is she a heroine here in the future?"

"Not that I'm aware of... Do you know her, Harissa?"

"I can't say that I do. Is anyone else familiar with her?"

"I'm not."

"Me neither."

Not Harissa, not Satsuki, not Lea, not Fam, not L, and not even the doctor... No one knew anything about Yuuhi, but the War of All had started as a quarrel between the heroines of the future. Did that mean Yuuhi was one of them?

"But if she's a future heroine, why is she trying to kill Rekka?"

"You're right... That would be fundamentally contradictory."

"Maybe she just got tired of fighting?"

"Or maybe she's one of those 'if I can't have him, nobody can' types?"

"A real psycho, huh? We can't discount the possibility."

The conversation began progressing without me in a rather frightening direction. A-Anyway...



“More importantly for now, I don’t see the heroines anywhere here.”

“I don’t either. But just in case, L, can you scan the room?”

“Just a moment.”

At the doctor’s urging, L placed her hands on the ground. Not a moment later...

Crack!

“Active defenses?! On the whole room?!”

L quickly pulled her hands away from the floor, but it seemed the damage had already been done.

“Tch...”

On the other side of the room, Yuuhi clicked her tongue.

“L-Lady Yuuhi?”

The higher-up she was talking to seemed none the wiser to what was going on, and he certainly didn’t see what was coming next... Yuuhi suddenly stood up and delivered a swift blow to his neck.

“Gah!”

He flinched briefly before collapsing to the ground.

“She knocked him out...?!”

But why? Wasn’t he a member of the extremists? I had a lot of questions, but no time to think. Yuuhi held a hand up, palm outward in our direction, and muttered a single word...

“Break.”

When she did, I felt something like a gust of wind brush my cheek.

Huh? What was that?

I could tell she had done something, but I had no idea what. I was at a loss. But in the midst of my confusion, Harissa seemed to figure it out.

“...Huh?! Be careful, everyone! The invisibility has been dispelled!”

“What?!”

Wait, the telepathy had been cut too? Was this Yuuhi’s doing?

“So you’re here already, Rekka Namidare. That was faster than I expected.”

“You know who I am, yet you’re not surprised to see me... I guess that means you really are the mastermind behind all this.”

“Mastermind? Hmph, is that what you’ve been calling me?” Yuuhi spat out boldly and hatefully.

There was so much I wanted to ask her, but it would all have to wait.

“Give me back my heroines!”

“...”

Yuuhi narrowed her eyes, not responding. She scanned the group of us, her gaze falling on L.

“So it was you that led them here, was it, L?”

“Shut up. You... You didn’t tell me anything. You just cast me aside. You don’t have any right to complain,” L said, glaring sharply at Yuuhi.

L was never informed about the attack the extremists had planned on the past, which was the start of all this. She took it as a sign that the extremists—that the mastermind—had abandoned her. She felt thrown away. Yuuhi, however, was the one frowning right now.

“You’re the one who has no right to complain, L.”

“What did you just say...?”

“Don’t you know, L? You’re already a heroine of this Rekka Namidare. You have been ever since the summer festival.”

“Huh?”

“I suppose you may not have realized it since you’re still in the middle of being saved. But given a little more time, you would have betrayed me of your own will.”

“...”

Yuuhi's declaration left L at a loss for words. Whether her silence was because what Yuuhi said had struck a chord with her or because she was just that stunned at the accusation, I wasn't sure.

"You seem awfully certain of yourself, Yuuhi," the doctor suddenly interjected. "I'm surprised you have the gall to play it high-and-mighty after deceiving my precious L like you did."

"If it isn't the king of Laputa..."

"I'd love nothing more than to give you a piece of my mind right now, but there's something else I have to ask first."

"..."

Yuuhi showed no reaction to what the doctor said, which she took as a sign to continue.

"Is it possible that you know the whereabouts of our Rekka Namidare?"

Huh?

At first, I didn't understand what the doctor was saying. I slowly replayed the sentence in my head... Wide-eyed, I looked back and forth between Yuuhi and the doctor.

"Wh-What do you mean by that?!"

"Remember how I told you there were two serious incidents that triggered the War of All?"

"Two triggers..."

I scanned back through my memories. The doctor had said that the first trigger for the War of All was the terrorist attack on the Greater Galactic Federation's central congress. The second was the fact that my future self went missing.

"The real cause of the War of All was the disappearance of our Rekka Namidare, which started the rumors that one of the heroines was monopolizing him... And the reason they continued was because no one could prove otherwise. Not even Satsuki could locate Rekka with her Omniscient Magic."

Yeah, that's right. She'd said something like that before too. I remember thinking it was strange that... Wait, Satsuki couldn't locate future Rekka with her magic? Just like... how she couldn't locate the mastermind or the heroines either?

As I was turning all this over in my head, the doctor glared at Yuuhi.

"It only occurred to me today after all the time we've spent chasing you down... The thought that someone other than the current heroines might've been involved with the War of All from the beginning," the doctor said calmly.

According to her theory, it was Yuuhi who had kidnapped future Rekka. And upon hearing this, Satsuki, Harissa, Lea, and Fam all narrowed their eyes sharply in her direction.

My heart was pounding so hard in my chest that it hurt. It couldn't be... It just couldn't, could it? I wasn't even sure if I wanted her to be right or not. All I knew was that I was on the edge of my seat.

After several moments of tense silence, Yuuhi opened her mouth...

"I have nothing to say to you."

And refused to give us an answer. I swear the temperature in the room dropped a couple of degrees.

"...Shall I force her to talk?"

Even big-hearted Lea was saying some pretty violent things now. But in the face of sheer murderous intent, Yuuhi didn't even flinch.

"Hmph... I expected you lot would show up eventually the moment that artificial life form named R got in my way and let Rekka Namidare escape," she said. "Did you really think I would just be waiting here unprepared?"

Yuuhi pressed some kind of switch hidden in the sleeve of her jacket, and when she did... a rip in the air next to her tore wide open.

"A warp?!" Fam exclaimed.

"No... That's more like a gate to another world!" Harissa declared.

But Yuuhi faintly shook her head.

“Saying it’s a gate to another world is close... But you’ve still got it wrong. This rift is connected to the other side of the mirror. The side that you would normally never come into contact with.”

“The other side... of the mirror?”

“That’s right. The space inside this rift is a pocket dimension not connected to any other world. I can hide anything in here, people included, and never be discovered by anyone.”

“What?!”

The Magic of Omniscience accessed the Akashic record, which was the annals of history across all worlds. But if what Yuuhi was saying was true, then the mirror dimension wasn’t part of any world... That’s why Satsuki hadn’t been able to learn anything about it with her magic. That... That had to mean...

“Come on out,” Yuuhi called.

When she did, several figures emerged from the rift.

“Wha?!”

I doubted my eyes.

“Huh?! I-It’s us?!”

I was surprised, but the future heroines standing next to me were in downright shock. It was because we recognized the people who’d emerged from the tear.

Satsuki. Iris. Harissa. Lea. Rosalind. Fam. Corona.

They were all heroines we knew well.

“Why are they following her orders...?” I muttered in disbelief, searching for a reason.

When I squinted, straining my eyes to get a better look at Yuuhi, I could see she was wearing an earring with a small red jewel. It... It looked familiar.

That’s a Doppel Stone! It can copy magical and psychic powers!

Come to think of it, the doctor had said Yuuhi used a Doppel Stone to wipe my memory of the heroines. If she had one with that kind of power, I could

understand why the heroines were following her orders.

She must've copied Rosalind's charm power into it!

Once I put two and two together, I could see it plain as day. The heroines all had a glassy, dazed look in their eyes... They were clearly being controlled. That meant I'd have to give them some kind of shock to snap them out of it. Yuuhi likely knew that, which was why she'd brought out the heroines with the highest combat potential. Granted, she'd brought out Satsuki and Harissa too.

"Go."

With a simple order from Yuuhi, the past heroines all moved to attack us in a rather systematic way. Past Satsuki came for future Satsuki, past Lea came for future Lea, and so on. Basically, the girls were attacking themselves.



“Crap! I’m sure you all already know this, but make sure you don’t hurt yourselves!” the doctor yelled.

The doctor once said that the greatest weakness of people from the future was that they couldn’t attack people from the past, right?!

It wasn’t that they couldn’t attack, per se. For example, future Satsuki could kill her past self if she needed to... But then she would disappear too. Even if she didn’t go that far, just injuring her past self could do lasting harm that would come back to bite her. In other words, the future heroines couldn’t seriously fight their past selves. And that put them at a disadvantage. The mind-controlled heroines of the past weren’t pulling any punches. It was an utterly one-sided fight.

Now, as for Iris, Rosalind, and Corona who didn’t have their future selves to fight...

“Erk!”

Naturally, they came after me!

Of all the heroines, it had to be the three of them!

I wouldn’t stand a chance against any one of them.

If I have a prayer right now, it’s getting at least one of them on my side... But how am I going to manage that with the three of them attacking me together?!

As I racked my brain, they drew menacingly nearer.

“Tch!”

Who should I aim for? The easiest one to shake up... didn’t seem like it’d be Corona. That meant I had to go for Iris or Rosalind. I desperately tried to remember a time I’d seen either one of them completely shaken... And the first thing that came to mind was that time I accidentally grabbed Iris’s chest.

“Here goes...!”

It was quite possibly the worst thing I could have thought of in the heat of the moment, but I didn’t have time to come up with a plan B.

Iris! I’m sorry!

I set my sights on the alien princess. Rosalind and Corona were coming at me from the left and right respectively. I would duck under their attacks and charge at Iris to bring her back to her senses. That was the plan, anyway. Considering the difference in physical ability between me and the heroines, however, my chances of succeeding were practically nil. But I still had to try. It had taken me five seconds just to think things through this far. There was no time left. All I had to do now was move forward... But when I looked up, I could see dark energy gathering in Corona's palm.

"Wait... That's unfair!"

I had no way of blocking a ranged attack. Corona unleashed her spell without mercy. I reflexively raised my arms to shield myself, but I knew it wasn't going to save me! I was about to get obliterated!

"What are you doing, dumbass?!" L shouted, throwing up a barrier to block Corona's magic.

"L! You saved—?!"

Before I could even finish thanking her, I gasped. A red mist was encroaching, obscuring my vision.

Rosalind?!

I covered my eyes immediately. Visibility within the red mist was zero. I was practically paralyzed, not knowing which way to go or what to do...

"Rekka! Get down!" the doctor suddenly shouted through the fog.

"!"

I huddled down on the floor as instructed, and not a moment too soon. Rosalind's arm went sailing through the air where my head had just been.

"..."

She looked down at me with lifeless eyes before dropping an axe kick on me.

"Whoa!"

I threw myself to the side, rolling to get out of the way.

Ka-bam!

The floor tiles crumbled where Rosalind's heel forcefully met the ground. Realizing she'd missed, she transformed once again into red mist. But...

"Bad move, Rosalind!" I could hear the doctor shout as white smoke began coursing through the red mist.

I watched in surprise as the mist crackled and solidified in place almost instantly. It was like the doctor had used some kind of freezing spray on it.

"I'll unfreeze her later, so just hold on for now," the doctor said as she made her way over to me.

I see. The doctor isn't one of my heroines, so she has no past self here to fight.

The same applied to L. The two of them would be the key to overcoming this.

"Rekka, at this rate, things are only going to get worse."

"I know."

The heroines fighting their past selves right now had it even harder than I did. Their past selves were going all out, but all they could do was stay on the defensive. As long as they couldn't fight back, it was only a matter of time before they were defeated. That meant now was the time... While the past heroines were still occupied, I had to make a decisive move. And that would be...

"You...!"

I turned to look at Yuuhi.

"..."

And she was looking right back at me. We both knew it. That this match would be decided with either my or Yuuhi's defeat.

"The earring..." I muttered.

"What about it?" the doctor asked.

"If we can do something about the Doppel Stone embedded in it, Yuuhi should lose her control over the heroines. Once she does, we'll have this in the bag."

"That may be true, but how are we going to do that?"

“I have an idea.”



“Lea, connect us with telepathy one more time!” I yelled loudly.

Yuuhi had shut it down earlier with her mysterious power.

“It’s up!” Lea’s replied telepathically.

“Everyone, listen up!”

I quickly told everyone my plan telepathically so that Yuuhi couldn’t hear it, but she wasn’t going to just sit there and let us get away with that.

“Break!”

Just like that, our telepathic link was cut again. It didn’t do anything to the past heroines, however. They were still fighting at full strength under Yuuhi’s control.

Tch, so she can pick what abilities she cancels! How annoying!

It seemed Yuuhi could pick and choose which powers she targeted with her break ability. That was cheating on a whole new level of unfairness... It was probably how she’d avoided detection via Satsuki’s Magic of Omniscience until now too.

But unlucky for her, my plan was short and sweet. There were just two steps, and I’d already finished telling the girls everything.

“Ealim Nekram!” Harissa shouted, casting her invisibility spell over us once more.

Once they lost sight of us, the past heroines were stopped in their tracks. This was step one.

“...”

“...”

L and I made eye contact. In accordance with step two, she pulled a certain device out from her sleeve.

“Break!”

When Yuuhi used her mysterious power again, the invisibility was lifted. We reappeared as one would expect, but not everything was as it had been. Something was different about Corona, who'd been facing off against L.

"?!"

Iris took one look at her and froze. That was because Corona no longer looked like Corona... Indeed, thanks to L's hologem, she now looked like me.

"Hah!"

Iris, following the orders she'd been given under the charm, attacked "Rekka Namidare" as she perceived him. Corona, however, had no idea what was happening. She was suddenly being attacked by her ally, and without any mirrors in the room, she would never know why. Moreover, the hologem generated a disguise with science and technology rather than psychic powers and magic. Yuuhi's cancellation ability would, hopefully, be ineffective against it.

While Iris and Corona were tricked into dueling each other, L, the doctor, and I were free to do as we pleased. We took the opportunity to make a break for Yuuhi.

"Yuuhi!"

"..."

I called out to her, but she only glared at me. There was a keen glint in her eye.

"So you're the same as ever... You never give up. I should've known. It runs in the family."

I ignored Yuuhi's words as I clenched my hand into a fist.

"Chirika! Shirley!" she called.

"What?!"

At Yuuhi's beckoning, Chirika and Shirley jumped out of the rift to the mirror dimension. Chirika immediately sprung at L, while Shirley went after the doctor. Both of them ran past me to get to their targets.

“Tch!”

“Shirley, no!”

L and the doctor both had to come to a halt to deal with the new incoming threats.

I see! She's wary of me returning them to their senses, so she won't bring them out unless she has to!

That meant I had to settle things before she brought out any more reinforcements. We could really be in trouble here!

I continued to run for Yuuhi, who clenched her fists too. It was clear neither one of us was backing down. The moment we were in range of each other, we both swung. It was almost like we were mirror images of each other.

“...!”

“...!”

Fist met fist with terrific impact on both sides. It staggered both of us, but the moment of reprieve gave Yuuhi just the opportunity she needed.

“Rekka Namidare, I've prepared the perfect opponent to defeat you.”

“And who would that be?”

“An old friend of yours, you could say.”

At that, Yuuhi summoned someone else from the rift...

That blue hair. That old-school military uniform. That tiny build. That unreadable face.

Yuuhi was right. This was a good friend of mine.

“R?!”

When I called her name, R looked at me as expressionless as ever.

“Enemy strength confirmed. Elimination target acquired,” she declared quietly.

“What are you saying, R?! Elimination target?! Don't you know who I am?!”

“There's no use,” Yuuhi spat coldly. “After her system ceased functioning at a

binary level, I completely rewrote everything. She's no longer one of yours."

"What?!"

Yuuhi's words shook me greatly.

"That's impossible! There's no way you could hack into my R's system!"

Even the doctor, who was being kept in check by Shirley and her scientific weapons, was shaken with disbelief.

"..."

Yuuhi, however, ignored us both.

Come to think of it, we still don't know who out of the extremists was able to use the doctor's time translocator!

I didn't really understand it myself, but the time translocator was supposedly extremely difficult both to install and to operate. I'd seen that much firsthand when a small error had warped L directly into my room on her mission to assassinate me, causing the whole plan to fail miserably. But somehow, between then and the attack on the past, the extremists had figured out how to use the time translocator with enough precision to accurately send a small army of giant robots back in time. It was possible... that was all Yuuhi's doing. That had meant she had the skill and know-how to rival the doctor, which in turn meant that it was conceivable that she'd reprogrammed R.

"Eliminating target."

"Guwah!"

The blue beam of light R fired from her fingertips pierced through my limbs. With the smell of burning flesh filling my nose, I collapsed on the spot.

"Damn... it..."

At times like this, I was all too aware of how powerless I really was. If only I had all those special powers like my future self... Really, it would be a huge help if I were just a little more fit. Or a little smarter. I just needed something to give me an edge... Then maybe I would've been more of a main character.

There was nothing special about me. I was always relying on other people. In

other words, my friends were my only real power... But Yuuhi had taken them from me. Especially R, who'd been by my side since the very beginning. She'd never lent me her powers like the heroines, but she was always there for me. And Yuuhi... She'd taken even that from me.

I... don't have anything left...

R slowly approached where I was writhing on the floor.

"This is the end."

Her fingertips began glowing a second time. I didn't even have to look to know they were aimed at my head now.

"Rekka!"

"Sir Rekka!"

"Brother Rekka!"

Realizing the trouble I was in, the heroines abandoned their fights and tried to rush to my aid.

"Do not interfere."

With a wave of her hand, R threw up a semi-transparent blue barrier around us, preventing the future heroines from getting any closer. That gave the past heroines the opportunity to catch up to them, and their respective fights resumed once more. There was no one left to stop R.

"This is goodbye."

I stared straight into the blue light that flew forward from her fingers. Just before it reached my face...

SHNK!

A red barrier appeared to block it.

"L?!"

She must have used her particle relocator to get inside the R's barrier! This was the complete reverse of what had happened in my room months ago: L was now saving me from R's attack. There was a clear difference in power, however, and R's beam pushed L further and further back. She was going to be

overwhelmed. However, just as I thought that...

“Why do I have... SUCH A STUPID LITTLE SISTER?!” L yelled angrily.

“...”

The light in R’s eyes wavered a bit. At that, the red barrier and blue beam both burst, cancelling each other out.

“Aaargh!”

Ignoring the pain in my legs, I stood up and started running towards R. Forcing strength into my numb arm, I made a fist. In the end, when all of my power had been taken from me, the only things I had left were this fist and...

The belief that no one can ever really steal the bond between us!

R locked eyes on me. Light began gathering at her fingertips again, this time aimed directly at my forehead. But I was aiming for her forehead too.

“SNAP OUT OF IT ALREADY!” I shouted, swinging my fist.

Thunk!

I landed a solid blow, sending R’s cap sailing through the air. The blue barrier surrounding us disappeared.

“...”

“...”

R walked over and wordlessly picked up her hat, which had landed quietly on the floor some distance away. She then looked at me and said...

“Punching a girl? You turned into quite the brute while I was away, Rekka.”

She spoke in her usual mocking tone as she slipped her cap back on, pulling it down to cover the reddening mark on her forehead. Fighting the pain, I mustered a laugh.

“Don’t be like that, partner.”

Next Prologue

“Impossible... Her entire system had been overwritten...”

Seeing R return to her senses, Yuuhi finally seemed shocked for the first time.

“There’s only one reason why a robot would rebel,” R replied, forming the shape of a heart with her hands. “Love. Rekka saved the world by falling in love with me. This is where the ending credits would start rolling.”

“Hey!”

What the heck was this?! A Hollywood movie?!

“Tch...” Yuuhi clicked her tongue, not seeming particularly convinced or amused.

“Hey, you! You better not be thinking about choosing R of all people to end the War of All!” L shouted, glaring at me in disgust. “Filthy lolicon...”

“I am not!”

“There, there, Sis. It’s my fault for being so irresistibly charming. You shouldn’t blame Rekka.”

“Who the hell are you calling ‘Sis’?! ”

“Oh? And here I thought you called me your little sister earlier...”

“I said *stupid* little sister! That’s different! They’re two different species!”

“So what does that make the elder sibling of a stupid little sister? A dumb big sister?”

“Who are you calling dumb?! ”

Both R and L seemed to be in top form... Everything was back to normal between them, I guess.

“Save it for later, you two! The battle isn’t over yet!”

All around us, the future heroines were still fighting their past selves. Even the doctor was fighting now, too. We had to destroy Yuuhi’s Doppel Stone as soon as possible to put an end to things.

“Hmph... Don’t think I’ll just let you have your way.”

“Same to you. I’m not going to let you escape. Sis and I are top-of-the-line models, you know?”

“ ... ”

Even confronted by me, R, and L, the steely light in Yuuhi’s eyes never faltered. It wasn’t sheer pride or overconfidence, however. It was just the strong light of an unrelenting will. I could tell that much. I could see it in her face.

What is this? If the doctor was right, the War of All is really Yuuhi’s doing... but I don’t sense any evil in her.

Why was Yuuhi fighting with us? What was her motive?

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

R and L seemed to sense the same thing I did, and showed a similar reluctance to attack. But we couldn’t just stand here forever. While we hesitated, the situation around us was deteriorating. We had to defeat Yuuhi now or the tables could turn on us at any moment.

“Tch...”

I scolded myself into forcing one foot in front of the other. But as I stepped forward, I saw it... A shadow rising behind Yuuhi.

That’s the guy Yuuhi had knocked out at the beginning of the fight!

He now had a knife in his hand... and it was aimed right at Yuuhi.

“Tch!”

Yuuhi noticed him not a second after I did, swinging her elbow around behind her to land a close-range blow. But in spite of her swift response, the man’s knife was faster.

Clink!

The knife cut right through Yuuhi’s earring, dropping the Doppel Stone to the ground. It rolled along the floor...

“!”

And I promptly took the chance to scoop up the crimson gem.

“Everyone, stop fighting and snap out of it!”

Once I had the Doppel Stone in my hand, I immediately shouted my order. And just like that, the fighting stopped.

“...Huh?”

“What... are we doing?”

The room was abuzz with the confused murmuring of the past heroines and the relieved sighs of the rest of us. I, for one, heaved an especially large sigh before turning to Yuuhi... Or rather, the man that attacked her.

Why would a guy on Yuuhi's side...?

When I saw his face, however...

“What?!”

It was torn up. Yuuhi's elbow had probably grazed him when she was counterattacking. The man's face was seriously damaged... It was literally torn up, but... What? As I looked on in shock, I realized the man's near-shredded face wasn't yielding a single drop of blood.

“Just... who are you?” I asked.

In response, the man stood up briskly and pulled off the rest of his face.

“WHAT?!”

“Calm down, Rekka. It's just a mask.”

“Oh... a m-mask, huh?”

Now that I took a closer look, it did have the texture of one of those prosthetics they used in movies.

“You...” Yuuhi murmured.

“You may have guessed it by now. Since your strange ability nullifies any transformations, I had to counter with a more practical gimmick. But you're so reliant on your ability that you overlooked this primitive trick, didn't you?”

The higher-up guy was confronting the glaring Yuuhi... No, I shouldn't say "guy." Once he'd taken off his mask, I realized it was a woman. And not just any woman. She looked a lot like someone I knew...

"I-Is that you, Hibiki?"

"In the flesh. I was only pretending to be knocked out, so I think I get what's going on here," future Hibiki said with a soft smile.

I wasn't the only one surprised by her appearance, however. The doctor and Satsuki were similarly shocked.

"Hibiki! What are you doing here?!"

"I don't have any convenient powers like Satsuki and the others, you know. I have to earn my information the hard way. It wasn't easy to become a trusted higher-up in the extremist faction," Hibiki responded smoothly.

Apparently, she had chosen not to join any particular faction herself and was researching the extremists of her own accord. Even she had realized something was suspicious about the mastermind... Surprised by Hibiki's investigative abilities, I asked her a question.

"Hibiki... Do you happen to know anything? About why Yuuhi would do something like this, I mean?"

"Unfortunately, when it comes to her motives, you'll have to ask her about that yourself. However," Hibiki continued, "if it's her real identity you want to know, I've pinned down that much."

"Her real identity?"

"Yeah."

"..."



We all turned our attention to Yuuhi, who silently looked back at us as Hibiki spoke up.

“Her name is Yuuhi Namidare. She came from a parallel world completely separate from ours, where, you could say, she’s her own Rekka Namidare.”

—*To be continued*—

Great Omniscient Magician

Satsuki Otomo

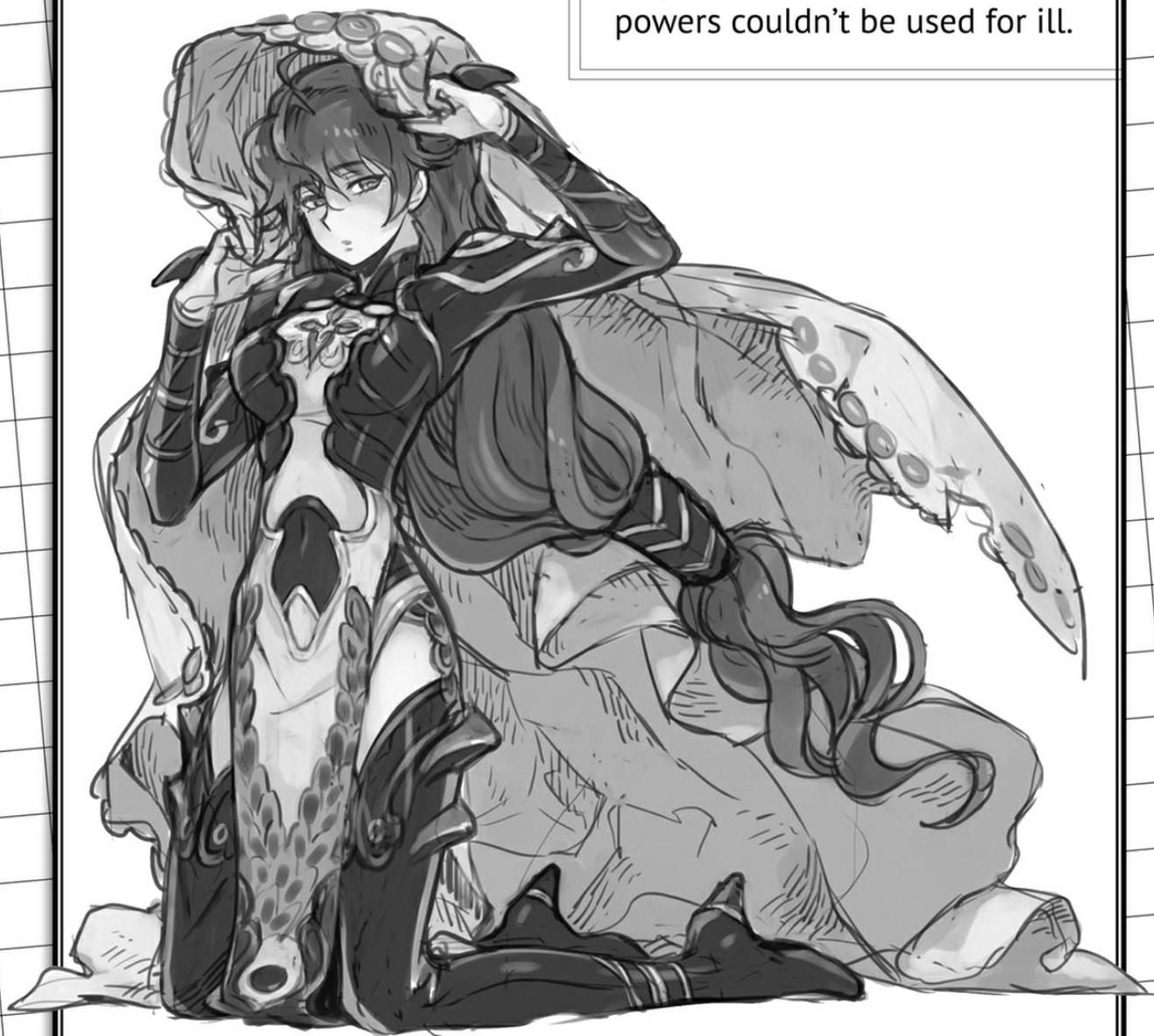
A member of the agency and the pacifist faction, both of which are working toward an end to the war and all the fighting. She's learned how to use all manner of ancient and modern magics with the Magic of Omniscience.



Leviathan, the Strongest Beast

Lea

A dove that has remained neutral ever since Rekka's disappearance first triggered fighting between the heroines. In order to maintain her neutrality, she refused to join the agency and sequestered herself so that her powers couldn't be used for ill.



Genius Royal Sorcerer

Harissa Hope



After her breakthroughs in summoning magic, she was promoted to royal sorcerer in Aburaamu, where she's now studying spirit sorcery. She's a dove who prays for an end to the fighting between the heroines and believes that Rekka will return one day.

Heroic Space Pirate

Fam

After inheriting the title of captain, she's stayed out of the politics between the various factions. In regards to Rekka, however, she's a hawk that believes in the pirate way of life—fight and take what's yours. She now has full control over her gremlin powers, but continues to wear her old headband for sentimental reasons.



Leading Member
of the Greater Galactic Federation

Iris Fineritas Cyphercall

Inherited her father's seat in the central congress of the Greater Galactic Federation, where representing Finerita gives her a great deal of influence to wield. She's a hawk that would employ any means necessary to find Rekka.



Elusive Free Agent

Hibiki Banjo

On favorable terms with the agency and often exchanges information with them. She supports their work, but believes the problems of the future should be solved in the future, so she's working independently to track down the missing Rekka herself. Pacifist-leaning neutral.



Afterword

This was the fifteenth volume of the super-cosmic battle royale romcom. Hello again to everyone coming from volume 14, and hello to everyone who bought all 15 volumes together.

How did you like the middle part of the future arc? The story mostly took place in space this time, but the entire series has gone back and forth between the three main stages of present day (Earth), future (space), and other worlds (with some liberties). I wanted to include all three stages somehow in the future arc since it's the grand finale. And so, next time in volume 16... Well, you probably guessed it already, but to be perfectly honest, I don't have any solid plans yet. (Haha...) Regardless, I'll do my best to reach the end. Speaking of doing one's best until the very end, I wanted to make sure every heroine had an important role to play in this arc, but... What should I do?! Half the heroines have yet to appear! Aaah! Will I be able to reach my goal?! Stay tuned to find out!

Now, last but not least, the usual acknowledgments. To Nao Watanuki, thank you once again for the many wonderful illustrations this volume! The designs for the future heroines even had me, the author, excited to see them! Thank you very much. To my editor Mr. Kinoshita, this volume only came into being with your guidance. Thank you very much for overseeing my plot and manuscript once again. And finally, to all who are involved in *Little Apocalypse*, the editors and marketers at HJ Bunko, the bookstores that line their shelves with this series, and the readers who picked up this book... You have my deepest gratitude. I hope you'll continue to support *Little Apocalypse*.

This is the illustrator Nao Watanuki. The rough sketch I am introducing this time is Yuuhi. She was rather easy to design, as I was told her features would highly resemble another certain character.

No sense of season and kind of apocalyptic?! I think she turned out pretty wild. She's rampaging about on the cover as well. Thanks to the designers, the checkered pattern and photos in the background were also composed in a very unique way. I hope you were surprised by the change from usual!

Namekojirushi, editors, thank you for your work this time. And to the publishers who I normally don't interact with but have taken care of me, thank you for the opportunity to study your work more closely via the cover this time!

Now, it's the last spurt. I hope the readers will come along for the ride. Thank you for enjoying this series, and I hope to see you next time as well!

Nao Watanuki

挿絵担当・和狸ナオと申します。

今回で紹介するラフ案は 遊陽、とある人物と特徴を似せるという事で、すんなり描くことが出来ました。

季節感皆無のファッションで、黙示録!? 1 ワイルドな女性キャラになったかと思います。表紙でもしかり暴れておりますが、この15巻の表紙は、背景の格子柄やフォント等 仕上げて下さるデザイナー様ご協力の下、特殊な構図となりました。

いつもとの違いに おっ!? と気付いて頂ければ幸いです。

なめこ印先生、編集様方、今回もお疲れ様でした。また、普段お世話になっていても接点のない、出版に携わる方々の仕事の一部を今回の表紙を通して垣間見ることが出来、自身にとっても勉強になりました。いつもありがとうございます!

さて、あともう一息。
読者様にもお付き合い頂けますよう、
どうぞよろしくお願い致します。
ここまでお読み下さりありがとうございました!

和狸ナオ 拝。



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I Saved Too Many Girls and Caused the Apocalypse: Volume 15

by Namekojirushi

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