

In Another World With My Smartphone

29

Patora Fuyuhara
illustration • Eiji Usatsuka



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I met with Halle,
Melle, Ney, and Lycee
in the reception room.
Kuon was also in
attendance.

**“SO, TO
PUT THIS
AS SIMPLY
AS I CAN,
THIS CHILD
IS HALLE...
BUT ALSO
NOT.”**





The black hole,
which was around
three meters in
diameter, was roughly
three kilometers out
from the castle town.

Its surroundings
were distorted and
it almost looked as if
it was slowly rotating.
There seemed to be
little sparks coming off
of it as well.

**“WE
APPEAR
TO BE
A LITTLE
LATE.”**

Character Profiles



Elze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The elder of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. A ferocious melee fighter, she makes use of gauntlets in combat. Her personality is fairly to-the-point and blunt. She can make use of Null fortification magic, specifically the spell **[Boost]**. She loves spicy foods.



Yumina Urnea Belfast

One of Touya's wives. Princess of the Belfast Kingdom. She was twelve years old in her initial appearance, and her eyes are heterochromatic. The right is blue, while the left is green. She has mystic eyes that can discern the true character of an individual. She has three magical aptitudes: Earth, Wind, and Darkness. She's also extremely proficient with a bow and arrow. She fell in love with Touya at first sight.



Mochizuki Touya

A highschooler who was accidentally murdered by God. He's a no-hassle kind of guy who likes to go with the flow. He's not very good at reading the atmosphere, and typically makes rash decisions that bite him in the ass. His mana pool is limitless, he can flawlessly make use of every magical element, and he can cast any Null spell that he wants. He's currently the Grand Duke of Brunhild.



Sushie Urnea Ortlinde

One of Touya's wives. She was ten years old in her initial appearance. Her nickname is Sue. The niece of Belfast's king, and Yumina's cousin. Touya saved her from being attacked on the road. She has an innocently adventurous spirit.



Lucia Leah Regulus

One of Touya's wives. The Third Princess of the Regulus Empire, she's Yumina's age. She fell in love with Touya when he saved her during a coup. She likes to fight with twin blades, and she's on good terms with Yumina.



Kokonoe Yae

One of Touya's wives. A samurai girl from the far eastern land of Eashen, a country much like Japan. She tends to repeat herself and speak formally, she does. Yae is quite a glutton, eating more than most normal people would dare touch. She's a hard worker, but can sometimes slack off. Her family runs a dojo back in Eashen, and they take great pride in their craft. It's not obvious at first, but her boobs are pretty big.



Linze Silhoueska

One of Touya's wives. The younger of the twin sisters saved by Touya some time ago. She wields magic, specifically from the schools of Light, Water, and Fire. She finds talking to people difficult due to her own shy nature, but she is known to be surprisingly bold at times. Rumors say she might be the kind of girl who enjoys male on male romance... She loves sweet foods.



Paula

A stuffed toy bear animated by years upon years of the **[Program]** spell. She's the result of two-hundred years of programmed commands, making her seem like a fully aware living being. Paula... Paula's the worst!



Sakura

A mysterious girl Touya rescued in Eashen. She had lost her memories, but has now finally gotten them back. Her true identity is Farnese Forneus, daughter of the Xenoahs Overlord. Currently living a peaceful life in Brunhild, and she has joined the ranks of Touya's wives.



Leen

One of Touya's wives. Former Clan Matriarch of the Fairies, she now serves as Brunhild's Court Magician. She claims to be six-hundred-and-twelve years old, but looks tremendously young. She can wield every magical element except Darkness, meaning her magical proficiency is that of a genius. Leen is a bit of a light-hearted bully.



Hildegard Minas Lestia

One of Touya's wives. First Princess of the Knight Kingdom Lestia. Her swordplay talents earned her a reputation as a 'Knight Princess'. Touya saved her life when she was attacked by a group of Phrase, and she's loved him ever since. She's a good friend of Yae, and she stammers a bit when flustered.



Luli

The fourth of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Azure Monarch, the ruler of dragons. She often clashes with Kohaku due to her condescending personality.



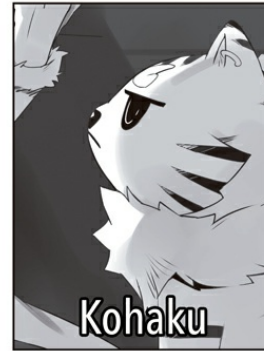
Kougyoku

The third of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She is the Flame Monarch, ruler of feathered things. Though her appearance is flashy and extravagant, she's actually quite cool and collected.



Sango and Kokuyou

The second of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. They are the Black Monarch, two in one. The rulers of scaled beasts. They can freely manipulate water. Sango is a tortoise, and Kokuyou is a snake. Sango is a female, and Kokuyou is a male (but he's very much a female at heart).



Kohaku

The first of Touya's summoned Heavenly Beasts. She's the White Monarch, the ruler of beasts, the guardian of the west and a beautiful White Tiger. She can create devastating shockwaves, and also change size at will.



Goddess of Space-time

A high-ranking goddess who controls time. She is usually found preventing or repairing any distortions in the time-line. She claims to be Touya's grandmother when she visits the surface, and is well-loved by the children.



God Almighty

The god who accidentally murdered Touya and sent him to another world. He currently leaves the curating of the world to his victim. A pleasant old man who claims to be Touya's grandfather when he visits the surface. Surprisingly quite playful.



Mochizuki Moroha

The God of Swords. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She trains the and advises the knights of Brunhild. She's gallant and brave, but also a bit of an airhead at times.



Mochizuki Karen

The God of Love. Claims to be Touya's older sister. She stays in Brunhild because she says she needs to catch a servile god, but doesn't really do all that much in the way of hunting him. She's a total pain in the butt.



Fredmonica

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hangar, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Monica for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #28. She's a funny little hard worker who has a bit of a casual streak. She's a good friend of Rosetta, and is the Gynoid with the most knowledge of the Frame Gears.



Bell Flora

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Alchemy Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Flora for short and wears a nurse outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #21. A nurse with dangerously big boobs and even more dangerous medicines.



High Rosetta

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Workshop, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Rosetta for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #27. For whatever reason, she's the most reliable of the bunch.



Francesca

Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Hanging Garden, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Cesca for short. Her Airframe Serial Number is #23. She likes to tell very inappropriate jokes.



Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Storehouse, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Parshe for short and wears a shrine maiden outfit. Her Airframe Serial Number is #26. She's tremendously clumsy, even if she's just trying to help. The amount of stuff she ruins is troublingly high.



Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Library, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Fam for short and wears a school uniform. Her Airframe Serial Number is #24. She's a total book fanatic and hates being interrupted when she's reading.



Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Tower, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Noel for short and wears a jersey. Her Airframe Serial Number is #25. She sleeps all the time, and eats laying down. Her tremendous laziness means she doesn't do all that much.



Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Rampart, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Liora for short and wears a blazer. Her Airframe Serial Number is #20. She's the oldest of the Babylon Gynoids, and would attend to the...personal night-time needs of Doctor Babylon herself. She has no experience with men.



Touya and Yumina's child, as well as the only son of the Brunhild royal family. Though always a gentleman, he appears to have inherited his father's stubbornness. He skilfully utilizes various Mystic Eyes in battle, and enjoys creating dioramas as a hobby.



One of the five great gollamancers of the Reverse World. Filled with curiosity, she appears to get along with Doctor Babylon, as the two are often found conducting experiments together.



An ancient genius from a lost civilization, reborn into an artificial body that resembles a small girl. She is the "Babylon" that created the many artifacts and forgotten technologies scattered around the world today. Her Airframe serial number is #29. She remained in stasis for five-thousand years before finally being awakened.



Terminal Gynoid in charge of the Research Lab, one of the Babylon relics. She's called Tica for short. Her Airframe serial number is #22. Of the Babylon Numbers, she is the one who best embodies Doctor Babylon's inappropriately perverse side. She is in charge of maintenance for the Numbers alongside Doctor Babylon.



Touya and Lucia's child, and the fifth daughter. Good at cooking, she loves feeding her father her creations. She often finds herself at odds with her mother, but they're close underneath their competitive spirit.



Touya and Yae's child, and the oldest daughter. She is a reliable older sister who frequently looks after her younger siblings. As she can use [Gate], she went on a pilgrimage to hone her skills upon arriving in the past, since she knew she could teleport back to Brunhild at any time.



Touya and Linze's child, and the seventh daughter. Similar to Elna, she takes after Elze more than her mother. After first arriving in this timeline, she got up to all sorts of mischief, including taking part in a tournament. Gauntlets are her weapon of choice.



Touya and Elze's child, and the sixth daughter. Rather than taking after her mother, her temperament is more akin to Linze's, and she primarily uses magic in battle. Due to their mothers being twins, she is close with Linne.



Yoshino
Touya and Sakura's child, and the fourth daughter. She approaches life with a carefree attitude and shows talent in all manner of performing arts, especially music. She likes singing, but has mastered various instruments that she prefers performing with more.



Quun
Touya and Leen's child, and the third daughter. Keenly curious about magitech, she will take any opportunity to carry out fieldwork to investigate ancient technology. She is currently in the process of refining a Golem partner named Parla who looks just like Paula.



Freigard
Touya and Hilde's child, and the second daughter. She takes things at her own pace, but has a strong sense of justice and believes strongly in chivalry. As she fights using various weapons she keeps in **[Storage]**, she enjoys finding new ones for her arsenal.



Stephania
Touya and Sue's child, and the eighth and youngest daughter. She's good at getting people to spoil her. Her age leads to her being a little reckless. Often combines a tackle with **[Prison]** for her signature Stephrocket that Touya is usually on the receiving end of.



Allistella
Ende and Melle's daughter, known as Allis for short. She has a bit of a mischievous personality and loves Kuon dearly. As Kuon's betrothed, she is working hard to learn to become a better wife.



Melle
The previous Sovereign Phrase. After finally reuniting with Ende, she has settled down with him in Brunhild. She has learned to enjoy food during her stay, and has become a bit of a gourmet.



Ende
A man born to a race that travels worlds. He used to be on a search for the Sovereign Phrase. He married Melle after they finally reunited, and now lives happily together with her in Brunhild. The god of combat took notice of him, and before he knew it, Ende had become his ward.

The Story So Far!

Mochizuki Touya, wielding a smartphone customized by God himself, continues to live his life in a newly formed double-world! The war against the Wicked God, which threatened the existence of two innocent worlds, has finally come to an end. Touya has emerged victorious, but at what cost? Now he's saddled with divine duties! Awakened to godliness! Our hapless young lad is to be caretaker of the newly-created world. Fortunately, things seem to be at peace. But could this only be a surface observation? The seeds of discord are sown out of sight, and chaos could very well burst from the dark... How will Touya fare in his new station? Only time will tell.

The Worlds of In Another World With My Smartphone World Map

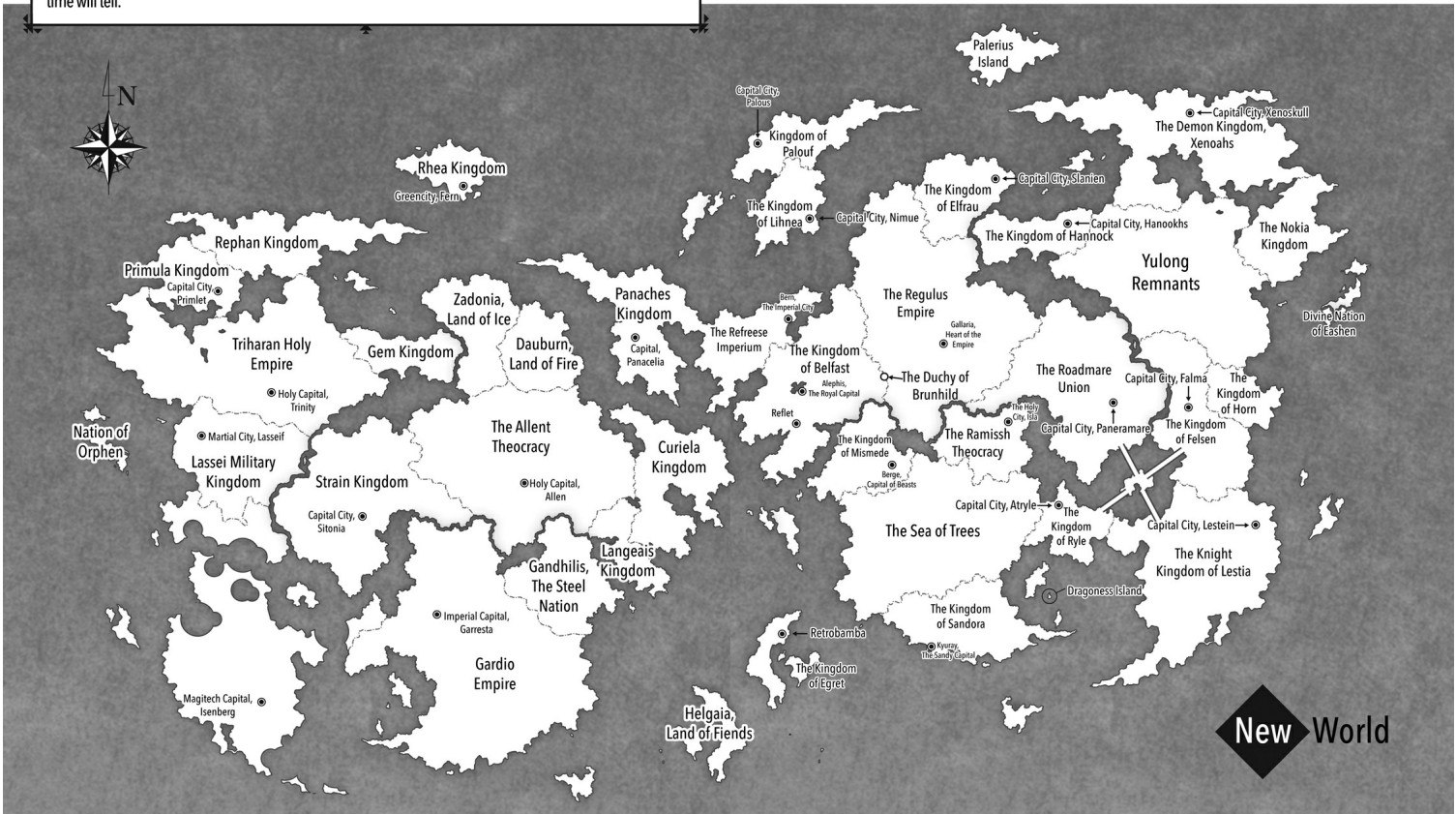


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Chapter I: The Visitor from Phrasia

“[Translation].”

I wouldn't be able to understand Melle's apparent brother as things were, so I applied translation magic on him. He showed apprehension for a moment when I held out my hand, but Melle's soothing words were enough to have him cautiously reach out with his own.

“It feels weird...” Halle said. The magic must have taken effect—I was able to understand what he was saying clearly.

“Can you understand me now?”

My sudden question made the boy jump.

“Y-Yeah, I can. Who are you? Are you my sister's servant?”

Melle chuckled and answered, “Halle, this is Touya Mochizuki. He's the sovereign of this land, as well as my savior.”

“The sovereign?! D-Do forgive me...”

The boy bowed his head as he apologized to me. What a polite kid. Was he really the Sovereign Phrase?

“So, Halle, what's going on? Why do you look like that? Why are you in this world?” Melle asked in short order.

“That's...”

Just as Halle was about to respond to the barrage of questions, someone entered the garden.

“I'm home! Whoa, what's with this big body? Did something happen? Wh—Huh? You're...”

Faced with the large corpse of the Gemstone Phrase and Halle gripping Melle's hand, Ende could only blink.

“I know who you are,” Halle muttered in a chilling voice, letting go of Melle's

hand as he stood, crystalline armor crackling as it formed around his hand to create a large red blade. Why was everything suddenly getting so tense?!

“Endymion! How dare you?! This...is for my sister!”

“Halle!”

“Halle? Your sister? Wait, no way, are you *that* Halle?!”

Ignoring Melle’s cries for him to stop, Halle lunged at Ende, swinging his blade down toward the man’s head. Managing to evade the attack at the last second, Ende immediately equipped the phrasium gauntlets that I had crafted for him.

“You were the one who...!”

“H-Hang on!”

Ende successfully deflected the blade with his gauntlets.

Yeah, no, that kid’s just relying on the weight of his body to swing his sword. His strength isn’t anything special. Ende’s got this.

“Stop right this second, Halle! I will not forgive you if you harm Endymion!”

“But, sister, you’re being tricked! If he hadn’t come along, Phrasia would never have been thrown into chaos!”

Halle’s assault on Ende was relentless, even as Melle told him to stop.

Thrown into chaos? What’s Ende done?

Ende continued to dodge the slashes from the boy’s blade. It didn’t seem like he had any intention of retaliating. Halle didn’t seem skilled enough to hurt Ende, anyway, but it wasn’t as if I could just leave the situation be.

Just as I went to step in, someone jumped in ahead of me.

“You quit thaaaaaaaaaaaaaat!”

What blocked Halle’s next attack was not Ende’s gauntlets, but Allis’s.

“Who are you?! A Dominant Phrase that isn’t my sister or her attendants...? What? What is this echo?!”

“I won’t let anyone bully my dad!”

“Uh, Allis, slight clarification: I wasn’t being bullied...”

Allis charged at Halle, ignoring Ende's trivial remark.

"Prisma Rose!"

"What?! But Prisma Rose is my sister's—!"

Crystal rose thorns burst out of Allis's outstretched hands, restraining Halle in an instant.

"Allis, wait!" Melle yelled.

"Resonance Plasma!"

"What?!"

Melle's interference had come too late, however, as an electric shock akin to lightning traveled through the thorns and into Halle's body. That was meant to be Allis's restraining skill. It was similar to the **[Paralyze]** magic that Kuon and I could use.

Being electrocuted so directly caused Halle to pass out, still caught up in the crystal thorns. He was okay, right? I...would like to think that Allis would at least know how to control her strength.

Ney frantically rushed to Halle and placed her hand on his chest.

"He's okay," she said. "I think he just temporarily entered a sleep state. Or at least, assuming this body is similar to that of a Phrase..."

Everyone instantly felt relief at her words.

"Huh? Was I not meant to take him down?" Allis asked, realizing that she had perhaps done something wrong.

"Not quite, but, uh..." Kuon answered with a nervous smile on his face.

"Man, I wasn't expecting this at all. Is this kid really Halle? He looks completely different."

"He does, but his echo is undeniably the same. If not Halle, he's at least someone related to him in some way," Melle responded to Ende's question while gazing at the boy's unconscious body.

By his appearance being different, they must have been referring to how Dominant Phrase were born as adults. "Adult" in this case was just someone

whose body had developed, though, so there were apparently cases that could look as young as fifteen.

Ney sighed as she picked up Halle's body.

"I can't say for certain if this is really Lord Halle, but we'll have to ask for specifics once he has awakened. Endymion, don't return home until we contact you."

"Huh?! Why?!"

"The boy cannot freely speak with you present. It will simply turn out like earlier. If he is really Lord Halle, then to him, you are a despicable villain who deceived Lady Melle."

Ende was clearly in shock from those words, but upon hearing her say it like that, I could understand why Halle was so mad at him.

I get it. In his eyes, Ende's just this evil dude who kidnapped his precious sister.

"It becomes a lot more believable when Ney says it."

"I know, right? Even Ney immediately jumped for Ende when she first met him."

Lycee and I nodded in understanding.

"Ngh, don't bring up such old stories!" Ney protested, her face bright red.

Perhaps it would take giving Ende a good punch to calm Halle down, just like it did Ney.



"Phrase that look like gemstones, huh? Sorry, but I haven't a clue."

Ende tossed the fragment of the Gemstone Phrase onto the table and took a sip of his iced tea. I had taken him to the bar after he was thrown out of his home. Naturally, I sent Kuon back to the castle first. It was getting late, and that meant the rough sort would start appearing. Didn't want them serving as a bad influence on my kid or anything.

"That boy, Halle, he had a core that it seemed like those Phrase were trying to protect. Are you sure you don't know what this is about?"

“Yeah, man, I seriously don’t know. We aren’t even sure if that’s really Halle. The Halle I knew was a boy that was just a little shorter than me.”

Though Dominant Phrase didn’t have a juvenile period, the forms they were born into were each slightly different. Usually, they could look anywhere from fifteen to forty years old, but there was no way someone in their forties would look younger than someone in their teens, right...? Then again, the long-lived species here were similar, so I guess it wasn’t so strange.

Halle, Melle’s younger brother who used to be the Sovereign Phrase, had been a little shorter than Ende. Would that place him at around fifteen, maybe sixteen? Actually, that would depend on what age Ende was. He looked around eighteen, but he was definitely older than me. The age of inhabitants of different worlds was way too difficult to discern for its own good.

“When Dominant Phrase have children, they take a replica of their partner’s core and fuse it with their own. They have no concept of marriage, so usually, when people say they have siblings, their parents are different. Melle and Halle’s circumstances are a little different, though,” Ende explained.

The Sovereign Phrase had to give birth to a strong child to be their successor, so in order to do that, they would fuse with the core of someone they deemed strong. That way, the strength would be inherited, and an even stronger Sovereign would be born. That was the case of Melle’s birth, conceived between the previous Sovereign and a chosen warrior.

“But Halle was a Sovereign Phrase born as a division of the Sovereign.”

“Hm? I do remember being told that Sovereign Phrase can give birth to a new core without a partner, but that just makes them a deficient replica of the original, no?”

“Because it was already determined that Melle would be the next Sovereign Phrase...well, Halle was a kid that the previous Sovereign created for the hell of it. He was basically made as an attendant who would never betray Melle.”

It felt a little unpleasant hearing about how Dominant Phrase practically viewed children as simple objects, but at the same time, that was likely normal over there.

“Melle and Halle got along great. As her younger brother, Halle looked up to Melle, and as his older sister, Melle coddled Halle. A while after the previous Sovereign passed and Melle took up that role, I arrived at Phrasia, and that was when we met. The first time I met her— Ah, wait. That isn’t important here.”

“Oh, c’moon, tell me! It was love at first sight, right?” I prompted him to continue, grin wide on my face. Ende’s face scrunched right up in discomfort.

“If I tell it to you, you’d totally tell Allis, so how about no.”

“Tch!”

It seemed like it would be such a fun story too. Not like I could blame him, though. Your kids learning about how you fell in love *was* embarrassing. Hell, my romances had been outright turned into *stage plays*. I wondered if they’d ever cancel them entirely...

“Basically, a ton of stuff happened, and now Halle hates my guts. It’s pretty much just the same as what happened with Ney.”

“Can’t blame him. You’re his precious sister’s kidnapper. Of course he’d hold a grudge.”

“‘Kidnapper’?! At least say we eloped. And anyway, we really did try again and again to persuade them before we left, but Ney and Halle just wouldn’t listen to us.”

Yeah, I could see that. No way they could have reached an agreement. On one side, you had the people of Phrasia who didn’t want to lose their Sovereign; on the other, you had the Sovereign who wanted to live together with her beloved. There was no right or wrong side here.

“There were people who said it was irresponsible for her to just abandon her duties as Sovereign Phrase, but it wasn’t as if Melle voluntarily chose that role. Why does she have to abandon her happiness for a handful of selfish people? Melle was in despair seeing how reliant Phrasia was on her, and desperately wanted to do away with the crown, so she left the title of Sovereign to Halle, her most trusted person, and left that world together with me.”

What Ende said made sense, but it was hard to deny that those left behind would be left with negative feelings themselves.

With these kinds of situations, Kousaka would always say to me, “The leader doing absolutely everything is not good for the country.” I could really understand what he meant by that now. If the country became too reliant on the individual, that individual ever disappearing would cause the country to simply fall apart.

There were already many examples of that in history: when charismatic men like Takeda Shingen, Oda Nobunaga, and Toyotomi Hideyoshi died during the Warring States period, the regions they had been in charge of splintered. Perhaps if they had firmly appointed successors before their deaths, they would have been fine. In fact, Melle had likely foisted the role onto Halle hoping there was still a chance of salvaging the situation.

“Like I said, Halle is a Dominant Phrase born solely from the last Sovereign Phrase. Compared to someone like Melle, who was born through a fusion with a chosen warrior, he’s much weaker. That led to a lot of Dominant Phrase like Gila or his brother, General Xeno, rejecting Halle as their Sovereign. Whatever their opinion, though, there’s no denying that Halle is the son of a Sovereign, and that meant he did have at least some supporters, but...”

A number of citizens had fought against the decision until the end, including Ney and Halle himself, and that led to extremist groups forming with the goal of taking down Melle and stealing her power of the Sovereign. The aforementioned Dominant Phrase were likely the leaders of such a movement.

Realizing how much danger they were in, Melle and Ende eventually decided to leave Phrasia altogether.

“Neither of us knows what happened to Phrasia after that. Is that kid really Halle? Just what exactly happened over there...?” Ende muttered to himself, mindlessly poking the fragment of the Gemstone Phrase while he was lost in thought.

I was surprised at being faced with such a somber Ende.

“Are you still caught up on Halle accusing you of being the reason Phrasia’s a mess now? I’m kinda surprised you’re actually such a sensitive soul.”

“Guh! Why, yes, as a matter of fact, I *am* sensitive! Unlike a certain someone who keeps getting told by their wives about how slow to catch on they are!”

“Huh?! You wanna say that again?! You’ve crossed a line this time, my dude!”

“Then I’ll happily cross that line!”

“Calm yourselves.”

A hand stretched itself between the two of us, who were snarling at each other. I looked up, and there Lycee suddenly was, looking utterly exasperated.

Do you have to let out such an exaggerated sigh?

“Lycee... How’s Halle?” Ende asked.

“Sleeping. He’s probably fine. But Lady Melle said that if you’re present, things will just become far more complicated, so you should go sleep somewhere else tonight.”

“Yeeeah, take that, loser!”

“Gnnnrgh!”

Ende looked like he had eaten a sour candy at my taunt.

We won’t be able to find anything out until Halle is awake, so I guess I may as well just go home myself.

Apparently, Lycee was going to have dinner with Ende at the bar first while she was here. Was that the real reason that Lycee had come here? Well, whatever. Today had been hectic enough that I was utterly exhausted.

The big question now was what to do with the fragments of the Gemstone Phrase. I decided I’d consult with the girls first. And so, with a goal in mind, I exited the bar and opened a **[Gate]**.



The next day, Melle brought Halle to the castle. Compared to yesterday, he was much quieter. Maybe he was ordinarily a much calmer boy so long as Ende wasn’t around. Naturally, Ende wasn’t present right now. As requested, he was making sure to avoid contact with the boy.

Allis, who had come together with the girls, went straight off to get her etiquette lessons from Yumina. Today, she would apparently be learning meal etiquette.

I was meeting with Halle, Melle, Ney, and Lycee in the reception room. Kuon was also in attendance.

“So, to put this as simply as I can, this child is Halle...but also not,” Melle attempted to explain.

“I’m sorry, but that is the complete opposite of putting it simply,” I responded with a frown.

No, seriously, what do you mean? At least start from the beginning.

“Put less briefly...”

According to what Halle had told Melle about what had become of Phrasia after she left with Ende, having been thrust into the position of Sovereign Phrase, Halle had done all he could to try to support the country in his new role. However, due to those with complaints, and those who refused to acknowledge Halle as their Sovereign, Phrasia gradually grew more and more fractured. The previously united Phrase began acting on their own accord.

As Halle had been fighting against a rebel force, an incident occurred: Yula and his men, having discovered the technology to cross worlds, left Phrasia. Those who did not acknowledge Halle, along with those who either wanted Melle or her power, left Phrasia all at once.

According to Ney and Lycee, who had accompanied those Phrase at the time, what had once been a fair number of Dominant Phrase at the start of their journey had only grown fewer and fewer through their constant conflicts with each of the many worlds they visited.

“At the end of the day, none of us really thought of each other as comrades,” Ney explained. “We shared the same goal, but we all knew we were just using each other.”

Her words brought to mind the Dominant Phrase I had met before. The battle maniac Gila, the pleasure-seeking twins Leto and Luto, and then Yula, the man who had desired power greater than even the Sovereign.

Neither Ney nor Lycee likely had any sense of comradeship with them. Even I didn’t think I could get along with them.

Halle had thought that with the rebel forces gone, Phrasia would regain its peace. But the moment there was a mass exodus of Phrase, even though it meant outright rebel forces had been quelled, the Sovereign Phrase's reputation in Phrasia had hit rock bottom. He was seen as an incompetent Sovereign who couldn't even unify his people.

Faced with such hatred, the only thing Halle could cling to was the previous Sovereign, Melle. If he could gain her power, Phrasia would once more be united under the rule of the Sovereign. And so, Halle had turned to the research Yula had left behind.

"Thus began Project Quos, the creation and production of artificial Phrase. It was research developed to give birth to a whole new kind of Phrase soldier, ones that went through a much different kind of crystal evolution," Melle explained. In Earth terms, it was essentially a plan to make a bunch of android soldiers.

Halle continued the research on his own, all to gain the same power as the previous Sovereign. Though he was only a division of an original, he was still born to a lineage of Sovereign Phrase. Plus, while perhaps not as talented as Yula, he was still a spectacular researcher.

Yula had already created the base for the artificial Phrase, so all Halle had to do was refine it. But there was one fatal flaw to these Quos: if the most apt comparison was to an android, that would mean there needed to be someone who could control them, not unlike a Golem's Master. If he wanted the Quos to obey him, Halle would have needed to create a whole new Dominant Phrase that could lead them—a Phrase made from the fusion of the cores of a Dominant Phrase and a Quos.

"Wait, wait, wait, you're not telling me that the Halle we have here is..."

"It is as you have surmised. This child is a fusion created from a replica of Halle's core and a Quos core."



"If he was born from a fusion of Halle's core and a Quos core, does that mean that, uh...this *isn't* Halle?"

“Correct. A division of Halle, his child, is the more accurate descriptor.”

His kid, huh? Well, I...guess that makes sense?

Personally, it felt more like he was a clone. Would I really call my own clone my son? I would think he'd be closer to a brother.

“But he has Halle's memories, right?”

“Yes, it does appear that Halle implanted his memories inside this child. Those memories and emotions were what took control yesterday due to the exhaustion. That is not this child's natural personality.”

“Hang on, things are just getting confusing again.”

He *implanted* the memories into the kid? He had a personality of his own? This was getting complicated.

“So, in other words, it's like Halle has two personalities?” Kuon supplied, noticing my confusion.

“Two personalities... Why, yes, I do think that would be an appropriate way to view it.”

That *did* make it easier to understand.

“This child does not quite appear to have an identity. The two sets of memories are jumbling together, leading to instability.”

I glanced at Halle, who was sitting beside Melle. He did appear much more nervous and jumpier compared to how calm he'd been yesterday (at least, before he encountered Ende). That must have been his original personality.

“Sorry if this wording's a bit rude, but basically, Halle was trying to use this kid to unite Phrasia?”

“Yes, though his plan failed. A coup d'état occurred before this child awakened fully. Apparently, the few remaining armed forces like Gila suddenly attacked Halle's army. Afraid that the opposition would acquire his newly created child's power, Halle implanted his memories, and sent them off with a crystal beast to seek out my echo.”

Why did he appear in the future, then? Had I released the **[Prison]** sealing the

Dominant Phrase's echoes? But then, why would I do that? Had I known things would turn out this way? That was the only way that made sense to me, but...

"What happened to Halle after that?" I asked.

"We don't know. That is where this child's memories stop," Melle mumbled, her face clearly pained. I couldn't blame her—her brother might be dead, after all. "But whatever happens, there is no denying I abandoned Phrasia. I have no right to get involved with that world's affairs anymore."

Her words were clear and sharp.

Phrasia is your home, though. Should you not be at least a little more worried? I thought to myself. But this was a show of the resolve that Melle'd had when she chose to leave Phrasia. There was no point in going back on that now.

"What's the plan for the kid, then?"

"If we could, we'd love to take them in, but..." Melle's words trailed off.

"Endymion is the problem," Lycee elaborated.

"Oh, right..."

I turned my head up at that reminder. If the kid and Ende met each other again, we would just end up with another fight like yesterday...and it would feel way too bad to force Ende alone to live elsewhere.

"You don't think we could do what we did with Ney and just let him get a punch in, do you?"

"I only held back because I had to worry about Lady Melle at the time, but I would've punched him far more if I could've, you know? So much that he'd never be able to stand again," Ney said.

Just how much did you hate the guy? I couldn't help but wonder upon hearing how exactly Ney had felt at the time.

"But that isn't how you feel anymore, right?" Melle asked.

"W-Well, he makes good food, he notices all the small details, and he's actually quite considerate, but..."

Though the words were said with reluctance, they made me realize just how

much she had softened. Hopefully, we could expect the same from Halle.

“Maybe we just have to slowly get them used to each other.”

“Better make sure Halle learns to not lunge at Ende first, though.”

Ende not being able to relax even in his own home was way too cruel. Halle could hate him if he wanted, but at least put away the intent to murder.

“I’ll leave the kid to you guys, anyway. Which, while on the topic, are we okay with still calling him Halle?”

Even if he had Halle’s memories, he still wasn’t really Halle. It felt appropriate to give him a different name.

“You raise a good point. It would likely be okay to call them Halle when that personality is present, but we should think of a name for their original personality.”

“Am I...not Halle?” “Halle” asked, looking up at Melle.

“Don’t worry. Even if you aren’t Halle, you’re like a niece to me, so we won’t chase you out or anything. You could even stay here forever if you wanted.”

“...Wait. They’re like a *niece*. Huh?”

They were essentially her brother’s child, so it was the right idea, but why a *niece*, of all things?

Melle awkwardly chuckled at my confusion and answered, “Actually, when we gave this child a bath yesterday, we realized that, um...”

“She’s a girl,” Lycee finished off.

I *had* thought she looked like a girl, but given that Halle’s personality had been active at the time, I ended up completely convinced she was a boy. So this kid was really Halle’s daughter, and that was why she was like Melle’s niece.

Wait, Phrase take baths? I knew that they had different genders, but Ende had told me it had no bearing on their ability to fight or most other matters. Also, wasn’t a kid born through division meant to be the same sex as their parent?

“Maybe it’s because of the Quos core that was fused during the process. I

can't theorize any specifics, though."

Oh, since it was fused with a Quos core, it wasn't really an individual birth. Wasn't having a male personality inside a girl's body a bit difficult, though?

"Not particularly. Phrase don't perceive differences in gender so much."

Of course, I forgot that it never really mattered to them who was a boy and who was a girl. The only thing they really had to consider was that fusing two cores from same-sex Phrase could leave the child disadvantaged. I'd asked Ende about it once and, apparently, they didn't really feel sexual desire either.

"Anyway, we should give the personality that is not Halle a name."

"In that case, I think we should combine Lycee and Melle to make Lylle."

"No! We should combine Melle and Ney to get Mey!"

Melle's suggestion had instantly resulted in a fight between Ney and Lycee.

She isn't even your kid...

"Leylle...?" While the two were arguing, a combination of the two names raised slipped out of the child's mouth.

"Leylle sounds wonderful. If you like it, shall we go with that, then?"

Leylle gave a small nod at Melle's question. It was easy enough to say, so I thought it was good.

"In that case, it's nice to meet you, Leylle. I've already said my hellos to Halle, but I'm this country's ruler, Touya Mochizuki. If you ever need any help, I'll be right here."

Leylle gave me a nod.

She's so quiet.

If I compared her to my kids, she seemed closest to Elna in personality. Well, if we ignored the fact that she became someone else entirely when Halle's personality was at the forefront.

"My name is Kuon Mochizuki. I'm...a relative of the grand duke."

Everyone here apart from Leylle knew that Kuon had come from the future,

but he seemed to have gone with the “relative” explanation to avoid any confusion. Wasn’t Leylle technically also from the future herself, though?

“Also, about Leylle’s ability as a Quos...”

Regardless of whether or not Leylle could fully control the Quos, the Gemstone Phrase that she had created was a key issue right now. If they ended up going loose in the town, everyone would go into a mass panic. As the leader of this nation, I couldn’t simply ignore a potential danger to my citizens.

“According to ‘Halle,’ her abilities won’t activate so long as she isn’t in danger. If you deem it too dangerous, I believe you should be able to seal her echo just as you did ours. It seems so long as that order does not reach under the earth, the Quos will not be born.”

Did that mean the Quos that we saw before were a self-defense mechanism? Hmm, I could definitely understand her believing she was in danger once her bodyguard crystal beast died. She’d been left in a core state in the forest where magical beasts were roaming wild. Those Quos had only been hunting the surrounding monsters—it must have been because they were specifically trying to protect Leylle.

In other words, those Quos won’t go out of control. Or, at least, I hope they won’t.

That said, while the possibility existed that they could, I decided it would be best to do as Melle suggested and seal her echo with **[Prison]**. After getting permission from the girl herself, I erected a barrier only around the core within her. With that in place, no more Quos should be created by her.

“If we’re blocking off her ability to create Quos, though, we’ll need to think of another way for her to defend herself,” Ney said, dropping into thought.

As it turned out, the fighting ability that Leylle had shown yesterday was entirely Halle’s. He already hadn’t been very suited to battle, but Leylle was even more lacking in physical ability than he was.

“Leylle’s whole reason for being created was to lead the Quos, after all. With that sealed, she’s practically lost her hands and legs.”

“But she at least has the base abilities that a Phrase has, right? Like being able

to turn her hand into a blade.”

“She can, yes, but not reliably.”

To be honest, I don't even think she's in that much danger here, especially if she doesn't leave the town. They're so overprotective, I thought to myself, though I refrained from saying any of it out loud. Leylle was pretty much a refugee from a world that they had abandoned, so they might have been feeling guilt over the matter.

“I'll leave Leylle to you guys. Don't let her do anything dangerous now.”

“We won't. Thank you, Touya.”

In this case, my desire for her not to do anything dangerous was more for Brunhild's sake than her own. But at least with this, that was one issue dealt with. There was still the issue of Leylle and Ende's relationship, but that was more of a household problem, so I'd rather they dealt with that themselves.

Once Allis returned from her etiquette lessons, the Phrase family all returned home together.

“Whew, well, I'm glad that situation didn't get any worse,” I said as I stretched out over the sofa in exhaustion. Kuon placed a hand on his chin in thought.

“Allis seemed a little strange there. Did something happen during her lessons?”

“Did she? She looked normal to me.”

She just seemed the same as always. Maybe a little less lively than usual, but it wasn't as if she was excitable every second of every day. Could she have had a sore stomach or something?



That's what I had thought. But that night, Allis arrived at the castle by herself. Why was she here this late?

“I've...run away.”

“Huh?!”

Just as Allis muttered her explanation, my phone started ringing.

It's Melle. Perfect timing, I suppose.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Touya? Allis hasn't shown up at the castle, has she?"

"Yup, she sure has. What's going on?"

"Well..."

Apparently, the girls had been fussing over Leylle so much that Allis threw a tantrum and ran out of the house. She ran away for a trivial reason like that?

"I'm sorry for the trouble, but do you mind letting her stay the night? She'll probably be quite stubborn as she is."

I didn't particularly mind, and to be honest, seeing the usually lively Allis frown so much, I was just a touch worried. She was sitting on the sofa in a huff, wrapping herself around Kuon's arm, refusing to let go. For now, I would just let Yumina and the others know about what Melle had said.



“Ahhh, the Phrase girls have been giving Leylle so much attention that it’s got Allis in a huff, is she?”

“But Leylle doesn’t have anyone else that she can rely on, so I can’t really blame them.”

It wasn’t as if the girls were deliberately trying to leave Allis out; they just wanted to help a child who was thrust into this world all by herself.

“It’s a bit of a tall order to ask a child to understand that, darling.”

“I guess...”

I felt like Kuon would understand, but maybe that was a sign of a parent’s neglect more than anything...

“I’d say it’s pretty normal when you have siblings,” Elze said. “Oh, though you wouldn’t know that, huh, Touya?”

“I agree. There were times I was so frustrated that I would cry when my brother got praised all the time,” Hilde added.

Huh? Is it really that common? Admittedly, they’re not wrong. I didn’t grow up with siblings, so I can’t relate.

I had a younger sister now, but we didn’t grow up together, so I couldn’t say I fully understood the sentiment.

“I understand that feeling, as well, when I get compared to my sister...”

“I do get compared to my brother too, I do...”

Even Lu and Yae had experience.

“Hmm, I’ve never particularly felt that way with my little brother, though?” Sue said.

“You may not understand so much when you have a large age gap,” Linze replied with a wry smile.

Yumina, Sue, Sakura, Leen, and I didn’t have any siblings close in age, so it didn’t quite click for us in the same way. Well, Allis and Leylle weren’t really sisters, more cousins, but it was a similar idea.

“Oh, but I have been compared to Yumina before. I remember that making me feel a little annoyed. Now I get it.”

“What? You were compared to me?”

Apparently, there was a time when Sue had been compared to Yumina at a noble function, and she’d felt quite unhappy at the time. Sue and Yumina were also cousins, so I could imagine that people would compare them. That meant Sue joined the ranks of the ones who got it.

“We’re not making comparisons between Allis and Leylle, though, so I doubt it’s quite the same.”

“Basically, it’s to do with jealousy. Allis feels as if her parents’ love has been stolen from her...perhaps?” Leen analyzed.

Jealousy was the root cause of this predicament, huh? When you see love directed at your sibling instead of yourself, you start to get jealous because you’re worried that your parents don’t love you anymore. Something like that?

Honestly, it made *me* a bit worried. I wasn’t showing more love to one of my kids over another, was I? Well, whatever the case, Allis was the focus for now. She was a good kid, so I personally thought she’d understand if we just had a chat with her about it.

I turned to go talk with Allis, but then Yumina yanked me back by the sleeve.

Huh? Why are you stopping me?

“Do you hate Leylle, Allis?”

“...Not really.”

“Then why are you angry?”

“...I dunno.”

Kuon and Allis were talking. Yumina was glaring at me, practically shouting at me to read the room. Was it really okay to just leave it to him?

“Leylle has arrived at this world alone, where she knows not a single soul. If we didn’t have Grandmother Tokie, we would have been in the same boat. Do you not think she’s quite scared right now?”

“...”

“You’re angry at yourself, aren’t you? You weren’t able to be kind to Leylle, despite her experiences, so you directed all your anger at your mothers. You can’t forgive yourself for what you did, but you aren’t sure what to do. Did I hit the nail on the head?”

“...Yeah, probably. How’d you know?”

“I *am* your fiancé, after all. I can at least understand how you’re feeling.”

Kuon smiled at Allis as her face turned bright red. What a tactful choice of words... Was Kuon really my son?

“Kuon’s nothing like his dad, huh?”

“That’s because he’s *my* son!”

“I wish his father would learn a thing or two from him, I do.”

Elze, Yumina, and Yae were all muttering about me behind my back.

Now, come on, you shouldn’t take Kuon as the base level here. I’m pretty sure most men are as bad as me... Surely.

“I said some really mean things to my moms...”

“Everyone sometimes says things they don’t truly mean. I sometimes accidentally say some really mean things to Silver myself.”

“You what? Things you don’t mean? Only sometimes?” came the questioning voice of Silver at Kuon’s waist. The moment Kuon laid his hand over him with a smile, the Artificer shut up.

“If you’ve done something bad, then simply apologize. Your mothers will forgive you.”

“Leylle too?”

“Leylle too, I’m sure. You two are pretty much cousins, right? In fact, Leylle is almost like a newborn child, so you have to make sure you teach her all kinds of things as her big sister.”

“As her big sis? I get to be a big sister?”

As if she hadn't realized that fact until this very moment, Allis's face lit up in utter delight. Technically, since she came from the future, she would be younger than Leylle, but far be it from me to ruin the mood. Actually, wait, Leylle was from the future too, so maybe it was right.

"Allis!"

Just as I was thinking such trivial things, Ende burst in through the balcony window.

Hey, don't come in through there! We have an entrance for a reason! I've really gotta work on the castle's security...

"Hey, didn't we already decide that Allis would be staying here tonight?" I asked him.

"I was worried, so I came here by myself! I can't go back home right now, anyway! Lemme stay too!"

So now the father was tagging along. We had spare rooms, though, so it was whatever.

"Allis, daddy will stay with you for as long as you need today, so—"

"I'm going home. Sorry, dad."

"Huh?"

Ignoring Ende looking dumbfounded in the corner, Allis came over to us and bowed.

"I'm sorry for all the trouble I caused! I'll go home now! See you later, Kuon!"

After saying her farewells with her usual liveliness, Allis simply left through the balcony.

No, seriously, both of you need to learn to use the front door.

"Wait, Allis?!"

Ende went back out through the balcony in pursuit.

What did I just say?!

"Well, uh, I guess everything worked out?"

“Most likely. The rest is for Allis herself to handle,” Kuon said, giving his body a big stretch.

“You really know how to handle her, huh?”

“Well, when you have as many sisters as I do, you learn how to mediate.”

Oh, so *that* was what he was used to. Did that mean I was partly responsible for my son having no choice but to learn how to handle women...? He’d probably had to learn those skills in order to live in peace with a family of mainly girls. I gave him a gentle pat on the head, beginning to feel a little bad for him.

And then, Yumina tossed me aside and took over that role.

Why...?

Chapter II: Desert Stampede

“I brought Leylle with me today! C’mon, Leylle, say hello!”

“H-Hello...”

Allis arrived for her etiquette lessons with Leylle in tow. Having overcome whatever was on her mind, she was smiling as she always was. Leylle, on the other hand, was clearly much jumpier, eyes nervously swimming.

I could feel Allis silently exuding the air of one who was trying to be the dependable older sister.

“So you were able to make up?” Kuon asked.

“Yup! Oh, Leylle, Kuon’s gonna be my husband someday, so that makes him your older brother!”

“My brother...?”

“That’s...not quite right.”

Kuon looked a bit uncertain at Allis’s claim. He was clearly thinking about how being the husband of one’s cousin did not make them your brother-in-law. I understood where he was coming from, but it was for the best if he let them say whatever they wanted.

“Um, I can go home if you think I’ll get in the way...” Leylle nervously spoke up.

“No, not at all. Today is a history lesson, so it would benefit you to listen in,” Yumina told her with a reassuring smile. She was right—learning about this world could only do her good.

“Oh, also, Your Grace! I was hoping we could get a **[Mirage]** pendant for Leylle too.”

“Hm? Oh, did you guys borrow Melle’s for now? Got it, I’ll make sure to have one ready by the time you go home.”

I couldn't see the distinctive features of a Dominant Phrase on Leylle, but I realized at that moment that she had the pendant I'd given to Melle hanging around her neck. Thanks to the effects of **[Mirage]**, she looked just like a regular girl. She was about the height of Kuon, or maybe a little smaller? She was at least taller than Steph. Her clothes, a simple plain dress, were likely also an illusion.

"Linze, sorry to bother you, but..."

"Don't worry, I understand. I'll make plenty of cute options in her size."

Linze nodded before I even finished what I was saying. The way we were able to guess what the other was thinking in only a few words made me feel like we were a couple who had been together for years. It made me happy.

Leylle was dragged away by Allis to go take the history lessons with Yumina.

Oh yeah, when does Halle's personality even come out?

I was pretty sure that Ende's presence was a trigger. Things were tough for him, as well. If he returned home while Leylle was present, he'd just get attacked, and even if he wanted to get closer to his daughter, if Leylle was with her, he wouldn't get that opportunity.

He was able to return home safely now, but the moment it was time for Leylle to head home, he would just be kicked out again.

I feel bad for him...

Well, I was sure things would work out eventually. I wasn't the kind to get myself too involved in someone else's family affairs, so I had to keep myself out of it.

Just as I was coming up with such excuses, my phone started ringing.

It's not Ende, is it? Oh, good, it's just the doc.

"Hello, hello?"

"The Ark's on the move."

I instantly felt a chill run through me upon hearing those words.

"Are the adjustments on Reginleif and the Valkyries finished yet?"

“Sorry, but not quite. We’ve not even started on Reginleif, and for the Valkyries, only Elze’s, Yae’s, Hilde’s, and Lu’s are ready. They’re suitable for underwater combat now, and we’ve upgraded their mobility, but...”

I could tell what she was trying to say. All four of them were made for close combat. Lu’s Waltraute could at least exchange parts to make it more suited for long range, but that wasn’t the best solution.

“What about the Nereids?”

“We have about ten ready to deploy. Their test flight’s gonna end up being the real thing, though.”

We’d been training the knights in underwater combat using the Frame Units in a simulation of the Nereids. This would end up being their first actual attempt at piloting a Nereid, but the controls weren’t all that different from a Frame Gear, so I didn’t think they’d struggle *too* much.

“Where’s the Ark headed?”

“They’re going north through the sea to the west of Isengard. Keep going and they’ll hit Orphen.”

Orphen, the island country ruled by the houtei. It was the opposite shape of Eashen, the land most resembling Japan.

“Is Orphen their goal or is it the natural resources in the nearby seafloor?”

“If it’s the resources, then we’d be better off not engaging. We’re not exactly in the best condition to fight them. Sure, we’d be leaving them to create more Kyklops, but it’s not like they’re going to build thousands of them overnight.”

She was right. The infiltration plan we had in mind involved entering the Ark discreetly and taking down the wicked devout with the diver helmet that could use teleportation magic. It would take a bit more time before we were prepared to handle such an operation. If their target was Orphen, then we would have no choice but to send aid, but if they just wanted to excavate the resources, then I felt it would be better to leave them to their devices, as frustrating as it was.

Thankfully, our fears were unfounded, and the Ark began excavating

resources just south of Orphen, which meant the island was safe for now. That said, that didn't mean we could let our guard down. I made sure to tell Doc Babylon to remain vigilant with their observation of the Ark and to speed up the strengthening of the Valkyries and the production of the Nereids.

I at least made sure to send a message to both Orphen and the nearby Lassei to evacuate their citizens if there were any strange movements by their ocean borders. Even if there was no movement from the Ark, there was no telling if there would be attacks by the Fishmen.

There hadn't been any Fishmen attacks the past few weeks, but this felt like the calm before the storm. It left me with an indescribable sense of unease.



Far south of Brunhild, in the sprawling Sea of Trees, there was a location known as Dragonbone Roost. It was a large hollow ruled by the Red Dragon hidden deep within the forest. It was a very precious place to the Dragons located a short distance away from their Sanctuary.

Deep within that large cave rested Dragon bones of all sizes. As the name implied, it was where elderly Dragons would go to rest at the end of their lifespans. It was a special place, acting as a Dragon's final abode before being sent off to the afterlife.

Due to being one of the strongest beings of the land, Dragons did not have a high rate of fertility—because they were strong, they did not need to worry about numbers as a species. Around ten Dragons being born every thousand years was more than enough.

Dragons were a long-lived species; even if the number of Dragons being born was limited, they would always retain a steady population. In more recent years, however, the number of living Dragons had decreased dramatically.

A combination of the rampages of insolent young Dragons who did not know their place, and the tyrannical rule and massacre of the self-proclaimed Dragon King had led to many Dragons ending their lives without even making it to Dragonbone Roost. The last time a Dragon had lain to rest in this cave was centuries ago.

A Dragon's bones contained huge concentrations of mana, and it would not fade even thousands of years later. After ages, the corpses of many Dragons had gathered in the Roost.

Standing in the holy ground of those departed Dragons were three suspicious figures. One was a man with a diver helmet, a metallic blue hatchet hanging from his waist. Another was a woman wearing a domino mask, a metallic orange mace hanging from hers. And last was a surreal-looking man, covered in a black robe and wearing the skull of a goat. He was wielding a metallic black scepter.

The masked woman, Tangerine, sighed as she muttered, "Bones, bones, and more bones. Look to your left, bones. Look to your right, bones. Could this place be any more suspicious?"

"This is essentially a graveyard, what else did you think would be here?" The man with the diver helmet, Indigo, sighed back.

"So? Does it look like we can use this?" Tangerine asked the robed man.

"There should be no issue. They contain plenty of mana. This will make the perfect catalyst," the man replied in a ragged voice. Tangerine stuck her tongue out in disgust at the sound of delight that had come from the back of his throat.

"Then hurry it up, Graphite. If you take too long, then— Oh, forget it, it's too late."

Just as Indigo had called out to the robed man, when he turned round, standing at the entrance to the cave was a gigantic Red Dragon glaring right at them.

"Who gave you permission to enter this sacred land? This place isn't welcome to people like you."

The Dragon's voice was filled with a boiling rage. He wanted nothing more than to incinerate these intruders right there, but this was his kin's place of rest. He couldn't carelessly destroy such a place, so he managed to restrain himself. If possible, incineration would be left for after they left the Roost.

"Ah, the Red Dragon. What an interesting turn of events. We could use its bones too. I leave him to you, Tangerine."

“Huh?! Why do I have to deal with the annoying job?!”

The moment Tangerine fired back at Graphite’s selfish order, the cave was suddenly filled with the flames of hell. Upon realizing that these intruders had no intention of leaving peacefully, the Red Dragon decided there was no point in showing restraint.

The flame breath of the Red Dragon was so hot, it could melt even mithril. Even orichalcum could only withstand such heat for so long before it, too, ended up boiling. A regular human falling victim to such an attack would be completely scorched in the blaze, even bones turning to dust.

The Dragon bones scattered throughout the cave were as sturdy as orichalcum and held a high magic resistance, so one blow from the Red Dragon’s flames would not be enough to disintegrate them, allowing him to release his flames without restraint. The idea of disturbing his kin’s rest left him with immense feelings of guilt, but he told himself that they would no doubt wish for peace as soon as possible.

When his flames faded, there was no one standing there.

“Hmph, made their leave, did they? Still, what is the lookout doing? They’re slacking if they didn’t catch three whole intruders. Young Dragons these days...!”

The Red Dragon’s eyes widened when he turned around. The humans he should’ve burned to a crisp only a moment ago were now standing right in front of him.

“Ugh, what a pain.”

“Guh?! ”

At the Dragon’s noise of surprise, Tangerine jumped up into the air and struck down with her mace, Halloween. Though the mace should have been nothing more than a metal rod that stung as much as a toothpick to someone like the Red Dragon, that single hit struck the side of his head as hard as a swish from one of his kin’s tails.

The second strike was stronger than the first, then the third strike was stronger than the second—the strength of the blows was increasing with each

consecutive hit.

The Red Dragon tried to breathe out its flames in retaliation, but the moment he did, Tangerine melted into the ground like water.

“What?!”

The Dragon’s eyes roamed through the cave, searching for the woman’s whereabouts, but what he found instead were the two other figures that he thought he had annihilated in his blast standing a distance away. The woman who had struck him wasn’t there. Just where did she go? Right as he was left on edge, he was suddenly hit with the strongest blow he’d faced so far.

“Grah?!”

She was suddenly above him?! It took until that moment for the Red Dragon to realize that his opponents had some form of teleportation magic. Except, he hadn’t felt any mana coming from the woman at all, which meant that the culprit had to be one of the two standing farther away.

Though he now realized who he really had to deal with, his head began to swim. Perhaps due to being struck on the head, his sight was beginning to blur. No longer able to stand, the Dragon’s body crashed to the ground of the cave.

“He held out much longer than most. That’s a Dragon for you, I suppose,” Tangerine remarked.

“You fool. The Dragon’s skull is the most important part of their skeleton. Break it and we’ll get absolutely nothing of use from it.”

“Ha! If you have complaints, do it yourself!”

Watching the two of them argue, the Red Dragon thought to at least roast them with his flames, but his head refused to stay up.

“You...insolent trespassers! Is this it for me...?!”

Just as the Dragon was about to give up, a white fog suddenly began filling the cave. Before long, the space was so filled with it that it was impossible to see even a few meters in front of your eyes.

“Hey, what is this?!”

“Tangerine, do not move recklessly. This is not a regular fog,” Indigo warned. Tangerine obeyed the command, staying where she was and keeping an eye on her surroundings. There was no telling when and where the creator of this fog would make their attack from.

Only a minute had passed. The wicked devout refused to drop their guard for that whole minute, but the fog gradually dispersed.

“Oh my.”

“Seems we were played.”

By the time the fog cleared, the body of the Red Dragon was no longer there.

“It appears they have made their escape. In which case, we had best hurry and retrieve these bones. If a whole herd of Dragons comes, I can’t guarantee our safety.”

“Then hurry up and do it. Isn’t this your job?” Graphite prompted the diver man.

“You are such a slave driver,” Indigo mumbled to himself as he began teleporting the Dragon bones scattered about the cave.



“Ngh...”

“Red Dragon, are you all right?”

Though his head was still swimming, the Red Dragon somehow managed to lift it to see a white Dragon in front of him. They were a beautiful Dragon much smaller than himself.

“Mist Dragon... So you were the one who rescued me?”

The Mist Dragon was unique in that she held the rare power of teleportation. More specifically, she produced a fog that would also turn herself and her target into fog, and allow them to freely move within its range of effect. Rather than **[Teleport]**, it was an ability much closer to **[Gate]**, but it had a notable flaw in that one could not teleport instantaneously. It was required to move through the wide-range fog field.

The Red Dragon was currently in a forest far removed from Dragonbone Roost. The Mist Dragon had no doubt carried him this far.

“When I was flying above the Roost, I suddenly saw your flames... Just what happened? Who were those humans?”

In exchange for the Mist Dragon’s special ability, she did not boast much in the way of physical strength. Upon seeing the Red Dragon struggle against his opponents, she instantly judged she would be unable to stand a chance, and so chose to rescue her kin and then run. It appeared she made the right decision.

“I do not know, but regardless, they were undoubtedly grave robbing. I cannot ignore those who would dare disturb our kin’s rest!”

The Red Dragon’s injured body bristled as he once more spread his wings to return to Dragonbone Roost, but before he could take flight, he wavered and collapsed back onto the ground.

“Those damned...!”

“Red Dragon, please stay here. I will go take a look.”

The Mist Dragon then released her fog once more, and her body dissipated from view. Expanding her field to cover Dragonbone Roost, she used her ability to infiltrate the cave. However, by the time she made it to the area, there was no longer anyone there.

Not only that, but not a single one of her sleeping kin’s bones remained.



“Yeah, there’s no mistaking it. That was definitely the wicked devout.”

Being the Heavenly Beast of the Dragons, Luli was the first point of contact the Mist Dragon reported the incident to. We could tell straightaway that it was the work of the wicked devout.

Damn it, even if we can keep an eye on the Ark, it doesn’t mean anything if they can just wreak havoc everywhere by teleporting wherever they want. This is beyond just outsmarting us.

“But what could they want with Dragon bones?” I asked from our place in the garden.

“Dragon bones are known as an all-powerful material. They’re so sturdy that they can replace orichalcum in forging weapons, and they can be used as catalysts for both magic and medicine. They may be intending to use it for the inner frames of the Kyklops,” Quun answered my question while wielding her spellcaster.

Dragon bones could even be used as medicine? Did you crush them and have it as a powder? Or did you have it like tonkotsu soup stock? Dragon meat was delicious, so soup made with Dragon bone dashi sounded good.

Instead of tonkotsu ramen, we could have ryukotsu ramen...

My curiosity was kind of piqued.

The Mist Dragon suddenly stepped back from me.

Oops, my thoughts must have slipped out.

“My liege, please allow me to accompany you when you depart to eliminate the wicked devout. I very much desire to have them experience the rage of those who had their rest disturbed.”

Luli’s blue eyes were positively burning when she looked at me. She might have looked like a calm and composed beast on the surface, but deep inside, she was quite the passionate one. There was no denying that the horrible treatment of her kin was causing her great anger.

The majority of Dragons whose final resting place was Dragonbone Roost had died of old age. Apparently, Dragons allowed the opponent to do as they wished with the bodies of those who died in battle, but desecrating the corpses of those who were finally granted peaceful rest in heaven after such a long lifespan was deemed unforgivable.

If they had died due to old age, that meant they were most likely Ancients. In other words, they were the veteran Dragons of old. Of course the Dragons would be mad if the graves of those respected elders were ransacked. Luli, as the leader of the Dragons, obviously didn’t want to simply stand by and do nothing.

“The bones of Ancient Dragons... There’s no way, is there?”

“Leen?”

Leen raised her head from the magic codex she had been reading next to Quun.

“They may be trying to create Artificers using Dragon bones. It has been said that immortal soldiers born from magic known as Dragontooth Warriors or Spartoi were used by a country of the ancient magic kingdom.”

“First we get Fishmen, then we get Four-Armed Golems, and now we’ve got Dragontooth Warriors. Man, their forces are just getting stronger, huh?”

We couldn’t forget that we were also managing to bolster our own forces, though. I’d made the sacred treasure, we’d found the Ark, we’d managed to create several Nereids, and the Valkyries’ upgrades were going smoothly. There were various things I was a little worried about, but if I let those overtake my thoughts, we’d never be able to go on the offensive.

I could sense it: our battle with the wicked devout was fast approaching.



“Come oooooon, isn’t there, like, some kind of magic or artifact that can seal a personality or something?”

“There’s nothing as convenient as that, no.”

Ende, clearly exhausted, was in the castle’s living room with me, complaining about his predicament, to which I ruthlessly cut him off. The situation between Ende and Leylle had gotten no better, and Ende was still unable to return home. He at least got the opportunity to return for a short while whenever Allis brought Leylle to the castle. Today, though, he was here voicing his complaints.

Allis was receiving dance lessons with Kuon today, but she had also brought Leylle along. Her father was moaning because he wasn’t able to go see her.

Leylle and Ende weren’t even on bad terms, so this felt extra bad. It was Halle’s personality inside of Leylle that absolutely detested him.

“The kid’s main personality is the girl called Leylle, right? Then there shouldn’t be any issue with just removing Halle’s personality from her, no?” Ende suggested.



“You haven’t forgotten that we still have no idea what happened to the original Halle, right? If he’s dead back up on Phrasia, that means that for Melle, that personality inside Leylle is the last remaining memories of her brother—in fact, it’s her brother himself. Could you really delete that?”

“You’ve got the wrong idea, I’m not saying to delete him. But is there no way to temporarily seal the memories, or make it possible for us to enable and disable the personality at will? I’m pretty sure a fluctuation of emotions being all it takes for Halle to present himself isn’t convenient for Leylle either.”

I understood what he was saying, but wouldn’t everything be solved if he just...made up with Halle? They’d be able to interact fine if Halle didn’t keep coming out because of his instinctual animosity toward him.

“I doubt there’s any chance of us making up...” Ende said, his head drooping dejectedly. I honestly couldn’t think of what else to tell him. “Were your wives’ families against you getting married to them at all, Touya?”

“Not really...? Wait, no, the overlord was a bit grumpy when I married Sakura.”

But being grumpy was all he was, however. He didn’t particularly object to it. Sakura was completely on my side, so he couldn’t really do anything.

“Couldn’t Melle maybe help mediate a little?”

“Melle still feels guilty over having essentially abandoned Phrasia, so I don’t feel right trying to convince her to help with something like this.”

“Not like I don’t understand where you’re coming from, but...”

If no one ever took that step, then the whole situation would remain unsolved. There’d be all kinds of issues if we just remained at a stalemate.

“...Then again, you’re the one who’s most troubled by all this, so maybe we don’t have to worry too much about solving it?”

“Hang on! It’s a huge problem for Allis too, ’cause she can’t meet me, you know?!”

“She’s never said anything like that. And she’s getting along with Leylle like they’re sisters.”

All the color drained out of Ende's face before he collapsed sideways onto the sofa.

Oops, guess I went too far there.

My phone rang as I was wondering what to do with the guy.

Wait, that's not mine. Is it Ende's?

"Hello...? Huh? Yeah, now's fine, but..."

Ende's eyes regained life again as he spoke on the phone. He slowly rose off the sofa and walked away as he continued his conversation with whoever was on the other end.

Who was he talking to? Was it Melle telling him to buy groceries for dinner?

When Ende finished his phone call, he turned to look at me as I was sipping away at my tea.

"It was from the guildmaster. Apparently, there's a stampede over in Sandora."

"A stampede?!"

At that ominous news, I pulled out my phone and displayed a map in the air. Zooming in on the Sandora region, I used **[Search]**. "Run search: monsters or magic beasts going on a stampede."

"Searching... Search complete. Displaying results."

Red pins appeared on the map. Though it looked like they were moving slowly, in reality, they were running at an extremely fast pace.

"Exact number of matches?"

"32,691 matches."

Damn, that's a lot.

It was a stampede on a pretty large scale, *and* it looked like there was a town in its path. They'd reach it in less than three hours at the current rate.

The Kingdom of Sandora that ruled the region no longer existed. Nowadays, several small city-states had become independent, working away at improving

their trade to survive. My reputation was the same in Sandora as it was in Yulong, given that I was the one who led to their destruction, especially with slave traders.

Given the town was in Sandora, chances were high that it was financially supported by ex-slave traders, but...

“So what was Relisha saying?”

“It was a hunting request. They only just managed to get a branch set up in Sandora, so the last thing she wants is for them to get destroyed already.”

Could Ende really manage it alone? Sure, he had the Dragoon, but that was still a massive number.

“Don’t worry about me. Relisha said she’d send a request to the black and red crowns as well.”

“Norn and Nia?”

Norn was the master of the back crown, Noir, while Nia was the master of the red crown, Rouge. They were both registered with the adventurer’s guild, and we had also loaned them their respective Over Gears. Add the Dragoon and some more impressive adventurers, and such a large horde of monsters *should* be fine. Ende could teleport over there, so his time wouldn’t be so limited.

“You can join if you want, Touya? This commission is for adventurers who are red-rank or above.”

“I’m not so sure I can... Reginleif is still in for maintenance.”

It wasn’t that I would be in danger if I were to participate without it, but the problem was that the people of Sandora really didn’t like me. I’d much rather not make myself visible, especially since a lot of adventurers taking part would be from the area.

I could probably avoid it if I used a Knight Baron, but it had been so long since I really moved my body that I felt I might as well go without one. I’d been so focused on forging the sacred treasure that it’d been a while since my last fight. Plus, I could just put on my silver mask to make myself unidentifiable.

It was time for the return of Shirogane, the silver-masked warrior. I wanted to

warm up before I had to fight the wicked devout anyway.

“Hm, might as well join, then. I’ll let Relisha know.”

People would probably be shocked if Shirogane suddenly reappeared again without warning, so I made sure to send a message explaining the situation to the guildmaster.

That’ll do.

“I’ll get in contact with Norn and Nia, so let’s meet in two hours outside the gates,” I said.

“Roger,” Ende responded before leaping out through the window.

What did I say about using the front door?!

I grumbled to myself as I returned to my room to get changed, completely unaware that a small figure had been watching us that entire time.



I met up with Ende, Norn, and Nia in front of the town entrance. Norn and Nia had made sure to bring their crowns with them. The noble thieves that usually accompanied Nia weren’t with her this time though, only Est, her second-in-command, and Akagane, Est’s Golem.

“Where’s Red Cat?” I asked.

“Those guys aren’t red-rank yet, so they can’t join. Only Est and I are qualified.”

I hadn’t realized they hadn’t passed the required rank. Nothing else we could do about it, then. That was probably the reason that Norn’s humanoid Golem, Elfrau, wasn’t here either. Though Norn’s elder sister, Doctor Elluka, had said that Elfrau was specialized for medical purposes, so I didn’t think she would be all that useful in a fight anyway.

“Not that I care all that much, but what the hell are you wearing? Have you gone loopy already?”

Norn was looking at my full attire of armor, surcoat, and silver mask in disgust as she gave her harsh opinion.

It isn't that weird, is it?

"I don't have the best reputation in the Sandora region. This is just a disguise so I don't draw too much unwanted attention. Call me Shirogane when I look like this."

"You don't have the best reputation? What did you do?"

"Well, uh...I guess I destroyed their country?"

I could feel everyone present apart from Ende recoil at that admission.

Okay, now hang on a sec, they're the ones who declared war first! I just protected Brunhild from a potential danger.

I didn't expect them to understand if I explained, so I just went ahead with opening a **[Gate]** to Sandora.

"Whoa!"

When we stepped through the **[Gate]**, there were already a ton of male adventurers waiting for us.

This was one of the small oases in the desert of the Sandora region. It had been designated as the meet-up point for everyone involved in the commission. It seemed like a good bunch had already gathered.

Relisha had already let the members of the guild know we were coming, so someone frantically rushed over the second he saw us.

"Gold-rank adventurer Ende, red-rank adventurers Norn, Nia, and Est, and...Shirogane, yes?"

The moment the words "gold-rank" were uttered, the crowd around us grew restless. There were only three gold-rank adventurers in the world right now, after all: Galen, one of the previous kings of Lestia, Ende, and myself. I was pretty sure Yae and Hilde would join those ranks soon, though.

The guild member had clearly deliberately obscured what rank I was. Seemed Relisha had made sure to work that out with this branch.

"So you really can use teleportation magic. It gave us a bit of a fright. No wonder you're gold," he marveled.

“Well, y’know,” Ende awkwardly muddled his words. I was the one who used the **[Gate]**, but Ende could actually use teleportation magic, so it wasn’t a complete lie.

“Is this all of the adventurers who accepted the commission?”

“Yes. There are ninety-four red-rank adventurers in the Sandora region.”

Including us, that made an army around a hundred strong. Even though a lot of it would be trash like goblins and kobolds, asking us to take on a stampede that was more than three hundred times the size of us was insanity. But red ranks were first-class adventurers, so they would be strong enough to take this on. Plus, the commission was put out under the assumption that people like Ende and Norn would be joining anyway, so we would be fine.

“Jeez, it’s so hot out here...” Norn complained. “Sorry, but I’m gonna go cool myself down until the fight starts.”

After saying that, she took out a storage card from her pocket, and with a swish, made her lion Over Gear, Leo Noir, appear in the desert. Ignoring the shocked onlookers, Norn boarded the cockpit together with Noir.

Look, I get that they come equipped with air conditioning, but seriously?

“Ugh, lemme do the same.”

Nia immediately copied Norn, materializing her tiger Over Gear, Tiger Rouge, and began boarding it. Sometimes these girls could march to the beat of their own drums a *little* too much.

Seeing the two Over Gears on our side, the adventurers began showing signs of relief. They must have been nervous after all.

I had heard that there were a lot of former slaves and gladiators among the adventurers of Sandora. I couldn’t imagine former slaves holding a grudge against me, but it would be a little awkward if they started making a big deal about getting to meet me, so I felt I’d made the right call coming in a disguise.

“Tou— Shirogane, how far has the stampede gone?” Ende asked.

“They’ll arrive here in about thirty minutes,” I said upon checking my map. Ende had also called out his Dragoon from the pocket dimension.

There was a large town to the back of this oasis. They had guards there, but the ideal situation would be not letting a single monster leak through. In the case that any did reach the town, though, the guards would be more than capable of handling a few dozen of them.

“Guess I should get ready myself.”

As I watched Ende board the Dragoon, I pulled two phrasium katana from **[Storage]**, one large and one small, and attached them to my waist. If I used Brunhild, I would definitely end up standing out. There was also the risk of people realizing who I was. Phrasium weapons were easy to explain away, since other countries who had acquired Phrase fragments, few as those were, had learned to manufacture them themselves.

All that was left was to call out Kohaku.

“My liege, what is with your appearance?” she asked, looking at me with suspicious eyes. I could tell, right this minute, that she was thinking to herself, “You’re doing something strange again, aren’t you?”

“We’re trying to stop a little stampede. Thought I’d have you tag along like you did in Eashen.”

“I see. Well, I have been a bit lacking in exercise recently.”

While at the castle, Kohaku very much lived a cat’s life. Or a *big* cat’s life in captivity, in her case. She would eat, sleep, rinse, repeat. Of course she would feel that she wasn’t getting enough exercise. Naturally, I made sure to say none of that out loud.

“Hm?”

Suddenly feeling eyes on my back, I turned around. The Sandoran adventurers were focusing on preparing for the stampede, maintaining their weapons or focusing their minds. Some of them were looking in my direction. Was it their eyes I felt? Rather than curiosity, I felt like someone had been watching me out of caution... Well, whatever.

“Tou... No, uh, Shirogane, it seems like the head of the pack’s arrived,” Ende told me from the Dragoon. I leaped up from the oasis using **[Fly]**, and when I focused farther away in the desert, I could see a sand cloud being kicked up

among the heat haze.

“[Long Sense].”

I strengthened my sight and was able to see countless magic beasts charging right toward us. Sand Goblins, Desert Scorpions, Basilisks, Sand Crawlers, Lizardmen, Desert Buffalo, Sand Sharks... There were a number I didn't know the identity of too.

Beasts that could move through the sand such as Sand Sharks and Sand Crawlers led the group. Due to the difference in speed among them, rather than closing in like a wave, they were in more of a spear formation.

Well, at least that makes it easier for us.

“They're here, huh? All right, let's do this!”

Nia, full of energy, burst right out of the oasis with Tiger Rouge.

“Oh, come on! Don't go charging in by yourself.”

Sick of Nia's antics, Norn chased after her in Leo Noir.

“Guess I should head off too.”

The Dragoon lowered the wheels in its heels and dashed off into the desert. I thought the sand might impede movement, but it seemed to be moving perfectly fine. Had Doc Babylon upgraded it?

Once the three Frame Gears were off, the adventurers also began their charge into the desert.

Better make sure I don't fall behind.

I jumped onto Kohaku after she had landed on the ground and turned into her large tiger form. When I unsheathed my tachi, Kohaku charged toward the stampede.

“The silver-masked warrior will begin his assault! I suppose that's the appropriate thing to say here.”

Kohaku had passed by the adventurers in a matter of seconds, and before long, we had caught up with Ende and the others. We were going fast despite having to wade through sand.

“Kohaku, we’ll just end up getting in the way if we’re too close to the Frame Gears, so let’s hold back here and catch any monsters that get past them.”

“Yes, my liege.”

Kohaku slid to a halt. Ende’s group was already wreaking havoc on the stampede, no mercy to be seen. I could see a Sand Shark’s fin poking out of the sand, sliding along toward us. The sharklike magic beast leaped out of the sand, mouth open wide to chomp down on me.

“Get lost, you impudent brat.”

At the shock wave that Kohaku released from her mouth, the leaping Sand Shark exploded into pieces. Now nothing more than chunks of meat, it fell to the ground, red stains left behind in its wake.

You can eat Sand Shark, can’t you? Maybe cook up its fins?

I could already picture Lu and Arcia getting mad at me if I wasted it, so I decided to put its body parts in **[Storage]** for now.

“Oh, got another visitor.”

First was the Sand Shark; now came a Desert Buffalo. Desert Buffalo were rampaging carnivorous beasts that came equipped with deadly horns. Kohaku easily dodged its charge, and I took my phrasium blade and slashed its head clean off as it passed. The buffalo went tumbling over after being beheaded.

Lu and Arcia would almost definitely get pissed at me if I left the buffalo behind too, so I decided to store that as well.

For now. Just for now, okay?

“Hyeh hyeh hyeh!”

“I don’t need you, though,” I ruthlessly said as I cut down the Sand Goblin that had come jumping at me next. No point collecting monsters we couldn’t eat.

“Kohaku, prioritize the targets we can take back as food.”

“I feel like your priorities are a little skewed here...”

Kohaku was clearly confused by my order, but she ran off to fulfill it regardless. We jumped into the rush of magic beasts that had gotten past the

Frame Gears and slashed through them all. I made sure to not forget to take a little detour to put them into **[Storage]** here and there.

I could've taken all of them down with one fell swoop were I to use magic, but then the adventurers would lose out on pay, and I wanted to get my feel for battle back anyway, so I decided not to do that.

The more monsters I fought against, the more I could feel my honed instincts returning. I was keenly reminded of how this stinging tension that came from being in actual danger wasn't something you could truly replicate in training.

When I looked up, I noticed the adventurers also starting to engage with the stampede.

Look at 'em go.

Trust red-rank adventurers to charge into a horde without fear and still successfully take down the monsters.

Perhaps because there were a lot of locals, they seemed knowledgeable on the most efficient way to take the creatures down. They were even properly equipped against those with venom like the Desert Scorpions. Good on them.

Oh, and there was Est fighting together with Akagane. They were both showing great teamwork, coordinating their attacks well as they looked out for the other. As expected of a Golem and its master, they were completely in sync.

The adventurers were fighting as hard as they could to not be shown up. There was a girl over there fighting with a katana, same as myself. Was she from Eashen? She looked a lot like Yakumo. Another girl over there swinging a halberd around looked a lot like Frei. And a girl beating up a Lizardman by the back looked a lot like Linne.

Oof, that was one hell of a tackle.

The girl who'd done it looked exactly like Steph. The girl using magic over there looked like Elna, and the girl cheerfully singing looked like Yoshino. The girl going around collecting the monsters that looked edible looked exactly like Arcia. And honestly, I could only see the one wearing the power armor as Quun.

Ha ha ha...

“WH-WHAT THE HELL?!”

What are my kids DOING?!



No matter how you looked at it, my kids were taking down the stampede one monster after another.

“Hey, why are you guys here?!” I angrily questioned, running to Linne where she was sending Lizardmen flying with her fists.

“Who are you, old man?” was the response I got back from Linne, her head tilted.

Guh!

A metaphorical knife stabbed right into my gut.

Oh, right, I enhanced the mask with cognition disruption, so of course she wouldn't recognize me...

It was a type of magic that only got stronger the better I knew the person. It completely erased that sense of someone looking familiar, meaning that Linne couldn't register any features that would let her recognize me. In her mind, I was just a stranger. Still, did she really have to call me an old man? I was eighteen...

“Huh? Wait, is that you, Kohaku?” Linne asked, looking over in surprise at Kohaku behind me.

“Indeed.”

Oh, so you'll recognize her and not me, huh?

Even though Kohaku had no form of cognition disruption cast on her, I still felt burned.

Things finally clicked into place, so the girl slowly asked, “Is... Is that you, dad?”

After a beat, I replied, “I am indeed your father.”

I nudged aside my mask a little. Somewhat hilariously, Linne started flailing at the realization.

“U-Um, that’s, this...! Q-QUUUUUUN!”

At Linne’s shout, Quun immediately came lumbering over in her power armor. Quun herself had made it, an Armored Arm Gear that she called Beowulf, I think?

Jeez, just what are you riding there, girl?

“Whatever is the matter, Linne? Did you get hurt? Wait, father?!”

When Quun saw me with my mask slightly off, she showed the same shocked expression as Linne.

“Quun? Mind explaining why you’re all here?”

“U-Um, that’s, this...! Y-YAKUMOOOOOOO!”

Thank you for having the exact same reaction.

The Mochizuki family’s eldest daughter, Yakumo, came over next, slicing through any monsters in her path.

“Why are you all hanging around here?! We need to prioritize the high-ranking monsters and take them... Wait, f-father?!”

Admittedly, I felt a little depressed at Yakumo having the exact same reaction as the other girls. Our kids had a habit of pushing responsibility on Yakumo much more than they should. I really needed to sort that out before it was too late.

“Yakumo, you’re the oldest. You must have an explanation, right?”

“U-Um, that’s, this...! A-AUNT MOROHAAAAA!”



“What’s up, kid?”

“YOUUUUUUU! YOU’RE THE REASON FOR THIS MESS, AREN’T YOU?!”

It was my turn to exclaim when Moroha suddenly popped up.

And so, the villain makes her appearance! It was clear that this musclehead goddess of swords hadn’t gotten enough action recently and so had decided to lead our children down the path of evil!

“Well, that’s a bit rude. I’m more like their leader and their guardian.”

She laughed heartily as she slashed the incoming monsters in half with her sonic boom.

“The kids were already heading here through Yakumo’s **[Gate]** by the time I saw them. I thought it looked kinda fu— I mean, I felt a little worried about ’em, so I decided to hop on through as well. I only learned what was going on after I got here.”

So rather than Moroha bringing them here, the kids had made their way here themselves. Apparently, Yoshino had overheard me and Ende talking about the stampede. Steph ended up wanting to go when Yoshino told them, then Linne and Frei joined in after her, and Quun successfully enticed...*convinced* the reluctant Yakumo. And then, Moroha caught them in the act and ended up becoming their leader plus guardian?

“Do Yae and the other girls know?” I asked, eyes narrowed suspiciously.

“Um, they...probably don’t? We only came here for a bit of exercise, so...” Yakumo mumbled, averting her eyes.

You don’t go participate in a stampede extermination for some light exercise...

I mean, technically, that was why I went, but still! To these kids, this was probably the same as going to play a little ball in the park. Why should they need to tell their mothers about every little outing? But that was dependent on family. That said, we did tend to give them a lot of freedom.

“If Kuon had been there, I’m sure he would’ve either tried to stop you or at least made sure to tell me and Yumina,” I muttered with a sigh. Quun averted her gaze. She totally didn’t tell Kuon for that very reason.

You'll be the ones getting yelled at by your mothers later, you know?

"Father, um, maybe you can leave the scolding for later? The monsters are closing in, see? Look!"

"Mngh... You know what, fine. Stay together, don't get separated. If anything happens, tell an adult right away."

"Okaaay!"

At least their responses were enthusiastic, but I was pretty sure their mothers would be mad at me too later for this... In fact, it would definitely happen. They'd demand to know why I didn't stop them. But what parent *could* after seeing how much fun they were having?

Nothing I can do about it. I'll just get scolded along with them.

"Moroha, keep an eye on them for me, will you?"

"Leave it to me. But before I go, Touya, who exactly is this musclehead goddess that hasn't had enough action recently, hm?"

"I'm really sorry!"

Damn it, she knew exactly what I was thinking!

After bowing my head in apology, I leaped onto Kohaku and left the scene.

I'll just let sleeping gods lie!

"Grrrrrrrrrr!"

"Shut it!" I slammed a **[Fireball]** straight into the mouth of the Sand Crawler that suddenly decided to stand in my way. It might have been a bit too obvious that I was letting my frustrations out, but...well, whatever.

Even though Ende, Norn, and Nia were managing to thin out the numbers, the amount leaking through never seemed to decrease at all. With the kids and Moroha here now, it didn't really matter how many leaked through—we'd be able to clean them up easily. But it was quite mentally taxing when it felt like there was no end in sight. I guess if the adventurers were hitting the end of their tether, I could just kill them all with magic...

Oh?

“I think there might be some monsters joining the party that I’ve never seen before.”

Pretty sure that Sand Shark I just killed had two heads. Was it some kind of subspecies...? It wasn’t as if I knew every monster that existed. In fact, since I was basically never in Sandora, I wouldn’t really know about the monsters specific to this region. I kind of just assumed they would be the same monsters you’d find in any old desert region.

Suddenly, I was attacked by yet another unfamiliar monster. Was it a squid? An octopus? Some kind of strange monster with a bunch of tentacles burst out of the sand. I cut one of its tentacles down with my blade when it attacked, purple blood spurting out from where it was severed. When the rest of the tentacles attacked, I cut those off as well.

Right after that, it suddenly started spouting some kind of red-brown liquid at me. Of course, we made sure to dodge that one. When it landed on the sand, there was a sizzling sound as white smoke rose from it. It had quite literally melted the sand.

Ugh, not dissolving acid!

It was gross as hell, so I decided to take it down as fast as I possibly could. Betting on it being similar to a squid or octopus, I thrust right between its eyes, and just like that, it fell to the ground dead.

This was the first time I’d seen a monster like that. Was it a Sand Octopus? Or maybe it was called a Sand Tentacular?

Can we eat this...? No, no, that thing was spitting out acid. No way I wanna eat something like that.

But there was definitely something strange going on. None of the monsters attacking us now were the same as the ones from earlier. And if it wasn’t my imagination, it felt like they were getting stronger too.

Just as I was starting to feel a faint anxiety at that thought, my phone started ringing. It was Ende.

“Yeah, hello?”

“Touya, something’s weird about this stampede. It’s like there’s no end to it, like they’re just infinitely appearing from somewhere.”

I did agree that it felt like there were a bit too many monsters than would be normal. Stampedes obviously did not occur if there were no monsters or animals to cause said stampede. There would be some sort of trigger that would result in swathes of them migrating from areas like forests and mountains that tended to be rich in resources. But deserts were tough locations for animals to live in to begin with, so stampedes rarely had reason to happen in them.

But then, where did these monsters come from? It was like someone had gathered them from all across the desert and set them loose...

I was starting to get the feeling that this was a man-made stampede.

Could this also have been caused by the wicked devout?

I took a look at my phone’s map again, but the shape of the stampede hadn’t changed at all. The only difference was that the red pins now stretched all the way to our location. The rear wasn’t moving at all? Actually, rather than it not moving, it was like more monsters were appearing from there.

“No way! **[Teleport]!**”

Getting a bad feeling, I teleported myself and Kohaku to the rear of the stampede. What I saw there was a whole crowd of monsters coming out from distorted space. The monsters leaping out were charging straight along the desert, probably blindly following the monsters in front.

“Is this a **[Gate]?! Actually, no, is it...?!**”

“Oh my, was I a little late?”

As if to confirm my speculation, a familiar voice spoke from behind me. When I turned around, standing there was Grandma Tokie, a slightly awkward smile on her face, which meant...

“Is this a timequake distortion?”

“Precisely, my dear. And one so dangerous that it is completely connected to the past. Should this remain, the past and this time will have a constant path

open to each other.”

Was it one of those time tunnels that she had mentioned once before? If I remembered correctly, when time tunnels completely stabilized, the past, present, and future would get all jumbled together, and since there was no easy way to fix it, the god of destruction would have to appear and completely destroy the world as a countermeasure.

Hey, hey, hey, isn't this pretty bad?!

That meant that the strange monsters I had been seeing were actually extinct species from the past!

“I’m sorry. I acted so confident, and yet I had been putting this off... It is quite shameful of me.” Grandma Tokie laughed bashfully. It was a rare sight for her.

But is this really a laughing matter?!

Despite my panic, Grandma Tokie simply closed her right fist into a ball...and the dimensional rip disappeared in an instant. I thought we were in a critical situation, yet she handled it so easily...

“Um, what was this about you being late, exactly?”

“You see, I wanted to solve it before you found out, but it appears I was just a *wee bit* too slow.”

That was what she was talking about?! She was talking about erasing the evidence?! Grandma Tokie gave me a cheeky little chuckle.

“Dimensional distortions of all sizes have been opening across the land recently. I had thought it was the effect of the timequake, but it appears there might have been someone pulling the strings.”

“The wicked devout, by any chance?”

“Yes. They are unmistakably creating the distortions of their own volition. As a result, monsters foreign to this time are flowing here from the past. That can often be the trigger for a stampede, but in this case, the stampede itself is from the past. Due to the endless flow of monsters, even if the dimensional rip wants to close, it can’t.”

Usually, small rips in space fixed themselves through the world’s natural

regenerative abilities. But when they got too big, it took time to close them, and on rare occasions they could end up stuck there. That created a time tunnel.

The constant flow of monsters coming through it was what had been preventing this specific tear from repairing itself. The god of destruction would absolutely have ended up arriving here if it weren't for Grandma Tokie...

Was *that* the goal of the wicked devout? The end of the world through the god of destruction? That spelled the end for themselves as well, so it felt odd to think it was the case, but there were those out there who outright wished for complete destruction, so maybe it wasn't so far-fetched.

"What has me a little curious is why the recent ones have only connected to the past. Dimensional distortions should be able to connect to the future as well."

"Now that you mention it..."

Though there were plenty of visitors from the past, the only visitors from the future had been our kids. The kids' and Leylle's appearance here was no doubt due to the timequake, and the wicked devout likely had no hand in that. Was there a reason for them to be so invested in the past?

"Wait, is it possible for them to pull the wicked god here from before we killed him?"

"That would be impossible. So long as I'm here, I refuse to let the wicked god or any other troublemakers make their way here. Were they to arrive, I would send them to an infinite looping time chamber and have them wander there for eternity."

My deduction was immediately crossed out. An infinite time chamber? What was that? It sounded kind of scary...

Paying no mind to my fear, Grandma Tokie sighed and continued, "They may be unaware of that themselves and are going on a wild-goose chase, though."

That *was* a possibility. It could be that the wicked devout were trying to revive the wicked god, unaware that their efforts were fruitless because of the goddess of space-time's intervention. But as much as I'd end up feeling sorry for them if that was the case, was that really what was happening?

“Wait, does that mean stampedes like this will keep happening?”

“This case is a little unique in that the dimensional tear just happened to end up connecting to a stampede from the past. That is the only reason it grew to this size. I don’t think ones of this scale will happen so often. But these kinds of distortions tend to appear next to anything that moves, so monsters appearing will be an inevitability. Since many monsters in the past were stronger than the ones in the present day...”

“That leads to a stampede, regardless.”

Basically, all the animals got a fright when really strong monsters suddenly appeared, so they all ran away at once. It was their natural survival instincts kicking in, so I couldn’t blame them, but it sure was a hassle.

“So...is there any way for you to know where dimensional tears are going to appear before they happen?”

“Well...I wouldn’t say it’s impossible for me to pinpoint likely locations, but...not only can there be unexpected cases like this one, but I don’t know what to think about an upper god like myself giving too much assistance to the surface world. There are already some gods unhappy at how much we listen to you.”

Ugh, well, if she says that...

It *was* technically my responsibility as the caretaker of this world to clean up this mess. Plus, I was already getting a ton of help from Moroha and Kraft. They could at least make the excuse that they were just giving some guidance to the newbie, but Grandma Tokie was hands-on assisting.

If a time tunnel were to form, the god of destruction would arrive to bring about the end of the world. That in and of itself was a special measure put in place by the gods, especially given this was the gods’ resort.

“So you can only assist when a time tunnel has already formed, is that right?”

“Yes, I’m afraid that is all you can rely on me for. More importantly, is everyone all right over there?”

Grandma Tokie pointed behind me, and when I turned, I saw a large sand

pillar. A gigantic monster about the size of Leo Noir with the body of a lion, the wings of an eagle, and a skull head was floating in the air. Was it a Behemoth?

Hmm, no, maybe on the way to becoming one. The size is kinda small, comparatively.

“This is not a monster that crossed over to this world. It was originally from the desert of this time.”

“Yeah, I think this is a...Skull Sphinx? It probably got attracted here by the smell of all the blood.”

Though the Skull Sphinx had a skull for a head, it was a monster that loved sucking the blood of its enemies. Whether it was because deserts were so devoid of water or it was simply just its taste, I didn’t know, but it was definitely attracted by the ridiculous amount of blood flowing here.

“Grrrrrrr...”

All I could see within its eye depressions was pitch darkness. Though it had no eyeballs, I could tell that it had noticed me. The mouth of the skull opened, and a long needlelike tongue slithered out. That was most likely what it used to suck out the blood of its prey.

Like a falcon that had found its quarry, the Skull Sphinx made its attack from above.

“GRRRRRRRRRROOOOOOAAHHH!”

“Be quiet, you fool.”

Kohaku slashed her claws down at the attacking Sphinx. A slash that practically cleaved space in two cut the monster into pieces.

“GRRREEEEAAEEEEEE?!”

“There we...go!”

I slashed the Skull Sphinx in two when it came falling toward us.

Wait, I’m pretty sure this guy’s fur sells for a lot. Man, what a waste.

Now that the time tunnel had been sealed, there were no longer monsters adding to the stampede. We could probably put an end to all of this in just a

few more hours.

There was no way in hell the girls weren't going to shout at me once we got back, though...

This sucks.



“Activation experiment no. 125: failed.”

The dull light being emitted from the large jagged core that looked like konpeito candy inside a cylindrical tank filled with light purple liquid faded. A small figure sitting in front of the tank frantically ran its gold fingers along the console, looking at the graphs displayed on the monitor.

“Adjustments complete. Commencing activation experiment no. 126.”

Bubbles started to form in the purple liquid, and the core began pulsing as a light flickered from it.

Deep within the camera eyes of the small golden Golem that was quietly watching over the experiment were the dark flames of a deep-rooted delusion glowing like embers.

Chapter III: Those Who Lurk in the Dark

“You’re all meanies! All of you! Why did you go play without us?! Kuon, Leylle, you think they’re big meanie pants too, right?!”

“I don’t think they particularly did anything wrong...”

“I-I don’t really like fighting, so...”

Both Kuon and Leylle were calm in the face of Allis’s anger. She was mad about yesterday’s stampede—something so fun had happened without her knowing, after all, so she was upset over having not been invited. Kuon and Allis had been in the middle of dance lessons at the time, and the kids knew that if they told Kuon, he would’ve absolutely either stopped them or informed the adults, so inviting him would’ve spelled the end of their little romp. Allis didn’t seem to quite understand that, however.

“I wanted to fight the monsters toooooo!” she screamed. Kuon instinctively realized that this wasn’t good. Stress from the etiquette lessons had seemingly built up more than he’d initially thought.

Allis was a fast learner. The more she was taught, the quicker she would make it her own. Realizing how good of a student she was, Yumina and the other girls kept teaching her things one after the other, and as a result, her lessons had begun progressing at a much faster pace than before.

Allis could do anything if she tried, but she didn’t really like studying, and that meant she needed to let off some steam sometimes. In this case, exercise or food would be best. Let her go absolutely wild somewhere, or fill her full of the food she liked. That was something Kuon had learned, having been friends with her for so long.

In her current state, letting her run wild was most likely the best option, but it would be impossible to find somewhere she could do that right now, so Kuon decided to get her something to eat instead.

“Allis, how about we have them treat us to something at Parent as

punishment? I hear they have a cake fair going on right now.”

“Cake! That sounds good! Let’s do that!”

“What is ‘kayk’?” In contrast to Allis falling hook, line, and sinker for Kuon’s trap, Leylle was only confused.

“Cake is a dessert that’s sweet and fluffy and delicious! I’m sure you’ll love it too!”

“Sweet and fluffy...”

Kuon could no longer sense the earlier anger from Allis as she excitedly informed Leylle of how wonderful cake was.

“Y’know, ain’t yer lady a bit...easy to please? You sure you good havin’ her as your wife, kiddo?” Silver let slip, exasperated.

“She’s the perfect wife, if you ask me,” Kuon replied, patting the sword as he smiled at the sight of Allis still enthusiastically explaining the wonders of cake.



The Duchy of Brunhild had recently commenced testing the Swordsman and Guardian series of Knight Gollems. Currently, there were only five units of each, but if the tests went well, there were plans to rapidly expand their numbers. Both were primarily intended to patrol the city, but they would always have a knight together with them as a buddy. There were situations Gollems would struggle to solve, after all.

The civilians were afraid of the large Gollems at first, but the moment they learned they were part of the knights, no one particularly cared anymore.

Are my people not a bit quick to adapt...?

It probably helped that those with crown Gollems like Norn, Nia, and Luna tended to bring their Gollems around with them, so the citizens were at least somewhat used to the sight. They saw the Frame Gears all the time too.

“Are they performing well?”

“Yes, sir. Both the Swordsmen and the Guardians are performing without issue. A Swordsman managed to restrain some troublemakers at the pub with

ease, while the Guardians assisted in a rescue operation when there was an accident at a construction site.”

I felt much calmer upon hearing my knight commander’s report. I would give it a few more months, and if things were still going fine, I would see about raising the numbers. According to my children, I had established a Knight Golem squad separate from the human knights in the future. Albus was their commander, but he was occupied with the observation of the Ark from Val Albus right now, so I’d have to think about it again once the wicked devout were dealt with.

“Actually, Your Grace, we found this...”

Lain held out what looked like a bunch of small medicine pouches wrapped in white paper. I took one, carefully opened it, and saw that inside was a small scattering of gold powder.

“Where did you find this?” I immediately asked.

“One of the drunks that the Swordsman restrained had it on his person. Is this...?”

“There’s no doubt about it. It’s that golden drug.”

The gold powder was a terrifying drug made out of a mutant’s body that could completely mutate a human.

Dammit, so it’s started spreading around Brunhild too?

“Where’d they say they got this?”

“They said that they bought it while in Badrianna, a port town of Belfast. Some black-robed stranger suddenly spoke to them in a bar and sold it to them.”

From right next door, huh? Is that robed dude a member of the wicked devout?

“We can’t rule out that they might eventually come straight into our territory. Tighten security. Stay alert for anyone suspicious.”

“Understood, sir.”

When Lain left the room, I teleported up to Babylon's laboratory and asked Flora to analyze the contents of the golden drug. It could have been more advanced than before, or perhaps even a fake, so I thought it important to check, just in case. I then reported the situation to the king of Belfast.

Upon returning to my office, I did a **[Search]** with my phone and found that the drug really had managed to reach all the way to the eastern continent. There was an especially concentrated amount in Panaches and Refreese, probably because they were the main trading hubs that connected east and west.

Though it was a lot, it was still fairly scattered. Not that that meant I could just leave it alone, of course. I'd given some of the antidote out to each country a while ago, but...

"Is this really something that can spread so fast...?"

"Concerning that—"

"WHOA!"

I accidentally shouted when Tsubaki suddenly appeared.

How long has she been there?! Wait, the corner of the ceiling is open! I don't care if you're a ninja, at least come in through the door!



“Papillon appears to have a hand in this.”

“Papillon?”

It felt like I had heard that name somewhere before.

“It was a criminal organization that you took down on the western continent. They were Black Cat’s parent organization.”

“Right, right, that was a thing.”

We had infiltrated the black market in the western continent once in order to try to get our hands on some Gollems. The operators of that black market had been a criminal organization known as Papillon. That was where we first met the purple crown, Fanatic Viola, and its master, the perverted girl named Luna Trieste. I remember we nearly got killed back then...

Papillon ended up fractured after that, and a number of the stray members banded together to form Black Cat under the lead of Silhouette, also known as Kageyuri. Black Cat operated as information brokers, making use of what they learned from the brothels and inns that they owned. Tsubaki appeared to frequently make use of their information network, so that was likely where she received the info.

“But didn’t I destroy Papillon?”

“Not entirely. You only cursed the leader, then left them to their own devices.”

Wait, did I really do something so terrible...? I totally did. I cursed, uhhh, what was his name? Zabbit? I cursed him to never go near Silhouette or the other Black Cats ever again.

He left the town after that, but we met him again trying to extort money from an orphanage in a different town. I had only cursed him concerning Black Cat, so he was free to do all kinds of heinous acts elsewhere. Was I maybe a bit too naive not doing anything more direct?

“So, this Zabbit is transporting the golden drug to the eastern continent?”

“That is not quite right. It is confirmed that Papillon is behind it, but Zabbit has already passed away. Someone else is now the leader.”

What? That old dude kicked the bucket? Was it because of my curse? But Silhouette hadn't said anything about getting into an altercation.

"No, Your Grace, your curse was unrelated to his death. He died due to infighting. His men overthrew him."

What, he was betrayed by his men, then?

To be fair, he didn't really come across as someone who would be all that well-liked by his people. Maybe that was common in the underworld.

"And this new leader is the one spreading the drug?"

"Yes, Your Grace."

But that left the question of where Papillon was getting their supply of the drug in the first place. Were they in cahoots with the wicked devout?

"Where's their base of operations now?"

"They previously had their base of operations in Strain, but are now located in a town in western Gardio."

That was close to Isengard, where we had fought the wicked god. Isengard was now nothing more than a wasteland, basically a lawless country, so it was the perfect place for the underworld to gather.

"The drug does seem to be spreading around Gardio as well..."

Looking at the map, the pins were in higher density in highly populated areas, as you would expect. That had to be because of Papillon.

Naturally, we'd made sure to supply Gardio with antidotes as well, but there was a limit to the number, and the antidote was only effective up until the worst symptoms began showing. By that point, there was a good chance it was too late to save the patient. Even though we'd spread the information that the gold powder was dangerous, there would still be those who would take it.

According to Flora, the drug temporarily reduced stress—in other words, pressures on the mind—and made any pain, both mental and physical, vanish. Of course, if that was all it did, you couldn't really call it a bad drug, but unsurprisingly, the rate of addiction was high. When one quit cold turkey, their stress would increase, and so naturally they'd relapse in a desperate attempt to

get rid of the renewed stress. It led to an endless cycle.

Flora had suggested that this repeated cycle caused a human's negative emotions to build up inside their body. Once that reached a certain level, the mind became unable to handle it, and just like an overfilled balloon, the worst symptoms would start to show. When one ended up in that state, an antidote was incapable of doing anything. You would become an inhuman follower of the wicked god.

Wanting to escape mental strain or pain was natural as a human. Not everyone had the mental fortitude to cope. They were the ones being preyed on with the drug. The dealers weren't selling them at an especially high price; it was a price that even an average citizen could afford. That, in and of itself, was also preying upon the weak.

The drug would steal your money, eat away at your mind, and break your body. It quite literally consumed you down to your bones, turning you into its slave. It was something completely unforgivable.

"For now, I'll inform each country where the gold drug is spreading."

I attached an image of the map with the pins still on it and sent it around. If I made them all aware of it now, it would help in the prevention of victims.

"What shall we do about Papillon, Your Grace?"

"Good question. If we don't nip it in the bud, it'll just turn into a game of cat and mouse."

Where were they acquiring the drug from? Who was doing the deals with the wicked devout? Usually, I would just assume it was the new leader of Papillon, but...

"Shall we infiltrate Papillon's new base?" Tsubaki suggested.

"Infiltrate? Who, you?"

"No, Homura's team."

The three kunoichi serving under Tsubaki were Sarutobi Homura, Kirigakure Shizuku, and Fuma Nagi. Would it really be safe, though? Maybe it was because I'd known them since they started their training, but I felt a little nervous at the

idea.

“Those three girls really are improving,” Tsubaki reassured me. “In terms of their fighting prowess, they have been training under Lady Moroha and Lord Takeru every day, so they are already much stronger than your average knight. In addition, Homura has her Mystic Eye, Shizuku has her superior abilities of disguise, and Nagi has various tools for assassination.”

Wow, the girls have been growing up, huh?

Not that their ages were much different from mine. Still, if Tsubaki was vouching for them this much, then it had to be fine.

“All right, then, I’ll have those three infiltrate the place. Though, I’ll send Bastet and Anubis to accompany them as support.”

“They are the black cat and dog Gollems, yes? I see. That way, they will be able to collect information without appearing suspicious.”

Bastet and Anubis were Gollems designed by Doctor Elluka, but recently, they’d been left with nothing to do, so they’d just been wandering around the town. They’d been assisting with gathering information and patrolling, at least, but if we wanted to investigate something, those two could do it without drawing suspicion. Bastet was a smart kitty, and Anubis was...well, he could be a bit slow sometimes, but he was friendly, and could easily pass for a regular dog.

Having revealed their locations to the other countries, all we had left to do was destroy Papillon. Take down the drug dealers and the number of victims would decrease. We couldn’t let the wicked god’s curse spread any further.

I took out my phone to contact the ruler of Gardio for assistance.



In western Gardio, not far from where Isengard used to be located, sat the coastal town of Brenn. Before Isengard’s destruction, the town was a prosperous stop-off point for trade, with freight carriers and horse carriages frequently going back and forth between the countries, but the fall of Isengard brought another division of the land, casting a dark shadow over Brenn’s prosperity. For a city on the frontier, it was doing well for itself, but there was

no denying that the quality of life for its citizens had taken a direct hit.

Traffic decreased all at once—all visitors to Isengard would stop off at Brenn first, but no curious travelers would make that journey anymore. With unemployment rates rising, and resources only decreasing, many took to crime, and as a matter of course, those who would control that crime only increased.

Even the lord of the land had been bought off by those criminal organizations, thereby ignoring any wrongs they committed. As the trustworthy previous lord died of disease, his younger brother had taken over, but...had the previous lord really died due to natural causes?

“The rumors surrounding the previous lord are as one would expect—rumors of if the underworld plotted the assassination of the previous lord in order to put a puppet ruler they could control in place.”

The time was early evening. In an inn overlooking the streets of Brenn, Bastet had urgently gathered everyone to pass on her information.

“Apparently, Papillon formed an assassination squad after its fracturing. It is hard to brush it off as simple hearsay.”

Upon hearing Bastet’s report, Kirigakure Shizuku, one of the three kunoichi sent from Brunhild, placed a hand on her chin in thought, long hair gently swaying.

“Perhaps the previous lord’s death was planned by Papillon, after all.”

“In all likelihood, that is the case. As remote a location this may be, how else could they gain complete control over it?”

As Shizuku nodded to herself, the droning sounds of a different group of people uninvolved in the conversation reached her ears.

“Oh, Nagi! I was gonna eat that!”

“Should’ve been faster, then!”

“Hang on, girl, gimme a piece too!”

“But you’re a Gollem, aren’t you? You shouldn’t need to eat.”

“It’s ‘cause I’m such a high-spec Gollem, y’see! Something like that’s no big

deal!”

“Then I’ll give you this, okay?”

“Yahoo...! Hey, this is just the bone! That’s animal abuse, y’know?!”

“But don’t doggos adore bones?”

“Pfft, then you can have mine too!”

“Shut up already!” Shizuku and Bastet both shouted for the noisy table in the corner to quieten down. They were far more serious about their work than the carefree three accompanying them.

“Aww, c’mon, lighten up. Gonna end up missing the forest for the trees if you tire yourself out so quick,” Anubis was quick to throw back.

“Oooh, look at you giving a good piece of advice for once, doggo. Listen to him, Shizuku, you should relax a bit,” Homura added on.

“Hey...”

“You are all *too* relaxed! Are you even aware of how serious this mission is?!”

“I said hey...”

“You too, you stupid mutt! Quit indulging them! I will tell on you to Fenrir if you keep this up!”

“Wha—?! Hey, that’s unfair!”

“Is that not Papillon over there?”

All arguments came to an abrupt halt. When they looked to the side, Nagi was standing by the window, staring outside. The rest of the group swiftly sidled up to the window and caught sight of men dressed in black illuminated by the streetlights.

“There’s no doubt about it. That’s Papillon,” Homura confirmed, using her Mystic Eye to catch sight of the black butterfly embroidered in their cuffs.

“Finding our target on day one? We’re so lucky!” Nagi celebrated.

“I don’t know if that’s the word I’d use... Well, it’s true that it keeps us from wasting time. Bastet, Anubis, can we count on you?”

“Leave it to us. Let’s go, you idiot mutt!”

“Don’t you start calling me that too, sis! Dogs are man’s best friend, y’know?!”

The two Golems swiftly leaped out the window and gave chase along the roofs.

“We will keep gathering info. We must investigate what Papillon’s leaders are like.”

“Good idea. I’ll do a sweep of the pubs,” Homura said.

“Then I’ll go to the entertainment district!” Nagi volunteered.

With a nod, the ninjas all left out the window as Bastet and Anubis had, disappearing into the night.



“This the one?”

“Yeah. If you look here on his arm...”

One of the men dressed in black rolled up the sleeve of a homeless man collapsed on the ground. The man let out a groan, but otherwise didn’t resist the manhandling of his body.

“I see. So it’s begun.”

Dark gray scales were beginning to grow along the man’s arm.

“Bring him with us. It’ll be troublesome if he mutates in public.”

“What a pain... Can’t we just deal with him here, bro?”

“Orders from above. We’re not supposed to kill them.”

The leader of their group lit a cigarette as he watched his men lift the homeless man by the legs and drag him away. The smoke he puffed out dispersed in the cold night air.

“What good is there in keeping someone like that alive?” his subordinate asked.

“Who knows? Probably as a guinea pig for some experiment? Might as well

make use of him how we can.”

His interest in the matter was entirely nonexistent. The moment he’d finished his smoke, the leader crushed it under his shoe.

“Let’s go.”

“Aye aye, sir.”

The men exited the back alley and walked off into the night, unaware that a black cat and dog had witnessed everything that just transpired.



In a pub known as the Silver Shark that was located in the south of Brenn, rough crowds of men were once again getting plastered on the cheapest of alcohol. Such a place attracted all manner of people, from fishers who went out to sea, to cranky shipwrights, to shady merchants. They weren’t joyously celebrating, however, but rather venting their anger and grievances.

“HUH?! Say that one more time, you bastard!”

“Sure, I’ll say it as many times as I need to!”

And that right there was the signal that another brawl was about to begin. The rest of the patrons screwed up their faces at the familiar sight, but they weren’t going to bring it upon themselves to put a stop to it. The only one nervously hovering was the master of the bar, knowing that a fight inside the establishment couldn’t end well for them. If they got too aggressive, it would start causing issues for the other customers too.

Having reached the end of his patience, a small young man stood up and walked toward the fistfight.

“Shut the hell up, you old farts.”

When the young man thrust out the palms of both of his hands toward the pair, a smile still on his face, they both went flying through the air despite their muscular builds and out through the door. The ones who hadn’t been watching looked up in confusion, while those who had seen exactly what went down had their eyes wide in a very different kind of confusion.

The young boy returned to his seat as if nothing had happened, then spoke to

the suspicious merchant sitting opposite.

“Sorry, where did you leave off?”

“Oh, yeah, uh, I was just talking about Papillon’s hierarchy...”

The merchant had become more aware than ever that the boy in front of him was not ordinary whatsoever. In fact, calling them a boy wasn’t even correct—they were a girl.

Homura, one of Brunhild’s intelligence officers, had managed to cut down her targets to this comparatively loose-lipped merchant in the bar in her search for more info. Her frustration at the noise of the arguing pair had led to her unintentionally standing out, but it seemed to have made the merchant all the more willing to spill the beans, so it all worked out in the end.

“There are several elites underneath the boss with four of them designated as division heads. They’re all split into one of four groups: field ops, underground trade, reconnaissance, and counterfeiting and smuggling.”

“What’s this field ops team?”

“They cover anything that requires muscle, like being bodyguards, intimidation tactics, or debt collecting. Apparently, they’ll carry out assassinations too if the price is right.”

According to the rumors, the previous ruler was assassinated by Papillon. With this, Homura had no reason to doubt that was the truth. Assassination actually came under the work description for ninjas on occasion as well. Thankfully, Homura had never had any such mission given to her, but she had heard the stories from some of the elder ninjas from Eashen.

What she had also heard was that taking on such commissions came with its own risks, less from the assassination mission itself, and more because of the chance of being targeted by the one who had put in the request.

If the assassination was successful, the only ones with the knowledge of the perpetrator were the client and the one who carried it out. In other words, the assassin now had info they could hold over their client’s head. There were many stories of ninjas who had been killed by their clients in order to keep them quiet.

Homura couldn't be sure how it worked in Papillon, but if it was an assassination that would be especially bad if made public, the one who carried out the assassination might have already been dead.

I would never accept a request like that, Homura thought to herself, but when she considered how nonchalant her current master was, she realized that he'd never make her do something like that to begin with. A smile crept onto her face as it became apparent to her how unfounded her worries were.

"Which division's spreading the gold drug?"

"...Why are you asking that? I'm not here to judge, but don't stick your nose into shady business like this. I get it—you're strong, but if you make yourself a target to them, you're a goner."

This merchant was a kinder man than Homura had initially thought. Seeing this man who looked so unbelievably suspicious actually worried about her made her feel like he'd probably get so much more business if he just made an attempt to look less shady.

Homura placed a silver coin on the table in front of the merchant.

"...Couldn't tell you the specifics, but I personally think it's either Delloria, the one in charge of underground dealings, or Bilis, the one in charge of counterfeiting and smuggling," he said, as he dragged the coin toward himself. He then downed the rest of his now-lukewarm ale. It seemed pretty clear he had some kind of connection to Papillon.

No one in this town could be involved in trade and *not* be mixed up with Papillon. In fact, even the establishment Homura was in right now probably had to pay protection money to them. If they didn't, they'd have been run right over by now.

"Delloria of underground trade or Bilis of smuggling and counterfeiting, hm..."

Given this was tied to dealings with the wicked devout, her mind immediately went to underground trade, but the dealing of the golden drug would also be tied to smuggling.

"Thanks, gramps. You were a massive help."

Homura laid down another silver coin, then got up from her seat. Her meal cost was included.

Having managed to bag some good info, the kunoichi was in a good mood as she left the building. But shortly after she began walking away, a bunch of tough-looking guys appeared and circled her.

They weren't Papillon. Among them were the two drunks that she'd kicked out earlier.

"She's the one! Shitty kid going around like he owns the place!"

"Oy, you lot! Pin him down!"

Apparently, they had come for revenge—after making sure to bring their friends with them first, naturally. The men all jumped at Homura at once, but in the next moment, a rapid-fire cacophony of punches rang out, and every last one of them fell to the ground, eyes rolling into the back of their heads.

"Huh?!"

The two who had been the cause of all of this hadn't gotten involved in the dogpile and were simply standing to the side in shock. They hadn't even been able to see what had happened.

"If you wanna beat me, you're gonna have to bring ten times more people than this!"

Homura dashed right up to the two men, then used the same move as back at the bar, but this time, without holding back. The two men went flying, knocking over the fence and water buckets by the nearby stable, and landed right in a pile of horse manure.

Curious onlookers had peeked out the bar to see what all the noise was about, but by the time they caught sight of the two unconscious men covered in poop, Homura had already disappeared into the night.



"Are you an idiot?"

"Ow! How you wound me!"

Shizuku's response to Homura's report was immediate. Homura exaggeratedly clutched at her chest at the sudden insult.

"Why are you drawing attention to yourself? Maybe if I have you write 'ninja' one thousand times, you will finally remember what you are."

"It was just kind of inevitable, I think..."

"If there are people causing a scene, you ignore them. Simple, don't you agree? They were not picking a fight with you specifically, correct?"

"Well, no, but..."

The two men were arguing so loud that Homura couldn't hear what the merchant was saying, so she went to put a stop to them without thinking. Though, the scolding from Shizuku was enough to have her reflect. Perhaps she had maybe been a bit too short-tempered in that instance.

"You did get us some good information, though, so I will give you some credit."

Homura, Shizuku, and Nagi were all gathered in their room in the inn, Bastet and Anubis still to return.

"What about you, Nagi?"

"Oh, I went to the entertainment district. Walked past quite a few suspicious people!"

"Like, Papillon kind of suspicious?"

"No, not in that way. Suspicious as in the 'they'd been taking drugs' kind of way! They were all unsteady on their feet, their eyes were empty, and they kept muttering about wanting drugs."

They looked as if they had taken the gold drug. It had clearly spread more than they had initially anticipated. The moment the victims ran out of money for more, they would likely run straight to crime. The drugs had the ability to dull one's sense of reason, after all.

"I thought about giving them the antidote, but..."

The three kunoichi had been supplied with several antidotes for their mission,

but given how few had been supplied to each country, they were more than aware of how precious they were.

“You were right not to. Ignoring the fact that they were already at late-stage symptoms, we cannot use such a precious medicine on whoever we find. And even if we cured them, if we do not solve the root of the problem first, they would likely end up going back for more, regardless of what we do.”

“Yeah, I know...”

Though Shizuku was being as logical as she could, she couldn't deny the frustration she also felt. They had the means to save the people, yet they couldn't afford to use it. Logically, she knew there was a good reason for that, but that didn't stop the part of her that wondered if it was truly okay to simply leave the victims be.

Shizuku shook such pointless thoughts out of her head. She was on duty right now, so she had to fulfill the mission she had been assigned.

At a sudden knocking on the window, the three looked up and saw Bastet and Anubis, who were blending into the dark so well that it was as if they were one with it. They must have come back along the roofs.

Nagi opened the window for them, and the two quietly hopped into the room.

“Whew! I. Am. Pooped. Could that lot stay still for two seconds?”

Anubis gave his front legs a big stretch.

Do Golems even get tired? Homura thought to herself with a tilt of her head, but she chose not to say anything.

“We have discovered that Papillon is not just dealing the drugs, but also gathering the bodies of those with late-stage symptoms,” Bastet reported.

“What? It...is unlikely that is for treatment, yes?” Shizuku asked.

The black cat nodded.

“When the curse inflicted by the drug progresses far enough, the body begins to metamorphose. The victim completely loses any of their rationality, and can no longer recognize who they are. The antidote could potentially save them,

but...”

“What would Papillon need with them?”

“When a body completely mutates, they form an octahedral crystal that Papillon calls a ‘cursestone’ inside their body. That is what they are extracting from them.”

The three girls tensed up at Bastet’s report. They were extracting the stones from their bodies—in other words, those people were no longer alive.

“Those cursestones can be used as a replacement for a Gollem’s G-Cube. They can acquire a core that is stronger and more impressive without any of the usual hassle. It is of little surprise they are taking advantage of it.”

They were continuing to exploit the victims right up until their deaths... No, even *after* their deaths. Anger filled the hearts of everyone present.

“Not everyone mutates, though, right?” Nagi asked.

“According to Doctor Babylon, those with high magic resistance or those who still hold much hope in their heart are much harder to curse. Curses prey on the negative energy in one’s heart, so the more negativity they feel, the easier it is to cast it on them,” Bastet explained.

Nagi couldn’t help but wonder how anyone could keep hope in such an environment. Hope was as good as dead in this town that Papillon controlled.

“In any case, first we need to find the drug’s source. If we tail both Delloria and Bilis, we should be able to find something. Bastet, Anubis, the two of you would be most suited to this mission, but I will need you to split up this time,” Shizuku said.

Homura frowned as she turned to look at the dog beside her.

“Is this stupid mutt really gonna be okay without Bastet...?”

“What was that for?! There’s no one better at acting like a dog than yours truly! Woofity woof!”

Acting like a dog? You basically are a dog, the kunoichi all thought to themselves.

“I feel a little uneasy about leaving Anubis by himself, so it might be best that one of us accompanies him,” Shizuku suggested.

The three girls all turned to look at each other. There was no denying that whoever had to go with him would have pulled the short stick. This was going to be a pain.

“Rock, paper...!”

“Gosh, you’re all treating me like some criminal here,” Anubis dejectedly muttered as the girls passionately fought to avoid the job.



There was a street in the northern part of Brenn lined with high-class establishments, quite opposite to the general image of the town. Manastones lit up their neon signs at night, serving as a light trap for the wealthy customers in the area. It was a stark difference from the cheap bars in the south.

But that was a given. Each of the establishments on that street was invested in by Papillon themselves. They were used as locations for Papillon to meet their trade partners, and to carry out transactions not fit for public view. One such transaction was currently being carried out in a brothel known as Nightmare.

No matter how much freedom Papillon had gained upon wrapping the ruler around their finger, if the knights of the capital were to catch wind of what they were doing, they would be in deep trouble. While the possibility remained that disguised officers could infiltrate Brenn at any moment, they needed locations to carry out their dealings safely and privately.

“These are the goods we promised. Now the payment, if you please.”

“But of course. Here you are.”

A box containing a dull blue octahedral crystal and a leather pouch with a considerable number of gold coins inside were exchanged over the table. The moment the exchange was complete, the one receiving the box clutched his purchase to his chest and swiftly left the room.

Immediately thereafter, a large mustachioed man with a cigar in his mouth

came out from another door. The slender man with slit eyes who had carried out the transaction got up from the sofa and bowed his head.

After sitting down where the customer had been, the mustached man crushed the finished cigar in the nearby ashtray and picked up the leather pouch left on the table, feeling its weight.

“Surprised they’re so willing to dish out this much cash for a tiny rock like that,” he remarked.

“For a Gollem engineer, there is nothing more desirable. And for a researcher, this is a material with many unknowns. What could be more enticing?”

“Hah! Greedy little shits. Well, keeps us running, so whatever floats their boats.”

The coins inside jangled as the man haphazardly tossed the pouch back onto the table and pulled out another cigar from his case. When he cut off the end with a cigar cutter, the employee beside him politely came over and lit it for him.

“And? Where’s the goods?”

“Right here, sir.”

The slender man placed a small case on the table. When he opened it, there were about a dozen glass test tubes lined up inside. Each of those test tubes had a dark gold liquid inside of it. The mustached man grabbed one of the test tubes and held it up to the manastone chandelier.

“This is a more concentrated version of the golden drug made by adding the cells of a special monster,” the slender man explained. “When we conducted experiments, however, injecting it into a subject’s body managed to forcefully mutate them, but they lost all reason in the process, so a core was not formed.”

“So they’re all duds, then.”

“The ones who were injected gained strength that surpassed even Gollems, and they appeared to lose all sense of pain as well. In that regard, it was not entirely a failure.”

“What good’s a soldier that can’t use his brain? If they’d produced cores, we

could've at least taken those and found some way to make use of them."

The man returned the test tube to the case. The slender one closed it again and continued speaking.

"No, I believe we may actually have a way to use them. Consider attending a party for the upper class and stealthily injecting a guest with this."

"They'd suddenly turn into a monster and the place would be in complete panic in two seconds. You know what, true. If things went well, we'd be able to remove annoying pests from the picture. That what you're saying?"

"Indeed. There is no guarantee it would work, of course, but it was more an example that its usefulness depends on how you use it."

The mustachioed man, leader of the counterfeit and smuggling division of Papillon, Bilis, fell into deep thought. Certainly, the chances of it working were slim, but being able to create a creature they could sacrifice at will could prove to be pretty useful somewhere. They could wreak havoc without drawing suspicion to themselves. The only issue would be that whoever ended up being injected would attack indiscriminately, so it could end up with the messenger very much getting shot.

"Still got room to improve it, yeah?"

"Yes. We are currently investigating if reducing the concentration allows the subjects to keep their rationality."

"Then keep it up."

"Sir."

The slender man politely bowed as the employee informed him of the arrival of a guest.

"He's here, huh?"

Bilis's main purpose in being here was not to receive a report on the new drug sitting in front of him, but to do trade with the person who had just arrived. After the slender man removed both the coin purse and the medicine case, the employee guided the visitor in.

"Pardon the intrusion."

Some of the employees, upon seeing their guest for the first time, clearly looked horrified. No one could blame them—he was simply that creepy.

The newly arrived man was wrapped in a black robe and had the skull of a goat covering his face. His voice was that of someone elderly, and in his hands he held a metallic black scepter.

Graphite, one of the wicked devout, sneered underneath the goat skull.



“So that’s Bilis?”

“Apparently. Or at least, that’s what his men were saying.”

Though the mustached man was too far away for a regular person to see, Homura was able to make use of her Mystic Eye, watching as he boarded a carriage. Though not entirely clear due to how dark it was, she could tell that he was a massive, well-built man around his early forties. Embroidered on his collar was a small black butterfly with a gold outline.

Despite her superior sight, though, Homura couldn’t hear what they were saying from this distance, which was where Anubis came in.

Having lost the round of rock-paper-scissors, Homura had no choice but to be the one to dogsit the Gollem, and so, the two were assigned the task of monitoring Bilis, the leader of Papillon’s division of counterfeit and smuggling.

Bilis had been going all around Brenn on a Gollem carriage. Each time he moved location, Homura and Anubis would cautiously follow over the rooftops, being careful to not get spotted by the people of the town below.

The Invisibility Cloak, currently on loan to the girls from Brunhild’s intelligence division, was a cognition-disrupting cloak that could also be used as camouflage to blend into their surroundings. It was the kind of technology used in the mirror armor of Yumina’s Frame Gear.

It would be hard for them to be detected with that in their possession, but Homura still kept a distance just to be on the safe side. Though it was able to inhibit detection from regular people, those with a strong instinct were perfectly able to see through it. It would be for the best that they remained

cautious.

“A brothel this time, huh? Why’s the guy keep zoomin’ all over the place? This is such a pain...”

“I don’t really know, but given what he’s involved in, he probably has a lot that he wants to keep secret, don’t you think?” Homura replied to the grumbling Anubis, making sure her eyes remained on the target.

Honestly, Homura had just said whatever came to mind, but she was more correct than she realized. Despite his rough appearance, Bilis was the cautious sort, and he would change the location for every single transaction. There were even times he would change the location as late as the day before.

Smuggling had become a natural part of Brenn, but that didn’t mean it was something to be witnessed by the general public. Bilis would choose his trade partners seriously, and if he deemed them even the slightest bit suspicious, he would immediately cut them off.

The thing Papillon feared most was having the scene of the crime be discovered.

Ever since the new emperor ascended the throne in Gardio, he had carried on the wishes of the previous emperor and focused on continuing to build friendships with other nations. As those relations improved, the trade between countries only increased, and as a natural consequence of that, inspections of anything crossing the borders were growing stricter.

Under those circumstances, it was only natural that there was an increase in those who engaged in smuggling and trafficking, and therefore an increase in those who would regulate and oversee such illegal trade.

There was no way for them to tell where any of the empire’s dogs might be lurking, so Bilis’s caution was not unfounded. Given his nature, this was technically business as usual for him, though.



“Here’s this month’s.”

The man with the goat skull sat down on a chair opposite and planted a

leather pouch that was about the size of a puppy's head on the table. Bilis pulled the bag toward himself and confirmed the contents. It was filled with a powder that glowed a dark gold.

It was the gold drug that had become a large source of Papillon's income.

Bilis had attempted to analyze the structure of the drug to try to make some of their own, but none of their research brought them any closer to figuring out its makeup, so eventually, they gave up. Given who was supplying them with the drug in the first place, Bilis was certain that it wasn't anything particularly legal, but if he had permission to sell and make use of the stuff, he had no issues with that. Of course, he made sure to never drop his guard, but this kind of relationship was fine...for now.

When Bilis closed the pouch, one of his men stepped forward from beside him and laid an attaché case on the table. Inside were numerous large transparent lumps about the size of softballs. Thin grooves ran along their surfaces, creating strange geometric patterns.

"Each of these is from unique legacies, yes?" the goat skull man confirmed.

"Yeah. Made sure they were all from different models, just as you asked."

The old man picked up one of the crystalline spheres and examined it closely. It was a Q-Crystal, the part of a Gollem's body that acted as their brain. But if all of these were truly from legacy Gollems, its value would be immeasurable.

Gollems were made up of their G-Cube—their energy source—and their Q-Crystal—their brain. So long as both of those were kept safe, a Gollem could make a full recovery regardless of the amount of damage to their body.

Many Gollem engineers would agree that the Q-Crystal was far more important than the G-Cube. A Q-Crystal retained a Gollem's acquired knowledge, experiences, and fighting abilities, after all. To put it bluntly, if the Q-Crystal was intact, you could use any old G-Cube to bring them back. They would just lose their memories and their performance might end up a bit more lacking than before.

On the other hand, if only the G-Cube was kept safe, even though its power and performance would be retained, the ability to control those parts of its

body would have to be trained from scratch.

Q-Crystals were already valuable, and that value skyrocketed when it came to legacy Gollems. Legacy Gollems were survivors of an ancient Gollem war, and that experience and knowledge was not something that could be easily acquired. So then, how did Papillon manage to acquire such precious items?

Given that they ran the black market, it wouldn't be difficult for them to locate any, even if it might cost them a pretty penny, but there was a way to acquire them without needing to fork over the cash: just steal it. Kill the master, disable the Gollem, and take out the Q-Crystal. Sure, it was a crime, but Papillon was a criminal organization to begin with.

"We can get you the G-Cubes as well, if you'd like."

"No need. We only need their Q-Crystals."

Bilis frowned at that response. A legacy Gollem's G-Cube and Q-Crystal were generally linked. If you installed a Q-Crystal without its G-Cube, its performance would drop so much that you wouldn't even be able to use its Gollem Skill anymore. It made no sense to not also want the G-Cubes if they were going to make new Gollems with those Q-Crystals.

What were they going to do with the Q-Crystals alone? Bilis had no idea.

Deciding he would rather not wake a sleeping lion, Bilis chose to forgo that line of questioning and instead paid attention to whatever commotion was going on in the back of the store.

Just as one of his guards put his hand on the hilt of his sword, the door slammed open with massive force and an imposing man of nearly two meters barged on in.

"Yo, sorry for the rough entrance."

"Brass...!"

Bilis frowned at the man who suddenly entered. He had dark skin and a shaved head, with the right half of his face covered in tattoos and his left decorated with a large scar running from the bridge of his nose to his cheek.

It was Brass, another division leader of Papillon who led field ops.

Bilis clicked his tongue, glared at Brass, and said, "I'm in the middle of a meeting right now. If you need me for something, ask later."

The two could barely be said to be on good terms. Bilis looked down on Brass's aggressive methods of getting everything he wanted through physical force, killing anyone who was in his way with no thought of what came after, while Brass viewed Bilis as a cowardly bastard for his meticulous and cautious planning.

Brass ignored Bilis's admonition and instead sat himself down diagonally opposite Graphite.

"And who would this fine gentleman be?" the wicked devout inquired.

"Name's Brass. I'm a division leader of Papillon, same as this dude here. Pleasure."

Brass introduced himself to Graphite with a wild smile on his face. Bilis couldn't help but disapprovingly click his tongue again.

"Been tryin' to catch you for ages now. You're the one supplying the drug, yeah?"

Brass dragged the leather pouch on the table toward himself, confirmed the contents, and his smile widened.

"You say 'for ages,' but we haven't exactly been hiding from you."

"You might not've been hiding intentionally, but this asshole over here loves keeping his trade partners secret, y'see. Took a hell of a long time to finally track you down."

Brass sneered at Bilis. Since Bilis was the one in charge of dealing the drugs, the other executives weren't directly involved with its trade.

The gold powder originally made its way around Isengard with the rumors that it was effective against goldflower pox. Its effects and distinctive properties caught Bilis's eye, and so he hunted down who was distributing it, leading to the negotiations that had brought them to this point. It had become such a source of money for Papillon that no one could feign ignorance about it.

Bilis knew that the other executives had started digging upon realizing how

lucrative it was, but the last thing he expected was for *Brass* to be the first to track him down. He couldn't hide his annoyance at the fact.

"Lemme cut straight to the point. Hand over the method for making it."

"Brass! Are you that shameless to steal the business opportunity that I found right in front of me?!"

Bilis's men immediately put their hands to their swords. Brass's men did the exact same in retaliation, so the room immediately took on a dangerous air.

Graphite lifted his scepter and banged it against the floor, cutting through the tension that now hung around them.

"I would appreciate it if you did not move things ahead without the dealer in question. You cannot make this drug whether I tell you or not."

"Really now? If you ask me, I think we could give it a good bash if we get our hands on some goldbugs," Brass responded.

Graphite flinched.

"Goldbugs" were the mutants that had appeared on the continent. Many of them looked like insects, so they naturally ended up acquiring such a name. The gold drug was made by taking the wicked god's curse inside mutants, amplifying it, compressing it, and then crushing it into powder.

Not all mutants disappeared at the time of the wicked god's death. A handful had entered hibernation, while others had been sealed by barriers or replicated by the wicked devout themselves. In rare cases, there were monsters such as Ropers or Slimes that consumed the mutant, transforming it into a different species altogether. Brass was not entirely wrong when he said that even Papillon could make the drug if they took advantage of that.

"Well then... I must commend you on making it this far. It appears we might have underestimated you."

"We've heard there were some folks over in Isengard doing something suspicious. Some rumors were starting to spread that there were demon-like Golems carrying around gold monsters. Those are the base for the drug, right?" Brass interrogated, a sneer still on his face. That little tidbit of information was

something Brass had managed to get out of the leader in charge of recon.

The wicked devout had the Ark as their headquarters, but that didn't mean they had no other bases scattered about the continent. Barely anyone approached Isengard nowadays, so it was a suitable location for them to carry out various experiments they didn't want others seeing.

It seems we were a little too lax, however, Graphite sighed to himself. Tangerine was in charge of that area, so his expectations for an appropriate level of caution had never been high to begin with, but that was still bad.

"There are two of those goldbugs still left at the research labs in Strain and Allent, right? All I need now is the method."

"Brass, you're not...?"

Bilis couldn't help frowning at Brass's words. This was the man whose creed was to take literally everything he wanted by force. There was no way he *wasn't* intending to capture Graphite.

He couldn't help but feel like Brass had swooped in and stolen his prey, but he wasn't entirely against the idea given he'd been thinking to himself that he'd end up forcing Graphite to reveal the method one day. Bilis had just intended to let him stay free for a little longer while he determined how much danger would be involved.

The men surrounding Brass drew their swords. Now that they were at this point, Bilis could do nothing to stop him. Despite his complaining, he wouldn't interfere with something that would bring benefit to Papillon.

"Consider this piece of advice my thanks for how much of the drug you've supplied for us: it's in your best interests to tell him what he wants to know. This guy is more than happy to use torture or even drugs to get the truth out of you," Bilis said, almost as if pitying Graphite. He didn't even think of mentioning how he'd probably be erased the second they got the info they needed out of him. He could at least be given a peaceful death if he told the truth without hassle.

"Hoh hoh hoh. This old codger is grateful for your warning. I really thought we could have a fruitful relationship. What a pity. I had hoped we wouldn't have to

cut you off.”

“Huh?”

Brass thought he had misheard for a moment. What was he on about? They were the ones about to cut *him* off, not the other way around.

Graphite slowly and deliberately removed a bracelet that was made of animal tusks strung together like a rosary and threw it onto the table. That alone caused the bracelet to burst into pieces, tusks scattering all across the room.

“What are you...?”

Bilis narrowed his eyes in suspicion, but Graphite ignored this and simply banged his metallic black scepter into the ground.

“Come forth, O Darkness. Bring Out My Desired Skeleton Soldiers of Days Past: [Dragontooth Warrior].”

After Graphite chanted the incantation, the scattered fangs instantly turned into Skeleton warriors one after the other. They weren’t just any old Skeletons, though—they had reptilian skulls like a Lizardman and held round, dark gold shields and warped, single-edged swords.

“Magic?! You were a magician all along?!”

“It took you far too long to figure that one out.”

Magicians were rare on this side of the continent. Regardless, magic was understood as a concept, and magic-based technology from the east was slowly becoming more prevalent.

Ordinarily, those on the eastern continent would put up a simple barrier during potentially dangerous negotiations; it was seen as common sense. But given there was no barrier here, it became possible for Graphite to use his summoning magic without interruption.

The Papillon guards immediately went to attack the Dragontooth Warriors. They were one of Brass’s elite field operations squads, far stronger than your average knight, and more than willing to use cowardly tactics that knights did not utilize if it meant winning the fight. They had the skill to kill the opponent in an actual fight. These Dragontooth Warriors were a little different from the

human enemies they were accustomed to, but the bodyguards' swords were able to aim around their shields without issue.

“Wha—?!”

However, the moment they hit the collarbone, their swords would go no further. The Dragontooth Warriors ruthlessly swatted away their weapons. One of the bodyguards was cut clean in two, guts splattering all over the place.

“Now then, since your negotiations with little old me have broken down, I have no reason to hold back any further. I suppose I might as well have a little fun.”

When Graphite banged his scepter against the ground again, miasma seeped up from the slaughtered body before suddenly gurgling as it dissolved into nothing but bones.

“What is going on here?!”

The bones that had been separated began to rattle. Suddenly, they were attracted to each other like magnets, returning to their original shape and slowly standing back up. The newly born Skeleton picked up its sword and attacked its former teammates, slashing down one of the guards. Graphite banged his scepter against the ground, and the meat on the body melted just as the previous one did, creating a new Skeleton soldier.

That was the moment Bilis realized they had made a *massive* mistake. They weren't the ones using Graphite, Graphite was the one using them. The wicked devout could have cut them down whenever they so pleased. The only reason they hadn't was because they hadn't felt like it was necessary.

If he had known it would come to this, he should've just killed Brass himself when he started to do his own thing. Do that and apologize and maybe they would've stood a chance. Bilis only felt heavy regret at his inaction, but he couldn't turn back time and redo it all.

“Grugh!”

A Dragontooth Warrior stabbed its sword into Brass's throat right in front of Bilis. For a man who had absolute confidence in his power, it was a pitiful end indeed.

When Brass's body fell to the ground, Graphite once more banged his scepter. The man who had once been an executive of Papillon transformed into a monster of only bone, then turned his blade on Bilis...



"Seems preeeeetty noisy in there. They got a bit of a problem customer or something...? Wait, Homura, look!"

Homura had been dozing off while waiting on a roof from where the brothel Bilis had entered was visible, but she was ripped out of the dreamworld when Anubis frantically shouted at her.

"Whoa?! What, what's going on? Huh?"

The kunoichi rubbed at her sleepy eyes and looked toward the brothel in question. It seemed there was some commotion going on inside—people were fleeing from the establishment. She activated her Mystic Eye to try to get a better view of what was happening.

"That's...!"

A Skeleton with a draconic skull appeared from the entrance as people frantically ran away. It was slashing down those it could with its curved blade one after another. Black miasma then appeared out of nowhere, covering the slain customers before immediately dissolving their flesh and turning them into nothing but bones that became the base for another new Skeleton soldier. Those newborn soldiers would then attack even more of the fear-filled crowd, leading to a chain of tragedy.

"They're turning into Skeletons?! But how?!"

"Couldn't tell you, miss, but, uh...this might be a little too much for our paws to handle!"

While watching the panicked crowd only grow more hysterical, Homura's phone went off. She frantically pulled it out of her pocket. If it was from the grand duke or Tsubaki, she needed to report the situation right away.

"Huh?"

Seeing who was phoning, Homura frowned a little. It wasn't her master or her

boss, but it wasn't someone she could ignore either.

"Hello? Hm? No, I'm on a mission right now... Oh, um, you see...I'm in Gardio..."

Homura turned her back to Anubis and quietly summarized what was going on to the one on the other end of the line. She decided she might as well ask them to pass on the circumstances to her master or boss.

"What? You'll help? It...sounds fun? B-But you haven't gotten permission from the grand duke! It isn't a problem? Oh, I see... Yes, yes... I'll, um, I'll be waiting..."

After hanging up, Homura's head creaked robotically as it turned around to face Anubis, eyes empty.

"Wh-What's up, Homura? Who was that from?"

"It was from Elze-sama..."

"Huh?!"

Since she was skilled at melee combat, Homura would sometimes serve as Elze's sparring partner, which led to them exchanging phone numbers. In fact, the reason Elze had phoned her originally was to ask if she was free to have a little match, but...

"She said they're gonna come over here right now..."

"You wanna say that one more time?"

"Since she knows where you and Bastet are, she can come here with **[Teleport]**, apparently..."

"Sorry to keep you waiting!"

"WHOA!" the two exclaimed in fright. The *people* in question suddenly appeared on the same roof as them instantaneously.

"Wow, they are being quite violent down there, they are."

"We can't just ignore this. Let's go save them."

"We're gonna get worked to an early grave like this..."

“Were you trying to make a joke, Sakura?”

Behind Elze stood Yae, Hilde, Sakura, and Sue. They were all the wives of Homura’s master, and that meant they were Grand Duchesses of Brunhild. This wasn’t somewhere for such esteemed ladies of their country to come out on a picnic.

“Since we didn’t get to help with that stampede the other day, I’ll use today to work out all this energy!” Elze enthusiastically yelled, tapping her gauntlets together.



Homura was fairly sure that their objective and the means to carry it out had already drastically changed from the original mission, but she chose not to say anything. Not like it would've done anything, anyway. Besides, there was no denying that these reinforcements were strong.

Nevertheless, Homura chose to phone her boss; she would get in trouble later if she didn't inform anyone. It was a wise decision, if she dared say so herself.



The city of Brenn was in absolute pandemonium. The Skeletons appearing left, right, and center were attacking every crowd they came across.

Undead were actually very uncommon on the western continent. Cremation was a much more common way to handle the deceased on this side of the world, so zombies and ghouls would rarely appear. Compared to the magically developed east, the concept of the resurrection of the dead was not something the average citizen on the western continent gave much thought to. Fire was believed to be a sacred light that deterred monsters and helped guide the souls of the dead to heaven.

Those in the upper echelons of society would have a regular burial largely due to the legends that remained of revival medicines or resurrection arts, but generally, people on that side of the world were cremated, and only their bones were buried in graves. That was why, when hearing the word "undead," most in the west would think only of Skeletons with their skin already peeled off.

Undead were monsters created from humans whose souls were unable to return to heaven, and so they latched on to their old bodies instead. They were left aimlessly wandering the land because of their inability to return to where they should be.

However, this change was not something that happened immediately; it would happen over an extended period of time. Turning into Skeletons immediately after being killed like what was happening in Brenn was impossible. Nothing that was occurring in the port town was normal. It wasn't strange that people were in such a panic.

Skeletons killed the people, and those people turned into Skeletons of their

own. The number of Skeletons only continued to increase, and it was becoming more and more difficult for the town guard to hold them back.

“EEK!”

When a Skeleton tried to attack a woman who had fallen during her escape, a right fist flew in from nowhere and pulverized the core in the Skeleton’s breastbone.

“Crusher!”

It wasn’t just the core she shattered, however, but every bone making up its body.

After defeating that Skeleton, Elze immediately rotated her body and slammed a backward roundhouse kick into another. The heel of her greaves hit right on the core. Delivering attacks with such pinpoint accuracy allowed her to take down Skeletons one after another without exerting too much energy. The girl was more than happy to show off her moves to the swarming hordes of monsters.

“C’mon, come at me with all you got!”

“She is very lively about all of this, she is,” Yae remarked.

“Probably because she hasn’t really had the chance to fight in person like this recently.”

Yae and Hilde slashed down Skeletons while they spoke. Their weapons being made of phrasium meant their blades slashed through the Dragontooth Warriors like they were tofu. Rather than aiming precisely for the core like Elze, they found it far easier to slice the Skeletons into small pieces, then crush the cores under their feet.

The three ninjas were once more made painfully aware of their difference in strength compared to the grand duchesses as they watched the girls hum cheerfully while they took down the Skeletons appearing one after the other.

“Why do the towns we visit always seem to end up having Skeletons appear in them...?” Homura despaired.

“I know, right?”

“This is only the second time, you two. Do not act as if they appear because of us.”

The last time they had gone to Sandora on a mission, to the city of Astal, it was Crystal Skeletons that had attacked them instead.

Do we attract Skeletons or something? Homura wondered to herself, hoping they didn’t as she cut down another of them.

Right at that moment, a bright voice suddenly spread through the town. It was like someone’s song was pouring down from the heavens, bathing everyone in its light.

When Homura turned around, she saw Sakura singing on the roof they’d all been previously gathered on. She was using the **[Speaker]** magic that her phone had built into it in order to add a musical accompaniment to her voice.

Wait, Sousuke Mochizuki was also up on the back of the roof playing the piano. What was going on? How did he get a whole grand piano up *there*? Homura’s confusion remained unanswered, however, as the tempo of the song suddenly picked up and a soulful voice began being emitted in return.

The Skeletons falling victim to the song suddenly began moving much more sluggishly, and their response times were becoming much slower. Had the grand duke been here, no doubt he would’ve said, “Well, yeah, no wonder they’re being affected—they’re undead, after all.”

The song that Sakura was singing was originally a famous hymn, but it had been arranged as a gospel song in later years. It was used during the climax in the sequel to a Hollywood film about the commotion caused by an unconventional fake nun.

Drive the dark of doubt away, fill us with the light of day.

As the song stated, the Skeletons’ power weakened, while Homura and the girls were only strengthened. The support effects from the singing spread through the area.

“Come forth, O Light! Radiant Resurrection: [Regeneration]!”

Sue’s light magic overlapped with Sakura’s vocals and enveloped the

surroundings. A man whose arm had been lopped off by a Skeleton while protecting his wife was bathed in that light, immediately regenerating his missing limb. A different man who similarly lost his leg in order to protect his child had his body also restored to normal.

Healing magic able to regenerate body parts was an extremely advanced ancient magic. Given Sue's age, it seemed impossible that she would be able to use such high-level magic, but she appeared to have a talent for light magic, and after reading a magic codex in Babylon's library, she ended up being able to use it right away. Even Leen, who had her own strong opinions on the topic, was rendered speechless.

In a land where mages were rarely seen, missing limbs being restored was a miracle that left the locals crying tears of joy as they watched it unfold in front of them.

"Our own team is just as extraordinary, huh?"

Our grand duke's wives all have a bit of a screw loose, Homura thought to herself, swallowing those disrespectful words before they could escape her lips. She had no idea if they'd ended up so insane after becoming his wives, or if they became his wives because they were so insane.

"Still, just what happened here? It does not seem to be because of a stampede..." Shizuku questioned as she shook off the Skeletons that were continuing their assault.

The undead generally wouldn't get mixed up in stampedes, since they wouldn't ever have emotional outbursts or feel extreme fear when faced with danger, so nothing would compel them to be swooped away by the panic. That said, it wasn't completely unheard of for the undead to attack in groups. Sometimes, the dead who shared a strong resentment would rise from their graves together and attack the living as an army known as an Undead Legion.

According to Homura, the Skeletons had begun flowing from the brothel that the executives of Papillon had entered. That would lead to the assumption that the cause of this mess was tied to them in some way...

As if to answer Shizuku's question, the brothel in question blew up in a spectacular manner.

“Huh?!”

Something slowly rose up from the rubble. It was a large four-legged winged Dragon made entirely of bone.

“A Bone Dragon...!” Shizuku’s voice croaked out upon being faced with what could very well be called the symbol of death.

Dragons were renowned for being the strongest living creatures, but they only became even more troublesome when they returned from the dead. Undead like Dragon Zombies were not so agile due to the carrion still hanging on their bodies, but Bone Dragons were nimbler than they appeared, since they weren’t impeded by flesh.

What was more, even though they were just bone, they were able to fly in the air and breathe fire. Those abilities of a Dragon were not generated by their bodies, but were produced with mana. And since they were undead, they would never tire and never sleep. They would remain in the world until they completed their goal.

The Bone Dragon chased the fleeing crowd as it destroyed the town of Brenn. But among those fleeing bodies was one who stood solidly in its path.

“Glad you’re an undead that can take a beating for a change.”

Elze covered her body with energy. That, mixed with divine spirit, made it appear as if she were cloaked in a platinum light. Elze’s divine trait was the ability to infuse her body with residual divinity as a battle garb of sorts. Put in simple terms, it was a simplified version of Touya’s Apotheosis. It was an ability that boosted one’s physical abilities to the limit and created a sturdy armor of energy around the user—in the case of a melee fighter like Elze, it was like she had been granted both a divine sword and shield in one.

Elze kicked off the ground after enhancing her legs with **[Boost]**, allowing her to jump all the way into the air toward the Bone Dragon so fast that it was as if she had been fired from a bow. The Bone Dragon reacted swiftly to Elze’s assault, opening its mouth wide and breathing fire in her direction.

It was reported more than once that being completely encased in a Dragon’s breath would leave not even one’s bones behind. The citizens of Brenn watched

on in despair, but as if to laugh that off, Elze appeared out of the flames with her fists raised and fired a full-power right straight punch between the Bone Dragon's eyes.

"Get wrecked, you stupid pile of bones!"

With a tremendous crash, the Bone Dragon crumbled into dust. For the undead, divine power was a dangerous poison. It literally sunk into the Dragon's bones, causing the Bone Dragon to disappear from the world.

Seeing the symbol of despair be defeated so easily, the three kunoichi renewed their impression that their duchesses were crazy.

"Oh my. I did think my minions were having more trouble than anticipated, but it was the little upstarts from Brunhild, hm?"

All of a sudden, an old man cloaked in a black robe who was wearing a goat's skull appeared on top of the rubble of the brothel. He held a metallic black scepter and was looking over in their direction with glowing red eyes.

"How strange of us to meet in such a desolate port town. Or perhaps this is the guidance of the wicked god? Is he telling me to let off some steam?"

"Pretty bad guidance if he is. The guidance of a wicked god will only lead to your destruction," Elze retorted. Graphite showed no anger to that, however, instead only flashing an odd smile.

"I cannot deny that. However, could that not also be called the truth of the world? Whether man or woman, young or old, rich or poor, diligent or lazy, all of us will perish one day. In that case, do you not think that granting destruction to those who lament over such inequality would be their true salvation?"

"You just sound insane."

"I would much rather view it as a difference in opinion. Death is a wonderful thing that is always right next to you. I'm sure you would all view it much differently if you died once yourselves."

"We refuse."

Elze pushed off the ground and ran with great force toward Graphite. But before her fists could make contact, a Dragontooth Warrior leaped into her

path and was punched into smithereens instead. Its head, which had been spared in the attack, opened its mouth wide and went to bite down just like a crocodile.

Elze managed to backstep right in the nick of time, but that was followed by arrows of Skeleton Archers closing in on her from all sides.

“Hmph!”

Elze thrust her left fist into the air, causing a tornado to appear around her that disabled all the arrows heading straight for her.

“My, they don’t call you the War Queen of Brunhild for nothing. You really are something else.”

Graphite ripped off his jeweled necklace, threw it to the ground, and then raised his scepter. Black miasma leaked from the weapon and enveloped the jewels he had discarded moments before. What followed was the pale figures of female ghosts crawling out from the jewels in pain.

“You’re kidding me...!”

Elze, who had been taking everything very easy a moment before, froze up the moment she saw the pale ghosts. When it came to the undead, she was especially weak to wraiths, so she found it mentally difficult to deal with ones that materialized in spiritual bodies. Her gauntlets were enhanced with light magic, so it wasn’t as if she couldn’t hit them, but such a deep-rooted fear couldn’t disappear so easily.

When she unconsciously took a step back, the female spirits let out a tremendous screech. Their voices gave any humans who happened to be nearby a sense of intense grief and unsalvageable despair, enough to lead them to suicidal ideation.

“Banshees!”

Banshees were evil fairies whose frightening cries drove those around them into the depths of despair. They were originally harmless fairies who would only appear to announce one’s death, but there were rare cases of some who fell to darkness.

Elze was able to fight against the voices, but the same couldn't be said for the citizens in the area. Those who could hear the cries of the Banshees were screaming, shedding tears as their faces distorted in pain. If this continued, they would ultimately take their own lives due to the pure despair, no doubt leading to their own transformations into Skeletons.

When Elze stepped forward to put a stop to the Banshees, Sakura's voice echoed out from behind her in an attempt to cancel them out. She was now singing a German version of the song she had been singing before.

Sakura's song of joy clashed with the Banshees' song of lament, pushing through to light up the people's hearts with hope instead.

"OoooOOaaaaAAhHHhhH!"

The Banshees were pushed back by Sakura's song. Yae and Hilde took that opportunity to jump out from behind Elze and slash them in two. It would usually be impossible to physically slash a spirit, but the pair's blades were so enhanced with magic that they could cut through them easily.

The slashed Banshees wailed in despair at their death as their bodies disappeared. The jewels scattered over the ground cracked at their defeat.

"It has been a long time since I have had to exorcise a ghost, it has."

"Yae, those aren't ghosts. They're technically fairies."

Fairies were spiritual beings too, so was it so wrong to call them ghosts? Well, regardless, Yae swung her katana down, slaying these ghosts or fairies or whatever they were.

"Hm?"

Yae halted the swinging of her blade and tilted her head.

"What's wrong?" Hilde asked.

"No, it's just...I feel like I slashed not just this Banshee, but the one in back too, I do..."

She was sure that her slash had become a shock wave that hit the Banshee in the back, but perhaps she was just imagining that.

Feeling a strange power start to leak out from her body, Yae suddenly realized something.

Ahhh, I see. So that's what this feels like.

When Yae lightly swung her katana toward a Banshee that was a fair distance away, it cut clean in half. In fact, not only the Banshee, but also the stone wall of the building behind it.

"Hmm. Is this my divine trait?"

Yae could make her slashes go where she willed them. It wasn't a case of turning them into shock waves—she was literally having her attack cross space, slashing anything on the way there in the process. Deeming dimensional cleave a good way to refer to it, Yae released a further flurry of slashes at all the Banshees in the area.

The moment Yae sheathed her blade, the Banshees all vanished at once.

Hilde stood there stunned at the sight for a moment before she suddenly returned to her senses.

"Yae! You woke up to your divine trait?! That's unfair!"

"But it was not as if I controlled this, I did not..."

Hilde hounded Yae out of frustration upon having realized what she had just done. Even though there was no way for them to do anything about individual differences in manifestation, it was still frustrating all the same.

Given that Yae seemed to be able to cut through space itself, it was reasonable to assume that it could cut through basically anything. The problem was the difficulty in specifying the range. Precise control would be necessary to not slice through that which she wished to leave untouched.

"This is quite the exhausting ability, this is..."

"Oh, yeah, when I first acquired mine, I felt the same. Don't worry, you'll start to get used to it," Elze said with all the pride of someone who had been first. Hilde began uselessly swinging her sword around, hoping she, too, would wake up to her ability.

"I see what Indigo means now when he calls you lot our natural enemy. I

should remove you from the picture sooner rather than later,” Graphite said.

“Do it if you can,” Yae declared, slashing her sword at Graphite. Her dimensional cleave almost definitely should have cut where Graphite was standing, yet he remained there unfazed, not a shred of panic to be seen.

“Hm?”

Yae tilted her head quizzically before then trying to slash two, three more times.

“I cannot cut him...?”

“No, you are. I don’t quite understand how it works, but it is a splendid show of skill. You are simply cutting me so cleanly that my regeneration is too quick to be seen by the naked eye.”

Yae frowned at the explanation. It was said that if you cut your finger with a sharp blade, the tissue would remain closer together and therefore heal faster. Was that what he meant?

The man with the iron mask they had defeated not long ago also had similarly impressive regenerative abilities—his arm grew back after being cut right off. This old goat skull man must have been the same.

“It still ruins my clothes, though, so I must ask that you cease.”

Graphite shook his arms and legs, causing pieces of his robe to flutter down. It was also sliced along his chest, revealing his skinny ribs. They might have ended up seeing his lower half if the clothes hadn’t been tied up with a rope around his waist.

I’m so glad I didn’t cut vertically, Yae thought to herself in relief.

If that was the case, though, it just meant that she had to mincemeat him so fast that he *couldn’t* regenerate in time. Yae held her sword at her waist as she entered into position. A power different from mana welled up from deep inside her, a platinum light coating her body.

I can definitely slash him into pieces.

With overflowing self-confidence, Yae began to pull her sword out from its sheath...when suddenly, a hand was placed on said sheath, putting a stop to her

attack.

“That’s enough, y’know.”

“Karen?!”



Without warning, the goddess of love had appeared. Her smile was as carefree as ever as she wagged a finger in her face.

“Tsk, tsk, tsk. Yae, don’t forget that you’re Touya’s ward. You can’t use divinity to defeat that guy or you’ll be violating a divine rule, y’know? If you do that, the god of destruction will come and the world will go *boom!* Y’know?”

“Boom...”

“I-It’ll go boom?”

Elze and Hilde both seemed a little shocked at Karen’s vague explanation. Touya had explained it to them before, but Karen spoke about it as if it were the most casual affair possible. Admittedly, from the gods’ perspective, just one world being gone probably was as simple as a small *boom!* But still...

“Anyway, you can’t use your divinity here, y’know? Okay?”

“Mmm... I understand, I do...”

“Are you done blathering?” Graphite asked, hands leaning on the top of his scepter as if he were taking a leisurely break.

“Indeed,” Yae responded. “Sorry to keep you waiting.”

“Why, there is no bother. I simply wanted to buy some time, that was all. Thanks to you, I made it.”

Graphite sneered as there was a sudden explosion from elsewhere. Being so sensitive to sound, Sakura immediately pinpointed where it came from. What she witnessed from her position on the roof was one of the lighthouses at the docks toppling over into the sea from its base. That lighthouse was then crushed by a massive golden arm that stretched straight out from the water.

The massive one-eyed Golems, the Kyklops, began appearing one after another from underneath the ocean and began stepping foot on the harbor. Fishmen, Four-Armed Golems, and Rock Titans followed at their feet.

Elze climbed up to the same roof as Sakura and spotted a familiar shadow floating not far behind. It had a goat’s head, a bat’s wings, a muscular human torso, and an owl’s lower body. It was one of those Demon Lords that Touya had fought on the night of the coup d’état in Regulus. However, something

about it was greatly different: its whole body was mechanical. Not in the sense that it was completely turned into a machine, but that the mechanical parts had been fused with the creature's natural flesh. Many demons fused in the same way were floating behind it.

The mechanized Demon Lord and its minions were beginning an assault on Brenn.

"Let's try this one again, shall we?"

Graphite tapped his metallic black scepter on the ground.

"SAVE UUUUUUUUUSSSSSS!"

There were no longer only Skeletons romping along the ground, but also mechanical demons flying in from the air. To the citizens of Brenn, it must have looked like hell incarnate. Homura began to panic, more than aware that their numbers would never be enough.

"Don't worry. We've called our own reinforcements," Sue reassured her from nearby.

"What?"

When Homura turned around to look at the duchess, she instead saw a **[Gate]** and knights clad in silver armor flowing out from it, accompanied by Knight Golems. They weren't Brunhild's knights, though: theirs was the armor of Gardio.

"Knights of Gardio, protect the citizens! We will not let these cruel invaders have their way!"

Standing at the front of the knights, issuing a rousing call, was Lancelet Rigg Gardio, the Empire of Gardio's young emperor. Homura and the other ninja girls let out a sigh of relief when they saw the familiar black hair and white coat of their master.



Oh god, there really are Skeletons and demons crawling about everywhere.

After receiving a call from Sue and Tsubaki explaining the situation, I got in contact with the emperor of Gardio, and then finally arrived at the port town

through a **[Gate]** with a group of Brunhild's knights. It wouldn't have been a good look to send through foreign knights without asking for permission first, so I ended up a bit delayed. I had already been making plans with the emperor to storm Papillon's base—we were just waiting until we had all the intel we deemed necessary first. But unfortunately, it seemed we had to put that on the back burner for now.

With this many citizens mixed in among the enemies, AoE magic was definitely out of the question... There was a risk of them getting caught in the blast radius and causing even more panic. While I was trying to decide on the best course of action, a Skeleton came stumbling toward me with sword in hand, its jaw rattling away.

I shot its skull with Brunhild, but it immediately began regenerating.

Guess I have to target it straight at its core.

“[Apport].”

I pulled only the Skeleton's core to my hand. Having lost its life source, the undead being fell apart right on the spot. I dropped the core to the ground and crushed it with my shoe. This really was the easiest way to deal with this type of creature.

Crash!

This time, it was one of the mechanical demons that made its descent in front of me. Its long arms and legs were built like a Golem's, while its body was that of a demon's. They were like those Cydevils from before.

“Whoa, calm down!”

The Cydevil's outstretched hand detached from its wrist and began flying toward me. I managed to dodge it in the nick of time, but the wires that attached the body parts pulled the hand back to its arm, setting it into place. A wire rocket punch, huh?

Brunhild might not have been able to do much to the mechanical parts of the Cydevil's body, but I shot three of her bullets right into its fleshy torso. They successfully struck around the chest and stomach, but it didn't look like it had much effect. There was blue blood flowing from the gunshot wounds, though,

so I had at least injured it, but it was countered by its thick muscles.

“Can you handle what comes next, though?”

“GREEE?” it let out in what almost sounded like confusion.

The moment the Cydevil took a step toward me, it exploded, its torso shredded in half.

Hell yeah, I knew an explosion from inside would be too much for it.

The demon appeared to have died after being annihilated by the **[Explosion]**-enhanced bullets I had shot at it.

That said, demons were resilient. It was a bad idea to assume one was dead without confirming first. At the end of the day, demons were basically just servants of the wicked god. They both preyed on the negative emotions of humans as their energy source, *and* they loved a good sacrifice. What was the difference, really?

According to Moroha, demons were also known as vestiges of the wicked god, which when you changed your thinking, sort of made the wicked devout a type of demon.

“The stuff they’re pulling off is demonic enough. Basically the same thing if you ask me,” I commented to myself.

I fired shots at two more Cydevils that were nose-diving toward me from the sky. After a beat, they both exploded into a rain of meat and blue blood.

Remind me not to shoot them when they’re directly above me...

I used **[Fly]** to get myself onto the roof where Sakura was. Looking out at the docks, I realized the Kyklops were starting to make it to land. Well, this certainly wasn’t good.

“Target lock: Kyklops.”

“Searching... Targets locked.”

“Invoke **[Gate]** beneath their feet.”

“Understood. Invoking **[Gate]**.”

The Kyklops that had made it to land began falling into the newly created

holes one after the other. The ones still in the sea were teleported away together with them to an area a little bit away from the town. It was an open field with no inhabitants, so a bit of chaos and destruction wouldn't hurt anyone.

"Sue, Sakura, can I leave those ones to you guys?"

"You sure can!"

"Okay..."

Sue and Sakura instantly disappeared, chasing after the Kyklops with Sakura's **[Teleport]**. After some time passed, a large golden Frame Gear and an accompanying light-red Frame Gear appeared far beyond the town.

"Cannon Knuckle Spiral!"

I heard Sue's shout of her skill through my phone together with the loud impact of the Kyklops being punched by her mech's fist.

Suddenly, there was a massive explosion followed by a bunch of gold powder floating into the air. I froze in shock.

Is that divine venom?!

Wait, no, sorry, *diluted* divine venom. It had basically no effect on those of us with divinity. Those who were our wards would still experience negative symptoms, though, even if it didn't kill them. To steal the words of Sakura, it made them feel like they were "forced onto a roller coaster right after stuffing themselves full, and then got catapulted right into a pool of bugs."

It wasn't something they couldn't tolerate, but it still felt bad, both physically and mentally. And to make matters worse, the output of the Frame Gears also decreased. Doc Babylon had said that their modifications would stop that being as much of an issue, but...

"Don't worry. Sakura and Sue definitely have the suits we made on them. Us too," Elze reassured me. When I jumped back down below, she activated some app on her smartphone and then aimed it at the sky.

"[Equip]!"

A ball of light shot up into the air before it immediately came back down and

enveloped Elze. When the blinding light settled, she was standing there with the aforementioned pilot suit on.

What's with the sudden magical girl transformation?!

“It’d be a pain if we had to keep getting changed like normal, right? That’s why we asked Doctor Babylon if she could make a system that lets us transform.”

Elze’s face was covered by her helmet the whole time she was explaining, and the black visor was lowered so I couldn’t see her at all. Compared to the version of the pilot suit I’d seen before, this one had her gauntlets still equipped. Plus, the gray coloring from before was now red.

“We had its defense upgraded too. It’s much tougher than some shoddy makeshift armor now.”

The shoulders, chest, and lower back were covered with something that looked akin to phrasium armor. With them having personal colors now, it really did feel like we were forming our own team of Power Rangers.

Two more blinding balls of light were suddenly emitted, and when I looked toward their source, I noticed that there was now a purple and an orange ranger. It must have been Yae and Hilde. Both of them had some kind of attachments around their waists, probably the sheaths for their swords.

“I really do think these suits are a bit too tight, I do...”

“I agree. I appreciate that they’re easy to move in, though.”

The girls also had their visors over their faces, so I couldn’t see their expressions, but they were squirming in clear embarrassment. Yae’s assets certainly did make her curves stand out...

“Touya-dono, I would appreciate it if you would stop staring, I would...”

“Oh, crap, sorry...”

Oops!

Even spouses should show the appropriate manners to each other. I shouldn’t look so brazenly like that.

“A-Anyway, is the divine venom having any effect on you? Do you feel ill at all?” I asked, seeing the gold powder make its way over here.

“No, not even a bit,” Hilde confirmed. “I have no issues moving either.”

“Indeed. We will have no issues fighting like this, we will not.”

Seemed like the Puretree filter was working its magic. It *was* essentially a thin barrier surrounding their bodies, so I’d hope it would work.

“Sorry to interrupt your little flirting session, but I would recommend you not turn your back to the enemy, y’know?!”

I turned around when Karen suddenly spoke up and saw that the wicked devout on top of the rubble had started to morph into something strange. Several bones began protruding from the back of the old man with the goat skull. Those bones, which were long and had several joints, looked very much like the legs of a spider. I was pretty sure I’d seen something like that in a movie recently: a superhero gained spider powers and then looked like that when wearing a special suit from one of his fellow superheroes. This one had way more legs, though.

The tips of the bones looked as sharp as blades. The goat skull man was floating in the air held up by those bone legs.

“A pleasure to make your acquaintance, Grand Duke of Brunhild. My name is Graphite, necromancer and alchemist of the wicked devout.”

Hmph, a necromancer, huh? No wonder he’s using bones and demons.

“I wish I could’ve faced you *after* I had made all of my preparations, but there’s nothing I can do about it now. I will simply entertain you with everything I have.”

Graphite took his metallic black scepter and began waving it in the air. A pitch-black miasma emanated from its tip, then started crawling along the ground like the smoke from dry ice.

“Everyone, pull back!”

Elze, Yae, Hilde, Anubis, Bastet, and the three kunoichi all immediately created distance between themselves and Graphite, out of reach of the

miasma.

Huh? Where'd Karen go?

That woman would always appear and disappear as she willed.

The miasma Graphite released from his scepter surrounded the Skeletons, their figures disappearing into the black fog. But when that fog cleared, a whole army of Skeleton Knights encased in pitch-black armor was standing there, wielding similarly colored swords and shields. It was the birth of a sinister army from literal hell.

“GRAAAAAAAAAAGH!”

That sound came from the mechanized Demon Lord up above us.

They can't give us a break, can they?!

“Touya, we'll hold them off here! You handle the demons!” Hilde shouted over to me.

“I suppose that would be best,” I said, then nodded and jumped into the air with **[Fly]**. Given the fact that they were airborne, I would be the best combatant here. Best we fought where our abilities were most suited.

“GRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

A Demon Lord, huh? Hadn't seen this thing since the coup d'état in Regulus. This one was much bigger than that little shrimp, though. Plus, its limbs were mechanized. It had been turned into a cyborg just like its kin, though it got slightly better treatment with its gold hands and feet.

The red eyes of the Demon Lord emitted a strange glow before suddenly firing red laser beams toward me. It was a move I'd seen before, so it was easy enough for me to dodge it, but the moment I pulled out Brunhild to retaliate, the other demons around the Demon Lord fired the exact same eye lasers.

“You're kidding?! **[Prison]**!”

Dodging such concentrated fire would've been way too tough, so I erected a **[Prison]** barrier around me instead to tank the blast. Damn things couldn't keep their gazes off of me. It was tough being popular.

“Now it’s my turn.”

I pulled out a sword from **[Storage]**. On the surface, it looked like a regular phrasium broadsword, but...

“Take this!”

With just a press of a button and a swish of my sword, the blade separated into segments, becoming like a whip as it wrapped around one of the demons. When I let go of the button, the wires keeping the blade together pulled back to their original position, making it take its sword form again. Shredded by the retracted blade, the captured demon fell to the ground in pieces.

I had taken the idea of Frei’s whipsword and fashioned a new weapon for myself, just made of phrasium instead. Once I got used to it, it would be pretty efficient for fighting waves of enemies.

I cut down all the demons that came at me. Mechanical limbs were nothing against phrasium—it was as if my blade were cutting through paper. Each one I cut up fell down below.

“Stop getting their blood all over us!” I heard Homura shout from the ground.

Oops, uh... Sorry 'bout that.

“GRUGHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

The Demon Lord raised one of its arms and went to punch me, but naturally, it was blocked by the **[Prison]**.

“GRAGAGAGAAA!”

The Demon Lord kept striking the **[Prison]** again and again, as if it would do anything, as if it could—

Crack!

I had been so confident just two seconds ago. And yet, there that sound was. The sound I didn’t believe I would ever hear.

“GWORAAAAAAAAAAGH!”

The **[Prison]** shattered at the same time that I jumped backward.

It broke my [Prison]?! Damn it, that means its limbs have to be made from

mutants!

The mutants who were wards of the wicked god had some of his divinity within their bodies. And as rotten as that power was, it was still divinity. **[Prison]** wasn't enhanced with divinity by nature, so of course they would break it if that was what they were born from. Usually, when a mutant's core was broken, though, its body would dissolve into sludge. Had they found some special way of creating them that prevented that? We made phrasium from the bodies of Phrase, so could they be doing something similar with mutants? Were they making a kind of demonic metal? Demonium, so to speak.

Though they had the power of mutants, if I enhanced a **[Prison]** with divinity, that *should* be enough to block their attacks, but me using any of my divine power risked breaking the rules...

Damn, sure does suck that the other side is allowed to use divinity, yet we aren't! Just a little unfair, no?!

Strictly speaking, the rule was that I couldn't use my divine powers in a way that would greatly influence the world, so for all I knew, it was fine. But there was no way for me to know how the gods I wasn't acquainted with would take it. My body was already accepted as being that of a god's. If I used my divinity, I'd have no more excuses. I didn't have so many screws loose that I would bet the fate of the world on a feeling that it *might* be fine.

"I'm not gonna lose just 'cause I can't use my divinity, though. Kougyoku, go ahead."

"My liege."

"GYAAUGAAAAAH!"

In a flash, the Demon Lord was enveloped in the flames of hell. It writhed in pain within the blaze and plummeted to the ground. I had secretly summoned Kougyoku and had her attack from behind.

What a cowardly move, you say? As if I cared about such things with demons.

After falling out of the sky, the Demon Lord rolled about as if trying to put out the flames burning its body. Everyone had already retreated far enough away from under me that I could use my next attack without worry; I pulled out a

regular old gigantic rock I had been saving in **[Storage]**.

“[Gravity]!”

I lightly touched the rock, activated **[Gravity]**, and sent it hurling toward the Demon Lord with thousands of times the weight.

“GYAOOOAAAAAGH!”

A thud and a splatter that would make one’s insides churn resounded through the area.

Demon extermination complete. Except for the small fry, that is.

“Luli.”

“Yes, my liege.”

This time, a large Dragon as blue as sapphire appeared beside me. She flapped her enormous wings, breathing out fire all the while, incinerating the mechanized limbs of many of the Cydevils.

“Luli, Kougyoku, I’ll leave these demons to you.”

“Yes, my liege.”

“I’ll burn every last one to a crisp.”

Deciding to leave the aerial enemies to the Heavenly Beasts, I returned to the ground. The transformed Sango and Kokuyou had begun their attack on the Skeleton army with the ninja girls, Bastet, and Anubis riding on their backs. When I’d called out Luli, the other Heavenly Beasts had excitedly volunteered to come out and assist too, so I’d ended up summoning all of them. Kohaku was headed to where Elze and the other girls were.

Kokuyou was slashing the Skeletons in half with his water cutter, while Sango was using her massive feet to squish them. I felt like I was watching a kaiju movie.

“Luli, Kokuyou, look after them for me.”

“Yes, my liege.”

“Leave it to us, darling!”

Having put my trust in them, I turned and ran toward where the girls were. When I made it to the collapsed brothel, I saw Elze, Yae, and Hilde in their pilot suits along with Kohaku fighting against Graphite's Skeleton Knights. The Skeletons didn't seem all that strong, but their cores were completely protected by the armor, and it was clearly making it tough for them to fight back.

Graphite, on the other hand, was letting off a metallic glimmer that was the same as the Skeleton Knights and had transformed into something that resembled a giant spider crab. Instead of pincers, however, he wielded what looked like a massive scythe. His human upper body, which held his scepter, was sticking out of the crab body.

Was this a crab version of an arachne? We had an arachne among our knights; they were a race of demonkin. This crab thing just looked like a kaiju.

Can't stand around here forever. Time to start the hunt!

"Pierce through, O Light! Sacred Illumination: [Holy Ray]!"

A laser burst forth from my palm straight toward the giant black spider crab relaxing on the rubble. It wasn't an attack using divinity, so this was fine, right?

"Take this: **[Jet]!**"

That spear of light should have been unavoidable, yet with a light swoosh of Graphite's scepter, a black fog sucked in the laser like a black hole.

He can do that?!

"Blaze, O Fire! Blazing Penetration: [Burning Lance]!"

This time, I threw a gigantic lance of fire at the old man, but yet again, he absorbed it whole with the weird black fog.

"It's useless, I tell you, useless. Magic does not work on me," the crab Graphite laughed.

Magic didn't work on him? If this worked on the same principles as **[Absorb]**, then...

"This is bad!"

"A little present for you."

From that fog came countless black arrows.

“**[Prison]**!”

I immediately surrounded everyone with a barrier. The arrows didn’t pierce it, but a lot of them had managed to lodge themselves inside the walls. There were already cracks starting to form.

That was close! If I had been any slower, we’d have been done for.

Since those arrows could damage **[Prison]**, that had to mean there was wicked divinity inside of them. These bastards really were a pain! He would absorb any magic used on him with that fog of his and turn it into his own. *That* was why magic was useless against him. In fact, it wasn’t just useless, he’d fire any magic we used back at us in an even stronger form. Presumably, those metallic black parts of his crab body were a more solid version of the fog. Was he like a pseudo Phrase? In that case, physical attacks were the way to go.

“Everyone, get away from him!”

All of them reacted immediately to my voice and jumped away. Once I had confirmed they were far enough, I opened a massive **[Gate]** above Graphite.

“Get crushed!”

A bunch of rubble from the destroyed buildings in the surroundings went crashing down onto his head. Literal tons of rubble rained down on Graphite and the surrounding Skeleton army, completely crushing them. By the time all of it had been released, there was a towering mountain of rubble left behind.

“Did...we do it?” Yae cautiously asked.

No, Yae! Don’t jinx it!

Just as I thought that, the crab Graphite burst out of the mountain of rubble as if to prove my worries right.

“HA HA HA! Quite the clever strategy there! Now, allow me to repay you in kind!”

Graphite swung down the scythe he held in two of his crab hands. A shock wave ran through the ground toward us from the impact. We managed to avoid it, but it cut straight through a building behind us and split it in two.

Tch, that's got some real power behind it.

“TAKE THIS, TAKE THIS, TAKE THIS!”

Shock waves rushed toward us again and again. They weren't impossible to dodge, but it did mean we would struggle to get any closer. If we even tried, we were immediately blocked by more shock waves. He was clearly trying to avoid close-quarters combat.

Could we manage to approach it if we forced our way through using **[Shield]**? But the other side was using a form of divinity, so it was possible the **[Shield]** would get destroyed. No way we could take such a dangerous gamble.

When it comes to physical attacks from afar...

I pulled out Brunhild from my belt and fired it at Graphite. The bullet hit without issue, but it was easily repelled. Not that I was surprised, of course. That thing got crushed by rubble and came out looking as good as new, so obviously a stupid little bullet wouldn't do anything.

Then how about we charge into him with more than just a stupid little bullet?

“Sue, you ready?” I confirmed over the phone.

“Ready whenever!”

“Hm? What are you...?”

“**[Gate]!**”

Graphite was sucked into the earth together with the rubble. The second that happened, I teleported to where I had sent him: the piece of land where Sue and Sakura had been fighting the Kyklops. The first thing Graphite would have seen after being teleported was a gold titan driving a massive fist into him.

“Cannon Knuckle Spiral!”

“What?!”

The high-speed rotating golden fist of the Ortlinde Overlord charged at the flabbergasted Graphite. He attempted to dodge, but it was already too late. Those tenths of a second of hesitation proved fatal, and the black crab got a face full of fist.

“GHBWUH!”

Together with a muffled cry, the huge crab burst into pieces. It was the strongest physical attack in our arsenal. No way he could put up a fight.

And yet...

“You...! What a cowardly trick...!”

Graphite rose from the crushed shell using his scepter as a cane.

Even that didn't kill him?

Thanks to the wicked god's divinity, the wicked devout all had exceptional regenerative abilities. The dude with the big meat cleaver had his whole arm regenerate in front of me, for example.

Was the sacred treasure really the only way to beat these guys without directly using divinity?

“What's the plan? Shall I assist?” a small voice piped up from beside me.

“Hang on a sec...” I quietly responded. “Not yet.”

Kuon had actually been here the whole time under the cloak of **[Invisible]**. He was right beside me even now. I'd had him hide his presence before we came just in case the diver helmet guy was here again. If he *was* here, the wicked devout could easily escape with teleportation magic the moment they detected too much of a threat. The plan, if that was the case, was to have Kuon use the sacred treasure to take him by surprise and seal his magic. Best case scenario, we'd defeat him too.

If we could just defeat their primary means of escape, we could infiltrate the Ark without having to worry about it getting away. I really had thought he'd show up after we'd injured Graphite this much...

Was Graphite not as injured as I thought? Had he not been injured so badly that the diver helmet guy felt he had to step in? Had they had a disagreement of some sort? Or perhaps there was a reason the diver guy *couldn't* come here?

He hadn't come to help the guys with the meat cleaver and spear either, even though he had before. To be honest, it had always been questionable how much they really viewed each other as comrades.

I guess it would be a waste to give up a chance to put an end to one of them, though.

“Actually, change of plans. Kuon, can I count on you?”

“Of course,” he said.

“Whew, guess there’s no other choice now, huh?” Silver said. “Now that’s more like it!”

Why do I always end up more nervous whenever that damn sword speaks...?

I dispelled the invisibility magic, revealing Kuon beside me. In his hand was the silver crown, Silver, who took the form of a shimmering blade. A little metallic sphere about the size of a baseball was floating around him like a satellite. Kuon raised his free right hand into the air.

“Sacred Treasure Equip.”

The platinum-colored sphere unraveled into threads and changed shape as it wove itself into Kuon’s hand. It now took the form of a single-edged sword, but it had a trigger, cylinder, and muzzle on the blade; it was a gunblade, same as my Brunhild. I had originally planned for it to be a normal sword, but since Kuon already had Silver, I decided to spice things up a bit.

What was different about it compared to Brunhild was that it was a sacred treasure and that it couldn’t swap between its gun and blade forms. It was more like it had a sword as its foundation with a gun form attached to it. Its size adjusted to fit Kuon, so it was more like the size of an adult’s shortsword.

Kuon held the gunblade in his right hand, and Silver in his left.

Huh? Does he intend to dual-wield?

Yae, Yakumo, and Moroha would probably be able to manage, but would Kuon...? Well, I would be there to support him if I needed to, so it would all work out somehow.



“Sue, Sakura, could you bring the Kyklops closer to us?”

“Leave it to us!”

“Okay...”

The Ortlinde Overlord and the Rossweise were currently contending with the Kyklops. When I looked off in the distance, I could see Gerhilde, Schwertleite, and Siegrune coming toward us from Brenn. With five of them here, they’d be more than fine.

“Who is that child? When did he get there? Fine, I will simply use my trump card.”

Graphite took off the large necklace made up of fangs hanging from his neck as well as a bracelet of similar design, dumped them on the ground, and then forcefully banged his scepter down. The moment he did, that same old black fog emitted from the scepter, enveloping the fangs. That fog began to take shape, eventually forming the head of a Dragon. Naturally, it was not one made of flesh but of bone, its neck protruding from the fog.

Then, suddenly, another similar Dragon head popped out, and then another.

“It’s a Hydra!” I exclaimed.

“You insolent fool, don’t even compare it to such a sham of a serpent. This is Tiamat, the wicked king of Dragons. Thou shalt revive the corpses of thy brethren in thy bosom.”

“Grrrrr...!”

A five-headed Dragon made of bone appeared from within the fog.

Damn, pretty big, isn’t it?

What was this about being the king of Dragons, though? Was that not Luli?

《Luli, you done over there?》

《My liege? Yes, most of the demons have been incinerated. Is there something I can assist you with?》

It seemed it would be fine to call them over here. I summoned Luli over to get her thoughts on Tiamat.

“What?! This creature is...!”

Luli immediately had a shocked reaction upon being faced with the Dragon.

“Do you know them?”

“Yes. This is the Wicked Dragon King Tiamat. Though they are considered a Fiendrake, they are a Wicked Dragon that was said to reach even the strength of a Heavenly Beast. How pitiful... To have such a revered being be revived in this unsightly manner.”

So that made them the king of the Fiendrakes? If they reached the heights of a Heavenly Beast, did that mean they matched Luli in strength? And now that they were enhanced with the power of the wicked devout, it could be that they were even more powerful than Luli now...

“Graaaaaaaaaaagh!”

Suddenly, the five heads of Tiamat spat out breaths of fire all at once. No, not just fire, but water, wind, light, and dark too. It was aimed not at me and Kuon, but straight at Luli.

“How insolent!”

Luli spat out her own breath toward it. The five breaths and the single large one clashed, vying for dominance. A few seconds passed of the two Dragons battling before Luli’s breath started to overpower Tiamat’s. Tiamat could no longer keep its assault up, and Luli’s breath managed to strike the Dragon made of bone directly.

Tiamat staggered a little as they were hit by Luli’s breath, smoke coming from where they were hit.

How were they not instantly burned to the bone? Uh, wait, they’re already bone. How were they not burned to ashes? How much defense does this thing have?

“I will take this beast on. Allow me to grant it release once more.”

“Please.”

After leaving Tiamat to Luli, I took out Brunhild and fired it at Graphite. Using the crab-spider legs he had growing out his back, he scuttled to the side and

avoided my bullets.

“Strike true, O Light! Sparkling Holy Lance: [Shining Javelin]!”

I immediately followed up with **[Shining Javelin]**.

“I already told you that magic won’t work!”

Once more, black fog absorbed my magic.

Yeah, I know, dumbass. I fired it at you so you wouldn’t move.

“Hey man, it’s flattering and all, but I dunno if it’s such a good idea to keep your eyes on me like that.”

“What?”

By the time Graphite realized that Kuon had managed to approach him, it was already too late. He frantically raised the black fog as a shield, but it vanished like a puff of smoke being blown away.

“Hm?!”

Graphite blocked Kuon’s sacred treasure with his scepter. The loud crack that rang out was audible even from where I stood.

“Impossible! You managed to damage Jet?!”

“Perhaps it was a knockoff,” Kuon retorted as he swung Silver in from the side. Graphite threw off the sacred treasure with his scepter, then jumped backward. However, Kuon immediately followed up by pulling the trigger of the sacred treasure, releasing a bullet of light.

“Guh?!”

The bullet shot right through Graphite’s foot. Not a single drop of blood spilled out of the large gouge, but there was no sign of it closing up either; his regenerative abilities weren’t working. That bullet was a whole chunk of divinity, so of course it wouldn’t allow for regenerative abilities gained from the wicked god to take effect.

“You brat...! Just who are you?!”

“Unfortunately, I was told not to tell my name to strangers, so I’m afraid I can’t answer you.”

Kuon's right eye shone a red-gold. It was his Mystic Eye of Compression.

"Take this! First Seal Release!" Silver called out. When the glowing Silver touched one of the crab legs, it blew it up into pieces. That must have been the crown amplifying Kuon's abilities. He was surprisingly useful.

"Curse you! Don't think you've won this!"

Graphite held up his scepter, but unlike before, no black fog was released. Instead, all that began to surround him was a thin mist.

"Why?! Why can I not use Jet's power?!"

That was the Divine Neutralization ability of the sacred treasure I had created taking effect. So long as Kuon was nearby, that scepter would be rendered completely useless.

"Nrgh!"

Graphite threw his crab legs around like swords, sending shock waves hurtling toward Kuon. The fact that he was managing to use them at all meant it had to be a magic attack that wasn't using divinity. Those shock waves were clearly being used to create distance between him and Kuon, but Kuon was dodging the attacks with ease. His right eye was currently orange-gold, which meant his Mystic Eye of Precognition was active. He could predict exactly what was about to happen, and exactly where the shock waves would come from.

Having avoided all the attacks, Kuon approached Graphite once more. Graphite's crab legs moved to block the sacred treasure coming in from the side, but just like a phrasium sword—no, even more so than a phrasium sword—it was too sharp to be blocked. The sword slashed right through the legs and straight into Graphite's main body.

"SHYAH!"

"Ah!"

A tornado of flames suddenly enveloped Graphite, forcing Kuon to jump back. That fire continued to burn Graphite himself. Suicide by self-immolation? There was no way. I was pretty sure I saw that old man sneer at me from behind those flames.

“I see. So you were the one who defeated Hazel and Orchid. You had quite the card up your sleeve. Still, don’t think this is the end.”

Kuon wasn’t actually the one who’d defeated the previous wicked devout, but there was no need to explain that.

Graphite’s body continued to incinerate, and when the meat had been completely reduced to ashes, a metallic black Skeleton with the skull of a goat was left standing there.

That bastard. The second he realized he couldn’t use the wicked god’s divinity, he immediately swapped to condensing it inside his body instead.

He must have been gradually diverting the divinity into his bones during the fight, turning himself into a complete undead. That metallic black body no doubt had tremendous durability thanks to that. Still...

“[Slip].”

“Nwooogh?!”

The scepter that Graphite held slid forward with Kuon’s magic. His feet also slid at the same time, and he fell forward in an unsightly heap after losing his balance. The scepter clattered as it rolled its way over to Kuon’s feet. Holding it down with his foot, Kuon swung down the sacred treasure.

“What?! No, stop!”

“I refuse.”

No matter how sturdy or hard those bones were, there was no need to take down the main body to defeat a wicked devout. All you had to do was destroy their wicked vessel, the source of their power.

Kuon swung down his sword and shattered the metallic black scepter into pieces.

“Guh?! GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!”

The goat-headed Skeleton reached out to Kuon as he lost his metallic black sheen. The bones gradually turned into a dull gray and crumbled into dust, while his shattered scepter dissolved into a sludgy black liquid.

Did we finally win?

Tiamat, who had been fighting Luli, also clattered to the ground as it fell apart into a mountain of bones, most likely because Graphite was no longer around to supply it with energy. It looked like the girls were basically done dealing with the Kyklops too. The monsters roaming in the town were pretty much cleaned up by the knights of Gardio and Kohaku's group.

At least we'd confirmed we could use the sacred treasure without worry. Though, that diver helmet guy hadn't come to help, after all. Given the same happened with the spear-wielding kid, this guy really must not care for his companions...

Hm?

Sensing something strange, I took out Brunhild, aimed it at the black shadow I could see in the sky, and fired. After a bit of time, a small machine fell down to the ground and burst into pieces.

Is this...a Golem? A bird Golem?

It had been watching our fight... No, had it been monitoring us? Since when? I stuffed the bird's remains into **[Storage]** so I could ask Doc Babylon to give it a look later.

I haven't messed up, have I? Have the wicked devout found out about Kuon and the sacred treasure?

It wasn't that we hadn't come up with contingency plans for exactly that scenario, but...

"Father? Is something the matter?"

"Nah, it's nothing. Good job."

I patted Kuon on the head, then headed off to help the girls finish off the Kyklops.

Chapter IV: The Secret of the Golden Crown

Shortly after Kuon defeated Graphite, the legion of gigantic Kyklops was taken down by Sue's team. The demons, Fishmen, and Dragontooth Warriors that had been roaming the streets were taken down by Kohaku's group and the Gardio knights. With that, the port town of Brenn managed to return to relative peace.

The damage was extensive, and the civilians were still racked with fear, but the presence of the knights served as a calming force. The knights led by Emperor Gardio took the opportunity to storm Papillon's headquarters and arrest the leader while they verified the damage to the town.

The leader was originally arrested only under the *pretense* that they were the culprit behind everything, but in reality, that wasn't so far from the truth. They had undeniably been the ones dealing with the wicked devout, and had been selling off the drugs around the continent.

We later discovered that Papillon had even been working on developing the drug further, turning it into a kind of stimulant that made people lose their minds and transformed them into monsters. Who knew just how bad the situation would've gotten if that had spread around the whole continent.

Regardless, that marked the end of this fight. Unfortunately, we weren't able to pin down the location of the diver helmet guy, despite being thorough enough to cloak Kuon in **[Invisible]**. Guess I'd missed the mark.

We'd confirmed that the sacred treasure I had made had an effect on the wicked devout, at least, so it wasn't all for nothing.

The Gardio knights remained in Brenn while we escorted the emperor back to the capital, and then we made our own way home. I was so exhausted that I conked right out the second we returned, no energy to even dream.

When I headed to the living room in the morning, I was met by some very grumpy children.

"You're such a meanie, Kuon! I wanted to go too!"

“Steph, I wasn’t there just to play around...”

I was greeted by the sight of Steph angrily complaining to Kuon. Kuon was not immune to his little sister, so his only option was to timidly pull back.

“We wanted to defeat them too!”

“We’ll beat up all the baddies!”

And then Linne and Frei cornered me. Unsurprisingly, Yakumo didn’t follow her sisters, but she was still clearly upset, her hands on her hips and a frown on her face.

“All right, all right, that’s enough,” Leen admonished, clapping her hands. “This was a very spur-of-the-moment thing. We had no idea how dangerous the enemy was, so you cannot blame him, no? Plus, you were all fast asleep too.”

Right, I felt bad waking them up when they were sleeping so peacefully. Kuon just happened to be going to the restroom at the time, so I ended up asking if he could join me. Whoever came with me had to be cloaked with **[Invisible]** and Kuon was definitely the one most suited to the task... There was also the fact that it felt wrong bringing my daughters to an entertainment district in the middle of the night.

The kids still seemed a little upset, but that explanation seemed enough to placate them somewhat. Honestly, I hadn’t even wanted to bring Kuon at the time. The only real requirement to take down the wicked devout was to have someone who could wield the sacred treasure—that didn’t have to be the children. Surely it would be fine to bestow the weapon to the strongest person in this land beneath us gods and name them a hero.

Honestly, though, looking at the power of the wicked devout, I didn’t think a regular human would ever have any hope of standing up to them. And that wasn’t even taking into account that it would take time for the hero to be able to use the sacred treasure at will. One year, maybe even two... I couldn’t stand by and let people die and countries be destroyed while they trained.

No matter what options I thought of, I ultimately ended up at the conclusion that our demigod children were the most suited after all. I knew that. *I knew that*, but there was still a part of me that was frustrated about the whole

situation.

I was pretty sure that the strongest human in these lands was Hilde's grandfather, the king of two generations ago. Gallen was strong, but he was getting on in age, and I knew we couldn't rely entirely on him—we'd confirmed that there was at least one woman within their ranks. If that skeevy old man laid eyes on her, there'd be no shortage of openings in his defense.

Once I finished with breakfast, I took the bird Gollem that I'd shot down up to Babylon.

"Hm, this appears to be a surveillance Gollem," the professor said. "It is completely lacking in combat capability. They've made very sure that it's lightweight, so there's barely any defense to it. Anything this sees is sent to another paired bird Gollem, which means..."

I frowned at his explanation.

"The footage is already in the hands of the enemy, right?"

Man, if it was just the type that recorded the footage and stored it internally, it'd have been dealt with the moment I shot it down.

Then again, there was no guarantee that this was the only bird Gollem. We'd be better off assuming that the enemy was now aware of our sacred treasure.

Things might not go so easily next time.

"But if he was able to see what was going on, why did he not come and help?"

"Because this isn't a model that allows simultaneous recording and playback. By the time the footage was sent, it would've been too late."

They couldn't watch the footage live? So it was basically a video camera on wings? That wasn't like a surveillance camera at all.

"It is very easy for parts of a recording to end up blurry when sent back in real time. Perhaps they felt they were more guaranteed to get useful footage this way. That, or they had no intention of saving their comrade to begin with..." the professor mused to himself.

I thought that possibility was pretty high. Even if they had been able to view it in real time, what if they'd intended to leave Graphite to die from the start just

so they could see what tricks we had up our sleeve?

They might have gotten intel on us, but we managed to take another of their leaders down. I didn't like it, but we had no other choice than to slowly but surely rip off each of their limbs.

Suddenly, Doc Babylon spoke up. "Oh yeah, we've finished making adjustments to the Valkyries, so we'll be able to start working on the Reginleif now. Though, I guess modifying it is the more accurate term here."

"Huh? Are you planning to add on some random new features again?"

If it was to make it more suitable for water traversal, then fair enough, but if she was adding something unnecessary, I feared to know what it was.

"Ever since you defeated the wicked god, the quality of your mana has been steadily changing. The ether circuits built into Reginleif can't hold for long anymore—the recovery just can't keep up, so we were looking at trying to strengthen them. You don't want it to suddenly stop moving on you at the worst possible moment, do you?"

The quality of my mana had been changing? Maybe because I reached true divinity upon defeating the wicked god. Of course the quality of my mana would change after that. It wasn't that I couldn't pilot Reginleif as it was, but it was probably best that I not use something that could break at any moment. It would suck if the reason I lost in an important battle was because I couldn't fight at full power.

After giving Doc Babylon permission to work on the ether circuits, I exited the lab. It was then that my phone started ringing.

His Wickedness? What does he want?

He wasn't going to beg for something concerning Sakura or Yoshino again, was he? He could be so stubborn once he started begging and it made him such a pain to deal with... Sure, he was my father-in-law, but I really didn't want to pick up. Still, I had a bad feeling he would only be *more* annoying if I didn't, so I reluctantly answered.

"Hello?"

“Grand Duke, hello there. I have something I wish to ask you.”

“And what is that?”

If you want me to help you dodge Sakura so you can play with Yoshino, you're on your own.

“Not too long ago, something strange was discovered around our mountain ranges to the west. It appears to be ruins of some kind... We sent a surveillance team to investigate, but they came across a door that they couldn't open no matter what they tried. When I took a look myself, I realized that the crest on it looked familiar. Let me send you an image.”

Ruins? A door that wouldn't open? That sounded like ruins from the ancient magic civilization. If there was a crest, it might have been sealed with seal magic.

Just as I was thinking that, my phone beeped with the overlord's message. When I opened it up, I wasn't greeted by what I expected.

Is this...?!

“A crown?!”

“So I was right. This is the same crest engraved on the neck of your White Gollem, right?”

As His Wickedness said, that crest was the symbol Chrom Ranchesse engraved on his crown series of Golems. What was going on here? Why were there ruins in Xenoahs with the crest of the crowns engraved on its doors? Was Chrom Ranchesse not from the Reverse World to begin with?

Wait, no! Of course! Ranchesse used the power of the white and black crowns to go from the Reverse World to the Upright World!

Albus *had* told us that he had been doing his research in a small village somewhere. If I remembered correctly, it was the United Kingdom of Pillaisula, a country that was destroyed upon the attack of the Phrase, but that existed where Xenoahs was now situated.

Did that mean those ruins were the ruins of the laboratory that Chrom had used after coming to the Upright World?! Maybe that was where the golden

crown and Silver were made?

“Your Wickedness, please tell me where those ruins are!”

The moment the overlord told me the exact location, I teleported to the Val Albus, where the white crown was observing the Ark.



“There is no mistake. This is Chrom’s laboratory. Gold and Silver were both created here,” Albus confirmed after we took him to the ruins in Xenoahs.

“Is this true, Silver?” Kuon asked.

“Couldn’t tell ya, kiddo, sorry. I was kept locked inside, remember? Was never awake for long, since I kept gettin’ put back to sleep shortly afterward. I’d have to take a look inside to say for sure.”

The silver crown on Kuon’s waist had been kept confined while in the lab, so an external view wasn’t enough. In front of us, half buried by a pile of rubble, were two large metal doors, and next to them was a crown crest about the size of one’s palm.

“What’re your thoughts, Gold?” This time, I questioned the gold crown accompanying Steph. However, the Gollem shook his head.

“I have no information from before I met my master, so I cannot answer your question.”

Right, I forgot that Steph had reinitialized his data without realizing it. All of his past memories had been completely erased.

“Does it seem like it will open?” The one who asked that question was the second prince of Xenoahs, Sakura’s brother and by extension my brother-in-law, Prince Farese. He was the one in charge of the survey team for the ruins, and he had come here together with a knight squadron.

On my side, we had the white, silver, and gold crowns, myself, Yumina, Kuon, Steph, Sue, and Leen. From the Babylon development team, we had Doc Babylon, Doctor Elluka, the professor, and Quun.

There was no way our magitech maniac squad could pass up the chance to see such a coveted target as Chrom Ranchesse’s laboratory firsthand. Because

of that, though, we'd arrived as a much larger group than I had intended.

Sorry about this, Farese...

"To open the doors, two crowns must touch the crystals on either side of them."

I looked where Albus had stated, and right enough, there were two small diamond-shaped crystals beside each door. Did that mean these doors were impossible to open without two crowns? It would make sense, given Chrom came to the Upright World with Albus and Noir. He just used the crowns instead of regular keys. Thinking about it, you needed a crown to get into the Ark as well, as both a bodyguard and a key.

We had three crowns with us, but it seemed like it would be a hassle to use Silver for this, so we had Albus and Gold touch one crystal on either side. There was the sound of something activating, and then the two metallic doors creaked open.

"Whoa! It...opened?"

What started as voices of excitement from the Xenoahs people morphed into confusion.

Beyond the doors was nothing more than an empty small circular space.

"This is the laboratory...?" I asked in confusion.

"Incorrect," Albus responded. "This is the elevator. The laboratory is underground."

Oh, this is just the entrance, then.

We left around half of the Xenoahs knights aboveground just in case something happened, then closed the doors again once we were all inside. I thought it would turn pitch-black, but the entire wall was actually slightly lit.

Albus messed with some panel at the side, and with a jerk, we felt a sensation similar to going down an elevator on Earth.

Wow, it's really moving!

We were used to it, but for Farese and his knights, it was their first time

experiencing something like this, and they were completely frozen to the spot during the journey down. I couldn't blame them, really. Not like you could expect them to get used to it right away.

After a bit less than a minute, the lift clunked to a stop.

Are we finally here?

On the other side of the doors was another room dimly lit in the same way as the elevator. It was a fairly wide space with a bunch of random objects scattered about. A desk, chair, some unknown devices, a glowing blue-white capsule, a bunch of cables... It certainly seemed to be a lab, but there was dust and sand piled up absolutely everywhere, making it impossible to make out anything.

"What a state this place is in..." the professor lamented.

"Is this really Chrom Ranchesse's lab? It may as well be a ruin," Doctor Elluka said after him.

Doc Babylon pinched something on the ground between her fingers, but it crumbled right away.

"None of the objects here have had preservation magic cast on them," she said. "The building itself has, so I don't know if there was a reason he *couldn't* cast any on this stuff, or if he cast it once and then it got dispelled by something..."

"The most likely cause was me and Black losing control and using our crown skills. Time wound back to before the preservation magic was cast," Albus explained.

So because they rewound this space's time to before the preservation magic was cast, they essentially canceled it out.

"And that's why there's a mixture of objects that are still fine and those that have completely decayed," Quun mused to herself, lightly kicking something that looked like a book with her foot that immediately turned to dust.

The rampage of the black and white crowns five thousand years ago must have been the storm of contradictions that Doc Babylon had mentioned once. It

resulted in the timelines ending up in one big tangled mess. Though, thanks to that, we were able to chase the Phrase into the dimensional gap, allowing the world's barrier to repair itself and prevent it from being destroyed.

"Still, it's not like absolutely everything is useless. Like this here is..." Doc Babylon trailed off as she picked up a thin book that was still managing to stay together and opened it up. She immediately frowned when she realized it was in an unfamiliar language. "Never mind, I can't read it. What language even is this? Is this an ancient alphabet of the Reverse World?"

Chrom was a resident of the Reverse World, so it would make sense that he was more comfortable writing with their letters rather than ours. And besides, it would serve as a better way to keep his work secret.

"Let's see here... Is this Ancient Palpa Engineering Script? There's a lot that's indecipherable, but I think I could work it out with some time."

"Here, translation glasses."

I took out a pair of glasses enhanced with **[Reading]** from **[Storage]** and passed them to Doctor Elluka after she had given it a shot and failed.

"Wow, this is amazing! I can read all of it!"

"Touya, me too."

"And me, son."

"Father, me too!"

All of the dev team, including Quun, were begging me for their own glasses, so I handed them some of the spares I'd kept.

Why are all four of you fighting over the same book? There are tons of other books around the place.

"Perhaps we should start by separating the books still intact from the ones that have decayed?" Farese suggested.

"Sounds like a good idea." I nodded. Thankfully, it was very easy to distinguish which were falling apart and which would hold up, so it wasn't something that took too much time.

For now, I'll start with the books... No, wait, I guess they're research notes.

"These are definitely notes documenting the foundations of Chrom's Crown Gollems. They're of incredible value," Doctor Elluka remarked.

"Hmm, but it seems like he'd only just learned how to use magic at this point. He appeared to struggle with controlling the mana output," Doc Babylon said.

"Oh? This ether line coils all the way to the other side...but whatever for?"

"Professor, I think it might be to collect mana from the generator here. Any excess is then recycled over here..."

Hey, you four, stop messing around and come help us.

"Touya, it looks like there are more rooms over there," Yumina said, pointing toward several more regular-looking doors. I turned the knob on the metal door closest to us. The interior was exactly the same as the room we were just in: sand, dust, and objects falling apart. On top of what appeared to be a desk was a massive pile of more sand and more remains of crumbled objects. Had he placed some documents here or something?

"Huh?"

I saw something rectangular sticking out amid a bunch of the rotting objects. I picked it up and batted it free of any sand. It was a transparent board akin to acrylic that was a little bigger than the palm of my hand.

"That is ether film. If you run mana through it, it will show the recorded data."

"Wow, so it's like a picture, then."

When I did as Albus explained, an image did in fact appear on the board.

Wait, is this...?

What was shown was three people: a man, a woman, and a child.

It must be...

"That is Chrom, his wife, and their daughter."

After Albus confirmed my suspicion, I looked at the picture again. The girl standing in the middle was smiling and holding her parents' hands.

It's a family picture...

When I looked closer, I noticed there was writing on it—writing from the Reverse World.

Edda and Ryuuri. These...must be the names of his wife and daughter.

Had Chrom Ranchesse looked at this exact photo in order to motivate himself in his work? After the black and white crowns went berserk, though, he should've lost his memories. He didn't lose them all at once, but rather, he slowly lost more and more of the memories of his family... It was terrifying to consider.

If that rampage hadn't happened, though, his family would have remained killed by that bastard Gila. The reversal of time saving their lives would have been a satisfying end for him, I was sure.

"Father, may I show you something?" Kuon, who had been investigating a different room, asked by the entrance, beckoning me over with his hand.

"Did you find something?"

I put the ether film away in **[Storage]** and followed to where my son was taking me.

"What is this?!"

It was a large room with countless swords scattered over the floor. They were all damaged or shattered, like a sword graveyard. What surprised me wasn't that, though, but rather that the weapons before us looked exactly like the sword Kuon wielded.

"Silver, is this where you were kept confined?"

"Yeah. No doubt about it, kiddo. This was where I was created," Infinite Silver, the silver crown hanging by Kuon's waist, told us with a heavy voice.



Every one of the swords haphazardly strewn across the floor was chipped or shattered, and there were still more hiding in the corner buried under a bunch of sand in the exact same condition.

“These swords are the same as you, right, Silver?” I asked.

“Aye, indeedy, sir. Guess they’re like my siblings in a way. Felt a whole truckload of memories come back to me once I saw this place... The silver crown was originally made as equipment for other crowns, y’see.”

Weapons were made to be wielded, so that wasn’t necessarily strange, but they were for the crowns and not the masters?

“Chrom was researching how to use crown skills without paying the price, remember? One of his proposed solutions was forcin’ someone else to be the substitute.”

A substitute? As in, they would take the price for their master?!

“You mean, all of these swords here are...?”

“They’re the ones who couldn’t take it.”

The price one had to pay for using a crown skill differed depending on the unit. For example, the red crown required blood, the green required hunger, and the blue required sleep. If it didn’t require too much, then you would be fine, but it could be fatal if the price became too steep, leading to death by blood loss, starvation, or a coma, respectively. Chrom had tried to pull out the power of a crown skill with no harm to the master by having the silver crown take it all.

“This is pretty darn obvious, but Golems can’t bleed, and they sure can’t get hungry either. We don’t have anythin’ like human desire. Given that, we naturally can’t pay the price we’re bein’ expected to pay, and that means we can’t go round activatin’ those crown skills neither. What if he made a Golem with those desires, though? ’S what Chrom was thinkin’.”

Someone suddenly clicked their fingers.

“And that’s why he considered trying to combine a crown with an Artificer.”

It was Doc Babylon, having appeared out of nowhere.

An Artificer... Taking Slimes as an example, they would prey upon other living creatures to survive. They at the very least had survival instincts and an appetite. That was what Chrom had tried to take advantage of, then.

“Yeah, but that ain’t as simple as you make it sound. ‘I wanna live,’ ‘I wanna eat,’ ‘I wanna sleep’—all those desires put too much strain on Artificers. All the ones who couldn’t handle it, well...”

“They turn out like this.”

I picked up one of the swords lying about and gazed at it. Rather than it being destroyed by an outside force, it did seem to have shattered from the inside. It couldn’t handle the strain and imploded.

“Does that mean you were a success, then? That you can act as the substitute for a crown skill?”

“I guess? Doesn’t mean I don’t got my limits, though. If I even dared try to use Albus’s Reset, my spirit circuits would go blank and that’d be it for me.”

In other words, he had a onetime use. But that would mean...

“All of you silver crowns were just disposable sacrifices, then. All so the crown skills could be activated without the master paying the price.”

Doc Babylon, with absolutely no tact at all, said exactly what I was thinking without hesitation.

Yes, disposable was exactly what they were. Like wooden chopsticks you’d use for only one meal or vinyl gloves you would use to not dirty your hands for a single occasion.

Quite the expensive disposable object, though. Maybe the value of getting to use the crown skills without the price was even higher, however.

“Either way, I was the only one who was perfected to such a level that I became the best disposable Silver. Even then, I’m not to the level that Chrom wanted. ‘S why the development came to a halt.”

Whether from decisiveness or a lack of obsession, Chrom Ranchesse decided to make something else entirely from scratch rather than continue his trial and error with the silver crowns. Was that what made a genius a genius? He wasn’t ever caged in by a single concept. The moment he found a new method, he’d instantly swap to that instead. Not that I thought there was no value in obsessing over one thing and perfecting it—personally, I thought that was a

talent in and of itself.

“And so, once he finished with the silver crowns, he moved over to the gold?”

“Seems that way. I was left here, so I haven’t a clue what the intended concept for gold was. Most I heard was any of his mutterin’ that happened to pass through from the other room.”

Honestly, I felt bad for thinking it, but it kind of seemed like Chrom had seen the silver crown as a failure. His ultimate goal had been to be able to use the white and black crown skills without having to pay the price, and escape this world that was being invaded by the Phrase. In the end, though, he didn’t make it in time, and the sudden activation of the white and black crowns led to him paying the price anyway...

Hang on a second. Does that mean the gold crown is incomplete?

Thinking back, Gold *did* say he had no crown skill. But if it turned out the gold crown was created for the sole purpose of taking on the price of the other crown skills, perhaps that would make sense... Ugh, I had no idea.

“Then Gold was made here too...” Kuon mused to himself. “Gold, do you remember anything?”

“Negative. I retain no memory of this location.”

The reinitialization process really seemed to have completely wiped his memory bank. Though he could remember his specs, all of his other memories were completely erased.

“A Gollem’s memory data is split into the data baked into their Q-Crystal, and then the memories that are simply put into their memory drawer. The fundamentals behind their existence, like what they are and that they should abide by their master’s wishes, come under the permanent memories that aren’t erased, but simple everyday memories are completely wiped in the initialization process,” Doctor Elluka explained as she examined the discarded Silver remains.

“Why not just burn them all in, then? That way, nothing would get erased.”

“Do that and the chain of command would get all messed up. The Gollem

wouldn't be able to function properly. If you have the order to not cut down trees baked into its memory, then it would conflict with an order to cut a tree down in the future, even if you want it to do so in that moment."

So the difference was writing an order in pencil or writing it with permanent marker? It was fine to write down any vital orders in marker, but if it was an order that you might want to revoke later down the line, you should write it in pencil.

At the request of Doc Babylon, who thought they might be useful as a reference later, I placed the remains of the silver crowns in **[Storage]**.

After leaving that room and peeking in a different door, I was met with a slightly larger room. It also seemed like a laboratory, with a large work surface in the middle surrounded by unfamiliar machinery. Just like the other rooms, it was nearly impossible to find anything of use with the accumulation of sand and dust everywhere. When I tried opening the drawer in a nearby desk, all that was inside were the remains of something that had crumbled apart.

"Father, look."

"What's up?"

Kuon picked up something from a box filled with sand and held it out to me; it was a round mechanical part with a golden glow.

Wait...

"Gold, could you come here for a sec?" I called over Gold, who was happily waddling around as Steph's bodyguard, and held the part against his shoulder.

"It fits perfectly."

I nodded at Kuon's words. They were the exact same parts. In other words, it was the same as what was used for the armor on Gold's main body. Were they spares or were they defective parts?

"Was this where Gold...or the gold crowns in general were made?"

"Unknown. I retain no memories of this."

He gave the same answer as he had before. Guess there was no jogging them back after all. But the possibility that this was where he was made was quite

high. It would be good for us to see if there was anything of note here.

I found several notebook-like objects, some kind of weird ring with a cord attached, and a large capsule that seemed to be cultivating something, and stuffed them all in **[Storage]**. We had an agreement with Xenoahs to jointly manage anything found here, so everything we discovered today would be reported to them.

I swear I'm not trying to hog all of these.

"Hm...?"

I was suddenly hit by a strange sensation. Though faint, it was a flow of mana. Mana that was silently flowing much deeper than where we were now. I hadn't felt it before, though... What was it?

"Touya, something the matter?" Doc Babylon asked.

"No, it's just...I'm suddenly feeling some sort of mana flow. It's like it's all gathering into one place deeper underground."

"It's all gathering into one place...?"

Suddenly, she gasped before frantically yelling, "Shit! Touya, we're getting out of here NOW! The place is gonna self-destruct!"

"Huh?!"

The place is gonna WHAT?!

"Target lock... Confirmed."

"[Gate]!"

The ground beneath our feet disappeared and our bodies landed with a large thud on the ground. We were immediately thrown into the wilderness outside as we heard a massive explosion in the distance that vibrated through our whole bodies.

"Is everyone okay?!"

I wasted no time in checking on everyone who had been thrown through the **[Gate]** with me. All of my friends were fine, and it looked like the Xenoahs team were safe as well. I had Prince Farese confirm his numbers for me, and only

once he confirmed that everyone was accounted for could I let out a sigh of relief.

“That was so close...! What kind of lunatic was that dude? Why’s he installing self-destruction devices inside his own laboratory?!”

“Is that not natural?” Doc Babylon asked quizzically. “Though I’ll admit I was a bit slow on the uptake myself.”

Doctor Elluka, the Professor, and Quun were all nodding in agreement.

Were they serious? Were research labs and self-destruct mechanisms meant to come hand in hand or something? The thought of that was terrifying...

Hold up...

“Don’t tell me you’ve got something like that installed in Babylon.”

“Of course I do. Oh, whoops, did I not tell you? I have them installed in all nine— Ow, ow, hey, that hurts!”

I noogied both sides of her head with my knuckles as she nonchalantly confessed to such an insane idea.

You have something as dangerous as that floating in the airspace above my country?!

“The second we get back, you better get rid of those!”

“Oh, come on, what if Babylon ends up in some villain’s hands?”

“Can’t Babylon only be controlled by its current master and the sisters? Shouldn’t it be fine to disarm them?”

“The facilities themselves, yeah, but not anything inside of them. It’d be more than possible for someone to steal the Frame Gears or our panacea.”

My immediate question would be how the hell someone would sneak up there in the first place, but it was true the possibility wasn’t zero. Surely there was a better option than blowing them up, though.

“This is just a scientist’s mindset, to be honest. We’d rather our research be destroyed than stolen, and Chrom Ranchesse was clearly no exception. It’s just the way of a magitech researcher.”

It wasn't like I couldn't understand where she was coming from, but I still felt like blowing the whole place up was going a little too far.

We returned to the lab with **[Gate]** after we had confirmed everyone's safety. The rocky hill where the entrance had been was completely blown to bits, and there was wreckage all over the place.

It's been completely destroyed, huh?

"The lab has been completely buried..." Prince Farese remarked as he kicked at the debris by the doors.

"What's the plan?" I asked.

"It wouldn't be impossible to dig it back up, but it would take an incredible amount of time, energy, and resources... We managed to examine all of the rooms, so we might have to be content with what we have," the prince said in disappointment.

I couldn't rule out there being a hidden room that we didn't find, but there was no point wasting resources just for that. Plus, preservation magic had been cast on much of the lab, but that was to protect from dirt and rot, not an explosion of such a magnitude. Notebooks enhanced with such magic could still rip and burn. They could last for centuries and look untouched, but it wasn't an invincible barrier.

"Hopefully we can learn something about the gold crown with what we found. It might help us prepare against the one the wicked devout have," Doc Babylon said.

Right, we still have that to deal with.

I had forgotten about that until now. Given all the parts left lying around in the laboratory, could it be that multiple gold crowns had been created?

Don't tell me we're going to end up with a third gold crown on our hands.

"What I'm questioning is if their gold crown still has the memories that would've been wiped from the one that Steph put through the initialization process. They managed to take the Ark way easier than it feels like they should've under normal circumstances. Could it be because they had info on

the Ark before they went ahead with the plan? I think their Gold might have access to Chrom Ranchesse's research notes."

And that meant chances were high that they were aware of this research lab as well. The fact that they didn't take over it the way they did the Ark made it seem possible that they deemed the lab worthless. Did they leave it alone because they felt they didn't need it? We'd managed to retrieve a lot of what was inside, but that train of thought wasn't instilling me with much hope in terms of its usefulness...

Regardless, it wasn't a waste of time to make efforts to understand what Chrom had been thinking. In fact, our own magitech team was clearly fascinated...

I guess we shouldn't expect to see them show their faces for a while again.

Still, if the wicked devout has access to Chrom's research notes, they might have used that in their development of the Kyklops. Doctor Elluka and the professor had suspected that the maestro, one of their fellow great gollemancers, was involved in their development, but if he had access to such pivotal research, who knew what kind of insane thing he could build given enough time? It was scary to think about...

Whatever came our way, though, we just had to beat it to a pulp.

Just as I'd resolved myself, my phone started ringing.

Sakura?

"Hello?"

"Grand Duke, please return immediately. There is a hole in the sky."

Excuse me? There's a hole in the sky? Is her head on straight...ish? Wait, as in, a distortion in space-time?! In Brunhild?!

After sending the Xenoahs men back home through a **[Gate]**, we immediately dashed back to Brunhild. The knights had already been deployed from the castle, standing at attention around the hole in the sky. Several Frame Gears had also already been deployed.

The black hole, which was around three meters in diameter, was roughly

three kilometers out from the castle town. Its surroundings were distorted and it almost looked as if it were slowly rotating. There seemed to be little sparks coming off of it as well.

The center of the hole was nothing more than a pitch-black space. Quite literally like a black hole, except it didn't suck things in, it spat them out.

"So that's a distortion in space-time?" Linze asked, looking up at the distorted hole.

"Yup. It's a hole connected to a different time and space," I explained. Well, really, I just stole Grandma Tokie's explanation. They were opening up in our world and wreaking havoc. Usually, they ended up causing stampedes because of the powerful monsters that would end up traveling here from the past, but according to Tsubaki, there was at least one case of a distortion that had sent through a whole truckload of water that washed a village away. It must have connected to the ocean or a river from the past.

"Is there no way to get rid of it?"

"If Grandma Tokie were here, then she could get rid of it with a snap of her fingers, but...apparently, with a distortion of this size, we can just wait for the world's natural regeneration to kick in and close itself. So long as nothing comes out during that time, we should be fine...I think."

As I gave Linze my response, I began to feel the anxiety creep in as it sunk in that a distortion had finally appeared in Brunhild. I was pretty sure that many distortions had already opened across the land and we just hadn't realized it. Since nothing came through them, they closed naturally and without incident, so we never knew they had even happened. I could only pray that this one was the same... But how long would it take? One day? Three? I couldn't just leave the knights stationed here forever.

"Darling, why not put a **[Prison]** around the distortion? That way, you could stop there being any damage if anything ends up coming through."

"Oh, of course."

I bumped my fist against my palm at Leen's suggestion.

"That's a good idea. If I just put a barrier around the rip—"

“Or perhaps not. We appear to be a little late.”

“Huh?”

Just as I was about to put up a **[Prison]**, the rip distorted even further...and suddenly, a wave of very familiar monsters began pouring out of the hole. They were sparkling as they reflected the light from the sun, circling around our heads.

“What?! Isn’t that...?!”

“It’s the Phrase!”

There was no way for us to mistake those crystalline bodies. There were currently several sharklike Phrase swimming about in the air above us.



I saw dazzling crystalline bodies and round, see-through red cores. It was unmistakable—those were Phrase slowly circling our heads, and all four were sharks. Judging from their size, they were probably Intermediate Constructs.

“Why are there Phrase here?!” Linze exclaimed. “Didn’t the wicked god turn all the Phrase into mutants?”

“No. The only ones he turned into mutants were the few that had come to this world. There should still have been Phrase left in Phrasia,” Leen calmly explained. As she said, only a fraction of the Phrase had actually invaded our world, and that meant only a fraction of them had been mutated; they hadn’t gone extinct or anything. “That said, these Phrase have not come through a dimensional tear, but rather through a space-time distortion, so the chance that they are actually Phrase that have come from the past like the other extinct species we have seen is quite likely.”

In other words, they would have been pulled through from the great Phrase invasion five thousand years ago. Why was it so precise?! Could it have chosen a worse time?! Actually, I guessed it could be possible that they were from the time that we were fighting them too...

“Touya, do those Phrase look...kind of strange to you?” Yumina pointed out.

“Hm?”

I looked up at the sky. Nothing looked unusual to me, but...it wasn't as if they were mutated either.

"We're right here beneath them, yet they're showing no signs of attacking."

"Wait, you're right."

Phrase would usually attack humans indiscriminately, given that their original objective was...

Oh!

"Please do not worry. They will not attack us."

Just the people I was thinking of.

When I turned around, Melle had arrived together with Ney, Lycee, Leylle, and Allis. Hiding underneath a tree in the distance was Ende, unable to come any closer with Leylle present. If he showed himself, the personality of Halle would no doubt take control and attack him...

"Did you stop them, Melle?" I asked. She was the previous Sovereign Phrase and a Dominant Construct, at that. There was no way Intermediate Constructs could defy her command.

"No, it is impossible for me to do so while you have sealed our echo with **[Prison]**. I imagine they are actually responding to *Allis's* echo."

Allis's? True enough, I hadn't sealed Allis's echo at all, and I remembered Ende and some of the others saying that Allis's echo sounded similar to Melle's.

"So...what does that mean, then? Are they confused because they can't tell if Allis is the Sovereign or not?"

"Put simply, yes."

The shark Phrase were still aimlessly floating around up in the sky, almost as if they were dogs who had lost their owner.

"Allis, why not try calling them?" Kuon suggested.

"Mmm, I dunno if this'll really work, but... Heeey, over heeeeeeere!"

The moment Allis shouted, the four sharks swam through the air and gathered around her.

Is this really all right...?

Despite Melle's reassurances, I couldn't help but be wary due to our experiences thus far, but the sharks showed not a single hint of hostility and instead began circling in the sky above her. They were swimming a little faster compared to when they'd looked lost, so much so that I couldn't help but think they almost seemed happy.

Ney leaned down and whispered something into Allis's ear.

The next moment, Allis shouted, "Into line!"

As commanded, the sharks uniformly got into line one after the other.

"Up!"

Up they zoomed.

"Down!"

This time, they descended.

"Spin in a circle and then stand up straight!"

In a circle, they swam before then whipping their tails down so their bodies were vertically straight. Everyone present inadvertently let out sounds of amazement at the sight as they applauded.

Are we at an aquarium now or something?

"Definitely no mistaking it now—those Phrase are viewing Allis as their Sovereign. You don't need to worry anymore. They won't be attacking anyone anytime soon without her orders," Ney said. All of us sighed in relief. The opinion of a Dominant Phrase could definitely be trusted with matters like this.

Allis began to cheerfully pat the shark Phrase that were now under her command. They really were like her pets...

"Leylle, here, you pet them too! They're so cute!"

"Huh...? O-Okay..."

Cute?

I could understand someone saying they were all pretty and sparkly, but

“cute” definitely wasn’t the first adjective to come to mind.

Leylle did as Allis said and pet a nearby Phrase. Watching a Phrase calmly float there and be pet without struggling was a bizarre sight. Thinking about it, Leylle would share an echo with Halle, who was Melle’s brother and the current Sovereign Phrase, so it made sense they would obey her as well. But what about a regular person? Just as I thought of that question, Kuon and Steph joined the girls in petting the shark Phrase without any hesitation.

I...don’t know if I like how trusting they are.

Though I didn’t think there was much an Intermediate Construct could do to either of them.

“Touya, the hole!” Linze suddenly shouted.

“Huh?”

I looked up and saw the hole was starting to close. The hole continued rotating as it got smaller and smaller before finally disappearing completely with a small spark.

Phew, at least this ended without incident.

If it had opened up in a different town, there was a good chance they would’ve been attacked by the Phrase... Or perhaps not. They likely would’ve come straight to Brunhild, chasing after Allis’s or Leylle’s echo, regardless of where in the world the hole had opened.

Was the dimensional distortion opening up here really just a coincidence? Was it possible that the will of those pulled into the timestream affected where it would open?

“So...what do you intend to do with those Phrase?” Leen asked as she watched over the children playing with them.

“That’s a very good question.”

It hadn’t been long since the Phrase had last attacked. With those memories so fresh in everyone’s minds, I could only hope that the people wouldn’t panic at the sight of them.

I brought up my concerns to the Phrase girls, but they instantly reassured me.

“You don’t need to worry about that. We can keep any Phrase that we own in a different dimension.”

That’s at least a better option, but, uh... ‘own’?

“At risk of creating a misunderstanding, we Dominant Phrase, as our name implies, exist to dominate the Phrase beneath us. Worded in a bit of a worse way, you could say they’re nothing more than tools for us. It isn’t so different from the pets and livestock of this world,” Ney explained.

Hey, pets and livestock aren’t just tools!

Thinking back, Gila had called forth Lower Constructs from a different dimension too, so it must have been normal for Dominant Phrase to store away lower-ranked Phrase like tools. Looking at Allis now, though, I couldn’t imagine her ever doing something like that. She wasn’t quite the same as a regular Dominant Phrase, though, so perhaps that was to be expected.

“Mom, can we ride them?!”

“Of course. Don’t fly them above the town, though.”

The moment Melle gave permission, Allis was off like a light jumping onto the back of one of the shark Phrase, dragging Leylle and Kuon up with her. Steph jumped up by herself.

Seriously, guys, be careful!

“Steph, at least put up a **[Prison]** around you!” I shouted.

“Got it, daddy!”

At least with the **[Prison]** deployed, even if they were to lose their balance, it would break their fall. It would be like they were flying within an invisible box.

“Up, up, and away!” Allis cheerfully called out as the Phrase flew off into the air. They really were treating those Phrase like mounts. Or honestly, probably more like a roller coaster.

“In some ways, it might have been for the best that it was only Intermediate Constructs that appeared. We’d have been in trouble if the Phrase that had come through had been Dominants from five thousand years ago,” Leen muttered to herself as she watched the kids take flight.

Oh, for sure.

“There’s no Dominant Phrase recorded as going missing five thousand years ago or anything, right?” I asked Ney, just to be sure.

“I hate to break it to you, but several of them did go missing. Their echoes suddenly disappeared, so we assumed they had died, but...I see. They probably ended up in this world.”

Hang on, there actually could be Dominant Phrase here from the past?!

“Don’t forget that many Dominant Phrase died in the battle against the heroes of the ancient magic kingdom. I don’t think you were wrong to think they died,” Doc Babylon reminded us. Apparently, the tales told of heroes who had made sure to bring the Dominant Phrase down with them, resulting in parts of the Yulong coastline being gouged out.

Just what kind of self-destruction magic did they use?

Honestly, they probably would’ve struggled to defeat the Dominant Phrase if they hadn’t gone so far. Phrase, especially Dominants, had incredible resistance against magic. That was why the ancient magic kingdom had stood no chance against them, leading to them finding a method that wouldn’t involve directly attacking them with magic.

“How many died in that attack?”

“Three. All were young, selfish fools,” Ney spat out.

Guess she didn’t like them very much. And no wonder, given they never particularly viewed each other as comrades. They must not have gotten along with Ney very well. Not that that was a surprise when it seemed she didn’t get along with any of that group other than Lycee.

So to sum up, does that mean that the Dominant Phrase who attacked our world five thousand years ago were Yula, Gila, Ney, Lycee, Leto, Luto, and three unknowns?

“I only heard that two had died, though,” Doc Babylon said. “The numbers don’t add up.”

“Hey, I really don’t like the sound of this!”

“Well, things were pretty hectic back then. We could barely even contact other countries, though that was partly because of how many had been completely destroyed... It wouldn’t be strange if another had died somewhere and we just weren’t made aware of it.”

The world had been one step away from total destruction during that war, so it made sense that there would be no reliable source of information. But was the third truly destroyed or...?

“Hmph, no matter who comes our way, they won’t last against us. We simply need to bring them under our command. If they don’t obey, we destroy them,” Ney confidently proclaimed.

“There’s a chance they’d actually obey you guys?”

“Probably not. They were always hanging around Gila, after all.”

I had felt the slightest bit of hope after Ney’s words, but then Lycee came in and sunk me into the depths of despair again.

Yeah, no, if they were hanging around with Gila, then they’re immediately out. No way they’re anything but trouble.

While I was left worrying, the shark Phrase began doing somersaults off in the distance. Trust Allis to put the kids through something so crazy... Steph was no doubt having the time of her life, but I felt sorry for Kuon and Leylle having to deal with her whims.

At least with this incident, I had a more thorough understanding of how the monsters came through from the past. If this was happening all across the world, then they must be causing a hell of a lot of issues. Just because a distortion opened up a wormhole, that didn’t always mean that a monster would jump out of it, but Grandma Tokie did say that they tended to open up next to things that moved. If those happened to be small animals or bugs, everything would be fine, but any bigger than that, well...

Grandma Tokie would help close any large distortions or potential time tunnels, so I’d prefer if we could do something to assist with the smaller ones.

“Grandma Tokie said that these distortions aren’t actually caused as aftereffects of the timequake, but by the wicked devout...”

Did that mean that the enemy had some kind of ability or tool that could interfere with space-time? Or maybe they'd used the gold crown's knowledge to recreate the black crown's crown skill? In theory, they'd be able to cross worlds or timelines if they had managed that, given the black crown controlled time and space. But the price for such a skill was so large that Chrom Ranchesse had apparently turned back into a boy after crossing worlds.

...You know, if a long-lived species like elves or fairies were to use it, what would happen? Could they use it almost at will? Maybe not endlessly, but they'd be able to time travel a few times before hitting their limit.

Unless the way it worked was that it took a percentage of one's lifespan as the price. Even a long-lived organism couldn't survive being reversed all the way back to before they were a fetus. Magic that could interfere with time was naturally so advanced that it was difficult to use at will, but it wasn't impossible to make use of it in a limited scope.

Hell, even **[Accel]** fell under the umbrella of time magic. When you got used to using it, it felt like time around you slowed down, and by extension, your thought process would speed up. You could easily argue that was equivalent to messing with time, if even just a little. It was only one's own time in that case, though.

There was the Spatial Translocation ability as well. Apparently, you could use that to not just cross worlds, but even time to some degree if you were experienced enough. I didn't quite know how to do that yet, though...

I had actually been thinking that I'd like to bring my kids to Earth with Spatial Translocation to meet my mom and dad before they had to go back to the future. At least that way, my parents could see the faces of their grandchildren.

They might be a bit surprised at how early it happened, but...I think I have the duty to do that much, at least. I wonder how big Fuyuka's gotten? Not even a year's passed, so maybe she won't be all that different. Don't babies grow quite fast, though? Maybe she can nod her head now.

Getting the opportunity to check on my little sister was another reason for me to work on taking down the wicked devout, however tough parting with our children would be...



“We’ll be back soon!”

With a farewell, Kuon, Allis, Leylle, Steph, Linne, and Frei rode the shark Phrase high up into the air from the castle’s courtyard. Those Phrase had truly become Allis’s cars. Actually, would it be more accurate to call them horses, since they weren’t mechanical?

After being told by Melle not to fly above the town, Allis took the Phrase around with her and thoroughly covered every part of the castle town to show the citizens that they weren’t dangerous. What started as the people being a little afraid turned into them slowly but surely becoming so accustomed to them that the local children would even beg Allis to let them ride the sharks. They sure had become popular.

Flight wasn’t without its dangers, so I made sure to tell Allis in advance to only allow extremely low flights—around fifty centimeters off the ground—for the kids. Before I knew it, Quun had used **[Modeling]** to develop little passenger seats that attached to the back of the Phrase.

Is it really okay to do this?

They had already given the four sharks names: Gin, Tequila, Rum, Vodka... There was no way that wasn’t the influence of that no-good goddess of alcohol. What was it they were called again? The four greatest spirits of the world? It sounded like the name of some elite assassin squad—but you know, that was similar enough to sharks and Phrase.

I took a call from Doc Babylon in the middle of all that. As it turned out, they’d found something new among what was salvaged from Chrom’s laboratory. When I made it up to Babylon, she, Elluka, and the professor were all present. A cylindrical glass container was placed on a large table. It was about the size of a plastic bucket, and it was filled with some green liquid that looked like melon soda. Floating in the liquid was a single mechanical gold part.

“Is that what I think it is? Is it that spare part of Gold’s that we picked up?”

“Well, we couldn’t tell you if it’s a spare or not, but it’s very likely made from the same material. We’d considered the possibility before, but this seems to be

an Artificer.”

An Artificer? This lump of metal? Well, there were Gargoyles and Metal Golems made of stone and metal, so it wasn’t entirely out of the question, but...

“Gold’s chassis is made to hold the same characteristics as Slimes and orichalcum. It can morph into any shape, is sturdy, and yet also elastic.”

“Slimes? Is this related to those Orichalcum Slimes you mentioned once before?”

Slimes were Artificers from long ago, and they held many special properties. The world had so many varieties of Slime because of how quickly they evolved. There were Slimes that evolved based on their environment, such as the Magma Slimes you would find in volcanic areas or the Marine Slimes you would find in bay areas, but there were also those like Sludge Slimes and Metal Slimes, which would evolve through whatever they consumed.

Given how easy they were to work with, many mages and alchemists would create whole new Slimes—those Slimes were often the ones that caused all kinds of trouble, though. We’d had our own experiences with such man-made Slimes, like the Bust Slimes that would latch onto girls’ chests or Basin Slimes that loved falling onto people’s heads like those stupid school pranks.

“Unlike a lot of Slimes, this thing here doesn’t really have a sense of free will. It’s stuck in a state of following its master’s order to retain its shape.”

“Man, doesn’t that mean it’s more like a slave or a tool...?”

“That’s what Artificers are. They’re artificial existences made to obey their master. You’ve seen how Golems and Gargoyles act, haven’t you?”

She was right. They came under that category too. Slimes were often mistaken for monsters because they were comparatively free creatures, but no, they were artificially made.

“According to Silver, Chrom Ranchesse was carrying out experiments in order to create an Artificer that could take the place of using a crown skill instead of the wielder, but he realized that Artificers weren’t suitable vessels for such a thing. So what was there left for him to do? Touya, if you had to put a whole bucket of water into a tiny cup, what would you do?”

“Huh? Uhhh, take it in multiple goes? Oh, wait, I’d take it using a bunch of cups.”

“Yes, exactly.”

That told me nothing! So basically, the bucket of water was the price of the crown skill, while the cup was the Artificer. Pouring the water into the cup over several goes...would mean you’d need to figure out what to do with the full cup first. Maybe not that, then. Pouring the water into several cups instead... Several cups?

“He made multiple Artificers to pay the price, you mean?”

“Yup. Usually, Golems have only one master, so it would be impossible to split the price between multiple people. But he managed to succeed with the idea of having a contracted Artificer take the price with Silver. In that case, what if he were to make use of *several* Artificers at once? The answer is this Slime here.”

Was she saying that Chrom had several Slimes take the price of crown skills? That each of the Golds he created were made of Orichalcum Slimes?

“You know about Big Slimes, yeah? At a glance, it looks like one, well, big Slime, but in reality, it’s a bunch of smaller Slimes fused into one. That’s basically what this Orichalcum Slime is.”

“Huh?! This one part is made of a bunch of Slimes?!”

I turned to look back at the gold shoulder part floating in the green liquid. It was so small, yet it was really made of a bunch of Slimes? I thought this would be one Slime at best... Maybe they were all mini Slimes.

“Exactly how many Slimes are in here?”

“There’s one core per Slime, and based on our analysis, there are about three hundred million cores inside of it.”

“HOW MANY?!”

I was rendered practically speechless by the insane number. This tiny little shoulder piece was made of three hundred million Slimes?! They had to be even smaller than regular cells by that point.

The amalgamation of Artificers that had become Chrom Ranchesse's long-sought answer sat there in that green liquid, emitting a strange light all the while.



I couldn't believe that this Golem part was made up of three hundred million Slimes. It looked like it was made of gold, nothing like a Slime. Then again, if it was one of the Metal Slimes, they could be pretty sturdy, and there were plenty of Slimes that would camouflage themselves as other substances. Like Doc Babylon had said, if you made a compound Slime hold the properties of orichalcum, you could make it imitate a metallic part like this.

"Can it go back to being a bunch of small Slimes?"

"Nope. Now that they're joined together, there's no going back for them," Doc Babylon answered. "They will continue to live out their lives as an Artificer that simply exists."

Could you even call that living? The idea of existing while being unable to budge even a single inch, not even allowed to have your own free will, gave me the shivers. I'd gotten a really similar feeling from a sci-fi film I watched a while back. In that movie, humans were only allowed to live because they served as an energy source for the machines that ruled the world. They would die never knowing that they were really living in a cyberspace made to imitate the real world.

Could you really say that those people were living happily? What did the Slimes that were turned into this mechanical part feel about this?

"Of course, since they're alive, they have the natural primitive desire to live, and they do that by taking in what they need to survive—in this case, the magical element in the air. That's why if they end up sealed inside a space that lacks any of that element, such as your **[Prison]**, it would simply fall apart within a few years."

Right. If they're alive, then if you cut off their food source, of course they'll die.
"They're troopers to have survived five thousand whole years, though..."

"I mean, they're Artificers. Think of them a little like Cesca."

Cesca, the terminal gynoid of the garden, had been put into cold sleep several times over her lifespan. So it was kind of like that? In fact, wasn't Doc Babylon's body also an Artificer? Her brain matter was the same as when she had been alive, so she had a shorter lifespan than the gynoids, but she would still live for thousands of years.

Ugh, does that mean I'm gonna have to deal with her for thousands of years too?

"Hm? Why are you staring at me like that? Finally open to the idea of cheating on your wives, are you? I'm always prepared, so I don't mind, but I'd appreciate you setting the mood a little first..."

"This Orichalcum Slime can take the price of a crown skill, right?"

I ignored Doc Babylon, who was squirming in feigned embarrassment as she said complete nonsense again, and instead turned to Doctor Elluka for an explanation.

"I think it would be possible, yes. It *is* a mass of hundreds of thousands of living beings, so I don't think it would have any issue taking the price. But if it did take the price, those Slimes would be put in a critical state, if not outright killed. The master may be safe, but the same couldn't be said about the gold crown," she explained. In other words, the Gollem would act as a substitute for the master. That was basically the same concept as the silver crown.

"Sacrificing a Gollem for your own selfish goals isn't a style I'd particularly like to consider," the professor chimed in, sinking into deep thought as he started stroking his white beard. "Though I suppose that is simply the sign of just how badly Chrom Ranchesse wished to cross worlds."

Chrom had tried to escape to his own home world and away from this one being invaded by Phrase. It was no doubt in order to save his family; if I had been placed in that situation, where the world was two steps away from ruin, I would've likely tried to find a way to teleport even just my family to Earth. I didn't find it that strange that he would've gone to any lengths to make that possible.

"There is something that I'm still a little curious about," Doc Babylon said, joining back into the conversation. "Touya, do you remember that Gluttony

Slime we saw? The Slime that was in the Ark when we had Val Albus's probe infiltrate it?"

"The Gluttony Slime? Oh, that Slime that had turned into a red liquid..."

Hang on. Another Slime? Is this just a coincidence?

"The Gluttony Slime was originally made to dispose of waste, but it was so gluttonous that it ended up going out of control, consuming everything it came across, and evolving into a Slime capable of swallowing a whole small country whole. Its attachment to life far surpasses most Artificers. This is just a possibility, but..."

"Was he trying to make something more out of the Gluttony Slime by fusing it with orichalcum?" I asked. This was a Slime that could swallow a whole country we were talking about here. Its appetite was probably bottomless. What if that could take the whole price?

"Or maybe he was trying to make some extra equipment for the gold crown so he could use multiple crown skills?" Doctor Elluka suggested.

"It's definitely possible. I think you could use Gluttony Slimes as a mana tank for using crown skills."

"Hmm, Gluttony Slimes would definitely be of a much higher quality than just fusing a Slime with orichalcum. But in that case..."

I let the geniuses discuss among themselves while I stared at the golden part. Even all this time later, I could still feel Chrom Ranchesse's obsession.



Watching Steph play with Gold in the courtyard, I wasn't sure how to feel.

So Gold's just a big amalgamation of Slimes...

Well, I didn't think *all* of him was made of Slime. It was probably only the chassis, while the inner frame was made from regular materials.

Armor made up of several life-forms that contained the characteristics of orichalcum, something that served as a shield so its master didn't have to pay the price of the crown skill. That meant that even Steph could use a crown skill without endangering her life. Gold would have to be sacrificed in the process,

however.

But hadn't Gold himself said that the gold crown itself had no crown skill? That would mean they needed something else to activate one first. Could the distortions in space-time that had been happening so frequently recently be the result of the second gold crown using a crown skill that allowed for the manipulation of those axes?

"What's with the frown?" Sue asked, suddenly sitting in the chair opposite me.

"I was just thinking about how to send the kids safely back to the future," I replied as I watched Kuon, Allis, Leylle, and Steph all playing together. If I wanted to manage that, we had to take down the wicked devout. We were slowly but surely finishing our preparations to cage them in, but we had to be extra careful that we didn't end up alerting them to our presence and having them escape.

"That's not fair. Need I remind you that Steph arrived here last? I wanted the chance to spend time with her for longer like I got to with the other girls."

I could understand her disappointment. If Steph hadn't dropped her phone, we'd have been able to find her immediately and they could've spent more time together.

"I wonder when we'll get to meet again once they go back to the future... Even when Steph is born in our timeline, it would take another five years before we could talk to them about all of this," Sue said as she turned her gaze to the kids.

The oldest of our children was Yakumo at eleven. Steph was only five. It would take over ten years before we reached this point of their timeline. Still, our future selves managed to wait that long. We needed to make sure to send their kids back.

"Better make as many memories now so we have plenty to talk about in the future, huh?" I said.

"You're right! I should play with Steph more too! Then we'll have plenty to talk about when she's born in our timeline!"

After saying that, Sue stood up and ran over to Steph. Given they weren't even ten years apart right now, they seemed more like sisters than mother and daughter.

"Equip!"

BWUH?!

One second, Sue was chatting with Steph; the next, she was holding her phone up to the sky as her body was enveloped in a yellow light that transformed her into her battle suit.

"Wow! You're so cool, mommy!"

"Aren't I just!"

The mother was standing with her hands on her hips, puffing her chest out proudly while the daughter was gazing starry-eyed up at her. Was this really the kind of memories she wanted to create...? Even Kuon was smiling awkwardly at them from behind. Wait, but Allis and Leylle were watching Sue with the exact same starstruck look as Steph...

Come on, Touya, they're kids. It's normal for them to be fascinated by a transformation sequence.

Even I'd played with one of those fake transformation belts when I was younger. Was it just a fact of life that boys would admire the heroes in tokusatsu, and girls would admire magical girls? It wasn't as if they'd ever seen magical girl shows on TV, though... Maybe I'd shown them those kinds of shows in the future. I mean, my daughters were all literally magical girls. Just without the transformation sequence.

"Everyone has a desire to have their own transformation."

"Whoa?! Where'd you come from?!"

Linze was suddenly standing beside me. The gods already did that to me all the time, but I didn't expect Linze would start too. I would often forget that my wives could hide their presence as well... It was kind of frightening.

Wait, did she just read my thoughts?

"I want to become a different me," "I want to look like the person I look up to

most.’ Nothing is strange about having a desire like that. By changing your appearance or putting on makeup, you can turn your personality and feelings in a more positive direction, and by extension, you can live your life more positively as well.”

“Did you...read a cosplay magazine or something?”

As I listened to Linze speak so passionately, I suddenly remembered there being something like that in a magazine I had brought from Earth. Linze made costumes on the regular, but she’d been especially big on making outfits of anime and manga characters as of late. This world was already a fantasy world to begin with, so most of the outfits fit right in. Honestly, rather than anime and games, I’d say a police officer or office worker would look more like a cosplay here. Well, maybe that was just me.

“I want the kids to live life with that kind of positivity as well. And so...I made this.”

“Whoa, what’s this?! Why are you so good?!”

In the sketchbook Linze was showing me were costume designs for all the kids. She was amazingly good at drawing. Was she always this good?! This would definitely hurt his feelings if he heard me say this, but she was even better than my dad and he was a mangaka...



Realism was the norm in this world, but what Linze had drawn here was more akin to a manga style. She'd probably been influenced by the manga from Earth that she had been reading. Linze said that she had never drawn before back when we first met, which meant she'd gotten this good after only a few years. Was she a genius?

There were a bunch of magical girl drawings in the sketchbook as well. They were incredible.

"They really can transform if we make use of the system that Doc Babylon created. I wanted to make these for them before they have to return to the future."

I wasn't doubting that we would be able to give them transformation sequences, since the girls already had their own for the pilot suits, but was there any reason for them to wear the outfits in the first place? They didn't strengthen them in any way, right? And they weren't supposed to be disguises either. In fact, did they need an actual system in order to transform? Couldn't they just get dressed normally?

"Do you not want to see the children in these outfits?"

"I do," I replied immediately. What parent wouldn't? They were all adorable, so there was no way they wouldn't suit them.

Linze pointed at one of the costumes in the sketchbook.

"I've made nine pairs of this design here for now. Though honestly, it's still lacking some of the details."

"Cool... Wait. *Nine* pairs?"

As in, Kuon had one too? These were magical *girl* costumes, right?

"There's no need to worry. Kuon will pull it off," Linze declared with full confidence.

"Stop right there! Don't put him through that!"

Yeah, Kuon had a feminine face because he'd inherited Yumina's features! But as small as he was, he was still a boy. There was no way he wouldn't get embarrassed about having to wear girls' clothes. I knew for sure as his father.

“The most important thing when deciding on a costume is whether or not it suits the person. Gender has little to do with it. In fact, aren’t there boys in Earth books who are known as ‘femboys’?”

Crap, Linze’s eyes were serious. If I didn’t do something fast, Kuon was going to be forced to dress up as a girl. I had to stop my son from being traumatized at such a young age! Though...if Kuon wanted it, maybe it would be fine? Even putting the idea of cross-dressing aside, it wasn’t that strange for a boy to want to dress up in something cute. If that was the case, then I had to learn to be more understanding as his parent. I would make my decision after confirming his thoughts on the matter.

I wasted no time in calling the boy over and explaining the situation.

“So, do you want to wear these kinds of clothes?”

“No.”

Oof, an immediate shutdown. And with such a huge frown too. Linze immediately tried to persuade him, though. “I think you’d look adorable in this, Kuon!”

“I do think the clothes are cute, but I do not particularly wish to wear them myself.”

“Yumina would be overjoyed to see you in this! Think of it as a way of showing your love for your parents!”

“Oh, I’m certain she would be happy, but I still do not particularly wish to wear it myself.”

Kuon retaliated against Linze’s fervent persuasion with his usual polite smile. There was absolutely no room for debate here.

Linze finally gave up and let out a dejected sigh.

“I made nine whole costumes too...”

“Then why not give mine to Allis? Wait, then we’d need one for Leylle as well. You can make just one more, can’t you, mother?”

“Of course I can!”

Linze might have lost Kuon, but this new suggestion had filled her with gusto. She was fine with anything so long as it involved making outfits, huh? I wouldn't deny that I wanted to see our kids in the costumes as well. I was starting to understand the feeling of parents that wanted to dress their kids up.

Clearly wanting to strike while the iron was hot, Linze grabbed Allis and Leylle, pulled out a measuring tape from somewhere, and began taking their measurements. She was way too used to this.

"Hmm, what would make for a good transformation item? A magic staff? Or maybe we should make it more girly and go for a compact mirror? We could also go for a curveball and have it be a perfume bottle..." Linze muttered to herself, completely lost in her own world.

I closed my eyes in despair. This was going to take a long time.

Interlude: Monsters and Magical Girls

“I’m glad you’re okay.”

“Ack, how embarrassing. You really can’t fight the effects of old age.”

Emperor Regulus was sitting up in his bed, looking a little worn, but his pallor was healthy, so he was probably fine.

“I was really surprised, you know? The last thing I expected was to get a phone call telling me that you’d collapsed! And to think it was simply from food disagreeing with you! Be more careful about your health!”

“I-I will. I just couldn’t stop myself... Don’t be so mad.”

Faced with his angered daughter, the man couldn’t help but shrink back. Apparently, he’d tried some food for the first time—he found it delicious, so he kept eating until suddenly, his condition worsened. The doctor had said that his body wasn’t compatible with the food. Maybe it was an allergy. Allergy symptoms were different from person to person, but I was glad his symptoms were light.

“Please get well soon, grandfather,” Arcia politely said.

“Oh, but of course, darling. If you’re telling me to get better, then I have no choice!”

Watching her father go doe-eyed for his granddaughter, Lu sighed to herself, putting a hand to her head. The man always completely doted on Arcia. Which reminded me, the emperor was still alive in the kids’ future, though he appeared to have stepped down from the throne. Wouldn’t that mean he’d stay alive for quite a long time?

“I’ll cook your lunch today,” Arcia proudly declared. “Healthy food leads to a healthy body, after all!”

“You need to stop being so selfish, Arcia. You realize you’ll end up causing the chefs trouble, don’t you?”

“Oh, it’ll be no problem,” the emperor reassured. “It’s my grandchild’s homemade food. I’ll happily eat it.”

Did you forget food is why you’re bedridden right now?

Arcia was naturally aware of that, though, so I was sure she would make the meal easily digestible.

With that decided, we left the emperor’s room and headed for the castle’s kitchen. The head chef of Regulus Castle turned out to be a huge fan of Lu’s cooking app, so they were more than happy to let us use their space. Lu really was popular, wasn’t she?

Wait, she was originally a princess from here, anyway.

“So? What do you plan to make?” Lu questioned her daughter.

“I’m going to make something grandfather will be able to eat easily, of course. I was thinking of making some nyumen.”

I nodded.

“Nyumen, huh?”

“What is this ‘nyumen’?” Lu asked. I was immediately in agreement with Arcia’s choice, but Lu seemed to have no idea what nyumen even was.

Huh? Did I not tell them what nyumen is?

The fact Arcia knew what nyumen was meant that this was the moment that Lu would learn about it. Did that mean Lu told Arcia, who then came to the past and told Lu...?

Is this not a time paradox?

Well, it...would be fine, I was sure. The spirits working under Grandma Tokie would figure something out.

“To put it simply, nyumen is somen noodles cooked in warm broth. It’s easy to digest, simple to slurp up, and it puts less strain on the stomach,” Arcia explained.

“I see. It certainly *sounds* kind to the stomach.”

If I recalled correctly, nyumen was written with the characters for “boiled”

and “noodles.” Noodles boiled to softness did sound easy to digest.

“Let’s keep it simple and avoid adding too many extras. Mother, could you boil the noodles?”

“Of course.”

Lu filled a pot with hot water, then put in some dry somen noodles she’d kept in **[Storage]**. Meanwhile, Arcia chopped up some kamaboko, shiitake mushrooms, mitsuba parsley, and spinach, and then made a soup using some dashi already in the kitchen. The boiled noodles were served in a wooden bowl, toppings were sprinkled over the noodles, soup poured in, and finally, yuzu peel was grated lightly over the top to finish it off.

As we were also permitted the chance to taste it, Arcia made four bowls of the nyumen, placed them on a cart, and wheeled it back to the emperor’s bedroom.

“Oh my, noodles? Is this somen?”

“Yes, grandfather. It is a dish called nyumen.”

“I had the opportunity to try cold somen noodles in Brunhild before, but this is the first time I’ve had them warm.”

Still sitting in his bed, the emperor picked up one of the bowls of nyumen from the tray that had been set on his bedside table. He scooped up some of the noodles with a wooden fork, blew gently on them, and slurped them into his mouth.

“Mmm... It has a very gentle flavor. The noodles are so soft that they’re very easy to slurp up. The soup is also delicious, and the smell is delectable.”

“You must be smelling the yuzu,” Arcia told him, a wide smile on her face. I took that opportunity to have my own bite.

Yep, it’s delicious. This would be easy to keep down even without an appetite, and it seems good for digestion. The soup and dashi pair well with the somen.

“I think this would be nicer if you added chicken,” Lu muttered as she tasted her own bowl.

“I-I didn’t include any this time because I was thinking about grandfather’s

health!”

“I’m aware, don’t worry. You didn’t include chicken in ours either because you thought father would sulk, yes?”

“I’m not that greedy...?” the emperor said quizzically as he continued slurping away at his noodles with a hurt expression on his face. I agreed with what Lu said, though—this really would taste nicer with some meat in it. That said, it was still plenty nice without it.

Having enjoyed the warming taste of the nyumen, we left Regulus Castle. Though he looked much healthier by the time we left, the emperor still needed his rest. We gave the recipe to the head chef so he’d be able to have it again whenever he wished.

When we returned to Brunhild, we found Elze, Elna, Linze, and Linne sitting together in the castle’s living room.

“Oh, welcome back! Did everything work out okay with His Imperial Majesty?” Elze asked.

“Everything was fine, he just gave himself a bit of a stomachache,” Lu said.

Linne looked about ready to fall asleep on Elze’s lap, while Elna and Linze were doing some knitting. Or at least...it looked like knitting, but they seemed to be making some kind of doll.

“I’ll pop out and get dinner made. I left lunch entirely to Crea, so I should really help out.”

And with that, Lu was immediately off to the kitchen.

Wasn’t Crea the head chef? That was literally her job. Lu was a grand duchess—she didn’t need to be in the kitchen in the first place. Still, Lu did like to cook, and it sounded like Crea had been a big help, so I chose not to say anything.

“Mother, allow me to help! I’ve thought of a good idea,” Arcia exclaimed as she followed her mother out of the living room. Did she mean the nyumen? As nice as it was, I wasn’t sure how I felt about having it for both lunch and dinner...

“And I’m done!”

“Good job, Elna. It’s very cute.”

Elna excitedly showed off what she had knitted to Linze, who immediately praised her. It was a plush toy in the shape of a rabbit.

“You were making some soft toys, huh?” I asked.

“You call them knitted toys,” Linze explained, showing me her...knitted toy? “They don’t use any fabric, just wool yarn. They’re much simpler to make and customize than normal soft toys.”

Linze’s creation was also a bunny, but it had a very hard-boiled look to it. Why was it wearing a black suit and white scarf? Was it the boss of the bunny mafia? In contrast, Elna’s was cute with its little blue shirt. Peter seemed like the perfect name for it.

“Here, mommy! A present!” Elna exclaimed as she thrust her bunny toward her mother.

“What, for me? Wow, thank you, Elna!” Elze responded with glee, her face melting into a smile. Elze unconsciously went to hug Elna in the spur of the moment, but she suddenly remembered that Linne had fallen asleep in her lap and began waving her hands in frustration.

Fine, I’ll give you a little hand.

“**[Levitation].**”

“Mnyah...”

I floated Linne off the sofa and levitated her over toward me. Now that she had been freed from being used as a pillow, Elze gave her daughter a massive hug.

Elze, known lover of all cute things, had just been given a cute present from her cute daughter—of course she’d be happy. I set Linne down on the opposite sofa and gave her an actual cushion to lay her head on before then peeling Elze off of Elna.



“You’re hurting her, quit it.”

“Noooooooo!”

Elze flapped her hands around in frustration at being made to let go of her daughter, while Elna sighed in relief at being freed. This mother really had to learn to not be so aggressive with her affection.

“You’re gonna make her hate you if you keep being overbearing, you know?” I whispered from behind so only Elze could hear. That immediately put a stop to her struggling.

“E-Elna, I’m really sorry, okay? I was so happy, I just...”

“No, it’s okay. I’m happy it made you that happy.”

What followed was Elze’s excited squeal.

“Eln— Gwuh!”

I grabbed Elze by the collar the moment she tried to jump on her daughter again.

Why is the mother so much more of a hassle than the daughter?

Linze was chuckling awkwardly at our exchange, before her phone started vibrating in her skirt pocket.

A phone call? From who?

“Hello?” Linze answered. “What? They’re ready?! Yes... Yes, I understand. I’ll go pick them up right away!”

Elze and I looked at each other in confusion at Linze’s sudden joy and excitement. Linze ended the phone call and looked over at us.

“It was from Doc Babylon. They’ve finished the transformation items for the kids! Touya, could you take me up to Babylon?!”

Was this to do with that whole magical girl thing we were talking about before? Had she been serious?!

“Come on, let’s go, let’s go! Hurry!” Linze said, yanking my arm.

“Wait, hang on! Ow, ow, stop pulling so hard! I’ve got it, I’m going!”

I couldn't fight against Linze when she was this worked up.

This girl's deadly serious.

After being somewhat forced to open a **[Gate]**, we teleported up to Babylon.



"So the transformation item is that bracelet?"

"Yup. We considered the idea of a compact mirror or a perfume bottle, but we decided on this. Those kids'd probably lose 'em otherwise."

I couldn't argue back against Doc Babylon's words. Quite a number of them had dropped their phones when they arrived in this world.

"How do they use them?" Linze asked.

"If they say the key phrase while flowing mana into it, the clothes stored inside will be swapped with the clothes they're wearing at the time. I made sure the requested effects will also happen when it's used."

Effects? What kind of effects? This really was a transformation item. So many people could only dream of having something like this. If you stored your pajamas, formal clothes, and casual clothes in here, you'd conveniently be able to change your outfit as you needed.

"I'm surprised you were even able to make something like this..." I muttered.

"We happened to have a fast-change artifact in the storehouse, so we took that and modified it a little. It works similarly to the girls' pilot suits."

Having something to base it on *would* make it easier. It would be easy to duplicate using the workshop, as well.

"What should we have the incantation be, then?" Linze asked excitedly, practically huffing as she zoomed up toward me with one of those bracelets in hand.

Is this something to get that excited over...?

"Uh...why not just something like, 'Transform!' Short and sweet, no?"

"No, that won't do."

“Won’t do at all.”

Linze and Doc Babylon both sighed in disappointment at my answer.

Come on, it’s not that bad!

“Listen here. That may be okay for a boy, but for a girl, it completely lacks impact. We have to make it something flashier,” Linze lectured me.

What impact? Who are you trying to impact with it? Us?

“What about ‘Twinkling Heart Babylon Wave!’?”

“Oooh, so you went for the cool route. I think something that imitates the sound effects works too. Like ‘Pimupimu pipirun! Pirurururu! Pamupamu papareru! Parurururu!’”

Pimu...what?

Help, I think something’s wrong with my wife. She’s starting to sound crazy.

“Your daughters will be the ones transforming, so why not just ask them directly?”

“Good point! They can choose from a list!”

Linze pulled out her phone and started typing what looked like incantations into it. Were there really that many options to choose from? The two were completely ignoring me as they kept coming up with new ideas, while I remained there greatly perplexed.



“**[Twinkling Heart Babylon Wave]!**” Steph cheerfully chanted the transformation incantation and thrust her arm with the bracelet up into the air.

So we went with Doc Babylon’s idea after all?

A ball of light jumped out of the bracelet and enveloped Steph. The light around her neck burst into a ribbon, then shoes, then a skirt. Steph’s outfit changed with every burst of light. Even her hair morphed from her side ponytail into pigtails. One last big flash of light was emitted, and Steph was standing there in a yellow magical girl outfit, holding a small staff.

“You look adorable, Steph!”

“Hee hee hee hee!” Steph giggled and bashfully fidgeted at Sue’s unrestrained praise. She definitely was adorable, no denying that.

“Do those clothes do anything special for the wearer?” I asked Doc Babylon, who was looking satisfied beside me.

“They come equipped with both physical and magical resistance. It’s way better than your average suit of armor. We also infused it with cognition disruption, so acquaintances won’t be able to recognize who they are.”

“Hm? But can’t we tell that it’s Steph perfectly fine?”

“Hey, you do realize you’re comparing your and your wives’ magic resistance to that of normal people, right? Even the court magicians of other countries are affected by cognition disruption, but it barely has any effect on you guys.”

I hadn’t realized it was so difficult for cognition disruption to affect us. In fact, it didn’t affect us at all. It would have to at least be on the level of my or Quun’s **[Mirage]**.

I looked over at Allis and her ice-blue outfit, and Leylle in her similar mint-blue outfit. Ende was taking pictures from afar, his face the picture of frustration as he watched the three Phrase girls praise the two—he wasn’t able to approach because Leylle was there. It was clear that the cognition disruption wasn’t working on him either.

While I was lost in my thoughts, the other kids began transforming one after the other.

“T-[Twinkling Heart Babylon Wave]...?”

The embarrassment was practically radiating off of Yakumo as she said the magic words. Her costume was the same as Steph’s, but was a light purple instead. Her usually straight hair had changed into loose waves.

A change of hairstyle makes for a fresh look, after all.

“It suits you, Yakumo, it does.”

Yae nodded approvingly. Yakumo’s face turned red as she nervously pulled at the bottom of her skirt.

“I think this skirt is a little short, though...” the girl muttered.

“Don’t worry about it. The cognition disruption will stop anyone from remembering if you happen to flash your panties,” Doc Babylon said as she gave her a smooth thumbs-up.

“That doesn’t make it any better!”

Yakumo usually wore a hakama, so she might have felt a little uncomfortable wearing something like a skirt.

“If you *really* don’t like it, I did make sure to install leggings as additional equipment. Just tap the blue crystal on the side of your bracelet.”

“Tell me that sooner!”

When Yakumo did as Doc Babylon said, the area around her waist momentarily sparkled before revealing some short leggings sticking out from under her skirt. The girl let out a sigh of relief. As her father, I also felt better about this. Even if there was cognition disruption, that only worked if the person didn’t have high magic resistance, right?

I wasn’t so bothered by the thought of my wives or the Phrase girls seeing, but the thought of *Ende* seeing them...!

Maybe I should gouge his eyes out while I’ve got the chance.

Apparently, having had the same thought, Ende sent a message to Allis telling her to put on the leggings too, especially because she was way more active than any of the other kids... She was much more likely to leap around everywhere.

Ten new magical girls were finally born. Though technically, they were already magical girls even without transforming. Everyone was wearing a similar outfit, but the details were what distinguished each of them.

“If we just gave them all the same outfit with the color being all there was to differentiate them, it would be like any old uniform, so I made sure to obsess over the details,” Linze proudly stated.

“You did, huh?”

I felt the passion in her words, but I wasn’t entirely sure how to feel about it. It was fine, though. Everyone looked cute, after all.

“I kinda want to see the kids try them out for real now, honestly.”

Those words of Doc Babylon's were exactly what I *didn't* want to hear.

Look, now Linne, Allis, and Steph have all latched on to the idea...

"If you really want to, why not have a practice match with the knights?" I suggested, making sure to suggest a safe option right off the bat. Linze looked less sure of it, though.

"Touya, can you not call out some monsters or something?"

"Are you crazy?"

If I called out monsters, I'd be the mastermind!

Just as I was still reeling at Linze's unreasonable suggestion—though I was sure she'd been joking when she said it—Doc Babylon said something just as casually that led me to being no less exasperated: "I can call some out."

So you're the mastermind.

It fit her, honestly. She was like some evil scientist, after all.

"Remember that digital space I used with you guys once before? It can call out fake monsters. It was originally a training tool for security officers, but if I mess around with the settings, I could probably turn the intruders into regular bad guys."

"Is this that amusement park experience you made us go through once? Is that really safe?"

"Of course it's safe—you saying it wasn't safe when I let you experience it before? If things really get dicey, it'll forcibly eject you. You can manually set the training stage and scenario too."

Linze was nodding along to the scientist's explanation. She was totally into the idea.

"In other words, you can adjust the location somewhat as well? So you could make the scenario that they have to defeat the bad guys who are infiltrating the castle, or to defeat the bad guys messing up the town?"

"Sure can. I can make it both safe and thrilling. This was originally designed for training, after all."

“I see. In that case...”

Suddenly, an impromptu meeting began between Doc Babylon and Linze.

This is gonna take a while...

Deciding to leave them to their own devices, I joined the other parents, who were taking part in a photo shoot with all the girls dressed up in their magical girl outfits. Those smiles were as wonderful as ever.



“Wait, this is actually pretty cool...!”

Seeing Doctor Babylon’s garden diorama up in the lab, I couldn’t help but be amazed. Brunhild’s castle town was perfectly recreated—the only thing missing was the townspeople. Well, there *were* people, but the vibrancy of the real thing was missing. I wasn’t sure why—maybe they were holograms—but they looked like actors in a black-and-white film.

“There can be issues if you make things too realistic. Though if I’m honest, I just didn’t have the time to get around to it. Thinking about how long it would take to put in the data for each individual civilian gives me a headache.”

I could imagine, and really, I wasn’t going to ask her to do that much for something that was only intended to be a children’s training exercise. Color aside, the townspeople were walking around the town and having fun, just like the real deal. As fake as they might have been, it was easy to mistake them for actual living human beings.

“What kind of training are you even going to make them do here?” I asked the girls.

“We thought up a lot of scenarios, but we feel it might be best to teach them restraint,” Linze said.

“Restraint?”

At my confusion, Linze and Yumina both started explaining.

“Their power is not the same as a regular person’s, so they need to learn how to hold back.”

“If they go too far against a monster, the most they’ll do is render parts unusable, but if they were to accidentally go too far against a human, then the result could be much worse.”

“Oh...”

I understood what they meant now. Our kids were definitely strong, but one wrong step and things could go very wrong very fast.

If it were against criminals who had committed heavy crimes, like bandits or raiders who would plunder and slaughter, I didn’t personally think they needed to hold back—but then what if they accidentally killed someone who had committed only a minor offense like running off with someone’s stuff or leaving a restaurant without paying? We had healing magic in this world, so as long as they didn’t die, we could do something about it—ignoring the fact that the medical fees could be pretty high, that is. But that still didn’t make it okay for them to go all out.

“I see. So you want to teach them how to arrest criminals?”

Hilde nodded in understanding.

“I think Yakumo would be able to disarm an opponent with the back of her sword, I do... Or, wait, perhaps she would end up breaking their bones, she would...”

Yae simply frowned at her inability to find a defense for her daughter.

“Linne could most likely apprehend them with **[Gravity]**, but...I can also see her putting too much force on them and squishing them...”

“Steph too, even though I think she could use **[Accel]** for more than just tackling people...”

Linze and Sue both looked just as conflicted as Yae did. Theirs were certainly the kids that seemed the least likely to be able to control their strength.

“If they’re learning how to capture criminals, do their outfits have something special installed?” I asked.

“Beyond the cognition disruption, the clothes themselves also have slash resistance, blunt resistance, heat resistance, cold resistance, and magic

resistance. Oh, and also has an effect that lets your body feel lighter. As for the staff...”

Doc Babylon took a short pastel pink staff and pushed it into Tica. A small noise was emitted, and a ring of light captured the gynoid.

“Master?”

“As you can see, you can also capture people like this. You do have to be able to touch them, though, so if the target is moving, they might easily escape your grasp. It means it becomes necessary to immobilize them first.”

Damn, that seemed like it would be great for our patrolling knights to have on hand. It could become a replacement for handcuffs.

“You can also hold the perpetrator up against the wall and use it, and it’ll secure them there.”

A second ring of light wrapped around Tica and attached her to the wall.

That’s useful.

She tried to escape, but she couldn’t budge an inch.

“Master, why are you capturing me?”

“Because we’re about to go visit the kids. Dangerous creeps need to be secured.”

“You set me up!”

Tica began wildly moving her head back and forth to try to escape.

Jeez, she’s desperate.

No wonder Doc Babylon set her up like she did. Weren’t the Sisters developed using fragments of her personality, though? Wouldn’t that mean she was just as bad deep down...?



“Let me explain the rules,” Linze said as all the children gathered around her in the courtyard. “A group of suspicious people will be released into this makeshift Brunhild. The villains will vandalize the town and carry out all manner of crimes, so your mission is to apprehend them. If you kill...or, well, eliminate

them, you're out."

After the explanation, Linne immediately raised her hand and asked, "We've just gotta capture them, right? Don't need to hand them over to the knights?"

"Yes, we'll deal with them after you apprehend them. You just need to capture them and then leave them there. If you don't capture them properly, though, you won't get points, so be careful."

"There's a point system?" Quun asked this time, also raising her hand. Linze hadn't even mentioned a point system until now, so of course the kids were confused.

"The training will work on a point system, yes. Your points will decrease if you damage the town in any way, inconvenience the citizens, or eliminate the bad guys. They'll increase if you successfully capture them."

"What happens if we get lots of points?"

"They're like reward points. The one with the most points will have any wish granted by Touya."

"Any wish?!" the children's voices all harmonized. *Any* was maybe a bit far. I wasn't some big Green Dragon or anything. I prayed they didn't ask for anything that went way beyond what I was capable of—the last thing I wanted to have to do was tell them I couldn't grant their wish. Oh, and I wouldn't take any wishes to give them more wishes.

Now that the talk of a reward had pumped the kids up, Linze explained the rules again. Catch the bad guys and you'd get points. Kill the bad guys and you'd get them taken away. Destroying the town in any way would also deduct points. If the bad guys successfully carried out any crimes, they'd all lose points. If their point total went below a certain threshold, there would be no reward. That would become the incentive for the kids to keep capturing the bad guys even if their personal total was high.

"Um, so for example, if I used a paralyzing bullet and it missed and hit a wall instead, I'd have points deducted?" Quun asked.

"Not by a lot, but yes, that would count as a point deduction," Leen answered. "If you're able to catch the bad guy with that, though, it might end

up being a net positive.”

Unfortunately, even as professionals in this kind of thing, accidents did sometimes happen, no matter how much you tried to avoid them.

Incidentally, magic attacks being used in populated areas would also lead to a deduction in points—you were essentially being a nuisance to the civilians in that scenario. It was terrible for me to feel this way, but I would be pretty thankful if the kids racked up so many minus points that none of them got a reward... Though, if I wanted them to grow, we needed them to learn restraint. What a dilemma...

“Shall we begin?”

“Yeah!” The children all cheered in unison as they were sucked into the little diorama. At the same time, a bunch of hologram windows opened up around the device, showing what was going on inside. It really was identical to the real thing. The only difference was that the citizens were all black-and-white.

The kids appeared right in the middle of that fake town. They were all looking cautiously around them, surprised by the familiar location stretched out before them.

“Release the bad guys!” Doc Babylon exclaimed as she swiped a finger across the screen and a different window showed the bad guys tied up. Or at least, what she *called* the bad guys. Their whole bodies were covered in some tight black fabric, and they had masks over their faces... More than bad guys, they looked like certain Combatmen who would yell, “Yee!”

“Heh heh heh, let the games begin!” she cackled, an evil smile spread wide on her face as she tapped the screen again and screams erupted from the town. The enemies had begun wreaking havoc.

“You really *are* the evil mastermind...”

Though, really, the worst they were doing was eating fruit from stalls without paying, or arguing with shopkeepers, or chasing girls around. No large-scale crimes. Not that that changed the fact that they were crimes that shouldn’t be overlooked, of course.

“You do know these are the types of crimes currently plaguing many towns,

right?”

“Exactly. Many dropout adventurers will commit acts such as these.”

As Leen and Yumina said, rougher towns tended to be crawling with these types of crime, and it wasn't as if Brunhild was free of it either. Naturally, the citizens themselves didn't carry out such crimes, but thugs from outside sometimes would. Honestly, those were the types that you had to be able to hold back for—bandits and wanted men were the ones it was fine to cut down.

“Th-Then let us split up and take down the bad guys,” Yakumo called out.

“Heh heh, I'm not gonna lose!” Steph enthusiastically responded, clenching her fists.

“Let's do this! **[Twinkling Heart Babylon Wave]!**” Linne was the first to call out the magic words, thrusting her bracelet toward the sky, resulting in her being wrapped in a cocoon of light. With little pops of light, she reappeared in her blue magical girl outfit. “If you'll excuse me!”

Like a rabbit, the girl leaped up and across the roofs.

“Hey, that's not fair! Leylle, we're going too!”

“O-Okay, Allis.”

Allis and Leylle transformed into their own outfits and followed suit.

Could you at least use the paths? You know, on the ground?

Linne running across the roofs was displayed on a different screen. Apparently, there were cameras automatically following each one of the children.

“Found you!”

“Nyee?!”

From atop the roofs, Linne spotted a bad guy rampaging through a market, sending vegetables flying everywhere.

They really did make their cry so familiar...

“Take this!”

“Nyee?!”

Linne jumped down and kicked the bad guy as they picked up another wooden box filled with vegetables. The fact that she didn't use her special **[Gravity]** kick to increase the weight was probably her own way of showing restraint.

The vegetables scattered everywhere as the bad guy collapsed to the ground. At that same moment, they vanished into balls of light.

I see. Guess this is what happens when they commit overkill.

“What?! That was too far?!”

“Oh, did I forget to tell you? The bad guys have high physical strength, but I've set it so they're real squishy in contrast. If you don't control your strength, they'll drop dead super easily, so better watch out.”

“You could've told us sooner!” Linne howled up at the announcement. Even if the villains *hadn't* been set to be so squishy, if a regular person had taken that kick, they would have definitely broken some bones. Breaking bones was a bit far for simple disruption of business, no? Or...maybe not? For the shopkeeper, their business was a matter of life and death, so...

“Since you eliminated that bad guy, that's minus points for you, Linne. Oh, and since you ruined the vegetables too, that's another slight deduction.”

“Oh no, I'm so sorry!” Linne exclaimed, then immediately bent down to start picking up the vegetables and return them to their boxes. Some were so bruised that there was no way they would sell anymore.

Definitely worth a point reduction. It's not good to cause a hassle for the townspeople.

Though the point reduction likely wasn't by very much.

“Oh, Linne...” Linze quietly sighed. One of Linne's problems was her lack of consideration for the small stuff, but if she was made to consider her actions, I was sure she would improve with time. Maybe.

“Nooo, you can't just send them flying like that, Steph!”

I looked over in Sue's direction and saw Steph in her yellow magical girl outfit,

tackling a bad guy into the distance. He went so far that he collided with the far wall, disappearing into light at the impact.

Man, over here too? Our kids are so bad at holding back...

“Yes! Good going, Elna!”

On the other hand, Elze’s daughter was the first to successfully capture a villain. She had immobilized them with **[Icebind]** and then simply tapped them with her staff to deploy the light ring.

Elna got the first point, huh?

On the neighboring screen, Quun was confronting a villain, not with her staff but with a weirdly shaped gun.

“Capture!”

“Nyee?!”

A throwing net blasted out of the gun toward the bad guy. It landed right on top of them, sealing their movement, allowing Quun to walk up and tap them with her staff to capture them.

“Heh, that makes one point for me!”

“Should that count...?” Leen questioned, tilting her head.

“Hmm... I feel like it’s moving away from the idea of learning restraint, but she did apprehend the criminal properly, so maybe...” Quun wasn’t learning to hold back her own strength like this, she was entirely relying on her weapons. Though there was no denying that anyone could apprehend criminals with ease using that gun. For now...I’d accept it. I mean, she wasn’t cheating or anything.

“Oh.”

I suddenly heard Yakumo and Frei’s voices in unison from a different screen. Yae and Hilde were standing in front of it, the latter with her face in her hands, the former looking up to the sky in despair.

“She is putting too much strength in, she is...”

“She doesn’t need to thrust so hard that she sends the enemy flying...”

Apparently, Yakumo and Frei had misjudged their strength entirely. Of course,

that was enough to defeat them, deducting points from their total. I was kind of surprised. Both of the girls would often spar with the knights, so I had assumed they knew how to hold back their strength.

Actually, was their training with the knights the kind where you stopped right before you hit them? In that case, I guess it made sense that they never really learned how to control their strength from there.

The girls ended up annihilating many of the bad guys after that, but they gradually got the hang of it, finally learning how to reduce their strength to a level where they merely knocked the enemy unconscious.

“Arcia’s really managing to take down bad guy after bad guy compared to the rest.”

“That’s because control in cooking is essential, after all,” Lu proudly stated. “From controlling the heat to controlling the level of spices, this is nothing new for her.”

Could those really be called the same thing? Did she mean because you had to toe the line for both? I wasn’t sure...

“Grand Duke, would Yoshino lose points in this case too?” Sakura asked as she watched her daughter take out her keyboard and begin playing a lullaby.

“Hm? Ahhh... Yeah, probably a bit.”

Due to Yoshino’s performance magic, the bad guys fell asleep right on the spot, allowing her to capture them with ease. There was nothing wrong with that. The problem was that she had put the other townspeople to sleep in the process. That would come under disrupting the people. But it was difficult for anyone to capture large numbers of criminals without accidentally causing a bit of a commotion, so I couldn’t see her getting too many points deducted.

“Leylle, he went over there!”

“Y-Yeah! Prisma Wall!”

“Nyee?!”

The bad guy running in front of Leylle suddenly bumped into something and fell. When I looked closer, I noticed that there was a transparent wall. Was it a

crystal wall? He must have slammed right into it. Allis caught up and used her staff to apprehend them.

Nice, they caught them without any minus points.

“We did it, Leylle!”

“I’m so glad...”

The girls cheerfully gave each other a high five. They really were like sisters.

“I’m glad it looks like they’re having fun.”

“They’re both so cute. I’ve gotta record this.”

“Yeah. We should preserve it forever!”

Melle, Lycee, and Ney were all overjoyed at their achievement. Even Ende was recording the screen with his phone. I already told him I’d give him the edited footage later, though...

“Everyone seems to be getting used to it now. They’re capturing the bad guys much easier than when they started,” Yumina commented as she watched the screens.

Even Yakumo and Frei, who had been completely unable to control their power before, succeeded in knocking them unconscious at least half of the time. Linne seemed to be learning as well. Quun, Arcia, and Elna were all safely taking them down as they had been, and Yoshino... Well, she was still accidentally getting the townspeople wrapped up in her performance magic...

With Allis and Leylle still successfully taking the bad guys down, that left only one problem child.

“Grrrrrr, why did they disappear again?!”

“Steph...”

Steph pulled out yet another **[Prison]** tackle and annihilated another bad guy. Sue remained worried as she watched her daughter.

A tackle would be pretty hard to control the strength of.

Steph was light, so if she didn’t add some force with **[Accel]**, she couldn’t quite make her tackle strong enough to do anything significant.

Kuon, who was currently standing beside Sue, called out to Steph.

“Steph, can you hear me?”

“Kuon! The baddies keep disappearing! I can’t catch them!” Steph wailed. It was a lot to expect of such a small child to know how to control their strength. It might have been best if I’d asked for the settings to be adjusted a bit...

“Listen to me, okay? **[Prison]** itself was intended as magic to capture enemies. There’s no need for you to tackle them.”

“OH.”

“Huh?”

His words were so obvious, yet even me and Sue couldn’t help but let out a noise at the realization. Steph didn’t quite seem to understand, though.

A bad guy chasing a girl down the street just happened to pass by Steph at that moment.

“Um... **[Prison]**?”

“NYEEEEEE?!”

A rectangular **[Prison]** that looked almost like a coffin materialized around the bad guy, and then they both fell with a bang. Steph bounced over and tapped him with her staff, capturing him in the ring of light.

“I did it!”

“Congratulations, Steph.”

“Thank you, Kuon!”

That tearful face from only moments before had completely changed into a wide smile as she cheerfully charged into the next bad guy. Kuon couldn’t help but give a satisfied smile at the sight.

“What a girl... Hm? Why are you looking at me like that?” Kuon frowned in our direction. Our big grins had been caught.

“Oh, nothing at all! I was just thinking how good of a big brother you are.”

“Yes, exactly. I’m so proud to have you as my son. You’re so kind, always

thinking about your family.”

“Indeed. You gave splendidly precise advice! You make a good older brother, Kuon!”

Showered in our praise, Kuon turned bright red as he whipped his face away from our direction. Was he embarrassed? He was usually so composed. I was happy he was a big brother who cared so much for his sister too, especially 'cause I couldn't do anything for my own little sister...

I wanted to bring my kids to Earth once we'd dealt with the wicked devout, and I hoped I could introduce them to Fuyuka then. Though it would be a bit weird—their aunt would be younger than them. Then again, the kids were from the future, so did that technically still make her older? Time shenanigans really were convoluted.

Now that Steph had learned how to capture the bad guys, everyone was managing to build up their points. In the interest of fairness, only Doc Babylon was aware of their scores. We didn't even know how many points you received for a successful capture, or how much you'd lose for eliminating the villains. If it turned out the points lost for eliminating the bad guys were greater than the points for catching them, that would mean Steph would have a hard time catching up after all those points she lost at the start.

Still, it didn't mean it was *impossible* for her to win. **[Prison]** was the most suitable Null magic for capturing enemies. She could completely turn the whole match around.

“But, you know...while I know that all the crimes these bad guys are committing are meant to be considered light crimes...”

“I know exactly what you're thinking right now. How severe is peeking or groping girls?”

“I don't think killing someone who did that should result in a point deduction even if they were to hit them as hard as they could.”

Leen, Linze, and Sakura were all narrowing their eyes at a bad guy who was running around peeking into public baths and feeling up girls before then running away. Why did I feel like I was being criticized as a man even though I

had nothing to do with this? I'd never even peeked or felt up a girl before... Wait, that was a lie. I'd peeked multiple times before, but not because I was trying!

Realizing I shouldn't let my panic show, I concentrated on watching the kids capture more of the bad guys.

"By the way, how does this all actually end?" Lu suddenly asked.

"Hmm... Maybe it's about time for me to release the big bad," Doc Babylon muttered to herself. What big bad? They weren't about to suddenly become gargantuan and attack the town like in a good ol' hero show, were they?

A new villain appeared in the main street.

Oh, they look different this time. They're wearing a white coat. Hang on...

"Hey, that's the exact same coat as mine."

"I wanted to make them feel like a boss character. I stopped at just the coat 'cause I realized it'd be kinda bad for your image if I made it look exactly like you."

This was already bad enough for my image! Was she saying I looked like a final boss just because of my jacket?!

"Unlike the previous villains, this one will fight back, so you better watch out. Catch the big bad and the game will come to an end. Good luck out there!"

"It retaliates? You made sure this'll be okay, right? It's safe, yeah?"

"I mean, this is an experiment to test this all out, isn't it? C'mon, don't look so worried. I made sure that it wouldn't actually try to injure anyone. Just watch."

How was she meant to pull that off? Was its weapon some silly paper fan or something?

"There he is!" The first to come face-to-face with the big bad was Linne. She made a mad dash for him, swinging her staff. The moment he saw the girl, the big masked bad with his white coat pulled something out of his pocket.

Is that...a gray Brunhild?

When he pulled the trigger, some glowing cobweb-like thing shot out of the

gun, covering Linne.

“Huh, what is this?! I can’t move!”

Linne, now stuck to the ground with the web, desperately struggled to break free.

Honestly, she, uh...kinda looks like a bug caught in a web...

The fact that it was my own daughter in there didn’t help how bad it felt to watch.

“That glowing web won’t disappear until a set amount of time has passed. Linne, you’re on the bench for now, I’m afraid.”

“Noooooooooooo!”

So that was what she had meant when she said that it was programmed to attack in ways that wouldn’t hurt the kids: it was using a more advanced form of Quun’s net gun.

The capturer becomes the captured... A little ironic, really.

The big bad left Linne struggling on the ground and began his escape.

Hey, he totally just felt up a girl’s butt on the way out.

“He just felt up a girl like it was normal...”

“It almost feels like I’m watching Touya do it...”

“Hey, don’t drag me into this!”

Linze and Elze were suddenly subjecting me to unjustified defamation. For some reason, the big bad was doing the exact same crimes the smaller bads did. Why would you not make it do something more dramatic? Actually, wait, that would spell even worse trouble for me...

My feelings were left in a complicated mess as I watched the big bad causing a ruckus in front of shops, starting fights, and peeking into all the baths it wanted.

“He even peeked...”

“I swear it looks just like Touya...”

“Hey, I’m starting to feel like this was created maliciously.”

“Nahhh, you’re just imagining things!” Doc Babylon said, laughing like crazy to herself all the while.

I’m not stupid! I can see who you modeled that after!

“**[Prison]!**”

While I was getting mad at Doc Babylon, it was suddenly Steph’s turn to take on the big bad. She instantly went for her signature magic. There was no way it could escape a whole prison! Or at least, that was what I thought, but all it took was a headbutt and the thing shattered.

“No way?!”

“He can destroy a **[Prison]?!]**”

“He’s the final boss! It’d be no fun if he got caught too fast, right?”

That damn scientist made some weird setting, didn’t she? The garden was essentially a pseudo-space—the scenery and people could be considered illusions. It wouldn’t be far-fetched to think she could set the parameters so that a **[Prison]** could be broken.

The big bad fired his Brunhild once more, sticking Steph to the ground just as he had Linne.

“Noooooooo!”

Steph had the exact same reaction as Linne; they really were sisters. The big bad swiftly made his escape, but he made sure to not forget to look up a girl’s skirt as he went.

C’mon, dude, you’re gonna make me want to run away...

“Found you!”

“We won’t let you escape!”

It was Yakumo and Frei’s turn this time. Stepping in front of the big bad, they gripped their staffs in their hands just like swords and dashed for the villain. He bounced back before shooting a web right where he had been standing. The moment both girls set foot on the glowing web, they were stuck in place and

toppled forward.

“I can’t move!”

“Grnnnnnngh!”

Was that light net basically like birdlime? You know, why did they even charge into something that was clearly so suspicious, anyway?

“Prisma Rose!”

“Nyee?”

As the big bad tried to escape from the scene, Allis and Leylle attacked from above. The crystal vines that emitted from their hands wrapped around him and caught him tight.

But the next moment, he disappeared into particles of light and rematerialized elsewhere.

“Did that not count?” I asked.

“They probably squeezed him too tight,” Linze said.

This was so difficult. Personally, I didn’t care if they beat up that defaming asshole.

Having reappeared right beside where it had been taken down, the big bad aimed his Brunhild at Allis and Leylle, who had failed—or in some sense succeeded—in their surprise attack, and fired another sticky net. The two girls ended up stuck to the nearby wall, and the villain went to make his big escape.

Until suddenly, he fell to the ground as if he’d suddenly lost all his power.

What just happened?!

“Down we go.”

Yoshino suddenly appeared and lightly tapped her staff on the big bad’s back, capturing him in the ring of light.

Of course, Yoshino’s lullaby!

It turned out Allis and Leylle had fallen asleep too. To think the final boss wasn’t resistant to sleep.

“Good job, Yoshino. You did good,” Sakura proudly said, a smug look on her face. Yae and Hilde on the other hand were giving their biggest angry frowns.

C’mon now, friendly competition only.

“And that marks the end of that. Game, set, and match. Good job, you guys.”

A buzzer suddenly rang out, and the kids were all returned to the courtyard. The game was finally done. I wasn’t sure if I could confidently say that they had learned how to show restraint, but at least it looked like they’d enjoyed themselves.

The biggest problem now was that I had to listen to the wish of the victor. Who’d actually won in the end? Yoshino, since she caught the final boss?

“I’ll start from third place, then,” Doc Babylon began. “In third place, we have Yoshino. You caught the big bad, but you racked up too many negative points to steal the win.”

She was third, huh? I was surprised. Though, it was true that Yoshino kept putting the townspeople to sleep when capturing the villains. If that had been a real mission, that could’ve been dangerous. A thief could very easily sneak into a shop while the shopkeeper was unconscious. Figuring out how to put a specific target to sleep instead of indiscriminately affecting everyone present would be something for her to work on.

“By the way, Quun was in fourth place. You were doing great at the start, but you started observing the garden halfway through, didn’t you?”

“Mngh... Once I started thinking about it, I just couldn’t stop...”

Rather than catching the villains, Quun had been much more preoccupied with understanding the garden’s systems and had swapped to observing the location in the second half. The fact that she still got fourth despite that was incredible if you asked me.

“Second place was Elna. You took your time, slowly but surely catching a lot of the bad guys—you had no point deductions either.”

“Great job, Elna!”

“Hee hee...”

Elze hugged the bashful Elna tight. Even when the big bad had appeared, Elna chose to steadily focus on whatever villain appeared in front of her rather than ignore them to chase after the final boss. A steady pace had planted her in second, but then what about first?

“And the winner is...Arcia! Not only were you precise, but you were fast, pulling you into the lead at a good pace. Even when the big bad appeared, you kept catching the small fry. The thing that really separated you from Elna was the speed at which you moved from one bad guy to the next.”

“Saving time is a key part of cooking, after all. You have to always consider how to move efficiently.”

Arcia was relating it to cooking, but were they even connected? Like, at all? Then again, if you weren't efficient with your methods, cooking anything could take forever and you'd just end up with something that tasted bad instead. In the sense of being efficient, it was the same idea.

Still, the champion was Arcia, huh?

I'm a little afraid of the kind of request she'll make...



“Whooooaaa! It's so shiny and new! It's amazing!”

“I'm glad you like it.”

Arcia's wish had been to get her own kitchen, so I worked with Doc Babylon to create a small compact kitchen that she could keep in her smartphone's **[Storage]**. It was a kitchen cabinet in the shape of an L, with a large table attached to it. It also had three magic stovetop burners, a magic oven, a stainless mithril sink, and marble countertops layered with **[Protection]** so dirt never had to be a worry.

A large water spellstone capable of taking in the mana in the environment served as an endless water source, and it was made so that you could use teleportation magic to funnel the tap to wherever you wanted. We had also installed a magic ventilation fan that would absorb any smoke and convert it into clean air, allowing her to cook even when inside a building.

The pièce de résistance were the premium cooking utensils made of a mix of phrasium and mithril. The chopping board was made of phrasium so the phrasium knives wouldn't slice straight through.

This whole kitchen could be called from Arcia's **[Storage]** anytime, anywhere. Personally, I think we did a fantastic job.

"Ugh... I want one too!" Lu muttered in envy. I thought she would say that, so we'd actually prepared one for Lu as well; I just wasn't giving it to her today. Why not, you ask? Well, because my daughter now had the opportunity to look so incredibly smug in her new kitchen. It was meant to be her reward, after all.



“I’m going to make something right away! Father, do you have any requests?”

“Hmm... How about gratin? And gyoza? And maybe...roast beef?”

I kept glancing over at Lu, deliberately requesting food that would take far too long to prepare alone.

“Gratin, gyoza, and roast beef... Mother, could you help me out?”

“W-Well, since you asked so nicely! All of those take so long to make, right? Working together would be much more efficient!”

Lu excitedly entered the little kitchen space. She seemed really happy about getting to try out a new kitchen. I’d give it about a week before I gifted her with one of her own.

“Let’s start with the gratin! Mother, the white sauce if you please!”

“Leave it to me!”

I couldn’t help but smile at the sight of the mother-daughter pair having fun in the new kitchen as I sat down on one of the nearby chairs.

Gratin, gyoza, and roast beef... Would I even be able to eat it all...?

Afterword

Hello again, and thank you for reading *In Another World With My Smartphone* Volume 29. I hope you enjoyed it!

With my usual greeting out of the way, I'd like to start with an apology. In chapter 3 of volume 28, I stated that Noir and Albus had both drifted into the Belfast of one thousand years ago due to Chrom Ranchesse's rampage, but this was a mistake. I left something in that I was supposed to cut out...

It was due to the rampage of Arthur Ernes Belfast that Noir time traveled, and Albus fell into the lake. I'd written that original one by mistake in the web novel, and then forgot to edit it later... Mistakes in the web novel are easy enough to fix, but when it comes to the published light novels, well, once it's published, it's hard to take back...unless there's a reprint.

I may be able to have the digital versions edited, but the volumes already published will remain as they are. I apologize profusely. I've made a similar mistake before where I mentioned mutants before mutants even appeared in the story... I never stop thinking about these kinds of mistakes when I make them, so I really need to be more vigilant about this kind of thing... *Sigh...*

And now for season two of the anime. Just like with season one, it felt like it took ages for it to begin, but once it did, those three months passed by in a flash. It took a long time before a second season was approved, but it was because of the support of all of my readers that it happened.

I feel nothing but appreciation for all the animation staff, sales workers, and voice actors involved. It was only with everyone's support that I could see this through. Thank you so much for supporting the anime well after season one ended. If you all enjoyed it, then I'm happy.

The web novel has been continuing for a long time, but it's now finally reaching its conclusion. If I were to make a rough guess, the big climax should happen around volume 32. I've thought of the path to that conclusion already, but I've been making adjustments so that it'll all end cleanly and concisely,

rather than in one massive volume at the end. The speed of publication may slow down, as we're out of material to adapt at the moment, but I hope you'll stick with me until the very end.

And now for my usual thanks.

My illustrator, Eiji Usatsuka. Thank you for designing the magical girl outfits for all the girls. I look forward to working with you again on the next volume. K, the Hobby Japan editorial department, and everyone involved with the publication of this volume, you have my greatest thanks.

Finally, thank you to everyone who reads my web novel, as well as everyone reading this book right now.

Patora Fuyuhara



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by Patora Fuyuhara

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