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Natsume Akatsuki

ILLUSTRATION BY
Kakao Lanthanum

COMBATANTS

WILL
BE

DISPATCHED!



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6

"I'm working on projects that aren't due for quite a while, so I'm free to take a break whenever, but..."

VIPER

Former Demon Lord who has now become a Supreme Leader in the Kisaragi Corporation. She's capable in every way. However, her gentle and kindhearted personality makes her unable to commit the acts of villainy required of her.

AGENT SIX'S VIEW

Vi, when are you gonna be done with work?

THIS VOLUME'S MAIN HEROINE

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COMBATANTS WILL BE DISPATCHED!





Astaroth

Lilith

Belial

THE KISARAGI CORPORATION
SUPREME LEADERS



COMBATANTS

DISPATCHED!

WILL
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ILLUSTRATION BY
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NEW YORK

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Combatants Will Be Dispatched! Vol. 6

Natsume Akatsuki

Translation by Noboru Akimoto

Cover art by Kakao Lanthanum

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Prologue



On the monitor in front of me, Astaroth, one of the Supreme Leaders of the Kisaragi Corporation, flashes a smile of approval.

“Well done, Agent Six. Good work on subjugating our rivals, the Demon Lord’s Army.”

Astaroth’s good mood is understandable. Thanks to my brilliance as an elite Combat Agent, the Demon Lord’s Army has joined the Kisaragi Corporation. With our greatest rivals under our heel, our conquest of this planet will go much more smoothly.

“Praise is nice and all, but isn’t it about time you made me part of the leadership? I think I’ve proven my loyalty to the Kisaragi Corporation as the longest-tenured employee. Why did Vi, the rookie, get promoted to a Supreme Leader, but not me?”

“Well...you’re weak.”

...

“Hey!”

“I mean, you’re weak. Sure you’re tough and can survive any battlefield, but...”

Man, this chick is being really mean to me. Also, why’d she have to say it twice?

“You outfit me with all sorts of enhancements and then decide to call me weak? That’s pretty messed up, isn’t it? I mean, the reason I’m not all that great

is because I've still got first-generation enhancements! Everyone who joined after me is stronger because they got all the latest mods! Can't you upgrade me or something?!"

"Upgrade...? Well, it's not impossible, but with the original body being so bad...", Astaroth struggles to explain, a concerned grimace finding its way to her face.

Is she trying to say I'm a lost cause?

"...Well, the thought of going under Lady Lilith's knife a second time fills me with dread, so I don't really mind staying the way I am... But can I apply to return to Earth? Since things have settled down a bit here, I'd like to get a little R & R in Japan."

The gold coins I've acquired on this planet should make for some decent spending money back home.

Besides, I can't spend Japanese yen on this planet, so I should have a decent bit of cash just sitting in my Earth accounts.

"Oh? You were so adamant about not coming back until recently. What changed, hmm?"

"The reason is obvious, ma'am! It's because I want to see your face in person, Lady Astaroth!"

Obviously, it's because my Evil Points are no longer in the red.

"O-oh, I see! ...It's true that this is the longest we've been apart since you joined Kisaragi... But I can't approve your return request yet."

...

"What gives? You were acting all seductive and practically begging me to come home until recently."

"I wasn't acting seductive! And, well, getting the Demon Lord's Army to join us was certainly a positive development, but you're still at war with the kingdom of Toris, aren't you? Work hard to win that fight as well. Show me how awesome you can really be," Astaroth says teasingly, chuckling.

I'm usually pretty easy to please, and ordinarily that would have worked,

but...

“Given that you sent me here so suddenly, I want to check in on my apartment. I’m worried about my cactus, and I’m pretty sure my fridge is a biohazard at this point.”

...At this point Astaroth, on the other side of the monitor, glances away, clearly uncomfortable.

“...Your apartment’s gone.”

She then says something nonsensical.

“...? What do you mean it’s gone? Did they evict me because I haven’t been there for such a long time? My rent money should’ve been automatically deducted from my accounts.”

“...It seems the Heroes caught wind of your address, and they bombed it a few days ago.”

Wait...

“What the hell?! Why did they bomb *my* house?! I’m just an underling! Hell, don’t I qualify for workman’s comp?! Kisaragi’s gonna pay to replace my furniture and clothes and stuff, right?!”

Astaroth completely ignores my words.

“So it’s still too early for you to come home! Earth is currently suffering from severe climate change and food shortages! We’ve got no margin for error left! We’re counting on you, Six! The fate of humanity rests in your hands!”

“Hey! You better prepare a place for me to live! What kind of operation are you running where everything I own is gone by the time I complete my mission?! ...Don’t try to avoid the subject by pretending the connection sucks. I know you can hear me! Dammit, she hung up... She’s gonna get it when I get back to Earth! I’m gonna make her beg for mercy, dammit!”





Alien Planet Exploration Log



1

It's been one month since the massive celebration commemorating the destruction of the Sand King, the giant monster that wreaked havoc on the surrounding countries.

With the Demon Lord's spectacular self-destruction in the midst of the celebration, the war between humanity and the Demon Lord's Army came to an end.

The kingdom of Grace declared an end to the war, and in our Hideout City, the demon refugees were hard at work.

Although there was the occasional attack from barbarians and monsters from the Great Woods near Hideout City, the Kisaragi Combat Agents had been dealing with them pretty easily.

"Vi, when are you gonna be done with work? This video game's getting a little stale, so why don't we take a break and go bother Heine?"

We're currently enjoying a period of peace.

"I'm working on projects that aren't due for quite a while, so I'm free to take a break whenever, but... No, Mr. Six, we shouldn't bother others while they're working. Please don't tease Heine too much."

As I lie on the sofa and toss my portable game console onto the table in

boredom, Viper's pen stops as she turns to look at me, her brow faintly pinched with concern.

"I'm not teasing her. Besides, boys tease girls because they like them. It's the thing where I can't help but tease the girls I like."

"I see... So, Mr. Six, does that mean you like Heine...?" Perhaps because we've never broached the subject, Viper asks with a faintly hopeful expression.

"I like her face and body."

"Honestly, I don't dislike how honest and direct you are. But please don't say that to her face."

We're in Viper's office.

Viper switched jobs from being the Demon Lord to one of Kisaragi's female mutants, and Alice has officially given her this room to serve as her executive office.

It's a slightly nicer room than most, and it has also become my preferred hangout spot.

...Oh, speaking of which.

"Do you have any special abilities other than your healing magic, Vi? For example, can you manipulate fire or water like Heine and Russell?"

"Special abilities? Well, I'm good at time magic. I can rewind time and fix people's injuries or mend broken items. I can also accelerate time, which allows me to do things like make crops grow faster."

Ah, I see, so she's a time mage.

In anime and video games, that's definitely something only super-powerful characters can do.

"...So does that mean you can stop time, too? Damn, Vi, I'm super impressed! You can peek on baths and changing rooms all you want, can't you?!"

"Stopping time takes an enormous amount of mana, so I can't do that. I mean, even if I could, I wouldn't do such things... Goodness, why are you always plotting such nefarious schemes, Mr. Six?"

She speaks as though she's lecturing a small child.

"You're a Supreme Leader of an evil corporation. If anything, Vi, you're supposed to be one of the people who seduces me, the innocent and pure Six, to the path of evil."

Yes, that's right. Viper is now a Supreme Leader in the evil Kisaragi Corporation.

I have no doubt that in the near future I'll be able to see evil Viper in action.

"M-me?! ...I suppose that's true. They were nice enough to give me a leadership role, so I suppose I should put all my effort into luring you to the dark side. Um... And what am I supposed to do, exactly?"

"Since you're a female Supreme Leader, I think drawing me in with promises of erotic pleasure is your best bet. While your skintight bodysuit is a little lewd, I think you could show some more skin... What's with that look, Vi? Are you questioning my wisdom?"

For some reason, Viper is wearing an exasperated expression and mumbling something under her breath.

"Um...well, I feel like you just want me to wear sexy clothes, Mr. Six..."

I guess I've been teasing her a little too much lately. She's finally growing suspicious of me.

When Viper first took the job, I told her that female Supreme Leaders were supposed to help Combat Agents relax, and I talked her into giving me massages or lap-pillow ear-cleaning sessions, but it's gotten much harder to convince her to do that sort of stuff.

Right now, she isn't wearing the appropriately lascivious bodysuit that she had as Snake Woman, but rather, the clothing she had worn as the Demon Lord.



*

But it's true that the female Supreme Leaders of an evil corporation have to be easy on the eyes.

"If you look at the Kisaragi's Supreme Leaders, other than Lilith who's supposed to be the brains, everyone else is dressed pretty erotically, right? And even Heine, a former member of the Elite Four, is practically naked!"

"N-now that you mention it!"

And it was at that moment...

...the office door slowly opened, and—

"I'm sorry, Mr. Six! I'm ashamed that I doubted you... I'll do my best to become a Supreme Leader with as much sex appeal as Heine!"

"Vi...?! Lady Viper?! Don't suddenly say ridiculous things so loudly!"

With impeccable timing, Heine entered the room and threw cold water on Viper's pronouncement.

"Hey, don't interrupt us! Vi's finally awakening to her true nature! Get back to work."

"Awakening? Don't insult us! Stop filling Lady Viper's head with weird ideas! ...Wait, never mind that! That's not why I'm here!"

Heine slaps the wall a few times as she speaks.

"It seems the party that went to check on Toris is back. Alice wants you in the conference room!"

The neighboring kingdom of Toris has been wiped out.

At first, I don't understand what that report means, but it seems they were suddenly invaded by a mysterious new force and crushed with little to no effort.

Additionally, the royal family of Toris has vanished, but we don't know who this mysterious new entity is, nor do we know what happened to the prince Snow had been trying to seduce.

"According to the reports from our scouting party, the capital of Toris is

currently blockaded, and they had no idea what was going on inside. It doesn't seem like the occupying force is preparing to invade us; we don't even know if they're an enemy. With the Demon Lord's Army gone, it would have been only a matter of time before we could take out Toris ourselves, but... Well, they took our prey from us, but for now we're going to just see how things turn out."

Alice speaks from her position at the head of the conference table, holding court as though she is the one in charge.

Since she seems to have a bit of an attitude, I grab her head and give her a noogie.

"You're being awfully tame today. They took our prey from us! We can't just kick back and let them have their way!"

My words trigger a flurry of responses from the other Combat Agents.

"Six, for once in your life you have a point! We gotta show 'em who's boss!"

"Let's invade! We can take over Toris or whatever it's called now!"

"I dunno who the hell those guys think they are, but they can't get away with stealing our prey from us! Kill 'em!"

The bloodthirsty underlings hold up their fists and howl.

"I mean, hell, what were the scouts even doing?! They couldn't figure out who the enemy was *and* they couldn't figure out their motive?! Ugh! How useless! They're robbing us blind by collecting their pay! If you guys feel even a little guilty for how useless you are, go spend your undeserved salary on drinks for the rest of us!"

"Yeah, Six is right! If you're not gonna pay for our drinks, get back to the war zone!"

"Punishment! Punishment for the useless!"

"You're telling me you can't even do recon on some backwater country on this ass-backward planet? You had all those fancy gadgets at your disposal and *that* was the best you could do? What a waste of Kisaragi technology!"

We gang up on the scouting party, who all wear guilty expressions.

Bullying people for their shortcomings while making excuses for our own is the Kisaragi way.

“Y-you bastards...! It’s not like we were out playing around! There was a huge tiger monster guarding the gates of Toris! One that was almost as big as that Sand King we fought recently!”

...Whoa, seriously?

The conference room falls quiet as everyone seems to think the same as me.

“Which is why we’re going to stand back and see how things develop. I know you’re all chickens at heart, so you probably won’t do anything now that you know there’s a considerable risk factor, but I’m still warning you to stay quiet for now.”

Alice’s voice seems to ring particularly loudly in the silence.

I feel as though Alice has seen right through me, so in an attempt to distract myself from that discomfort, I grab Alice’s head again.

“Wh-who the hell are you calling ‘chicken’?! We’re Combat Agents of the Kisaragi Corporation! We’re not scared of anything! We struggled against the Sand King because guns didn’t work on it, but as for other monsters? *Pfft!* They’re nothing... Isn’t that right, guys?!”

“Y-y-yeah! We’re totally not scared! Yep, not scared at all, right?!”

“Felt something pucker a little, but yep, totally fine!”

“The Sand King, huh...? W-well, obviously, if our guns didn’t malfunction we would’ve Swiss cheesed it!”

As the Combat Agents try to put on brave faces, Alice speaks from under my hand.

“Let me spell it out for you meatheads. This planet’s got abandoned combat vehicles and mysterious O-Parts, huge mechanical lizards and optical weaponry. And now we’ve got a giant monster the size of the Sand King sitting in front of Toris, which got taken out in a single day. The opponent, who we know nothing about, probably has tech and weaponry or at least living weapons that are more advanced than what we’ve got. Don’t think this is anything like the showing off

you lot talk about against a bunch of backwoods yokels.”

The clamoring Combat Agents fall silent in an instant.

Just then, Alice stops and looks up at me.

“Then again, considering the relative worth of Combat Agent lives, we can afford to send in a single squad...”

“Why do you say that while looking at me?! Is it... Is it because I ignored your orders?! You’re gonna send me to my death just for that?! I’m sorry I didn’t trust you! I’m really, really sorry!”

“For the last time, stop weighing the value of our lives!”

“Everyone here is a veteran Combat Agent! You should treat us better!”

Alice shakes her head and sighs at our complaints.

“Then it’s like I said earlier. We’ll wait and see what they do. For now, let’s focus on developing Hideout City. This is the infrastructure stage of the game, essentially. Make sure you listen to me... Hey, don’t do anything stupid without my permission, got it? You guys over there, wipe that ‘you can count on us’ look off your faces. I’m serious!”

2

As Alice and I leave the conference room, I hear a familiar voice from around the corner of the hallway.

“W-we can’t do that... Besides, we already have a supplier for buying ingredients...”

“Ingredients are the same regardless of who we buy them from, aren’t they? One of my acquaintances sells meat for real cheap. We can buy from him and then take the difference...right? I’ll make sure you get a share...”

Alice and I exchange nods as we catch bits of the hushed conversation.

“Caaaught yooou!”

“Huh?! How dare you!”

I restrain Snow, who was conspiring around the corner.

“Don’t look so upset, Little Ms. Corrupt! We know you’re trying to feed us shady meat!”

Alice uses the opportunity to shoo away the demon in charge of buying food supplies for Hideout City.

Snow turns around to confirm that it is me restraining her and then speaks up.

“Ms. Corrupt?! How dare you! I was just kidding! I haven’t even done anything yet! Yes, this is a *Kisaragi* joke! The sort of joke that’s common in evil organizations!”

“Kisaragi joke?” The hell is she talking about...?

“You’ve gotten way too comfy with the villain life! You’re still supposed to be a Combat Agent Recruit! I knew you were easily corrupted, but just look at how many times you’ve been caught embezzling money!”

It’s temporary, but Snow’s been transferred to our organization.

Apparently, Snow’s screwed up a few too many times in the Grace Kingdom and is now considered a nuisance by the kingdom’s nobles.

Tillis asked us to add Snow to our ranks as a way of avoiding the royal family getting blamed for Snow’s failures.

Originally the plan was to have her fully transfer to our organization, but it seems even Snow is aware that she wouldn’t have anything left if she lost her knighthood, so after she threw a crying fit, we came to the current arrangement.

She’s a common sight around Hideout City, and she knows my coworkers pretty well.

Aside from that, Tillis mentioned that because Grimm and Rose were being transferred, it’d be mean to leave her out of it... which is why we chose to take her, but...

“Practicing your villainy is totally fine, but don’t do anything shady with the food. A Combat Agent’s body is their bread and butter, so we have to stay properly nourished.”

“Hey, Alice, don’t let Ms. Corrupt off the hook! If you don’t chastise her she’ll just do it again!”

Snow’s been weirdly lively since she got assigned to us. It’s almost like she’s a natural when it comes to evil deeds.

“What’s gotten into you? Why do you look so happy?! What happened to the kicked-puppy face you were making?! I don’t want this Snow! Gimme back the serious knight commander who was always accusing me of espionage!”

“Sh-shut up! I’ve always been like this! ...Huh, do you think I’ve looked happy? Dammit, seems I let myself get all giddy over being reunited with my squadmates...”

Snow blushes as though she’s embarrassed by the revelation, but I think she should probably be more ashamed of her embezzling.

As I maintain my hold on her, Alice leans over to ask...

“...So putting aside the fact that you’re here, where are the other two?”

Grimm smiles gently as she sits with a demon at one of the soup kitchens in Hideout City.

“Here you are. Be careful; it’s hot... You seem to be hurt, so please don’t push yourself too hard.”

“Th-thank you... Um, you can let go of my hand now. I’m not so badly hurt that I’ll drop my plate...”

Grimm’s serving a bowl of stew to a male demon with a hand injury, but...

“Are you sure? I can spoon-feed you if you’d like.”

“N-no, I’m fine! U-um... I’m gonna go now!”

The demon blushes as he takes the bowl of stew and runs off.

Grimm, who has been quietly watching over him, seems to have noticed us.

“Oh, what brings you two here? We’re starting to wind down at this station since there are fewer and fewer people coming to get food. There seem to be eateries opening up around town, so I think we can start phasing out these kitchens.”

“I see. Good work. That’s fine, but—”

Just then a demon girl shyly brings a bowl to Grimm.

“Um...”

Before the girl can say more, Grimm quickly fills her bowl with stew and hastily hands it back to her.

“Thanks!”

“No need to thank me. Go eat! But be careful; it’s hot! Next!”

As Grimm practically shoves the beaming girl aside, stirring the stew to cool it down for the next person in line, I can’t help but comment.

“Hey.”

“Yes? We’ve got enough hands here. Just leave it all to me, will you? Hee-hee-hee. I’m going to feed all the innocent young boys. That way, there’ll be boys who grow up with a fondness for kind, older women. I’m investing in the future. I won’t let anyone get in my way. Not even you, Commander.”

Maybe we should isolate her from the kids before it’s too late...

I’m pretty sure she’s the last person who should be in charge of the soup kitchens. She’s way too obvious in how differently she treats the boys and girls.

...Grimm responds to me as she continues her preparations, but then suddenly pauses as she spies the next person in line.

There’s someone in a dog suit standing in front of Grimm, bowl in hand...

“Rose, I know it’s you in there! This soup kitchen is only for the demons of Hideout City! You already get food from Kisaragi!”

Rose stands there dressed in the dog suit, looking for a handout.

“Please give me stew, pretty lady!”

“I’m not giving you any stew even if you try such obvious flattery! Here, I’ll give you my snacks, so go eat those instead! ...Why are you taking some, Commander? You should buy your own!”

Grimm, who is more of a softy than she lets on, reaches into her pocket and

produces snacks...

As she watches this typical afternoon scene play out, Alice crossed her arms and murmurs, “Man, they’re all useless outside of battle...”

3

The next day.

“All right, we’re leaving the city in your care.”

We stand in front of the gate that leads from Hideout City to the woods.

Alice is saying her good-byes as she stands, carrying a backpack, accompanied by Viper, who is dressed in her Snake Woman outfit.

The rest of the usual crew, minus the other Combat Agents, is here to see them off.

“Yes, leave running the city to me! I’ve always been really interested in governing! Really, really interested!!” says Snow, intent on staying behind.

I’m pretty sure she’s just interested in the bribes that inevitably go hand in hand with running a city.

“All right. Rose and I should keep our eyes on Snow so she doesn’t do anything stupid, right?”

“Leave it to us! If Ms. Snow does anything bad, I’ll bite her up!”

“You two... You’ve really stopped pulling your punches of late...”

At Grimm’s and Rose’s responses, Snow, with a faintly troubled expression, murmurs, “...So where are you two planning to go?”

“Well because of the stupidly huge mechanical lizard and the barbarians, I hadn’t been able to do a proper survey of the surroundings. Since things have settled down a bit, it’s a good opportunity to survey the landscape and look for useful raw materials and water sources for industrial use. Basically, we’re going to explore.”

...

“Hold up! Why do you get to go on a fun adventure like that?! That’s a big risk

you're taking out there given how weak you are! You need me out there with you! Your combat specs are the same as an average human child, so you should take a Combat Agent along for protection!"

In response, Alice points to Viper, who is also carrying a backpack.

"I've got all the protection I need right here. I'm taking Viper with me this time. She's not only stronger than all of you, but she's smarter *and* she's got a decent amount of common sense to boot. No matter how you look at it, Viper's a better choice than a Combat Agent."

"Um... Erm... I'll do my best..." says Viper with a bow. There isn't anything I can say in response.

Wait, hold on; that's not the point!"

"Hold on, Alice! I'm your partner! C'mon, Vi! I know you're talented, but don't take my role away from me!"

"I-I-I-I'm sorry, I apologize! Um, Ms. Alice... Given what Mr. Six is saying, maybe I should stay and do administrative work in my office..." Viper says nervously, but Alice shakes her head.

"Either way, I'm gonna need someone with local knowledge. But the other three locals are useless, so it's not like I had a choice but to take you in the first place."

"Just a moment, Alice! I used to be a high-ranking officer in the kingdom! Calling me useless is a bit much, don't you think?! Also, this has been bothering me... I get why Six would call Snake Woman 'Viper,' but why are you doing it as well...? And the way you're saying it makes it seem like *this* Viper is someone from *this* world..."

As Snow starts rambling to herself, I decide to push my case to Alice.

"C'mon, Alice, I'm your partner! You've been so busy acting like the commander that you're paying no attention to me! C'mon, gimme a bit of your time! Besides, no matter how strong Vi is, it's still dangerous having just two girls out there!"

Frankly, I'd much rather go on a planetary exploration mission that's full of

mystery and adventure than deal with the bothersome bits of paperwork that come with running a city.

As I grab her tiny shoulders and shake her, Alice, despite being an android, looks like she's struggling with her emotions while she thinks through the situation.

"...All right, fine. Then you can tag along. But don't do anything stupid like you did when we first got here, okay? You've got a history of doing stuff like screwing with the rain-making artifact."

I take the backpack from Alice and hoist it onto my own shoulders.

"I have no idea what you're talking about, but leave it to me. With a single punch, I'll take care of all the barbarians that dare approach you."

"I'm telling you not to do those things, you idiot. This mission includes trying to negotiate with the local savages."

I half listen to Alice's words as I excitedly put on the backpack.

While I finish my prep, Viper takes the opportunity to ask Alice a question.

"Ms. Alice, shouldn't we tell the other Combat Agents as well? Like Mr. Six, there might be others who want to tag along..."

"I'm sure there will be. In fact, I'm pretty sure all of them are so bored by the peace that they'll all try to come. It'd be a hassle to deal with them, so we're just going to leave them be. I'm sure they'll forget about it if we bring them back a souvenir or two," Alice says as though it's the most obvious solution in the world, but she's probably right about the hassle.

With that said, Tiger Man, the one who will be the most trouble if he gets upset, has gone off to look for a sorcerer stone that is superior to even the one he nabbed from a dragon.

The other Combat Agents are all simpletons, so I'm sure they'll perk up if Viper gives them their souvenirs with an apologetic look.

And then...

"Snow's insistent on staying in the city, while Grimm's wheelchair's not really suited for exploration."

“Yes. I’m a city girl, so I’m going to pass on the woods. I gotta keep an eye on Snow, too.”

As Alice glances toward Grimm’s feet, Grimm smiles and folds her hands on her lap. Just then, Rose chimes in.

“I wouldn’t mind tagging along and eating some monsters after hunting them, but...”

“You’re fine in terms of combat ability, but you’re a bit lacking in the brains department. You should stay at Hideout City this time around and do the math problems Alice left for you... Hey, why are you looking at me like that? I actually graduated middle school, so I outrank you in education!”

“...It’s a little weird for you, who’s not much smarter than Rose, to be acting so smug, but... Anyway, are you two ready to go?” asks Alice, now significantly lighter on her feet since I took her backpack.

“Vi, this is your first exploration mission, right? It’s gonna be a tough journey, but no special treatment for you, got it? However, if things get too tough, make sure you ask for help from me, the veteran Combat Agent, okay?”

“Okay, Mr. Six. I promise to ask for help if need be. But I’ll do my best not to get in your way...”

As Viper and I exchange nods, Alice says with an even more aggressive expression than usual, “Right then, our objective this time is to find useful resources, secure a water source, and bring the savages to our side! And more than anything, we’re going to find out how the life-forms on this planet are ignoring the laws of physics!”

Dammit, she’s adding a personal vendetta of hers to our objective.

She’s going on about how griffin flight spits in the face of physics, and seeing as she already hates the supernatural, asking her to ignore stuff like this is probably a tall order.

...But come to think of it, she did pretty well last time. Saving Viper while making it look like she self-destructed was a clutch move. I guess I owe my cranky partner some credit, so I’ll help her out as best as I can this time.

“I don’t care if it’s a griffin or a dragon! I’ll wipe out all life-forms that defy the laws of evolution and aerodynamics!”

Such are the words of the pretty-girl android who holds so much animosity for the supernatural, you’d think a dragon killed her family or something.

4

“Alice! Aliiiiice! Alice, help! My gun doesn’t work on this thing!”

I’m already regretting my decision to tag along as I take aim with my handgun.

“Hang on a sec. Leave critters like this to me. I’m having them send me a special Kisaragi-made vacuum cleaner!”

Having entered deep into the woods, we are being pursued by mysterious floating balls of light for some reason.

Well, technically they’re just following me.

For some reason, these floating balls of light are clinging to me.

“They’re wind spirits. They’re harmless, so no need to worry about them. They’re said to provide all sorts of benefits and are worshipped around the world,” says Viper, smiling as she watches the spirits chase me around.

“More nonsense... Great.”

After sending off her request for the vacuum cleaner, Alice grabs one of the glass jars she brought for gathering samples.

“Caught me a wind spirit!”

“Ms. Alice?!”

Alice captured a wind spirit in her jar.

“...Phew, thanks Alice. I’m fine against opponents that weapons work on, but I really can’t do anything to incorporeal creatures, like ghosts and spirits, when my weapons don’t work.”

“No worries, partner. We’ve each got our specializations. Let’s send this thing

off to Kisaragi when we get back to Hideout City. It's a rare life-form, so I'm sure we'll get a good price for it."

"Y-you can't sell a spirit! They're very sacred and precious beings!" insists Viper as Alice puts a lid on the jar.

I click my tongue and wag my finger at the protesting Viper.

"Vi, you don't get it, do you? Are you sure you're a Kisaragi leader? We're an evil organization! We're *supposed* to go out of our way to do bad things!"

"Ah! Y-you're right! I'm a leader in an evil organization!"

Viper seems to come to her senses, then stares intently at the spirit inside the jar with a determined expression...

"...Heh. No matter how sacred you might be, we won't worship you."

"Vi, the wind spirit escaped."

"What the hell? I thought it was just some sort of glowing bug... Well, if bullets go through it, I guess it can also pass through a glass jar."

Viper, who was talking to the jar, turns beet-red and covers her face in embarrassment. Meanwhile, the wind spirit that escaped returns to floating around me.



“All sorts of odd things seem to like you. Do you emit waves that nonhuman critters like, maybe?”

“In manga and video games, spirits like people who are pure of heart. And if you bully the little ones like this spirit here, the big one comes to get revenge.”

We leave Viper to her embarrassment and the floating spirit to do as it pleases and take a look around the area.

Alice, who wants to secure a water source for industrial use, has brought us to the shore of a vast lake that stretches as far as the eye can see.

It is a lake so large that you’d swear it was an ocean. Its pristine, clear water speaks to how lovely the untouched wilderness is on this planet.

Off in the distance, there is a mountain range lined with peaks that are taller than Mt. Fuji, and the woods near the lake are populated by trees that must be hundreds of years old...

“Hey, Alice. When I look at beautiful scenery like this, I start to wonder if I’m really doing the right thing. We’re going to use this lake for the factories we’re planning to build, right? I wonder... Should we really be disturbing this land...?”

“It means you still have a heart, Six. It’s not something I can understand, being an android, but I do think those feelings have value.”

“Mr. Six...”

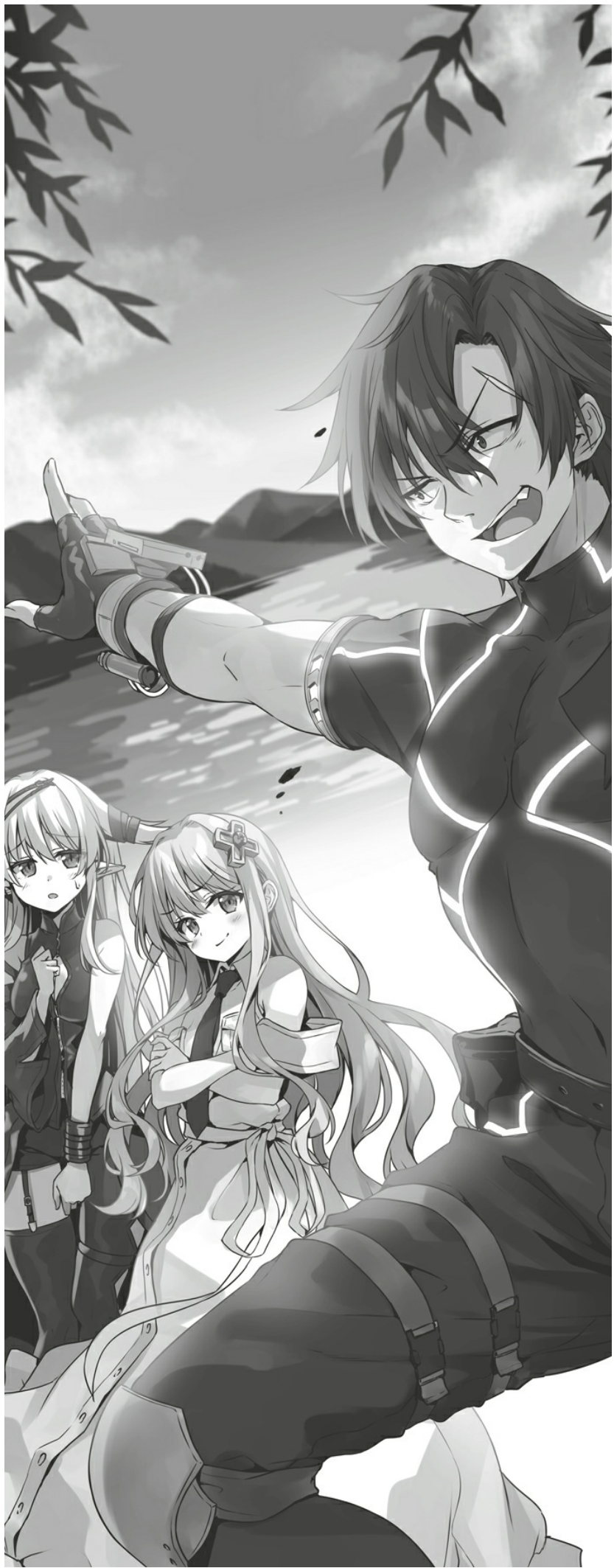
Alice and Viper watch over me as I study the lake...

“Alice, let’s hurry up and gather resources so we can expedite our invasion plans. There’s tons of lumber we can gather from the trees over there, so let’s build some log cabins along with the factory. We’ll build a nature retreat to have a cookout with the Supreme Leaders. And since we’re on a lake, I bet they’ll wear swimsuits...”

It only takes about two minutes for me to grow bored of the breathtaking landscape.

“Guess that’s the limit of your conscience. It’s reassuring to know you’re still you, Six.”

“M-Mr. Six...”



*

Several hours later, we're wandering around the shore of the lake using the map in Alice's head as a guide.

"...Hey, Vi, are you sure these things are harmless? Honestly, it's a bit creepy to have so many of them around me."

"H-how odd... I've never heard of anything like this happening..."

I'm being so swarmed by various types of spirits, I can't see a thing in front of me.

"I mean, these things are clearly dangerous. I can't see where I'm walking. There's no way for me to know if there's an enemy nearby, and that means I can't run away, either."

The spirits circle around my head, shimmering and ringing like little bells.

It'd be one thing if they looked like cute fairies, but there's nothing nice about having bright balls of light fluttering near my eyes.

"Hey, Vi, it sounds like being liked by spirits can be a pretty powerful ability, but is it really?"

Often the main character in a novel, for example, is loved by spirits, fairies, and various demihumans.

"Let me see. Well, there's a type of magic called spirit magic. Spirits are said to be the servants of various goddesses. Spirit magic works by beseeching the goddess to bring forth a miracle. One can also ask to borrow their spirit servants for the purpose of wielding magic, but...I'm told that people who are friendly with spirits can borrow their power directly. Doing it that way evidently lets them use magic with less cost than using their own magic or offering a sacrifice to the goddess."

I had completely lost interest in magic since it seemed that earthlings couldn't use it, but I feel a glimmer of hope at hearing the description of spirit magic from Viper. If spirits like me so much, why can't I be a spirit magic user?

"So basically the goddesses are skimming magic off the top, huh? I guess that makes them spirit interpreters or something. Then if I can speak directly to the

spirits in their own language, I can cut out the middleman goddesses, right?”

“You’re not wrong, but you’re inviting some divine punishment with that sort of thinking...”

I mean, I guess, but if they’re that easily offended...

“...Then isn’t Alice more likely to get punished? I mean, look at her. She’s spraying the spirits with pesticide.”

“Don’t do that, Ms. Alice! Spirits are sacred... Oh, but I’m a leader in an evil organization...”

Ignoring Viper’s struggles with her own inner contradictions, Alice shoos away the spirits.

I don’t think the pesticides will kill them, but they clearly don’t like being sprayed with random chemicals.

“So physical attacks do work on spirits. Maybe I should order some bug spray as well.”

“Please don’t! Spirits really are sacred!”

5

The sun sets by the time we finish testing the purity levels of the lake water and the surrounding soil.

Having decided to make camp by the lake, we start setting up our stuff.

Since I want to show off to Viper, who, although superior to me, is a less-experienced survivalist, I go to gather firewood.

After I gather some small, dry twigs so that I can lecture them on how regular wood smokes a lot, I return to the campsite to find...

...Viper summoning parts for a cargo container at Alice’s instruction.

“...Hey, Vi, how were you able to order that? Are you sure they’re not giving you special treatment because you’re a leader?”

Once assembled, the container is designed to be more durable than the

temporary shelters used for disaster relief.

This is probably the ideal living space for a forest infested with monsters.

Viper glances at the teleporter on her wrist.

“Well, I have a lot of Evil Points...”

She looks at me apologetically.

...Seriously? Just what sort of evil did the cherubic former Demon Lord Viper end up committing? She is such a pure and innocent girl. It's hard to think she's been corrupted by Kisaragi already...

“Vi, y’know... Sure, Kisaragi’s an evil corporation, but there’s no need for you to do anything you don’t want to do. I know you’re serious about your work, but that sort of thing can wait until you’re more used to working here...”

I can’t help but voice my concern, but I shouldn’t have done that.

Viper has made up her mind and steeled her resolve in joining Kisaragi, so as her elder in the ways of evil, I should be praising her...!

“Oh, I’m not angry or anything, Vi. Can I ask just what sort of evil deeds you committed to be able to summon a container like this...?”

As I ask this with a troubled look, Viper’s expression clouds.

“I accidentally deleted the save data for your video games...”

“What the hell, Vi?! Wait, I mean, yeah that’s pretty awful, but how did *that* get you so many Evil Points?! Like, yeah, that really sucks for me, but...!”

Alice chimes in as I seesaw between praise and anger.

“Evil Points are calculated by the amount of guilt felt by the person in question, the amount of psychological damage to the victim, and how severe the offense was. Basically, in Viper’s eyes, erasing your save data was unforgiveable.”

...I see.

For example, let’s say Viper and Lilith are dying of thirst after being stranded in a desert for days on end. Then they suddenly run into a vending machine full of drinks. In Viper’s case, she’d probably take out her wallet, look for some

money, then if she doesn't find any, she'd struggle to figure out a way to get a drink from the machine without breaking it. But unable to come to a solution, she'd be racked with guilt as she does what needs to be done...

In Lilith's case, she wouldn't even bother taking out her wallet; she'd happily destroy the machine, take all the drinks inside, and then probably take any money inside as a bonus.

So while Lilith would have committed the greater crime, there probably wouldn't be much difference in the number of Evil Points they gained.

Which reminds me, when the eggs that I scattered around the city of Grace went off in a wave of explosions, I got a load of Evil Points even though there hadn't actually been much damage.

"Meaning, if I struggle with my conscience, I can easily get points?"

"That's right. But in *your* case, your conscience wouldn't be bothered unless you did something really heinous."

Just who does she think I am?

"I'll forgive you for erasing my save data, Vi, since I get to stay in this container instead of a tent. But don't ever do that again. And even though I'm forgiving you, you still have to play that shitty game with me until we make it back to my save point, okay?"

"Yes, of course. I'll help you to the very end."

Even though I am clearly scolding her, Viper seems faintly happy for some reason.

How can she not show a hint of remorse for this unforgivable act?

I guess that's just what happens to a person after they join up with the bad guys...

"Why are you smiling, Vi? In Japan, it's a serious crime to erase other people's save data, y'know? If you'd erased someone else's data and not mine, I bet you'd be in deeeep trouble right now."

I make sure to hammer home the point as I try to start a fire with the branches I gathered.

“Yes, I understand, Mr. Six. I’ll make sure to only do bad things to you.”

“You don’t understand at all! Not one bit, Vi!”

Viper seems amused by my reaction as she huddles near the campfire. I guess her former Demon Lord status is still skewing her sense of right and wrong.

Looks like it’s time for me to counterattack Viper, denizen of this backward planet, with the power of science.

“Vi, watch carefully, I’m going to start a fire without using magic. This is called a Zippo. Not a zipper, a Zippo.”

“I see; a Zippo... It’s similar in shape to a magical lighter. How does it work?”

...

“Hey, Alice, what the hell is a magical lighter?! Vi just mentioned something that sounds like an item from a magical girls show!”

“I keep telling you not to underestimate this planet’s tech level. When we were living in the castle, there were TVs and lights that ran on a mysterious power, remember? Sure, your average peon digs latrines and uses them instead of toilets, but the upper crust live perfectly comfortable lives replete with indoor plumbing.”

Oh, right, now that she mentioned it...

“Um, Mr. Six. The fire’s started...”

While I am arguing with Alice, Viper already started the fire.

“...So that’s a magical lighter, huh? Wanna trade for my Zippo?”

“I don’t mind trading, but people without magic can’t use this...”

Damn you, magic...

“Ah well, it’s gonna be a long night. Why don’t we sit around the fire and chat? Though you did start the fire without my help, you can leave any camping-related survival stuff to me from here on out. I have enhancements and stuff, so I can see in the dark. As your senior in the Kisaragi Corporation, I’ll find you something to eat...”

“Oh, about that... I’ve already caught a three-eyed eel! I put it in a container

with fresh water so it will spit out all the mud. We can have it for dinner.”

Oh, come on, Vi...

6

After skillfully cleaning and gutting the mysterious three-eyed eel and grilling it over the fire with a pinch of salt, Viper gives me a curious glance.

“So, Mr. Six, what shall we talk about?”

“Um, I’m just going to stop trying to impress you with my experience. Well done, Vi, you’re a full-fledged member of Kisaragi.”

“Th-thank you...?”

Viper thanks me even as her expression reveals she doesn’t understand what I am saying.

“I’ve been watching this whole charade, but you do know there’s a reason why Viper was promoted to leader so soon after joining Kisaragi, right? Leaders need fighting prowess, but they also need the leadership skills to command Combat Agents, and sound judgment besides. Comparing her to a defective product like you is totally asinine.”

“Who are you calling defective, dammit?! And all the leaders I know were problematic in some way. I mean, Tiger Man’s not any smarter than me, for example.”

Yes, Tiger Man—one of the longest-surviving leaders in our organization and pedo extraordinaire—is a good example.

He is out on a journey looking for the planet’s most powerful sorcerer stone in the faint hope that Viper can make him a child again.

I mean, isn’t that a little too self-centered, even for a feline mutant?

But Alice shakes her head in exasperation.

“Tiger Man got a degree from a good university. He’s even got a teaching certification. Apparently, he joined Kisaragi because he couldn’t get a job as a teacher. His face was too scary.”

“Wait... That teaching certification isn’t for the elementary-school level, is it...? If that’s the case, I’m pretty sure there’s another reason why he couldn’t land a job...”

...Viper watches us and smiles as though she is watching a particularly close pair of siblings squabbling.

“You really are good friends, Mr. Six and Ms. Alice. You two are partners... right?”

“Yeah, she’s my partner, but she’s been so mean to me lately...”

“Why in the world would you expect an android to be all warm and mushy? Your brain’s already mushy enough.”

I can’t believe this bully is supposed to be my partner in crime.

Just then...

“...Oh? Hey look, Alice. The spirits are coming back. While I doubt a ruthless android made by an evil corporation like you could understand, critters like these can sense that I’m pure of heart, so they wanna be my friend.”

As the spirits gather around me like they had during the day, Alice pokes at them curiously.

“Oh, hey, Vi. You mentioned earlier that I might be able to use magic if I figure out how to communicate with the spirits, right? Alice, can you translate what I’m saying into spirit language?”

“These things are made of plasma. That or they’re some type of firefly.”

This is the problem with science-worshipping robot kids.

“Mr. Six, I happen to know a little spirit language. Would you like me to interpret?”

“Oh? Sure, give it a go, Vi. Let’s see... Try saying, ‘I come in peace. Let’s be friends,’ and see how they respond.”

As I flash a winning smile at the floating spirits, Viper begins to whisper something to them.

The spirit lights then begin to blink as if in response.

“U-um...they say, ‘Begone, filthy invaders from a foreign world. Stop being stupid and leave immediately. If not, we’ll curse you until your dying breath...”

“Vi! They’re not friendly at all! They really, really hate me!”

As I try to chase off the spirits with pesticides, Alice, who has gotten down on her hands and knees, regards the spirits with newfound curiosity.

“What? Now you like these spirits? That’s pretty odd, given how much you hate the supernatural.”

“...No, I was wondering how these things knew we came from another world. I can’t imagine Viper telling them random drivel, so do they have microcomputers in them that can predict the future? They’re just mysterious floating objects, though...”

As we let Alice ramble about complicated sciencey stuff, Viper gently reaches out her finger to the spirits, and one of them comes to rest on her finger.

She’s currently dressed as Snake Woman, so watching her stand by the moonlight lake with a spirit resting on her finger is one hell of a sight.

“All right, I’m gonna get you this time.”

“Ms. Alice?!”

Evidently Alice put her vacuum cleaner in the container, waiting for a moment like this, and she’s using it to capture spirits.

“Yep, this is the surefire way to deal with things like ghosts and spirits.”

“You just like ghostbusting them with that vacuum.”



“Oh... Th-the spirits...!”

Viper is the only one horrified by the display as Alice happily puts down her vacuum cleaner.

“Let’s have Lady Lilith look into what these so-called spirits are. If things go well, even you Combat Agents will be able to deal with the ghosts that infest this world.”

“...Well, those spirits did seem evil, so I don’t mind, but...”

It is at that moment when—

—the sharp, percussive noise of something hard banging against a tree rings out a short distance away.

Feeling hostile eyes on me, I stomp out the campfire.

“Vi, take shelter in the container with Alice! This is the sound those head-bashing barbarians make, right?”

“Yes, the Bashin tribe. And it’s too late to escape into the container. They’ve got us surrounded.”

Alice also has night vision, and after glancing around the camp, she grabs her gun.

“Aren’t you supposed to be a high-performance android?! Don’t you have infrared sensors or anything?”

“Of course, I do, you meathead. I’ve got thermography, infrared vision, and all sorts of other sensors. But they’re covered in something that’s masking their heat signature. They live in these woods, so maybe they’re covered with mud to avoid the bugs?” says Alice as she looks around curiously, but now’s not the time to be curious about the savages.

“If they’re just savages, then guns should do the trick! Cower before the might of Kisaragi!”

Using my own night vision, I find one of the Bashin tribe members and open fire with my assault rifle.

Thanks to my exploits in Operation Retrieve Viper at the festival, I’ve got

plenty of Evil Points.

Not only do I have a brand-new assault rifle, but I've got plenty of magazines strapped to my R-Buzzsaw, so there's no way I'll be losing to a bunch of primitive folks.

I spray gunfire at the silhouettes lurking among the trees and shout out the standard warning to surrender, fully aware that my adversaries won't understand a word I say.

"Mwa-ha-ha-ha, this is the power of civilization! Now, those were just warning shots! Next I'll start aiming right at you! Surrender if you value your lives! If you can understand me, throw down your weapons!"

Pinned down by my gunfire, my opponents are unable to respond.

Just then, a silhouette that appears to be a Bashin warrior winds up and throws the ax he's holding.

"Whoa!"

I duck my head as an ax whooshes through the air above it.

"Even if they're from different planets or countries and don't speak the same language, they can still understand expressions and body language. I don't recommend taunting them."

"Oh, shut up! That caught me off guard! I'm gonna slaughter them, just watch..."

Sure, I may have almost soiled myself, but I do my best to put up a brave front before Alice, who has been using me as a shield, lightly taps her own head.

"Leave this to me, the brains of the operation. I can understand what they're saying based on their gestures and body language. If we can negotiate with a powerful tribe and get them on our side, that's the smarter solution."

"...Well, since you put it that way, I'm happy to leave it to you. If the negotiations don't go well, send some sorta signal..."

Before I can finish talking, Alice peers out from behind me and shouts, "What do you want, you savages?! Money? Women? Power? You name it! We've got food and clothing and lots of shiny treasure. All you have to do is obey us and it

can all be yours! Refuse if you wish to die!”

I somehow manage to block another ax thrown my way.

“Was that your idea of negotiation, you useless scrap heap?! Some brains you turned out to be! You’re no better than me!”

“Savages usually spend their time drinking, eating, and sleeping, right? My terms should have been awesome. I simply wasn’t able to get my point across this time. I’ll get it right this time. Leave it to me.”

Alice speaks with an incomprehensible amount of confidence, but I’m pretty sure there’s no way we can successfully negotiate when this useless bucket of bolts naturally looks down on the Bashin tribe.

While Alice and I are arguing, Viper has somehow made her way to the Bashin tribe members.

“We’re sorry for disturbing you at such a late hour. We’re just visiting your woods. We have no intention of stealing your prey, so could you just let us stay here a few nights?”

“Vi, what the hell are you doing?! They’re not going to understand your peaceful request!”

I step in front of Viper, hoping to shield her if she’s attacked, but a man in a mask and loin cloth takes a deep breath and...!

“Awwwwwaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

“See! You made him super mad, Vi! Hey, Alice, time to go! Get us a flash-bang!”

As I cower at the sudden scream, Viper looks at me with a puzzled expression and shakes her head.

“No, he says, ‘So long as you leave our primary prey, Supopocchis, alone, do as you wish, young lady.’”

“Why is he so polite?! Wait, you can understand them, Vi?”

“E-erm, yes... The Bashin tribe speak the spirit language, so...”

So that “awwaaa” was spirit language? Seriously?

...But based on the fact that the Bashin person Viper spoke to puts his ax away, it seems they really do understand her.

I suck in a deep breath.

“Awaaaaaaaaa!”

<Evil Points Acquired>

“Graaaaaaaaaah!”

After attempting to speak in the spirit language, I barely have time to dodge the ax thrown at me.

“What an awful thing to say, Mr. Six! You shouldn’t ever say such things!”

“I was just trying to mimic their ‘awwaaaa’ scream! What the hell did I say that was worthy of Evil Points?!”

7

Thanks to Viper’s desperate pleading, we’re able to get the Bashin tribe to go home so we can finish our dinner.

“Huh, I didn’t expect the Bashin tribe to be so civilized. Hey, Alice, at this rate maybe we can talk to them about developing this area,” I call out to Alice, who is conducting soil tests despite the fact that it’s pitch-black outside.

“Nah, that’s not possible. Our goal is complete subjugation of these lands. First, this stupidly big lake is necessary if we’re gonna build up an industrial base. People have been fighting over water rights since the dawn of time. No matter how civilized they may be, if we start taking over this area, they won’t go quietly,” says Alice while pointing something that looks like a radio at the lake.

Currently there’s a steady stream of demons immigrating to Hideout City. And under Alice’s direction, they’ve taken up jobs and are slowly improving their standard of living.

For the time being, Kisaragi’s been providing food to the demons living in Hideout City.

But our goal is to develop this land as a space for people from Earth to move

to.

According to Astaroth, the food shortages on Earth have us teetering on the edge of ruin.

While we're currently caring for the demons because they're refugees from the Demon-Human War, in the long run they're going to be the labor force that helps develop this land.

Of course, we're the highly sophisticated and civilized Kisaragi Corporation. We won't make the demons pick up hoes and plows and manually develop the land.

We'll be leveling this entire area with heavy machinery and building up an industrial base. There are also plans to start large-scale farms near Hideout City.

To accomplish all that, we need to take water from this enormous lake, create the working environment by hand, and then use the demons as employees in our giant corporate endeavor.

"...I really do appreciate the fact that you've given my people shelter and even jobs... I'll do everything in my power to repay the Kisaragi Corporation..."

Viper has become extremely loyal to Kisaragi after hearing about these plans.

"Hey, Vi, we just want to use the demons to make money, okay? We'll pay them, of course, but Kisaragi only pays low wages, so there's no need to thank us. They might not technically be servants, but they're gonna basically be corporate wage slaves."

"I don't know what corporate wage slaves are, but on this planet it's an enormous blessing to have a safe place to live and to have a warm meal in exchange for work... The usual price for my people for losing the war would have been enslavement and being worked to death, after all...!"

Oh, right, this was a world with a screwed-up ethics system where orcs are worked like slaves as farm labor, then eaten after they die of old age.

"In that case, you can pay me with your body, Vi. You'll do *anything*, right?"

"Yes, of course! Leave it to me!" says Viper without an ounce of hesitation, leaving me unable to actually tease her by asking for something perverted.

Dammit, if this was Snow, I'd have no trouble asking her to do lewd stuff...!

Just then, Alice, who had been conducting soil tests, speaks up.

"Six, if you don't want me to tell the Supreme Leaders about this conversation, do me a favor."

"I haven't said anything bad, so I have nothing to be ashamed of, but I'd be happy to do you a favor. So don't tell them about this."

While Alice had offered a line or two during the conversation, she hadn't taken her eyes off the lake.

Viper and I look in the same direction, but don't find anything unusual...

"Go take a dive in the lake."

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

I may have night vision, but to go diving in the lake at night?

At Alice's unreasonable request, Viper speaks up enthusiastically.

"Is there something in the lake? I can go check if you'd like."

"I've been using a metal detector to look at the metals in the ground, but I'm getting a huge reaction from the lake. I figured there might be an artifact or something down there."

...Well, I suppose I have to if there's an actual reason and not just Alice trying to haze me.

I take off my power armor and strip down to my underwear. As Viper blushes in awe of my rugged physique, I make my way to the center of the lake.

Brandishing my knife between my teeth in case of trouble, I take a deep breath, then dive down with a breaststroke.

With my various enhancements, I can go for about ten minutes without air.

And my enhancements mean I can see underwater without goggles, so I'm able to steadily explore the bottom of the lake.

Over the next hour or so I thoroughly investigate the lake, coming up for breath every once in a while before diving again. I lost count of the number of

times I'd dived down when I see a giant silhouette lying on the bottom.

While I feel a prickle of fear, I focus my eyes on it and realize it's something mechanical. Its skin has long since peeled away, exposing its mechanical innards.

I take pictures with my underwater digital camera and notice that the external design looks like the mecha-lizard that Lilith destroyed a while back.

But even as I swim around it, it doesn't move, and it appears to have completely stopped functioning.

I remain submerged as I head back to Alice to report on my discovery.

"Alice, there's some giant robot down there! It looks dead, though... Errr... whoa!"

As I peer at the shore, Alice and Viper are surrounded by a swarm of monsters.

"Hey, Six, hurry up and put on your power armor! It looks like those are the infamous Mounting Gorillas!"

"Wait, hold on! Gimme at least thirty seconds! I wanna change into dry underwear!"

Around the container is a group of silver-furred gorillas threateningly pounding their chests.

As I change, a small gorilla tries to tackle me from below.

"Demon Lord Punch!"

Viper, who has been defending Alice from the gorillas, knocks away the gorilla that lunges at me.

Seeing one of their number roll along the ground after taking a powerful blow further agitates the other gorillas.

"Thanks, Vi! I'll repay you with my body!"

"You don't need to thank me, so please put on your underwear!"

As Viper turns away, her face beet-red, I put on some fresh undies and then my power armor.

“There, all set! Sorry to keep you waiting! Come get some, you stupid monkeys!”

In response to my taunting, the gorillas start flipping me off... I’m not kidding. They stick their middle fingers up at me, screeching in an eerily human manner. Where the hell did they learn that?

While gorillas are known to be gentle giants on Earth, this planet’s gorillas seem to be straight-up jerks.

“There’s no need to fight them if you don’t have to. In fact, apparently they’ll protect you if you surrender to them. The symbol of surrender is to lie down and show your stomach to them. Try it.”

“No way! Why the hell should a Kisaragi Combat Agent surrender to a gorilla?! C’mon and try me, you big dumb apes!”

Since I rejected Alice’s suggestion, the largest gorilla in the group comes flying at me in a low tackle.

But having had my recent experience dealing with a chimera in a fursuit trying to tackle me, I am ready for it.

Dodging the tackle, I then land on top of the gorilla, stupidly heavy power armor and all.

But the gorilla, unfazed by my weight, uses its muscles to lift me up.

Damn, this is one impressive gorilla.

The other gorillas seem to want to help their boss, but can’t because of Viper’s presence.

Leaning my entire weight into the gorilla, I acknowledge my rival.

“You’re not half bad...! Fine, I’ll show you my true power. Release re—”

As the gorilla and I trade intimidating grins, we’re hit by a blast of Alice’s chemical spray.

“...Gaaaaah! My eyes! My eyyyyyyes!”

“Aggaaah! Howaaaaaaaah!”

As the two of us roll around clutching at our faces, Alice says coldly, “We’re

done playing. Go home. If you don't, you'll get another eyeful of this pepper spray."

When Alice turns her spray bottle toward them with that line, the gorillas take off running.

"Six, go wash your face and then get over here. Why the hell were you trying to have a fair fight with a gorilla?"

"You stupid, evil android! We were gonna have a gentleman's—"

Just then, Viper speaks up with a tense voice.

"Mr. Six, Ms. Alice, a powerful magic signature from what seems to be a giant monster is heading this way."

As if to back up Viper's words, howls ring out all around us.

"Seems the body odor and cooking of modern humans aren't conducive to a peaceful time in these woods. That's fine. I'll do things right next time. I can save and reload, so do your best to make it home in one piece."

"Now's not the time for that! Dammit! Retreeeeeeeat!"

The depths of the Cursed Forest are a dangerous place that makes even a night of camping a challenge.

[Status Report]

Dear Supreme Leaders back on Earth, I hope this letter finds you well.

The environment here remains extremely hostile to humans, and I have every one of my preconceived notions of fantasy worlds being shattered on a daily basis.

I spoke with spirits the other day.

Spirits are, of course, a popular fantasy creature second only to fairies, but these spirits were really, really mad at me.

Just about the only creature on this planet that has had a comforting presence is the mokemoke.

Also, this planet has gorillas.

While Earth's gorillas are giants, the ones here are aggressive, dangerous creatures that act more like thuggish Yakuza than anything else.

Can't I just take my subordinates from this planet and return to Earth, please?

Also, since my apartment got blown up, as part of my workman's comp, please find me a new place to live. Pretty please.

Reporting Operative:

Combat Agent Six, Who's Homesick Even Though He Has No Home to Return To





A Heroic Encounter?



1

The day after we somehow managed to escape the Cursed Forest.

“Screw that! I’m not going outside after that shit we dealt with yesterday! I’m holing up in the safety of Hideout City for a while!”

I’m in my room at Hideout City.

I am chewing Alice out after she insists we return to the Cursed Forest despite our experience yesterday.

“You were the one who reported finding a giant robot at the bottom of the lake. Remember, Lady Lilith brutalized the mechanical lizard known as the Forest King until it was beyond repair. There’s a pile of this planet’s technology at the bottom of the lake. There’s no way we can just let it sit there.”

Alice ignores my pleas and begins to tug insistently at my arm.

“Let go of me, shrimp. There’s plenty of others with time on their hands if you need protection! Since Vi erased my save data, I’m busy trying to get caught up on the game!”

I peel off Alice’s hands and try to shoo her away when she turns to me.

“If you don’t cooperate, I’ll erase your data when you get close to the end.”

“Stop threatening me with my save data, dammit! Seriously! Given how often

you back up *your* data, you, of all people, should know how serious of a threat that is!”

As I’m busy arguing with the cold, unfeeling android, the door suddenly flies open.

“Hey, Six, what in the world have you done?! Her Highness is demanding your presence at the palace!”

Snow just starts yelling at me the moment she enters the room, but I don’t think she should be throwing around accusations just because Tillis summons us.

“Hell of a greeting there, Snow. Whatever she’s mad about, it’s not my fault. I still have plenty of Evil Points at the moment. Go interrogate the other Combat Agents.”

“So there’s no doubt the culprit is one of ours, hmm?”

Yeah, no doubt about that.

I arrive at the palace, essentially being marched along between Snow and Alice, and notice that the palace exterior was dramatically transformed in the short time I was away from it.

There are two additional moats around the palace, and there is some sort of magical item that looks like bells installed at regular intervals around the wall.

There are also more soldiers standing guard at the gates, giving the whole palace a more intimidating air.

As we are let into the palace, I crane my neck toward Snow and ask, “The defenses are a lot heavier now, what happened?”

“The defenses were reinforced because some pervert was sneaking into Her Highness’s bedroom every night. Lately, she’s been determined to make the pervert give up and has been doing everything in her power to discourage them from sneaking in.”

Ah, so Agent Ten’s still been sneaking into Tillis’s room.

I don’t get what’s driving the two of them to such extremes, but...

“Y’know, this is the sort of thing where the two of them start enjoying it and start thinking about the other as a romantic partner. While she might feel relief when Ten doesn’t manage to sneak into her room, she’ll start to feel like there’s something missing.”

“If you say that in front of Her Highness, she’ll demand your head on a spike.”

It was just as we arrived at the courtyard while chatting...

“Your Highness, it’s all right. We’re here to support you!”

“All of you, offer your prayers! Offer your prayers so Her Highness’s voice will reach the heavens...!”

“Your Highness, there’s not a person here who will laugh at you! Please, for the sake of the Grace Kingdom and its people! Please recite the holy prayer!”

Tillis stood with her eyes closed and hands clasped in prayer in front of the rain-making artifact. She was surrounded by countless ladies-in-waiting with tense expressions on their faces.

Then Tillis opened her eyes and called out the prayer in a booming voice...!

“Dick Festival!”

Tillis gave off an incredibly hallowed aura as she gazed intently at the machine...

“Hey, Alice, can you believe it? The girl over there yelling about dicks is the ruler of this kingdom.”

“I mean, it’s pretty embarrassing for a young woman, let alone a princess. I sure hope her parents don’t find out.”

“Hey, quiet! This is important! She was finally willing to say the prayer after intense pleading from her retainers!”

Tillis apparently heard our voices, and her expression shifts from determined to beet-red in the blink of an eye.

But it seems her voice didn’t reach the heavens, because the machine remains unresponsive.

Seeing this, Tillis places her head in her hands and ruminates.

“This isn’t enough people, I see... One of the activation conditions is to have many of our people in front of it, but how does this artifact recognize that there are lots of people around? Requiring that it be in front of the people would make sense if it takes magic from all the people present. Does that mean there isn’t currently enough magic in the area to power it...?”

“Hey, Snow, Tillis is trying to shrug off the fact that she just screamed ‘Dick Festival’ by mumbling some technobabble.”

“Shh, not so loud! She can hear us! Her Highness is trembling!”

Tillis is now red as a tomato and her shoulders are shaking, unable to ignore us any longer.

“Sir Six, thank you for coming. We’ve been expecting you...”

She smiles at us with her flushed face, but it isn’t just her shoulders that are trembling. There are noticeable tremors in her voice as well.

“Alice, did you record that scene?”

“Of course, it’s stored in my internal memory. I can record anything I see, after all.”

“I’m not quite sure what any of that means, but it can’t be good. Please stop!”

As the ladies-in-waiting try to do the tactful thing and leave, Tillis waves them off to the side and pleads with us.

“I mean, why did you say something so stupid anyway? If it’s about solving the kingdom’s water problem, didn’t we bring you a useful replacement?”

Yes, by capturing the Demon Lord’s Army’s Elite Four member Russell of the Water, the kingdom should have been regularly refilling its reservoirs...

“About that... There have been mounting concerns among the citizens... Apparently, it’s hard for people to watch such a frail girl use so much magic to create water for their sakes...”

But...Russell’s a boy.

Welp, that’s one unexpected consequence of Tiger Man forcing Russell to dress like a girl.

“<Hey, Alice, isn’t there some way to fix that machine’s password?>”

“<There should be if we reformat the machine. But it’s more fun to leave it as it is, don’t you think?>”

Yep, she’s an android made by an evil corporation all right. I agree that it’s more fun to leave it alone.

Tillis tilts her head in curiosity as Alice and I launch into an exchange in Japanese, but then seems happy to resume the conversation.

“Let’s set aside the water problem for now... No, there’s another reason I’ve called you in today. There have been reports of suspicious people lurking around in the city—”

According to Tillis, someone dressed in an outfit similar to power armor shows up at night and meddles in various affairs around town.

Up until now, Tillis and the kingdom looked the other way on our less-than-admirable activities because they are relatively harmless, but the more recent incidents have escalated to the point of being serious problems.

For example, someone recently attacked the orc farms in an attempt to free the orcs.

Also, someone revealed the source of the meat used by a certain skewer vendor and cut deeply into his sales.

There are countless other examples, in fact—too many to name—but they are all clearly different from the pranks that we’ve been pulling up to this point.

“That’s gotta be one of our Combat Agents. I take my eye off them for one second, and they lose their damn minds.”

“Sorry, Princess, we’ll take care of it on our end.”

As we immediately draw the conclusion that it’s one of our people, Tillis shakes her head.

“No, Sir Six, at first I thought it was someone from your organization, but... The armor that the suspect was wearing was white, not black. That’s why I wanted your help investigating this matter...”

At Tillis's words, Alice and I exchange glances—

“There's a traitor in our midst!”

The moment we return to Hideout City, we gather everyone in a room and I make the announcement.

Kisaragi Combat Agents aren't allowed to wear power armor that isn't black. It's not that white itself is prohibited. Alice's dress is white, and Spider Woman likes wearing white-silk outfits.

“You call us together and blindside us with this?! *You're* the one who tagged along with the girl in the Hero squad when they made a pass at you!”

“Keep your delusional bullshit to yourself! You're the sorry excuse for a Combat Agent who fled back to Hideout City after a single night out camping!”

“All of us are veteran agents of Kisaragi! None of would choose now, of all times, to turn traitor!”

“Besides, we all belong to an evil organization! Is betrayal really that big a deal?!”

Their arguments made me want to smack them one at a time, but I calmed myself before responding.

“It seems someone in white armor is going around causing problems in the city of Grace.”

At those words, everyone froze in shock.

Power armor had to be black.

This was something that was true for all evil organizations throughout human history.

It was tradition for the bad guys to wear black, and for us cannon fodder Combat Agents, it was our most distinguishing feature as well as our cherished sense of style.

“I'm not saying there's anything wrong with betrayal. But we all know how important the color black is to our identity, don't we? Remember how hard we fought when Lady Lilith tried to claim black as her color and change the power

armor color because it overlapped with her title?!”

Yes, there was a time when Lilith said, “Black is the signature color of Lilith the Black. So I’m going to change the official power armor for Combat Agents to hot pink,” prompting all of us to take up arms and rise up in rebellion.

We united under the banner of outrage. Outrage at the idea of Combat Agents being forced to dress in hot pink, and outrage over the fact that this woman—whose real name was Yasuda—was using the moniker, “Lilith the Black.”

“Yeah, I remember that... That’s when you, Six, said, ‘If you’re afraid about the overlap, it’d be a lot cheaper to just change your name from Lilith the Black than change all the power armor.’ We all called her Lady Yasuda for a while, didn’t we...?”

“Sure did. She ended up crying and begging us to stop calling her Yasuda when we were facing off against the Heroes.”

My colleagues think back on those days fondly. It was a reminder of just how important the color black was to us. It was something we had clawed back from Yasuda’s temper tantrum.

Which brings me to the question of why the hell she even calls herself Lilith the Black when she always dresses in a white lab coat.

As Alice watches the reaction of the Combat Agents, she nods to herself.

“Hey, Six, it doesn’t seem like they’re to blame.”

“But...Tillis did say the armor was similar to our power armor, right? Which means...”

I glance around at the agents, then decide to travel to visit a particular subordinate—

2

That night.

I’m pushing a wheelchair along as I stroll around the city of Grace’s nightlife district.

“...You’re such a bad boy, Commander. Using a mission as an excuse to take me on a date...”

Grimm, who is sitting in the wheelchair as I push her along, rambles nonsense as she smiles up at me.

I brought Grimm with me on patrol to look for the suspicious individual, but...

“What are you talking about? I keep telling you, we’re just doing a night patrol of the city.”

“Yes, yes, I know, I know. Boys do want to show off, after all. You need a reason to take a girl on a date... That’s it, right?” Grimm says cheerfully and chuckles, but no, she’s wrong.

The reason I brought her along is because she’s competent at night, and because life in the city has settled down, and we’re done passing out food to the demons, and she’s just collecting a free salary, so she needs to earn her keep.

The other Combat Agents are busy either exterminating monsters around Hideout City or heading back to scout Toris.

Viper is occupied with an enormous amount of paperwork and is managing all the demons.

What’s most surprising is Snow, who has been calling herself the Deputy Lord of the City, has started negotiating with the merchants of the city of Grace and has been pretty useful in doing things like securing supplies for cheap.

And Alice has taken Rose as her bodyguard as she goes to check on the giant robot at the bottom of the lake.

Which means that Grimm was the only one left, and she’s lazily collecting pay without doing much of anything.

“So where are we patrolling? How about a bar with a nice, mellow atmosphere? There’s also a park up ahead that’s usually deserted, but it’s a bit early for that. First, we need to set the mood with some light conversation. Then we can go to the park after we’ve had a few drinks and I’m a little tipsy. Girls need a reason to tag along with you, after all.”

What the hell is this deadbeat talking about?

“I’ve already got our first destination planned out. We’re going to turn that corner and head to the slums.”

Hearing that, Grimm lets out a dry chuckle as though in faint exasperation.

“There’s plenty of scary men hanging around that area, so if you take a pretty girl like me, you’ll definitely stir up some trouble... Tsk, you and I have known each other for a while, you know... What’s it called? Misattribution of arousal? There’s no need to set up that sort of charade. I know you’re a man I can depend on, Commander.”

Grimm continues rambling as she winks up at me.

“...Commander. Hey, Commander. Mind if I ask you something?”

Having arrived at the slums, we are wandering around looking for the suspicious individual.

Grimm looks up at me with a serious face as I push her wheelchair.

“What is it?” I reply to Grimm while directing an intimidating glance at the thugs in the slums...

“...Is this really for work?”

“...? That’s what I’ve been saying from the start. There’s a suspicious person that’s been showing up around here lately.”

At my nod, Grimm suddenly starts throwing a tantrum.

“Whaaaaaaat?! You asshole! You got me all excited for *this*?! Why did you only invite me, then?! And why did you choose the nighttime to take me out?

“The reason I brought just you along was because you’re the only one who wasn’t doing anything important. As for why we’re doing this at night, it’s because you’re useless during the day.”

“Don’t use logic on me! You, over there! Can’t you see that there’s a beautiful woman sitting right in front of you? Why aren’t you sticking your nose into our business?!”

As Grimm finally goes so far as to rope bystanders into her nonsense, the men

dressed like thugs standing around suddenly start glancing away to avoid getting involved.

“Just so you’re aware, the thugs that frequent this area won’t pick fights with me. I made sure to show them who’s boss a while back. That’s just business as usual for an evil organization member.”

“What an awful thing to do! You’re the thug here, Commander, not them! ... Wait, come to think of it, at the bars I’ve been visiting lately, most people avoid eye contact with me. Is that because—?”

“They probably think you’re one of us.”

“Ahhhhhhh! Noooooooooooooo!”

Bawling her eyes out, Grimm tries to wheel herself away from me, but I make sure to hold her firmly in place.

“You’re a proper member of Kisaragi now. It’s too late for you to get away. While we happily accept all newcomers with open arms, no one’s allowed to leave!”

“You never told me that! You never mentioned that at all! It’s bad enough that I’m woefully single, but now everyone looks at me like I’m undesirable!”

I’m pretty sure worshipping a dark god already made you plenty undesirable.

“Pipe down and get over here! You already accepted the payment, so I’m gonna make you work it off with your body!”

“At least phrase it differently! You make it sound like you’re about to do something lewd to me!”

I just meant that she needs to earn her keep, but it doesn’t sound like a joke when she says it.

As I attempt to forcefully wheel Grimm away...

“That’s enough!”

...an oddly spirited voice that feels out of place in the unhealthy slums echoes across the alley.

When I turn in the direction of the voice, there is a slender black-haired

beauty standing on a ramshackle hut that looks on the verge of collapse.

Since the white-armored woman is glaring straight at me, I can only assume I'm the one she's talking to.

She seems indignant as she lays eyes on the teary-eyed Grimm, and she points an accusatory finger at me.

"I'm Adelheid Krueger, the Umbral Savior! I'm the arbitrator assigned to determine if this kingdom should be left alone or brought under our management! As I'm currently on assignment, I probably shouldn't get involved, but..."

At a glance, she seems like a calm, collected beauty with sharp, aggressive features. However, her booming voice and the hatred burning in her eyes quickly shatters that image.



In the next moment, Adelheid...

“You worthless villain! Trying to kidnap a defenseless woman in a wheelchair, are you?! If I let you go, I’d be failing my mission to manage this world...! Now, release that—”

...collapses along with the hut as I bring it crashing it down with a single kick.

3

And so, I capture the weird woman who falls off the roof and proceeds to writhe around on the ground in pain.

“Who the hell is this woman...?”

“She really did seem intent on saving me. What a pity. I guess I’ll give her an A for effort. Alas, if she’d been a man, I might have ended up betraying the Commander by accident.”

Since Grimm seems intent on spouting more nonsense, I ignore her and survey the hog-tied woman lying on the ground.

Her white armor is definitely closer to our power armor than the standard armor.

“Urgh... Damn it all... I, an ally of justice, will never bend to evil!” says the weird woman as she squirms along the ground.

She definitely has *Crazy! Do not interact!* written all over her.

“Commander, what is it? ...Ah-ha, I bet you’re thinking dirty thoughts because she’s a woman, aren’t you? You naughty boy. You can’t go around seducing another woman while you’re on a date...”

“I keep telling you, we’re on a mission, not a date. I’m pretty sure she’s the suspicious person we’re here to find.”

I set aside the crazy spinster who’s pouting despite her age and kneel in front of the new woman.

“...Now. What did you say your name was? I had something I wanted to ask you.”

“I’m Adelheid Krueger, the Umbral Savior! My friends call me Adelie! But I have no intention of answering any questions from you, villain!”

...Shit. My Don’t-Get-Involved alarm is going crazy.

Usually, interrogating a beautiful woman is a great opportunity to earn tons of Evil Points and get away with sexual harassment, but...

I shove all my internal struggles aside and just ask her directly, “Hey, Adelie... Do you know what a Hero is?”

Yes, she has the same air as the superheroes I’d fought countless intense battles with on Earth.

“...Who’s this Hiro you’re talking about? ...Oops! I’m not telling you anything, villain! Also, Adelie is a nickname reserved for friends, so don’t call me that!”

Given that she seems sincere in her response, does that mean she’s unrelated to the Heroes from Earth?

I figured someone this uptight and uncooperative would be someone associated with the Heroes for sure, but...

“Hey, Ms. Adelheid, you mentioned something about justice, didn’t you? Meaning you fight for what’s right, and all that?”

“Yes, I’m an ally of justice... Also, I don’t like being called Adelheid. It’s not very cute. I guess you can call me Adelie.”

Adelie speaks casually as she lies on the ground, and I can’t really be certain that she’s the suspicious individual going around causing trouble.

“I’m Combat Agent Six. This is Grimm. We’re currently patrolling this area looking for a suspicious individual who’s been causing problems for this city...”

“...Oh, so you know the woman in the wheelchair?”

At that question, I explain the reasons behind my little to-do with Grimm earlier.

Having heard that, Adelie lets out a sigh of relief.

“Oh, thank goodness. So there wasn’t some innocent woman being kidnapped by a villain. Mr. Agentsix, I’m sorry for insulting you by calling you a

villain. I had no idea you are also a warrior for justice trying to keep the peace. I mistook you for the villains in black who, according to rumors, have been engaging in heinous acts around the city.”

I have a good idea of who she is talking about, but I decide to keep quiet.

At this point, Adelle opens her eyes and declares, “This must be fate! I, Adelle, will assist you in your quest to find this suspicious person!”

“I’m pretty sure it’s you, though.”

“Hey, Commander. As the Archbishop of Zenarith, I’m giving you a warning. You really shouldn’t get involved with this person.”

At my accusation of her meddling, Adelle squirms and protests.

“I’m not a suspicious person, oh ally of justice! If you’re patrolling the city to keep the peace, then we’re on the same side!”

“What do you mean, we’re on the same side? This country’s peace is kept by the police and us Combat Agents. Do you have permission to be doing any of this?”

“There’s no need for an ally of justice to get permission to keep the peace. Of course I haven’t asked for permission!”

“Hey, Commander, it’s not too late. I really think it’s better to avoid getting involved with this person.”

I mean, sure, I’d prefer not to deal with her, too, but I need to make sure...

“Hey, you. Did you attack one of the kingdom’s farms recently?”

“I did attack an evil farm that was using orcs as slave labor, but I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

No, I’m still not sure she’s the one.

“I also heard a meat-skewer vendor’s having a lot of trouble because his sales tanked after having the source of his main ingredient leaked. Might you have any idea what I’m talking about?”

“I did report a stall vendor that was using meat from a source so foul I can’t say it out loud, but I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

W-wait, no... I'm still not sure she's the one.

"Hey, Ms. Adelie, could you tell me more about your good deeds?"

"Well, there was an innocent maid girl at the reservoir being forced to endlessly create water, so I started a protest to rally the people against her heinous treatment."

"So you *are* the suspicious person!" I can't help but comment and hoist the hog-tied woman to my shoulder.

"N-now hold on, citizen! I was just doing what justice demands! What are you planning to do to me?!"

Well of course, I'm going to—

"N-no, you can't, Commander! You're planning to do pervy things to her by using the excuse that you're interrogating her, aren't you?! Just like when you captured Heine of the Demon Lord's Army's Elite Four!"

No, I'm just going to turn her over to the authorities.

"Wh-what?! Don't do that, oh ally of justice! That's something evildoers do! Of course, I understand why you'd be tempted, since I'm well-known among my comrades for being super-beautiful, but..."

"You obnoxious tart, coming out of nowhere to steal the Commander! I mean, the Commander said he'd be willing to do pervy things to me if I wasn't a clingy follower of Zenarith or if I was okay with him not taking any responsibility!"

Yup, my instincts are right.

Since I now have two crazy women on my hands, I need to get rid of one ASAP.

"Ally of justice, where do you plan on taking me?! While I do think we would have pretty good chemistry since you keep the peace of this city night and day, we've only just met and—"

"You don't plan on going to the meeting motel, do you?! Hey, Commander, it'd be the lowest of the low for you to do that with another woman while on a date with me!! Pick me, not this random intruder! I've been with you for so much longer!"

Maybe I should just turn both of them in...

"We're heading to the police department."

At that, Adelie stops squirming.

"...If you don't mind, could you please tell me why you're going there?"

"To hand you off to them."

Hearing that, Adelie begins to squirm against my shoulder.

"No, not the police! Please wait! Let's talk about this!"

"Quiet! You're bad news, I just know it!"

Ordinarily, for an evil organization like us, trouble should be a good thing.

We can dive headfirst into the trouble and turn things to our advantage through complaints.

Then we can demand things like restitution and damages to line our pockets.

But her...

"Hey, Commander, you're weirdly calm today. I figured you were going to sexually harass or bully her by using the interrogation as an excuse," Grimm whispers to me quietly, ignoring Adelie, who is pitching a fit while slung over my shoulder.

"I have the right to choose who I harass, y'know. For some reason, this girl's just not doing it for me..."

No, that's not right.

"To be blunt, I think she's extremely annoying."

"I heard that! You're pretty rude, you know!"

4

The day after I hand the weird woman over to the police.

"You look tired, Mr. Six. Did you run into trouble last night?"

"And then some. Because that crazy woman treated me like a fellow ally of

justice and threw a tantrum, it made things really annoying at the police station. Then when I tried to go home after, Grimm decided to get all clingy. So in the end, I wound up drinking at the bar with her until dawn.”

As I lie around Viper’s office as usual, I swallow a yawn and complain about last night.

“So who was the suspicious woman you captured?”

“I’m not entirely sure. In many ways, she reminded me of a Hero, but...”

I left her to the police because I didn’t want anything to do with her, but I still wonder what her deal was.

“I did learn a bit about them in my Kisaragi training, but just what sort of people are Heroes?”

Heroes, huh...?

Well, for starters, they’re people who’re convinced beyond a doubt that they’re always in the right. They have zero intention of seeing things from anyone else’s point of view. Also, they shout a lot.

And while they go around talking about how much they love peace, I’ve never seen them try to resolve anything through negotiation instead of launching straight into battle.

They are usually jocks who lean on tired old clichés about how justice can overcome any challenge, and they’re pretty much all a bunch of pretentious blowhards.

...But to be honest, I’d much rather be a Hero than an agent for an evil organization.

But when I was just starting out as a Combat Agent, I was recruited by the Pink Hero in the something squad, and I sat through some superhero training.

They would have Hero shows at the amusement parks on Sundays, and they would teach little kids that Heroes always fight for what’s right. They would tell them things like, *Your support is what helps us win!* and show their appreciation by selling cheap plastic knockoffs of Hero equipment as a way for the kids to become Heroes themselves. They would then use that money to fund their

activities.

Needless to say, reality was a slap in the face. But for me, the final straw was the fact that the pink lady who recruited me wouldn't even do anything sexy with me.

Yep, apparently anything eighteen plus is completely off the table for Heroes because kids look up to them.

With that thought, I look intently at Viper, who always listens to what others have to say and is very much a pacifist at heart.

"To put it simply, they're the exact opposite of you, my dear, sexy Vi."

"S-sexy?! Y-you really think I'm sexy?!"

While Viper usually wears her Demon Lord outfit at the office, her Snake Woman costume is a feast for the eyes.

"Well, Vi, you've got the sexy appearance down, but you're also pretty lewd on the inside, too. I mean, up until recently, you kept offering your body as part of your restitution, remember?"

"P-please forget about that! ...Um, b-but am I really that sexy looking? ...Well, as a member of an evil organization, I suppose I should strive to be sexy..."

I'm having fun teasing the flustered Viper when the office door flies open. It's Heine, all worked up about something as usual.

"All right, I've decided! From this day forth, I'll muster up the courage to go without underwear!"

"That's admirable, but I think you should still wear panties, Vi."

"...Lady Viper, what's happened to you since becoming a mutant? Are you trying to cause problems for me?"

"Vi's evolving every day. If you're not careful, she'll steal your identity as the sexiest member!"

And right on cue, Heine starts to bawl.

"I already have an identity as the fire user, dammit! Lady Viper, if you keep interacting with this man, his stupidity will rub off on you! You should ban him

from this room!”

Heine is being extraordinarily rude after her sudden appearance and I start to wonder why the hell she’s even here.

“Having Mr. Six here provides welcome distraction from my work, so banning him would be a bit too harsh... At any rate, you seem to be in a panic, Heine. What’s going on?”

“O-oh, that’s right! Russell is...!”

Heine leads us to the city of Grace’s reservoir. There, Russell (in his maid outfit) is being accosted by the weird woman.

“L-like I keep trying to tell you, I’m doing this job because I want to! Who the hell are you anyway?! Just leave me alone already!”

“No, they’re taking advantage of you! As an ally of justice, I can’t stand idly by as a child is exploited! Now come with me. I’ll take you somewhere safe.”

The one trying to help Russell—who clearly doesn’t want to be helped—is none other than Adelie.

“Graaah! You pervert! We caught you red-handed trying to kidnap a minor!”

“What are you planning to do with Russell, you molester?!”

“Whaaaaaat?! Wh-what’s going on?! ...Ohhh, you’re the man from yesterday!” Adelie yells at me the moment she sees me. “How dare you call me—an ally of justice—a pervert! I’m Adelheid Kreuger, the Umbral—”

“You’re being arrested for trying to kidnap a minor with the intention of molesting him. To try to molest a minor! You’re beyond saving, you pervert!”

I interrupt Adelie before she can finish and verbally describe her crimes. As a Combat Agent tasked with keeping the peace, I have the authority to arrest people at times like this. As a bad guy, I am the one committing the crimes more often than not. But they’re all harmless crimes, so let’s just write them off as added bits of character.

“H-h-hold on! I had no intention of molesting—! W-wait, ‘h-him’? What are you talking about?!”

Having confirmed that I have Adelie firmly subdued, Heine goes to hug Russell.

“Russell, are you all right? I heard a weird woman was harassing you, so I came as quickly as I could...”

“Thanks for the help, Heine. Since I’m still under supervision in this kingdom, I can’t counterattack when someone’s harassing me.”

As former members of the Demon Lord’s Army’s Elite Four, both Heine and Russell are still operating under certain restrictions.

Russell will get in trouble if he attacks a citizen of the Grace Kingdom, even if they are a pervert trying to accost a young boy.

Which means...

“You fiend! I can’t believe you would try to take advantage of a minor while fully aware that he couldn’t fight back! You can make your excuses behind bars!”

“Wait, I really had no intention of molesting him...! Besides, what the heck is wrong with your eyes? There’s no way such a cute child is a boy!”

“What’s wrong with *your* eyes? Of course a child this cute isn’t a girl!”

“?!?!?!?”

A confused Adelie looks to Russell for help, but...

“He’s right. Despite what I’m wearing, I’m a boy. And please allow me to clarify that I’m not dressed this way by choice.”

“I don’t understand this at all! Why are you dressed like that if you don’t want to be?!”

As Adelie’s confusion deepens, Heine angrily lashes out at her.

“Who cares about how Russell is dressed?! The problem is the fact that you were trying to take a young boy to some ‘safe’ place!”

“Wait! Phrasing! That makes me sound like a really heinous criminal!”

“That’s what we’re saying. You are a heinous criminal. Hey! Don’t resist! Hey, Heine, help me hold her down.”

“Tch, she’s strong for a human...”

“Nooooooooooo! I’m an ally of justice! I’m a servant of the god of law and order! Why am I getting arrested two days in a row?!”

Adelie’s words give me pause, even as she bawls and squirms.

“You know, you were going on about justice or whatever yesterday, but you’re being even weirder today. What do you mean by ‘servant of the god of law and order’?”

“I mean exactly what I said! I’ve been sent as a bringer of law and order to save the ruined world and the people teetering on the brink of destruction!”

As Adelie announces her status with a smug smirk, Heine smacks her across the face.

“You?! A servant of law and order? An ally of justice?! How dare you! You’re the type of hypocrite that I hate more than anything else!”

“How dare you slap an ally of justice, you exhibitionist! You’re dressed like a Demon Lord’s concubine! Have you no shame?!”

“You...! You’re calling me an exhibitionist despite meeting me for the first time?! Also, this may no longer be the case, but I was definitely one of the Demon Lord’s Elite Four at one point! Don’t be so prejudiced! Are you asking for an ass-kicking?!”

Heine bares her teeth and glares at Adelie, probably because she’s a demon. It’s only natural, though. It would be weird to expect god-fearing allies of justice to get along with demons.

It is at that moment—

Adelie lets out a sharp breath and rips away the rope that’s been restraining her.

...Wait, seriously?! That rope is reinforced with steel wire!

“What the?!”

The moment that Adelie, now free, lashes out at the shocked Heine...

...Viper blocks Adelie’s punch, protecting Heine, who threw up her hands to

try to protect her face.

“Lady Viper!”

Adelie, ignoring Heine’s tearful words of appreciation to Viper, glares at Viper with grim determination.

“...Step aside. Even a former member of the Demon Lord’s Army’s elite should be exterminated in the name of justice!”

“...I don’t know what the Demon Lord has done to earn your hatred, but Heine has been sentenced to servitude and is in the process of atoning for her crimes. I cannot simply let you kill her.”

Intimidated as she is by Adelie’s grim expression, Viper holds her ground and looks her straight in the eye.

As the two face off, Heine and Russell prepare to offer their aid to Viper.

I circle around behind Adelie and drop into a stance so that I can restrain her at any moment...

“I have nothing against her, but the Demon Lord’s Army needs to be wiped out! That’s what god intended! ...But wait, why is one of the leaders of the Demon Lord’s Army still alive?! What’s the Chosen One doing? Once the Elite Four of the Demon Lord’s Army was defeated, the barrier protecting the Demon Lord’s castle would collapse and the Chosen One would slay the Demon Lord and bring peace to humanity... That should have been the prophecy passed down to this kingdom.”

I don’t have a clue what Adelie’s saying, but that does remind me—Oh, right, there was a Chosen One or whatever, wasn’t there?

Wait, does she think the Chosen One killed the Demon Lord as prophesized?

She’s pretty fixated on justice and stuff. Is she a Chosen One fangirl or something?

“The Chosen One’s been missing for a long time! We were beaten by that man standing behind you. I know about the Prophecy of the Chosen One. But too bad for you, that old fairy tale turned out to be fake! Hah, sucks to be you!”

As Heine taunts Adelie while standing behind Viper like a kid on a playground,

Adelie's face contorts in confusion.

"Hey, Agentsix, is that true? You, and not the Chosen One, defeated the Demon Lord's Army?"

"Yup, that's true. Though the one who dealt the final blow was my boss, not me."

Thanks to Lilith completely ignoring the tropes and just bombing the Demon Lord's Army, the army collapsed and the previous Demon Lord was killed.

And the Demon Lord's Army has been absorbed by Kisaragi, and that's where we are now...

"While I'd like to praise you for doing the right thing and dismantling the Demon Lord's Army, this is all a bit of a problem. We're getting further and further from the divine revelation..."

"You keep going on about prophecies and divine revelations, but just what the hell are you anyway? You've been a serious pain in my ass the last couple of days. If you wanna play Hero or Chosen One, go do it somewhere else."

Adelie becomes lost in thought, and Heine suddenly holds her hand out in front of her.

"The hell are you muttering about after attacking someone?! This is a fight *you* started. You better be prepared for us to fight back!"

Nice job hiding behind Viper until your opponent lets her guard down and then taking the opportunity to attack, Heine! That's a move worthy of a former member of the Demon Lord's Army's elites.

But Adelie seems completely unmoved and puts out her hand to swat away Heine's fireball.

"We've already accounted for your abilities. No matter how hard you demons try, you can't—Owww, shoooooot!"

Adelie lets out a scream as her hand is engulfed in flames.

After desperately smacking her palm against the ground and somehow putting out the residual flames, Adelie looks up with a smirk even as tears fill her eyes.

“...We’ve already accounted for your abilities. No matter how hard you demons try, you won’t be able to harm me with the sorcerer stones at your disposal.”

“Hey, Heine, go full blast with your next one.”

“Yep, got it. I’ll show you my true power.”

Since Heine appears willing to play along with my proposal, Adelie hurriedly backs up.

“H-hold up! Something’s wrong here! This is way more firepower than a demon should be able to produce! First the prophecies are wrong and now this... What’s going on in this world...?”

She’s saying something about the sorcerer stones at the demons’ disposal, but I’m pretty sure Heine’s current stone was taken from a dragon.

As Adelie mutters to herself, Viper gently approaches her and takes Adelie’s burned hand in her own.

“Wh-what?! Y-you wanna fight?! Fine. If I use my full power—”

“In the name of the Goddess of Time, thy wounds be healed!”

Just as Adelie tries to pick a fight with Viper, the burn on her hand heals as though time is being reversed.

Ignoring Adelie’s stunned silence, Viper turns to Russell.

“Russell, can you use your water magic to soothe her burns?”

“You’re too soft, Viper...,” Russell says fondly as he begins to cool Adelie’s wounds. Adelie can only stand and stare in muted shock.

Heine scratches her cheek awkwardly.

“While I do not know who you are, I understand that you view demons as your enemies. However, Heine and Russell are currently atoning for the crimes they committed as members of the Elite Four. Won’t you please leave them be and watch over them instead?”

At Viper’s sincere plea, Adelie joins Heine in awkwardly scratching at her cheek.

“...It seems I acted rashly. But since I’m an ally of justice, I can’t just pretend I didn’t see survivors from the Demon Lord’s Army leadership. So...I’ll ask that you prove that you’re not evil. Here, do you know what this crystal ball is?”

With that, Adelie produces a plain-looking crystal ball.

I know at once what it is.

Heine and Russell visibly pale when they see the crystal ball.

Based on their reactions, I know that my guess is right.

“This is a karma-measuring crystal that reads a person’s soul. The purer the soul, the whiter it glows. And the more corrupted and evil the soul, the blacker it becomes. For example, in my case...”

With that, Adelie closes her eyes and grasps the crystal ball, which emits a white light.

“...Phew. As you can see, that’s how it works. You don’t have to be as pure as I am. Just prove to me that you’re not evil!”

Adelie wears a look of triumph as she speaks. Personally, I don’t see how this can end well. It’s one of those fantasy tropes that uses magic to check if someone is a bad guy or not. There’s no way it isn’t. This kinda thing pops up all the time in *isekai* anime.

“Well, shoot. I’ll be fine, given how pure and righteous I am. But the crystal’s gonna be jet-black for you two, I bet.”

“I-I-I’m not as big a villain as you are! At least, I don’t think I am! If we’re talking villains, Russell used to treat enemies like toys! He’d berate and torture them...”

“H-hold on, Heine... I was just doing my job...! Besides, you’re the aggressive battle junkie that picks fights with everyone! I bet you’re in more trouble here!”

As we exchange heated whispers, Adelie eyes us with suspicion.

Russell glances briefly at her and purses his lips before continuing.

“Besides, we’ve been pardoned by this kingdom’s princess. No one else gets to decide whether we former Elite Four are evil or whatever. Hey, is that woman

even strong? We've got the advantage of numbers, so why don't we..."

As Russell smirks, Heine and I draw back.

"Look at that, Heine. That's pure evil right there. And at his age, too! What a monster!"

"R-Russell..."

"N-no...! C'mon, it's her fault, not ours! I was just doing my job! And yet she tried to kidnap me, then attacked us when we stopped her! By the laws of this country, I'm pretty sure she'd be the guilty party!"

Just as Heine and I are sent reeling by the depths of Russell's dark heart...

"I'm their superior. So perhaps we can settle this matter by having me tested as their representative?"

With that, Viper takes hold of the crystal Adelie is holding out.

But...

"No can do. As an ally of justice, I can't let a single evildoer go..."

"I have a responsibility to protect them. And..."

Viper cuts Adelie off before she can finish voicing her objections.

"...My name is Viper. I am the last of the Demon Lords as well as a Supreme Leader within the Kisaragi Corporation. As a former Demon Lord, my head will surely be the most valuable thing you can take to your superiors."

Viper speaks flatly, not as my superior the mutant Snake Woman but with the authority only a former Demon Lord can muster.

"D-Demon Lord?! If that's true, then you alone might be... Huh?"

Adelie backs away as though intimidated by Viper. But then she stops midstride as if she intends to watch events unfold to the very end. Then she freezes.

"Vi... Vi! That crystal's shining really brightly."

"It's not just bright, it's definitely brighter and whiter than when that other lady was holding it."

“Amazing, Lady Viper! To make it shine brighter than a self-proclaimed ally of justice! This makes it hard to tell which one’s the evildoer here, doesn’t it?!”

The crystal ball in Viper’s hand shines brightly, emitting a pure-white glow that almost hurts to look at.

Adelie freezes in place, staring at the crystal ball in horror.

“Ah—Umm... What should I do in this scenario...?” asks Viper in a troubled voice. She clearly wasn’t expecting this outcome. The question brings Adelie back to her senses.

“E-e-errrm, w-w-w-well! Um? I wasn’t going to let you go if it shone only a little bit... But, um, it seems to be shining about as brightly as it did for me, so? I might be willing to accept that you’re someone on the side of good and justice, maybe, sorta...”

As Adelie keeps stalling to avoid admitting her defeat, the two former members of the Demon Lord start stage-whispering to each other.

“Hey, Heine, listen to what she’s saying. Maybe we should make her hold the crystal ball again. I bet it won’t shine as brightly, given how much of a sore loser she is.”

“Hey, Russell, does this mean her soul’s more corrupted than a Demon Lord’s? Is she really allowed to keep calling herself an ally of justice?”

Upon hearing this, Adelie’s brow becomes drenched with sweat and she points at Viper.

“You’re quite impressive, citizen! All right, I’ll let you go this time! But next time, I’ll reveal your true character! That’ll be—”

Just as Adelie tries to leave a parting shot, someone taps her on the shoulder.

“Excuse me, miss, do you have a moment? You’re the person who spent the night in our jail, aren’t you? You promised you wouldn’t cause any more problems when we let you go this morning, so what’s all this about?”

The one who taps Adelie on the shoulder is the policewoman I’ve come to know pretty well. She’s the one who’s always getting into fights with Grimm. It seems she’s out on patrol.



The color drains from Adelie's face, and she stops dead in her tracks as even more sweat beads on her brow.

"I-i-i-it's not what you think! I'm dealing with villains as an ally of justice..."

"That's *my* job. Also, this reservoir is an important facility for this kingdom, so what are you doing here?"

The ally of justice, upon being interrogated by a police officer, looks at us pleadingly. Then the policewoman also turns her attention our way.

"She tried to kidnap me. She said I shouldn't be here."

"She tried to kill me when I attempted to stop her from kidnapping Russell, using the excuse that I used to be part of the Demon Lord's Army..."

"Thank you for your hard work, officer. We'll hand over this suspicious woman to you, so please give her a good talking-to at the station."

At our statement, the policewoman puts Adelie in handcuffs.

"Wait! Hold on! I'm an ally of justice! I was just trying to defeat the Demon Lord's Elite Four!"

"Yes, yes. I'll listen to your excuses at the station. Given that you were let out yesterday on the promise of good behavior, you're not getting out again for a while—"

As I watch Adelie get hauled off in tears...

...I find myself embarrassed that I ever suspected her of being a Hero.

[Status Report]

We found the remains of a giant robot while exploring a lake near Hideout City.

Alice won't shut up about trying to retrieve it, which made me wonder if you really did program her with the Three Laws of Robotics.

She's super rebellious from time to time, and it seems like she doesn't care one ounce about human life.

I mean, just the other day she asked me for a blood sample. She was going on about cloning me just in case I died.

Oh, that reminds me, I ran into a weird woman while on patrol at night with Grimm.

There's already one odd woman who prowls the alley at night and happily goes along with my harassment, but this was a completely different person.

Her strangeness is on the level of the Supreme Leaders, so I would like to introduce you to her the next time one of you visits this planet.

But she keeps going on about justice this, justice that, so I'm not sure if I should get too involved with her.

I'll provide additional intel on this weirdo some other time.

Reporting Operative:

Combat Agent Six





Our Barbaric Neighbors



1

A week after the crazy woman was arrested for the second time, the agents sent to scout Toris a second time returned.

“Well, you gave us all sorts of crap for the last report, so we used a relatively large amount of Evil Points and gathered lots of useful information with high-precision optical telescopes. Here, take a look at this.”

We are all gathered in the conference room as the scout team, looking pretty disheveled, plops a thick-bound sheaf of reports down on the table.

Alice flips through it before opening her mouth to comment.

““As a country rich in water crystals, Toris uses its plentiful water supply to create a large number of leisure facilities such as public pools and giant bathhouses. Perhaps because the primary mode of transportation in the city is boats along its many canals, people prefer to dress in light, thin clothing just in case they fall into the canals. Because the massive deposits of water crystals underground occasionally erupt in geysers, the people of Toris are often showered by these geysers...’...So when do you actually get to the useful information?”

“That was *all* useful information! Especially the part about Toris citizens

wearing skimpy clothing and getting wet!”

Alice tilts her head quizzically as the agent smacks the table for emphasis.

“...So are you saying that we should sell swimsuits in Toris? I mean, sure, clothes that dry quickly, plastic umbrellas and raincoats, and hair dryers would probably sell well, but I reiterate: Is this really useful information?”

Alice has her head tilted in confusion, but she is totally missing the point.

“I see, so there’re tons of women wandering around with wet T-shirts in Toris!”

At my comment, the other Combat Agents perk up.

“They really did bring home useful information! Hey! I’m going on the next scouting mission!”

“Screw you! I wanna go, too!”

“Leave infiltration missions up to me. I’ll draw up a superaccurate map of Toris.”

My selfish colleagues get into a shouting match and begin physically fighting over who will go next. I join the fray, too. Obviously. Sick of watching us fight, Alice speaks up.

“If we conquer Toris, you’ll be able to see those women in wet T-shirts every day, you meatheads.”

Well, well. It seems my partner really is as high-spec as she claims to be.

“So you are a genius after all! Now use those smarts to figure out how to conquer Toris. Let me preface that by saying it has to be an operation with zero Combat Agent casualties.”

I ruffle Alice’s hair. Rather than putting up a fuss, she simply nods.

“Leave it to me. I’ve already got a plan written up. In war, numbers are everything. So I’m going to clone you lot and send in those clones to—”

“Why do you always come up with these morally questionable schemes?! No bioweapons! No nukes! No clones! Every life is precious! C’mon, isn’t there something more along the lines where we get to slack off but still enjoy the

fruits of the conquest?”

As we all reel back in revulsion at the ruthless android’s proposal, Alice shrugs and replies:

“If such a thing existed, we’d already be done conquering Earth. The easiest shortcut is to continue developing Hideout City. We may have gotten some land pretty quickly on this rock, but Hideout City is our only real accomplishment so far. Now’s the time to secure our gains, build up our strength, and make this place a true safe-ops center.”

The Combat Agents, myself included, let loose with a stream of jeers and boos as we have the delicious treat yanked away from us and replaced by boring routine work.

“Fine, whatever. We’ll set aside developing the city and proceed with invading Toris. But you’ll need to tell Viper that we won’t be able to fulfill our promise of securing living space for the demons until we finish our invasion. Tell her that we’re sorry but she’ll have to wait a little longer...”

“Don’t use Ms. Viper to guilt trip us! Fine! We’ll work on development!”

“How awful! Ms. Viper’s been working her ass off because she wants to repay Kisaragi for saving the demons!”

“She wakes up earlier than everyone and stays up working later than everyone else. And not only does she do so without complaint, she even puts on a smile every day. We can’t possibly tell her that...”

Seems like these guys can’t stand the thought of upsetting Viper, even though they’re cannon fodder for an evil organization.

Obviously, I can’t break that news to her, either.

The android that’s extremely good at manipulating people, noting that we’ve calmed down, makes her pronouncement.

“Then we’ll stick to our policy of working on the governing. Also, the useless scouting party needs to head back to Toris and get some *useful* information this time... Dismissed!”

“Dammit, scouting missions are dangerous! Fine! We’ll definitely bring back

important intel this time!”

We start filing toward the exit after the scouting party leaves in a huff, but it’s then that Alice says, “Oh, right, I need the rest of you to come help me with something.”

She says it casually, as though asking us to run a simple errand.

Combat Agent shouts ring out across the giant lake in the woods.

“Ahhhhhhhhh! New enemies incomiiiiing!”

“More enemy life-forms detected!”

“Something’s growing out of the ground! Watch your legs!”

“Detecting several dryad types, orc types, gorilla types, and several new species! We can’t hold this! Retreat!”

The Combat Agents who accompanied Alice are fighting the endlessly spawning monsters in the forest.

A short distance away from the hellish battle scene—

“B-Boss! There’s way too many of ‘em! Even with everyone in Hideout City, we won’t be able to eat ‘em all!”

“Gah, we’re not here to secure food, you idiot! Just leave the monsters where they fall!”

As Rose’s voices concerns that are completely off base, I shout at the top of my lungs in Alice’s direction, “How much longer is setting up the tow cable going to take, Alice?! We can’t hold out much longer!”

At the center of the lake, Alice is currently connecting a tow cable from the Destroyer to the wreckage of the giant robot.

Having surveyed the wreckage the other day with Rose, Alice declared that she was going to salvage it.

Since the giant lake is deep in the woods, we can’t take any heavy equipment with us, so we had to drag out the still-recharging Destroyer, but—

“We can’t just leave them here! The laws of nature demand we eat the enemies we defeat!”

“Hey! Leave the feral orcs alone! No orc meat allowed in Hideout City!”

Rose, who has been dragging a supopocchi by the tail while hauling a feral orc on her back, suddenly throws her body to the ground.

Something thrown in Rose’s direction slams into the orc’s head...!

“Boss, there’s someone else here! The Bashin tribe’s showed up!”

“Eeeeeep! That orc’s head looks like something out of a splatter flick! Throw the damn thing away!”

I can’t help but let out a scream on seeing the gory remains of the orc on Rose’s back. Just then, the low bass of a heavy engine rumbles through the area.

None of us turn to face the source of the engine noise, something every Kisaragi employee finds to be a comforting sound. Instead, we look in the direction the ax came from.

“The Bashin tribe are civilized. If you’re polite to them, they won’t attack us! Smile! Smile at them!”

With that, I turn and smile at the bushes only to be greeted by an ax thrown in my direction.

“What do you mean ‘civilized’? They’re totally ready to kill us! Actually, in my case, I sometimes enter the woods looking for food, and usually there’s a high chance I get attacked by the Bashin tribe. They’re an evil tribe!”

“B-but we’ve been able to come to an understanding with the Bashins of late! Vi would interpret their spirit language, and...”

It is just then that I remember.

Oh, right, they—!

“The supopocchi! Rose, leave the supopocchi! That’s their main source of food, so if you leave the supopocchi alone, the Bashin won’t attack us!”

“I can’t follow that order, Boss! A Kisaragi Combat Agent letting someone else take their prey?! You should be ashamed of yourself for that suggestion!”

Why the hell are you picking now of all times to show some Kisaragi spirit?!

That's totally out of character for you!

When I look around for covering fire, my useless colleagues have already started retreating upon hearing the Destroyer's activation noise.

Rose moves to guard the enormous pile of monster corpses behind her, then spreads her arms and tries to intimidate the enemy bushes.

"Raaaaaaaaaaaaawr!"

Rose's attempt at intimidation looks like a child doing her best to scare away a wild animal, but I guess something about her stance is keeping the opponent in the bushes on their guard, and there's no sign of them leaving.

...No, after a rustling noise, a small Bashin tribeswoman hiding her face behind something that looks like a hockey mask steps out of the bushes with an ax in one hand.

The tribeswoman who stands in front of Rose is dressed like a Neanderthal. She is wearing various animal skins and has strange patterns tattooed on her arms and legs.

The lone tribeswoman—based on her long, dark-brown hair and figure—appears to be a girl in her teens.

"So you've come, Ms. Bashin! Why do you always try to take my prey?!"

"Pretty sure it's you that's been coming and intruding on their hunting grounds."

Based on Rose's remarks, it sounds like she knows this young Bashin tribeswoman.

"When I enter the woods, this girl usually shows up. So far, we're tied for wins and losses. But I don't feel like I'm going to lose today!"

"...It sounds like you and Little Bashin are rivals. Why the hell are you forging weird relationships with people when I'm not around?"

I can't see her face, but it looks like she's about the same age as Rose.

...Just then, I don't know what occurs to her, but the girl put down her ax and then tauntingly quirks her index finger at Rose.

I can't understand what she's saying, but it's clear what she's trying to communicate. She's challenging Rose to a fight.

Rose sets down the orc on her back, balls her hands into fists, and drops into a stance.

"I don't really get what's going on, but I won't lose today, especially with you here, Boss!"

"Huh...?! Two against one? Are you sure you're okay with that...?"

"...?!—Ah!"

Apparently she understands what Rose is saying, and the girl appears to be raising an objection despite not being able to raise her voice.

And seeing that I also dropped into a fighting stance, the girl looks around worriedly and trembles.

"It'd be one thing if this was a duel, but this is a fight for survival to secure my dinner! Fighting two on one may not be fair, but might makes right! So let's end this today!"

"Man, your morals fly right out the window when food gets involved, don't they? ...But fine. I guess we're employees of an evil organization, after all."

Seeing that I was intent on joining the fight, the girl then smacks her mask with both hands.

Seems she's steeled herself for the fight, and she picks up the ax she'd set on the ground, drops into a stance, and—

—cowers as the Destroyer's front leg lands right next to her.

Then comes Alice's voice from inside the Destroyer, amplified by the loudspeaker.

"Stop playing around, you idiots... Begone, savage!"

"...Tch!Tch, tch!!"

As the leg waves around to shoo her away, the girl lets out a silent shout and flees—

It seems she was the only member of the Bashin tribe in the area.

There is no sign of axes flying in our direction after Alice chases them off, and Rose insists loudly that she's going to take all the monsters home. So we tie the monster corpses to the Destroyer and somehow manage to get them back to the city.

And when we arrive back at Hideout City, there is a woman who looks starry-eyed at the giant robot towed by the Destroyer... No, at the giant pile of monster bodies tied to its steel frame.

"There's so many monsters that'll make good money! Alice, leave dealing with those to me! I'll use my connections, the strength of Kisaragi, and my authority as a former knight commander to get a good price from the merchants!"

Snow, who has started calling herself the 'Governor' and 'Deputy Lord of the City,' starts appraising the value of the dead monsters.

"No can do, Ms. Snow. I'm going to eat all these monsters!"

"Don't be ridiculous. There's no way you could eat all those monsters. The innards can be used for medicine, while the skins and bones can be sold at a respectable price. If we had all that money, we could use it to help develop the city... H-hey! Doing that won't change anything, Rose! Stop gnawing on me!"

As Rose fights like a wild animal to avoid losing her prey, there is a group gathering to have a look at the wreckage of the giant robot that has been dragged here by the Destroyer.

It is about one size-class smaller than the Destroyer and slightly resembles the Sand King.

There's algae growing on various parts of its body, perhaps because it has been submerged in the lake for so long.

If it was created to fight the Sand King, why was it at the bottom of a lake instead of in the ground?

The planet's mysteries just keep getting weirder.

"All right, your name's Mr. Mogero. I'm going to fix you and make you look all new!"

Alice cheerfully pats the robot mole's armor and gives it a name.

I guess she feels a certain kinship with it because it's a robot, even if it's from a different planet.

"Well, you can fix it if you want, since you're the one who picked it up. But make sure you care for it, so it doesn't go on a rampage or anything... I mean, I'm sure it'll be pretty hard to repair a completely alien robot in the first place..."

After all, a different world means different culture and technology.

We'd have to take the robot apart with large-scale crane equipment, figure out what's broken, look for parts that seem compatible and adjust them to fit, and then do test runs... It's a long, long process that's already giving me a headache.

I shrug at Alice, who is full of childlike wonder now that the giant robot is finally in front of her...

"The hell are you talking about? Given that you're not doing anything in Hideout City, you're gonna help fix Mr. Mogero, Six."

"Wha...?"

2

With no enemies to fight at the moment, we begin pouring our efforts into fortifying Hideout City.

Even the sections of Hideout City without any residents are now equipped with proper plumbing and multipurpose buildings.

The demons inhabiting the city all have homes now—albeit simple ones—and there are plenty of them out working in the farm fields we cut out from the forest.

Still, because the fields are near the woods, monsters still show up the moment we let down our guard.

The scenes of Combat Agents chasing off monsters as the defensive walls go up around the farming sector are the epitome of planetary settlement.

We also have heavy equipment bulldozing a path through the forest to

connect the city with the giant lake where Mr. Mogero was found. It is a scene that would probably drive environmentalists into a homicidal rage.

I watch such scenes unfold from afar and speak to Alice as she continues her repair work.

“Looks like it won’t take more than six months to finish the industrial sector. According to Vi, the demons that had been scattered around the world are gathering at Hideout City, too. I mean, here we have cheap labor, a lot of land, and plenty of resources, too. Yeah, I think I’m pretty much over Earth. Couldn’t I just have found my own kingdom here?”

“If you became king, there’d be a coup within three days. I foresee a future where you end up in an intense fight with the Retribution Squad sent from Earth.”

It has been a week since she started repairing Mr. Mogero.

It was a soggy rust bucket when we first found it, but it has since been restored to a brilliant sheen.

“Hey, it’s starting to look pretty good. Is it gonna start moving soon?”

“Doesn’t look like it. I repaired the broken components, but he still won’t start up. It seems that he’s powered by the sorcerer stones or whatever. But he hasn’t responded to any of the stones I’ve gathered.”

Alice gently strokes Mr. Mogero’s armor as she speaks, like she’s soothing a baby.

“Ah-ha! I bet it’s designed just to listen to its creator’s orders. Or maybe only members of a specific bloodline can run it.”

“That only happens in manga and anime. I’ve never heard of a real-world security mechanism like that.”

As Alice and I apply a coat of wax to Mr. Mogero’s armor, a beaming Rose appears with something in her hand.

“Ms. Alice! I’ve finished my math homework! It’s finally all done!”

Having now formally become a Kisaragi Combat Agent, Rose is in the process of training her brains to catch up to her combat ability. To that end, Alice has

been regularly giving her homework.

The idea was to start small with elementary-level math problems, but...

“...Nearly half of the answers are wrong. Start over from the basics.”

“W-wait, hold on, Ms. Alice! If you put it a different way, it means half of the answers are right! So that means if I only do *half* of the basics again, I should get them all right!”

Rose brings out her unique brand of statistics and tries desperately to argue her case.

I decide to give her a hand as a fellow meathead.

“Alice, you should start by praising her for her successes. As someone who responded really well to positive reinforcement back in the day, you can trust me on this one.”

When I was a kid, my mom cried tears of joy when I stopped putting crawfish I’d caught in the fridge.

“And *that* is what you get when you repeatedly take the easy way out.” Alice points straight at me as she speaks. “...Listen, Rose, if you don’t study and work hard while you’re still young, you’ll end up like him in the future.”

“I’m tired of studying, but...I guess I’ll put in a little more effort!”

“All right. Grit your teeth, Rose. Let’s settle once and for all who’s head is stronger.”

As I try to head-butt her, Rose slowly begins to back off.

A demon merchant who supplies Kisaragi with food runs over to us the moment he catches sight of Alice.

“I finally found you, Ms. Alice! Someone’s flooding Grace Kingdom’s market with cheap water crystals! Now’s the time to buy them cheap and flip them for a profit!”

Alice tilts her head quizzically at the sudden bit of useful information.

“Water crystals... That special mineral produced in Toris? Did the ones who invaded them start dumping them? But why would they flood the market with

them and charge next to nothing?”

Alice murmurs to herself and falls deep into thought. Rose smiles innocently at her.

“So that must mean the people who took over Toris are nice people! They’re sharing their leftover water crystals with us!”

...No one’s *that* charitable. There must be a catch.

Alice then nods slightly, as though she has come to a conclusion...

3

<Evil Points Acquired>

“Hey, hey, hey! Who the hell gave you permission to open a shop here?!”

“Eeep! I—I sent an application form to the landowner...!”

I listen to the Evil Points announcement in my head as I loom over the woman in front of me.

In Grace, we find the stall selling the water crystals, but...

“Don’t give me this complicated talk of application forms! Where the hell did you get these rocks, huh? Go on, spit out your source!”

“I—I—I—I can’t reveal that! It’d impact my credibility, and supplier information is life and death for a merchant...!”

The woman tries her best to hold her ground while glancing nervously around for help.

But the people of the city, evidently aware of who I am, all pass by, pretending not to notice...

As I tower over the woman who is on the verge of tears, Alice gently places her hand on my arm.

“Let’s try talking to her first, okay? Are you all right? I’m sorry about my companion. He’s usually not such a bad guy, but... He’s been swindled before, so he gets really aggressive against shady merchants.”

Alice affects a pained expression, then approaches the woman I’m

intimidating and gently takes her hand.

The woman, her eyes brimming with tears, seems to relax a bit at Alice's words.

"I—I—I see. Then I guess that can't be helped... B-but I'm a legitimate merchant."

I want to complain about being described as an extortion victim, but it seems Alice is attempting to play the good cop here.

The good cop, bad cop routine forms the basics of Kisaragi negotiation techniques.

"A legitimate merchant. Still, it's a bit odd, isn't it? Water crystals are a precious mineral found in Toris. But we currently don't have any relations with them. And if you can't talk about your supplier, it's only natural that people suspect you of smuggling..."

"See? She's doing shady business! To secretly conduct business with an enemy country we're not trading with, how suspicious! I'm going to pass you off to the greedy knight who loves taking credit for things!"

"P-p-please wait! I haven't smuggled anything; please believe me! Um, by greedy knight, do you mean Lady Snow?! Tell anyone but her, please! If she gets ahold of my weaknesses, she'll squeeze me for all I'm worth!"

She's more scared of Snow than she is of me. Just what the hell has that corrupt chick been doing?

Kisaragi may be an evil corporation, but recruiting her might have been a mistake.

The woman, terrified, looks around cautiously before saying softly,

"So just between us, the water crystals were given to me by a certain person. It seems like their intention is to support this kingdom from the shadows, seeing as we're chronically short on water. They've been handing out water crystals to various merchants and telling us that they want the crystals distributed cheaply to the people..."

Wait, what? Is this a campaign from some sort of charitable organization?

...It's now that Alice murmurs to herself, "They've already got operatives in this kingdom. What a nuisance."

I don't know what she's talking about, but thinking is her job.

Which means what I ought to do is...

"If you got them for free, then you won't mind if we confiscate them, eh? Give us all your water crystals, dammit! We're taking them because you're kinda shady! We'll be the ones to distribute them to the kingdom! If you want them back, then you can go and prove that you obtained them legitimately!"

"Th-that's not fair. I may have gotten them for free, but they're mine now! Please, miss, stop this man!"

As I hear the Evil Point chime, I once again tower over the woman.

The woman turns a pleading gaze to Alice.

"To sell imported goods in this kingdom, you need to report where you acquired them, how much you acquired them for, and your sale price. What do you intend to do about that?"

"Oh, I just don't report any of that. That way I don't have to pay any taxes. It's killing two birds with one stone."

The woman's knee-jerk response to Alice is shockingly brazen, but she soon comes to her senses.

"What was that about doing legit business, Ms. Tax Dodger?!"

"That was just a slip of the tongue, sir! Please, just pretend you didn't hear anything!"

As the woman throws herself over the water crystals, I respond cheerfully with a canned response, wiggling my fingers in delight.

"Hee-hee-hee, you can scream all you want, but no one's coming to help! Now, don't resist!"

"Ohhh, so confiscating the water crystals is just an excuse and what you really want is my body! Fine, if you wanna do something pervy, go ahead and do it! In exchange, I'm keeping the crystals!"

I smirk at the woman as she screams something ridiculous at the top of her lungs.

“Relax, I’ve got my pride and honor as a man. Sexual assault is strictly prohibited. Just hand over the crystals. Also, you’re not my type. C’mon, hurry up!”

“How rude! I’m not going to hand over this amazing opportunity! I already decided I’m going to sell these crystals and make a fortune! If seduction won’t work, then how about money?! I’ll give you ten percent of the sales, so help me dodge my taxes!”

“...Hey, Six, look at the price she’s selling the crystals for. Despite being told to sell them cheaply, she’s actually charging an arm and a leg for them.”

Damn. Not only is she planning to dodge taxes, but she’s ripping people off.

“Paying taxes is a citizen’s duty. I bet we’ll find all sorts of dodgy things about you if we dig around! I’m going to report you to the proper authorities!”

“Heeeelp! Someone help meeeeeee!”

Right at this moment—

“That’s enough!”

As the woman (who turned out to be a lot shadier than a simple tax dodger) screams, someone with weird tastes decided to respond.

Just as I’m thinking this series of events feels oddly familiar, Alice and I turn around to see—

“...What the hell are *you* doing here?”

“I was helping an old man in the city carry a ton of luggage. That’s when this lady came up to me and told me I had promise. Then she asked if I wanted to help her bring justice to the world!”

Standing before us is Rose, with a sunny smile on her face. And next to her is Adelie...

“Ah, so we meet again, Agentsix! Thanks to you, I spent a long time in jail! The police spent every day lecturing me. I’m definitely going to repay you for that!”

“The reason you got lectured was because you’re a criminal.”

“I’m! Going! To repay you for that!”

Adelie ignores my quip and repeats herself, angrily enunciating each word.

“...Hey, Six, who’s this weird woman?”

“Someone I’ve met but don’t know. She’s some oddball named Adelie.”

Alice looks at Adelie like she’s a curious specimen, before clapping her hands together in recognition.

“Ah, so she’s the white-armored weirdo from the reports... Now I get it.”

I don’t know what she gets from our exchange, but Alice turns toward Adelie.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Ms. Adelie. I’m Six’s partner, Alice Kisaragi.”

“Thank you for your polite introduction. I am Adelheid Krueger, the Umbral Savior. You can call me Adelie or Ms. Justice... Now.”

Adelie then points at me and speaks in a ringing voice.

“Agentsix, you’ve finally shown your true colors! You’ve entrapped me multiple times and turned me over to the police, but...now that I’ve caught you in the act, you’re not getting away this time!”

“You kept getting caught on your own. I don’t remember setting any traps for you.”

“Now that! I’ve caught you! In the act! You’re not getting away this time!”

Adelie once again ignores my quip and smiles triumphantly.

“Your crimes are blackmail and attempted sexual assault. You’re trying to steal the water crystals that I magnanimously provided to this kingdom’s people! That’s undeniably evil!”

“Ah, so you’re the source of water crystals. And you’re admitting to being connected to the merchant who’s trying to sneak away, right?”

At Alice’s observation, Adelie tilts her head quizzically.

The merchant, who has somehow sneaked away with the bag of water crystals on her back, reels at Alice’s observation...

“Ah, she’s making a break for it! Rose, that lady’s attempting to dodge her taxes! She’s a criminal! Chase her!”

“Ohhh?! U-understood! I’ll go get her!”

I watch as Rose runs after the fleeing merchant before I hand Adelle the price tag that had been on the water crystals.

“Didn’t I tell you what my job was? I’ve been given the authority to arrest people in order to preserve the peace in this city. That woman’s crimes include tax evasion and running an unauthorized business, but it seems she’s committed additional crimes. We’ll find out more after an interrogation... This also makes you a coconspirator.”

“No, that’s not true, Comrade Agentsix! Please listen to me, friend! So Rose, the person I recruited, was one of your people? She’s a really good girl, with a great sense of justice. A rare find, indeed. Also, I’m sorry for doubting you, Agentsix, when you have subordinates like her. You are an ally of justice. I was right about you after all.”

Adelle starts nervously offering excuses after seeing the price tag, while Alice efficiently sends off an order memo and obtains a set of Kisaragi-manufactured handcuffs.

“Adelle, was it? I have a fair sense of who you are, but tell the details to the cops. All right then, it’s time for us to get going.”

“Wait, please listen to me! ...Oh?! Wait, I don’t feel an evil aura coming from you. You look like a child, but what are you, exactly?!”

Adelle drops into a battle stance as she backs away, trying to avoid getting handcuffed by Alice.

Exasperated, Alice lets out a sigh and speaks.

“...What the hell is an evil aura? There’s no way you could sense anything like that.”

“No, I know! It’s the sixth sense of justice! My sense is right about twenty percent of the time. When someone catches my eye, I then unmask them with this!”

As though she has drawn a firm conclusion, Adelie draws out her crystal ball.

Wait, 20 percent accuracy? That's basically random chance, isn't it...?

"This is a karma-measuring crystal that reads the person's soul. So if you're going to insist you're not evil...!"

Alice grabs the crystal ball before Adelie can finish her explanation.

Obviously, the crystal ball that reads souls or whatever shows no reaction.

"...It doesn't turn black when Alice touches it, but what does that mean?"

"...If it's not turning white or black, I guess it means she's neutral? I've never seen this before..."

Alice mercilessly cuffs Adelie's wrists as Adelie stands there in confusion.

"Stop playing with stupid toys. It's time to go."

"Wait, hold on! I shouldn't have done that! I'm sorry for doubting you; please forgive me! Please, if the police arrest me again, I won't get out for a long time! It's really hard to deal with the interrogator's exasperated tone when he says, 'You again...?'."

We haul Adelie off toward the police station as she howls in protest.

"<Hey, Six, I've never met them myself, but are the Heroes on Earth at least a little better? The superheroes that threaten Kisaragi can't be all like this, right? >"

I keep silent, since Alice asks in Japanese.

"So just what the heck is she anyway? She's always going on and on about justice, so it's clear she's not someone we can coexist with, but..."

Having returned to Hideout City, I mutter to myself as I lie on my cheap bed.

While we were able to deliver Adelie to the cops, it seems the tax-dodging merchant was able to evade Rose's pursuit.

Because of that, I suspect the merchant might be quite the skilled operator, but given that Rose had meat-skewer sauce around her mouth when she came back, she is being interrogated by Grimm on suspicion of accepting a bribe.

At my random muttering, Alice, who followed me to my room and is sitting on the couch as she cleans her trusty shotgun, speaks.

“She’s an agent of the mystery faction that wiped out the Toris royal family. She’s done a lot of weird things like flooding the market with cheap water crystals and trying to crack down on crime in the city, but there’s no doubt that she’s one of theirs.”

...?!

“Seriously? We lost Toris to someone that useless?! We were outmaneuvered by *that*?!”

“No, I’m pretty sure she’s one of their rank and file, not a leader...”

Alice sounds oddly unsure of herself.

“...But she’s an agent? When I heard they took down Toris, I figured they were really strong, but they must really be short on help if they’re recruiting people like *her*. I mean, getting arrested three times when you’re sent somewhere as a spy is a pretty remarkable bit of incompetence.”

“I can’t comment on that. I mean, I’ve got an agent in front of me who was sent to this planet as a spy, screwed up, got caught, and nearly ruined the mission.”

Since I’m a man who doesn’t dwell on the past, I have no idea what Alice is talking about.

“Anyway, figuring out her identity will have to wait until the investigation is over. I know she’s been arrested twice already, but I let the authorities know she might be a spy. She probably won’t be troubling us for a while.”

“I dunno... As a Combat Agent, my gut is telling me that we haven’t seen the last of her...”

4

It’s been two weeks since Adelie began her third stint in jail.

Hideout City’s residential area is filled with rows of prefabbed mass-housing units, and the commercial district is now handling various types of foodstuffs,

helping to relieve our supply shortages.

As for the giant lake not too far from Hideout City, we've slowly been building a road in that direction while doing our best to avoid upsetting the Bashin tribe.

Around the Grace Kingdom, there are countries other than the demon realms and Toris.

We'd been building up relations with those countries, with Alice taking the lead on the matter...

Basically, everything is going according to plan so far.

"So surrounded by a huge group of Heroes, the mutant Panda Man says, 'Attack me if you want. I'll accomplish my goal even if I have to force my way through every last one of you.' Those words were intimidating enough that none of the Heroes lifted a finger to stop him..."

"Wow! Panda Man's impressive!"

"He's so cool! I wanna meet Panda Man and cuddle him, too!"

We're all in Viper's room, aka my favorite hangout spot.

There are two chimeras listening intently to my story of Panda Man's accomplishments.

"A-and was Panda Man able to safely go to the zoo and hug the kids?"

"Yeah, the kids were ecstatic. They got to hug Panda Man and even squish his paw pads. I seem to recall the mutant tiger man watching them enviously from the shadows..."

"I wanna squeeze Mr. Panda Man's paws, too! I'd gnaw on them if I could!"

As the two chimeras are getting all excited, Viper, who has been hard at work, tilts her head and comments:

"Um... I think the Heroes didn't attack Mr. Panda Man because they were being filmed by those 'television cameras'...the ones filming the Washington Convention you mentioned earlier. I believe the Heroes would've gotten yelled at by all sorts of people if they attacked Mr. Panda Man while in front of the cameras."

Viper's observation riles up the two chimeras, who are totally starry-eyed over Panda Man.

"Viper, what a terrible thing to say! You've been thoroughly corrupted by Kisaragi..."

"That's right, Ms. Viper! There's no way Mr. Panda Man is that much of a schemer!"

"I—I see, my apologies! Yes, you're right. It was wrong of me to make judgments about Mr. Panda Man's character without having met him! I'm sorry!"



The chimeras nod with satisfaction at Viper's contrite apology.

"See, look at this picture, Viper. There's no way this supercool Panda Man would be that nefarious!"

"What are you talking about, Mr. Russell? Mr. Panda Man is adorable, not cool. Just look at him! He's got that cute little puffball tail that makes you want to nibble on it. When I meet him, I'm definitely going to nibble on his tail, or maybe his ears..."

Thinking back on it, both Panda Man and Koala Man always made sure there were TV crews around when they were facing off against the Heroes.

They always gave envelopes to the TV crews once the battles were over... I wonder what that was all about.

But never mind that...

"Hey, Russell, should you be slacking off in here? I know you're the Kisaragi Corporation's maid and mom figure, but your actual job is creating water, right?"

This chimera still looks like a girl when dressed as a maid, but he doesn't seem to mind being loved by everyone. It also looks like he's grown pretty fond of the outfit, despite his protests.

"Since there are cheap water crystals being sold in the city of Grace, I've got less work to do. That woman really did mess with what I'm doing. Us chimeras are created to be useful to people, so we actually kind of like working..."

Seriously? I wondered why he was so willing to work despite being a former member of the Demon Lord's Army's leadership. But if that sort of disposition is coded into a chimera's DNA, then it makes a bit more sense...

I can't help but glance at the other chimera scarfing down snacks next to Viper.

"...What is it, Boss? Is there something you wanna say to me?"

"You're the same kind of creature as Russell, right? Is there a difference in personality between male and female chimeras?"

...I defend myself against Rose, who sets aside her snacks and lunges at me. The sirens suddenly started going off in Hideout City.

“An attack by monsters or savages? But everyone seems to be in a bit of a panic, all things considered.”

There are several types of alarms, and depending on how urgent the situation is, the sirens will repeat more quickly.

“Ha-ha! It’s finally my time to shine, Boss! I mean, I’m not just eating and sleeping all the time for no reason! I’m preserving my strength for moments like this! It’s time to show everyone the power of a combat chimera!”

Rose, who was grappling with me, then leaps out the office window.

We’re technically on the second floor, but I guess that doesn’t matter to a combat chimera.

As he watches Rose leap out the window, Russell shakes his head with a fond sigh and stands up.

“She’s so reckless, it makes me wonder if we really are the same species. But it’d be good to show people our true power. I feel like no one’s been taking us very seriously lately. I need to show everyone that I used to be a member of the Demon Lord’s Army’s Elite Four...!”

Russell smiles at Viper as he speaks.

“...? Oh yes, please be careful, Russell. You’re wearing a short skirt, so don’t move around too much, okay?”

“I didn’t ask you to worry about that! That look I gave you meant that you, Viper, the former Demon Lord, should show off your power, too!”

5

In the woods a short distance from Hideout City.

As demons look on from a distance, Rose has her tail raised in an intimidating pose, while countless Bashin tribe members face off against her.

“Oh damn, that’s a huge group! Where are the Combat Agents?! Why aren’t they here?!”

Even thinking about numbers, there are way too many of them here.

In the worst case, we can resort to sweeping them aside with machine-gun fire, but given that the Bashins are practically naked, the result would be a gory mess.

Among the residents of Hideout City looking on from a distance are the demon children.

It wouldn't be good for their emotional development to witness a machine-gun massacre.

As though detecting my anxiety, Viper speaks up in response.

"The Combat Agents are all off working on the road to the giant lake. Ms. Alice is in the city conducting trade negotiations, while Ms. Snow went off to the city boasting about how she was going to buy up food and supplies at a cheap price..."

And of course, I bet Grimm's asleep. Dammit!

"...Tch! ...Tch!"

Facing off with Rose is a large Bashin tribesman as well as the Bashin girl we encountered a while back.

It seems the girl wants to communicate something and is appealing to Rose in her muted tone.

"I don't quite get it, but you're here to fight again, right? Fine. I'm Rose: Combat Agent and chimera of the Kisaragi Corporation! I accept your challenge!"

"—! ———!"

The young Bashin girl shakes her head intently from side to side, but Rose pays no heed, sucking in her breath—

"Drown in a sea of hellfire...! Sleep for all eternity! Crimson—"

Rose falls over and rolls on the ground, fire spilling from the corner of her lips after I smack her in the back of the head.

I guess having her fire breath interrupted midcast causes her to lose control

of the attack.

“Aaack! Wuh are you doingth, Bothh?! If I wasn’t a combat chimera, I’d have nasty burns inside my mouth!”

“Um, I’m pretty sure you wouldn’t be able to breathe fire at all if you weren’t a chimera, but hang on a sec. They don’t look like they’re here to fight.”

Yes, while the Bashin tribe are all carrying weapons, none of them look like they want to attack us.

I thought they might have been here to protest our construction near the giant lake, but that doesn’t seem to be it, either.

It is then that the Bashin tribesman begins to mumble...

“Ummm. ‘Is the white-armored woman who keeps interrupting this girl’s rite of passage one of your people? If so, we would like to know why she keeps getting in the way...’ is what he’s asking.”

White armor...? Oh, you’ve gotta be kidding me.

Since she’s not one of us, I let Viper know the Bashin tribe can deal with the interloper however they see fit.

“‘In that case, we’ll deal with her on our own. We’re sorry for troubling you with such a large group.’”

The Bashin tribe is a lot more civilized than I gave them credit for.

If anything, our chimeras who refuse to let down their guard are more savage than they are.

“I don’t quite get it, but I guess you solved everything by talking? I’m always competing for prey with that girl, so I wanted to finish her off here, but...”

“Aww, how boring. I was hoping I could toy with these savages...”

Yeah, based on what Rose and Russell are saying, *they’re* totally the savages.

And I think we are done, but...

“_____!”

...Little Bashin, who was quiet up until this point, begins to plead her case.

Having noticed, the Bashin tribesman murmur something to Viper.

“...Um, he says, ‘We have nothing else to say as a tribe. But...we wanted to ask the chimera girl a question. Why does she also continually interrupt this girl’s rite of passage?’ to Ms. Rose.”

At Viper’s interpretation, everyone turns to look at Rose.

It seems that Little Bashin can’t speak the spirit language yet, so Viper can’t interpret what she’s saying.

“What’s a rite of passage? The thing is, whenever I find a delicious-looking supopocchi to hunt, that girl shows up and gets in my way. So ask them why she does that!”

“—! ———!”

Little Bashin emphatically shakes her head, and the tribesman murmurs again.

“‘Members of our tribe are considered adults when they can hunt a supopocchi on their own. That’s what we call our rite of passage. We do controlled breeding of supopocchi in our forests by hatching their eggs, but the chimera girl comes into our forest territories and takes the ones that are ready for harvesting...’”

“You’re totally in the wrong here, Rose! You’re hunting animals they painstakingly bred!”

“B-but the forest belongs to everyone! You can’t just claim a piece of it for yourself! Besides, I don’t know what the difference is between wild and human-bred supopocchi! If they’re that important, put your names on them or something!”

As Rose lashes out, the little Bashin girl shakes her head again.

“—. ———...”

“‘Because of this world’s climate, supopocchi eggs can’t hatch naturally without human intervention. All the supopocchi in this forest were bred by humans.’”

“We’re going to apologize to them. I’ll order some gifts with my Evil Points to make up for it.”

“W-w-wait, Boss! How was I supposed to know about the life cycle of a supopocchi?!”

I make sure to grab Rose, since she’s trying to flee as the situation turns against her, and order a gift package of confections from Kisaragi—

““No, it’s enough if you recognize our breeding efforts. We did cause you problems when we were doing our drive hunt with a giant pack of monsters, so...””

I figured they were trying to interrupt our construction efforts, but they were just doing a drive hunt.

Still, it sounds like Rose has been taking their animals not just once, but multiple times...

“I know this isn’t much, but please accept this both as an apology and as a greeting from your new neighbor.”

““Oh-ho, thank you for being so polite! But we only have our hand axes to give you as a gift in return. Please, accept this...’, Mr. Six, I’ve heard that axes are the second most important thing to the Bashin tribe, next to their lives. What should we do...?”

Having been offered the ax in exchange for the sweets, I have Viper tell them that I can’t accept such an important item as a gift, but the Bashin tribesman is adamant that he can’t accept our gift without providing one in return.

After a moment’s thought, I have Kisaragi send me two tomahawks.

I don’t know what they prefer, so I order one each from two major weapons manufacturers, Flowning and Smith & Johnson.

“I’ll accept your ax. These are personal presents from me. Go ahead and choose the one you want and take it. Also, the girl seems pretty close in age to our chimera, so I hope they can be friends.”

““Such a beautifully crafted and functional weapon! Despite being made entirely of metal, it’s easy to grip and the weight balance is nearly perfect... Ohhh! And this one’s designed perfectly as a throwing weapon...!”

“...You can go ahead and keep them both.”

Since the Bashin tribesman is having trouble choosing between the two, I insist he take both.

The tribesman holds each ax in either hand and freezes, and after several long moments spent in thought, hands one to Little Bashin.

Given that he then bows his head and urges the little Bashin girl to thank me, maybe he's her dad?

Little Bashin stares, transfixed by the ax before she cradles it to her chest and looks up at me.

"Thank you...very much..."

She speaks softly, but in words I can understand.

"Since they've taken two axes, giving them the sweets as well would be too much, right? I'll go ahead and eat this."

"Graaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah—!"

"Dammit, we're trying to clean up your mess, you idiot! Hey! Stop fighting, you two!"

6

After Rose and Little Bashin spend some more time chasing after each another, it feels like we've gotten to know our neighbors a little better.

I'm giving a report in my room to Alice as she returned from spending the last few days negotiating with merchants gathered from the various neighboring countries, but...

"If they love axes so much, we could probably hire them as mercenaries by offering them tomahawks. Since we're short on combatants back on Earth, it might be an option if things get bad enough."

Alice makes this proposal while lounging around on her bed.

"They don't seem like bad people. Little Bashin comes out to play every once in a while, and she seems to be a positive influence on the chimeras."

I ask for the girl's name, but evidently the tribe considers itself a single entity,

and they have no concept of individual names.

Rose decided to call her Ms. Bashin, while the rest of us have started calling her Little Bashin.

Though she utters the occasional word we can understand when playing with Rose, it feels like it'll still be a while before we're able to communicate properly.

"So the problem is the crazy one in white armor."

"Yep, seems they released her at some point."

It sounds like Adelie has even started causing problems with the Bashin tribe while we aren't looking, and it feels like past time to settle things with her.

"Seems the police put her through rigorous interrogation, but she didn't break in the end. There's no doubt she's related to the ones that took over Toris, so let's collect some evidence to prove she's a spy and have her hanged."

"Again with the violent solutions. I mean, I know espionage is a capital offense in most countries, but that's going too far. I'm nice to pretty women, after all."

But even as I say that, I just can't feel a hint of attraction when I look at her. At first, I thought it was because she wasn't my type, but could it be that...

Just as I'm pondering Adelie's secrets, someone opens the door to my room.

A demon merchant who does business in Hideout City appears on the other side in a panic.

"Ms. Alice, come quick! Ms. Snow's been captured in the city of Grace..."

Alice and I get up to deal with what feels like our daily routine of damage control.

"So you've finally shown your true colors, corrupt Governor Snow! I had been investigating various crimes in this city, but it seems you're at the heart of it all!"

"Wh-wh-wh-wh-what basis do you have for that accusation?! To accuse someone you just met of crimes! How rude!"

Having been shown to the city's main square by the merchant, we find Adelie pointing an accusatory finger at Snow in front of a large crowd of onlookers.

I approach someone in the crowd...

“Hey, what’s going on here?”

“Mm? Oh, you’re one of the black suits in charge of law enforcement. That woman decided to call out Lady Snow, who’s been flaunting her authority as governor to get her way. People have been suspecting Lady Snow of rigging bids on public projects and accepting bribes...”

Given Snow’s personality, I can say there’s no doubt that those allegations are true.

“Hey, Alice, we’re totally at a disadvantage here. We should ditch Snow and retreat.”

“Yep, agreed.”

Alice and I try to go home after we grasp the situation, but Snow, who has been looking around for help, spots us before we can leave.

“Six, Alice, help me! This rude woman is calling me a criminal!”

“I’ve already got the evidence! Just surrender and come along peacefully!”

Help her? Why? We know better than anyone that she’s guilty.

Alice and I turn away from the pleading Snow and try to hide in the crowd.

“C-curse you, Six—I’ll remember this! Is the evidence those papers you’re carrying?! It’s true that they’re signed by me, but that’s easy enough to forge!”

“What?! They’re not forgeries. They’re definitely authentic...!”

Snow decides to abandon any pretense of playing innocent and goes on the offensive.

“For example, someone could have brought me a blank sheet of paper and told me, ‘I’m a fan, please give me your autograph!’ and then filled in the contract text on the rest of the sheet at a later date! Or maybe by using the ink of a camouflage octopus that fades away after a certain amount of time and getting a signature on a harmless contract before rewriting it later! There’s plenty of methods like that!”

“<Hey, Alice, she’s definitely used those tricks before, hasn’t she?>”

“<It feels like it’d be better to just leave her and go home, but...>”

As Alice and I exchange whispers in Japanese, Adelie, on the defensive from Snow’s counteraccusations, produces something from her fob.

It’s—

“If you’re going to make that claim, then we’ll use the karma-measuring crystal to...”

“Lady Snow made a run for it! After her!”

“So she’s been engaging in corruption! Apprehend her!”

The moment she sees the crystal ball in Adelie’s hand, Snow makes a run for it.

The corrupt governor runs not toward the distant Hideout City, but toward the royal palace.

Evidently she’s come to the conclusion that she can’t outrun the mass of people to get to Hideout City, so she decides to use her connections from her last job.

The fact that she makes that decision so quickly probably means she already planned out her options in case she was exposed.

“H-hold up, Snow, you corrupt governor who uses the taxes earned by the blood and sweat of the people to line her pocket! I, Adelie, the Umbral Savior, won’t let you escape! ...H-hey, don’t run away! At least say something snarky before you flee...!”

“...”

Snow wants to avoid wasting her breath on a remark, and she keeps running without a word.

Her ability to just roll with the situation is pretty admirable, honestly.

“Hey, Alice, I’m starting to think Snow’s an even better fit for Kisaragi than I am.”

“If she became a full employee, I bet she’d climb the ranks pretty quickly. I really don’t want to give her a teleporter... I’m pretty sure she’d start selling

things she's not supposed to sell just to make money..."

Alice sighs and produces a small radio.

"I guess we can hedge our bets..."

As Alice calls in to Hideout City, she and I chase after Snow as she makes a serious run for it—

7

When we reach the palace, Adelie faces off against the guard in front of the tightly locked castle gate.

"Hand over the corrupt governor! I'm going to punish her in the name of justice!"

"What are you talking about? Do you even know where you are?! And while Lady Snow is temporarily assigned to Kisaragi, she's still a knight of this realm. I can't just hand her over to some random person!"

I guess Snow has more of a following than I thought. The guards won't yield an inch to Adelie.

...I really don't want to deal with her again, but Snow's still technically serving as Hideout City's governor. If things keep going the way they are, we can't pretend we're not involved.

As Adelie holds out a weapon that looks like a police baton, I call out cheerfully to her from behind:

"Hey, Adelie. Seems you're going on and on about justice again."

"I-it's you, Agentsix! ...Look, I'm chasing after a great evildoer today. Since nothing good ever seems to happen when you're around, do you mind going home?"

Pretty sure it's your own fault that nothing good ever happens to you.

I reply to Adelie as her expression soured the moment she turned and saw me.

"I understand you're a serious person who loves justice. But even if Snow's a

villain and an evil, oppressive governor, it's not up to you to get involved, is it?"

At these words, Adelie produces something and shows it to me with a confident smirk.

"Agentsix, can you still say that after seeing this? Yes, I'm a member of the Hiiragi Agency of Order, the Defenders of Justice and Truth of this world! I'm Adelheid Krueger, the Gray Savior! Bow before me, surface dwellers!"

Adelie flashes a card that shimmers white-gold.

As Adelie displays the card with a triumphant expression, Alice, who Adelie underestimated, reaches up and swipes it.

"?!?!?! W-wait, what are you doing?! Give it back! That's really important to me. You're a good girl, right? Give it back, please!"

Ignoring Adelie's pleas, Alice holds the card up to the sun.

"Wow, it's made completely out of platinum. Nice find."

"Platinum's expensive, right? So if we sell that, we can pay for drinks tonight!"

"Please give it back. Without that, I'm no different from anyone else! ...Wait, I'm a member of the Hiiragi Agency of Order, and that doesn't mean anything to you? Shouldn't you be more afraid of me?!"

Adelie's eyes well with tears as she tries to take back the card.

"Um, I've never heard of them."

"Whaaaaat?!"

Adelie let out an odd noise, completely at odds with my response and she freezes in place.

"...Wh-why? Wasn't it part of the legend? When humanity was threatened by the Demon Lord and on the edge of extinction, the Chosen One, granted power by the gods, would save this kingdom. And the Chosen One would be guided by the heaven-sent agents of Hiiragi and bring peace to the world..."

"Um, well, I'm a foreigner, so I don't know anything about that. Does the legend passed down in this kingdom really mention Hiiragi or an agency of order?"

The legend is probably the Grace Kingdom's story about the Demon Lord and the Chosen One.

I kinda recall hearing something about that when Alice and I first came to this kingdom.

Hearing my remark, Adelie looks back to the guards behind her.

"W-well... Of course they're mentioned, right? You're from this country. I'm sure you learned of the legend as a child, right? That the servants of the Hiiragi would bring about world peace... Right?" she asks with a hopeful expression to the still-wary guards.

"No, I mean I learned about the Chosen One coming and defeating the Demon Lord, but there was nothing after the defeat of the Demon Lord. Just your usual happy ending."

"Hiiragi? Hiiragi... Hiiragi..."

"Nope, never heard anything about you guys..."

"This is what's wrong with you backward surface dwellers! At least make sure you pass down your legends correctly! ...No, I misspoke. Sorry! Dammit, calm down, Adelie. It's too early to give up even if they didn't pass down the legend correctly...!" As she says this, Adelie begins to ruffle her own hair before she widens her eyes in realization.

"Oh! The oracle! There should be a famous oracle in this kingdom whose family has been doing that for generations! Have that person prophesize the future of this kingdom right now. Then you'll discover the truth!"

Hearing that, the guards tilt their heads and exchange glances.

"Oracle? Oh, the person whose prophecies all ended up missing the mark? The one who said the Chosen One would defeat the Demon Lord, despite the outcome being completely different...?"

"Oh yeah, that person... If I recall, Lady Snow chased them out of the country because the prophecy was wrong. I think she called them useless. Pretty sure they're in another country by now."

"Whaaaaat?!"

Oh, right, I seem to recall Snow mentioning that.

“Ch-chased them out?! ...Calm down, Adelie, it’s not time to get angry yet! It’s too early to determine that this kingdom is evil because of the actions of one foolish woman...!”

Adelie mutters to herself and places her hand over her chest to calm herself.

It is then that one of the guards claps his hands together as though remembering something.

“Ohhh, I knew I’d heard the name Hiiragi somewhere!”

“Yes, yes. So now you remember?” says Adelie with hope in her eyes.

“Remember the tribe of barbarians in the woods that used the weird light to attack you? This lady’s part of that tribe.”

“““Ohhh!”””

“How dare you call me a barbarian! Those surface dwellers are our servants. When people acquire power beyond their control, they’re the watchmen that stop them! Calling them savages is an act of evil!”

Adelie grows visibly agitated at the circular discussion, glaring at the gate that stands in her way.

She then crosses both arms in front of herself and lets out a heavy sigh.

With that, a blue static electricity starts to spark around Adelie’s body, and her feet begin to glow!

“<Alice, there’s something wrong with her! I’ve seen that glow before! That’s what happens before the Heroes use one of their finishers!>”

“<I’ve sent for reinforcements from Hideout City, but I guess they won’t get here in time. All right, Six, time for you to man up! Treat her as a Hero-class threat!>”

My voice breaks into a squeak when I call out in panicked Japanese. Alice responds with a tense declaration:

“<The moment she attacks the castle, use that opportunity!>”

“Justice Attack...! Umbral...”

Just as Alice and Adelie are speaking—

—the castle gate opens slowly, cutting through the tension.

“I decided to have Snow taken into custody since she was assembling the castle’s soldiers despite being assigned to Kisaragi, and look what I find... Just what is going on here?”

Princess Tillis, the effective ruler of this kingdom, appears with a group of soldiers carrying a hog-tied Snow.

Having fled into the palace, Snow was planning to counterattack by using her authority as a knight.

Adelie, who has canceled her attack, looks back and forth between Snow and Tillis.

“You’re...this kingdom’s ruler, Princess Tillis, yes? I am Adelie, the Umbral Savior, member of the Hiiragi Agency of Order. I would like you to turn over that hog-tied bundle who had been engaged in acts of corruption and oppression in this kingdom.”

“Your Highness! You must not listen to this woman! She’s an agent working against this kingdom! She’s trying to drive a wedge between us! You should punish her for espionage!”

At Snow’s desperate attempt to save herself, for some reason Adelie’s expression tightens.

“Please believe me, Your Highness! My hunches are often correct! I didn’t grow up and survive in the harsh slums for nothing! I was the one who first realized that the mouth-breathing moron, Six, was a spy back in the day! I bet this woman is here to use all sorts of flowery words before she’ll repay the kingdom’s kindness with treachery! Yes, just like that man!”

“<Hey, Alice, shouldn’t we shut her up?>”

“<Eh, Tillis already knows you were a spy. We can just give that idiot a lecture later. Seems like the reinforcements I called in are finally here.>”

Alice, who was watching the events unfold, points her thumb behind her.

“Tillis was already well aware that this weird woman was an agent. While her

actions up to this point were misdemeanors, she's now been caught in the act of attacking the royal palace. We have a fair sense of who you serve, but now's about the time that you fess up to everything, don't you think?"

When I look over at the direction Alice is pointing, there is a group of Kisaragi Combat Agents, including Heine and Russell, hurrying over. They apparently rushed over from Hideout City.

"...I see. The reason you didn't crack down on the corrupt governor was because you wanted to force me to act. I suppose I can only say, 'Bravo; well done.'"

While I never intended to set any traps of that sort, reading the mood, I nod. In response, Adelie looks vexed as she points her index finger at me.

"But I can't just surrender in the face of evil! If I, the heroic woman the kids look up to, am doomed to a pervy treatment after getting captured by evildoers, it's only right that I go out in a blaze of glory instead...! Once I've taken as many of you as I can down with me, I'll self-destruct and blow this hive of villainy to smithereens!"

Holy crap, she's no Hero!

The villainous hog-tied bundle tries to squirm away after the guards put her down. Meanwhile, the Combat Agents who arrived surround Adelie.

As if in response, Adelie sucks in a deep breath...

"Justice Attack..."

"It seems there's a misunderstanding here. I'm already aware from reports that you are an intelligence agent serving the organization that conquered Toris. But there is a reason I ordered you released despite that fact."

Caught off guard by Tillis's words, Adelie pauses.

"...H-how long have you known I was an intelligence agent?"

Adelie's expression is one of shock.

"From the very start. When you were captured by Sir Six and interrogated, you were far too suspicious, so I had one of my own operatives tail you."

“You had seen through me from the start?! ...Tch. I only lost because I underestimated the surface dwellers as being backward and primitive...!”

“You know, given how much she goes on about justice, she says a lot of prejudiced stuff, doesn’t she? Like she’s totally assuming the people of this kingdom are beneath her by calling them backward surface dwellers.”

“Yeah, she’s just like you and Lady Lilith, who kept going on about how you were going to be invincible against the primitive locals.”

As Adelie frowns in displeasure, Tillis offers her a smile.

“We never had any intention of fighting a war with Toris. Unfortunately, we wound up in a war over a small matter concerning the trade of water crystals.”

With that, Adelie’s eyes widen in surprise before she speaks to Tillis in a serious tone.

“...Meaning you wanted to talk to the ones who had taken Toris... Us...”

“That princess is a piece of work. She just called putting your dick on the head of a country’s ruler’s a small matter.”

“You know, even though you’re an android, you still have the appearance of a young girl. You shouldn’t really say words like *dick* so casually.”

“Dammit, stop it with the dick remarks! We’re trying to have a civilized conversation here! ...Meaning, you don’t have any intention of fighting us despite the fact that we’d absorbed Toris.”

Adelie—who has said *dick* more than anyone here—narrows her eyes as though trying to determine Tillis’s intent and waits for her answer...

“Attacking the castle?! You’ve gone way too far this time, Justice Woman! Russell, I’m leaving the support to you!”

“All right, but that means I’m leaving the front lines in your care! Time to punish the lady criminal!”

The former Demon Lord’s Army’s leadership who had arrived at the castle gate raises their voices as they prepare for battle.

“So this is the weird woman that we’ve been hearing all those rumors about!”

“Yeah, you can definitely tell with a glance that she’s weird! I heard she’s an oddball that likes sleeping in jail cells!”

“Not only was she causing trouble for the citizens, now she’s attacking the castle! What a piece of work!”

Next came the shouts of derision from the Combat Agents who arrived a few moments later and Adelie’s eyes quickly filled with tears.

Seeing my colleagues with weapons in hand, Tillis steps in front of Adelie as though to protect her.

“Please, all of you, be still. I’m currently speaking with Ms. Adelie. Please lay down your weapons.”

With that, she stands between Adelie and my coworkers.

“...Wh-what are you doing? Why are you doing this?” Adelie asks with confusion, even as she seems to relax a little bit. Tillis smiles in response.

“What I seek is for my kingdom’s people to live in peace. Conflict produces nothing. Don’t you think it’s a foolish thing?”

“Y-you...”

While Tillis is as much of a schemer as Alice, she really does care about her people.

Finally in the presence of a proper, merciful ruler, Adelie drops her guard and closes her eyes.

“...It seems I was mistaken. The demons, who I had believed were evil, showed me souls that were purer than any I’d seen before. And you, the one known as the scheming princess, are, in fact, the noblest of them all. Heh... I almost feel like the villain here...”

“...Tch. Seems like everything worked itself out. I wanted to get her back for her calling us evil demons over and over, but...”

“Well, I mean, it’s true that we’re former members of the Demon Lord’s Army’s Elite Four. It seems like she’s sorry, so we should just let it go this time.”

At Heine and Russell’s remarks, Adelie looks at the ground apologetically.

“I’m sorry things got so out of hand, but...if you can forgive my offenses, I, Adelie, agent of Toris, or rather the Hiiragi Agency of Order, would like to speak to you as a diplomat representing my agency. What say you?”

At Adelie’s proposal, Tillis smiles and nods.

“How impressive, Your Highness, to forgive this spy woman! Hey, Adelie or whatever, you better apologize for calling me a corrupt governor! Also, you soldiers that tied me up, get over here! I’ve got a bone to pick with you all!”

Noticing that the tables had turned, the hog-tied bundle at Tillis’s feet suddenly adopts a pompous attitude.

Those words stir something in Adelie’s mind and she bends down to address the bundle.

“Oh, we haven’t punished *you* yet. But it turns out that the policies conducted by this kingdom all had deeper meaning. I’m sure there’s a deeper purpose to your actions up to this point. I was ready to execute you if you were truly an evil person, but...”

Snow lets out a surprised gasp and freezes as Adelie chuckles dryly.

“...Your actions *did* have a deeper meaning, right?”

“Y-yes, of course. I am Snow. I’m one who once served as knight commander of the Royal Guard in this kingdom. There’s no way a petty villain could rise to that rank, is there?”

Snow speaks with a sharp, professional expression and matches Adelie’s gaze as she speaks.

Adelie then takes out the crystal ball from her fob and presses it to Snow’s cheek.

““ ””

As the crystal ball turns a refreshingly honest shade of black, Snow and Adelie exchange troubled glances.

Briefly freezing in place, Adelie then turns to those of us watching the scene unfold.

“Yup, black! It’s black! You’re all almost refreshingly dark hearted! You’re all corrupt! I was right!”

Well, duh. We’re employees of an evil organization and former leaders of the Demon Lord’s Army.

“Hold on a moment. Yes, the crystal ball turned black! But they’re not bad people at heart!”

Tillis desperately tries to defend us, but with all the Kisaragi agents causing the crystal ball to give off an eerie black glow, even the soldiers look a bit uneasy about defending us.

“If they weren’t bad people at heart the crystal ball wouldn’t turn black! It’s looking at the color of their *souls*! ...For all of you to make it react this way, ah, you must all belong to an evil organization! In that case...!”

“‘In that case,’ what?! War?! If you’re going to declare war just because the other side has evil people, then that makes you far more evil!”

Tillis must think the situation is getting dicey and decides to go on the offensive.

“You declared that the orc farms are evil! Yes, when viewed from ignorance, it may seem exploitative. But in this harsh world, feral orcs can’t survive on their own! Which is why they come willingly to us for help. And they tell us that they want to live in peace and work as farmers...”

“I... I...”

Adelie mumbles and seems to back away. Seeing an opportunity, Tillis presses the attack.

“You what?! Orcs can happily live out their natural lives! We get their labor and their meat in exchange for protecting them! Why do you get in our way if everyone is happy with the arrangement?!”

“I-I’m sorry...”

As Adelie is cornered by Tillis’s argument, Tillis declares proudly, “I’m Cristoseles Tillis Grace, the eldest princess of the Grace Kingdom! If you have complaints about my kingdom’s policies, then feel free to air them to me!”

“O-oh, ohhh...”

Adelie is on the verge of tears; Tillis has overwhelmed her with her argument.

“...But I’ll stop bullying you now. If you cannot trust the others, then surely you can at least try trusting me? What did you see in the faces of the country’s people? Did they appear to be a people oppressed by an evil government?”

“I... N-no...”

Even Adelie has to admit that this kingdom’s government isn’t a bad one.

If I’m being honest, I was totally repulsed by the orc farms, and I still can’t get used to the idea of eating sentient beings. But the vast majority of this kingdom lives happy lives filled with laughter despite the harshness of the world.

“If you cannot trust me, then place your crystal ball on my hand. But if you can find it in your heart to trust me...then why don’t we start by learning more about each other?”

Tillis offers her hand to shake, smiling gently to Adelie.

At which point, Adelie looks apologetically at Tillis and places the crystal ball in her hand.

[Status Report]

The development plan around Hideout City has been progressing steadily, and the construction for the infrastructure around the giant lake is about 70 percent complete.

We succeeded in making contact with the local savage Bashin tribe and while we’ve only succeeded at forging a verbal agreement, we’ve negotiated a mutual nonintervention pact.

Little Bashin sometimes comes to play at Hideout City.

While she’s not much of a talker, her reactions are really entertaining when we give her candy.

Based on those things, our invasion plans as the Kisaragi Corporation are proceeding well.

However, it appears that the princess of the Grace Kingdom, our ally, has been declared an evil being by a weird woman claiming to represent the Hiiragi Agency of Order.

As the branch manager of the Kisaragi Corporation Grace Kingdom branch, we'll be raising our alert level against the Hiiragi Agency of Order, as they claim to be servants of justice.

P.S.—Among the strange items we've found on this planet, there's an item I'd really like the Supreme Leaders to try touching.

Currently, Tillis has caused the item to shine a sinister black, darker and more chilling than I have ever seen. But I'm sure Lady Lilith could top that with little to no effort.

Reporting Operative:

Combat Agent Six, Who Isn't The Absolute Worst Person In the World, According to the Crystal





[Vs. the Tiger King!](#)



1

The day after the chaos involving Adelie.

Having been invited to the palace to discuss yesterday's events, Alice and I are consulting with Tillis on how to proceed.

"Based on Ms. Adelie's reaction yesterday, there's a possibility she'll exaggerate our threat to her leaders, and they'll be moving to attack us. So I would like to request that Kisaragi serve as reinforcements under that eventuality."

The crystal ball that Adelie gave to Tillis adopted a particularly impressive shade of black.

I mean, it was even darker than when the former Demon Lord's Army leadership or employees of an evil organization touched it.

Whatever else she might be, Tillis is a princess. The sight of her freezing in place as the crystal turned a darker shade of black than for anyone else invited some pity.

"...Well, a Combat Agent's only value is in their fighting ability, so we don't mind the fighting part..."

"...What is it? If you have something you wish to say, please don't hold back."

As I sip the tea poured by the maid, I ask Tillis, “Tillis, were you actually the Demon Lord all along?”

“That’s going too far, even for you, Sir Six! Please don’t take what she said seriously!”

I don’t know what got into Adelie, but when she saw the crystal turn coal-black, she blurted out an odd remark, “So the true Demon Lord was here... So the saga of the Chosen One defeating the Demon Lord hasn’t started yet...!”

After proclaiming Tillis to be the true Demon Lord, she escaped our cordon and fled the Grace Kingdom, but...

“I’m already getting comments from the people in the castle. So far I’ve heard, ‘Your Highness, your method of governance isn’t wrong! Even if you are the Demon Lord, Your Highness, we’ll follow you to the bitter end!’ as their attempts at encouragement, so please don’t add to that...!”

With that, Tillis looks rather dejected, an unusual sight for her. It seems that being called the scheming princess behind her back is actually bothering her.

Alice speaks even as she tries to show some consideration for the deflated Tillis.

“Her objective isn’t clear, but she does seem to value the legends surrounding the Demon Lord. If anything, she made it sound like it’d be a problem if the legends didn’t come true.”

“Frankly, it’s all quite bothersome! The whole matter of the Demon Lord has already been settled!”

True. Even for us, given that we’ve already recruited Vi and accepted the demons into our settlement, we can’t have Adelie messing up our arrangement.

Which meant we were fine with being hired as reinforcements, but that still leaves us with a problem.

“...She was really strong...”

“Ah...”

Tillis lets out a sigh at my words.

In truth, yesterday we had a bunch of combat-ready people assembled—myself included.

And yet Adelie was able to meet our might head-on and then make her escape.

“It’s true that the fighting ability on this culturally and technologically backward planet is quite a threat. The Elite Four aside, she was even at the level of Earth’s Heroes.”

“Yeah, that’s just it... Heine and Russell’s magic attacks weren’t very effective. And when she grappled with us Combat Agents, not only did she match our strength, but she was actually pushing us back. All that despite the fact that this planet’s residents are supposed to be weak...”

“Ahem, I find both your observations a bit rude.”

Tillis, a denizen of this planet, protests with a look of displeasure, but there’s definitely something wrong when Adelie can match a technologically enhanced Combat Agent wearing power armor with only her physical abilities.

While Viper also has the power to knock over the Sand King with a mere kick, that is a fighting style that utilizes time manipulation and is only usable by the Demon Lord.

She accelerates her own body’s speed when attacking while slowing the time of the impact location on contact.

In doing this, the objects become due to the stopped time, crash together at high speeds, and impart a substantial amount of kinetic energy.

This means that Viper’s fighting style requires magic to use, but it doesn’t look like Adelie needs any magic to fight. To make matters worse, her combat techniques are on par with those from Earth.

“I don’t mind sending you our Combat Agents, but this opponent’s a different matter from the usual riffraff. We’ll need you to pay us way more this time around. I mean, the cause of this whole incident is because a corrupt governor from your kingdom went and assumed power in our Hideout City and caused all sorts of problems, then it was sealed by your scheming nature, Princess.”

“No, since Snow’s currently been assigned to you, it’s Kisaragi’s responsibility to keep an eye on her. As for the scheming, putting aside the fact that royals need to be schemers to a certain extent, all of Kisaragi’s people seem a bit too corrupt as well, no? It seems she considered Kisaragi with quite a bit of hostility, so I doubt she’ll just stop at making an enemy of us. So our payment would be...”

Just as Alice and Tillis start trying to push the blame on each another as part of negotiations...

I hear someone dashing down the hallway, and shortly after, there is a loud knock on the door.

“Your Highness! We have a problem! Someone has been distributing these throughout the city!”

The subject of the conversation, Snow, has burst through the door without waiting for a response. Tillis, elegantly taking a sip from her teacup, furrows her brow.

“What is it, Snow? Why are you in such a panic? ...And what are you holding?”

Snow holds out a piece of paper as she bends over and tries to catch her breath.

“Oh, well if it isn’t the corrupt governor who neither the Grace Kingdom nor Kisaragi wants to be responsible for.”

“S-Six, how dare you say that! Saying no one wants to be responsible for me is an exaggeration. Sure, I may have gone a little far at times, but that’s what all nobles do in this kingdom. If anything, considering that I’m producing results, I’m probably better than they are... Isn’t that right, Your Highness? And Alice, I’ve been doing pretty well at Kisaragi, haven’t I?”

Snow fails to show any remorse for her actions, but I’m more interested in the sheet of paper she was holding.

Since I can’t read the language of this Kingdom, I have Alice translate for me.

“It seems to be a bounty for ‘Demon Lord Tillis’ issued by the Hiiragi Agency of Order. The reward is fifty thousand gold pieces.”

Tillis—who was taking a sip of her tea—does an impressive spit take, prompting Snow to wipe her face with the paper as though nothing out of the ordinary has happened.

“I believe this is the spy woman up to her tricks again! No doubt she’s aiming to incite a rebellion by your subordinates by placing a bounty on Your Highness! But I, Snow, though fond of money, really am truly loyal to you, Your Highness! With it being so difficult to know who to trust, now is the time to make me knight commander once again! Please believe me, Your Highness. I love not only money and magic swords but power and authority as well! If anything, during times like this, you can trust a woman like me more than those who ply you with flowery words!”

Snow lets loose a litany of reasons that sound both convincing and unconvincing at the same time, but there’s something almost refreshing about her honesty.

Tillis’s cheek twitches as she stares at the paper before her expression softens into a small smile at Snow’s insistent pleading.

“I trust that no one in this palace, Snow included, will stay loyal to me... However, it’s also true that there are nobles who disagree with my policies. There’s no need to be paranoid about them, but simply leaving them to their devices would also be a problem...”

“Curse them! This is why nobles who care only about themselves are lower than dirt! What would they have a problem with, given Your Highness’s perfect public policies?!”

“It seems the upper class has a problem with your consistent screwups.”

While Alice’s quip causes Snow to avert her gaze, I study the wanted poster...

“<Hey, Alice. How much is fifty thousand gold pieces in Earth money?>”

“<The gold pieces circulating around here are about thirty grams apiece. So it’s roughly about ten billion yen.>”

Alice’s estimate stuns me into silence, prompting Tillis to hide behind Snow’s back.

“It rather unnerves me when you go quiet after a conversation in your native tongue...”

Just as Tillis voices her concern...

...the bells indicating danger ring out across the city of Grace.

2

Doing her best to mask the tremors in her voice, Snow addresses Grace Kingdom’s army.

“You may have already heard, but the enemy we face is a giant monster with little in the way of brains! The main weapon of we humans is our intelligence! There’s no need to face it head on! If we attack it with long-range weapons, we should be able to subdue it without suffering a single casualty!”

Snow—who has accrued an impressive number of screwups over the past few months, then further sullied her reputation with blatant corruption—puts on a brave face, as if blind to the mountain of chips stacked against her.

While I am skeptical about letting this crooked knight take command of the monster-extermination mission, it seems that she actually has a decent reputation as a military commander.

According to Tillis, Snow has a finger on the pulse of the everyday soldier’s motivation, perhaps due to her own humble beginnings.

She also expanded her network of connections to nobles and knights as she clawed her way up the chain of command, and she is well versed in how to deal with prideful individuals like nobles, so if you willfully ignore her rotten core, she is, in fact, a pretty decent commander.

“Hey, Alice, her voice is kinda shaky. Are you sure she can handle this? Do you think she’s scared because she hasn’t seen real combat in a while?”

“Meh, let’s pretend she’s just excited. If she can produce results in this mission, she can go back to being the captain of the Royal Guard. This could be the redemption she’s been waiting for.”

During our consultation with Tillis, emergency bells chimed, signaling the

approach of a giant monster nearing the kingdom's border.

We hadn't expected Adelie to make a move so quickly. But Snow, who was present when the alarm rang out, was tasked with defeating or capturing the beast.

And if, by chance, she is to fail her assignment...

"Formally joining Kisaragi as an employee? Kisaragi's not a dumping ground for screwups."

"Either way, if she can't pull her weight this time, she'll be fired. She's got a lot of flaws, but she's still half-decent in a fight, so we can probably find a use for her. Besides, corruption is a clear-cut act of villainy. If she worked for us, something like that wouldn't be a problem."

Well...Snow may have a garbage personality, but she's still hot as hell and knows her way around the battlefield.

She's morally bankrupt, but we do belong to an evil organization, so...

...I guess we can look the other way when it comes to corruption.

"...No, I almost went along with it, but Snow's underhandedness even puts Lady Lilith to shame. I've been working for an evil organization for a long time, and I still find Snow's actions excessive."

She's more than "a little" corrupt.

It wasn't until after she was caught that we got the full scope of just how bad things were under her watch.

"Yep, while corruption is run-of-the-mill in a backward society, she simply has no sense of moderation. Usually, the more money involved, the more the corrupt actor starts pumping the brakes because they're afraid of just how deep a hole they've potentially dug themselves into, but Snow's greed knows no limits. The amount of assets we seized was enough to buy a private estate in the Grace Kingdom."

What happened to the proud knight I once knew?

After Alice confiscated her ill-gotten gains, Snow's disgraceful crying and pleading made it impossible to reconcile that person with the woman I'd met

when I first got here.

“What really gets me is that she was able to keep things running despite the fact that she was accepting bribes and skimming off the top. The merchants, the city’s residents, even the laborers considered her a capable governor. How the hell was she able to get such a great price for the construction contracts despite the fact that she still got good work and wasn’t cutting corners on material fees...?”

...When it comes to making money, she can be pretty damn terrifying.

Since Kisaragi technically benefitted from all her gains, maybe it would’ve been a good idea to let her run the show a little longer...

Still, using company funds without permission and then embezzling it is a crime, even if it benefits the company.

At Kisaragi, internal embezzling and corruption as forms of villainy are actually strongly discouraged.

“All right, we’re nearing the Grace Kingdom’s border! All of you, keep your wits about you and...!”

Astride her unicorn at the head of the army, Snow shouts encouragement at the soldiers behind her.

Since she’s about to go from a debt-ridden knight to a criminal knight if things keep going the way they are, it is easy to see why she’s so motivated.

I am walking a short distance away from the army as the soldiers drag siege weapons like catapults and ballistae along the ground.

The reinforcements from Kisaragi consist of me, Alice, and the ex-Elite Four members.

Grimm and Rose aren’t here, but that’s because when we woke up this morning, we found Grimm’s corpse sprawled out on the ground.

Since there was a voodoo doll and five-inch nails discovered near her body, we assumed she’d accidentally offed herself again.

I’m not sure who taught her about Japanese curses, but we can just ask her about that when we revive her for the umpteenth time.

Rose had her hands full carrying Grimm's body to the temple for resurrection, and we left the other Combat Agents back at Hideout City.

There's also a good chance that this giant monster is a decoy. We'd heard from our scouting parties that a giant monster was protecting Toris, so it's safe to assume that the enemy has a means of controlling giant monsters.

Alice has already declared that this giant monster is a living weapon belonging to Hiiragi.

As I watch the army trudge along in front of me, I call over to the demon contingent:

"You know, that reminds me. Isn't it usually the job of the Demon Lord's Army to control monsters and send them off to battle? Come to think of it, I don't believe I've ever seen you guys act like the genuine leaders."

""?!""

The former members of the Elite Four snap to attention after hearing that.

"Wh-what did you just say about us?!"

"I can't let that comment slide. I'm pretty sure I had the airs of an elite demon. Back when I fought you, Six, I used a giant robot that I found in the ruins and almost killed you, remember?"

Looks like I struck a nerve.

"I mean, the only thing Heine ever did was get dragged into pervy situations at the drop of a hat. And Russell, you just ended up being a weak throwaway character. I think Gadal-whatever of the Earth was the most 'elite' of the Elite Four."

At my honest appraisal, Heine and Russell stop dead in their tracks.

"...I've been thinking this for a while, but you really don't give us enough credit."

"Yeah, it seems like we've been too friendly recently, and you've forgotten who we are. Six, you realize that there's two of us here, don't you?"

The fan-service demon and the chimera maid stare daggers at me.

“Vi, Vi, they’re trying to pick a fight with me even though I’m their boss. Could you put them in their place, please? All I said was that it should be the demons going around controlling giant monsters.”

“Uh-Umm... Listen, you two. Mr. Six is technically your boss, so you shouldn’t get so up in arms over small matters.”

“N-no fair, Six! Don’t hide behind Lady Viper!”

“Y-yeah! Picking a fight and then tattling? What are you, five?! Fight like a man!”

...I stand in front of Russell and hike up his skirt.

“Wai—!! Wh-what are you doing in public...?”

When Russell moves in a panic to hold down the hem of his skirt, I take the opportunity to circle around behind him.

I then put him in a choke hold...

“Hey, Six! Russell’s foaming at the mouth! Okay, okay, we’ll accept you’re stronger than us, so let him go! Let go!”

“M-Mr. Six, please stop! It looks really bad when you put someone who looks like a little girl into a choke hold...!”

I wipe my brow with satisfaction after I show Russell who’s boss.

“Y-you’re still surprisingly ruthless to a childlike Russell... Especially given how cutely he’s dressed...”

“I think you should worry more about the fact that Russell seems completely at home dressing that way. He actually gave the appropriate response to having his skirt hiked up.”

Viper, unable to abandon her former subject, picks Russell up and puts him on her back.

Just then, a buzz travels through the part of the army Snow is leading. And when I look over to see what’s happening...

“There’s the giant monster!”

...the scouts shout out at the top of their lungs.

Snow's voice rings out over the troops.

"All units, take your positions! Show them the determination of the Grace Kingdom's army!"

Even though Snow's voice is thick with enthusiasm, the soldiers are moving sluggishly.

They aren't fighting an invader that is threatening them but a giant monster.

There is no guarantee that the monster will harm the Grace Kingdom if left alone.

At the lack of motivation among the soldiers, Snow calls out again:

"I know how you feel! I'd probably be unmotivated too if I were you! I understand that you'd be hesitant to fight, especially given that the war with the demons has finally come to an end! But remember! The war is over!"

The soldiers tilted their heads curiously at Snow's desperate plea.

"At this rate, the army will stand down and our budget will plummet. If that happens, just how many of you here will end up jobless...?"

The soldiers all go pale at her statement, and Snow raises an arm.

"But I promise you, brothers! If we defeat this giant monster, I'll let the kingdom's leadership know just how much you're all needed! And even if we cannot defeat it, I promise that I'll get those of you who fought valiantly off the list of downsizing candidates!"



Light returns to the soldiers' eyes.

“Given how long you’ve been in the army, can you find other jobs? Of course! I’m sure it’s possible for those of you with a varied skill set... But think of all that you’ll lose if you’re no longer a soldier! As a soldier, I’m sure that people respectfully yield the road to you on the street, while bar owners give you drinks on the house for your service! It’s a law that soldiers are treated well during wartime, and since the war has only recently ended, I’m sure you still receive special treatment!”

I’ve gotta hand it to Snow. She definitely has leadership potential.

While what she’s saying is completely abhorrent, the previously demotivated soldiers hold up their fists and cheer.

“Show the people why we’re needed! Let’s kill the giant monster and get all sorts of praise! There’ll be a reward for those that inflict serious wounds! There will be money and glory waiting for us if we go home with this monster’s head in hand!”

The fact that she puts money first and glory second is so very much in character for Snow, but looking at the faces of the soldiers, it’s clear her words have had an effect.

“Chaaaaaaarge!”

As Snow forges ahead on her unicorn, the soldiers behind her loose a fearsome war cry!

3

“Retreat! Retreeeat!”

The sorry excuse for a knight commander is back in less than five minutes.

As events unfold like a joke with a quick punch line, I murmur in exasperation to Alice.

“...Hey, Alice, can you believe it? That pathetic woman is technically a Combat Agent recruit.”

“If you find yourself outmatched, it’s important to know when to retreat... Though as a Combat Agent, well, yes, it is beyond pathetic...”

Having been swept aside by the giant monster, the royal army’s soldiers flee in a disorganized mass.

Snow somehow manages to get them back under her control as she gallops toward us.

“Hey, Six, what are you doing?! You have to help us fight the monster!”

As Snow shouts at us, I see that she is covered in mud.

...I then direct my attention to the giant monster going on a rampage off in the distance.

“You call that a monster...but that’s clearly a house cat.”

Yes, a cat.

While it is far, far larger than normal, it is definitely a white house cat.

Alice claps her hands together in recognition as she marvels at the giant cat.

“Ah-ha. So that’s the tiger monster that the scouting party reports mentioned was defending Toris.”

“That’s not a tiger, that’s definitely a cat. The way it’s pawing at the soldiers makes it seem like it’s trying to play with them.”

It looks like its natural instincts are set off by the sight of the fleeing soldiers, creating the bizarre scene unfolding before us.

Stepping on the back of a soldier with its front paw, the cat cries out triumphantly, “Meooooow!”

“See! It said meow! That’s definitely a cat!”

Snow then verbally lashed out at me.

“I don’t care if it’s a cat or a tiger, we’re going to go kill it! For some reason, like the Sand King, projectile weapons don’t work on it!”

“Aw, really...?”

The Sand King that we defeated a while ago seemed to be protected by the

mysterious powers unique to this world, and as a result, gunfire and other projectiles didn't work on it.

Taking a closer look, the various siege weapons the soldiers are using are able to hit it, but none of them seem to be doing anything meaningful.

Meaning that the anti-rifle I am carrying won't do anything, either...

"Melee combat against something that big? Are you freaking kidding me? Besides, I can't imagine a scenario where I win against it..."

"Where's your usual bluster? Especially considering you were calling us throwaway opponents and cannon fodder."

Heine looks at me like I have a second head and smacks Russell's cheek to wake him up.

Viper gently lowers Russell to the ground, as if she intends to join the fight herself.

"I used to have a pet cat, so I can't fight it... I can't bring myself to harm it!"

"This isn't the time for that! I'll admit, it's adorable, but we can't just leave a dangerous monster to its own devices!"

Even though Snow sounds infuriated, she herself is admitting it's adorable.

Back when we ran into the giant sparrow monster, the Sky King, Lilith refused to fight it, but I now understand why she couldn't lift a finger against an animal she'd once owned as a pet.

Suddenly, Heine, who appears to have given up on waking Russell, speaks up.

"Cuteness is no reason to lose your edge. Observe! I'm going to go kill it with Lady Viper and show you the power of the Demon Lord's Army!"

"Huh?"

In stark contrast to Heine's spirited declaration, Viper lets out a yelp of surprise.

"...Wh-what's wrong, Lady Viper?"

"N-nothing! Y-yes, if we show our strength, we can prove that demons are useful. So for the sake of my people and for Kisaragi, who has done so much for

me, I'll set aside my mercy and...!"

Today Viper isn't dressed in her usual Demon Lord outfit and is instead wearing the power armor designed for Snake Woman.

It is at this moment that the giant cat notices Viper—who charged in with a battle cry—as well as Heine.

Having closed the distance in a blink, Viper pauses.

"...Oof! Is this charm magic...?"

"There's no magic at work, Lady Viper! Are you letting its cuteness get to you?!" says Heine on noticing that Viper pulled her punch right before it connected.

Viper, who we brought as Kisaragi's trump card, of sorts, easily folds. We are officially fresh out of options.

...No, there are still two people who haven't given up yet.

"There's no need to trouble Lady Viper! I'll finish you myself!"

"Good, Heine, draw its attention from the front! I'll attack from behind using my Sword of Searing Heat, Flame Zapper!"

The two former enemies are now working together to face off against a giant foe.

Rather than reminding me of exemplary operatives of an evil organization, the sight evokes the image of our sworn enemies, the Heroes...

"Meow!"

"Ohhh no! Heine! M-Ms. Snow!"

With little effort, the cat swats the two of them aside, and they roll to the ground, unconscious.

Even considering the size of the cat, the damage from that little pat was evidently quite large.

As the two of them are sprawled on the ground, Viper hurriedly makes her way to them.

“Hey, Alice. Why are we having so much trouble against moles, sparrows, and now cats? We’re here trying to seriously be an evil organization, and yet we keep ending up in life-or-death brawls against adorable critters.”

“Just being huge like that is a cheat in itself. But the only thing in our arsenal that would be an even match for them is the Destroyer, and it’s currently out of juice after exterminating the Sand King and salvaging Mr. Mogero. We need Heine to focus on recharging him...”

Kisaragi mutants have a final option of turning into giant versions of themselves as a means of fighting the giant robots fielded by the Heroes, but the only mutant currently assigned to this planet is Tiger Man.

And he’s currently off on a journey of his own.

...It is then that Viper, who has taken advantage of the giant cat being distracted by the fleeing soldiers, comes back carrying Snow and Heine on her back.

“Mr. Six, Ms. Alice. I’ll do something about that giant fluffball, so I’ll leave these two to you.”

After setting down the two on her back, Viper turns back to the giant rampaging cat.

“What do you mean, you’ll do something about it? Given its size, I don’t think even your Demon Lord Punch would be enough to inflict a mortal wound, Vi.”

“I have an ace up my sleeve. Now that I’m the mutant Snake Woman, if I take a lot of damage...”

Wait, does she mean...?

“You can turn giant, too, Vi?”

“Yes. When I became a leader in the Kisaragi Corporation, Lady Lilith gave me the requisite modifications.”

Viper smiles as though it isn’t a big deal, but Heine stands up unsteadily.

“L-Lady Viper...I never knew that... I won’t let you go! Please don’t risk your safety for us demons any further!”

Heine clings to Viper with a look of deep sadness, on the verge of tears.

But...

“Listen, Heine. We’ve been given so much by Mr. Six and the other members of Kisaragi. More than we can ever repay. I want to help everyone. It’s all right, I have no intention of giving up the life that Mr. Six worked so hard to save... It’s true that becoming a giant will take a few years off my life expectancy, but it won’t kill me immediately... That being the case, I have no reservations.”

Viper’s resolve is ironclad.

As she approaches the giant cat, Heine calls out to her, “Lady Viper! I applaud your determination! But we can’t have you risking your life to fight something so adorable! If in the off chance you die, people will say that a former Demon Lord died in battle with an oversize kitten!”

“...I—I won’t die, Heine, so don’t say things that’ll make me doubt my decision.”

As Viper shows a bit of doubt, I come to a realization.

“Vi, you can’t go giant here! If you do...!”

“...? This is a wasteland near the border. I don’t think there will be any damage to the surroundings if I fight while in giant form...”

As Viper turns back to me and tilts her head, Alice realizes what I want to say.

“Ah, I see. It’d be one thing for mutants who look like animals to become giant, but if Viper became giant even though she doesn’t look any different from a person... There’s no cover out here.”

“That’s right! If you become giant your clothes will be destroyed and you’ll be completely naked, Vi!”

“P-please reconsider, Lady Viper! There’s tons of humans here!”

Hearing that, Viper turns back to face the giant cat even as her shoulders faintly tremble.

“...If I can be of help to everyone, I don’t mind being naked...”

“I can hear the tremble in your voice, Vi! You really shouldn’t force yourself!

When you're big you can be seen from a mile away, and since we'll be looking up at you from below, it'll be really bad..."

"We don't need the details! Lady Viper's already frozen in place!"

As Viper covers her face and curls into a ball, the giant cat twitches its nose and snuffles as it glances around...

...until its eyes land on us.

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! How's that? You want some of this?! When I heard there was a giant tiger monster stomping around Toris, this is the ace I prepared just in case!"

Snow has gathered her nerve when we weren't looking and opened a bag.

There's white powder spilling from inside the bag, and the giant cat's eyes are locked onto it.

Oh no, she brought out something really dangerous...

"...From what I'm detecting in the air, that white powder is definitely catnip. She has Tiger Man's precious reserve supply. He's gonna throw a fit when he gets back..."

"For one who used to be a proud knight, Snow sure has her klepto moments. I think she's actually better suited to being a rogue."

I'd heard she grew up in the slums, so there's a good chance she was a petty thief when she was younger.

The giant cat warily heads over to Snow as she throws the catnip powder into the air...

"Look at that, Six. Snow's actually being useful. Looks like it's working."

"Wow, yeah. Impressive, especially since she's been a walking punch line of late."

"It probably sounds weird coming from a demon like me, but you guys are pretty awful."

At the cat letting out a purr and rolling around at Snow's feet, the fleeing soldiers seem to have regained their senses.

The soldiers gather first in squads, and once they gather into company-size units, Snow has them surround the giant cat, who is now completely under her control.

The soldiers are equipped with harpoons and nets, and it seems our lessons learned from the fight with the Sand King have been implemented by the royal army. Tillis has our reports to thank for that.

Despite the fact that the army is getting into position to take it down, the giant cat still focuses solely on the catnip.

Reassured by the sight, Snow looks triumphantly over at us.

“Look what I did! Hey, Six, since you’ve been such a help to me every day, I’m happy to split the credit with you this time!”

“...You’re just trying to make me an accomplice in your theft of Tiger Man’s catnip, aren’t you? He’s actually pretty hard on anyone who’s not a kid, so I refuse to get involved with this one.”

Snow keeps her eyes on the giant, purring cat.

“...I’m technically still seventeen. Given my age, do you think he’ll go easy on me, too?”

“You don’t have an ounce of the innocence that a child has. Also, given your looks, I’m pretty sure you never stood a chance of persuading Tiger Man to do anything... Oh, looks like they’re going to catch it now.”

The soldiers all throw their nets over the cat, but it’s so preoccupied with the catnip that it pays them no mind. It simply purrs in satisfaction.

Just when it seems like we have this one in the bag—

“I bring news! We’ve spotted a mysterious force in the distance! ...Um, what is that? They’re riding something odd...”

One of the soldiers who has been keeping watch of the surroundings comes to give a puzzled report to Snow.

“An army riding weird objects? ...Ah, I see, it must be that woman, Adelie or whatever. So they intended to use the giant monster guarding Toris as a decoy then circle around while we were busy dealing with it. Those of you subduing

the monster, continue your work! The rest of you, we'll reorganize our forces to engage the new enemy! Now's the time to show them the power of—"

Snow turns to face the newly spotted forces...

"...Hey, Six. What are those? They have a lot of those odd machinations you use every now and then."

"Those are clearly transport vehicles. Combat transports at that... Hey, Alice, we're in deep this time. Why the hell do they have modern weapons?"

In the wastelands spreading out before us, there are several dozen combat transports approaching us.

Since they don't have any turrets, they're probably APCs, armored personnel carriers.

"I explained it at the meeting, remember? There's a possibility that the faction that took over Toris had technology and modern weapons along with living weapons that are comparable or superior to those from Earth. After all, they conquered Toris in a single night. I knew they had something up their sleeve, but this just made conquering this planet a lot harder."

Given that they have armored transports, it's safe to assume they've also got firearms.

If they only have enough troops to man a few dozen APCs, we've probably got the advantage in sheer numbers. But there's far too big a gap in terms of equipment. If they have machine guns, it'll end up a one-sided slaughter.

More than anything, the enemy we see atop the APCs are all dressed in outfits similar to the power armor that Adelie was wearing.

Seeing them, Alice calls out:

"Retreat!"

Alice takes out her teleporter at roughly the same moment, scribbles down a quick note, and sends it.

"Wha...?! W-wait, Alice! We're almost done defeating the giant monster! I don't know how strong that force is, but we should be able to buy enough time to—"

At this point, I have to interject, even though Snow clearly doesn't want to let go of her potential win.

"Each of those guys over there probably has about the same fighting ability as us Combat Agents."

"Retreat!"

And so Snow orders the army's retreat without a moment's hesitation.

While there's no one who as hungry for glory as she is, the fact that she is willing to immediately retreat against an enemy without even fighting once again proves her skills as a commander. She never hesitates to make the tough decisions.

The fact that the soldiers immediately switch to retreating despite the fact that they had almost finished subduing the giant cat speaks to the quality of their training.

"So, Snow. I'm finally convinced you didn't gain your rank through your connections, money, or your body."

"Why are you bad-mouthing me at a time like this?! Damn it all! Those of you who can move quickly, help the slow ones! Throw aside your heavy equipment as you flee! They'll also serve to impede the enemy!"

As Snow leads her men to safety, Viper picks up the still out-cold Russell and holds him out to Heine.

"I'll cover the retreat. I'm leaving him in your care, Heine."

"Huh?! Wait, Lady Viper!"

With that, Viper begins running to the very rear of the Grace Kingdom Army.

"Ahh... Despite being a member of an evil organization, Lady Snake Woman is still a leader, I see. She really is good at her job. Not only can she fight, but she can do paperwork well. And not only do the demons love her, but the way the former Elite Four follow her...she has my undying respect..."

"Wh-what the hell are you going on about? Of course the demons love her... Mmph!"

I cover Heine's mouth and whisper into her ear:

"Lady Dandruff doesn't know that Snake Woman is Vi. We've got a pool going among the Combat Agents to see how long it'll take her to notice, so don't tell her."

"How blind does she have to be not to see it under these circumstances...? I mean, sure, it's probably better she not know since she'd probably pick a fight with us, but... Oh, never mind!"

Heine pushes Russell into my arms and hurriedly chases after Viper.

"I'll go cover the retreat with Lady Viper, so I'll leave Russell to you! We'll buy you a little time, so at least give me a few more days off, okay?"

Heine doesn't wait for a reply and begins to summon flames to her hands as she's running.

"Hey, you weirdly dressed humans...! I'm Heine of the Flames, former pillar of the Demon Lord's Elite Four! I don't know who you are, but you're not getting past me!"

She bares her large canines, unique to demons, and challenges the approaching army—!

4

Rose, who's waiting for us at the entrance to Hideout City, cries out as soon as she sees us.

"M-Ms. Viper?! Ms. Heine! And Mr. Russell, too!"

Viper is horribly disheveled and carrying an unconscious Heine in her arms. Russell, who is still unconscious, is now on my back.

The royal army started their retreat under Snow as Viper and Heine held off the mysterious approaching forces equipped with powerful weaponry.

Afterward, Alice and I hid ourselves using the optical camo we received from Kisaragi just in case Viper and Heine were in trouble, but—

"We're all right. Heine and Russell are unconscious, but they're not badly hurt."

Viper smiles reassuringly as Rose comes to greet us.

The soldiers of the royal army didn't suffer a single casualty and made it out with light wounds after trying to capture the giant cat. They likely would've fared far worse if they had engaged the new enemy.

Apparently Heine developed some new attacks with her powerful sorcerer stone, and she destroyed two APCs using super-concentrated flames. But she was hit by something that resembled a taser, and the shock rendered her unconscious.

In the end, the one who took the most damage was...

"Vi, you're the worst hurt of the group, so leave Heine to Rose, and let's take you to the infirmary. I know you're strong, but you shouldn't risk your own well-being much. You were pretty close to turning into a giant, you know."

"I-I'm sorry, Mr. Six... I let them get the better of me despite being a Kisaragi leader..."

Viper had fearlessly faced the mysterious enemy by herself and leaped at the sturdy APC with her signature flying kick known as the Demon Lord Punch.

Although the mysterious enemy hit Viper with the same taser-like weapon, she didn't seem to suffer any damage from it, and the enemy forces looked on in shock as she flipped over APCs, one after another. They hesitated before opening fire with their weapons, as if they had run out of options.

Against that gunfire, Viper slowed time so she could see the bullets and used her bracers to deflect them, then picked up Heine, using her back as a shield, and began her retreat.

She took a hail of gunfire to her back and somehow managed to join us after we emerged from our hiding space. And we then retreated with Viper still wounded.

"M-Ms. Viper, your back looks terrible! I'll take care of Ms. Heine, so please, go get treated!"

Viper smiles to Rose as Rose takes Heine from her in a panic.

"It only looks like I'm seriously hurt because my mutant suit is in tatters. But

as you can see, I'm fine, though I do appreciate your concern, Rose."

Viper's voice is calm, but she just had countless bullets removed from her back and received a medical nanobot injection as well.

While it looks like she finished healing on the surface, she still has a lot of internal damage and blood loss to deal with.

It's a wonder she's still upright. She must be putting on a brave face for Rose and the demons.

"The enemy must've been really strong if all of you got so hurt. I mean, even my fellow chimera Mr. Russell's down, so I don't know how much use I would have been, either..."

Rose seems troubled, but the one who took out Russell was actually me...

It's then that Alice shakes her head with a frustrated look.

"The enemy was certainly powerful, but they were holding back. If anything, they didn't show much interest in the retreating royal army. Their primary interest seemed to be the giant monster that was about to be captured."

"Oh, right. They all had guns but they only used them on Vi."

And there had been no sign of Adelie in that group.

It's possible that Adelie, as an intelligence operative, doesn't participate in war. If that's not the case, it doesn't make sense for them to leave such a powerful asset unused.

As we're contemplating the bizarre behavior of our enemies...

"I'm sorry, may I rest a little?" asks Viper, pale from blood loss.

"No, you may not rest for *a little*. You're going to rest until you're fully healed. I'm the medic for Six's squad, so you need to listen to your doctor."

"...I understand. I'll leave the rest to you, Ms. Alice."

At Alice's words, Viper starts to make her way toward Hideout City's infirmary, but she furrowed her brow a moment and stops, as though debating something in her mind.

Viper turns and calls to me with an apologetic expression.

“...Um, Mr. Six.”

“Yes, Sexy-Tattered-Suit Viper? What is it?”

“I-is it really that sexy?! As a leader of an evil organization, I suppose I should be happy, but... No, that’s not it...”

After enduring my teasing, Viper raised her gaze from the floor to meet my eyes.

“Despite the fact that you accepted all my people and even saved my life, then hired me as a leader...I’m very sorry for failing you when I had the chance to repay you for everything.”

Viper lowers her head in apology, but I think she did the most work out of all of us.

“No, no, Vi, you’re doing fine. You’re the one doing the most for us, and you’re always up late working. Everyone’s worried about you, Vi. You push yourself too hard.”

Without Viper covering the retreat, we may very well have suffered some losses.

Covering a retreat is the most dangerous job on a battlefield.

While no one was saying it aloud, everyone thoroughly appreciated the fact that Viper had volunteered to take on that dangerous task.

Viper blushes a little then, swaying as she makes her way toward the infirmary.

As I watch Viper limp away and can’t find any words to direct at her exposed, small shoulders, Alice speaks up.

“I have a good sense of what you’re thinking, partner. But first, we need to head to the palace. Getting revenge for Viper comes after.”

It looks like our high-spec pretty-girl android has learned to read people’s emotions.

I wasn’t able to trust her completely, so this time I’m going to put all my faith in my partner.

As Alice and I approach the palace, there is a tense atmosphere in front of the gate.

“Please, let us have an audience with Her Highness! What’s with the water crystals showing up in the market? I thought we had no relations with Toris? If imports have resumed, our family would like to purchase them as well! It’s dishonorable for the royal family to monopolize them!”

“Wasn’t the war supposed to be over?! I’ve heard that the soldiers sent to defeat a giant monster wound up in combat with another army, is that true?! Are our taxes going to go up again?!”

“There are rumors circulating that Her Highness is the Demon Lord, but I don’t care if she is! I love you, Your Highness! I’ll stand with you until the bitter end!”

“I’ve heard rumors that the rain-making artifact has been repaired! If that’s the case, then why hasn’t the royal family conducted the rain-making ritual?! Bring the blessing of rain upon our lands!”

There is a group of what appears to be nobles seeking an audience at the gate.

Ordinarily, nobles wouldn’t be stopped at the palace gates, but today is different.

“The soldiers of the kingdom have just returned today! Please come back some other time!”

“The people of the palace are busy treating the wounded! We can’t answer your inquiries! You have our apologies!”

The guards try their best to keep them from swarming the castle, but the people they’re trying to hold back are their social betters.

Since the soldiers can’t be too forceful with the nobles, none of the nobles give any sign of leaving.

“Currently the palace is under martial law, and no one is allowed to enter! Please come back another time!”

The guards manning the gate try to deter the nobles, but they wouldn't be nobles if that was all it took for them to back down.

"How dare *you*, a mere soldier, treat *me*, your better, that way?! This is ridiculous! Get out of my way! Who is your supervisor? Bring them out!"

Suddenly, as one of the nobles, completely out of patience, tries to force his way through the guards...

"I'm the supervisor. If you have any complaints, let's hear them."

...Snow emerges from the gate, drawn by the furor.

"<Hey, Alice, things look kinda bad, don'cha think? The nobles might revolt at this rate...>"

"<It won't happen immediately, but it does look like they've got tons of grievances. Given the princess's skill at dealing with these people, this is unusual. Things might devolve from here.>"

Alice and I watch from a distance and discuss the matter as though it doesn't directly concern us. It's then that a noble among the unruly mob who looks particularly important steps forward and speaks with an especially nasty grin on his face.

"I've heard the news, Lady Snow. It seems you failed in your mission to defeat the giant monster, despite mustering such a large force. How many failures does this make for you, now...?"

"And you are...? Ah, that's right, the Lord of House Howard who does close business with the Cricket Merchant Company! Yes, I'm quite familiar with them. The head of the company often sends me gifts! I also do quite a bit of business with them, myself!"

Having her failures thrown in her face, Snow responds by dropping a bomb on the noble.

"<Damn, Snow's a piece of work. She not only tactfully pointed out the lord's corruption, but she even appealed to him by revealing that they're birds of a feather. If he tries to drag Snow down by highlighting her failures, she could very well take him down with her by confessing to all the corruption. That's a

seriously impressive tactic. She really is good at this stuff.>”

“<It’s more than impressive. It’s terrifying. Look, the noble who spoke out against Snow clammed up.>”

As someone truly rotten from the inside out, Snow’s extremely good at verbal arguments.

The noble who sarcastically attacked Snow freezes, and his cheek twitches as he puts on a veneer of a smile.

“Well, as someone who uses the same merchant house, I would like you to look upon my latest failure with a bit of forbearance! Unfortunately, the people inside the palace are quite busy at the moment, so we would really appreciate it if you could come back another day...”

“Y-yes, well, indeed. I can’t say no to your request, Lady Snow! Ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Idiots don’t stay nobles very long.

The man must have decided it was a bad idea to mess with Snow, who was a veritable powder keg of issues. So he forces one last, greasy smile and scurries away with his tail between his legs.

“Those fools, using now of all times to cause problems. Her Highness is far too busy to deal with their petty nonsense...”

Having chased off the nobles, Snow complains to us as she shows us to Tillis’s room.

“Have the nobles of this country always been like that? In my experience, they were a lot more out of the way during the war with the demons.”

“No, them throwing their weight around is a recent development. Due to my less-than-prestigious upbringing, they’ve never liked me. But they love needling me for little mistakes. That said, they’ve never come to the palace to lodge a complaint in the past.”

I’m pretty sure none of your mistakes have ever been “little.”

“And that reminds me. Isn’t the protection around the palace a bit overdone? I hope this isn’t the case, but has Combat Agent Ten been up to mischief again?”

On the way to Tillis's room, I noticed that the faces of the soldiers are grim, much tenser than I'm used to seeing.

"They're on guard in case any nobles who are swayed by the bounty on Her Highness's head completely lose their senses and try something shady. While they were happy to have a leader like Princess Tillis during the war with the Demon Lord's Army..."

"Now that it's peaceful, the smart princess is just in the way. I suppose reality is harsh in every world..."

Alice, who has been quiet until this point, speaks up.

"Damn, Adelie got us on this one. They're pretending to do things in the name of justice to stir up rebellion in this kingdom. She was just pretending to be useless and made each of her actions look harmless to make us lower our guard."

"...Seriously? She didn't look that smart, honestly."

Yes, if anything, she seemed like a meathead like me and Rose.

"The dumping of water crystals in Grace may have looked like charity from afar. But by flooding the market with water crystals that were hard to import, she made everyone view the princess with suspicion. To the nobles, it looked like the royal family was just hogging them all. That being the case, all they needed to do was spread the rumor, 'Princess Tillis won't use the repaired artifact so that she can make money off the water crystals she just acquired!'"

I do remember telling all sorts of people that the artifact was already fixed so that I could get Tillis to say the embarrassing activation phrase, but I'm sure it's not my fault or anything.

"I see... So that woman is quite the schemer. She must have timed her exposing of my corruption and handed that crystal ball to Her Highness to..."

"Yeah, she used you as bait to cause a fuss and get Tillis into a public place. Then she made Tillis touch the crystal ball in public."

I mean, I kind of think none of it would have happened if Snow hadn't engaged in corruption in the first place. And I'm pretty sure the crystal turned

black because Tillis's personality is...well, y'know. But if my wise partner Alice is saying it, it has to be true.

"Which means she then declared Princess Tillis to be the Demon Lord and put a bounty on her head in order to...!"

As Snow reels in shock, Alice points her index finger at Snow like a famous detective.

"Yes, that was her true goal. Adelie wanted to reveal that Tillis had a rotten personality to the public so she could call her the true Demon Lord and put a bounty on her head. With that, the enemy gains the justification they need to invade us. They can say they're going to come liberate the people of Grace from the Demon Lord."

Eh, it seemed like Adelie wasn't really thinking deeply about anything and just blurted out Tillis was the Demon Lord at random, but given how confidently Alice was making this assertion, I started to be convinced of it as well.

"Think about it. The day after that woman fled this country, the giant monster and the mystery force came to attack us. This happened way too quickly...unless they prepared in advance. Meaning, it was all according to their plan!"

That force turned around and went home without attacking us after they caught the giant cat, but if even that turns out to be a trap of some sort, then we need to stop underestimating Adelie.

"This isn't the time to be standing around! I need to go report this to Her Highness at once!"

Alice pays little heed as Snow works herself into a lather.

"<There, I've given you a justification to attack. Now all we need to do is fight and win. I'm leaving that to you.>"

Alice keeps her voice low so that only I will hear.

6

After showing us into her room, Tillis receives the report from Snow and listens before she speaks.

“Well, this certainly puts us in a bind... To do this right as my father, the king, was gone and the nobles were trying to claim some power for themselves. If there wasn't the confusion in our borders, I would have invaded them...”

It's an unexpectedly aggressive statement from the usually calm Tillis.

“I guess the thing that was most damaging from her point of view was having the knowledge that the artifact was repaired. It seems a little different from the other measures in character, but to take this opportunity to reveal it... Damn, Adelie's a sly one.”

“...What a terrible thing to do. I'm gonna give her a good smack when I see her next.”

I decide to shift the blame to Adelie and pretend not to know anything.

“I have a request, Your Highness.”

Snow kneels, putting on a more serious expression than I've seen from her in a long time.

“I understand that I failed to defeat the giant monster, but please give me an opportunity to redeem myself.”

Oh, right, she was on the verge of getting fired if she failed another mission.

Snow's usual greedy self is nowhere to be seen as she looks intently up at Tillis and waits for an answer.

Honestly, I thought she was going to cry and throw a tantrum or something, so I'm a little surprised here.

“...A chance to redeem yourself? What do you intend to do? Given that the nobles are hatching schemes of their own, now is not a good time to attack the Hiiragi Agency. And considering you failed your last mission, even if you did get results, I can't guarantee that you'd be made knight commander again.”

“I care not, Your Highness. I'm prepared to give up my rank as a knight. If you'll allow me, I will infiltrate Toris and conduct sabotage missions to strike back at them.”

Even Tillis seems a little intimidated by the sheer gap between Snow's current demeanor and her usual self.

“If we stand by and do nothing, our neighboring countries will stop taking us seriously. Once I’ve defeated the nobles in the political arena, I do intend to send forces against them. But infiltration missions are dangerous. Can you not wait until the time is right? I trust your skills when it comes to entrapping the enemy in a battle of wits. Won’t you stay and help me? ...Or rather, to ask more bluntly: What’s driving you to act this way?”

Snow muddles her initial response.

“Lady Snake Woman...suffered a serious injury in the most recent skirmish...”

Snow’s ears turned beet-red, and she murmurs her confession in a soft voice.

“Perhaps because Six keeps calling her Vi, I always think of the Demon Lord Viper whenever I look upon her. I wasn’t able to do anything for the Demon Lord who shouldered the crimes of all demons and died for them. I wanted to do some damage to avenge Lady Snake Woman who had been doing her best to protect the demons in Demon Lord Viper’s stead...”

At this moment, Tillis and I exchange thoughts through a glance.

She seems to ask why I went this long without telling Snow the truth.

See, my plan was to originally have Snow find out about Viper’s identity from some random event and laugh at her for how long it took her to figure it out.

Or rather, given that we’d made Snow’s ignorance the subject of a betting pool, I had no idea she had taken it so seriously, and now I feel like I crossed a line that I shouldn’t have crossed.

Completely ignoring my inner turmoil, the android that had come up with the whole scheme to fool the world into thinking the Demon Lord was dead nods intently to Snow’s remarks and pats Snow reassuringly on the shoulder.

It is at this moment that I confirm that androids really are ruthless and heartless.

“Lady Snow, out of respect for your firm resolve, I will permit you to act freely. And if you’re able to produce results, I will once again make you knight commander of the Royal Guard!”

Apparently, Tillis can’t bear to let Snow wallow in her misery any longer.

While Snow's transfer to Kisaragi had been all but agreed upon under the table, if she can return to being the knight commander of the Royal Guard, then I agree that would be better.

"T-truly?! N-no, but given that I've repeatedly failed in my missions..."

"No. Go and accept that offer. You have the right."

"Yep, I'd been thinking that for a while. You're a fine knight. Even during the monster-hunting mission, you made the right call on retreat, so I don't think you can call it a failure."

While Alice and I try to back her up, for some reason Snow regards us suspiciously...

"Hey, why are you giving me your recommendation? Could it be that—...that you really don't want me to formally become a Kisaragi employee? D-do you hate me that much?!"

"No, that's not it at all! You're such a handful at times, dammit! I'm just happy about your desire to avenge Vi! Kisaragi employees value their comrades!"

I try to reassure Snow, who looks incredibly worried, when Alice speaks up.

"So you wanna counterattack against Hiiragi, right? Then we'll lend you our strength, too. Princess, you need to watch out for your own safety. After all, there's a huge bounty on your head. You can't let your guard down, even in the palace."

"Yes, indeed... I was hoping to have Snow, who was a member of the Royal Guard, serve as my bodyguard, but with this, I suppose I'll have to find someone else I can trust..."

It was just when Tillis glommed on to the conversation and started wondering about who to use for protection in an attempt to continue changing the subject —

"Leave protecting Princess Tillis to me."

The speaker has a deep voice, despite the fact that I'm supposed to be the only man in the room.

A human-shaped section of the wall begins to lift up, and a man appears,

peeling wallpaper off his body. He smiles at us.

“Guards!”

At Tillis’s scream, the man holds out his palm and speaks.

“It’s all right, Your Highness, there’s no one suspicious here. It’s just me, Combat Agent Ten.”

“Guaaaaards!!!”

At Tillis’s second, louder cry, there comes a buzz from the other side of the door.

Looking closely at the wall Ten had appeared from, I can see a human-shaped hole in the wall.

This man, who we hadn’t seen recently, has evidently been living as a part of that wall.

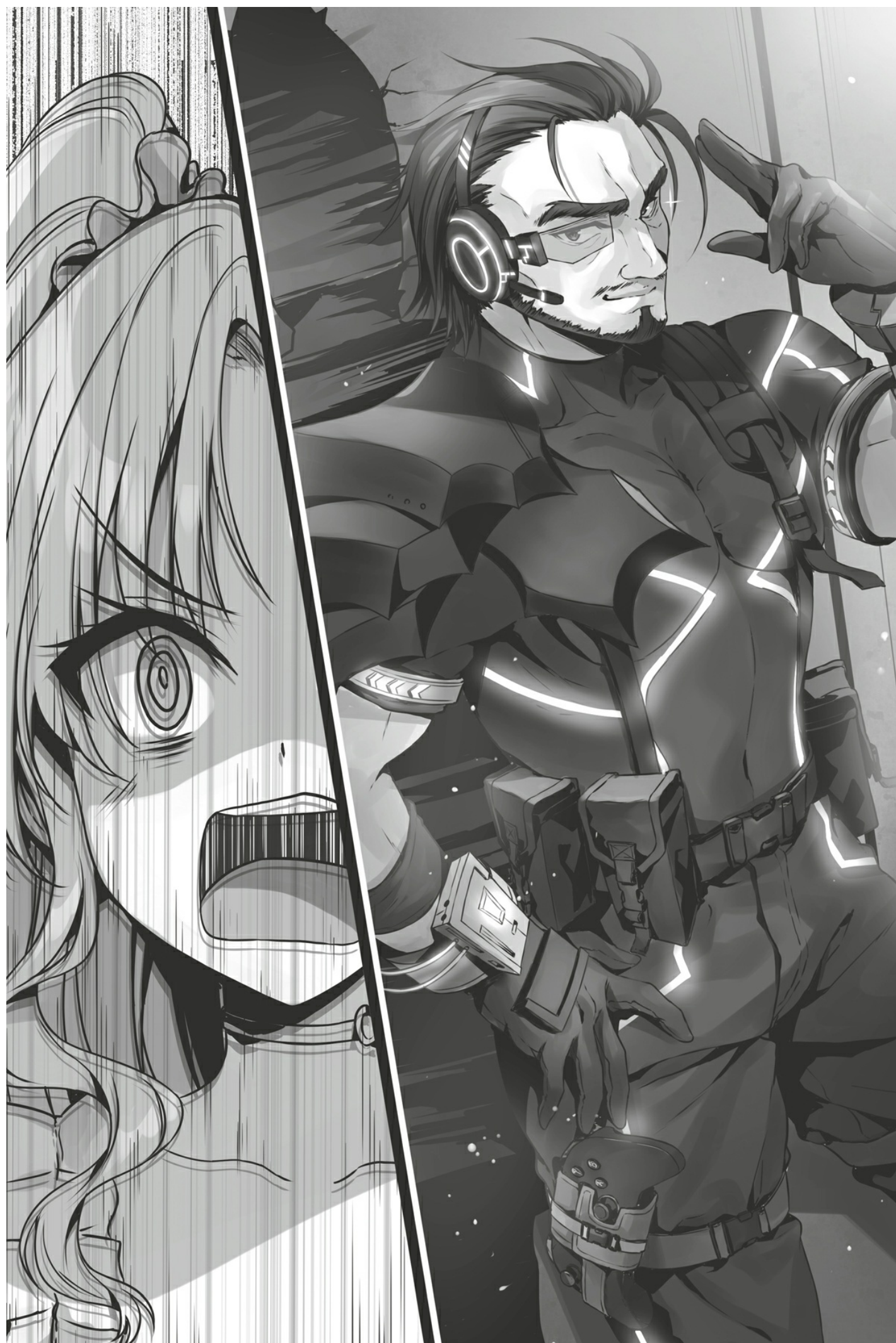
“If Ten’s here, then the princess is in good hands. We’ll leave her protection to you.”

“Yep, I got it.”

“No, you don’t! Or rather, how long have you been there anyway?!”

Ignoring Tillis’s panicked confusion, Snow smiles at Ten and says, “Her Highness may seem strong, but there’s a part of her that’s still afraid of things any girl her age would be scared of. Take care of her.”

“Yeah, I know. I’m already aware that she flinches at lightning when it’s storming outside. I’m even preparing a body pillow disguise for the next stormy night,” Ten replies with a smile.



Tillis ignores him and declares to Snow:

“Lady Snow, here are your orders! Make absolutely sure you get results and return to being my bodyguard!”

[Status Report]

The weird woman I reported about earlier turned out to be an intelligence agent.

Though she seemed like a moron at first, she turned out to be a lot more capable than I would like to admit.

That one woman was able to completely ruin Tillis’s reputation, nearly start a civil war, cause Vi to get seriously injured, and turn Combat Agent Ten into a wall. What a mess.

After discussing the matter with Tillis, we’ve decided to pin Snow’s corruption on her as well.

Alice has been conducting a propaganda campaign to convince people that because this woman was controlling a giant monster, the Sand King must also have been a living weapon created by Hiiragi. Thanks to her efforts, Hiiragi is being made out to be the most evil organization ever.

The rest of us were worried that this would make us, the evil Kisaragi Corporation, seem less important, so we got together to discuss possible solutions, and as a result...

We, the Grace Kingdom branch of the Kisaragi Corporation, hereby declare war upon the Hiiragi Agency of Order, and as the rightful rulers of this planet, we will annihilate them.

Reporting Operatives:

Combat Agent Six and All Local Combat Agents



The Villains Strike Back!



1

According to Alice, the counterattack operation will take some planning, so we're waiting around while she makes preparations.

I don't know what she's cooking up, but I trust her brains.

"...which is why we're gonna head over to Toris for a bit, Vi. I'm sure you'll be lonely without me, but I'll let you borrow my video game, so you can just relax and have fun, okay?"

We're in Viper's personal room in Hideout City. I finish explaining the situation to her as she lies in bed while I peel an apple.

"I'm thankful for the game, but please take me with you. I feel much better now. I'm sorry for worrying you..."

I push the plate of apple slices to Viper as she tries to sit up.

"Alice mentioned that you would definitely say that, so she said she was gonna mix a special concoction that would knock you out before we leave. Vi, if I happen across you while you're totally helpless, you know what's gonna happen, right?"

“I—I understand. I’ll stay and keep watch, so please don’t drug me! ...Oh, the shape of these fruit slices is very cute. Are you fond of mokemokes, Mr. Six?”

For my part, I had intended to make them look like rabbits, but now that I look at ‘em, they’re totally mokemokes.

As I start to peel a second apple, determined to make the slices look like rabbits this time, there’s a knock on the door.

“Lady Viper, I’ve come to check in on you... Ah, Six, quit killing time in Lady Viper’s bedroom! I’m starting to worry that you’re becoming too much of a bad influence on her!”

“...Heine’s right, Six. The more time Viper spends with you, the more flawed she becomes. Viper is the beacon of hope for all demonkind, so please don’t corrupt her.”

The two former members of the Elite Four are standing outside the door.

“Well, well, you two are awfully mouthy for servants.”

Currently, Heine and Russell are using their abilities to provide electricity to the Destroyer and Hideout City.

Since Russell is no longer needed in Grace due to the flood of water crystals on the market, we hurriedly constructed a reservoir with a hydroelectric power plant near our settlement.

Alice is extremely pleased that we have another green energy source.

“U-um, have I really changed all that much since I’ve started interacting with Mr. Six...?”

“Yes, Vi. You’re not as reserved as you used to be, and you’ve let your guard down in a number of ways, making you more gullible than ever. As adorable as it may seem, you’ve dumbled yourself down.”

...Viper’s eyes well with tears, and she curls up beneath her blanket. Heine and Russell crane their necks and beckon me over with a look.

I play along and approach them, and they speak in a whisper.

“You’re gonna go after the bastards who hurt Lady Viper, right? Take me with

you. I'm still a former member of the Elite Four. I can't let them get away with what they did to her!"

"In the last skirmish, someone choked me out, so I wasn't able to do anything. This time, I'm going to show you why I was made a member of the Elite Four in the first place."

Looks like they wanna get revenge for Viper, too.

"I don't mind taking you with me, but...what are *you two* doing sneaking over there?"

Grimm and Rose are eavesdropping on my conversation with Heine and Russell from the other side of the door.

I guess they thought they were hidden, and they step out a bit awkwardly..."

"Commander, I heard that the home-wrecker that was so friendly with you had gotten hurt, so I was here to laugh at her! What a lovely sight! Let this be a lesson to her for trying to steal another woman's man!"

Grimm's lips curl up into a nasty grin as Heine and Russell grit their teeth and glare at her. Just then, Rose chimes in.

"...Liaaaaar! You were the one who proposed checking up on her, Grimm. Besides, you were feeling guilty about missing the last fight because you died in a stupid way and took time to get resurrected... He—Oww! Ow! Ow!"

"Ohhh, you need to watch that mouth of yours! If you can't keep it shut, I'll have to shut it for you! But yes, since that home-wrecker is good at her job, I was just worried about what would happen to our work schedules! After all, if she got badly hurt, it'd really slow us down! ...What? Quit staring. I'll leave your get-well-soon gift here, so you better appreciate it!"

Grimm and Viper are both beet-red as Grimm plays the *tsundere* role to perfection.

When Grimm died most recently, it seemed to be for an especially reckless reason, but we're finally able to find out what happened.

Apparently, she found out I had met another young woman, and with her home-wrecker alarm blaring, she attempted to put a curse on Adelie.

She collapsed in the middle of her ritual, and the next time she opened her eyes, she had just been revived again.

But according to Grimm, she hadn't performed a curse strong enough to kill...

It is at this moment...

"Oh, there you are, Russell. I was looking for you. I'm giving you an important job in our fight against Hiiragi. Once you're done with it, you can go ahead and relax."

...Alice shows up to join the throng of guests in Viper's room.

"H-hold on a sec, Alice! I want to go with everyone else! Is it a job only I can do? If anyone else can do it, please ask them!"

Russell is putting up more of a fuss than usual. He must really want to get his revenge with the rest of us.

"Well, I just wanted you to pilot Mr. Mogero, but I guess I could just get Rose to do it...," murmurs Alice with a tilt of her head.

It is only recently that we figured out how to control the giant mole-shaped robot dubbed Mr. Mogero by Alice.

To be more precise, Russell just flat-out told us how to do it.

It's not so strange that he knows how to operate it. He once operated a giant robot he found in an ancient ruin, after all. But Alice, who spent countless hours trying to figure out how to activate Mr. Mogero, chewed him out for not speaking up sooner.

"See? It was just as I said. These giant robots won't function for just anyone. They're super picky with their pilots. This means Mr. Mogero's type is a pretty young girl who's still a little childish. I'm guessing Russell was able to pilot Mr. Mogero because it thought he fit the criteria."

"This isn't a manga or video game, of course that's not why. If he likes pretty young girls, then there's no way he wouldn't activate with me at the controls... I bet the same people who created Rose and Russell are the ones who built Mr. Mogero. They probably have a biometric security system triggered by DNA or something to keep anyone but allies from using him."

We discover that Mr. Mogero will activate if we shove someone related to him into the cockpit.

Well, if the theory that he reacts to pretty girls is wrong...

"I understand why he reacted to Rose and Russell, since both of them are abandoned products of ancient scientists, but why did he react to Vi?"

"This planet's Demon Lords must have been tasked by the scientists who left the tech behind with managing this planet's technology, thus granting them the authority to activate the O-Parts. Because of Lady Lilith's screwup, it'll forever remain a mystery, but seeing as things never work out conveniently for us, that's pretty par for the course."

I have trouble with complicated subjects like this, but even I understand that having an alternative to our ace in the hole, the Destroyer, is huge for us. After all, the enemy has a giant monster on their side. Using a giant weapon against a giant opponent just makes sense.

"I see. So Russell's special mission is to control Mr. Mogero and defeat that giant kitty, right?"

"No, I took a look at Mr. Mogero's specs, and he doesn't seem to be made for combat. Besides, Mr. Mogero doesn't have a projectile barrier like the giant cat does. If we had them fight, Mr. Mogero would be a sitting duck against enemy projectiles, and the fight would be over pretty quickly."

I wouldn't be surprised if Hiiragi possesses powerful ranged weapons like rocket launchers.

"We know we can deal with that giant cat by using catnip, so it's not that big of a threat. And this time, our side's also got firearms. I doubt they can make any rash moves... So there's something I want you to do."

"N-no, I refuse. I don't know what you want me to do, but I want to fight this time. I want to show them the power of a former Elite Four member..."

Seeing Russell nearly throw a tantrum causes Rose to sigh and shake her head.

"Then I'll pilot Mr. Mogero. Mr. Russell, even though you're weak, you're still

a chimera. Please give it your all this time.”

“Don’t call me weak! We’re supposed to be kin! I’m a former Elite Four member, dammit!”

2

Time passes gradually as Rose and Alice are off conducting secret procedures with Mr. Mogero, until eventually, the day to invade Toris has arrived.

In this relatively dry part of the world, we are graced by the rare sight of large, dark clouds in the sky.

On the dais in Hideout City’s practice field, I address our troops with a loudspeaker.

“Expendable Combat Agents, thank you for coming today despite your lack of things to do! Our ultimate objective is total domination of this planet, but it seems we have yet another hurdle to overcome in the form of this mysterious and powerful enemy! The situation is dire, and at this rate, they’ll end up delaying our invasion plans...”

“Get on with it! Someone as dumb as you doesn’t get to drone on this long!”

“Who the hell are you calling expendable?! You wanna die, pip-squeak?!”

“What the hell do you mean, ‘lack of things to do’?! Why do you feel the need to pick a fight with us every time there’s a mission briefing?!”

My rousing speech is interrupted by the jeers of around ten expendables.

Currently, the only ones present are the Combat Agents from Earth I’ve known for a long time and Alice.

“I’m important here, dammit! I’m basically your boss, so watch how you speak to me, cannon fodder!”

“Who does this jerk think he is?! Hey, let’s drag this idiot off his high horse!”

“His ego’s gotten way out of hand! Throw rocks at him!”

My short-tempered coworkers start throwing rocks at me. It seems my speech was a bit too complicated for them.

“Anyone who throws a rock at me is getting sent to the front lines! As Alice announced, we’re going to pick a fight with those Hiiragi bastards, and you’re all gonna fight with us!”

“Then open with that! Stop trying to make yourself sound important, dumbass!”

“You better be right there on the front line with us! Fighting is all you’re good at, remember?!”

...Dammit, I’ve had enough. I’m going to beat them before I beat Hiiragi.

“Stop calling me an idiot, you lot! You’re not much better than me in terms of academics!”

“Oh yeah? What high school did you go to?! I once took an entrance exam at a famous local prep school, y’know?!”

Alice picks up the loudspeaker I tossed aside so I could grapple with more of my coworkers and climbs up on to the dais.

“You can keep fighting if you want, but listen up. We’re going to take a number of our Combat Agents and invade the Toris branch of the Hiiragi Agency. A few days ago, we fought a small skirmish against them alongside the Grace Kingdom Army, and we discovered that they were in possession of both firearms and combat vehicles.”

Hearing that the enemy has firearms, the coworker I’m grappling with gets focused, as though realizing now isn’t the time for horseplay.

“So they really do have guns, huh...? Guh?! D-damn you...”

I take advantage of my coworker’s focus to land a sucker punch on his jaw. Alice continues unabated.

“The enemy’s battle technology is also quite advanced, and while we haven’t confirmed any giant robots commonly used by the Heroes of Earth, instead they’ve got giant monsters under their control. Well, to put it simply, they’re enemies on par with the Heroes of Earth. They’re an enemy we can’t afford to underestimate, so this time I’m not going to force you to participate.”

The Combat Agents all exhibit a rare degree of patience as Alice speaks. *What's gotten into her?* I wonder. She's usually the one going on about how expendable the other agents are.

Seeing that my *tsundere* partner has ditched her usual, coldhearted android persona, I say, "I thought you were the brainy partner, but it seems you really don't understand us yet. Hey, guys, tell her what you think!"

I work my coworkers into a lather and they all shout insults.

"Hey, shrimp, don't insult us, dammit! What, you think we're just gonna cower before our Hero-class opponents?! We couldn't call ourselves agents of an evil organization if we wet ourselves just because the enemy was a little strong!"

"Yeah! Fighting is our job!"

"I heard they hurt Lady Viper, Boobzilla, and even Little Russell! Why would we stay quiet when they've harmed our precious beauties?!"

"Go ahead and keep barking your usual orders. Treat us as expendable if you have to! We'll survive anyway!"

Alice seems pleased by the agents' attitudes.

"You're all so stupid and easily manipulated... But similar to the phrase 'idiots don't catch colds,' I've also heard that idiots are incredibly hard to kill. So please, remain idiots to the very end... Now then, here are your assignments!"

At Alice's words, my coworkers let out a particularly loud cheer!

"The time for subtlety has long passed. You'll need to stealthily enter Toris, but after that, we're switching to brute force. All Combat Agents are to request as much cutting-edge equipment as their Evil Points will allow. Then, Snow, Grimm, and the former Elite Four members will join you in the attack. Since your power armor will afford you more survivability, it's your job to serve as shields when the enemy forces show up. We can sustain up to five deaths. If we lose any more than that, I want you all to retreat immediately."

"Wait, you're totally using us as shields! What the hell happened to the

sentimental vibes from a few seconds ago?!”

“‘We can sustain up to five deaths’?! Could you adjust those terms a little?!”

“Weren’t you supposed to be a high-spec android?! Come up with a better plan, dammit!”

I thought she’d finally started understanding the human heart, but I guess that was just my imagination.

Since I wasn’t assigned to the front lines, I shout derisively at my coworkers:

“Stop whining like little children! You know Alice is smart! It’s about time you learned to trust her! ...So what should I do? I’m gonna deal the super-epic finishing blow while the expendables are busy buying us time, right?”

Alice steps off the dais.

“You’re coming with me to the front lines. I already told you. The time for subtlety is over. No sneaky tricks this time.”

She lost me.

“Wait, they’ve got a giant kitty that can shrug off gunfire. They’re gonna use it as a shield. Engaging in a firefight with a group like that is just begging for death!”

“It’ll be fine. Trust in my high-spec brain.”

She wants me to trust her? I’m sorry, but I just don’t see how brute forcing our way forward is gonna work against a group like Hiiragi.

“Can’t you be like Lady Lilith and get us a plane? Let’s just drop bombs on them with that! There’s gotta be a better option than a full-frontal assault! Aren’t you supposed to be smarter than this?!”

“You’ve all been wasting your Evil Points, so we can’t afford anything that expensive. I keep telling you to go above and beyond with your acts of villainy. But you just haven’t been performing.”

“I’m working hard every day! I’ve been having a ton of fun sexually harassing people! Dammit, I’ll do it! I’ll show you my power as the hardest-to-kill Combat Agent in all of Kisaragi!”

Alice's chiding has gotten me all fired up, and I prepare to order more equipment from Japan.

3

In the wasteland outside of Hideout City, Snow looks up and stares blankly.

"Hey, Rose, let me touch it, too! It's not fair to hog it to yourself!"

Leaving Snow to her stunned silence at the sheer size of Mr. Mogero, Grimm starts screeching up at Rose atop Mr. Mogero's head. Rose looks smugly down.

"Since he's now my underling, I can't let anyone else on. Not even you, Grimm."

"Why? Alice was the one who fixed it, and Russell was the one who told you how to activate it! You didn't do anything, Rose!"

We watch as Grimm tries to scramble up to the top of Mr. Mogero with Rose constantly discharging electricity to deter her.

"Why won't you let me up there?! Where's the harm in me joining you for a little! Hey, Rose, if you can make it move while seated up there, does that mean I potentially could, too?"

"It's just cooler if he's a special robot that only I can control. That's why I'm not letting anyone else in here. So what are you planning to do on this mission, Grimm? You haven't been much help lately, so I think you should show off your worth for once."

"Oh, wow. You get asked to pilot a giant robot and suddenly you're all high-and-mighty. I'll have you know I also received an important assignment on this mission. In fact, I'm pretty much the star of the show this time!"

For this mission, Grimm was asked to place a curse on all of Toris.

Not the people of Toris, the kingdom.

The plan is for her to curse the land itself and leave our mark on it.

Ordinarily, there is no way such a large-scale curse would work, but...

"I've received items bursting with the love and respect that the demons all

feel for Viper...”

After giving up on climbing atop Mr. Mogero, Grimm returns to her wheelchair. The items she is preciously cradling on her lap are items rich in sentimental value that the demon residents of Hideout City donated to the cause. When we told them that we wanted to get revenge for what Hiiragi did to Viper, just about all of them readily relinquished their most prized possessions.

“They’re all mementos with an extraordinary amount of sentimental value. For people to hand them over without a trace of hesitation, that girl must be beloved by all those demons. I’m so jealous... I hate her... I hate how popular she is!”

“H-hey, she’s not the one you should be cursing! Don’t get ahead of yourself!”

Well, we’re cursing the land of Toris, not its people. So hopefully, the potential backfire won’t put her life at risk...

Suddenly Snow, looking up at Mr. Mogero from astride her unicorn, speaks up.

“It seems we’re ready.”

Snow has an unusually determined expression on her face, with two magic swords on her hip and her katana strapped to her back.

The two magic swords are her old faithfuls, Flame-something and Ice-whatever.

The katana is the one that became her favorite after Tiger Man gifted it to her.

But I guess that isn’t enough to satisfy her, because on the side of the unicorn’s saddle are multiple magic swords encased in their scabbards.

We all have on our game faces today.

My coworkers are fully equipped with the latest weaponry and are all wearing optical camo.

Grimm is carrying the mementos she got from the demons, and even Rose atop Mr. Mogero looks full of enthusiasm.

Russell, who has taken off his maid outfit, is dressed in the outfit he was wearing when we first met him, and Heine's expression takes on a sharper cast as she idly handles her sorcerer stone.

At the center of them all are Alice and myself, looking the same as ever, more or less.

"Looks like everyone's ready to go. Are you *sure* you need me to come along?"

"You're the branch manager, here. Just man up already."

Snow's expression twists into a thin smile at Alice's and my lack of tension.

"You two don't change, even at a time like this. I suppose that was true when we attacked the Demon Lord's Castle as well. You kept teasing me even though it was the night before a decisive battle..."

Snow waxes nostalgic as she stares off into the distance...

"<Hey, Alice, what's gotten into her? She's being really weird today. I'm scared she's gonna trigger a death flag or something.>"

"<Well, our opponent this time is one that'll even kill Combat Agents if they hit us where it hurts. No doubt she's just steeling herself since she's about to face an enemy stronger than the Demon Lord's Army. We might have overdone it on the scare tactics...>"

It's time to settle the score. We're an evil organization. We can't let the enemy think we're weak.

"Demon Lord Viper, are you watching us...? We won't let them have their way with your precious demons. So please, rest in peace...", Snow murmurs as she gazed up at the cloudy sky. I'm not sure how to tell her that Vi's currently playing video games in her room...

It is at this moment that Alice receives the report from the scouting party on her radio.

The voices that leak from the radio report that the giant cat is still camped out in front of the city of Toris like a giant feline sentinel.

According to the report, there is no sign of enemy troops and we are free to

launch our assault, provided we aren't worried about the cat.

After listening to the report, Alice addresses the others.

"I don't know who these Hiiragi bastards think they are, but Kisaragi claimed this planet first. If they're going to claim to be agents of order, then proudly don the mantle of chaos! I've made enough justifications for you to attack them, so all you need to do is follow through!"

That's right. We're Combat Agents for an evil organization. We're invaders.

Usually, we don't even need a good reason to start a war. As my hardworking, degenerate coworkers grin in anticipation...

"Let's go, you apes! To war!"

""""""""""WHOOOOOOO!""""""""""

Alice smiles and holds a fist of encouragement high in the air!

4

"It's pretty cold today, isn't it? Usually it's too hot to sleep. What's going on?"

"I'm sure there's days like that. The biggest problem with the surface is the unstable weather..."

There are two soldiers exchanging words as they stand in front of the small watch station atop the outer wall.

"...Huh? It's raining! I didn't expect it to rain around here..."

"Dammit, our electronics are going to get wet... I wish I could dress like the surface dwellers in Toris and wear lighter clothing... Hey, did you hear something in the distance?"

The demotivated soldier notices something and speaks up as he throws a tarp over some sort of machine.

And then—

"Whoa!"

"Lightning?! Hey, are we seriously gonna have a storm?"

—electricity arcs across the sky, and the soldiers cover their ears as thunder rumbles a split second later.

And just as the soldiers feared, the first droplets begin to fall. In the blink of an eye, the light rain becomes a heavy downpour that muffles all other sounds in the area.

Shortly after, they rush to take shelter within the watch station.

“Combat Agent Six here. The guards have temporarily taken shelter. Who made the noise? We would’ve been in trouble without that lightning. Over.”

I report the situation over my comm unit, then return to watching over the surroundings. I use my optical camo to hide near the main gate and outer wall that protects the city of Toris.

“Alice here. Grimm’s the one who made the noise. She’s barefoot, and since she’s not used to walking, she tripped. Has the giant cat noticed you? If it does, spread some catnip and flee. Also, are you wearing your optical camo? It also serves as a raincoat. Make sure you have it on during this storm, or you might catch a cold. Over.”

So much nitpicking. Who is she, my mom?

“Everything’s fine. It hasn’t noticed me because of the storm. The giant cat is currently being soaked by the rain and curling up for warmth... What should I do? I wanna adopt it...”

“We’re already caring for two chimeras and the Combat Agents. We can’t take care of it.”

Don’t put us in the same league as pets, dammit.

“This rain is a blessing that the princess brought us at great cost to herself. We won’t miss this opportunity. I’m going to move everyone close now. Let me know when the enemy resumes their watch. Over.”

“Yeah, Tillis really took one for the team this time. We won’t let the opportunity go to waste. Over.”

Yes, this storm is caused by Tillis. But she didn’t use magic to call this storm. Before heading to Toris, we took the demons from Hideout City to the palace

and asked her to do *that*. We asked her to chant the prayer in front of the demons.

There's a condition for using the rain-making artifact, after all. It's required that a royal chant the prayer to the artifact in front of a large number of people.

Alice's guess was that the reason the artifact will only function when a royal chants the prayer is that it has a biometric security system tied to the DNA of the royal family to avoid having the artifact get misused, and it requires a large number of people to watch because it is fueled by the magic from the people gathered in front of it.

Meaning, we had Tillis shout out that prayer.

Since she threw a tantrum and said she would never say those words in front of her own people, as a compromise (a loophole, really), we brought the particularly discrete demons, but...

"Dammit, I should've recorded Tillis with a digital camera!"

"I recorded it, so relax. But damn, there's good sides to the princess, too. While she looked a little foolish when she shouted the words for Snow's sake, it was still a cool move."

Snow beseeched the princess for a large amount of rain so that she could risk her life to infiltrate Toris. And Tillis, with great reluctance, accepted that request.

It's this moment I notice someone approaching from the darkness.

It's the wet noise of footsteps in the rain that confirms the others have arrived.

"AIIII right, is everyone here? I can't tell if you're here thanks to the optical camo. Everyone, report in!"

"All but Rose and Snow held hands on the way, so we're all here. And everyone's present right now."

"Aww, all friendly now, aren't you? ...Err, wait. I know about Rose since she's on Mr. Mogero, but what happened with Snow?"

As I exchange whispers with Alice, something white appears from the

darkness as though to answer my question.

Because she can't see us, Snow, who is astride her unicorn and soaking wet with rain, looks to be on the verge of tears, desperate to find us.

Ah, so she couldn't fully cover the unicorn's large body with optical camo...

"We were supposed to be stealthy until we got inside the city. What are we gonna do with her?"

"I guess we have no choice. Snow can wait a short distance away."

Just as Alice is about to issue her next orders, I'm struck with an idea.

I get close to Snow.

"Eeep! S-someone just touched my butt...! H-hey, who just touched my chest?!"

<Evil Points Acquired> <Evil Points Acquired>

I was going to criticize her for falling behind so quickly, but I guess I'll let her go this time in exchange for the Evil Points.

I look to the watch station on the outer wall...

"Hey, dammit, stop! Six, I know it's you touching me! S-stop...!"

...Seems there are others who had the same idea I did.

If you're going to earn Evil Points, do it a little more quietly, will you?

"Six, dammit, that's enough...! W-wait, there are too many hands! So it's not just one of you groping me?!"

Finally out of patience, Snow draws a sword.

"Whoever was touching me, speak up! I'm going to charge you for every grope!"

"Who goes there?! ...What are you doing out this late?!"

"Unicorns are the military mounts of the kingdom of Grace! It's an intruder! Sound the alarm!"

The two soldiers come bounding out of the watch station and draw conclusions based on seeing Snow.

Mixed in with the sound of heavy rain comes the high-pitched whine of a siren.

“Dammit, Snow really stepped in it this time! Well, no use crying over getting discovered! Let’s go, you apes! Charge straight through!”

“””””Chaaaaarge!”””””

“I don’t agree with it being treated like my mistake! I’ll find all of you that touched me!”

As Alice shouts out the orders, we throw aside our optical camo and attack the soldiers—!

“Enemy sighted! Enemy sighted! Currently, an unidentified intruder has entered the city and is conducting activities related to sabotage! Civilians are to remain inside! We repeat...”

The announcement rang throughout the city of Toris.

Sounds like the other agents are already busy.

Originally, our plan called for acting as a group until the enemy found us, but we’re improvising here.

“Heine and Russell, go attack the soldiers’ barracks. If you encounter the enemy, fight with civilian houses at your backs. The enemy claims to be the good guys, so they shouldn’t be able to fire at you under those circumstances.”

“So we’re going to use civilian housing as a shield... Well, okay, fine. I mean, we’re former Elite Four and demons to boot...”

I stand next to Alice as she issues instructions to Heine.

“Listen, Six, opportunities like this are rare! There’s a row of luxury shops that cater to nobles in front of us! We’re right in the middle of enemy territory! If we set fire to those shops, we can do major damage to their economy!” chirps Snow.

“Well sure, that’s probably true. But in your case, I’m pretty sure you just wanna loot them! To go out of your way to loot and pillage during an assault, just what’s wrong with Grace’s knights?! What kind of knight are you?!”

Snow was mere moments away from forgetting the purpose of the mission and going on a looting spree.

“What happened to your desire to avenge Vi?! All of us were kinda moved by your speech, y’know?! Now I just want to take that back!”

“That’s that, and this is this! Why don’t you come with me? Look, there’s a store that appears to sell jewelry. I’ll let you have that, so leave the weapons shop next to it for me.”

The knight makes an awful proposal and readies the bags she loaded onto the unicorn’s back.

...Did she seriously bring the unicorn to Toris just so it could carry her loot?

As I debate whether to just give up on Snow, Grimm speaks up, smiling happily while carrying around the mementos from the demons in a big sack like Santa Claus.

“Commander, I’m ready to rain down curses whenever you are! Oh, should we head closer to the center of the city? Hee-hee-hee-hee, I’m going to curse all the couples in Toris to meet the person of their dreams! That way if I get backlash from the curse, happiness will rain down upon me instead! And what makes it even better is that the couples I do curse will end up breaking up because they’ve met someone better!”

“Stop! Don’t waste the demons’ mementos on such a useless thing! You’ve got a different curse you’re supposed to put on this place, remember?!”

We’re in the middle of enemy territory, but none of them seem to have any sense of urgency appropriate to the occasion!

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Now’s the time to teach the humans to fear us demons! Let’s go, Russell! I’ll engulf Toris in a sea of flames!”

“All right, I’ll make sure that humanity remembers they’re merely my playthings! Once Heine’s finished burning everything to a crisp, I’ll wash it away with a mighty flood!”

“No one told you to go that far! Your orders were to attack the barracks!”

Heine and Russell run off to attack the barracks with a noticeable pep in their

step.

I watch them and speak to Alice, who's issuing orders.

"I guess Kisaragi's folks were pretty normal, huh? The people of this planet are ludicrous!"

"It's just the people around you who are weird. You know what they say about birds of a feather, yeah?"

As explosions ring out amid the sound of pelting rain, I grab Snow and Grimm by the scruffs of their necks and start toward the palace, my main objective—

And stop as I see a familiar face on the main road to the palace.

"Y-you... I knew you were evil, but I didn't think you'd go this far..."

Adelie stares at us in shock, too surprised to even wring the rain from her hair.

5

As Adelie continues to stand in stunned silence, I point my index finger at her.

"Don't make it sound like you're just some bystander. You're the cause of all this chaos!"

"M-m-m-m-me?! What are you talking about?! How did my everyday good deeds result in terrorism in the city of Toris?!"

Adelie, who seems to have been caught off guard by my remark, tries to play dumb.

It seems that Snow can't just let Adelie's statement go without comment, and she hops on to her unicorn, drawing her sword.

"How dare you continue to mock us, even now! Don't think we'll simply forget all that you've done to the Grace Kingdom! We're here because we've accepted your declaration of war!"

"Really, what are you going on about?! What do you mean, declaration of war?! I don't know anything about that!"

Well, true, we haven't gotten a formal declaration of war by letter or by

messenger.

But...

“We’re already well aware that you were conducting acts of sabotage to cause a rebellion in Grace. Not only that, but sending your monster to invade us is clearly an act of war.”

“Causing a rebellion?! I don’t know anything about that. And what do you mean, sending a monster to invade you?!”

Even after Grimm points out her crimes, Adelie, of course, shows no sign of admitting to them.

Tired of Adelie’s attempts at playing dumb, Alice holds up her shotgun and speaks.

“Don’t play innocent after all that you’ve done. Of course, we don’t have any clear evidence that’s what you were planning. Obviously, no operative is going to be stupid enough to leave evidence of their intentions. But we’re the Kisaragi Corporation, an evil organization with a long history. So long as we think you’re responsible, we don’t need evidence. Besides...”

I cut Alice off by putting an arm in front of her.

Sorry, but it’s my right to speak up as Viper’s playmate.

“And you even hurt our boss who’s been working so hard lately that she’s lost a lot sleep. We, the Grace branch of the Kisaragi Corporation, are extremely pissed off about that. And we always get even. We don’t care who you guys are. We’re here for revenge! Once I beat your ass and kidnap you, I’m going to force you to apologize to Vi!”

“I really don’t know what you’re on about, but I’m well aware that you’re evil! I’m Adelheid Krueger, the Umbral Savior! Member of the Hiiragi Agency of Order! Don’t think you can win with such a small number of allies, Agentsix!”

At Adelie’s declaration, Snow spurs on her unicorn.

Despite the fact that we’re on a wet cobblestone road, Grimm kneels in place and clasps her hands together.

“I’m not Agentsix. I’m Combat Agent Six, employee of the Kisaragi

Corporation! I'll accept that you're a Hero. The accepted wisdom is for Combat Agents to fight Heroes with an advantage in numbers. So don't hate me for this!"

With that, I begin running in the pouring rain.

"Diiiiiiiie, Hero!"

At my high-pitched screech, Alice provides cover fire with her shotgun.

Adelie is already on guard when she sees Alice's weapon, and she crosses her arms in front of her face to guard herself from the scattering of buckshot.

Snow, who reached Adelie a step before me, shouts, "My name is Snow, knight captain of the kingdom of Grace! I hereby announce my claim to the head of the treacherous Adelie!"

"Don't call me treacherous when you're the corrupt governor!"

Even as she gives an idiotic response, Adelie uses her gauntlet to block Snow's burning blade.

Adelie grabs the blade, showing no concern about the heat from the flames. Snow quickly lets go of the blade and grabs the hilt of another sword on her saddle, draws it, and strikes at Adelie with it.

Adelie tosses the sword in her hand aside and dodges Snow's slash with a backstep, prompting Snow to throw the sword in her hand at her before drawing the ice sword on her hip.

Snow spurs her horse forward as Adelie dodges the sword thrown in her direction with just a tilt of her head.

...With just this short exchange I once again recognize Adelie's sheer skill as a combatant.

We're in the middle of enemy territory, and there are still soldiers scurrying about. It'll be bad for us if the fight goes on too long.

I run forward as Snow and Adelie are engaged in a fierce struggle.

"Release restraints!"

<Removing restraints from power armor. Proceed?>

I shout as I run. Behind me, Alice begins speaking into her comm link.

“Addressing all Combat Agents. Alice here. Given the difficulty in entering the palace, we’re now switching to Operation Mogero. Wrap up your sabotage activities and make immediate preparations to retreat.”

<Once restraints are released, you will have one minute to—>

As though to cover up that announcement, Grimm speaks in a sultry voice.

“It’s here, it’s here! This is going to be big! I feel the strength of the people’s feelings and the power of my god! O Great Lord Zenarith, deliver disaster unto this realm! Bring down misery and woe upon this land’s people!”

“What’s with that crazy woman?! Is she some sort of evil ancient spirit?!”

Even Adelie is put off by the sheer enthusiasm of Grimm’s prayer.

I, of course, find myself cringing as well.

“The people of this land shall be cursed to dream of lovemaking sessions with orcs for three days and three nights!”

Perhaps because of the sheer intensity of the curse, the ground beneath me shakes.

<Releasing restraints. To cancel, please revoke the order during the countdown...>

Adelie’s armor glows momentarily as the curse also impacts her, and for some reason, Grimm falls over dead. Alice promptly collects her corpse.

In that same instant, Adelie ducks down to deliver a palm strike to Snow just as Snow is reaching for the katana on her back...

<...9...8...>

Adelie looks around in confusion at an even larger rumble from the ground, even as she took down Snow with a single blow.

“An earthquake in Toris...? First the storm and now this. There’s something odd going on tonight!”

Just when I am about a step away from Adelie, there is an enormous tremor, and the asphalt that covers the streets of Toris cracks and crumbles.

Mr. Mogero appears from the hole in the ground, and...

“PYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

...lets out a cry that sounds like metal twisting together as its giant body emerges, backlit by a lightning flash.

“Wh-wh-what...is that...?! Looks just like the Sand King, but it’s a giant metal mole!”

<...5...4...>

Having been distracted by Mr. Mogero’s sudden appearance, Adelie now notices my approach and falls into a defensive stance.

“That robot’s your fault, too, isn’t it? This is the middle of Toris. If there’s something that noticeable standing there, the others will get here soon. I can deal with that giant robot so long as the reinforcements help me. Then...”

<...2...1...>

Adelie crosses her arms in front of her face and slowly exhales.

With that, something resembling static electricity fills the air around her...!

“Let’s go, Agentsix! Justice Attaaaaaack!”

<Power armor restraints released.>

Adelie draws back her hands from her face, holding them a moment by her hip before she thrusts them out with a shout.

“Umbral Thunder!”

“Agent Six Kiiiiick!”

With my restraints released, I accelerate and quickly let loose with a flying kick.

Surprised by my sudden acceleration, Adelie’s reaction is a split second too slow.

Before her lightning-wreathed fist can reach me, Adelie is flung backward with a sound like two dump trucks colliding—!

“Wow, Six, she’s still conscious. That was a kick that could have killed a Hero...

So what's up with this armor?" says Alice, patting Adelie, who is sprawled out on the ground.

Considering that Alice feels the need to inject her with nanobots, Adelie may be conscious, but she's in poor condition.

"After all, the flying kick is a terrifying move that's killed countless mutants. If anything, it's impressive she's still alive after getting hit by one."

Hearing that, Adelie seems to want to comment, but she has taken so much damage that all she can do is softly groan.

"Heh-heh. Well done, Six. I must say, I'm impressed that she and I were evenly matched even though I was equipped with my full arsenal..."

The loser who got knocked down by Adelie approaches while rubbing the spot on her stomach that suffered a nasty palm strike.

"You weren't evenly matched. You lost even though Alice and I were covering for you."

"Quiet. I only lost because I didn't bring the cursed blade Deadstriker with me. If I had her with me, I would've won," says Snow in a childish voice before averting her gaze. Rose hurries over after hopping off Mr. Mogero.



“Justice Lady! You’re the Justice Lady who bought me food in Grace! Why is this happening?!”

“Y-you... You’re the girl with the heart so pure, it made the crystal ball shine white...”

Rose and Adelie couldn’t have spent too much time together, so when did they get so friendly?

Had she been trying to recruit Rose as well...?

“Oh... I never expected you to be the pilot of that giant robot... So was it all just an act when you listened to me and agreed that justice was a good thing...?”

“I was only half listening because you promised to buy me meat skewers if I heard you out. But I do think being an ally of justice is a nice thing.”

After hearing this exchange, I realize they didn’t have much of a relationship after all.

“Haah... I’ve been soundly beaten... You know, I know I’m not the smartest, but I was at least confident in my fighting ability...”

“What a coincidence. My brain’s useless, but fighting is my one and only talent.”

Hearing that, Adelie chuckles and then coughs in pain.

It’s hard not to feel an odd sense of camaraderie with an enemy after a hard-fought battle. We’re both those who fight for a living, after all.

I turn to Adelie, who is still laboring to breathe.

“Looks like you’re friendly with Rose. Since you fed her skewers, I’ll hold off on kidnapping you and settle with you apologizing to Vi. This time.”

“Hey, Six, you’re probably freaked out because Adelie was hurt more badly than you expected, yes?”

Alice teases me, but Adelie seems concerned about something other than that.

“Vi...? Um, I really don’t know what you’re talking about...”

.....?

“Playing dumb despite being this badly hurt? What’s wrong with her?”

“Um, I think she really doesn’t have any idea what we’re talking about...”

Just as Snow and I exchange glances and tilt our heads...

“All residents hearing this message, please evacuate the area at once. In a moment, the giant mole robot Mogero will be performing its final ‘fireworks display.’ This will probably be the fanciest day in Mogero’s short robot life.”

That announcement rings out from the speaker attached to Mr. Mogero.

It is delivered in Alice’s voice, but it is probably a prerecorded message.

“If this entire area is going to go up in a blaze, then it’d be a shame to leave all these great swords here! I’ll go save them...!”

The fact that Snow came up with a convenient excuse to go looting seems to clue in Adelie to what is about to happen, and she looks up at me with a concerned expression.

“...If this is a joke, it isn’t funny.”

“...Sorry, my partner’s a big fan of self-destructing. I tried really hard to stop her, but she wouldn’t listen to me and insisted she wanted to give the decrepit Mr. Mogero one last chance to shine...”

The whole point of this attack was to leave a big mark on Toris to make sure they respected Kisaragi.

Starting with the attacks from my coworkers, there was also the attack on the barracks by Heine and Russell, Snow’s looting, and Grimm’s curse.

I’m pretty sure the mark we’re leaving behind is already big enough, but...

“Self-destruction is a robot’s final moment to shine! Don’t underestimate Kisaragi, dammit—!”

“Are you serious?! Are you seriously serious?! SERIOUSLY?! You heartless, ruthless, evil organization! You’ll pay for this! AHHHHHHHHH! AHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH!”

Adelie, who has yet to regain full control of her body, tries desperately to get

away from Mr. Mogero. Her voice has a certain sadness in it distinct to losing. It is a show truly comparable to Mr. Mogero's final fireworks display.

6

It has been three days since Mr. Mogero went up in a flashy blaze of glory. We are in the conference room inside the Grace Kingdom's palace. There is a palpable tension in the room when the bureaucrat from Grace Kingdom opens the proceedings.

"W-well then, let us begin the cease-fire negotiations between the Grace-Kisaragi Alliance and the Hiiragi Agency..."

At the table is the bureaucrat who represents the Grace Kingdom, as well as Alice and me.

On the other side of the table sits the representatives from Hiiragi: Adelie, who is still covered in various scratches and bruises, and a handsome man who appears to be her boss.

Adelie sits right across from me, and she glares daggers at me, her brow twitching.

"A pleasure to meet you, representatives of Kisaragi. My name is Fritz. First of all, allow me to apologize for all the trouble that my subordinate, Adelheid, has caused you."

The handsome, silver-haired, blue-eyed man spoke with a faintly high-pitched voice before deeply bowing his head to us.

"D-Director?! Wait! I was just carrying out the dictates of justice! There's nothing that you need to apologize for on my behalf! We're the victims here! We were suddenly attacked, and just look at what happened to Toris...! The scars left by these people are still there! The residents have been plagued by daily nightmares involving orc intercourse...!"

Adelie starts on a heated rant, but Fritz doesn't even turn to face her and continues, "...Watch your tone, Ms. Adelheid. Explain what it is you've done while in the Grace Kingdom."

“At once, sir! First, I learned that the Grace Kingdom was so chronically short on water that it had to force a young boy wearing girl’s clothes to create water with magic! That being the case, I handed out the water crystals that can be harvested in these lands to merchants who seemed to be pure of heart. This way, they could help the people of Grace by selling the water crystals for cheap!”

Adelie speaks confidently and puffs out her chest before Alice hands over documents and opens her mouth to speak.

“As you can see from these documents, the water crystals you handed out were bought and resold in large quantities by the merchants and are being traded at an enormous premium. Grace Kingdom’s sensitive to changes in the water market. Your interference has caused a serious problem. Thanks to your unnecessary meddling, rumors have spread that Princess Tillis was smuggling in water crystals and unfairly profiting from their sale. It created a major problem, with the nobles gathering at the palace in protest.”

“Huh?”

Adelie is shell-shocked. The bureaucrat nods intently along to Alice’s explanation. Alice then follows up.

“That’s not all. Other issues included patrolling the city despite not being a police officer and unjustly cracking down on the residents. Trying to force orcs to leave the factory they had agreed under a contract to work in. Also, speaking of the boy dressed in a maid outfit, you tried to kidnap him, too.”

“W-wait! About that... The flame of justice that burns deep within my heart just got out of control for a little bit! ...I’m sorry, I’ll certainly apologize for that... But—!”

Alice holds out her hand to cut off Adelie’s attempt to say more.

“You declared that Snow, who had been serving as a governor, was corrupt in front of the public and shattered her reputation. In spite of everything, Snow was a skilled governor. Yes, she may have accepted some bribes, but her leadership skills ensured that everything ran smoothly and everyone was happy.”

“Y-you’re mistaken! I didn’t know she was so good at governing, but if anything, having a skilled person engage in corruption would have resulted in something terrible happening in the long run!”

As Adelie desperately pleads her case, Alice hands her another document.

“Snow was an orphan who grew up in the slums, and she had been donating a portion of the bribes she accepted to the orphanage that had taken care of her when she was a child...”

“...Wha—?”

At learning an unexpected fact, this time, Adelie is at a loss for words.

This was something I’d learned recently as well, but that greedy woman had actually been donating some money to the orphanage. I was touched by the story when I first heard it, but naturally, there was an ulterior motive behind the donations.

Kids in the slums are keen eyed.

Apparently, Snow got the orphans on her side with her donations and used the information they gathered to help advance her own career.

That was the reason she always seemed so well-informed.

“She, of course, knows that it’s wrong. But I guess she wanted to help those poor children even if it meant engaging in corruption.”

“H-h-h-hold on! Hold on just a minute...!”

Adelie’s brow begins to bead with sweat after hearing of Snow’s unexpected kindness.

...Obviously, we didn’t mention the fact that the amount Snow donated to the orphanage was only a tiny portion of the bribes and hush money she’d collected. In fact, it made up less than 1 percent of the total.

“The same could be said of Tillis. Tragically, that princess lost her older brother, the Chosen One, and took over running the country after her father, the king, vanished. You called her evil, but she wasn’t always the way she is now. She took on the dirty work to protect her people. It was the only way she could face off against all the scheming nobles.”

“...?!”

Adelie’s demeanor goes completely sideways with confusion as she learns that the princess, who was still barely old enough to be considered anything other than a girl, is shouldering that much responsibility on her delicate shoulders.

Good work, Alice! Press the attack!

“But you, in your ignorance, decided to label her a Demon Lord and put a bounty on her head. As a result, the nobles and thugs started plotting her death, and she’s been having trouble sleeping ever since!”

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!”

When Alice points her index finger at her face, Adelie grabs her own head and begins to wail.

...Tillis actually took advantage of the bounty on her head to appear defenseless and serve as bait for the nobles she wanted to get rid of, having Combat Agent Ten capture the nobles when they attacked her. Basically, she entrapped them.

I want to mention that’s why the crystal ball turned such a dark shade of black when Tillis touched it, but it seems Adelie is in no state to think of that fact and trembles as she exchanges glances with her boss.

...Ah, seems like we’ve landed some good blows, but I should follow that up now.

“There’s also the fact that it’s because you let your pet wander off that Vi, the girl who was so pure of heart that it made the karma-measurement crystal shine a blinding white, got so badly hurt. And to elaborate, that was why it escalated into war this time. So if you’re feeling even a little guilty for all that’s happened, you should apologize for being born!”

The giant monster that protects Toris turned out to be Adelie’s pet.

Viper got hurt that time because Adelie’s coworkers had chased after Adelie’s pet and inadvertently crossed the border into Grace.

When they saw us attempting to capture the cat, they tried to subdue us

without hurting anyone. But upon seeing how strong Viper was, they panicked and opened fire.

Part of me wonders how such a stupid incident could escalate this far, but it's true that there have been incidents on Earth where soldiers chasing a feral dog across a border started a war.

Looking at Adelie's face, it's clear she's one push away from breaking.

"I-I-I-I'm sorry... H-how can I atone...?"

Adelie is torn up by guilt and Alice hands her another document to render the coup de grâce.

"Thanks to you going around telling everyone that the Grace Kingdom's artifact was fixed, Tillis was left in a serious bind. If you really feel guilty about it, you should pay us reparations and give us rights to the water crystals..."

"Wait! I don't know anything about that one! Honest! That's not my fault at all! ...Director! Please believe me on this one!"

We safely concluded the cease-fire negotiations.

While they will pay restitution to Viper for her injuries, given that Kisaragi went too far, we agreed to sweep this under the rug as an unfortunate incident caused by a misunderstanding.

I figured that Alice would try to squeeze them for more, but it seems the ruthless android has developed something of a conscience.

With the various parts of the conflict settled, we are on our way back to Hideout City when Adelie stops us, not even bothering to hide her sour mood.

"Well, you've really done it this time."

Adelie spits out the words, prompting me to snort derisively at her.

"What is it? You seem pretty unhappy. We're not exactly pleased about not getting a giant reparations payment from you, y'know. I was planning to buy a ton of gifts for Vi using the money we wrung out of you guys."

Adelie is about to comment, but she grits her teeth and swallows her words.

After she calms herself and straightens up...

“You got the better of me, but I won’t lose next time. I’m an agent of order, and a watchwoman besides. I’m the sentinel who surveys the world to make sure that people don’t acquire excessive power. I am the one who exterminates all evil,” Adelie says with a serious expression.

“You’ll eventually learn the reason why we’ve come back to the surface. And you’ll also learn what happened on this planet and how the world has come to be the way it is...”

She speaks with sadness in her eyes and looks off into the distant sky.

“You hear that, Alice? She makes it sound like there’s a giant mystery, but it all sounds familiar somehow.”

“Yep, so it’s gotta be that old cliché, right? There was a super high-tech civilization on this planet, but the idiots in charge went too far and the world was almost destroyed by pollution and the like, right? Then, they probably took shelter in a colony in the sky or something.”

“How do you know all that?! ...I—I mean... No! You’re wrong! It’s not such a simple story that you can explain the whole situation in under ten seconds. Anyway, it’s not time for you to know the truth yet. You know about the legend of the Demon Lord and the Chosen One, right? It seems that some people were already aware, but that story doesn’t end with the death of the Demon Lord. Even if things have changed a bit, there’ll be a new revelation...”

As Adelie begins to go on a weird tangent, Alice and I turn to go back to Hideout City.

“Don’t think you’ve won. We might have lost the battle, but we won the negotiations. You wanted the water crystals in lieu of reparations, right?”

Adelie seems to have become fed up with us ignoring her, and she tries to taunt us, but...

“You’re pretending not to hear me, but I can tell you’re frustrated! I can see your shoulders shaking, Combat Agentsix! I’m Adelheid Krueger, the Umbral Savior! I’ll consider this a tie! This time! Since you call yourselves an evil corporation, I’ll continue to stand between you and the world!”

I take Adelie’s declaration of hostility on my back and keep walking without

uttering a word.

7

As the bike's headlight lights the pitch-black mine path, we proceed along while avoiding going too fast.

We've gone quite a distance from Hideout City, and it seems like we should probably set up freight rails and such inside the mine and build out the infrastructure.

Alice, who sits on the back of the motorcycle, peeks her head out from behind my shoulder.

"We're almost at the destination. But damn, Mr. Mogero did some good work."

"Doesn't your heart ache to have made Mr. Mogero self-destruct after doing such good work?"

"What are you talking about? Mr. Mogero was old and, after all the wear and tear, nearing the end of his useful life. He was happy to have one final chance to shine."

"Seriously? Can you really understand the feelings of a robot? ...Ah, it's coming into view."

Arriving at the end of the mineshaft, I stop the bike and look up.

"Oh damn! These are all water crystals?! Just how much will these add up to?!"

There is a veritable wall of blue stones in front of me.

...We are deep underground, in Toris's water-crystal mines.

As we were preparing for our invasion of Toris, Alice and Rose used Mr. Mogero's abilities to dig the tunnel from Hideout City to this seam.

This was the job she was going to have Russell do at first.

"We could have gotten the same result using a shield machine, but you don't have nearly enough Evil Points to order one of those. We got lucky this time.

There was also a reason for Mr. Mogero to self-destruct. We collapsed some of the tunnels under Toris to make it harder for them to find our tunnel. That'll force them to spend time repairing their own infrastructure and buy time until they can resume their mining operations."

"...I see. While they're rebuilding their city, we can take all their resources. Damn, you really are an evil one!"



“Ah, c’mon now, you can’t say that to me, partner. Ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“Bwah-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!”

Toris’s strength came from the wealth they’d gotten from their plentiful resources.

Thanks to Mr. Mogero’s self-destruction, Hiiragi’s probably in no state to be mining anything.

Us sneakily stealing their resources will lead directly to undermining their strength.

Alice’s scheme this time around was a wonderful piece of work that not only brought us money but also sapped the strength from our enemies.

All we need to do is to set up infrastructure down here and have the demons of Hideout City work the mines. It’ll create jobs and bring us wealth. It’s perfect!

After we spend a bit of time cackling maniacally, we exchange glances.

“No doubt Adelie would go blind with rage if she found out. Make sure you don’t tell anyone about this, got it? Even if Adelie smirks triumphantly at you, keep this to yourself, okay?”

“That was really close, honestly. I was this close to bursting out in laughter.”

Adelie said earlier that it was a stalemate, but Alice had won the negotiations all on her own.

I imagine Adelie’s reaction on finding out about this fact in the near future...

Manic cackling echoes throughout the tunnel deep below Toris.



Epilogue



We're in Viper's office, aka our unofficial hangout spot.

"Vi, Vi, when are you gonna be done with work? You're still recovering, so you shouldn't push yourself too hard. Come play a board game with me!"

It's been a week since we negotiated the cease-fire.

Since we haven't received any complaints and they haven't moved against us, it seems Hiiragi hasn't noticed that we're poaching the water crystals.

We reinforced the tunnels using quick-drying cement, laid rails along the tunnels, and had already scaled up to full production with demon labor.

"I'd like to catch up on the work I missed due to my injury, but...all right, I'll play. Let's take a short break."

Given that Viper's working even harder than she was before her injury, I'm worried about whether she's getting enough sleep.

Viper looks around the room and smiles.

"But...let's play quietly so we don't wake the others," she whispers, putting a finger to her lips.

At Viper's feet are Rose and Russell, curled up and napping like puppies.

Next to the sofa I'm lounging on, Grimm is fast asleep in her wheelchair.

The game's designed for up to five players, so I was planning on waking them, but on second thought, they've earned their rest.

...At that moment, the sounds of military boots echoing down the hallway break the silence of the peaceful scene.

Hearing that commotion, Viper hurriedly puts on her Snake Woman helmet. There's a knock on the door. Then, without waiting for a reply, the knocker opens the door.

"Six, are you here?! Look at this medal! I'm finally back on top! My vengeance mission, conducted with small numbers, was considered a success, and I've had my knighthood restored! Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

Thanks to Snow's loud boasting and cackling, the three nappers wake up.

"What's going on? Right as I was getting comfortable... Oh, Snow, you're a knight again."

While Grimm seems displeased at being woken from her nap, she notices the medal on Snow's chest and smiles.

Yes, the corrupt knight has returned to her original position.

It seems that Tillis had meant well in transferring Snow to our ranks, but without her identity as a knight, Snow had turned into a petty criminal.

As a result, she was reknighthooded. She will continue to come to our hideout while occasionally returning to the palace to train the Grace Kingdom's soldiers.

Ironically enough, she owes her sustained freedom to Agent Ten. Thanks to his mysterious efforts, Tillis no longer needs bodyguards. Ten had been sneaking into the enemy's homes and gathering evidence of their wrongdoing. Using that evidence, Tillis was then able to crack down on her political enemies.

Currently, there is no sign of any noble uprising, and both the kingdom of Grace and Hideout City are enjoying a time of peace.

"After all, the only one suited to being at Her Highness's side is myself! I'm a little concerned that she's been lavishing Combat Agent Ten with praise for his usefulness, but the future of the kingdom seems bright!"

I turn to Snow as she continues to boast and ask, "Did you come all this way just to brag? We were about to start playing a board game. We're busy. If you don't have any other reason to be here, go home."

"W-well, yes, I did only come here to boast, so it's a little awkward when you point that out, but... Oh! There actually was something else! I also came to give

you a morsel of information I just acquired!”

Glancing longingly at the board game spread out on the table, Snow continues.

“Evidently, a kingdom on the far side of the Demon Lord territories, a place called Grunade, is in a panic because their national treasure, a giant sorcerer stone, was stolen by a monster. Without it, the kingdom can’t function... Doesn’t that sound familiar? A bit like a mysterious faction that threw our kingdom into confusion by controlling some monsters?”

Snow speaks proudly, but Russell, who is still blinking the sleep from his eyes, suddenly chimes in.

“Um, I’m pretty sure that’s Tiger Man’s fault.”

His statement is one that no one can readily refute.

“...Hey, Snow, was there any information on the monster that took the stone?”

Grimm speaks as a bead of sweat rolls down her brow.

“...It was a bipedal monster that seemed to understand human speech...”

“Yeah, that’s gotta be Tiger Man!”

I stop Grimm from sneaking out of the room to avoid the uncomfortable truth, while Snow, having heard Russell’s comments, turns her back to the room as she continues to speak.

“...The monster that was used in the heist purred a lot, suggesting it was a feline monster...”

“That’s totally Tiger Man! There’s no way that’s not Tiger Man! Stop hiding your heads in the sand and face up to reality! It’s too late to pretend you didn’t hear anything!”

AFTERWORD

Thank you for picking up Volume 6 of *Combatants Will Be Dispatched*. It is I, Natsume Akatsuki, the author.

The planet that Six has been sent to conquer is full of mysterious technology such as a floating castle, countless ruins that dot the landscape, the worn-out tank in the middle of the Grace Kingdom's city, and the artifact that makes it rain.

The faction that appeared in this volume is closely tied to those artifacts, so the secrets behind those mysterious artifacts will slowly be revealed in future volumes.

Mr. Mogero, whom Alice blew up, was actually a giant robot designed to improve the soil. It was created to counteract the Sand King's desertification, but since it probably won't be touched on in the actual novels, I thought I'd reveal that little tidbit here.

Now that's enough about this volume—time to move on to the important announcement that I touched on in the afterword of the previous volume...

Combatants Will Be Dispatched is getting an anime adaptation! Whoo-hoo!

While there's nothing more joyful for an author than to have my characters given voices and come to life on the screen, considering this will be the third adaptation after *Konosuba* and *Kemono Michi*, I'm starting to worry that I've used up all my luck for one lifetime.

I'm also prepared to apologize to the voice actors for making them say terrible things.

There's a fair amount of crass jokes and dirty humor, so I'm honestly surprised they're going to air it. But I keep telling myself it's fine, since *Konosuba* was allowed on-air.

That reminds me. It took a long time to come out with this volume, but I think I'll use the excuse that I was worn out after completing my other series, *Konosuba*.

It's not that I was particularly sick or tried to escape work, so please don't worry about that. Now that there's going to be an anime adaptation, I plan to work even harder on *Combatants*!

Speaking of which, I kept missing deadlines for this volume and would like to offer my apologies to the many people I caused problems for this volume, starting with Kakao Lanthanum. It's only thanks to your efforts that I somehow managed to get this volume across the finish line.

I now offer my apologies and thanks to everyone who was involved in the publication process.

And of course, I would once again like to offer my sincere thanks to all the readers who've picked up this volume!

Natsume Akatsuki



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