



I SAVED TOO MANY GIRLS AND CAUSED THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE

16

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ONCE UPON A
TIME, THERE
WERE TWO
GODDESSES...





**"JUST AS
YOU'RE MY
PAST SELF."**

**"ARE YOU
REALLY MY
FUTURE
SELF?"**

While his sudden arrival was shocking enough, that wasn't what made both me and Yuuhi go wide-eyed. It was his face. Indeed, he was someone we were both quite familiar with.

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 GYPERCALL



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
RETRA**

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



**TSUMIKI
NOZOMUNO**

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



**HIBIKI
BANJO**

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



LEA

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



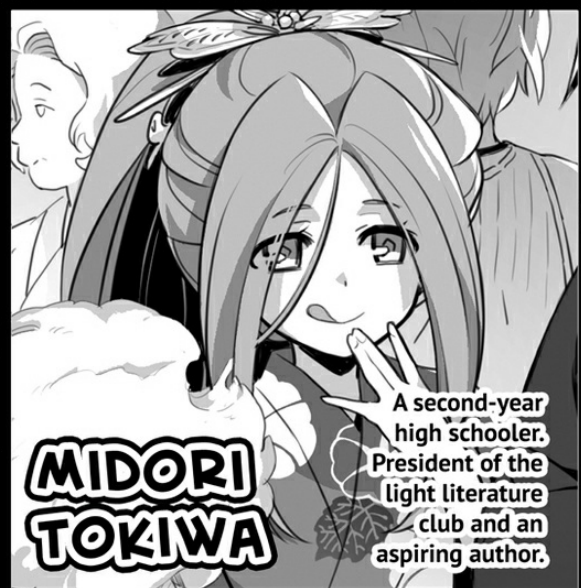
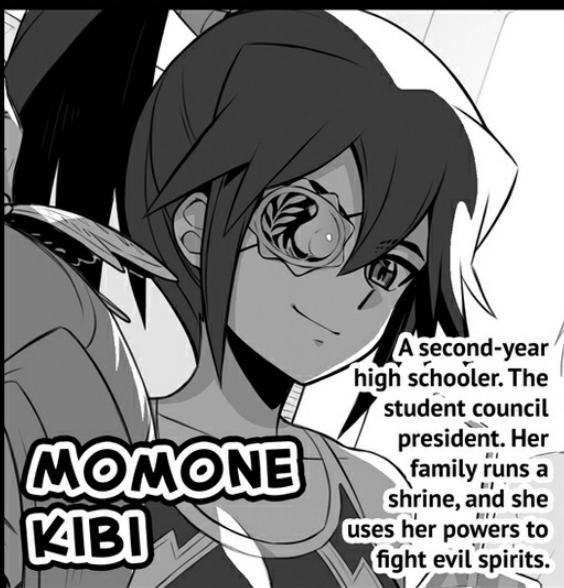
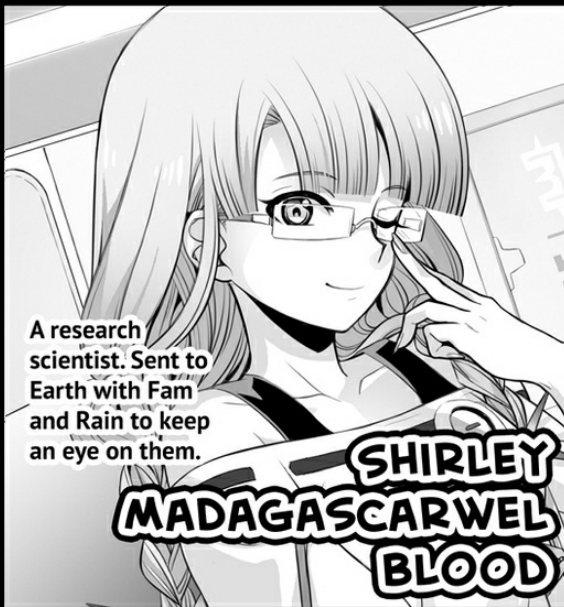
**ROSALIND
C. BATHORY**

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



**CHELSEA
MARGARET**

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



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



ELLICIA 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.



LYUN 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.



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 freeloadng 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

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



**KIRI
HAYASHIBARA**

**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

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



**SHERLYN
DOTEYES**

**TOUKO
IWAZU**



Wields the mysterious power of words. After learning that she's not actually all-powerful, she's been living a normal life.

Once a knight trapped in a video game, she's now living with Momone while looking for her family.



YORUN

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Prologue

“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.”

“She’s... a Rekka Namidare?”

The way future Hibiki revealed Yuuhi’s identity left me reeling in shock. Yuuhi was... her own version of me?

“Um... Do you mean this is actually my future self?”

Future Rekka had disappeared seemingly off the face of the planet—no, the universe. Was he... somehow the girl standing in front of me right now? Was Yuuhi my future self? Hibiki shook her head at my conjecture.

“No, that’s not what I meant. Your future self is an entirely different person.”

“Then who is Yuuhi...?”

“I just told you, didn’t I? She’s a Namidare from a parallel world,” Hibiki said, looking over to Yuuhi...

“...”

Who only glared at us silently.

I was one thing, but she showed no fear even in the face of the dozens of heroines now surrounding her. And it wasn’t just bravado.

There’s a reason she won’t back down... At least, that’s what her face says.

She had the steely gaze of someone who’d fully committed themselves to something. It was a look I’d seen several times over the past few months. It told me that, at the very least, Yuuhi hadn’t done any of this half-heartedly. But, well... half-hearted or not, if Yuuhi really was the one who’d caused the War of All, that was no small strike against her. Especially with the future heroines who lived in this world.

Meanwhile, my heroines—the ones from my timeline who Yuuhi had been controlling with the power of the Doppel Stone—were presently looking around very confused. They’d just been released from their mind control, so they didn’t

understand why they were even here.

“Rekka...”

“Sir Rekka...”

Satsuki, Harissa, and all the other girls came over to me. They probably wanted to know what was going on, but unfortunately, there wasn't really time to explain. We were still in the middle of a glare-off with Yuuhi... But this couldn't last forever. Someone had to do *something*.

“Say, uh, Hibiki...”

“What?”

“The world Yuuhi came from—this parallel world you mentioned. Could you explain that to us as best you can?”

Upon hearing my question, future Hibiki went a little wide-eyed in an expression of mild surprise.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Nothing. It's just been a while since I had to explain something to you. Now that I think about it... You used to rely on me a lot more in the past, huh?” Hibiki nodded with a faint smile, fondly reminiscing for a moment.

Frankly, I didn't see what was so touching about that...

“So, about that parallel world...”

“Ah, right. Sorry, sorry,” Hibiki said, snapping back to her senses. “Well, to put it as simply as possible, it's the mirror image of our world.”

“The mirror image of our world...?”

“Is it really that strange? I'm pretty sure it's a fairly common concept in the kind of manga you like to read.”

“Er, it might ring some bells...”

“Well, whatever. I'll take it from the top.”

According to Hibiki, this parallel world was one very similar to our own. It was, after all, a mirror image of it. It had planets and a sun just like ours... The look

and feel were very much the same, but despite that, there were key differences between them. Things that were subtly different or even outright inverted. And, yes, that apparently included my gender.

“In other words... Yuuhi is a female Rekka Namidare from a parallel world?”

“That’s the gist of it, yes.”

Hibiki confirmed my generalized understanding of the situation. While it may have been modest, it was enough for me to go on for now.

“Okay, so... What is the me from a parallel world doing here?”

“Who knows? I hadn’t gotten that far yet in my recon,” Hibiki said with a shrug. “You should ask her yourself.”

Yuuhi, however...

“...”

Was still silently staring us down. She wasn’t the only one with a stern expression, though...

“...”

“...”

“...”

All of the future heroines were glaring right back at her. The doctor’s earlier words were still echoing in their minds...

What if Yuuhi Namidare was the real culprit that caused the War of All? She might have been behind the terrorist attack on the Greater Galactic Federation, the very event that triggered the war... But there was no denying that there had been plenty of incidents to fan the flames of tension and discord between the heroines before that. Then there was also my disappearance...

Was Yuuhi really behind all of that?

It was true that with her ability to negate supernatural powers, she would be able to escape detection by Satsuki’s Omniscient Magic and get away with all sorts of things. Furthermore, she was the leader of the extremists, whose goal was to kill me in order to put a stop to the War of All...

Now that I think about it, the doctor once said the War of All could only be stopped by someone like me with a special relationship with fate.

And if that was the case, then the real goal of the extremists was...

Was she actually trying to kill me to ensure that the War of All would never end? Wait, wouldn't future me die too if she killed me?

If so, then wouldn't the War of All be prevented if the heroines couldn't fight over me in the future? But then... Huh? Argh, now I'm all confused!

This wasn't any good. I was just spinning my wheels at this point.

"Say, Yuuhi..."

In the end, I would only figure things out by asking her directly.

"Are you really the cause of everything?"

"..."

"I can't understand silence."

"I have no need to answer you."

"Then would you answer me if there *was* a need?"

We would probably never get another opportunity like this. Yuuhi was surely already thinking of a way to escape, but the future heroines would inevitably take their resentments out on her first. I had to think of something before future Iris showed up. She'd lost her father at the beginning of the War of All, so she more than any of the other heroines had a lot to hold against Yuuhi. And if future Iris had a temper anything like the Iris I knew...

Wait...

The Iris I knew was here too, but she didn't know anything yet. As soon as she heard that Yuuhi was responsible for her father's death, she would probably snap too. It was perfectly understandable, all things considered, but it could cost us this chance to negotiate with Yuuhi... perhaps permanently. We had to get to the bottom of things here and now before that happened. That's what my gut was telling me.

"Hey, Rekka! Come on, tell us where we are already!"

“Er...”

It was then, just as I was about to question Yuuhi, that Iris walked over and shook my shoulder. But she had a point. It was high time I gave the heroines an explanation. I just couldn't take my eyes off Yuuhi...

“Um, L, would you mind filling in everyone who came from the past about what's going on here? Just skip all the risky parts, okay?”

“What are you talking about? What do you want me to skip, exactly?”

“Errr...”

I wanted her to skip the part about how Iris's dad was dead, but it was hard to spell that out right in front of her. As I was racking my brain, however...

“I can fill everyone in.”

“R? But I'm the only one who can see you.”

“Not so fast. Everyone can see me now.”

“Huh?”

I turned around in shock to see all of the girls staring directly at R, paying attention to every word she was saying.

“Rekka, who is that?”

“She's floating?”

“How old is she?”

I was thusly pelted with questions about R one after another. Yeah, they could definitely see her, all right...

“Hey, R, what's going on? What does this mean?” I asked.

“It seems Yuuhi reprogrammed me. She removed certain functions pertaining to my camouflage processing. Well, let's just treat it as a convenience for now,” R said before moving on to fill in the heroines about what had happened.

Well, it was probably safe to leave that to her.

“Now, I'm sure everyone here is wondering what Rekka has done to me over the past few months where no one other than him could perceive me...”

Wow, okay, it wasn't safe at all. I mean, I guess this *was* R's typical way of joking around... Albeit reluctantly, I decided to trust her and forcibly turned my attention back to Yuuhi.

"..."

She was still staring at me with her unflinching poker face, but the determination residing deep within her eyes was plain as day. And that... I couldn't believe that was evil.

"Yuuhi."

"What?"

Relying on my intuition, I asked, "Just what kind of story are you involved in right now?"

"?!"

The future heroines collectively gasped at my question. Their faces betrayed that they hadn't even considered that possibility. Future Hibiki was the only one who didn't seem surprised. After all, she was the one who'd revealed that Yuuhi was another version of me. She probably had her own hypotheses, despite not knowing Yuuhi's exact motives.

"Wait a minute," future Satsuki said. "So... what? Are you saying this Yuuhi girl caused the War of All just to solve someone's story?!"

Her tone of voice made it perfectly clear how unacceptable the very idea was to her. To the girls from the future, what I'd suggested just now was probably ridiculous.

"I don't understand, Rekka."

"Well, I don't really want to believe it myself..." I scratched my head. "But if Yuuhi's really a Namidare, then the reason for her actions probably has to do with a story she's caught up in."

That said, I couldn't even imagine what kind of story had warranted all this. Just how badly were the threads of fate entangled that something like the War of All was necessary to fix things? Only Yuuhi knew.

"So what is it, Yuuhi?"

“...What are you going to do when I tell you?”

“You finally responded, huh? As for the answer to that question...” I sighed.
“If you’re a Namidare, then you should know.”

At that, Yuuhi’s expression grew grimmer before she said, “What’s with you?”

“I’m not sure how to answer that.”

“Can changing a single point in the timeline really make such a big difference...?” Yuuhi muttered to herself.

Difference? Change? I was curious what she meant, but more importantly, I’d finally gotten her to show an interest in talking with me. I had to keep things going, and so I said...

“I don’t know what kind of story you’re involved in right now, Yuuhi, but I’ll help you find a solution for it.”

“...”

There, she fell silent once more. But, in exchange...

“Rekka... Do you really intend on helping her?” future Satsuki spoke up.

“Satsuki?”

I turned to see her looking at me with a conflicted expression. And she wasn’t the only one. The other future heroines were looking at me the same way. I knew what must be going through their minds.

“Of course, there will be conditions,” I said to them as well as Yuuhi. “If we succeed in solving your story, I want you to assist us in putting a stop to the War of All.”

“Can you really do that?”

“If Yuuhi is a Namidare—moreover, if she was really the cause of all of this—then she should be able to use the time translocator to return to the past and change history, right?”

The latter half of my question was directed at Yuuhi. That was something I’d been able to do for Chirika and Nyanyan’s stories. And if Yuuhi was a Namidare too, then she also had the power to change fate... She was a crossroad keeper,

as the doctor called it. Since she'd forced the fate of this future world onto the path that led to the War of All, then the reverse should also be possible. The war had spread across all known worlds, all of space... It had wrought destruction on a scale that could no longer be undone. Just like how the doctor had sought me out, there was no other way to handle this than to go straight to the source... And the source, in this case, was Yuuhi herself. If we could gain her cooperation, we could change the awful past to save this future world that had fallen to a twisted fate... Or so I hoped.

As for the crucial part, Yuuhi's reply...

"Impossible."

"Whaaat?!"

Her unexpected response left me in a fluster, but there was more to what she had to say.

"It's impossible for you to solve the story I'm involved in."

"Ah, that's what you meant."

Whew! We were saved. I thought she'd meant it was impossible to stop the War of All.

"We won't know if it's impossible or not until you explain things, so get talking."

"...You're rather forceful."

"I've been leveling up that ability over the last half a year or so. Anyways," I said, glaring at Yuuhi a little. "Just so we're clear, I'm annoyed at you right now. My manners may be suffering a little for it."

"Hmph... Well, I'm no saint either."

"Obviously."

It wasn't like I had forgiven Yuuhi for starting the War of All just because it had to do with a story she was caught up in. She'd still hurt the future heroines. This world was still in shambles. None of that changed. I couldn't forgive Yuuhi for it, but it wasn't like punching her here was going to solve anything. Without her cooperation, we might not be able to nip the War of All in the bud. There

was too much involved to proceed safely without her. That was the only thought holding my rage back right now.

“Just talk already,” I ordered Yuuhi for the third time.

She remained as displeased as ever, but finally said, “If you insist that much, I’ll tell you.”

She then proceeded to explain in a tone that clearly conveyed her lack of expectation...

“I’m currently wrapped up in a goddess’s story.”

“A goddess?” I was taken aback for a moment. “A goddess... You mean, like, a deity?”

“Duh.”

What? A deity? That was... on a level far more intimidating than I’d imagined. The future heroines and the past heroines who had just finished listening to R were all looking at each other in shock too. But... if this was a story that involved a mirror world, then maybe the heroine had to be something like a goddess for it all to make sense.

“Ahem... W-Well, all right, so your heroine is a goddess,” I said with a cough, pulling myself together. “What does her story entail?”

“A game that wagers worlds for worlds.”

“A game?!” Another unexpected response made me cock my head further to the side. “A game... Wait, if it’s a game, then does that mean the goddess is playing against someone else?”

Single-player games did exist, but the wager Yuuhi mentioned implied there was another party involved.

“That makes sense... She’s in a bind against whoever her opponent is, which is how she ended up a heroine. So, who’s the opponent?”

“Another goddess.”

“Another one?!”

“There isn’t just one deity, you know.”

“Okay, so there are multiple gods... Or at least two of them, you say?”

“Two at the very least, as far as I know. One is the goddess of my world, and the other is the goddess of yours.”

“Wha...?”

“Earlier, Hibiki over there told you I came from a mirror world.” Seeing my confused expression, Yuuhi began explaining. “The world I was born in, like Hibiki said, is a completely separate world from the one you and your heroines live in.”

“You mean... When you say ‘world,’ you mean something different from, like, the other worlds that Harissa and Corona live in?”

“That’s right. Imagine a large box.”

“A box?”

“Now imagine the world you live in, the world Harissa Hope lives in, and the world Zaia Gardendos Corona lives in all shut away inside the same box, just partitioned apart from each other within that box.”

“...”

So the places we’d been calling “worlds” were all actually within the same universe. That meant Yuuhi was from a different universe... somewhere outside the world-box we lived in.

“What I’ve just described is the correct unit of a world. Now, for each world-box that exists, there also exists a deity that created said box.”

“You mean... The goddess of my world and the goddess of your world, like you said earlier?”

“Exactly,” Yuuhi confirmed with a nod.

“I see.”

Okay, that much made sense. This whole world thing and...

“Hm?”

That was when something hit me.

“Wait, does that mean the goddess of your world is in trouble because...”

“Because of the goddess of your world, yes.”

“...Seriously?”

When she put it that way, I suddenly felt a little guilty.

“Wait a minute! That’s not Sir Rekka’s fault! This is all the goddesses’ fault!” Harissa suddenly interjected angrily.

It seemed, thanks to R’s explanation, the heroines from my timeline were all caught up to speed now.

“I don’t recall stating it was Rekka’s fault,” retorted Yuuhi.

“Then are you implying it’s this world’s fault instead?” future Harissa asked this time.

Wow, it was kinda hard to tell them apart... For convenience, I think I’ll just refer to my heroines by their names and the heroines from the future as “future (insert name here).”

Future Harissa continued her questioning, “I don’t know what this game between goddesses has to do with it, but why did you think it was okay to start the War of All in our world?”

“Well... Let me explain the game to you next,” Yuuhi said with a furrowed brow.

Just thinking about it seemed to upset her.

“First... What should I even compare it to? For a god, a world is basically their own miniature sandbox.”

“Miniature sandbox?”

“That’s right. In the limitless box of their world, they create whatever worlds they want, provide them with necessities, then watch over their growth.”

“So it’s like a world simulation game, basically.”

I hadn’t played many games like it, but I was familiar with the concept—games where you made a farm or a restaurant or an amusement park, then raised cows, invented recipes, created attractions, and other various things to

make your world grow bigger and bigger.

“...Which makes us the characters the gods have created to fill their worlds.”

“That’s right. That’s not a bad way to think of it,” Yuuhi said with a shrug at my unhappy muttering.

The world we lived in was a goddess’s miniature sandbox... While that may be the truth, hearing it stated outright wasn’t a great feeling.

“Well, fine... Suppose that this world *is* a deity’s world simulation game. How does that relate to our current situation?”

“This is what I heard from the goddess of my world,” Yuuhi explained. “One day, the goddess of my world, Sith, was challenged by the goddess of your world, Maine, to a little wager in order to alleviate their boredom.”

“This is the game you were talking about?”

“That’s right. The so-called game was to see whose world was happier.”

“Whose world was happier...?”

When it became clear I wasn’t processing what she was saying, Yuuhi went into further detail. Apparently, the goddesses were able to measure the amount of happiness within their worlds. Sith and Maine—who were sisters—decided to compare their worlds’ happiness and compete to see who could make the happier world.

“The winner was supposed to achieve a certain lead over the loser, but there was no time limit, so the game continued for thousands of years.”

“Why would they do such a thing...?”

“Even humans like to compete. This is no different.”

I didn’t really think of sim games as a competition, but... I could understand the feeling of wanting to boast about the world you made to someone playing the same game. I guess it was like how my classmates were obsessed with that one game (I think it was some kind of cat collecting app?) and loved bragging about the characters they had to everyone else. This was just the divine version of that.

“So what does the game have to do with the story of the goddess you’re involved with? Sith, was it?”

“It’s very simple from there.” Yuuhi crossed her arms as if to hold back her feelings. “The goddess who loses the game loses their world. Sith and her world are on the verge of defeat right this moment.”

“...?!”

Yuuhi stated it so simply that the ridiculousness of what she said took a second to set in on me. The goddess who lost the game would lose their world... In other words, Yuuhi’s world would vanish.

“Hold on a minute,” the doctor interjected. “The world that’s about to lose is your world? Not ours?”

Huh... She had a point. If this was a match to compete and see who could get the happier world, it certainly seemed like the world afflicted by the War of All would be on the losing end.

“I see. So in order to ensure your goddess would win, you decided to cause the War of All in our world...” the doctor mused.

“That’s not it,” Yuuhi said with a shake of her head. “Sith’s world was the first to fall behind in happiness, and I learned the truth of it all once I became involved in her story. I had to cause the War of All here just to return things to a level playing field.”

“That’s...”

I started to say something, but the words escaped me. What Yuuhi had done was unforgivable, to me and to my world. But she’d only done it in order to save herself and her world. I’d assumed the mastermind behind all this would have to be the worst enemy ever after sacrificing Iris’s father just to start an intergalactic war... But she really wasn’t the atrocious villain I thought she’d be.

When I looked at Yuuhi, I thought I saw steely determination in her eyes...

But looking at her now, I realized that wasn’t really it. As stoic as she was, she looked like she could crumble at any moment.

“Do you understand now, Rekka Namidare? Without sowing misfortune in

your world, I cannot save my own.”

I clutched at my chest. What... What emotions were running through Yuuhi when she said that just now? Did she think she was the final boss that was going to destroy the world or something? That would be ridiculous. She was her world’s version of me. That meant, just like me, she was a perfectly normal girl. She just had a special bloodline that was different than most. How had things turned out so awfully for her...?

“A story about destroying one world to save another, huh?”

“...”

“You didn’t have a choice, did you?”

“That’s right. That’s why—”

“But now I’m here.”

“...!”

There, Yuuhi went a little wide-eyed, and I felt the gazes of all the other girls gather on me. Yet strangely enough, I wasn’t nervous. The scale of Yuuhi’s story was incomprehensible, and in the end, I was just a regular guy. But even so, in spite of that, I’d saved plenty of stories before now. This... This was it. From the very first time half a year ago... No, from the moment I was dragged into R’s story after my bloodline awakened... This was what it had all been leading up to.

I looked up at the blue-haired girl floating next to me.

“What is it, Rekka?”

If this was the story that would settle things between me and her, it was probably fated from the moment we met that I would make this decision. I turned to address Yuuhi, R, and everyone else.

“I’m going to save the world.”

Chapter 7: To the Parallel World

“You’re gonna save the world?” Yuuhi asked, narrowing her eyes. “Which one do you mean?”

“Both,” I answered.

We were still locked in a standoff as I stared her straight in the eye. She stared right back at me, and rather sharply, I might add.

“That’s...”

“Impossible? Maybe for you, Yuuhi.” When I said that in a strong tone, Yuuhi fell speechlessly silent. “If you can’t think of anything other than the War of All to help Sith, I’ll come up with something in your place. So lend me your strength, Yuuhi Namidare.”

“What can you do?” Yuuhi questioned me harshly. “In this future timeline, you indeed possess some tremendous supernatural abilities. But as you are from the past, you’ve gone through story after story and have nothing to show for it. You’re powerless.”

“So, what? You think power will solve all of your problems?”

“...”

“I may not have any special powers myself, but I know the way to overcome any difficulty—by putting everyone’s powers together.”

Plenty of the heroines I’d encountered had special abilities themselves, but that hadn’t been enough to save their stories on their own.

“You say you’re me from another world, but to me, you’re no different than any other heroine. Unable to solve your story with your own power, you’re on the verge of tragedy. So I’m going to save you.”

“I’m... not...” Yuuhi mumbled, biting her lip and looking down, finally putting an end to our staredown. “I’m a Namidare. I’ve done my fair share of saving the day. So I can’t relent here. If I give up now, the story of my world is over.”

“I know. I know that pressure, that responsibility... But it’s not a burden you

have to face alone!" I yelled. "Is asking for help really the same as giving up?! It's not, is it?! You may have saved plenty of people before now, but so what?!"

"Wha—Rekka, wait!"

Satsuki jumped in and tried to stop me, but I ignored her better judgment and marched right up to Yuuhi.

"I"

Yuuhi herself seemed quite surprised at my outburst. If she were an enemy, a reckless approach was a dangerous move on my part. But there was only one thought in my head right now: I had to save her no matter what. The final boss before me was stronger than I was, stupider than I was, and far, far more stubborn than I had ever been.

"Just because you're normally the hero doesn't mean that you don't need to be saved sometimes too!"

I took two steps closer so that Yuuhi's face was right in front of mine.

"..."

This girl who'd come to our world through the mirror... I admit that looking at her was almost like looking into a mirror. The same eyes stared back at me.

"Just say you need help, Yuuhi."

Perhaps to Yuuhi, this world was enemy territory and I was just another enemy. Perhaps she was wary of trusting me because she feared for the fate of the world she was carrying on her shoulders.

"You and I are both Namidares. If we both have the power to change fate, if we both help each other out... We should be able to save everyone, right?"

But this was all I could do. Like Yuuhi said, I was weak. Utterly powerless. I couldn't do anything without the strength my friends and allies lent me. And the first step to that was getting them to trust me. I knew it was highly unlikely that I'd be able to sway Yuuhi with words at this point, so I had to be perfectly clear. I declared that there was a way to be saved. That she didn't have to struggle alone anymore. That I would do something about it.

"..."

Yuuhi pressed her lips together firmly. Her hands slowly clenched into fists. If she wanted to punch me, she could probably take me out in a single hit. But what happened after that? What would she do next? She'd be up against every heroine present, so she'd either have to flee the scene or defeat them all. And what after that? Even if she got away, the extremists would lose without her. Would she just hide somewhere else and once again try to control the War of All from the shadows, continuing to sow the seeds of unhappiness in this world and plunging us further into misery? All to lead her own world to victory in the goddesses' game? Was that really a happy ending? It wasn't for us, and I didn't think it would be for Yuuhi either.

Is that really what you want, Yuuhi Namidare?

If she was me from another world, then she was probably asking herself the same thing right about now. Over and over. Just wondering if this was right. And the answer to that was obvious.

"Even you know this is wrong, don't you?!" I shouted, grabbing Yuuhi by the collar. "If you have any shred of pride left as a Namidare, then let's aim for the happiest ending possible together! And I mean a real happy ending, not some bittersweet one where one of us still has to lose! Let's author an ending where everyone can be happy! If you don't have the resolve to do that, then..."

"Then what?"

"Let me spell it out for you!" I declared. "You'd leave me no choice. I'd have to tie you up and go save everyone myself. And I wouldn't let you take any of the credit."

"..."

Hearing my answer, Yuuhi looked dazed for a moment.

"Was that supposed to be a threat or something?"

"Oh, it's a threat, all right."

"?"

"If I save the day while you're just sitting here, would you ever be able to forgive yourself?"

“...!”

There, Yuuhi’s expression changed.



The hurt Yuuhi had inflicted on this world ran deep. She'd pushed her breaking heart past its limits to do great evil in the name of saving her own world. But what if that had all been for nothing? If there had been another solution all along? If Yuuhi sat back and let someone else clean up her mess? The only thing she'd have left would be the weight of her crimes.

"Ridiculous. Ever since I resolved myself to do this, I—"

"You were planning on dying either way, right? You really are a fool."

Yuuhi really was just a normal girl at heart. She was no final boss after all. At this rate, even if she managed to save her world, the guilt of destroying ours would probably destroy her too.

"If you've got the guts to put your life on the line, then put those guts to good use, Yuuhi."

"Rekka, aren't you being harsher with her than you usually are with the ladies?" R interjected.

"I said it earlier, R. While I can sympathize with her, I'm also pretty pissed at her."

I believed that Yuuhi hadn't had any other choice. That much was certain... But had it always been? Or had Yuuhi decided on her own that this was impossible just because she couldn't do it by herself? If she'd sought someone else's help from the start... If she'd overcome her fears and reached out her hand... Maybe all of this could have been avoided.

"After sending L after me, and after everything else you've done as the mastermind of the extremists, you should have a pretty good idea of what I'm capable of, right?"

"Yeah..."

"Then you have enough information to make a decision. Now hurry up and decide whether I'm leaving you here or not."

I'd already said everything I could with words. If it just wasn't enough to convince Yuuhi, it was my loss. Of course, even without Yuuhi's cooperation, I still had no intention of giving up. I would still save both her world and mine. I

just... probably wouldn't be able to save Yuuhi too. I knew she'd never be able to forgive herself and there'd be nothing I could do about it. It would mean I'd failed to uphold my promise to the girls that I would save everyone... And I would carry that with me the rest of my life. But so be it. There really was nothing left to say to Yuuhi. All that remained was for her to make up her mind.

I let go of her collar, though her fists remained tightly balled. We were about to shape the future with our own hands—our own strength—the first and last weapons we possessed. It was simply a matter of whether or not Yuuhi was going to use her strength to fight or to run. If she ran, I'd give chase. If she fought, I'd fight with her. But the call was Yuuhi's to make. Only she could choose. Would she pick her world over the happiness of everyone? Right now, the end to this story was in her firmly clenched fists.

"I..."

Her fists trembled, then shook. She squeezed them tighter and tighter as though she was trying to hold back her emotions. She squeezed, and squeezed, and squeezed with every last drop of her strength. Her strained fists raised a complaint at the pain... then finally uncurled.

"Can you really... save everyone?" Yuuhi asked in a small voice.

It was R that replied...

"Don't worry. Despite how he looks, this Rekka here is an amazing hero with a 100-percent success rate. He's saved every story he's ever been involved in, and that'll include yours."

...with an announcement that Yuuhi had become my newest heroine.



I was going to save both Yuuhi's world and ours. My bold declaration left the future heroines looking a little conflicted, while my heroines simply looked exasperated at my typical behavior.

"Honestly, Rekka, you're just so... well, Rekka." That included Satsuki, who held her head in her hands as she bemoaned my nature. "Are you serious about doing this?"

“Yeah.”

“A parallel world... That’s completely outside the realm of even my magic, you know?”

Satsuki’s Magic of Omniscience was a powerful heirloom magic that allowed her to peek into the annals of history since time immemorial, but it could only access the Akashic record of our world. Nothing was recorded in it about Sith’s world—the mirror world Yuuhi hailed from.

“We can’t even confirm her story, Rekka...”

“I understand your concern, Satsuki, but I believe Yuuhi.”

I’d asked Yuuhi to trust me, which meant I had to trust her too in order for this to work.

“So, to sum up the game between goddesses...” I said, turning to Yuuhi, who was still standing some distance from the other girls. “Once the requisite lead in happiness is achieved by one of the worlds, the other will be destroyed?”

“That’s right,” she confirmed with a nod.

“Is there no way for the game to end in a tie?”

“None whatsoever,” Yuuhi replied bluntly. “Sith and Maine agreed to rules for the match before the game began. There was nothing about a draw in the terms set forward.”

“And so the game has continued for thousands of years... How patient of them.”

“They’re deities, after all. Their sense of time is much different than mortals’.”

“I suppose that makes sense.” There, I folded my arms and looked up at the ceiling. “I suppose, then... our only option is to ask them to suspend the game.”

If we couldn’t force a draw, then we had to find a way to call off the game.

“But suspending the game would require a mutual agreement between Sith and Maine,” said Yuuhi.

“And?” I asked.

“While Sith would agree to something like that on the verge of defeat, Maine

has no reason to agree when she's on the verge of winning."

"But it wouldn't hurt to at least try asking, right?"

I had no idea what Maine—the goddess of our world—was like, but I was hoping she wasn't the type to take delight in destroying her little sister's world.

"And how exactly do you plan on getting an audience with a deity?"

"Well, how did you meet with the goddess of your world, Yuuhi?"

"In my case, I overcame the goddess's trial to earn the right to see her."

"Trial?"

"Yes. You see, deities are the highest existences in the cosmoaverse. In order to meet them, you have to go through the appropriate procedures."

"Hmm..." Procedures, huh? "Doctor, have you heard of anything similar to this divine trial in our world?"

"Anything similar? That's pretty vague... Hold on a moment," the doctor said, pulling out some kind of tablet. "The keyword's just too broad. It makes it hard to search for... Yeah, sorry, there are just too many results."

"Are there really that many? And what is that device, anyway?"

"It's a terminal that can access all the databases in the world. I've looked through all available records, but mythology from all cultures is just teeming with stories of heroes and priests that have performed great deeds in order to gain divine audience. There's no end to this list."

"I see," I said with a nod before turning to Satsuki. "What about the Magic of Omniscience? Can you search up how to meet a god?"

"Hang on," both Satsuki and future Satsuki said in the same breath.

They then both looked at each other in surprise.

"Oh, I'm sorry. Go ahead."

"No, you're the... um... adult here, so by all means..."

"Actually, couldn't you both search together?"

A strange contest of yielding began to unfold between the Satsukis, so I

suggested they both take a crack at it. Considering the infinite list of potential answers the doctor said was available, I figured it would be most efficient for them to search together. It was going to take a while, after all. And while they were busy...

“Hey, that’s right! Rachelle!”

As I was thinking about things, it suddenly dawned on me that we had an angel in the party. She served the god—or goddess, as it turned out?—of this world. Maybe she could get us an audience. Hopeful, I looked for Rachelle... but couldn’t spot her among the heroines in the room. It was only then that I realized Yuuhi hadn’t released everyone yet.

“Hey, Yuuhi. Release the rest of the heroines already.”

At that, Yuuhi returned to stoically glaring at me.

“What, you still don’t trust me? I’m telling you, it’ll be fine.”



Still skeptical, Yuuhi pressed a concealed button in her jacket, and a rift between this world and hers tore open the very fabric of space. From the rift appeared the missing heroines, who all looked rather confused.

“Huh...? Where are we?” mumbled Kiri.

“What was I doing?” pondered Suzuran.

Realizing they were probably dazed from the brainwashing and everything else that had happened, I turned to L.

“Would you mind explaining things to them?” I asked.

“Ugh, fine,” she said in a huff.

L gathered up everyone to fill them in while I pulled aside the unmistakable girl in the back of the group with white wings.

“Huah? What’s this, Rekka?” Rachelle asked, still looking a little dazed.

She seemed puzzled as to why I’d singled her out.

“Rachelle, I have a favor to ask you.”

“A favor, you say?”

“Is there any way you could arrange a meeting with God for me?”

“WHAAAT?!” Suddenly, she went from looking dazed to wide awake. “Th- That’s impossible! No way, no how!”

“Please. The fate of the world is at stake.”

“E-Even if you say that...”

“Just this once!”

There, I explained what was happening to Rachelle. In order to save both worlds, I needed to meet Maine, the goddess of this world, and ask her to call off the game. But unfortunately...

“I’m sorry! It’s just not possible!”

“Why not?”

“I’m sure future Rekka would understand, but in the grand scale of the world

—and by that, I mean the cosmoveverse—Earth is just a tiny speck of dust, you know?”

“Fair point...”

Earth was just one planet in one solar system, which was practically nothing in the grand scheme of space, let alone the so-called cosmoveverse which included other worlds. Earth really was only a drop in the bucket, if that.

“Even the seraphim are pretty far down on the ladder, and I’m even below them! I’m, like, the *very* bottom! So I’m really sorry to say it, but it’s just not happening!”

“I see... Sorry for putting you on the spot.”

The more frantic Rachelle grew, the worse I felt. For someone as ridiculous as her to be taking this so seriously, it must have really been impossible.

“Rekka...”

My hopes, however, were reignited as Satsuki returned. If we were lucky, the Magic of Omniscience would find us a way to meet a deity.

“Hey, Satsuki. How’d it go?”

“Well, I looked it up with Ms. Satsuki’s help, but it’s not good news. There’s no way to meet the goddess of this world.”

“...Really?”

I had to ask just to be sure, and Satsuki hung her head as she nodded. For answers, I then turned to Yuuhi.

“Weren’t you able to meet your goddess by overcoming some kind of trial?”

“In Sith’s case, yes... but it’s up to the deity whether they want to set up a trial, or what that trial even is.”

“So our goddess has no intention of meeting anyone?”

“Probably not. For the goddesses, this is just a sandbox game. Whether they want to interact with the characters or just observe them from a distance is all up to them.”

That meant Maine, the goddess of our world, wasn’t interested in interacting

with any of us.

“I see... Is Touko around?”

“Over here,” Touko responded, raising her hand when I said her name.

She was the only one of the everyday heroines who had gone missing, but it seemed Yuuhi was responsible for that too. Come to think of it, why *was* Touko the only one of the everyday heroines who had been abducted? I’d have to get to the bottom of that later...

“Could your power get us a meeting with the goddess, Touko?” I asked.

“Hmm... I wonder,” she mused.

“Impossible,” Yuuhi interjected, immediately shooting my idea down. “Like I said earlier, deities are the highest existences in the cosmaverse. If you think they could be manipulated by the power of words, you’re dead wrong.”

“I guess it wouldn’t be so easy...”

My shoulders slumped in disappointment.

“Is it really impossible to meet the goddess of our world, then...?”

I closed my eyes to think. In order to stop the game with one of our worlds at stake, we needed to meet with Maine. We had to. The hitch was that there was no system set up in our world for doing so. Was there maybe some kind of alternative? Another way to get a chance to see her?

“...”

When I opened my eyes, Yuuhi was standing before me with that same solemn expression, tensely biting her lip. Was she worried I would rescind my offer once I realized I was out of options? I wanted to reassure her that wouldn’t happen, but it was perfectly reasonable that she was feeling anxious. That’s why I decided to suggest something more concrete.

“Yuuhi.”

“What?”

“Take me back to your world for a bit. Can you do that?”

“?!”

“Rekka?!”

“Sir Rekka?!”

“Rekka!”

My statement surprised not just Yuuhi, but all the other girls as well. To be honest, they were far more shocked than I’d thought they’d be.

“Your world has a divine trial in place, right? If I clear it, I’ll at least be able to meet with Sith.”

If Sith, her sister, tried to reach her, maybe I could get through to Maine that way. They’d arranged the game together, after all. There had to be a way for them to communicate.

“Well, Yuuhi? Can you do it?”

“It’s possible, but...” Yuuhi glanced over at Satsuki and the others before continuing. “The only people who can cross the boundary are me and people like me. That means I can take you, Rekka, but I can’t take your heroines.”

“I see...” I started to nod, but suddenly realized something. “Wait, if that’s true, then how did you get everyone in the rift?”

“Because it was just a rift. There’s a kind of wall that blocks the way between different worlds. That’s the barrier that no one can cross other than us Namidares.”

“Oh, okay.”

I didn’t really understand the logic, but if those were the rules, then so be it. I could accept that, but it seemed some of the girls couldn’t.

“Hey, don’t go making a decision like that all on your own!” shouted Shirley.

“You shouldn’t be so trusting!” shouted Rosalind.

“Even if you trust her, we need to know all the details first!” shouted Ellicia.

I mean, they weren’t wrong, but...

“H-Hey, wait a minute. Weren’t you frozen, Rosalind?”

If I recalled correctly, the doctor had frozen her in her red mist form during

the earlier confrontation with Yuuhi.

“I unfroze ages ago! And don’t try to change the subject!” Rosalind roared, baring her fangs as she landed a well-aimed chop right in my midsection.

“Guh!”

“Oops, you were closer than I thought... Sorry.”

“No, it’s fine...”

It honestly really hurt... Bad enough to make tears well in my eyes.

“I, for one, would like to confirm some things while Rekka’s reeling in pain,” Shirley said, pushing up her glasses as she turned to Yuuhi. “Firstly, explain in more detail the reason why only Rekka can cross this so-called barrier.”

“Well, first of all, I have the ability to cross the barrier between worlds.”

“Of course you do. Otherwise you wouldn’t be here in this world. What about Rekka?”

“Said ability is supposed to be something that only I can use. But Rekka is this world’s equivalent of me. Essentially, he can fool the barrier into letting him through.”

“And how, might I ask, do you know that?”

“Because I’ve already done it once.”

“You have? With whom?” Shirley inquired, her brow dubiously furrowed.

It was a good question, though. I was right here and had been all along. How could Yuuhi possibly have any empirical proof it would work with me? I had to wonder, but we got the answer straight from the horse’s mouth soon enough...

“With future Rekka Namidare,” Yuuhi replied.

“What did you say?!”

“Rekka?!”

Most of the future heroines angrily raised their voices in response to Yuuhi’s claim that she’d taken future Rekka to her world.

“I see... No wonder my Omniscient Magic couldn’t find him. He wasn’t even in

this world,” said future Satsuki, chewing on her lip in frustration.

“There’s something else bothering me.” Shirley, however, seemed unconvinced. “After we were abducted, we were shut in that space between worlds... The rift, you called it? What’s to say you couldn’t have kept future Rekka there as well? Tell us why you went out of your way to send him to Sith’s world instead.”

“There are two reasons for that,” Yuuhi said with a shrug. “The first is simply because the rift is useful. It can hide people from the Great Omniscient Magic, and I can use it myself to travel. It’s very versatile.”

“You can travel with it?” Shirley asked, continuing her line of questioning.

“I can open the rift wherever I want. So if I myself step into it, it’s essentially a free ride to my destination of choice.”

“That does sound convenient...”

It would have been the perfect tool for the extremist mastermind, plotting all kinds of schemes from the shadows.

“The second reason is also simple,” continued Yuuhi. “I feared that future Rekka Namidare would be able to break out of the rift.”

“Oh? But didn’t you say you’re the only one with the ability to cross the barrier?” Shirley said, cocking her head.

“More specifically, anyone who does not possess an ability like mine is unable to cross the barrier of any world they don’t belong to. But that’s not to say, for example... that someone like Harissa over there who’s well versed in teleportation magics couldn’t eventually cross the barrier of Maine’s world and enter the rift if she really endeavored.”

Basically, it worked out like this. Yuuhi was a resident of Sith’s world, and I was a resident of Maine’s. Under normal circumstances, Yuuhi wouldn’t be able to cross over into Maine’s world because of the barrier that surrounded it and vice versa. She could, however, still cross the native barrier around her own world to enter the rift. And the opposite was true; I could cross through Maine’s barrier and enter the rift. That wasn’t to say it would be an easy feat for a nobody like me... Crossing a world barrier was a big deal, after all. But if we

were talking about someone with a special combination of supernatural powers—and we were with my future self—then it was easily possible he'd be able to cross Maine's barrier from within the rift and escape back to our world. That's why Yuuhi had gone to the trouble of pushing him all the way through to Sith's world, essentially locking him behind two doors.

"So, when I sealed future Rekka Namidare in Sith's world, I confirmed that my equivalent self could cross the barrier as well... That's what I mean."

Shirley gave a silent, rather reluctant nod at Yuuhi's explanation. She still seemed quite wary.

"What's up with Shirley?" I leaned over to R and whispered. "Yuuhi's explanation just now seemed perfectly reasonable to me. Was there something I missed?"

"How ignorant you are, Rekka," R spat back with her usual verbal abuse. "Didn't Rosalind just say you shouldn't be so trusting of others?"

While I was whispering with R, Hibiki spoke up and entered the conversation.

"Yuuhi Namidare, in the end, we just don't have any reason to believe you won't pull a fast one on Rekka." With folded arms, she continued, "Originally, you were trying to kill our... past Rekka, would you call him? Leaving him alone with you, much less letting you take him to a world where no one else can reach you... I'm afraid I can't agree to that."

"..."

"H-Hey, Hibiki..." Between Hibiki's argument and Yuuhi's silent staring, I was at a bit of a loss. "I mean, I get why you're worried, but it'll be fine."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"Hmm..." I fumbled for the right words. "How should I put this...? Yuuhi reminds me of you, Hibiki."

"Of me?"

"Yeah. Back when we first met, you were tense all the time too."

"...!"

Hibiki's Banjo bloodline was very similar to mine. She also got caught up in all kinds of stories, and a dear friend of hers had accidentally been hurt in the middle of one once. Hibiki took it pretty hard, and in an attempt to make sure it never happened again, she started pushing people away and keeping her distance. It wasn't exactly the same as Yuuhi's case, but she was similarly determined not to accept anyone's help. She was convinced she needed to do everything on her own.

"That's why, well... Yeah, that might be why I wanted to save her. Though I also want to save both worlds too, of course."

There, Hibiki went quiet for a moment and sullenly turned away before saying, "Just because she reminds you of me... Don't do this over something so trivial, stupid."

"Sorry for being stupid. But that's—"

"That's just who you are," Hibiki said, hitting me in the chest before stepping back a little.

Wait, did that mean she'd accepted it?

"Hey, now hold on just a minute!" Tsumiki shouted, stamping her foot. "Hibiki's not the only person you have to convince! And besides, the biggest issue here still hasn't even been addressed!"

"That's right! Why are you apologizing for being stupid? We already know you are!" shouted Lyun in turn.

Tsumiki and Lyun both clearly had their objections, but so did Tetra and Mio, who were standing behind them. They looked at me with silent, pleading expressions that were practically begging me not to go. On behalf of all four worried girls, Tsumiki pointed a furious finger towards Yuuhi.

"So, lady, why were you trying to kill Rekka in the first place?!"

Instead of answering Tsumiki directly, Yuuhi turned to me and said, "The reason I tried to kill you was, naturally, in order to stop the pacifists' plan."

"But if you'd killed me, wouldn't that have prevented the War of All from ever happening?"

“No, it still would have happened.”

“How? Even if you were pulling the strings from the shadows, the War of All is really a fight over my future self. So if you cut me out of the picture, then there wouldn’t have been anything to fight about in the first place, right?”

That was something I’d been wondering about for a while now. Though they had different methods, both the pacifists and the extremists shared a goal in wanting to put an end to the War of All. Or so it seemed, but here we’d found out Yuuhi’s real goal all along was to keep the war going. Something clearly didn’t add up.

“Normally, a regular human would be unable to change the past on any significant scale.”

“Huh? But the doctor said if you kill someone from the past, it has repercussions on the future... That’s why the future heroines couldn’t fight their past selves, right?”

“That’s a misunderstanding on behalf of the scientists of this world. Allow me to reiterate: a normal human cannot change the past.”

“But... Then what about when I went back in time to save the people of Atlantis?”

“You’re no normal person. You’re a Namidare.”

“What...?”

“The corrective power of time is something no normal human has the power to stand against. Even if someone, let’s say, went to the past and attempted to alter the course of history, the world would self-correct by moving itself back to the course it was set to follow. Think of it as fate.”

According to Yuuhi’s explanation, even if a normal person went back in time and killed their parents, it wouldn’t change the fact that they’d been born. That was because time travels a fixed course once passed, and that course cannot be retroactively altered. So, in the example that someone went back in time and killed their parents, the hand of fate would sweep things forward in a way that brought about the same results. That person would still—somehow—be born, and the world would thusly be back on track. That was the self-corrective

power of time.

“But like I said, you’re no normal person. We Namidares have the power to make real changes. The king of Laputa and the others had the right idea. Instead of trying fruitlessly to alter the past themselves, they made you aware of the future so that you could do it. It gave them a real chance at quelling the tempest of fate that is the War of All.”

“R-Right...”

This conversation had reached critical mass in my head. I could feel the smoke coming out of my ears. But the short of it was that only we Namidares could change the past. Only we could change fate. Fate... Fate, huh?

What is fate, anyway?

I had never looked up the word in a dictionary before, but... was fate just the course that some god had predetermined? No, not some god... the goddess of our world. And in order to meet with her, I was about to travel to a parallel world.

When I see her, I should ask her what fate really is.

“So, okay... To summarize, it wouldn’t matter if someone went back to the past and killed me. You’re saying the corrective power of time would mean the War of All still happened anyway?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying,” Yuuhi confirmed.

“I see. So that’s why you sent L and those giant robots instead of coming yourself. You’re a Namidare too, so you coming to the past could’ve really screwed things up.”

“Well, yes... You sure don’t mince words, do you?” Yuuhi looked momentarily conflicted, but pulled herself together. “Similarly, I cannot kill Rekka with my own hands now. That much I can assure you of.”

“Grr... Even so!” Tsumiki grumbled, looking like she still had her objections.

And she wasn’t the only one. My instincts told me to trust Yuuhi, but the girls’ instincts were telling them differently. To talk this out with each one of them could take days, and that was time I didn’t have. I’d already made up my mind

to follow Yuuhi back to her world. And so...

“Tsumiki.”

I turned to her.

“Lyun, Tetra, Mio...”

I turned to the girls behind her, too.

“Satsuki, Iris, Harissa, Lea, Hibiki, Rosalind, Suzuran, Chelsea...”

I then turned to the girls on my left, looking each of them in the eye.

“Shirley, Fam, Rain, Ellicia, Corona, L...”

Same with the girls on my right.

“Rachelle, Zeta, Kiri, Chirika, Sherlyn, Nyanyan, Touko...”

I called out to all of them and thumped my chest with conviction.

“Believe in me. I’m going to see this through,” I vowed. “I’m going to do what it takes to save our future.”

I then turned to the future heroines who’d helped me get this far. Although Iris was still busy holding off the Greater Galactic Federation fleet, I was thinking of her too.

“I’m going to Sith’s world with Yuuhi, and I’m going to save both worlds to ensure a happy ending for all of us.”

When I said that, everyone reacted in their own way. There were sighs of both resignation and acceptance. There were tears. There was even laughter. It was almost as if they’d all been prepared for this moment. Like it was only inevitable that I was going to do something reckless. But yeah, I guess that was my MO. With a laugh, I finally turned to Yuuhi.

“Then let’s be on our way now.”

“Wait.”

Someone else called out to me. To my surprise, this time it was R.

“What, R? Are you going to try and stop me too?”

“As if. I wouldn’t do something so pointless,” she said with a shake of her

head. "I'm going with you."

"What?! But Yuuhi said only the two of us can cross over to Sith's world."

"Yuuhi," R said, turning to question her. "Earlier, you stated that only people with power like yours could cross the barrier. But what about people who aren't people at all? And by that, I mean have no physical body."

"No physical body?"

"That's right."

"...!"

The lightbulb came on for me when I heard those words. The same went for L and the doctor.

"R, don't tell me..." L said skeptically.

"Do you intend on returning to your demi-material state in order to follow Rekka?" asked the doctor.

"That's right," R answered, confirming both of their suspicions. "In my demi-material form, my existence almost overlaps with Rekka's. I am restricted to a certain radius around him and I am only perceptible by him. In such a state, I should be able to circumvent this barrier and the power needed to bypass it, no?"

"While there's a possibility, I cannot guarantee it will work," Yuuhi replied cautiously.

That was enough to satisfy R.

"If it's possible, then let's give it a try. With me tagging along, the doctor and the other heroines won't have to worry so much."

"R, if this fails..." the doctor said nervously.

But R was determined.

"Doctor, even if you attempt to stop me, this is something I must do," she said flatly. "This is my story as well. I have a duty to follow it to its conclusion."

"Even so... Fine. I suppose there really is no stopping you."

The doctor was ready to argue at first, but relented. She could tell there was no way R would bend on this.

“All right, Yuuhi. If you were the one who reprogrammed R to be material, that must mean you have the facilities to work on her.”

“I do.”

“Then lead the way and lend me a hand in returning her to normal. I need you to tell me exactly how else you modified R, too.”

“I don’t mind.”

“Good. Okay, R. Let’s go.”

“Very well.”

And so the three of them walked off together.



Roughly two hours later, R was back in her demi-material form thanks to the help of the doctor and Yuuhi. But unlike before, neither the doctor nor L nor Yuuhi could see her. She really was only perceptible to me now. That was an attempt to make her as close as possible to me, which was an attempt to increase the odds of her being able to pass through the world barrier with me. If we screwed that up... Well, no one wanted to think about that. Let’s just say the higher the chances of success, the better.

“All right. Time to go.”

Yuuhi pressed the same secret button in her jacket, tearing open the rift between worlds. I tried asking what the rift really was, but...

“Do you remember the world-box metaphor I used earlier? The world-boxes aren’t necessarily right beside one another. This rift, then, is simply the empty space between the boxes where nothing exists.”

Her answer was both very simple and very mind-boggling.

“Okay, everyone. I’ll be seeing you.”

“Come back soon, Rekka!”

“Farewell, Sir Rekka!”

When I waved goodbye, several of the girls called out to me and waved vigorously back. Seeing them like this, I knew... I knew that I had to return home safely.

“...”

Meanwhile, R was watching L from beside me. L was quietly staring back, though she couldn't see R anymore. Even if R said something to her now, her words would never reach L's ears.

“R...”

“No, it's not a problem. Besides, we'll be back. There's no need to go triggering death flags excessively,” R said coolly as she pulled down her hat.

But just as we set foot into the rift...

“.....back, you stupid little sister!” L shouted after us.



Though she hadn't been able to see R, she still called out to her loud and clear. Whether she said "make sure you come back" or "never come back" was unclear, but it didn't much matter.

"I'll be back soon, Sis," R said as she turned around and gave L a small wave.

And with that, we were well on our way to Sith's world.

Chapter 8: The Divine Trial

Traveling to a parallel world was a little different than my other world-crossing adventures. The feeling of moving through space-time was similar: my vision failed me, but my mind was sharp and clear. Incongruously, however, I still retained a sense of my body. And it felt like I was submerged in mud. I could only move my limbs slowly, unable to control them the way I wanted to. It was even hard to breathe. According to Yuuhi's explanation, this was the empty space between worlds... The void of the rift.

Feeling such resistance when there isn't anything here is a little uncanny, I gotta admit...

One simply drifted in outer space because it was a vacuum that provided absolutely no resistance. This felt like the opposite—a thick, boggy nothingness. I mean, it wasn't like I'd gone out in space without a suit before, but still...

All I could feel for certain right now was the oppressive sensation of not being able to move the way I wanted to, and Yuuhi's hand holding mine.

“...”

While it was calloused here and there, her feminine hand was much smaller and softer than mine.

“We'll be arriving soon. It's a hard landing on the other side of the barrier, so be ready.”

“R-Right!”

Surprised by Yuuhi's voice, I could only reply in a fluster. Despite her warning, however, I couldn't see the barrier. Or anything else, for that matter. Just as I was wondering how this was all going to go down...

“?!”

My vision suddenly went (even though I hadn't been able to see anything in the first place), and I felt like I'd been sucked into a violent whirlpool. It was like my body was being pulled every which way. My sense of direction was instantly gone, giving me serious vertigo. I felt like I was being pummeled all over with

sandbags, the dull pain crescendoing until it was too much to bear. And then, just as quickly as it had set in, the chaos was gone. Gravity was restored, and I could see again.

“!”

And the first thing I saw was the ground. It was right in front of me—literally.

“Bwuh?!”

Of course, I smashed face-first into it.

“Oww...”

My poor nose... Tears welling in my eyes, I lifted my head to take a look around. A barren wilderness spread out around us. So this is what the parallel world looked like...

“You all right?” Yuuhi, who’d landed gracefully, asked.

“Y-Yeah. I’m fine. No nosebleed or anything.”

“You really aren’t very athletic, huh?”

“Leave me alone.”

“It’s a stark contrast to your future self.”

“Everyone’s said that.”

My future self must be pretty incredible. A vampire-demon cyborg or something... He was definitely superhuman.

“Wait, have you fought my future self before?”

“It was only a surprise attack.”

Yuuhi had the ability to negate all supernatural powers. She also had the know-how to operate the doctor’s time translocator perfectly.

“Though I have to admit my ambush only worked because he didn’t know about my breaker ability. I shoved him into the rift the first chance I had. I doubt things would go so smoothly a second time.”

“Hmm...”

It was almost like she wasn’t talking about me... I mean, she wasn’t. She was

talking about my future self, but hearing her say all this made me feel the divide between us all the more.

“Well, what do we do now?”

“We head for the divine trial.”

“And where is that?”

“Hang on.”

Yuuhi pulled a compass-like object out from the inside of her jacket. But it wasn't merely a device with a needle to point us north. It displayed a confusing string of numbers overtop a simple map.

“It's about ten kilometers east of here. That's our destination.”

“Huh... And how are we going to get there?”

“How else? We walk.”

“Seriously?”

“Get moving already. We can still make it to a nearby town before sunset.”

“Roger that.”

“Walking all that way sounds exhausting, Rekka.”

“I don't want to hear that from the person who can float,” I half complained to R and stood up with a sigh.

It was then, however, that I noticed something.

“Huh?”

When I stood up and looked at the sky, I couldn't help remarking at what appeared to be a black, gaping hole in the air. It was above the cloud line, so I couldn't accurately say how big it really was. But just by eyeballing it, it looked like it was easily fifty meters across.

“Yuuhi, what's that dark spot?”

“That's a hole that opened in the world.”

“A hole in the world?”

“You remember how I told you that the unhappier world would be destroyed?”

“Yeah, that’s the price for losing the game.”

“Well, that hole is proof this world is on the verge of losing. Once that hole becomes big enough to consume the world, it’s game over.”

“...”

I looked up to the sky once more. Staring into the hole was like staring into the very maw of darkness.

Literally being able to see the end of the world coming... This is a lot like what happened to Kult.

Kult was a magical scientist from another world who I’d met while trying to save Hibiki. He wanted her powers to save his own world, which was on the verge of complete and total heat death because of a demon named Zolphiakd. This world was similarly on the brink of catastrophe; it just needed happiness instead of energy.

“...Hm?”

“What’s wrong, Yuuhi?”

“Nothing... It’s just that the black hole seems to be a little smaller than the last time I was here.”

“Huh?”

“I’ve been gone a while, so maybe I’m just imagining things,” Yuuhi said, sounding a bit puzzled.

As for me, I laughed a little.

“Hey, that’s great news! If it’s getting smaller, isn’t that what we want?”

“...I suppose.”

“This is a good start. Let’s keep the momentum going and get into town, shall we?”

“Yeah.”

And so we set off on the next leg of our journey.



Somehow, we managed to make it to the town near the divine trial and find an inn before dark.

“M-My legs are killing me...” I groaned from where I lay face-down on the bed.

Yuuhi wanted to set out for the trial first thing tomorrow morning... But could I even pass the trial in this condition?

“You should really work on building your stamina, Rekka.”

“I tell myself that every time, honestly,” I admitted as I started rubbing my calves and doing some light stretches. “But man... Yuuhi walked all that way too, and she didn’t even bat an eye. I guess I really am out of shape...”

“Well, I’m sure Yuuhi’s done her share of training. You, however, are a lost cause,” harped R.

“How many times have we had this conversation?” I asked.

“Dunno,” she said with a shrug.

“Depending on how things go, this might be the last time...”

“We’ll see.”

There was the question of whether or not I would pass the trial in the first place, but even if I did and managed to meet with the goddess of this world... No matter how it went, things would probably come to an end one way or another soon. And that included the War of All. Once that was resolved, R’s mission would be over, and there would be no more reason for her to follow me around. My longest-running story yet would finally be over.

Thinking about it that way is a little sad...

I got lost in my thoughts for a moment. But unable to stand the silence, I opened my mouth.

“What will you do once your mission is over, R?”

“Well... I’ve never considered that before.”

“Will you go patch things up with L first?”

“That will be my highest priority, yes.”

“What about afterwards?”

“Like I said, I haven’t thought about it.”

“There must be something you want to do.”

“You realize you’re talking to a workaholic, don’t you?”

“You’re pretty lazy whenever we have time off. Always watching TV and stuff.”

“TV, huh? Yeah, actually... Spending my days lazing about in front of a television sounds pretty good.”

“So you’re going from workaholic to couch potato?”

“Well, I’ve been working since the day I was created, so I think it’s high time for a vacation.”

“But who’s gonna take care of you? The doctor?”

“Good idea. L and I will live with the doctor and have her look after our every need.”

“That sure sounds nice.”

Hearing R talk about L took me back to when they were first reunited in my room that night. L had come to assassinate me, but R protected me. So much happened after that... The summer festival when R bared her heart and shouted at L was particularly memorable. It was clear she’d always been worried about her older sister. That she’d always cared for her. If the two of them could live together with the doctor, their creator, I’d say that was a pretty happy ending.

“Ah, but I still have all those foreign soap DVDs in your room that I haven’t finished yet.”

“Can’t you just watch them in the future?”

“I don’t know if the appropriate media players still exist in the future.”

“Good point.”

“Rekka, will you still let me come visit you every now and then once everything’s all said and done?”

“Sure, I don’t mind,” I said with a nod. “But try to limit visits to when I’m at home, okay? If you suddenly appear while I’m in class, I might scream out loud.”

“I doubt something like that would do anything to jeopardize your already compromised reputation.”

“Just how much of a weirdo do people think I am?!”

“Oh? Do you really want to know?”

“No. Never mind. I didn’t ask that,” I protested, sticking my fingers in my ears.

And so my trivial conversation with R continued into the night. When I thought about how it might be our last chance to chat like this, I didn’t want it to end. Looking back on it now, everything began when R first appeared out of the blue during my high school entrance ceremony... We’d been talking ever since.

But as we continued to tonight, the door to the room eventually swung open. It was Yuuhi.

“What’s up, Yuu—WHA?!” I stammered, falling right off the bed in a fluster.

“What’s with all the racket?” she asked, unperturbed.

But I didn’t get it! How could she be so calm like this?! She... She was...

“Why aren’t you wearing any clothes?!”

“What are you talking about? I’m wearing underwear.”

“That’s not enough! And what’s with the towel?! Did you just get out of the bath or something?!”

“Yeah, there’s a communal shower here. It’s just down the hall.”

“You walked down the hall like that?!”

“And?” she replied unflinchingly.

She made no attempt whatsoever to cover herself. Everything important was

just barely covered by her towel, but her toned figure was freely on display.

“Did you leave your sense of shame in the shower, then?”

“I don’t have time for things like shame.”

There, Yuuhi walked inside and shut the door behind her without any hint of blush on her face. She walked over to the bag of things we’d picked up before settling at the inn and pulled out a shirt.

“Please put something on downstairs too...”

“My jacket and pants are in the wash.”

Despite my protests, Yuuhi sat down on her bed in only a shirt and underwear.

“Why don’t you go shower too, Rekka?”

“I will. Later.”

I honestly wanted to get out of the room as soon as possible right now, but there was something I needed to do first. This was my chance to get some answers.

“For now, let me ask you something, Yuuhi.”

“What?”

“Why did this world’s happiness start to decrease in the first place?”

Really, that was the biggest question.

“Well, several thousand years passed after the goddesses began their little game, and not much happened. The happiness levels of each world remained constant. I mean, there were some fluctuations along the way, certainly. But there was never any sort of mass event that sent one world leaning one way or the other.”

That made sense. The game would’ve been settled long ago otherwise. It was only because the worlds were neck-and-neck in happiness levels that the game continued to this day. But something had to have happened eventually to put Yuuhi’s world at such a disadvantage after all that time. We needed to figure out what it was.

“I mean, I guess the margin could have just widened slowly over thousands and thousands of years and this is the result, but... Can you think of anything, Yuuhi? Anything that might have caused this?”

“Well...” Yuuhi paused there for a moment before asking me, “What do you think the Namidare bloodline really is, Rekka?”

“What? Why bring that up now?”

I didn’t get it, but Yuuhi glossed right over my questions.

“We Namidares are a sort of system.”

I couldn’t help cocking my head to the side at those words.

“Wait, a system? What do you mean?”

“You compared the goddesses’ worlds to a sandbox game where we’re the characters, remember?”

“Huh? Oh, yeah. That’s just what it seemed like to me.”

“Well, that analogy was surprisingly on the mark,” Yuuhi said, looking up at the ceiling. “The system I mentioned just now... Rekka, you know how characters require a role in order to proceed in a sandbox game?”

So far, I was following along. In, let’s say, a village-building sim, you’d have to assign your characters roles or jobs. You’d need a village chief, villagers, workers, *etc.* That was how you built up your village and made progress in the game.

“As for the role of us Namidares... We’re like the jokers of this world.”

“The jokers?”

The analogy took a sudden turn from video games to playing cards, but I got the gist of what she meant. The joker in most games was a card with different rules from the others, often meant to be used as a secret weapon or to shake things up.

“You mean to say we Namidares are wild cards?”

“Yeah,” Yuuhi nodded. “When the goddesses... When Sith and Maine started this game, they made an agreement.”

“An agreement?”

“About the fairness of the game.”

“What about it?”

“Did you not find it strange how similar this world is to yours? Surely you now see why they’re called mirror worlds.”

“Well, now that you mention it... Yeah.”

The people here all looked Japanese. The language they spoke sounded like Japanese too. I’d been able to understand folks walking around town earlier, and more impressively, I was mostly able to read the signs and things in shops. Then there was Yuuhi. Just looking at her... Yeah, everything here felt an awful lot like it did back home. It was easy enough to forget we were actually in another world right now.

“The two worlds really are surprisingly similar for being... well, for being different worlds. You’re suggesting there’s a reason for that, Yuuhi?”

“It’s in the interest of fairness.”

“Meaning?”

“How should I explain it? Let’s see... Do you think a human and a grasshopper feel the same amount of happiness?”

“What the heck?”

“It’s just an example. Now, you’d be happy to see a naked woman, wouldn’t you?”

“N-No!”

“He’s lying.”

“Shut up, R!”

Yuuhi couldn’t hear R, but I still felt the need to defend myself.

“Well,” Yuuhi continued. “Most men would. But do you think a grasshopper would experience the same happiness upon seeing a naked woman?”

“I, uh... kinda doubt it.”

“Exactly.”

“Huh? What’s your point?”

“In short, creatures that are vastly different experience happiness in different ways and on different scales,” Yuuhi explained as she drew a grasshopper in the air with her finger. “This becomes somewhat inconvenient in a competition over happiness levels.”

“Inconvenient? How so?”

“The more intelligent a creature is, the more complex its own personal happiness scale is. Compared to a human, it would be a simple matter to create the happiest possible world for a grasshopper. So in order to win the goddesses’ wager, it would be all too easy to cheat. By forcibly putting a stop to the evolution of intelligent life or delaying the development of civilization, for example.”

“Ah, I see.”

While I couldn’t testify to the happiness of grasshoppers versus humans, it was clear enough even to me that trying to compare the two was indeed inconvenient. And since this contest was all about comparing happiness levels, it would be something of an issue to leave that unaddressed. Moreover, if that created a loophole wherein either goddess could win by stopping the growth of their world, it would defeat the whole point of a game centered around building worlds.

“That’s why Sith and Maine discussed it and decided to limit the scope of their wager to the happiness of humanoids.”

“Humanoids?”

“Living beings that resemble humans, basically. That means it includes humans like us, as well as mermaids like Rain, demons like Corona, and so on.”

“Hmm, I see.”

“And so Sith and Maine began their game with that in mind... but another problem cropped up.”

“What?”

“Perhaps it’s because they’re sisters, but Sith and Maine would copy the good parts of each other’s worlds.”

“...What?”

I dumbfoundedly cocked my head to the side in absolute puzzlement, but it was really quite simple. The sisters were playing a game of copycat. For example, when Sith’s world began to develop after her people discovered fire, Maine stole the idea and encouraged her people to do the same to promote a similar development. And when Maine’s world hit the Industrial Revolution, Sith copied her. Rinse, repeat.

“Okay, so that’s how they created worlds that mirrored one another?” I asked.

“Pretty much, yeah,” Yuuhi confirmed with a nod.

If that’s the case, then what about outside?

When we’d first hit this world after exiting the rift, we fell into a barren sort of wilderness. I hadn’t exactly traveled all of Japan myself, but...

Do we really have wastelands like that back home?

I had my doubts, but I decided to hold on to that question for later and continue the current conversation instead.

“If the goddesses just keep copying each other, the game will never end, right?”

They were battling it out to see who could make the happier world, but if they made sure their worlds closely resembled each other, then there wouldn’t be much of an overall difference between them—happiness included.

That said, maybe it’s better if the game never ends...

“We can only assume they eventually came to recognize that glaring flaw,” R sighed in exasperation.

Even she seemed fed up with how poorly planned this little wager was.

“To that end, the goddesses created the Namidare system,” Yuuhi explained, finally getting back to her point.

We Namidares were the wild cards of the game, and she seemed to know why.

“The copycatting I mentioned earlier... That actually has consequences.”

“Like what?”

“Forcibly altering a world causes distortions, scattering fate in uncertain ways.”

“In layman’s terms, please. Another example would be good.”

“Okay... Let’s say the world is a perfectly serene lake. If you throw a stone in it, you’re going to cause ripples. Those ripples bump into things and bounce back, some bigger and some smaller, affecting the surface of the water in different ways.”

“Uh...”

I understood ripples and all that, but I didn’t totally see the connection. Meaning it was time for me to turn to my trusty companion.

“R, do you understand what she’s talking about?”

“In short, when highly influential events like the discovery of fire or the Industrial Revolution are forced to happen, they have other unintended effects. And based on the way Yuuhi’s talking about them, they aren’t good.”

“Okay, Yuuhi... So you’re saying that if the goddesses interfere too much, bad stuff happens? Is that the short of it?”

When I rehashed R’s explanation, she looked exasperated.

“I’m glad the guardian you were sent with has a good head on her shoulders,” Yuuhi remarked.

“I can’t help being stupid.”

“To put it as bluntly as possible, the goddesses’ overreaching can damn their own worlds.”

Wow... Okay, so that’s what she meant. This really was bad.

“Direct interference causes calamity that ripples throughout the entire world. The discovery of fire on Earth, for example, could have consequences in a

totally different corner of the galaxy.”

“You mean to say another planet might pay for what happens on Earth?”

“That’s exactly what I mean. The distortion and dispersal of fate can have consequences elsewhere on the timeline too. It might be the past or future that pays for it,” Yuuhi explained.

“Wh-What...? Why...?”

“Just so you know, Rekka, this is universally true. It may have been meddling on another planet, for example, that wiped the dinosaurs off the face of planet Earth.”

“She’s right, you know? That’s not what you should get hung up on right now.”

“I know...”

With both Yuuhi and R admonishing me, I was forced to come a reluctant acceptance. Yuuhi then continued to explain things for me.

“Because Sith and Maine repeatedly copied each other, they caused countless problems in their worlds. Solving said problems with more interference only beget a multitude of other problems, creating a vicious cycle.”

“So what did they do?”

“That’s where the Namidare system comes in,” Yuuhi said, flopping backward on her bed and staring up at the ceiling. “It’s sort of like how Doctor Laputa made you change the past yourself. If a deity interferes from the outside, it causes problems. So the answer is just to change things from the inside.”

“What?”

“The divine ability to alter the world and change fate... That is the true nature of the Namidare power.”

“What?!” Yuuhi’s words left me reeling. “Y-You’re saying we have the power of gods?!”

“A small fraction of it, but essentially, yes,” Yuuhi said, sitting up once again.

When she did, I realized something. She’d been refusing to make eye contact

with me for a while now. But more importantly... she looked angry. Her eyes with filled with rage that seemed to be directed at me.

“Though I called it the Namidare power, it isn’t really limited to us Namidares. There are other people blessed with similar divine powers.”

“RReally?”

Thinking about it, I did know people like Hibiki back in my world. That had to be what she meant.

“You could say we’re a way to clean up the goddesses’ mess. We’re drawn to calamities that occur from distortions in fate—stories en route to bad endings—and we act as special characters to help fix them.”

“Wow...”

This time, I was the one flopping over on the bed. To finally learn the truth about my bloodline... The shock of it all made me a bit dizzy.

“Rekka, this isn’t the time to flake out,” scolded R.

“What do you want from me?”

“She still hasn’t answered your initial question, you know. About what tipped the happiness scales between the worlds. About why this one is doomed now.”

“Ah, that’s right.”

Everything Yuuhi had said so far had thrown me for enough of a loop that I’d gotten completely sidetracked. Remembering my original question, however, I sat straight up and looked right at Yuuhi.

“So how did your world end up like this? Does it have something to do with the Namidare power?”

“Surely you’ve figured it out by now, but this game lives and dies by the Namidare power.”

“Umm...”

“She means that you have the power to undo the damage the goddesses wreak and thusly turn negatives into positives. And in a game where victory is determined by happiness, you could say that’s a huge plus. Get it?”

“I see...”

This time, R explained things for me before I even had to ask. Yuuhi seemed to expect as much, so she moved on without so much as slowing down.

“Unfortunately, however, that brings us to a different problem.”

“What? Another one?”

“Yes. As it turned out, we Namidares were doing too much.”

“Too much?”

I could understand how us not doing enough might be a problem, but how could we possibly do too much?

“The Namidares of both Sith’s world and Maine’s were too good at undoing the calamities of fate brought on by the goddesses’ meddling, putting the two worlds back into a deadlock, albeit a happier one.”

“Oh, that makes sense.”

So it was a problem for the goddesses. Not my biggest concern right now.

“So? If the game ended up back at a stalemate, what caused the decline in happiness in this world?”

“Eventually, you see, the sister goddesses grew impatient with their little game and made a bet.”

“A bet?”

“That’s right.”

“Another one? What was it for this time?”

“That should be obvious,” Yuuhi stated a little curtly. “They staked the reason for the game’s stalemate: the Namidare power.”

“What?!”

Just how many surprises were there in this story? I was used to twists and turns, but this was taking it to a new level.

“I can’t believe it... I guess that’s just how badly they wanted to end the game, huh?”

“It’s torture for those of us who are mere cogs in the grand scheme of things...” Yuuhi lamented with a sigh.

“Okay,” I said. “If this is going where I think it is, then that bet...”

“Sith lost.”

“I was afraid of that.”

“Of course, Maine didn’t take everything, but Sith’s world had to surrender nine tenths of its Namidare power.”

As a result, Sith’s world lost the ability to resolve most of the calamities inadvertently caused by divine intervention—past, present, and future. But if Sith stopped intervening in her world after losing its Namidare power, then who was there to calm the ripples? The effects of past interventions were still being felt, and they would only add up to more calamity. The end result of that was the black hole in the sky outside—the black hole that signaled the endgame. When it got big enough, it would swallow up this world.

“You saw all the wasteland on the way into town, right?” Yuuhi suddenly asked me in a murmur.

“Yeah, I did.”

I’d wondered about it earlier, in fact. I didn’t really think there was anything like that in Japan.

“That’s a side effect of the happiness level decaying in this world.”

“What?!”

I’d lost how count of how many surprises that made...

“I’ve been saying ‘happiness levels’ and such to make it easier to understand, but in reality, we’re talking about an energy that moves the world along its proper path. In a positive direction, you could say. Losing that energy means losing momentum, and the world stagnates or takes a negative turn.”

“So that’s how you ended up living in a wasteland?”

“That’s right. The lack of positive energy has had effects all over the world. Really, things here in Japan aren’t so bad. There are some countries that are

completely uninhabitable now.”

“...”

Based on what I was hearing, the situation was a lot more dire than I had imagined. Countries where no one could live? Just how much of the planet was barren rock and sand now? And we were just talking about mirror Earth here. What was the damage on the scale of the solar system, or even the universe? I had to wonder how far the destruction went. But as my thoughts turned dark, R tugged on my sleeve.

“I have several questions I’d like to ask. Will you relay them for me, Rekka?”

“Oh, sure,” I agreed. “Yuuhi, R says she has some questions for you. Is that okay?”

“What are they?” Yuuhi asked, seemingly receptive.

“Earlier, you said this world lost most of its Namidare power, but you still possess yours, don’t you?” I asked, repeating R’s question for her.

“What I possess is basically the gathered scraps of the power left in this world. It’s just barely enough for me to call myself a Namidare.”

“I see. Next, what did Maine do with the Namidare power she acquired from Sith?”

Once again, I parroted R’s question for Yuuhi.

“You can pretty much guess, can’t you?” she replied.

Nope. I was totally in the dark. R, however...

“So that’s what it is,” she said with a knowing nod.

Both girls then looked at me.

“H-Hey, I don’t know what’s going on...”

“No one’s looking to you for an answer,” R scoffed.

“Then what is it?”

“This means,” R said casually, “that you possess the Namidare power from Sith’s world.”

“Excuse me?”

“Maine took the Namidare power from Sith’s world and stuffed it into her own. That means, presumably, that it all ended up with the current Namidare. In other words... You.”

“...”

This time, I didn’t even have words. I was left completely speechless. But when I thought about it... I did remember my dad saying something about how I’d gotten caught up in stories at an abnormally high rate. The doctor had also mentioned that I was “a remarkable case” or some such.

“So I’ve gotten caught up in stories so rapidly because of that? Because of the extra Namidare power I have?” I muttered.

“That’s right,” Yuuhi said with a nod and a somewhat pained expression.

No wonder Yuuhi was upset talking about this.

The Namidare power had been stolen from this world, sending it spiraling toward its doom... If I had that stolen power, I could understand why Yuuhi was mad.

“I see. I understand now. But there’s another possibility,” said R.

“And what’s that?” I asked.

“Touko Iwazu,” she replied flatly. “The power of words she possesses is extremely similar to the fate-altering power Yuuhi mentioned. Really, it’s far more direct than the Namidare version. It’s possible she’s the inheritor of the excess Namidare power from Sith’s world.”

“Yeah, I guess she could be.”

Touko’s power was incredible. She could change the world with mere words. Surely she had the power to correct calamity too, but I looked to Yuuhi for confirmation.

“No, Touko Iwazu’s power is simply a glitch.”

“A glitch?”

“You could say it was an unintended result of messing around in the sandbox

game... Kind of like the alchemist's homunculus."

Apparently, the perfect homunculus surpassed its creator in intelligence. It was created by man, but outperformed him. Touko was similarly overpowered.

"Now, I wouldn't go as far as to say she surpasses the goddesses, but her power is extremely close to reaching divine levels. That's why I hoped..."

"Hoped what?"

"I hoped that perhaps I could use her power to take back my world's Namidare power from you."

"Is that why she's the only one of the everyday heroines you kidnapped?"

"I kidnapped her in order to copy her power with the Doppel Stone. The attack on your hometown was just a front, really," Yuuhi sighed. "But her disappearance is what alerted your guardian to my interference."

"..."

That got me thinking.

"Say, Yuuhi..."

"What?"

"You came to the past in order to abduct the heroines, right?"

"Of course. I couldn't leave that job to anyone else."

"Then is there any chance you intended on retrieving L and taking her back to the future with you too?"

"I"

R looked between me and Yuuhi with a gasp.

"L had a weird conversation with one of the robot pilots that didn't make sense to me. L didn't know about the attack, and the pilot was confused that she was helping me out. That's been bugging me this whole time."

When she and I first had our standoff in the basement of the extremists' hideout, Yuuhi said something about L betraying her and becoming a heroine. But if that was the case, then the pilot's reaction to L didn't really make sense. I

could connect the dots, however, if Yuuhi had meant to collect L as part of her plan.

“Well?”

“Yeah... You’re right,” Yuuhi admitted reluctantly, awkwardly looking away. “I was the only one aware that L had become a heroine. And because I knew that, I knew there was a possibility she’d sell us out if she was informed of the attack ahead of time. That’s why I was going to nab her and bring her back to the future by force, but...”

“But?”

“Your guardian was onto me the moment Touko disappeared, so I couldn’t touch any of the other everyday heroines. L somehow ended up in that category, and thusly eluded my grasp.”

“I see... So that’s how it happened,” R murmured with a smug nod.

Apparently the measures R had taken to protect the everyday heroines was what had resulted in L being functionally abandoned by the extremists. The only thing I could say to that was...

“Yuuhi, when this is all over, I need you to explain that to L. It’d be a sad story if you didn’t.”

“Yeah...” she said with a small nod.

There, our long conversation drew to a quiet end.

“I guess I’ll go take that shower now.”

I’d gotten pretty much all of the answers I needed for now. All that was left was to prepare for the divine trial in the morning.



The next day, Yuuhi and I checked out of the inn first thing in the morning. We were finally ready to set out for the divine trial. My hands were already shaking a little from nerves.

“Rekka.”

“Yeah, let’s go.”

But just as we were about to leave the inn...

“Hey, wait up a second,” the clerk called out.

“Huh? What is it?”

“I have something for you.”

“For me?”

What could it be? I couldn’t think of anything I’d left behind.

“Here,” the clerk said, handing me an envelope. “A guy who stayed here previously asked me to give this to anyone who looked a lot like him if they stopped here.”

With that, the clerk returned to the front desk.

“Someone who looked like me...?”

I exchanged a knowing glance with R and then Yuuhi before opening the envelope. In it was a letter.

Whether the person reading this is the girl who sent me to this world or a different version of myself, I’m writing this to inform you of my current situation. I believe you’ll make it here eventually.

That was how the letter began. It never specified who the “me” who actually wrote the letter was, but we had a pretty good idea.

“My future self came to the trial too, huh?”

“...”

“Then maybe...”

“No, your future self wouldn’t be able to take the trial.”

“Really?”

“Originally, the purpose of the divine trial was to bestow power upon those who overcame it.”

“Power?”

“Yeah. Those who successfully rise to the challenge of the divine trial are bestowed with a power of their choosing... Not that Sith would grant any

powers clearly requested with ill intent, mind you.”

“Hmm... So why can’t my future self take the trial?”

“Because your future self is already too powerful. I can’t disclose the nature of the trial here, but... simply put, if you’re too strong, then there is no trial.”

“I see.”

I nodded in acknowledgment and continued reading.

It seems I am not qualified to take the divine trial, so I will do what I can alone. A gloom weighs heavily on this world, and I aim to lighten that burden.

“A gloom? Wait, is he talking about the calamities caused by divine intervention?”

“Must be,” R confirmed.

There, I looked up at the sky. The ominous black hole was still lingering over us, but...

“Come to think of it, Yuuhi, when we first got here, didn’t you say the black hole looked a little smaller than you remembered?”

“I did, now that you mention it.”

“Could that be because my future self has been resolving stories here?”

“It could be.”

Just doing what he can, huh? Wow, my future self sure was a real bro.

“Being so proactive even after being thrown into a different world... My future self is pretty amazing.”

“I believe that could also be said of you as you are now, but nevertheless, being able to do the same or better alone is indeed impressive.”

While I hadn’t met future Rekka personally yet, I was already getting the feeling we were wildly different. But if Sith’s world was in a slightly better place just for having him around, then I was glad he was here.

“...”

If my future self had tried to take the trial, he and I had probably had the

same idea. If only he'd been able to meet with the goddess... No, there was no point in dwelling on that. My future self was already doing what he could, and I had to do the same.

"Okay, then... Shall we set off for real this time?"

"Let's go."

And so we at last departed the inn for the divine trial.



The trial was, apparently, located at the top of an absurdly long staircase.

"Hahh... Hahh..."

"What's wrong, Rekka? You're out of breath."

"Of course I'm... out of breath... after hundreds... and hundreds... of steps..."

"Really? I don't think it's been all that many."

I was very sure that most people would give up on the divine trial here on these stairs. I, for one, know I would've turned back if I hadn't had a reason to press forward.

"Hahh... Hahh..."

But eventually, after an hour or so of climbing, we reached the top.

"Hahh... Hahh..."

"Good work, Rekka."

"This... This wasn't designed to use up all of your stamina before the trial, right?"

Because I was just about at my limit...

"Don't worry. The trial is held in the spiritual realm. It won't actually test you physically."

"RReally?"

"That said, your form in the spiritual realm is based on your body in this realm. It's not like you'll magically be stronger there or anything."

“Ah, okay.”

As I nodded, I looked up past the top of the stairs. At the apex of everything was a ridiculously large gate. While the staircase we’d just ascended was clearly constructed with no regard for the laws of physics—being a floating staircase and all—there was something clearly abnormal about the gate. It was so tall that the top of it was obscured by clouds. I couldn’t even tell how something that big even fit on top of the stairs. It was a rather surreal piece of architecture in that sense, but at the same time, it made it very easy to believe that we’d reached an otherworldly place.

“Well, you’re on your own from here.”

“What about you?”

“I told you earlier. Those who are already too strong cannot take the trial. So I won’t be able to accompany you on yours, but I’ll go ahead and wait for you at the end where you’ll find Sith.”

“Hey, if you already know how to get to her, you should just take me with you.”

“No can do. In order to reach the realm of the gods, you must rise through the spiritual realm. That’s what the trial is designed to encourage.”

“Okay, okay. So no cheating allowed. Got it.”

I’d figured as much, but I still had to ask. I was a little bitter after hiking up all those stairs, so I felt like I deserved a shortcut right about now. If cheating was allowed, though, it probably would’ve been the first thing Yuuhi suggested.

“All right. Time to go try this trial thing.”

“Be careful.”

“I will... Wait, how do I open the gate?”

“Just imagine it opening. The gate will respond to those who are qualified.”

“Gotcha.”

The goddess’s automatic door, I see. I approached the gate as instructed, chanting “open sesame” in my head. And, sure enough, the doors swung open

with a low rumbling sound.

“Guess I’ll see you later,” I said, turning back to Yuuhi.

“I’ll be waiting on the other side. Make sure you get there.”

“Sure thing.”

I waved to her one last time before stepping through the gate.

“Everything around us is gradually getting brighter.”

“How far can you come along with me anyway, R?”

“I was reprogrammed to overlap your axis of existence as closely as possible in order to fool the world barrier, so I suspect I may be able to follow you through the trial as well.”

“Huh...”

“The price was that my entire physical being had to be reduced. As such, I no longer have a single piece of useful equipment installed. And as I am now, I won’t be able to prevent your assassination.”

“I don’t think you need to worry about that anymore.”

Yuuhi was no longer an enemy. And besides...

“This’ll all be over soon.”

“Right,” R said with a shrug rather than a nod.

I too gave a quick shrug before proceeding. As R had said, our surroundings were filling with a bright, white light that gradually made it harder and harder to see.

“I can’t tell what’s in front of me at all.”

“Do you want to hold hands? I can do that much for you.”

“There’s no point if you can’t see anything either.”

“Oh? Passing up the opportunity to hold hands with a girl, are we? How very wasteful of you, Rekka.”

“You joke like that so often that I’m starting to get desensitized, you know?”

“That takes all the fun out of teasing you.”

“Whatever. Considering your age, you’re out of the question anyway.”

“Then how old would a girl have to be for you to consider her a potential romantic target?”

“Well... My age, I guess.”

“I see you haven’t really given this much thought.”

“Shut up.”

“But if you think about it, Lea is tens of thousands of years old. Rosalind and Suzuran are over a century old too, so it doesn’t seem like age is really much of an object for you.”

“Then don’t ask me stupid questions like that in the first place.”

“Let’s decide your type instead. Go ahead and fess up already. Which do you prefer: well-endowed girls or flat-chested ones?”

“Nope.”

“Don’t be like that.”

“Not happening.”

“If you’d like, I can ask the doctor to upgrade my bust to a size of your liking once we return. How about it?”

“Give it a rest.”

“Hmph, how stubborn. What about personality, then?”

“Personality? Well, for starters, I don’t care for anyone who takes pleasure in tormenting people.”

“Oh? Is there someone like that among the heroines? Ah, I guess you must mean Sherlyn.”

“I’m talking about you, R.”

“No way.”

“Yes way.”

While I was bantering back and forth with R, I'd gone from practically being able to see nothing to literally being able to see nothing. Everything was bright white now, even when I closed my eyes. Was it just that strong a light? It was so blinding that I raised an arm in vain to try and shield my eyes, but the light suddenly vanished. The air suddenly felt colder, too.

"Huh...?"

I fearfully opened my tightly-shut eyes, and before me was...

"Is this... the spiritual realm? It looks like a castle."

"It sure does."

R and I took a look around, and like we'd both noted, it really did seem like we were inside a castle. A hall with stone walls and floors. Ornate pillars and other decorations. A long, plush runner. I was fairly familiar with this fantastical setting by now.

"What's going on? It's so dark in here..."

Wait. Come to think of it, I'd specifically been to a dark castle like this before. One where the only light was from the torches on the walls. A castle so creepy that it had to have been made that way on purpose. It was just like— "Who goes there?"

"?!"

I couldn't help flinching when I heard that low voice from the darkness. It practically rumbled the whole castle... Whatever it was, it sounded like it must be pretty big. And, actually, it sounded familiar.

"Rekka!" R suddenly shouted, pointing down the hall.

"Don't tell me the human hero dares to set foot in my castle a second time."

"That's..."

When I looked in the direction R was pointing, I saw...

"The Demon Overlord?!"

Yup, there was no mistaking it. That was the Demon Overlord who was trying to destroy the kingdom of Aburaamu in Harissa's story.

I thought I defeated him! Why is he here?!

I wanted the details, but it wasn't like he was about to sit down and explain them to me.

"Curse you... I'll destroy you for certain this time!"

"Waaah! No! You've got the wrong guy!"

An obvious lie, but still! I didn't have the Hero's Sword or a laser gun or anything else on hand right now! I couldn't play the part of a hero even if I wanted to! But the dragon wasn't about to have pity on me...

"Ugh!"

I took off in a sprint, fleeing as fast as possible. We were in some kind of hallway, but there were no doors on either side. It just connected to the next hallway, one after another like they went on forever.

"Wh-Wh-Why is the Demon Overlord here?!"

"Who knows? Maybe this is your trial."

"I can't slay a dragon barehanded!"

"You saved all those stories, but beating up a dragon is out of the question, huh?"

"I couldn't even beat up a goblin!"

"Too bad, I guess," R muttered.

Urgh! This was no time for gallows humor!

"Hold it right there!"

"No thank you!"

I ran straight down the hall in a panic, chased by the Overlord and his angry roar. When I glanced over my shoulder, I could see him stomping along on all fours with terrifying speed.

"He's fast for a dragon!"

"Well, his stride is much larger than yours."

"How can you be so calm right now?!"

I was running with all my might, but I was still so slow. Like Yuuhi had warned me, I hadn't suddenly gotten stronger just because I was in the spiritual realm.

"Oh, looks like Mr. Dragon here's about to breathe fire."

"WHAT?!"

R's warning made me pick up the pace a little.

"Raargh!"

When I saw the next upcoming turn in the hall, I threw myself around the corner in desperation. Not a second later, a blast of flame roared down the corridor where I'd just been running.

Oh my god... I was nearly a human barbeque...

Happy to still be alive, I heaved a sigh of relief. It was premature.

"Rekka, watch out!"

"Huh? Uwah!"

I dove to avoid the bolt of lightning that was sailing towards me out of nowhere, rolling along the stone tiles several times before coming to a stop. Wait, lightning? If memory served, the Demon Overlord didn't have any lightning powers... So what was that attack just now? I raised my head and looked in the direction the bolt had come from.

To my surprise, a large, wide-open field spread out before me. The stone hallway of the castle ended abruptly, opening to the outdoors. When I'd come to the Demon Overlord's castle with Harissa originally, we'd warped straight into the Overlord's room. I wasn't exactly familiar with the layout of the rest of the castle, but this design was just too nonsensical. And, if I wasn't mistaken...

"This field looks familiar."

"It sure does."

I was hoping it was just a trick of the light, but there was no fooling myself about that bolt of lightning just now. It was definitely an electric magical attack, and this field was...

"So you finally deigned to make an appearance, boy."

“Oh no...”

A chill running up my spine, I turned to see who it was... And there he stood. The villain of Satsuki’s story, the ultimate mage, Messiah Kyandistrapps.

“Now let us settle our duel over the girl with the Omniscient Magic,” Messiah scoffed, his theatrical cape fluttering in the wind along with his blond hair.

Ah, damn it... Even his laugh was the same. This was definitely Messiah.

“Groooh! Heeeeero!”

Lucky me. That was when the Demon Overlord caught up to us. For some reason, however, Messiah didn’t seem to think anything of a dragon arriving on the scene.

“Come at me, boy!” he shouted, trying to start the duel as though nothing was out of the ordinary.

A mage at my twelve and a dragon on my six? Wait, don’t tell me I’m supposed to take them both on at the same time! Or are King Satamonía’s meteor, Behemoth, and Zolphiakd all going to show up too?!

“It seems this is what you might refer to as the boss rush right before the final boss.”

“These guys are plenty of endgame content on their own!”

I knew R was right, but I wasn’t happy about it. I didn’t even have any heroines here to help me out.

“What am I supposed to do?!”





Back in Maine's world at the extremists' hideout...

After Rekka departed for Sith's world, the girls who remained behind began cleaning up the current situation, which involved dealing with the Greater Galactic Federation fleet still surrounding the extremist base. But despite all the tension, it was a peaceful encounter. Iris was leading the fleet, after all, and she knew what was really going on behind the scenes.

Hibiki—still acting as a higher-up of the extremist faction—issued a fabricated order from Yuuhi for the extremists to surrender to the Greater Galactic Federation forces. Not all of the extremists were willing to go quietly, but there was no disputing the fact that they were outnumbered and outgunned right now. It wasn't too hard for Hibiki to convince everyone that their best option was surrender. And so, after informing Iris of the extremists' cooperation, Hibiki brought Iris alone to the secret underground basement of the hideout, and the doctor got her up to speed on everything that had happened. And that was when the real trouble began...

"Why did you let that Yuuhi woman escape?!"

"We didn't let her escape. Rekka took her back to her world so they could end the goddesses' game."

"I don't care about that! She killed my father!"

"..."

The doctor was speechless before Iris's rage. There was no denying what Iris had said, and there was no denying her anger. Yuuhi was an enemy Iris would never forgive, and the doctor couldn't offer even the slightest objection to that. Neither could the other heroines.

"..."

Iris fell quiet, but her heart was still stirring. No matter how upset Iris was, Yuuhi wasn't here right now. There was no one for her to take her anger out on. But it wasn't like she could just let go of her emotions... Instead, she turned them in a different direction.

“Also... was it really okay to let Rekka go?”

“What do you mean?”

“Rekka from the past isn’t as strong as the Rekka we all know, right? Does he really have the power to solve a goddess’s problems? If Rekka from the past goes and dies in another world, what’s going to happen to *this* world?”

Neither the doctor nor the other heroines could offer Iris an immediate answer. Their belief in Rekka Namidare was absolute. But like Iris had said, the Rekka they’d sent to another world wasn’t the Rekka they all knew. He didn’t have any power to speak of; certainly none compared to future Rekka. They’d only let him go in the first place because, somehow or another, he *had* managed to stop the extremists. That gave the future heroines a reason to trust him. A reason to believe that he was really Rekka Namidare after all and that things would turn out okay. But confronted so bluntly by Iris, they all began to question themselves. Would it *really* be okay?

Future Rekka and past Rekka were different people. The doctor thought she knew that better than anyone, but had even she let her biases influence her? Perhaps she should have done a little more research before letting past Rekka go to Sith’s world... That nagging regret grew louder and louder in the back of her mind. But, suddenly, even it was drowned out by the sound of someone stomping and shouting.

“Shut up, you old hag!”



Back at the divine trial...

The place called the spiritual realm was amorphous, changing at a dizzying pace. It went from an open field to another world, another world to a modern house, a modern house to a cave, a cave to the ocean, the ocean to space... All settings I’d visited in previous stories. And each time the setting changed, a new bad guy appeared.

“Damn it!”

The villains from almost every story I’d ever saved were all here, each one hard-targeting me alone. I was pretty sure the Demon Kings should probably be

duking it out, but they'd somehow settled on a temporary ceasefire to band together against me.

"Come on! They should at least be attacking each other too!"

I'd tried provoking it several times, but it seemed there wasn't any hope of me turning them against each other. It was like the friendly fire setting had been turned off... Wait, settings?

"So the trial is just another game, huh?"

Was that putting it too simply? Whatever. If this trial was a quest, then there had to be a clear condition. (Whether or not it was reasonable was a different matter altogether.) The first step to getting out of here would be figuring out what exactly that was.

"A clear condition... I wonder what it could be..."

I was currently hiding within the crumbling temple of Atlantis. The ultimate mage, a dragon, a floating skull, and a warped monster were all prowling around outside. I needed to figure this out before things got any uglier.

"Wouldn't it normally just be to defeat the bosses?"

"I'm hoping it's something else..."

My shoulders slumped dejectedly at R's suggestion. I was afraid that honestly might be the answer.

"That'd be impossible for me!"

"..."

R quietly looked away as I clutched my head. She didn't even have to say it. I knew I'd always relied on the heroines to solve stories. In other words, I was powerless on my own. So how the hell was I supposed to overcome this boss rush?

"..."

I stared at my hands.



"Shut up, you old hag!"

The sudden outburst of outrageous shouting made everyone, the doctor included, freeze in place. Many of the future heroines had preserved their youth or extended their lifespans through various means. Because of that, well... The subject of age was considered extremely taboo among them.

“...Who was that?”

Future Iris, who had been yelling herself until mere moments ago, hissed in a terribly low voice. Her tone alone was enough to give some of the other girls chills. For someone who was usually primed to explode, it was rare to see Iris turn so icy. And that only made it all the more terrifying. But, seemingly unafraid, her accuser stepped boldly out in front of the other girls. It was none other than Iris’s younger self from the past. She and future Iris locked eyes in a mutual glare.

“Your nonstop bitching and moaning has been grating my nerves for too long now, so shut your trap already!” Iris declared in an angry huff as she crossed her arms.

“Excuse you! Why should I listen to you of all people?!” Future Iris put her hands on her hips and spoke in an even harsher tone of voice. “You don’t get it, do you? She’s the reason Daddy’s dead, you know?”

“I know. Trust me, I want to punch her too.”

“Then—”

“But you didn’t believe Rekka when he said he’d solve everything, did you? That’s the bigger problem right now!”

“It’s like I said! He’s not the Rekka I know!”

“So what?! Rekka is Rekka! He’s still the coolest boy in the world and the one who saved you all those years ago!”

“...!”

Future Iris was rendered speechless by her younger self’s outburst. And in her stupor, younger Satsuki and Harissa stepped forward.

“I know he can seem a little unreliable at times... But he’s my childhood friend, and I trust him more than anything. If he says he’ll do something, he

absolutely will. That's just the kind of person he is."

"It's true that Sir Rekka doesn't have any special powers. But what he does have is admirable courage, and that hasn't waned since the day we first met. That's why I'll always believe in him."

Hearing her friends' support, younger Iris nodded with a big smile.

"That's right. So just be patient. Until Rekka says he needs our help, we'll wait here for him... Believing in him."





As I hid in the interior of the temple of Atlantis, I looked down at my hands. I then turned to my companion.

“R.”

“Yes?”

“Are you sure there isn’t anything we can use here?”

“Hmm, let’s see... I considered the possibility of space, but I’m not sure if outer space even exists in this mental world.”

This “mental world,” as R put it, seemed to be made from my memories. All of the stories I’d ever been a part of were jumbled together. Earth was connected to other worlds and planets, making me think that R’s concerns were valid about what really lay beyond the sky here. Well, even if space did exist, there would still be a question of how exactly to launch the dragon into it... I wasn’t even sure if he needed to breathe air or not.

The more I thought about it, the more I came to realize that all I could really count on for sure here was myself.

“I guess I don’t have a choice...”

I gave in and stood up. R gave me a funny look as I did.

“Rekka?”

“If all I have is myself, then there’s only one option.”

Seeing my serious expression seemed to clue R in as to what I was thinking.

“Don’t tell me you’re going in for a suicide attack.”

“No, I don’t have any plans of dying today. I’ll just be charging in.”

“That’s the same thing.”

“It’s similar, sure. But I’m not charging in blindly, mind you.”

I took a quick survey of things from the shadows and located my target.

“I’m going to aim for the Gold Yaksha. I’ll take the Mask of Greed from him and turn myself into a demon. From there, I’ll figure out what to do with the

rest of 'em."

There were several reasons I was gunning for the Gold Yaksha first. He was comparatively less threatening than the other bad guys hanging around, for starters, and didn't have any special abilities to wreck me with. And despite being huge, he was still at least humanoid. That made the task at hand seem just a little less intimidating.

"However, the Mask of Greed is stuck securely on the target's face. How do you plan on ripping it off?"

"The Gold Yaksha carries a hatchet with him. I'll use that to get the mask."

"..."

"Don't make that face. I know good and well it's a crazy plan."

While he didn't have any special abilities, the Gold Yaksha had tremendous strength. He was no dragon or demon, but he was a frighteningly formidable opponent for an unremarkable human like me. On top of that, it wasn't like the other bad guys would just sit around on their hands while I attacked the Gold Yaksha. I'd have to figure out a way to get his mask off before they interrupted us. No matter how you cut it, it was a reckless plan. My odds of succeeding were practically nil. But still...

"There's no other way. If I've considered everything, and this is the only option available, then even if I have less than a one-percent chance of succeeding... I at least have to try, don't I?"

"Good grief..." R sighed again as she pulled the brim of her hat down over her eyes. "The fact that you don't hesitate at times like these is both endearing and insane."

"Sorry for worrying you all the time."

"I'm glad you knew that was a compliment."

"Hahaha."

After a good laugh, I steeled myself. I then took another quick look around from the shadows.

"!"

There he was. The Gold Yaksha. Seeing him, I clenched my fist. Fortunately, there were no other villains hanging around too close by. Only Demon King Grausam, the guy who tried to destroy the spirit world, hovered in the sky overhead. It would be difficult to evade his notice, but this would all be for naught if the Gold Yaksha wandered away while I waited for Grausam to leave. Exactly how long it took Grausam to notice me... That would all be up to luck. And historically speaking, my luck wasn't so hot. I crossed my fingers and said a little prayer inside.

“!”

I took a deep breath... and then took off running. Without even looking anywhere else, I made a beeline for the Gold Yaksha. At some point, I think I even stopped breathing. I poured every ounce of my strength into my legs. All I was doing was running. Running with everything I had.

It was like my vision narrowed as I went. I could no longer see anything but the Gold Yaksha. Had Grausam already noticed me? What about the other villains? If they had, I didn't know it. And even if they came after me right now, I had no spare energy to deal with them. I was already lacking in strength as it was. If I didn't focus everything I had into a single point ahead of me, I would never be able to break through. And so I looked at the Gold Yaksha and the Gold Yaksha alone, prepared to do whatever it took to get his mask. If focus alone could raise my odds of success by even a tenth of a percent, I'd take it.

“!”

When I got close enough, the Gold Yaksha locked eyes on me. Perhaps it was because I was so hyper-focused on him, but his movements seemed slower than I remembered. He turned to face me. I closed in. He raised his hatchet. Its dull blade would drop into my skull any second. I wanted to avoid that, but I had so much momentum that I couldn't stop running now even if I wanted to. Instead, I clenched my fist. I was just gonna have to hit him first. If I could divert the trajectory of the hatchet and deflect the blow, I'd count myself lucky.

It really felt like I'd been leaving everything up to luck lately, but who cared anymore? There was no way I could win this by anything other than a fluke. I'd known that from the start. All that was left now was to follow through and

swing my fist for all I was worth. Either my fist or the hatchet would be faster. Either the Gold Yaksha would be thrown off by my punch, or I was a dead man. It was that simple. The results would soon be apparent enough. There was no point in thinking about it further. And so, with all my might, I raised my fist.

All I was thinking about was this punch, seeing it through, and getting the Mask of Greed. That was it. That was all I needed to do now. There was no other way for me to pass this trial. It would be up to luck, but I would do everything in my power to persuade my fist to make up the difference. I put all the strength I had in my right arm and swung... only to catch empty air.

“?!”

With the momentum of my swing, I tumbled forward and rolled across the ground once or twice.

“Wh-What?!”

The Gold Yaksha hadn’t tried to dodge. There should have only been two possible outcomes here: either my punch made contact, or my skull was split open. So why was I on the ground? Unable to understand what had happened, I sat up and looked around... to find I was above the clouds.

“Heaven...?” I muttered without thinking. “Did I just ascend in a single punch?”

“Don’t be stupid,” a familiar voice replied.

I turned and saw Yuuhi standing there with her arms crossed, looking down at me with an exasperated expression.

“Yuuhi... Where am I? What happened to me?”

“You passed the trial, so you were brought here to the highest level of the spiritual realm.”

“Highest level...? What...?” I clutched my head in my hands, unable to process the situation. “But I still haven’t cleared the boss rush yet...”

“Boss rush?” It was apparently Yuuhi’s turn to tilt her head in confusion. “Well, the nature of the trial differs from person to person, but it generally looks at one’s disposition.”

“Their disposition?”

“Those who pass the trial are granted supernatural powers, so their character is what matters most. So the trial might test, for example, to see if you have a heart that never gives up even in the most dire of situations.”

“...”

All right. It was a difficult trial, but the difficulty level was appropriate.

“In other words, bravely facing the boss rush was the clear condition,” R rehashed, sagely nodding.

Come to think of it, didn't she say that people like my future self who already had too much power couldn't take the trial?

That was probably because someone's disposition, as Yuuhi put it, couldn't be accurately measured if they were too strong.

“Anyway... Judging from your expression, your trial must have been quite the ordeal. Good job getting through it. If you hadn't made it here, we'd be totally screwed.”

“Yeah.”

It still didn't quite feel real, but as long as I'd passed, I was okay with that. This worked out in my favor, after all.

“Follow me,” Yuuhi said shortly, urging me to stand.

I got up and followed her lead. There were no identifiable roads here. Just endless clouds in every direction. No matter where I looked, there were no signs of buildings or any other structures. We were really just walking on the clouds.

“Where are we going?”

“To meet Sith.”

“The goddess of this world herself, huh...?”

I was still a little unsteady on my feet, but hearing that we were about to meet a deity forced me to pull myself together. This was an important step toward our goal.

But wow... Angels, spirits, demon kings, and now a straight-up goddess. This bloodline of mine sure gets me involved with all kinds of powerful figures.

It wasn't really the time to be having such thoughts, but I couldn't help feeling like I'd reached the end of something. However...

"I know you said this was the highest level of the spiritual realm or whatnot... But really looking at it, it is exactly what I thought heaven would be like."

"That's because it was made in that image. You could say it was meant to meet your expectations."

"Huh..."

I nodded as we kept walking, and eventually a door came into view. It rose up from the clouds, standing alone in the middle of the sky. It was rather surreal.

"Is this it?"

"Yeah."

"There's a door but no building..."

"Just open it."

"Okay..."

At Yuuhi's behest, I skeptically opened the door. I thought there was no way it wouldn't just lead through to the clouds on the other side, but...

"Whoa!"

I couldn't help shouting out in surprise. There was an entirely different scene beyond the door. I double-checked to make sure, and it wasn't like a building had appeared or anything. The door just... opened straight into a vast room. What was going on?

"Don't fuss over the details. I told you this was modeled after our imaginations, but the goddesses are rather carefree with their creations."

"It's perhaps best to think of this as a set for a TV show or movie, Rekka."

"Right..."

Half exasperated, I walked through the door with Yuuhi and R. Once we were

inside, the door shut of its own accord. And then, all of a sudden...

“So you made it.”

“Wah!”

A woman appeared out of nowhere. She had stark red hair and wore an elaborate outfit adorned with all kinds of peculiar ornaments. But most notable of all, she had a sort of mystical aura about her.

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

She didn’t seem to understand my surprise, cocking her head to the side.

“It... It’s nothing...”

It was too troublesome to explain, so I took a deep breath to calm myself and got down to business.

“Are you the goddess of this world?”

“That’s correct. I am Sith,” the woman—the goddess—said with a small nod before frowning. “But, my gosh, the mortals from Big Sis’s world are so uncouth. Addressing a deity so casually...”

“S-Sorry?”

I was at a loss for how to respond. What exactly was she so bothered by? Her own manner of speaking was rather casual... if not outright childish compared to her appearance.

“Now’s not the time for that,” Yuuhi snapped.

“N-No! You too, Yuuhi?! I-I’m a goddess, you know!”

“The goddess of annoyance, maybe.”

“N-No, I’m a creator...”

Yuuhi’s sharp tongue left Sith quietly mumbling to herself. And, I... I, uh...

“She’s less majestic than I imagined.”

“I know, right?”

I agreed with R’s blunt assessment in a whisper. Based on everything Yuuhi had told us about the goddesses, I didn’t exactly respect them from the get-go.

But Sith turned out to be a lot more, well, pathetic than I'd expected. A lot more human.

"The whole world's about to be destroyed because of *your* thoughtlessness. Have some shame."

"Nuuu! Not the cheeks!"

Yuuhi continued to harangue a teary-eyed Sith, tugging her cheeks this way and that. I didn't bother to stop them. I simply waited for them to finish, and it took a few minutes.



“Waaah... You’re gonna stretch my cheeks out like that...”

“So be it.”

Yuuhi was unrelenting with Sith, who was pouting and holding her cheeks. It seemed, however, that they were done now.

“So, uh, can we talk?” I asked.

“Sure,” Yuuhi replied.

“Why are you answering for me, Yuuhi?!” Sith shouted.

She objected to Yuuhi speaking up on her behalf, but at least she seemed open to talking to me.

“Well, um, I already know about the state of this world and why Yuuhi caused the War of All in mine.”

I started by telling her what I already knew to get us on the same page. In response, Sith nodded.

“Yup. I’ve heard lots about you from Yuuhi, too.”

“Oh, so you already know what I want?” That made this much faster. “Then let’s just cut to the chase. Can you take us to the goddess of my world... Maine, was it?”

“Yup. That much I can do, but...”

There, Sith hesitated. What was bothering her?

“Is there a problem?” I asked.

“Not exactly, but...” After another moment of hesitation, Sith asked worriedly, “Big Sis has a pretty short temper... Do you think she’ll be mad if I take you to her?”

At that, I had to fight back a sigh to reply...

“I have no idea, lady.”

Chapter 9: The Story of Rekka Namidare In order to meet Maine, we set off once again. Moving here meant walking through the clouds with no discernable path, which I have to say was a little unnerving.

“Hey, so, uh... Can’t we move like the gods do?”

“What does ‘like the gods do’ mean?”

“I dunno. Like warping or teleporting or something.”

“Those are human technologies, aren’t they?”

“So that’s a no?”

“It’s a no,” Sith said plainly as though that had been utterly obvious. “You lot think too highly of us deities.”

“I mean... You are gods, right?”

“Call us what you will, but all we did was create our worlds, you know? We might be almighty when it comes to them, certainly...”

But in the world the gods occupied—the highest level of the spiritual realm, as Yuuhi had called it—they were just like any other living creatures.

“Let’s say someone gave you a blank piece of paper. You could draw whatever you wanted on it, no? You could even erase and redraw things as you please. But that doesn’t mean anything you draw actually becomes reality. It’s just like that.”

“Yeah, okay... I mean, that kinda makes sense but it kinda doesn’t.”

In essence, the gods could do whatever they wanted with their worlds, but not anything outside of that.

“So, anyway, how far do we have to walk?”

“Not far.”

“Yet there’s no sense of distance in this world. It’s just clouds everywhere...”

“Yes, but...” Sith’s eyebrows furrowed. “We’re only walking like this in the first place to placate your human conception of movement, you know?”

“What?”

“The fundamental concepts and laws of the upper and lower worlds are quite different. If we didn’t give you the sensation of movement by walking or make this world look like it was above the clouds, you—”

I couldn’t understand what she said beyond that. She may have been using some divine language. I didn’t really get it, but I think that she was essentially trying to say the gods were being considerate by trying to match our perceptions of things.

“Well, either way, we just have to walk, right?”

“Hm? Well, yes. It’ll be about ten minutes in your conception of time, I believe.”

“Hmm...”

Ten minutes, huh? That was a little long to just walk along in silence.

“So, uh, there’s something I wanted to ask you.”

“What is it?”

“What exactly are your worlds to you goddesses?”

One way or another, both my world and Yuuhi’s only existed because Maine and Sith had created them. But the goddesses weren’t as, well, high and mighty as I’d expected. They didn’t seem to have any grand plans for their worlds, nor any real systems for managing them.

I guess she did do all this out of boredom...

So why had the goddess sisters even made their worlds? I was a little curious about that.

“Even if you ask me why, I don’t know how to answer. Hmm...” Sith pensively hummed in thought. “I guess you could say they’re an extended way of killing time.”

“Seriously?”

“Er, was that a bad way to put it?”

“On a spectrum of good and bad, yeah. That was bad.”

“Whaaat?!” Sith looked even more puzzled now. “Then how about this? It’s a lot like what you humans would consider childrearing.”

“Childrearing?”

“Very much so. You create something and raise it yourself. It’s a lot like childrearing, no?”

“So you bet your child.”

“Just ignore that part...”

Sith shrunk back a little at my retort. That’s where Yuuhi stepped in.

“There’s no need to think too deeply about it, Rekka. Creating worlds is simply part of a deity’s biology.”

“What? But she just said it was like childrearing.”

“Having children is part of the biology all living creatures have in common, no?”

“...”

“That’s why I said not to think about it too deeply. It’s simply a fact of existence, divorced from feelings of love and the like.”

In other words, creating worlds was simply what deities did. And that was simply how it had been since the beginning of time. That part wasn’t really for me to question. That was just how it was.

“That’s right. It’s exactly as Yuuhi says. We’re creatures that were designed to create worlds, so that’s what we do. When they fail, we just make new ones from scratch. Whether or not we love what we created is irrelevant. We don’t need to have sex like you humans do either.”

“S—?! ”

“Hm? What’s wrong?”

“ ... ”

Maybe it was because it wasn't something deities did, but that word came out of her mouth *way* too easily. Hearing a beautiful woman talk about, y'know... It was bad for my heart. I had to take a deep breath and compose myself to get back to the matters at hand.

“So, does the lack of love make it easier to bet your world in a game?”

My pointed question made Sith avert her eyes.

“Well, this is my fiftieth world or so, after all... To be honest, Big Sis and I had gotten a little bored with creating worlds, so we wanted a little excitement.”

“Excitement, huh?”

I can't say I wasn't angry to hear that, but I knew it would be pointless to raise a fuss here and now. Like Yuuhi had said, this was the nature of the gods. No matter how human Sith looked (which may have just been her trying to match our perceptions as well), our minds worked completely differently.

“Wow, so Yuuhi's world is the fiftieth world, huh? The lifespan of one sun is ten billion years, so if you consider the lifespan of the entirety of space—much less the whole world—it's hard to imagine just how long it would take for it to come to a natural end,” R muttered to herself as she floated beside me.

Was she talking to me just now?

I glanced at R, but she wasn't looking my way.

“ ... ”

Fifty worlds' worth of years, huh? Yeah, that was a mind-boggling amount of time. It was probably in the billions, trillions, or even quadrillions. Doing the same thing for that long... If you asked me if I'd get bored, I don't think I could honestly say no. Not that that meant it was a bad thing, I guess.

“Well, there you have it. That's what worlds are to us,” Sith said, laughing off my real question.

I still hadn't completely accepted her answer, but I gave up pressing her any further for now. And just as I made up my mind on that front, Sith came to a stop in front of us. Suddenly, a door appeared before her.

“...”

This was the umpteenth time something weird like this had happened on our divine journey, so I can't say I was really surprised anymore. I could only assume this door would lead us to Maine.

“A-All right... I'm going to open it, okay?”

Sith slowly reached for the door, speaking as though she was talking to herself.

Maine was the goddess of our world... I couldn't help wondering what she was like. Her little sister seemed kinda scared to meet her. I was really hoping she wouldn't be a scary goddess... But that didn't change what had to be done.

“And... voila!”

Sith opened the door and a large space spread out before us.

“...”

I said space, but it wasn't empty space or anything. There was a marble floor, but no walls or ceiling. It was just a continuous floor. And seeing it, my first thought was...

“An arena?” I muttered unconsciously.

I didn't know why exactly that was the first thing that came to mind, but it gave me that impression. It was a wide, flat, even playing field free of any obstacles, making it the ideal place to have a fight.

Why an arena, though?

I had no idea, but as I was wondering...

“You also think it looks like an arena, Rekka?”

“You mean you do too, Yuuhi?”

“Yeah. Since that's the impression we both got, I think we can assume this is an arena Maine prepared.”

“You don't say...”

Based on how we'd gotten here and everything that had happened up until

now, it was clear that the goddesses were changing the world around us to match our human conceptions of things. That meant that, if this space looked like an arena to us, it was probably meant to be one. However, that took me back to my first question.

“Why an arena, though?”

“Well...” Yuuhi mumbled, looking reluctant to say any more.

But as she fell silent, someone called out to me.

“So you really came, Rekka Namidare.”

I looked up, and just like Sith had appeared out of nowhere earlier, there was a woman seated in an ornate throne before me. I didn’t know where she—or the throne, for that matter—had come from, but it was probably similar logic.

“...”

Since it was me she’d called out to, I stepped forward.

“Are you Maine?”

“That’s right.”

The goddess of our world, Maine, gave me a rather casual reply. She looked and dressed a lot like Sith, but she had blue hair and wore the same color head to toe. The biggest contrast between the sisters, however, was their eyes: Maine’s were red while Sith’s were blue. They weren’t twins or anything, but they had strikingly similar countenances otherwise.

“If you know who I am, then you know why I’ve come here, right?”

Once I got a good look at her, I addressed her again and got down to business. In reply to my question, Maine gave a small nod.

“Yep,” she said casually.

Sith came off as quite immature, but it seemed Maine was childish in her own way too. Thinking about what R said earlier, both of the goddesses had been alive for a tremendously long time... Did that mean they were stunted in some way, comparative to humans? No, now wasn’t the time to be thinking about any of that. I looked Maine straight in the eyes.

“Please call off the bet between the two worlds.”

“Don’t wanna.”

She rejected my request so bluntly that it was clear there wasn’t any room for negotiation.

“Why not?”

“What’s the point?”

“Um, if you’re asking that, I think you’ve kinda *missed* the point.”

At a loss for what else to say, I fell silent for a bit. It was true that, as the winning party, there was no reason for Maine to call off the game. Yuuhi had warned me of that much.

“Then at least return the Namidare power you took from Sith’s world.”

Maine had taken it in a little side bet she’d had with her sister. It was transferred to me, heavily swaying the outcome of their game. Losing it had caused a serious decline in the happiness of Sith’s world, so I thought that I might be able to restore the balance by returning it.

“Yeah, not happening.”

But Maine was difficult.

Tch...

While I should have expected it, she was really hard to deal with. I’d asked about the nature of deities and worlds on the way over here, but I’d only gotten answers about boredom and biology. If I had a solid reason, perhaps some belief or meaning to go off of, then I could use that to parley with Maine...

Creating worlds is just what they do. There’s no limit to the number of worlds they can create. If one fails, they just make another... I really don’t have a leg to stand on!

What was I supposed to do? How could I convince Maine like this? I couldn’t ask her to do it without anything in it for her. I just had to find some way to get her to agree to return the Namidare power she took... Some condition...

“Actually, why is Rekka the only one talking?” Maine asked, her gaze falling on

her sister. “This is our game, after all. Shouldn’t you be the one doing the negotiating, Sith?”

“M-Me...?”

Suddenly thrust in the spotlight, Sith fidgeted nervously.

“Yeah. Why is a human from my world negotiating on behalf of yours? That’s a little strange, isn’t it?”

“I... I...”

“You what?” Maine prodded, resting her chin in her hand.

I couldn’t help thinking it—she looked just like an older sister bullying a younger sibling.

If they’re siblings, then maybe Sith can sway Maine’s heart a little...?

I calculatingly took a back seat, observing the exchange between the two of them.

“I... Um... I...”

“Hahh...” Maine sighed at Sith’s reluctance to answer. “It’s just another world, you know? They all have to come to an end someday, and you can just make another one when we’re done. We’ve been through it countless times, haven’t we?”

“B-But...”

“But?”

“I-It’s true we’ve been through this a bunch...”

“Right? So what’s the big deal if you lose a world or two?”

“E-Even so!” There, Sith raised her voice for the first time, trembling like a puppy as she shouted. “It... It might not be a big deal, but...”

“But?”

“Starting this game with you made me passionate about the world I made for the first time in ages. I was serious about taking care of it, and I felt its rises and falls in happiness... It was all so fun.”

“Yeah, I feel the same way too,” Maine said with a nod.

“So that’s why, Big Sis! I’ve grown a little attached to my world this time... And losing it early like this... I don’t want that.”

“If you’ve only grown ‘a little attached,’ then what difference does it make?”

“I-It’s not a little! It’s a lot!”

Sith bared her emotions falteringly. Her tone was much more serious than when she’d answered me earlier...

I guess she couldn’t really open up to someone she just met, huh?

That made her seem even more like just a shy child. But at any rate...

“That’s why... I know it’s not fair, but could we just say you won this one and not... not destroy my world? Please?”

“...”

Maine fell silent for a moment upon hearing her little sister’s plea. Then, her chin still resting in her hand, she narrowed her eyes...

“No.”

And gave the same reply as before.

“Wh-Why not?!”

Her merciless answer made Sith question her with teary eyes.

“You said it yourself just now. It’s not fair,” Maine explained, turning her little sister down rather bluntly. “I agree with you, though. This little game of ours has brought out my passion for creating worlds again too. It’s been a lot of fun. That’s why I don’t want to cut it short and ruin things right at the very end.”

“Oh...”

Hearing her sister’s explanation, Sith slumped her shoulders dejectedly.

“...”

I’d been willing to let the sisters try and talk things out themselves, but it seemed this was an emotional conversation rather than a logical one. If I didn’t know any better and you told me these two ladies were goddesses, I wouldn’t

believe you. Leaving things in their hands any longer just plain made me nervous.

That said, I could kind of understand how Sith felt. She'd still been unbelievably careless with her world, but she at least seemed sorry for that now that she'd fallen in love with it. Yuuhi would give a due lecture about that later, I'm sure. But my task at hand hadn't changed. I needed to forge a path that allowed both worlds to coexist.

"Maine," I called out, stepping forward.

"Hm? What is it?"

"I have a suggestion."

The sisters' conversation had given me an idea.

"I heard that you two had a side bet where you wagered the Namidare power of your respective worlds. Is that right?"

"Yup. We waited forever and there was just no appreciable difference in the happiness levels of our worlds, so we had a little fun to move things along."

"And you were the one that suggested the side bet?"

"I was."

"Then let's have another side bet with more Namidare power on the line."

"Huh? I don't wanna."

My somewhat selfish suggestion made Maine cock her head to the side. She seemed confused as to why I still didn't understand her. But I didn't give up.

"Just hear me out. The two of you agreed to rules to make the game fair before you started, right?"

"Of course. It wouldn't have been any fun otherwise."

"So how is it fair to claim a win after you've taken almost all of Sith's Namidare power in a bet of your own design?"

"..."

"At the very least, to make things fair, shouldn't you accept a bet from Sith

just the same? That will mean you've each had a chance to turn things around."

"..."

For the first time so far, Maine looked like she was actually considering it.

"Wow, you actually made a good point," R said in awe from where she was floating beside me.

This was just a game to Maine. And the most important part of any game was that it had to be fair. That meant both sides had equal opportunity to achieve victory. It's why baseball games alternated teams for batting. So if Maine had been at bat all this time, Sith deserved a turn. It was only fair.

I thought negotiating on that point might work with Maine, and it was something I'd only thought of because the sisters kept going on and on about their wager like it *was* just a game.

Granted, if Maine's the type that's more concerned with winning than fairness, she might still shoot me down...

I didn't think that was the case based on their conversation so far. And to my delighted surprise, Maine eventually said...

"All right. Fine. Let's have one more bet."

Holy crap, it worked! But just as I was celebrating internally...

"However," Maine said, raising a finger. "I won the last bet, but there was something in it for Sith if she'd won too. So what's in it for me this time?"

"What do you mean?"

"It's simple. I'll bet the Namidare power I won from Sith last time, but she has to put something on the line too," Maine said with a grin.

I racked my brain for a way to decline, but... sadly, it seemed she was on point.

"What do you want her to bet, then?"

"The suspension of every interference caused by Yuuhi Namidare in my world."

"...!"

Yuuhi's expression went stiff when she heard that. Every interference she'd caused in Maine's world? That meant...

"In other words, I want to undo everything having to do with the War of All."

"Undo everything having to do with the War of All...?" Hearing it worded so specifically made my eyes go wide. "Is that even possible?"

"Certainly. And if Sith does it for me, then the repercussions of interfering will fall on her world instead of mine."

"Th-Then..."

This time, it was Sith that went pale.

"Without the War of All, my world will be much happier. And with the additional calamity that will fall on yours after that much divine intervention on my behalf, I'm sure we'll settle the game once and for all."

"W-Wait a minute! Then there'd be no point!" I objected in a fluster.

"What's the big deal? It's not a problem if you win, right?" Maine retorted with a casual tilt of her head. "This is what makes it fair for me, you realize? Honestly, I thought my victory was assured after I took most of Sith's Namidare power. I never dreamed things would drag on this long. So I think the War of All that Sith inflicted on my world is equal to the Namidare power I took from hers."

"But...!"

If we lost, Sith's world would be destroyed immediately. No, it probably wouldn't be instant, but it would certainly decide the victor of the game. The fate of Sith's world would be sealed.

"Well? Do you accept?"

"..."

We had no choice but to take her up on this.

I...

Even if it made me hesitate.

"What are you wavering for?" Maine asked.

“That’s...”

“There’s no down side in this for you, is there? Even if you lose, the War of All will be over, you know?”

“...”

I could feel Yuuhi and Sith boring holes into my back with their eyes. Actually, there was something I had been thinking for a while now...

“You have a surprisingly terrible personality.”

“This goddess sure has an awful personality.”

R and I, possibly for the first time ever, said the same thing. I was only giving my honest opinion, but Maine’s chin slipped off her hand in surprise.

“You know I’m still the goddess of your world, despite everything?”

“Sure,” I said, turning around.

I could then see Sith’s guileless uncertainty and Yuuhi’s skeptical wariness as plain as day. And I understood it. They’d both just been told flat out that I personally had no stake in what was about to happen. I got why they’d doubt me now. I couldn’t ask them just to trust me blindly.

That being said, Yuuhi must have realized that was the case when I first suggested all of this. There’s no reason to backpedal now.

We had no choice but to go along with it.

“Yuuhi, will you accept this match?” I asked.

I had negotiated everything thus far and presented the conditions to her. The fates of both our worlds were on the line. Moreover, this would be the conclusion—for better or worse—not just of R’s story, but Yuuhi’s too. I couldn’t do this without her consent. So if she said no...

“...”

“Yuuuhiiiiii...” Sith whined, tugging at her sleeve.

She was practically begging her to back down. Her eyes said it all. That was still a possibility, but Yuuhi...

"Sith," Yuuhi said, opening her eyes and addressing her goddess directly. "I want to accept this match."

"B-But..."

"I'm sorry... I know it's dangerous." As she spoke, Yuuhi's eyes moved to me. "But I've already seen a glimmer of hope... I don't think I can go back to that world and continue playing the villain at this point."

"Yuuhi..."

Sith tried to say more, but couldn't. Her hand released Yuuhi's sleeve. She must have felt guilt over making Yuuhi do what she'd done, and objected no further.

"..."

Yuuhi then walked up to me, staring me straight in the eye.

"I'll trust you."

I nodded.

"Once everything's over, you'll be helping me stop the War of All anyway, Yuuhi. Right?"

"Right."

There, Yuuhi and I stood side by side to face the goddess Maine.



"Ugh, fine," Maine groaned as she shook her head.

She seemed to understand that I had no intention of fixing the match in her favor.

"Let's get this show on the road," she said as she stood up, her throne disappearing from under her as soon as she did.

Now that I think about it... Does this place look like an arena because Maine wanted it to?

If so, had Maine expected this to happen from the get-go?

"So... how does this work? Wait, you're not going to be the one fighting us,

right?" I asked, the trepidation in my voice obvious.

In response, Maine laughed.

"No way. You can't have a fair match between a god and a human."

"Then do you have a representative for your world?" Yuuhi stepped in and asked, her sharp gaze fixed on Maine.

"Of course. I know just the person to fight you."

"Well, so who is it?"

"Someone you two are both very familiar with, actually."

"?"

Someone Yuuhi and I were both familiar with?

Is it a heroine? The doctor? Wait, would the doctor even agree to fighting us?

I mean, she could possibly be forced into fighting... But that didn't seem right for some reason. Just who was it, then?

"Allow me to summon him."

The moment Maine said that, a lone man appeared next to her. While his sudden arrival was shocking enough, that wasn't what made both me and Yuuhi go wide-eyed. It was his face.

Indeed, he was someone we were both quite familiar with. Yuuhi had met him previously, and although I couldn't say the same, I knew exactly who he was on sight. After all, I saw him in the mirror every day.

"So we'll be fighting... me?" I asked.

"Don't look so disgruntled about it... Granted, I understand how you feel," the other me replied with an extremely sour face.

I suppressed the initial surge of emotions that swelled up within me and asked...

"Are you really my future self?"

"Just as you're my past self," he said with a nod.

His face, his voice, his tone... Everything about him was virtually identical to

me.

“If you’re my future self, why don’t you look any older than me?”

“Ah, that’s because I became part vampire when I was about your age. I haven’t aged a day since then.”

“Oh.”

I’d opened my mouth and asked that without really thinking about it, but the answer he gave me was simple enough to understand.

“It sure is confusing having two Rekkas around... As a denizen of the future, the Rekka over there is really the Rekka Namidare from my timeline,” R noted as she glanced over at me. “But since I’m *your* heroine, I’ll continue to call you just ‘Rekka’ and the one over there ‘future Rekka.’”

R was right. It was confusing to have two Rekkas, so I’ll stick with her way of differentiating us too.

“And so, future Rekka, why are you on that side?” I asked, throwing the obvious question out.

If he was really me, then we should have similar ways of thinking. Shouldn’t he want to save not just Maine’s world, but Sith’s as well?

“Listen, we’re the same person. I know what you’re getting at,” future Rekka said bitterly, his expression the same as before. “But I’m sorry. I can’t afford to part with my Namidare power.”

“Why not? It’s not like you’re losing all of it, right? We just need to return the excess that wasn’t ours to begin with.”

“I need that excess power.”

“Huh?”

From where I stood, future Rekka was incredibly powerful on his own already. I couldn’t even imagine why he’d need *excess* power, and cocked my head to the side accordingly.

“Since I... Since we received Sith’s Namidare power, we’ve become involved in far more stories than any other Namidare in history. You know that much,

right?”

“Yeah.”

“Then think about it. If we go back to just being normal Namidares, what do you think is going to happen to the number of stories that come our way?”

“Huh? Well, that should go back to normal too—ait!”

When he put it like that, the light bulb came on. I finally understood. *That’s* what future Rekka was fighting for right now, but it wasn’t just about him. It applied equally to me. If he—if we return to being normal Namidares, then...

“That’s right. Just like Dad and our ancestors before us, the number of stories we get caught up in will decrease dramatically. And so will the number of heroines we can save.”

“!”

The Namidare power that Maine took from Sith was transferred to Rekka Namidare... In other words, me. Future Rekka’s past self. So if I lost that power now, future Rekka’s past would change accordingly. What exactly would that mean?

“The stories you’ve solved would most likely remain that way, so the heroines you already know will still be saved. But there’s no guarantee regarding what will happen to the heroines I saved after that.”

As it stood, I’d had a hand in resolving less than fifty stories. But Future Rekka had saved several hundred of them. So if I lost a significant amount of my Namidare power now, I’d only end up caught up in a fraction of the stories my future self had. That would change his past, effectively removing him from the stories I never got to. That would mean he’d never meet the heroines involved those stories, and that would mean he’d be unable to save them. While that was all hypothetical and in the future for me... For future Rekka, it was like sending hundreds of heroines to their graves. And that number would only grow. Unlike me, future Rekka was immortal. If he lost a significant portion of his power now, there would be an untold number of tragedies in the future, too.

I see. So what my future self really fears is becoming unable to save people...

Ah, damn it. That was indeed a very Rekka-like way of thinking.

“I understand now.”

“Do you really?”

“All too well, unfortunately...”

I couldn't help averting my gaze. Even though I was supposed to be the one doing the interrogating here, the tables had been turned on me. I had genuinely believed that winning this match would save both worlds. No, I still did. But at the same time, it would mean sacrificing several hundred heroines I didn't yet know. Was that really okay? I had to wonder. This story just outright refused to have any easy answers...

When my conversation with future Rekka came to a reluctant pause, Maine took the opportunity to cut in.

“Now, without further ado, let's get things started,” she announced.

“Wait!”

“I'm tired of waiting,” Maine continued, ignoring me. “Now, isn't it just lovely that the match is so simple and straightforward? You'll decide things through fisticuffs. But I can't have my Namidares killing each other, so that's the only thing that's out of bounds. Feel free to use your powers as you please otherwise.”

“H-Hey now...” I interjected, interrupting her explanation of the unreasonable rules. “My future self over there has over a hundred different abilities, doesn't he? I don't stand a chance against him on my own.”

“Then as a handicap, I'll let both of you take him two-on-one.”

“But—”

“I won't concede any more than that, okay? The rules were fair enough to begin with considering we have the same person fighting himself, don't you think? And now you've got a handicap on top of that.”

“...”

When she put it like that, sure, it made it sound like we had the advantage.

But that really wasn't the case! Future Rekka was super OP.

And speak of the devil... There, he raised his hand.

"I'm immortal, so you can omit the no-kill rule against me. There's a large enough gap between us already. If my past self holds back, it'll only make things harder on him," future Rekka offered of his own volition.

At least there was that... I mean, don't get me wrong. I was grateful, but all he was really saying was that he would hold back so he didn't outright murder us.

"Hmph, fine. If you say so. But I really won't concede any more than this. Do you hear me?"

"..."

No matter how much more I grumbled, Maine wouldn't budge on the rules. I guess I should consider us lucky that we got one more concession out of future Rekka... Or was that just a sign of how confident he was?

"Yuuhi, can you do this?"

"It won't be easy... But like Maine said, they've at least agreed to accommodate us in some way. It's no small miracle your negotiating got us even this far." Yuuhi's expression remained stiff as she readjusted her gloves.

"Listen, I'll cancel out his supernatural abilities. You stay close to me."

"Gotcha."

"Now, is everyone ready?" Maine asked.

Yuuhi and I both nodded in response. Maine then looked to her little sister.

"And what about you, Sith?"

"Yuuhi, Rekka... Good luck."

Even though Sith was a goddess, she had her hands clasped together in prayer.

"..."

Future Rekka silently clenched his fists. He didn't even brace himself or anything, but boy was he intimidating...

Is that really me...?

Just facing him was enough to make my palms sticky with sweat. I was as nervous now as I'd been during the boss rush earlier. I'd gotten the same feeling all along anytime someone mentioned "future Rekka," but... we were two totally different people!

"Okay... Let the games begin!"

Maine had distanced herself while I was distracted, but her voice rang out across the arena as clear as day.

"Whoa!"

I readied myself in a hurry, but future Rekka didn't immediately attack. It was a good chance to catch me off guard and he'd passed it up. The reason was clear on his face.

That pained expression...

Despite what I said earlier, on the inside... I guess we really were the same person. God, why was everyone so determined to walk the harder path?

Even though he knew it was his only option, future Rekka still rued his decision to fight against Yuuhi and Sith's world here. His guilt had cost him a golden opportunity to sucker punch me right at the start.

As for me, I couldn't afford to stand here and do nothing. Honestly, after coming this far, I was wavering. There, of course, was the question of how I could win this. But the even bigger question at hand was if I *should*. Could I really sacrifice the heroines who he'd saved? And all the heroines he'd yet to save? I didn't have an answer and faltered in my hesitation just like my future self. But neither of us were the first to make a move in the end. That honor belonged to another Namidare—Yuuhi.

"Let's go!" she rallied.

If I got separated from her, I'd be easy pickings for any number of future Rekka's supernatural abilities. That's why she'd called out to me. I had to keep up.

"I"

So despite my hesitation, I ran with Yuuhi. While we were on the move, she pulled what looked like a cattle prod out of her jacket. She clenched it tightly in her fist and it crackled to life as electricity flowed through it, sparks flying this way and that. Wait, were those things supposed to have such a high voltage?! I shuddered as I wondered.

“Hate me if you must...” future Rekka muttered stoically.

He then charged, seemingly unafraid of Yuuhi’s cattle prod. The distance between us closed in an instant.

“Take this!”

Yuuhi swung her cattle prod down on future Rekka right as he rushed us. But rather than being hit, he caught it midair with his left hand. There was a loud crackling sound as a powerful current entered his body.

“...”

But he had no reaction whatsoever. He didn’t collapse, let alone flinch. The electricity, however, burned through his sleeve in a flash. Through the tatters of what fabric remained, I could see the sheen of something metallic that I hadn’t noticed before.

“You’re a robot?!”

“A cyborg, technically,” future Rekka answered flatly.

There, he opened his right hand and released a ball of flame that came flying my way.

“Yikes!”

Yuuhi, thankfully, used her breaker ability to dispel it. In the process, she released her cattle prod and jumped back.

But what was that just now? Magic? Was it a psychic ability? Or perhaps another power?

“I see you really did give up on being human...” I muttered, rather taken aback.

“And I see you’re still clinging to it,” he replied. “We’re the same person, and

yet we're quite different."

"You're telling me..."

Cold sweat pouring down my back, I stepped forward. I couldn't leave everything to Yuuhi.

"Take this!"

"..."

Future Rekka brushed my fist aside with a third arm that suddenly sprouted from his shoulder. It was semi-transparent, glowing like it was made of magic.

"Tch!"



Using my momentum, I raised my right leg overhead. I thought it was a good idea, but this time another arm growing from future Rekka's back stopped me.

"Is anything possible with you?!"

"..."

Future Rekka offered me no answer apart from another ball of fire launched from his right hand. Crap! At this range, I was going to get burned!

"Rekka!"

Thanks to Yuuhi's intervention, the fireball vanished before it could roast me on the spot. The arms sprouting from future Rekka's left shoulder and back disappeared too.

Yuuhi and I got a little separated there... It seems her breaker ability still works with some distance between us.

With future Rekka's ethereal arms gone, my leg was free. I used this opportunity to get back to Yuuhi.

"Thanks, Yuuhi."

"I told you to stay close."

"..."

Future Rekka stared at us during our exchange.

"Hey, you'll be disqualified if you kill them, remember?!" Maine warned from afar in a loud voice.

"I know," future Rekka answered bluntly.

But, actually, yeah... Come to think of it, wasn't a fireball a little, well, overkill for a no-kill match? Surely future Rekka had a more appropriate ability for this kind of fight... I suddenly got the feeling something was odd, but under the circumstances, I didn't have any time to think about it.

"..."

Future Rekka raised his left arm in my direction. His hand was dangling loosely at the end of his outstretched arm... which I thought was peculiar until the

whole thing suddenly changed shape.

“Omega Blaster.”

“Eep!”

What was this terrifyingly evil-sounding weapon?! It now looked like his hand had become the muzzle of some kind of gun and his arm was the barrel. Based on its name, maybe it was an energy cannon? But gun, cannon... It didn't matter. If this was a technological weapon, Yuuhi's breaker ability wouldn't work on it.

We can't block this one!

Light gathered at the business end of the Omega Blaster.

“!”

Without thinking, I took off. Future Rekka wasn't that far from where I was standing. My only chance was to try and kick his arm—er, gun?—away to change its trajectory before he fired. I made a mad dash for it, but even faster than me was...

“Yuuhi?!”

She'd been one step ahead of me. She reached future Rekka first, reaching her hand out for his Omega Blaster. As soon as she touched it, the light gathering inside of it vanished and the whole thing began emitting a high-pitched screech like a broken PC. Was it some kind of hardware malfunction?

“!”

Future Rekka dodged Yuuhi's follow-up attack and leaped backwards.

“Tch...”

Yuuhi didn't pursue him, but instead held her ground. We both watched as future Rekka's arm returned to normal. Or, at least, sort of normal. His movements were odd, and his fingers were clearly bent in unnatural directions.

“A hack... or a virus? No, the actual physical components have been damaged.” Future Rekka opened and closed his left hand awkwardly as he assessed it. “I even insulated the outside to prevent this from happening... How

did you do it?”

“That’s a trade secret,” Yuuhi spat, shooting him down in a daring tone.

Hey, that’s right! Yuuhi’s a tech wiz too! Nice!

Back at the extremists’ hideout, I remember L mentioning their advanced security system. Yuuhi had taken countermeasures against both mundane and supernatural attacks.

If she can keep all of future Rekka’s powers in check, we might have a real chance!

It felt like I was finally seeing a glimmer of hope. But then...

“Equipment change.”

The moment future Rekka muttered those words, his broken left arm disappeared. A new one then appeared in its place.

“A 4D pocket?!”

“Sorry. I can swap out my left arm whenever I want,” future Rekka said, responding to Yuuhi’s blatant shock in a flat tone.

A 4D pocket, though? He had swappable parts stored somewhere he could grab them at any time just by saying a command? This was ridiculous!

“Then I’ll just destroy every last one you have!” Yuuhi yelled, going in for another attack.

“Yeah!”

Wanting to lend a hand, I jumped forward after Yuuhi and tried to punch future Rekka too. However, despite both of us coming at him...

“Sorry.”

In the blink of an eye, we both lost sight of him. He simply vanished. Was this another supernatural power? Or was it something like a cloaking device? I couldn’t tell which, but the effect was the same: future Rekka was gone.

“An optical illusion? No...!” Yuuhi yelled as she reached into her jacket.

“It’s not.”

“Mmrgh!”

Future Rekka seemingly reappeared out of nowhere next to Yuuhi, stuffing his fingers in her mouth to keep her from saying any more.

“Hey!”

I swung my fist to try and save Yuuhi, but future Rekka was gone in the blink of an eye again. This time, he took Yuuhi with him, reappearing several meters away with her still held hostage.

“Even if you can nullify abilities and weapons, you can’t do anything about my strength, can you? After all the superhuman blood I’ve taken in, I too have become superhuman.”

“Mmph!”

Yuuhi tried to bite future Rekka’s fingers, but it did her no good.

“I don’t know how you destroyed the Omega Blaster, but the activator is in your mouth, isn’t it? I saw you bite down earlier.”

“!”

The look on Yuuhi’s face told us both that he was right.

“Damn it...!”

I made a mad dash for Yuuhi, burning with regret. It all made sense now. Future Rekka had whipped out his fireballs and his Omega Blaster not to kill us, but to test us! He wanted to know what he was up against. Though it had been an ambush, he’d already lost to Yuuhi once in a humiliating defeat. That’s why he’d chosen to play his cards cautiously this time and assess his opponents carefully. And once he determined we weren’t any real threat, he got serious.

“Now sleep,” future Rekka said, placing a finger against Yuuhi’s forehead.

“Yuuhi!”

“Rek—!”

I reached out for her, but I didn’t make it in time. Some strange power coursed through Yuuhi’s body, causing her to convulse for a moment before collapsing on the arena floor.

“Now... All that’s left is you,” future Rekka said, turning back towards me.

“I”

I braced myself, but it probably wouldn’t do much.

“...”

Beside me, R silently refrained from her typical banter. Even she looked worried.

“Don’t worry,” future Rekka then said.

“About what?” I asked hesitantly, peeking up over my crossed arms.

“I don’t intend to let Sith’s world be destroyed either,” he said casually.

“...What are you going to do?”

“I’ll solve the stories that happen there too.”

“What?!”

In the letter future Rekka had left for me, he said he was going to do everything he could on his own. I couldn’t say for sure that was why... But Yuuhi had noted the black hole looming over her world was a little bit smaller when she returned.

Yeah, I guess there’s no way he’d just let an entire world be destroyed...

He was still me, after all. I knew he wasn’t lying about this. But did that mean I should leave things to him? If he came out victorious, he’d probably be able to save a lot more stories than I could. Neither of us wanted to leave any of the heroines to the horrible fates that awaited them. And future Rekka was just so...

“...”

Different from me? No.

“You can’t fool me.”

“I”

My words made future Rekka stop in his tracks.

“No matter how many incredible abilities you may have acquired, there’s no

way you can save every story in both worlds.”

A single world was big enough as it was. Big enough that there was no way any one single person could keep track of everything that happened within it.

“The reason the goddesses’ game has dragged on for thousands of years is because both worlds were overflowing with Namidare power.”

According to Yuuhi, the so-called Namidare power didn’t only belong to us Namidares. There were people all over both worlds with Namidare power, each of them saving stories in their own way. It was because of that—because of them—that the two worlds had existed for so long with comparable levels of happiness.

“So if we’re going to save the world, we need quantity over quality. Even if you alone have amazing power, you still can’t help everyone all at once.”

“Quantity over quality? Just because someone tries to save a story doesn’t mean they can,” future Rekka said with a pained expression. “People try and fail all the time. All over the world. So no matter how many people have Namidare power, that won’t save—”

“What’s important is that you try!” I yelled at my future self. “Whether you’re alone or whether there’s someone there to help you makes all the difference in the world! Don’t you know that?! Who’s going to save *you* if there are no other heroes?!”

Future Rekka fell silent, his fists trembling. He then shouted, “Even so... I can’t just abandon the heroines who I’ve saved so far!”

“...”

It was now my turn to fall silent. Future Rekka and I were weighed down by different burdens. If he lost, several hundred heroines would be thrown to the wolves of cruel fate. But no matter how big a game I talked, there was no chance of me winning this. And even if I did win, I had no idea how I was going to save everything.

There’s no way I can beat him in this state...

Wasn’t there *something*? A way to win against future Rekka and all his crazy

abilities... A way that every heroine could survive...

“...”

Wasn't there? There had to be. No, such a convenient power couldn't possibly — Wait, convenient power?

That rattled something in the back of my mind. Something I'd forgotten. It just hadn't seemed relevant... until now.

“Like I said before... Hate me if you must. I came ready for that,” future Rekka said, assuming a fighting stance once more like he was ready to end things.

“Wait, there's still—”

“...”

I tried to stop him, but future Rekka's determined expression told me he wouldn't listen to another word I said.

Damn it! I thought I'd almost figured something out!

I just didn't have time to put it all together. He was gonna take me out before I could! I clenched my jaw, ready to accept defeat, but then...

“Rekka!” Yuuhi called out to me as she swiftly moved around behind future Rekka and pinned his arms.

“Yuuhi?!”

“Ask... Sith...!” she eked out, trying her best to contain future Rekka.

But what was she talking about? What good would Sith do now?

“Oh!”

Just then, everything snapped into place. Yuuhi had given me the last piece I needed. I immediately turned on my heels and darted over to the corner of the arena where Sith was watching the fight.

“Sith! Is that offer still good?!”

“Wh-What offer?”

“I was supposed to get a power for clearing the trial, right?!”

That's what Yuuhi had told me—that the divine trial was meant to bestow

worthy individuals with power. I'd only taken on the trial to reach Sith, so I'd completely forgotten about that part.

"A power? Y-Yes, I can give you that, but... what would help you win in the fight against your future self?"

"Uh..."

From magic to science, ancient artifacts to superhuman blood... Future Rekka had obtained all kinds of power from hundreds of stories. What on earth could trump all that?

I can only receive one power... A breaker ability like Yuuhi's? No, he figured a way around that... Maybe a one-hit KO power, then? No, he'd probably figure a way around that too...

A full-body paralysis attack? Mind control? Several cheat-level powers I'd seen in comics before crossed my mind, but I couldn't imagine being able to use any of them effectively enough to win against future Rekka. I'd never had a power of my own. I was always relying on the powers of others when I got involved in stories...

"..."

Hold on.

No power of my own...?

I couldn't remember exactly when, but at some point, both Dad and R had used a certain metaphor. They said Namidares were the substitute main characters for stories that had lost theirs, leaving them spiraling towards unhappy endings. And yeah, that was basically how it worked. I got involved in story after story, borrowing the power of the stories' heroines in order to make a difference. What if I kept that up now that I was the one that needed help?

Is that... even allowed?

If I could still rely on them, I was *pretty* sure I could solve anything. Even the hardships I was facing now. However, objectively speaking, I knew what I was asking for would be a huge pain for everyone. It would be for future Rekka too, considering he was my future self. But mostly I was concerned about Satsuki,

Iris, Harissa, and everyone else I'd saved... plus everyone I'd save in the future.

Would that really be okay?

When I asked myself that, a certain voice from the past resurfaced in my head.

"Now come on. Ask us. Say, 'I'm putting you all in danger. Will you stay with me anyway?'"

That's what Satsuki had said to me when I was in big trouble during Hibiki's story. She'd scolded me when I tried to distance myself from the heroines to avoid putting them in harm's way because of my bloodline.

Heh, I'm still worried about causing them trouble... If they knew I was hesitating over that, I bet they'd all be pretty angry.

Until now, whenever I'd asked them to help me out, they'd always come running. The goodwill they'd shown me and the number of times they'd saved me... It was endless, but I remembered every single occasion. R had repeatedly asked me to choose between the heroines, but my useless ass was as indecisive as ever. Each of the heroines was wonderful and had given me far more than I deserved. Believing in them was the least I could do to repay that.

If I caused them trouble, then I'd just apologize for it. If anyone grew to hate me for it, they'd just stop being my heroine. And when that happened, surely they'd be released from this power. In fact, some of them might quit right away. But if any of them were still by my side after I gained this extremely annoying power... then I'd be happy to accept their goodwill once more. I'd love for them to save me. In return, I'd become strong enough to protect everyone.

I recalled Satsuki's words and the vow I made that fateful day once more...

"Sith, I know what power I want."

And made a wish to a goddess.



"Tch!"

Future Rekka broke free of Yuuhi's grip, knocking her to the ground. He looked down at her, biting his lip.

I may have held back earlier, but she still managed to get up again... She really is another version of myself, huh?

Parallel worlds were mirrors of one another. It wasn't as though Yuuhi had needed to tell future Rekka that. He knew it instinctually upon seeing her.

But readying himself again for the battle at hand, he looked his body over for any damage. Nothing seemed of concern. His left arm had been broken, but he'd already swapped it out for a replacement.

It's been a while since I struggled so much in a fight.

After obtaining so many powers and abilities, future Rekka had become strong enough that he outclassed any and all opponents he faced. No story posed an obstacle for him. As soon as he learned the premise, he could handle the rest on his own with ease. He'd become a deus ex machina that forcefully and decisively solved whatever impossible task was at hand. But he didn't pride himself on that matter. Being able to resolve stories quickly and efficiently was simply the best option. It didn't particularly rub him the wrong way that this fight—this story—wasn't quick and efficient. It had just been some time since he'd had a close fight with an opponent.

“...”

Upon having that thought, future Rekka corrected himself internally. It was Yuuhi who had a close fight with *him*.

I was the one who wanted things this way.

Maine's world and Sith's world. His world and the other. When weighing the two, future Rekka had picked the former. Of course, he hadn't chosen it simply because he was prioritizing what was his. It was still an anguished decision. Perhaps that was why it felt right to suffer so for this story. It shouldn't end so easily. He wanted to feel like he'd somehow managed to save everyone at the end of a long, harsh battle that cost him blood, sweat, and tears. Otherwise, it would just be too terrifying... Deciding the fate of a world was a scary thing, after all.

“Ugh...”

Future Rekka shook his head. There was no point in trying to fool himself.

All that's left is to defeat my past self... and it's over.

Thinking about it, though they were from different worlds and timelines, there were three Namidares in this room. There were three of them, and yet this was the ending they were about to get. This was the best they could do. It was laughable. Perhaps this was how it was meant to be. Perhaps his past self was right... Even if you had enough power to change the fate of the world, there was only so much you could do on your own.

“Damn it... Did I made a mistake somewhere?” future Rekka spat, directionlessly venting his frustration. “If so, I just need to set you straight.”

“...”

There, future Rekka raised his hand against his past self.



Future Rekka was making a rather pathetic face.

“If you want to be defeated so badly, walk yourself over here. I’ll deck you good,” I called out to him.

“That’s a rather bold challenge,” future Rekka said in a tired voice. “But sorry—I can’t let you do that. Even if I’m mistaken, I still have important things I want to protect.”

“If that’s how you really feel, then stop making that face.”

“...”

“Granted, if I were in your position, I probably would’ve made the same choice.”

“Then...”

“But like you said, we’re different.” That meant we were capable of different things. “I actually wanted to persuade you... but I give up. I can’t leave this story and the heroines to you right now.”

“Then what do you intend on doing?” future Rekka asked.

And so...

“Let me show you!”

There, I activated the power I'd just gotten from Sith. I knew it would be a pain, but...

"Everyone... lend me your power!"

I yelled probably the lamest thing a hero had ever said. They were words that eluded both Yuuhi and future Rekka, who were always trying to solve things on their own. But me? I shouted them loud and proud. And when I did... everyone appeared. Literally.

"Huh?"

"Wha—here am I?!"

"Surprise teleportation?!"

Satsuki, Iris, and Harissa were all quite startled to be suddenly summoned to the arena.

"Wait, Rekka?!"

"No way! Why are you here?!"

"Wait, how is Sir Rekka over there too?!"

They looked back and forth between me and my future self in confusion. He appeared to be quite confused as well.

"This is my new ability," I explained.

"Just what... did you do?" he asked, still dumbfounded.

"It's simple. I dragged everyone into my story."

The inherent power of my Namidare bloodline was getting caught up in the heroines' stories. I'd requested the inverse of that from Sith as my reward for passing the divine trial.

"I'm the main character this time, and I needed someone to rescue me... So I forcefully dragged everyone into things. It's an obnoxious power, but that's how it works."

As I explained things, more and more heroines continued to appear. Lea, Tsumiki, Tetra, Hibiki, and many, many others. Even the heroines from my daily life like President Momone and Tokiwa had arrived. Actually... Maybe it was a

bad idea to summon the fragile Tokiwa here with a fight on our hands. Oh well. I guess she can stay.

Now, in order to really beat the point home for future Rekka, who was still standing there in a daze...

“Everyone! Sorry for calling you here so suddenly!”

“Hey, what’s going on here, problem child? I can’t make heads or tails of this,” President Momone asked, tapping her wooden sword against her shoulder as she glared at me.

“I’m sorry! I’ll explain everything later,” I said, pointing right at future Rekka. “But for now, in order to solve all this mess, we have to beat up my foolish self over there! So...”

I took a deep breath.

“PLEASE LEND ME YOUR POWER!”

Shouting with all my heart and soul, I bowed deeply. The girls had been summoned here out of nowhere, and now I was begging them for help. And yet...

“I don’t really get it, but okay,” said President Momone with a shrug.

“I don’t like the idea of beating up Rekka... but that’s what you need us to do, right? So count me in!” shouted Iris.

“As if I could refuse a request from you, Rekka,” said Rosalind with a sly smile.

“Ugh, fine. Get over here, Lea! I’ll whip up some dark matter for ya!” hollered Tsumiki.

“Harissa, I’m going to support Nammy with my spirit armor! Please chant the spell!” called Lyun.

“Oh no! I have to change into my Galactic Beauty costume!” shouted Kiri.

“Asking an angel like me to butt into the business of gods is absurd! I mean, I’m still going to help, but I expect *a lot* of love energy for this later, okay?!” demanded Rachelle.

Each of the heroines agreed to help me out in their own way.

Well, what do you think, future me? I bet you've forgotten what this looks like, haven't you?

Future Rekka had gained countless abilities and powers, making him virtually the strongest man in the universe. He was the ultimate main character. So what did he need the power of heroines for? He was solving stories left and right without their help. The fact that he was standing here in this arena alone—in the middle of the most important story he might ever face—was proof of that. It also explained the lonely look on his face. He didn't have anyone to rely on, and he knew it. He'd hit a dead end. So I was going to take it upon myself to break through to him. To make him remember just how small and weak Rekka Namidare really was in the grand scheme of the universe.

"Mudara Waffe!"

"Nammy! The spirit armor is ready!"

With Harissa's spell, Lyun took an ethereal form and became a zephyrous set of armor to protect me. Her transformation signaled the start of the battle.

"Let's go! Brace yourself, Rekka Namidare!" I yelled, borrowing Lyun's power to fly.

When I did, everyone else started making their moves too.

"Heavenly wind, ancient wind, return what rightfully belongs back to dust."

"Go, Robo-spider!"

Satsuki unleashed a roaring gust of wind as Shirley let loose a mechanical spider. The roaring wind assailed future Rekka from straight on, while the mechanical spider attacked his feet with tiny zaps of electricity.

"Alchemize: Stone Wall!"

In response, future Rekka summoned a wall from the arena floor to shield him from both the wind and the spider. The spider, however, was stronger than expected. It walked right up the wall and exploded, blowing both itself and the wall to smithereens.

"Shirley! Haven't we talked about your dangerous toys before?!"

"Yes, and I told you that they're made with all the proper safety measures in

place! They're fine!"

I'd heard that all before, but I didn't trust Shirley or her inventions one bit... But I'd have to deal with that later.

"Kuh!"

The explosion had sent smoke and dust flying everywhere, momentarily blinding future Rekka. Suzuran had taken the opportunity to attack, slipping closer in the smoke before throwing one of her silver knives. Future Rekka raised his cyborg arm to deflect it, which left him open to Rosalind's follow-up attack.

"Take this!"

She was going right for his undefended abdomen.

"!"

While vampires were super strong and one of Rosalind's punches would ordinarily be enough to completely blow someone away, future Rekka was also part vampire. He had no trouble stopping her blow, catching her fist with his right palm before throwing her with it.

"Oof!"

Rosalind regained her balance midair and landed safely, but during her flight, President Momone, Chirika, Yulia, and Yorun came at future Rekka from four directions.

"Phantom Blade!"

"Silkworm Slash!"

"Take this!"

"Hyah!"

The swordswomen unleashed their special attacks while Yulia and Yorun both swung their oversized weapons with all their might. Future Rekka caught the first two attacks with his left and right arms, and the other two with a third and fourth arm that sprouted from his chest and back respectively.

"Whoa!"

“Since when did Rekka have such fancy skills—yaaah!”

President Momone immediately let go of her wooden sword and backed away, but Yorum was too caught off guard and didn’t react in time. Future Rekka tossed her just like he had Rosalind earlier.

“Yorum!”

I used Lyun’s wind powers to cushion Yorum’s fall so she’d land safely.

Even a four-person attack like that didn’t work?!

I’d offered to deck my future self earlier, but that was going to be harder to follow through on than I’d imagined. But as I was contemplating that, a lone shadow crept up behind future Rekka.

“!”

He seemed to notice it and swung his fist behind him, but caught only air... because the opponent that had approached him from behind was very, very short.

Chelsea’s shrinking magic!

Chelsea must’ve used her magic on whoever it was. Actually, who *was* it?

“Let’s make you a little shorter too!”

It turned out to be Ellicia the psychic, who proceeded to use her wall-walking ability to sink future Rekka through the stone floor.

“!”

She sank him all the way to his neck, leaving only his head sticking out of the ground.

“Rekka! Now’s our chance!”

“Kiri?!”

Kiri—now wearing her Galactic Beauty costume—leaped into the air and grabbed my arm.

“Let’s do this together!”

“W-Wait!”

She pulled me down with her as we both fell towards future Rekka. No, wait... We weren't just falling!

"Galactic KIIIIICK!"

"Erk! Oh yeah, uh... KIIIIICK!"

I just barely managed to yell the special attack name and form a kick with Kiri, but even with my weak performance, the combined jump kick with both our weight and momentum behind it was a serious threat. A direct hit to the head would surely knock anyone out. But future Rekka looked strangely calm. What was he up to?

"Leg blaster! Ignition on!"

When he shouted those words, a sudden, thunderous rumble cracked the arena floor. Then, before our kick could land, smoke sputtered from future Rekka's feet as he rocketed up and out of the floor. Having lost our target, Kiri and I landed helplessly.

"Uwah... That was close, Rekka!"

"But don't you think we could've gotten off a better surprise attack if we hadn't yelled the name of the move?"

"What? But Zeta said to yell it loudly."

"Hey, Zeta! Stop feeding Kiri bad advice!"

I turned my complaint to Zeta, who had set up a director's chair in the corner of the arena at some point like this was all a show to her. She even had a small camera with her.

"Shut up! I'm getting some real good footage right now, so stop complaining and get back to work!" Zeta yelled back at me through her megaphone.

"....."

Tokiwa had apparently taken refuge in the corner of the arena with Zeta, and leaned over to say something to her that I couldn't hear.

"Girlie here wants some material for her novels too, so she'd like to see some racy stuff while you're at it!"

“I don’t have time for that!” I shouted in abject honesty.

But Tokiwa simply gave me an enthusiastic thumbs-up like she couldn’t hear any of my angry yelling. She then took out the notepad she always carried in her breast pocket and began writing furiously. These damn creative types... Was art really the first thing on their minds at a time like this?!

“Argh, I give up! There’s no helping them!”

I mean, I *was* the one who’d called them here. As long as they stayed out of harm’s way, it should be fine. Now, back to the task at hand...

“Wait, you!”

I chased after future Rekka, who had fled upward. The heroines who could fly were already fighting him in the air.

“Gyaaaaaoh!”



Lea in Leviathan form was attacking future Rekka directly, and she had Tsumiki and Harissa riding on her head to offer support.

“Wow, Lea sure is as huge as ever,” future Rekka muttered, enlarging his right arm.

Lea was currently a great serpent over fifty meters long. Her mouth was big enough to swallow a house whole... But future Rekka clamped her jaw shut with one—albeit very large—hand.

“Mguh?!”

“Hey! What gives?!”

Tsumiki stamped her foot in protest from atop Lea’s head. I could see the tupperware container of dark matter in her hands. It seemed her plan was to feed Lea when she needed a power boost, but with her jaw clamped shut like this, she wasn’t eating anything. However...

“?! ”

Suddenly, future Rekka’s left arm started sparking in malfunction.

“Fam?!”

Future Rekka’s mind jumped straight to the green-haired gremlin, but there was no sign of her anywhere nearby. The both of us, however, quickly realized the trick.

She’s on Lea’s head with the others! Harissa must’ve made her invisible!

Yuuhi had busted future Rekka’s cyborg arm earlier with a secret technique, but Fam could destroy machinery without tools or any other kind of assistance. Harissa and Fam must have coordinated this strategy when they saw future Rekka fly off and realized he was part machine.

“Tch!”

Speaking of, it was right about then that sparks started flying from his legs. He saw them and quickly backed off, releasing Lea. It was the right call. If his leg blasters were put out of commission, he wouldn’t be able to fly anymore. Or, at least... that’s what I thought until he suddenly sprouted wings from his back.

They were bony and leathery, more like a bat's than a bird's.

"Yikes," Lyun shuddered. "Kinda creepy, huh?"

"Did he take in demon blood too?" I wondered aloud.

But then I clenched my fist. No matter what form he took, this was still a fight between me and my future self. And I still needed to deck him good!

"Raaagh!"

I flew in, but he evaded my fist at the last second.

"That wind... A spirit?"

"Yeah."

"You shouldn't answer me so honestly... Though I suppose that's typical for me," future Rekka muttered in exasperation, shaking his head. Then he said, "They can be used like this, you know?"

"What?!"

Future Rekka gave a flap of his wings, shrouding the area in a black mist. It sapped my wind power, and I sunk lower and lower as it grew weaker and weaker.

"What is this?!"

"M-My energy's being drained! It's almost like the ghostdemon sickness."

"Oh no!"

Back in Lyun's story, there was a disease that ran rampant across the land, corrupting spirits and magic. But if I recalled correctly, it wasn't a genuine sickness so much as it was a trap laid by a demon king... Wait, don't tell me the black mist just now was some kind of curse?

"S-Sorry... I don't think... I can fly anymore..."

Eventually, Lyun was no longer able to support me in the air, sending us both into a freefall. We were just about to hit the ground when someone grabbed me by the back.

"Rachelle!"

“H-Hello... L-L-Let’s get out of here!”

With me in her arms, Rachelle looked over her shoulder in a panic. Future Rekka was speeding our way at a frightening pace.

“Eeek! I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry I’m sorry!”

Rachelle wasn’t a particularly fast flyer, so I thought we’d be caught for sure, but...

“Gah!”

A lone fairy flew up and threw herself over future Rekka’s eyes, using her body like a blindfold.

“Poppy?!”

“Rekka! Rachelle! Now’s your chance!”

“R-R-Right!”

“Wait, Rachelle! Poppy is—”

I tried to get Rachelle to turn back, but...

“Mark!”

Sherlyn got on it before I could. I looked down and saw her standing tall in the middle of the arena. She’d just used her signature magic to put her mark on future Rekka’s shoulder. Next came...

“Steal!”

When Sherlyn activated the second part of her spell, future Rekka was rapidly pulled towards her. It would get him out of the air, sure, but it would also mean she had to contend with him.

“You’ll pay for what you did to me earlier!”

“Leave the close combat to me!”

Fortunately, Sherlyn had Rosalind and Iris to protect her. They took the front line.

“Don’t forget meow! I’m good in a catfight too!” Ai shouted as she jumped in too.

“Tch...”

With the weaker Ai now joining the fray, future Rekka had to hold back a little more. It was against the rules for him to kill us, after all. Both Rosalind and Iris were tough opponents he could handle with a fair bit of power, but not so much Ai. Her presence helped a great bit to handicap him... Not that Ai had probably considered any of that. The kitten Satsuki and I raised when we were kids had simply grown up to be a big, brave nekomata.

“N-Now’s our chance to get down!”

Despite her panic, Rachelle was able to get us to the ground safely.

“How are you doing, Lyun?” I asked.

“Urgh, it’s no good... I still can’t use my powers...” she answered in a pained voice.

What should I do? Would it be better to discard the spirit armor and try another method? But there were risks to taking Shirley’s medicine or using the Mask of Greed. The spirit armor was the safest way to raise my physical abilities.

“Rekka! Lyun!”

While I was debating my options, Mio came running over.

“I saw you fall earlier... Did something happen to Lyun?”

“Yeah. I think it might be some kind of curse.”

“A curse?! In that case...” Mio gave a resolute nod and took a deep breath before she started singing. “Not far away, not behind me, what’s in front of me is...”

Ah, I know this song! It’s “The Day Before the Future,” MIO’s debut song that healed the spirits of the ghostdemon sickness back in the spirit world. And the lyrics filled with hope for the future worked their magic on Lyun here too.

“Thank you, Mio!”

“Yeah, thanks, Mio. You’re a lifesaver.”

“I’m happy to help. Now get out there and do your best, you two!”

With Mio's cheering and support acting like a tailwind, we flew up into the air once more.

"But what are we gonna do? He's dodging everything everyone is throwing at him..."

"He's unfairly powerful! We'll never beat him unless we can really surprise him!"

"Really surprise him, huh?"

I admit the same thought had crossed my mind, but surprising future Rekka wouldn't be easy either. In addition to all of his ridiculous powers, he had the advantage of all the skill and experience he'd acquired over hundreds of stories. That's why he was so quick on his feet and had no trouble coming up with ways to get around or defeat the heroine's powers. I'd expect that much with Satsuki and Iris, but he was still taking down heroines he'd never met before.

If only we could catch him off guard with magic he didn't know...

Just then, things took a turn on the battlefield below.

"Take this!"

Rosalind transformed into a red mist to obscure future Rekka's vision.

"Oh singing wind, blowing storm..."

But future Rekka immediately chanted a spell, conjuring a whirlwind to clear the air. Rosalind's red mist, however, was only a decoy.

"We're going all in!"

"Right!"

"Now's no time to hesitate!"

Iris, Lea, and Corona were all standing in a line, armed with a laser gun, water magic, and dark magic respectively. The three of them were probably the heaviest hitters in our entire group, and they all attacked future Rekka at once. The destructive power of their collective attack was overwhelming. It instantly swallowed up future Rekka and sent three massive shockwaves throughout the arena.

“How long are we firing for?!” Corona asked.

“Until we run out of energy!” Iris answered.

And she made the right call. If they really wanted to overpower future Rekka, they couldn’t relent in the slightest. However...

“Huh?”

Iris suddenly raised a surprised voice. And the reason was before her eyes—cutting up through the middle of the beam fired from her laser gun was future Rekka. Unlike Corona and Lea’s attacks, Iris’s wasn’t magical. Future Rekka must’ve had some kind of energy shield to protect himself from it.

“Iris!”

I ran towards her as fast as I could, but it was too late. Future Rekka knocked Iris and then Lea and Corona out in the blink of an eye.

“Satsuki, Tsumiki, Suzuran! Get the three of them to safety!”

I entrusted Satsuki and the others with the three unconscious girls. Satsuki could use healing magic, so I figured they would be fine in her care. That said, her withdrawal from the battlefield put us at something of a disadvantage.

“Looks like your numbers have dropped quite a bit,” future Rekka announced, clearly seeing through me.

He then lifted his left arm, which he’d apparently swapped out for another new one at some point.

“Don’t worry. It’s just a shockwave. It won’t kill you, but it will hurt a bit.”

“I”

No sooner had he said that, the holes in future Rekka’s robotic hand started to suck in air before firing a pressurized ball of air from the center of his palm.

I can just change its trajectory with Lyun’s wind powers! Wait... No! Why isn’t it working?!

It was like it was too heavy! I couldn’t move it at all! The only thing I could do was clench my jaw and brace for impact. And so I did, but then a lone girl wandered out in front of me.

“Oh, that looks dangerous.”

The moment she muttered that, the shockwave shot off in another direction.

“Touko!”

“Hey,” she replied with a casual wave of her hand. “This is my first time experiencing what it’s like to be involved in one of these stories of yours, but it really is an amazing sight. No wonder my power of words led me here.”

Touko had long been troubled by her ability to manipulate reality with the power of words. She’d searched high and low for someone who could challenge her, and that search had led her to me. She’d also told me something back then that she repeated now...

“I only use my power of words on myself as a self-imposed restriction. I don’t think I’ll be much help to you now, or in the future.”

“Yeah, that’s fine. Even if you’re a heroine, it’s not like you have to listen to everything I say.”

“Hahaha! It’s exactly that, Rekka—your refusal to rely on my power even now—that makes you so incredible and unique.” Touko had a good laugh to herself before turning to future Rekka. “That said, if any attacks come my way, I’ll simply have no choice but to protect myself.”

“Huh? No, that’s dangerous. You should just stay back.”

“What?” Touko’s shoulders slumped. “Listen here, you! When someone makes concessions for you... Argh, just forget it! I’m willing to defend you right now, so just get that through your thick skull and accept it!”

Unsure why Touko was suddenly so mad, I couldn’t help cocking my head to the side.

“I see you’re as insensitive as ever, even at a time like this, Rekka,” R said in her usual exasperated tone.

“Gosh, I’m so mad,” Touko continued. “I’m so mad at you, Rekka... That the Rekka over there should kneel!”

“!”

Surprised, future Rekka instantly dropped to his knees. Touko's power of words surpassed any other supernatural, scientific, and physical powers. Not even future Rekka could lift a finger if she forbade it.

"The power of words, huh? None of my heroines could use that. There must have been some deviations in our fates after all," future Rekka said, struggling to lift his head as he remained kneeling. "But did you know such alteration abilities are limited to the range of one's perceivable world?"

"Huh? What are you—"

"Enclosed World: White Cube!"

The moment future Rekka uttered those words, a white box appeared out of nowhere and surrounded Touko. She had to have been inside it, but it didn't so much as rattle.

"Phew..."

Letting out a heavy sigh, future Rekka stood up.

The effect wore off?!

"What... What did you do?"

"I shut her inside a pocket dimension, essentially. As long as she's there, her power of words can't affect us here."

"Wha?!"

"Like I said, alteration powers are limited by one's perception. She's effectively isolated from this world right now and therefore has no power over it," future Rekka said flatly as though he were stating simple facts.

Come to think of it, though... When I solved Touko's story, I took her to an isolated game world to bypass her power too.

And, yeah... It wasn't like Touko could affect the world outside while we were in the game.

That meant future Rekka was right. As long as Touko was trapped somewhere else, her power wouldn't work here.

"Tch..."

While she herself wasn't as strong as Lea or Iris, Touko's power was unmistakably one of the strongest. But future Rekka had come up with a way to get past it, just like that...

"Too bad. But I figured it wouldn't be that easy."

"Hibiki?"

Before I knew it, all the girls who could still fight had rallied around me.

"No one's given up yet, and no one's running away. Hang in there, Rekka."

"Yeah... I know!"

Encouraged by Hibiki, I clenched my spirit armor-clad fist. This time, we'd all take him on together.

"We're finally reaching the finale!"

I could see the tension in future Rekka's face as well. He too knew we'd entered the final stage of this fight, though it was a little too pathetic to call it that.

Even without Iris, Corona, Lea, Touko, Satsuki, Tsumiki, and Suzuran, we had well over twenty on our side. But no one had managed to land a single hit on future Rekka. Our strongest fighter left was Rosalind, but he didn't have any trouble dodging her attacks. He'd been doing it all along as he oh-so carefully knocked out heroine after heroine. He'd been as gentle as he could so as not to hurt them.

After a while, Satsuki and Suzuran returned to the fray, but nothing changed... Future Rekka simply kept dodging and attacking. Just how OP was he to be able to pull this off?

But it's no use... Even if I tell him what I'm thinking right now, he won't understand. He's forgotten... He's forgotten the most important thing.

That's why I had to deck him. I had to beat it into him.

"Uaaargh!"

I borrowed more of Lyun's power to charge forward.

"Force Cancel: Purge."

“?!”

But suddenly, Lyun and I were separated. Did he dispel our spirit armor?! I got up in a hurry, but Lyun was already unconscious.

“It’s not the same as Yuuhi’s ability, but I have a few tricks up my sleeve too.”

“If you could do that all along, why didn’t you earlier?”

“If I had, the fall might’ve killed you.”

“That’s why you just cursed Lyun... so Rachelle or someone else would have the time to come save me.”

What a bastard.

“It’s over now.”

Future Rekka swung his fist, but just before it came down on me...

“Oh no!”

“Rekka!”

“Run for it!”

Tetra, Nyanyan, and Rain grabbed future Rekka’s arms and legs.

“...!”

I could see the hesitation in his eyes. The three girls were as fragile as Zeta and Tokiwa. If he didn’t want to hurt anyone, he’d have to be extra careful with them.

This is my chance!

I ran like the girls asked me to, but forward instead of backward. With him held in place, this might be my one and only chance!

“Haaaaah!”

Future Rekka didn’t bother to shake off the other girls. He was prioritizing keeping them unharmed. So in order to intercept me, rather than using his own limbs, a semi-transparent fist came flying out of his chest.

I forgot about that!

If he could use that power to defend himself, of course he could use it to attack too! My eyes followed the fist in slow motion, as though I was moments from death. It was the perfectly timed counter. There was no way I could avoid it. I didn't know how much power was behind his ethereal fist, but if it made clean contact with my chin, I would most certainly be knocked out. Once that happened, it would all be over.

“I”

I grit my teeth, stubbornly bracing myself. If I psyched myself up enough, maybe I could withstand the punch. I'd seen someone do something like that in a manga before... And I was gonna make it happen here and now! With that in mind, I focused intently on the approaching fist... Which was suddenly blocked by a semi-transparent red wall. Someone then grabbed me by the collar and my vision went black. It came back after a few seconds, and...

“You're too reckless! You dumbass!”

“Oh, L.”

It was L who'd saved me. She'd probably used her barrier and the particle relocator.

“Uh...”

I looked around to see where we were, and we hadn't moved that far. We were only about fifty meters from future Rekka. The teleportation had only taken a few seconds, but in that time, he'd managed to put Tetra and the other girls to sleep. That meant we were the only ones left.

“Argh, jeez... I'd read the materials, but your future self is ridiculously strong,” she complained.

“Damn right he is. He's the strongest main character in the universe, you know?” I returned L's deliberate banter.

She then grabbed me by the shirt. “Hey... you don't intend on leaving everything to him, do you?”

“Nah.”

“Good. We much prefer you as the main character, anyway.”

“Huh?”

L placed an awful lot of emphasis on the “we” part of that sentence, but she didn’t explain. She simply stood up.

“Got it?! We’re going to send him flying!”

And with that, she took off running.

“Wait!”

What is she doing? And who is “we”?

No matter how clumsy she was, this was... No, was she really just being clumsy and careless right now? Here, of all places? Or was she trying to tell me something else? Something she couldn’t say directly?

Was she wary of being overheard...?

With the diverse range of superhuman abilities future Rekka had, it wasn’t impossible that he had super-hearing too. L might have even done a scan of him and figured out exactly which parts of his body had been altered or enhanced. So what was the point, then? What was the actual message she was trying to convey to me?

I followed after her, closing in on future Rekka.

“...”

He was just standing there, quietly waiting for us to arrive—which would happen in just a few seconds. And during those long, long few seconds, I replayed L’s words in my head over and over again.

We’re going to send him flying? We...? Oh, duh!

That was it! Once I realized who she meant, I almost turned to look... But I stopped myself. I couldn’t ruin everything by revealing the secret too soon. If this went well, we might really just catch my future self by surprise. This would be our only chance, though. If I messed it up, it would all be over. It was a miracle I’d managed to figure out what L meant in the first place... But here we were. And I was going to believe—believe that it would all work out!

“Hah!”

L reached future Rekka first and unleashed a quick roundhouse kick at his shins. He dodged it without even looking, then placed a finger against L's forehead while she was still crouched low.

“Ah...!”

And just like that, L fell unconscious. It was the same technique that had knocked Yuuhi and the others out harmlessly.

“...”

“...”

Future Rekka and I locked eyes. There was a scant seventy centimeters between us. We were both in punching range of each other. This one blow would decide everything.

“Aaaah!”

I left everything to my momentum as I ran and let my fist fly.

“...”

Future Rekka saw through it all. The trajectory of my fist. The position of my chin. How to knock me out in a single move. He saw through it all and prepared his counterattack. But I'd thrown everything I had into my punch, meaning I had nothing to defend myself with. L was out now too, so not even her barrier could save me. All the other heroines around me were defeated. There was no one in sight left to help me... But just then, someone gave me a little push from behind and my whole body pitched forward, making my fist accelerate faster than future Rekka had expected.



“?!”

I saw future Rekka’s expression change in shock, but my mind was elsewhere.

So you understood L’s secret message too, huh?

Who was I kidding? She’d probably realized it before I did. After all...

You really are sisters, huh, R?

The other person L meant when she’d said “we” was none other than R—my sharp-tongued partner who’d become invisible to everyone except me in order to enter Sith’s world. And I knew future Rekka couldn’t see her because of what he’d said after knocking Yuuhi out the first time.

“Now... All that’s left is you.”

If he could see R, he would’ve known it was more than just me he had to deal with. So, in the end, R was the real linchpin in our surprise. After stripping her down of all her Kiklim functions, all she could really do now was interact with me... But that was enough. That gave her the power to give me a big pat on the back right when I needed it.

Of course, fighting against someone as laughably scrawny as I was, future Rekka probably had his guard down. He was overwhelmingly strong and believed he could see everything that might pose a threat to him. He probably had the range of my arms pegged down to the millimeter. He was probably sure that his counterattack would be the end of things. Too bad he didn’t know about R.

“Hyah!”

My full-bodied, spirited punch sank into future Rekka’s nose, sending him flying. No matter how tough he was... With his guard down like that, not even he could stand up to a full-power punch.

“Oww... You shoulda been ready for that. I told you I was going to deck you.”

I rubbed my sore fist as I addressed future Rekka, who was lying prone on the floor.

“...”

He then looked at me and stood up, seemingly unfazed. He wasn't even bleeding... Good grief, did he have a cyborg nose too?

"Is that all you've got?"

"Yeah, I think I'm done here. And this is your loss."

"How so?"

"Take a look around you."

Future Rekka cocked his head to the side with an expression that made it clear he didn't understand what I meant. I'd only landed a single punch, and it hadn't even put a scratch on him. Moreover, he'd probably caught on to the trick already. I wouldn't get to punch him a second time.

"...?"

My bold declaration of victory despite all that made future Rekka cock his head even more. I, however, paid him no mind and looked around the arena. They were all either knocked out or asleep, but my prided heroines were all around us.

"Well? Aren't they amazing? With their help, even a normal human like me can punch the strongest guy in the universe at least once."

"But what does that have to do with—"

"I know what you're really afraid of."

Hearing those words, future Rekka froze on the spot. The thing future Rekka feared the most... He was afraid of losing his excess Namidare power and losing the heroines he'd already saved. But in addition to that...

"Once the past changes and the number heroines you've saved decreases, so too will the number of powers you have. And you're worried that once you get weaker, you won't be able to save anyone else. Right?"

"..."

"You don't have to admit it. I know the answer already. We're the same, after all."

I knew his weaknesses better than anyone. All I had to do was think forward a

little and put myself in my future self's shoes... It wasn't that hard. And I totally got it—I'd be afraid of the same thing too.

"It's not being weak that scares you. It's the thought of not being able to save anyone that terrifies you."

"...I just couldn't say it out loud because of how lame it sounds," future Rekka finally said in a purposefully self-deprecating tone. Then he raised his head and asked me with a serious expression, "Well? Did you think that knowing that would make me hesitate to defeat you?"

Once more, I nodded without hesitation.

"That's why I showed you everyone's power."

"...!"

Future Rekka had grown too strong. He used his power to do everything on his own. He was always alone, which was how he'd forgotten what made him strong in the first place.

"Even if you might not be the strongest anymore, with their help... you'll be invincible! Remember that. And think about it. Back in the beginning, you couldn't save a single story on your own, could you?"

"Yeah... Yeah, you're right about that." Future Rekka gave a reluctant nod, seemingly still unconvinced. "But what will happen to the heroines I lose when I lose my power?"

"I explained my new power, didn't I?" I said, answering his question with one of my own. "It's the ability to drag heroines into Rekka Namidare's story. And if I have it, naturally, you will too. With this, we can pull in any of the heroines we need to help save a story."

"?!"

Future Rekka finally realized what was going on and gasped. Until now, Namidare power had been a purely passive thing. Only by meeting a heroine and getting involved with her could I become the de facto main character of her story. But I was done with that. All of it. Instead of just waiting for things to happen, I wanted the power to do something... And now I had it. I could call my

friends to my side anytime I needed their help. And together, we could save anyone. *That* was my real power.

“Besides, in the future, you’ll have access to the doctor’s time translocator. With that, you can save any heroine you want to, regardless of time or place.”

Once Sith’s Namidare power was returned to her world, the past of Maine’s world would be altered accordingly. Future Rekka would essentially lose all the heroines he’d saved with Namidare power that wasn’t his to begin with. But if he used the time translocator, he could seek them out and save them all over again with his—our—new power to drag heroines into our story.

“With this, both worlds, all the heroines, and even you, me, and Yuuhi can all be saved. So, what do you say? Do you accept defeat yet?”

The moment I asked him that, future Rekka fell backwards with a flop.

“U-Uh, hello?”

“You win... I admit complete defeat,” future Rekka whispered, looking up at the sky from where he lay on the ground like a deflated balloon. “But I wonder... Why are you and I so different?”

“I don’t think we’re really all that different at heart, you know? You just forgot a few things here and there.”

“Forgot a few things, huh...?” Future Rekka sighed a deep, heavy sigh before giving me a bitter smile. “But you’re leaving all the heavy lifting to me, aren’t you? Asking someone to save several hundred heroines all over again is a lot to drop in their lap, you know.”

At his expense, we both had a good laugh.

“Then shall I give you a hand? Or, wait... Don’t tell me you can’t remember each and every one of your hundreds of heroines?”

“As if that could ever forget them,” future Rekka answered immediately. “Besides, who needs your help? They’re *my* heroines.”

“That so?”

I nodded and said nothing more. And thus concluded our battle.



After the battle, the observing goddesses came over.

“Yuuhi... You okay?”

“Yeah...”

Sith was taking care of the now-conscious Yuuhi, leaving me to deal with the other goddess—Maine.

“Wow, what a twist that was. I never expected you would actually win. I suppose I underestimated you as a Namidare.”

“Th-Thanks...”

I didn’t really like dealing with Maine. There was something about the way she acted and talked... Really, she was the cause of all this trouble in the first place. I guess I just resented her for it.

“But you know what this means, don’t you? By returning Sith’s Namidare power, the happiness levels of the two worlds will balance out again and we’ll be back to square one.”

“Then you should just call off your stupid game,” I blurted out. “Why did you even start such a game anyway? If you’re that bored, there are plenty of other games you could play.”

“Well...” There, Maine turned to Sith and broke eye contact with me. “Sith told you how we deities can’t help but create worlds, right?”

“Huh? Well, yeah. Something about biology and all that.”

Funny... Maine wasn’t around when we had that conversation. Were deities all-hearing too?

“So what do you think happens to a god that quits creating worlds?” she asked.

“?”

“If a god stops creating worlds, they disappear.”

“Huh?!”

The shocking reveal left me reeling in bewilderment.

“Wh-What? But Sith said there was no particular reason for doing it.”

“Humans and animals also create offspring instinctually, no? If they fight that instinct and stop reproducing, that species would go extinct.”

“...”

So that’s what all that stuff about biology meant...?

Maine continued without meeting my gaze, “We’ve been creating and ending worlds for a long time now... Before we created our current worlds, Sith was in real trouble. She was on the brink of disappearing.”

“...That’s why you started the game?”

“Yup, that’s right. I wanted her to regain her passion for making worlds.”

“Then why would you want to destroy her world now?”

Based on everything she’d said before the fight, Sith had already rediscovered her love for her world-making. So if that was Maine’s goal, then she’d already gotten what she wanted. But Maine shook her head.

“I didn’t think destroying her world would be such a bad ending. If I did that, she would detest me and challenge me to another game... to avenge her world and destroy mine in turn.”

Hearing Maine’s real objective made me shudder. Man... What a goddess, am I right?

“So your little sister means more to you than all of the lives you would destroy in the process?”

“Of course. She’s the only sister I have,” Maine replied without hesitation.

There, she finally turned to look at me again. On her lips was a faint hint of a smile.

“Neither you nor I are real heroes, you know? We’re just doing what we can to protect the people precious to us.”

“Jeez, I get what you’re saying... But please pick a less destructive plan next time.”

“Hmph, I’ll consider it.”

Maine seemed to have said her piece and left my side to go hug her sister. It was an endearing display of sisterly love, though I worried about what exactly Maine’s love might mean for Sith in the future.

“Gosh, what a terrifying goddess. A textbook yandere, don’t you think?” R said from where she was floating beside me.

I felt like the life had been sucked out of me.

“Please save me from the yandere goddess that drags entire worlds into her games...”

And so I prayed that I would never end up in a story like this again.

Wait, if I pray for that, then the one who hears it is going to be...

The despair that weighed on me made my shoulders droop even more than they already had.

“Rekka...”

“Hm?”

“I was actually thinking about something.”

“What is it?”

“Why you and future Rekka are so different.”

R’s words piqued my interest. It was also something I’d wondered many a time before now. It didn’t really matter that much anymore, but I was still curious.

“Did you come to any conclusions, R?”

“Well, it’s all mostly conjecture.”

“Come on! Just tell me!”

“All right, all right... You have an excessive amount of Namidare power—the power to change fate—right?”

“Yeah. Though it’s gradually lessening now.”

Like we promised before the battle, Main was now returning the excess

Namidare power to Sith's world. It was apparently a highly condensed power, and it would take some time to disperse throughout the world as it was, meaning I had to stay up here in the spiritual realm for a few days while that happened. That gave me plenty of time to discuss things with R.

"Based on the way that only you were able to alter the past, my conjecture is that your fate-changing Namidare power can also affect time and space."

"I see, I see."

"That's how, as you witnessed for yourself, the Rekka of the future gained too much power and hit a dead end."

"Huh? But that's—"

"Yes, it was recently corrected. I know," R said, raising a hand to stop my interruption. "However, like I said, I believe that Namidare power can affect space-time itself. So perhaps somewhere in a different timeline, or even in a different world we can't perceive... Perhaps there's a Rekka Namidare somewhere that realized things couldn't keep on this way."

R was comparing me with my future self and Yuuhi.

"Perhaps that thought produced a change... A change that manifested at the very beginning of the story of Rekka Namidare. A change that would forever alter his life. And perhaps—just maybe—that's how we got to where we are now."

"Umm, so... In other words..." I racked my head trying to break down R's so-called conjecture and get to the bottom of it. "What you're trying to say is that... Maybe somewhere else in the universe, some other me changed my fate?"

"Like I said, it's all just conjecture."

R paused there to adjust her hat.

"Well, who cares about that anyway?" she said, the corners of her mouth turning upwards slightly. "Because as you can see, everything's been settled peacefully thanks to you now."

"Well... You're right about that."

Thinking the gist of what she'd said was right, I shrugged and smiled back at her in a similar fashion.

Epilogue

Some time after the duel, I returned to my own time period. The excess Namidare power within me that was originally from Sith's world was now gone, and it had taken a great deal with it. For example, the destruction wrought on my hometown by the extremists was completely undone.

Several days after I returned home, the doctor sent me a sitrep. While I personally hadn't ever engaged with her as a heroine, I knew her as the king of Laputa in my timeline. Thanks to that, she remained one of future Rekka's heroines even after his past normalized. Now, as for the sitrep she'd sent me, it contained all kinds of news. And I was grateful to get it since I didn't have any other way of knowing what was going on in the future.

First and foremost, the War of All was over. More precisely, it was gone. Like it never happened. Iris's father was alive and well, and future Rekka was never kidnapped by Yuuhi. He was, however, frequently absent because he was using the time translocator nearly every day to save the heroines he'd lost. He was still immortal because of the vampire blood he'd taken in, but he was pushing himself beyond human limits to get everyone back as soon as possible. To ease the burden on him, future Satsuki and many of the other future heroines were lending him a hand.

Then there was Yuuhi. After everything that had happened, she crossed back into Maine's world once to visit. Apparently both she and her world had undergone massive changes too. According to the doctor, Yuuhi was a lot more feminine now. She'd been through a lot because of losing her Namidare power... And, well, now that all that had been resolved, I guess certain changes were to be expected.

She still seemed to retain at least vague memories of what happened, however, which was why she'd come to Maine's world to thank everyone. The doctor even mentioned that she wanted to visit my timeline sometime to thank me too. I personally thought it was enough for her to thank my future self, but I was looking forward to seeing her again when she did drop by.

As for everything else, the various other effects of the alterations were vast and complex. Listing them all out would take far too long and be far too difficult to explain, so they were thusly omitted—that’s what the doctor said. And that was the extent of her report.

“Well, I guess this counts as a happily ever after.”

“Sure seems like it.”

After I finished reading the report, the words I muttered to myself were met with a retort from the peanut gallery. I mean, she was the one who’d delivered the report, but still.

“Hey, R...”

“Yes?”

“Why are you still here?”

“Wow!” she exclaimed, reacting with exaggerated shock to my rather reasonable question. “To think you’ve become such a cold-hearted man... Would you really abandon a little girl like me after everything we’ve been through together?”

“Um, I didn’t mean that,” I relented, scratching my head. “But the War of All is over, right? So you’ve been relieved of your duty, right?”

R’s original mission was to get me to settle down with a heroine in order to prevent the War of All. But now that the War of All wouldn’t happen, she should be free. So what was she doing here in my house, visible to only me and wearing her typical military uniform?

“You even said I could come visit every now and then.”

“Yeah, I know I did, but... No matter how I look at it, you look like you’re on duty right now, you know?”

I’d happily welcome her for a friendly visit, but I really couldn’t get over the way she was dressed. Nothing screams “serious business” quite like a military uniform.

“Oh, I wanted to inform you of that myself, so I asked the doctor not to include it in the report.”

“Huh? Inform me of what?”

R wanted to tell me something herself? Curious as to what it was, I sat back in my chair, ready to hear her out.

“Ahem,” she coughed, clearing her throat before beginning. “In short, the agency held a meeting the other day.”

“The agency did?”

“Indeed. And at said meeting, it was decided that the surveillance of Rekka Namidare would continue. Congratulations.”

“H-Hah?” I could barely comprehend what she was saying, and my stupefied voice reflected that. “Wh-What do you mean?”

“Well, you know how you got that outrageous new power at the end of the story?”

“Y-Yeah? You mean the power to pull other heroines into my story, right?”

“I mean that exactly. As it turns out, it’s actually a bit of an issue.”

“How so?”

“Well, to put it simply, now that you have this new power... You could end up with the same number of heroines that future Rekka did, or perhaps even more considering the discovery of Sith’s world.”

“...So what?”

“So you’ll likely save more heroines than anticipated.”

“...And?”

“How dull do you have to be to not see where this is going?”

“...”

Truthfully, I had an idea of what she was getting at. But I didn’t really want to hear it. Nevertheless, R pressed onward.

“In essence, with a surging number of heroines and a cowardly Rekka who can’t necessarily manage them all... Chances are higher than ever that the War of All will break out after all.”

“Is the agency stupid?!”

Their insulting conclusion on the situation made me reflexively spit words of insult right back.

“How the hell did it come back to this?! Do they not realize everything we just did to make sure the War of All *wouldn't* happen?!”

“Now, now... No one’s denying your accomplishments,” R said like she was trying to calm a raging bull.

“And besides, Yuuhi’s not meddling in things and trying to make our world miserable anymore. No matter how many heroines end up by my side, the War of All will never happen again.”

“It’s true that last War of All originated from Yuuhi meddling behind the scenes...” R clasped her hands behind her back with a mysterious look on her face. “However, discord and envy need not be sown by a third party. In fact, they’re a rather common occurrence between two people who like the same person.”

“Ugh!”

“In other words, whether Yuuhi is around or not, the greater the number of heroines you save... the greater the chances are the War of All will still occur. You’re already responsible for one little apocalypse.”

And by that, R was referring to the time Rachelle nearly incited the apocalypse by fanning the flames of jealousy between the heroines and turning them against each other. And Yuuhi wasn’t even around back then... I was loathe to admit it, but maybe the agency was on to something after all.

“Hey, wait just a minute! If you have to keep someone under surveillance, shouldn’t it be future Rekka?! How fast is he saving heroines now?!”

“Don’t worry. L is keeping tabs on him as well.”

“O-Oh...”

Someone had already anticipated that objection, apparently.

“Incidentally, she was quite unhappy about her assignment. She was adamant about wanting to be here instead, so she and I may switch places from time to

time. Nothing permanent.”

“Okay... Fine.”

I had no energy left to object and raised both my hands in surrender. Seeing me like that made R giggle.

“I’m looking forward to working with you again, Rekka.”

“Likewise, R.”

As soon as I said that, the doorbell downstairs rang.

“Oh, it sounds like someone’s come calling right away,” R mused, encouraging me to go answer the door. “I wonder if it’s Satsuki or one of the other girls. Or perhaps it’s a new heroine who’s already found her way to you.”

Things were back to normal... No, R was revolving around me in circles, seemingly more excited than she’d ever been before. In the end, we were only separated for a few days, huh? Truth be told, I’d gotten pretty used to her being around since this spring... I didn’t mind having her back at all.

“Coming!”

Harissa was out shopping at the moment, so I went to get the door. Who would be on the other side? I wouldn’t know until I opened it, just the same as I wouldn’t know what the future held in store until I met it.

And so I opened the door like flipping the page of a book. After all, we were about to start the next chapter in the story of Rekka Namidare.



—Fin—

Afterword

This is the sixteenth and final volume of the love comedy of all love comedies that has even ascended to the realm of the gods! It's nice to see all of you who came from volume 15, and it's nice to meet all of you who bought all sixteen volumes at once.

At long last, the future arc is finally complete! I'd wondered how this series might end from the moment the first volume came out, but I somehow managed to make it to a real conclusion. To be honest, the first ending I considered didn't resolve the War of All. You know, an "our little apocalypse is only just beginning!" type thing. But for the series to have reached a proper ending and for it to have spanned this many volumes... It's all thanks to the readers who supported the series along the way. I even got to accomplish my goal of including all three settings (present-day Earth, futuristic space, and another world) in the same volume. No one's more surprised than I am, haha! Now, in the end, as the title of the series implies, there were too many heroines... I was anxious about making sure none of the girls ended up unhappy. Rekka sure pulled through there! Rekka (and future Rekka) will continue to save as many heroines as there are stars in the sky from here on, solving stories across all of space and time.

However, as R pointed out at the end of this volume, that could become the trigger for a new War of All. So on an adventure of this scale, Rekka will have lots of ups and downs ahead of him. On an unrelated side note, in the very earliest drafts of the story, Rekka's name was actually Banjo Namidare. There was another main character with that name in another series (though the last name was read differently), so I changed his name to Rekka. I actually think both names suit him quite well.

But with this, the curtain falls on this battle fantasy, sci-fi, you-name-it drama of a story with a time-travelling main character struggling to do something about the hyper-dimensional war that could change the world forever. And that's not to mention his companions! His childhood friend, an alien princess, a genius sorcerer, psychic, scientists, and so much more.

Now, let's move on to the final acknowledgments.

First goes to Nao Watanuki, who has worked hard on a ridiculous number of character designs, backgrounds, and special items for each and every volume. I'm extremely grateful that the characters turned out so cute and that all of the art has really contributed to the feel of the various worlds that have been a part of the series. *I Saved Too Many Girls and Caused the Apocalypse* could not have succeeded without you. Thank you so, so, very much. I will forever be in your debt.

Next up are the editors, Mr. Nanbu and Mr. Kinoshita. While I changed editors partway through the series, thank you both very much for supporting sixteen volumes of this title. I started running out of ideas and repeating "no more, no more, no more" to myself around volume 10, but it's thanks to both of you that I was able to reach this point. You've taken such good care of me, and I can't thank you enough.

Next, to all the people at Hobby Japan who assisted in the editing, marketing, and publishing of this title; to the designers who squeezed the title onto the cover every time; to the bookstores that stock their shelves with these volumes... You're all incredible. This story only made it into people's hands because of you. Thank you.

Lastly, to you readers, I am truly grateful you've stuck with this series over five years and sixteen volumes. I wonder if everyone will be satisfied with this ending. I'm sure opinions will vary, but it would make me happy if you think back on Rekka and his story that will continue well into the future. I hope all your stories always have happy endings.

Illustrator Nao Watanuki here.

We've finally reached volume 16! Your rough this time is the goddess Sith. The divine sisters are pretty different in terms of personality, don't you think? One was based on the Queen of Hearts, and the other was based on Greek mythology. The slit dress was key.

I went all out for the color spread this time and packed in the heroines. The worried girls, the energetic girls, the exasperated girls... The composition was a pain, but it was a lot of fun deciding how each of the heroines would look.

To Namekojirushi and the editors, thank you for all your hard work. I'm sure it was an extremely difficult process, but as I reader, I personally enjoyed the very Little Apocalypse-esque ending! It seems you're continuing on, so I'll be working hard right alongside you. I look forward to meeting you readers again in the future too!

It's Children's Day right now, so here's a doll-style Chirika to celebrate May, even though she's a girl...

挿絵担当・和狸ナオと申します。

ついに16巻となりました。ご紹介するラフ案は
女神シス。姉妹ど大分、格好が違いますね。

姉はトランプの女王、妹はギリシア神話が
イメージの素。スリットがポイントです！

カラ-頁では張り切って、ヒロイン達を詰め込みました。
心配する子、励ます子、呆れる子、配置が大変でしたが
それぞれの様子を考えるのは楽しかったです。

なめこ印先生、編集様方、お疲れ様ございました。
大変難産だった事と存じますが、とても『リトル黙示
録!?!』らしい締めくくりに、一読者として楽しくすっきり
読了致しました！が、まだもう少し続きを出して
頂けるという事で、一緒に頑張らせて頂ければ
と思います。
読者様にも改めて、よろしくして頂ければ幸いです！

和狸ナオ拝。

只今「子供の日」につき
五月人形風ちりかです。
女の子ですが...



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I Saved Too Many Girls and Caused the Apocalypse: Volume 16

by Namekojirushi

Edited by Megan Denton

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Original Japanese edition published in 2016 by Hobby Japan

This English edition is published by arrangement with Hobby Japan, Tokyo

English translation © 2019 J-Novel Club LLC

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Ebook edition 1.0: October 2019

I SAVED TOO MANY GIRLS AND CAUSED THE LITTLE APOCALYPSE

An anime-style illustration of a young man and woman. The man, in the foreground, has spiky black hair and is wearing a dark blue school uniform with a red tie. He is smiling and pointing his right index finger towards the viewer. The woman, behind him, has short blue hair with a large red bow and is wearing a tan military-style uniform with a blue visor. She has a surprised expression and is holding the man's hand. The background is a light blue grid.

16

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Illustration: NAO WATANUKI