

Takehaya
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45

INVASION
OF THE
ROKU
JUMA
!?



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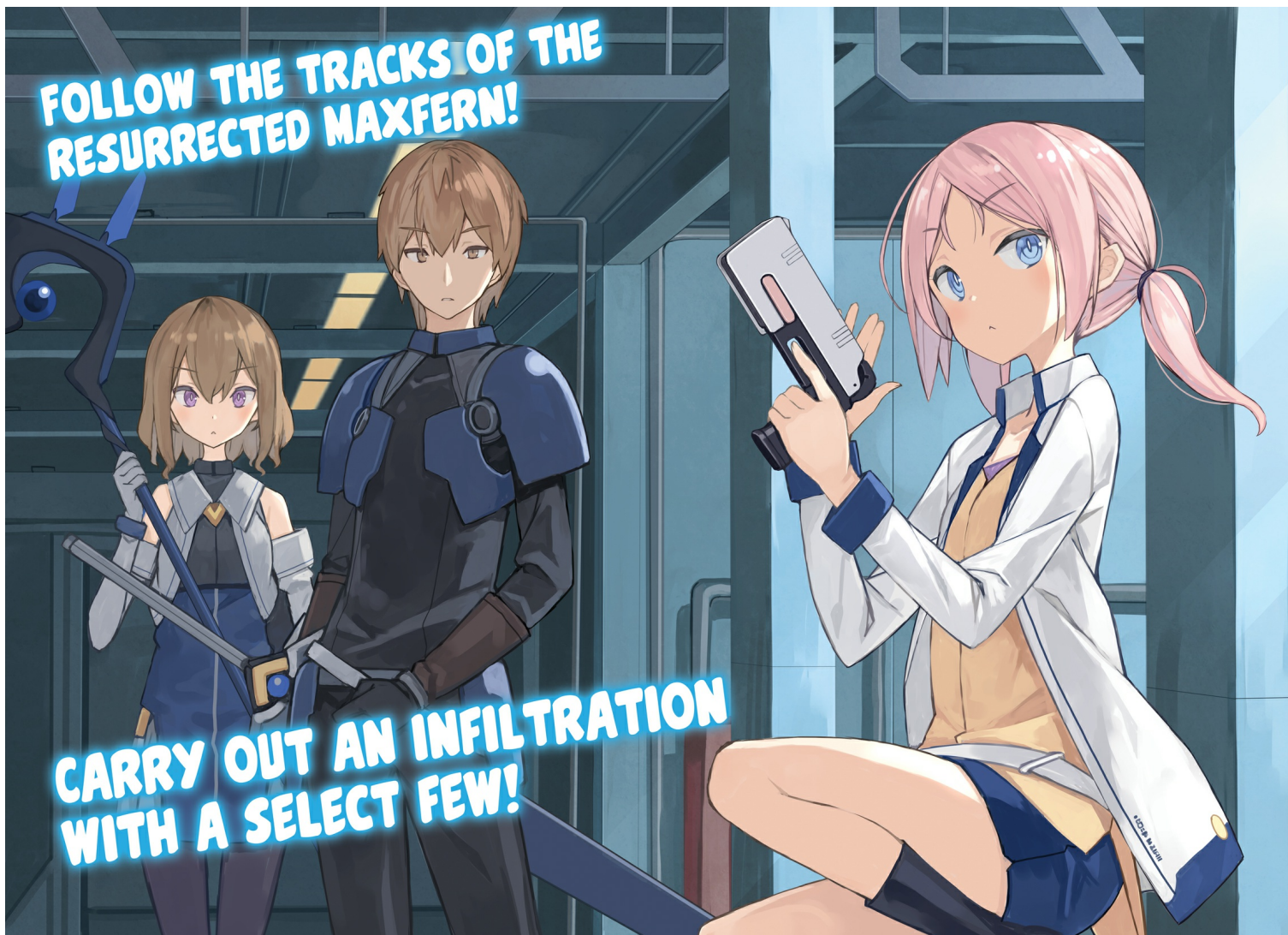
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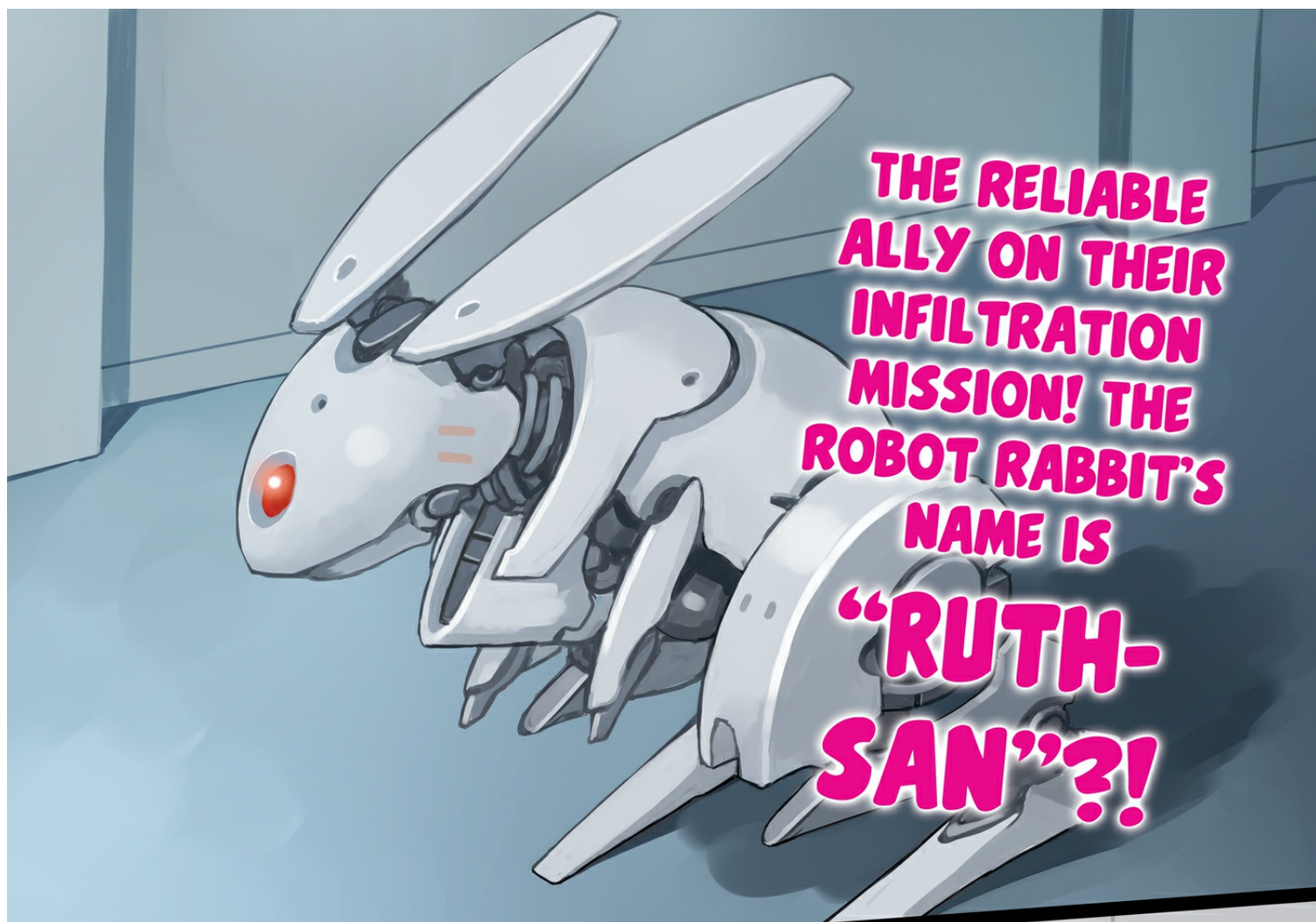
INVADERS
OF THE
ROKU
JUMA
!?



INVADERS OF THE
ROKUJOUMA!? 45







THE RELIABLE
ALLY ON THEIR
INFILTRATION
MISSION! THE
ROBOT RABBIT'S
NAME IS
“RUTH-
SAN”?!



“THEN
LET’S SET
OUT.”

“YES, I
WISH YOU
THE BEST
OF LUCK.”

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AIKA MAKI

A former member of the evil magical girl group, Darkness Rainbow. After bonding with Koutarou, she's now a loyal member of the Satomi band of knights.

MAGICAL GIRLS (OF THE MAGICAL KINGDOM OF FOLSARIA)

NIJINO YURIKA

The Magical Girl of Love and Courage, Rainbow Yurika. She's a walking disaster, but she's grown into a magical girl who really makes it count when she needs to.



RESIDENTS OF CORONA HOUSE



GHOST FORM



HIGASHIHONGAN SANAE

The ghostly girl that used to haunt Koutarou. She now has her body back, however, and is more energetic than ever before.

GHOSTS



RUTHKANIA NYE PARDOMSHIHA

Theia's retainer and assistant. She's extremely happy to be able to serve the master she so admires.



THEIAMILLIS GRE FORTHORTHE

Princess of Forthorthe and the Blue Knight's liege. She's blossomed into a wonderful leader, but she's still quick to pick a fight.



CLARIOSSA DAORA FORTHORTHE

Koutarou's partner during his adventures in past Forthorthe. She's still growing, both as a princess and as a scientist.

PRINCESS ALAIA



SAKURABA HARUMI

The reincarnation of Princess Alaia, whose soul travelled two thousand years through time to be with her special someone. She's currently happy to be living a normal life alongside him.



NALFA LAREN

A transfer student who's officially come from Forthorthe, but it seems she shares a special connection with Koutarou and company...

ALIENS

(OF THE HOLY FORTHORTHE GALACTIC EMPIRE)

FACTIONS MAP

KASAGI SHIZUKA

Koutarou's classmate and the landlord of Corona House. Alunaya the Fire Dragon Emperor resides within her.



KURANO KIRIHA

Heiress of the underground who's finally found her beloved. With her quick wits and big heart, she's a master of both tactics and love.



UNDERGROUND DWELLERS (OF THE PEOPLE OF THE EARTH)

SATOMI KOUTAROU

Our protagonist, and the formal tenant of room 106. Also the Blue Knight.



MATSUDAIRA KOTORI

Kenji's little sister, but you'd never know it. An introvert through and through. She's now enrolled at Harukaze High.



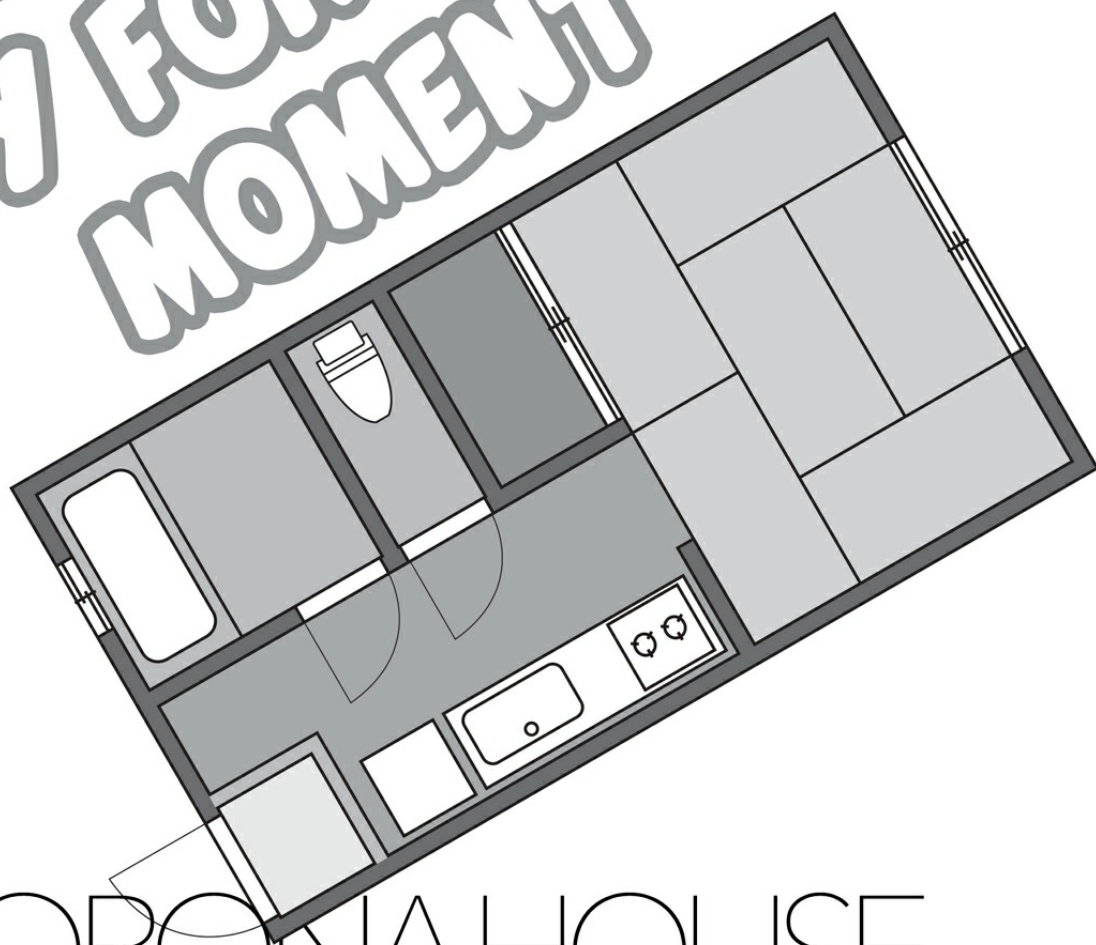
MATSUDAIRA KENJI

Koutarou's best friend-cum-partner in crime. He can be a bit tasteless, but he's a good guy at heart.



KOUTAROU'S CHILDHOOD FRIENDS

STANDING
BY FOR THE
MOMENT



CORONA HOUSE
ROOM 106

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Declaration of War and Childhood Friends

Monday, November 14th

To Koutarou, Ralgwin was supposed to be a hated enemy. He had supported Vandarion and then taken up the mantle after him. He'd also done unforgivable things, committed all kinds of crimes and terrorism, and many had fallen victim to them. Now he had a responsibility to face justice to make up for those crimes, which likely meant that he would receive the death penalty.

But when Ralgwin was taken away by Grevanas, Koutarou couldn't accept it. He was furious. Although being sacrificed or put to death had the same outcome, Koutarou felt that there was a huge difference between them. Then there was how Ralgwin had treasured Fasta. Even in the end, he had stayed loyal to his allies. He had only taken up leadership of the faction after Vandarion because they were family and he was his student. Koutarou could at least sympathize with that.

It was because of this that Koutarou felt Ralgwin being sacrificed was wrong. Taking responsibility for his actions and receiving the death penalty was inevitable, in a way. It was hard for Koutarou to accept, but he could at least understand it to some degree. Ralgwin had done things that couldn't be undone, but that didn't mean using him to resurrect Maxfern was acceptable. How could he repent if Grevanas trampled his very soul? Grevanas had no right to do that. And yet, that didn't mean that they should have sacrificed Fasta. Koutarou didn't want her to die, and Ralgwin treasured her as well.

Koutarou was going around in circles, unable to find an answer, which was putting him in a bad mood.

Ralgwin being taken away and Fasta-san dying are both wrong. So what should I have done?

Even now, Koutarou was sitting on the sofa in the lounge thinking to himself.

"Satomi-kun is making that face again," Harumi noted.

“Well, Satomi-kun can be surprisingly sensitive...and he thinks he could have made a better choice,” Shizuka pointed out.

“Oh, so he is remembering his mother...”

The two girls were watching over Koutarou from a little ways away. All of the girls had noticed his anguish and struggled to call out to him, but the problem he was up against was too complex. The first issue was that there didn’t seem to be much of a difference between the death penalty and being sacrificed. On top of that, it had been a choice between Ralgwin and Fasta.

The girls didn’t have an answer for what the right choice was either, so all they could do was watch.

“Can you hear me, Veltlion?!” Clan alone called out to Koutarou. Her voice was coming from the bracelet on his arm. Normally, Koutarou would have to answer a call before her voice would come through, but Clan had used an emergency channel to forcibly reach him.

“Clan?!” Koutarou shot up from his seat when he heard her voice. He couldn’t imagine her using the emergency channel for no reason, so he assumed something serious must have happened.

“If you can hear me, get to the meeting room right away! Something major just happened!” Clan shouted.

“Okay, I’ll be right there!”

With that, Koutarou ran out of the room. It was bad manners to run inside the palace, but given the presumed emergency, he paid no attention to that rule as he made his way to the meeting room.

On the meeting room’s large hologram was an image of Ralgwin Vester Vandarion. As Vandarion’s nephew, Ralgwin continued his uncle’s military activities in his place after the elder was gone. As the leader of the Old Vandarion faction, he was known as the man who kept the anti-government forces together.

“I am sure there are many this does not apply to, but allow me to say it anyway. Greetings, citizens of Forthorthe. I am Ralgwin Vester Vandarion. Like my late uncle, Lord Vandarion, I am one who laments the future.”

The moment Koutarou saw the image, he immediately knew something was wrong. And that feeling only grew as “Ralgwin” continued.

“My uncle stepped off the rightful path, but I wish to continue in pursuit of his original goal, and that is to overthrow the decrepit imperial ruling system that has lingered far too long.”

The feeling that something was wrong reached its peak when Ralgwin spoke of overthrowing the imperial government. Koutarou could see past his gleaming eyes and overwhelming words to the intense hate and vengefulness hiding under the surface.

“I will admit that it was a good system while our society was still maturing. However, it has remained for longer than necessary. As a result, the royal families and those affiliated to them have amassed too much influence and profit, which is distorting society.”

That was a view Ralgwin hadn’t had before. Although he had striven for the same ideal in the past, he hadn’t had any particular obsession with the royal families or imperial government. It wasn’t like he had no feelings about them at all, but his wish had been to fulfill his uncle’s goals. So if he’d had any obsession, it was with his uncle, and he’d had no reason to hate the royal families or government directly.

“Therefore, we have stood up to right this wrong.”

“That isn’t Ralgwin. It’s *him*,” Koutarou stated.

He was convinced. Although the man had Ralgwin’s appearance and voice, it was a completely different person. Koutarou had an idea of who despised the royal families and current system and wanted to rule everything in their place.

“Violbarum Maxfern...” Alaia’s nemesis and the man that Koutarou had banished beyond space-time. He recognized the hate and vengefulness in “Ralgwin’s” eyes—within him was no doubt the very same man.

“You think so too?” Clan asked with an anxious expression. As someone who had been there two thousand years ago, she had the same impression, which was why she had contacted Koutarou over the emergency channel.

“I stand before you today to show that we are not only asking for reform. In

other words...”

Koutarou and Clan were of the same mind. This meant the start of something terrible...and Maxfern’s next words were precisely what they feared.

“We, the Patriotic Band of Knights, and the Forthorthe Liberation Army that we are affiliated with, declare war on the royal families and the Imperial Army.”

“You damn idiot! Not only do you sacrifice Ralgwin to resurrect yourself, you’re trying to start another war, Maxfern!!!” Koutarou shouted, slamming his fist into the table. He didn’t even feel the pain in his hand.

“Veltlion!” Clan exclaimed, her voice worried.

Koutarou didn’t even notice her words as anger welled up inside of him. In the past, Violbarum Maxfern hadn’t been satisfied with merely being the prime minister; he had set his sights on seizing everything. Alaia and the Blue Knight had stopped him, but now, two thousand years later, he had resurrected himself through Ralgwin and was trying to take over the country again.

“Those who share our aspirations, gather under our flag! Let us defeat the Imperial Army together and right this country’s failures!”

Prime Minister Violbarum Maxfern and Grand Wizard Grevanas stood before Koutarou and the royal families once more.

Turning the clock back a bit: after being captured by Grevanas, Ralgwin was held in captivity for a while. Since his room had neither a window nor a clock, he couldn’t tell how much time had passed, but based on the number of luxurious dinners, it had been two or three days. The room was neither cramped nor dirty. It was quite spacious, with antique furnishings. Ralgwin wasn’t particularly knowledgeable about such things, but even he could tell that the bed alone could pay for an expensive car. It was far too luxurious a room to confine someone who wasn’t cooperative.

“I suppose that’s just how serious he is,” Ralgwin muttered to himself with a wry smile.

It wouldn’t have been strange for him to be tied down with his mouth gagged so that he couldn’t kill himself. But Grevanas hadn’t done that. Instead, he had

compelled him not to kill himself or attempt to escape using magic, and then locked him inside this room. As long as he remained there, Ralgwin was free to do what he wanted. He had a good idea why Grevanas had done this—he would not only be sacrificed, but his body would also be taken over by Maxfern during the resurrection. Meaning that although it was Ralgwin’s body now, it would eventually become the body of Grevanas’s precious lord. That was why the wizard had used a method of confinement that wouldn’t harm or put stress on Ralgwin.

A voice suddenly answered his muttering. “Of course. I expended a lot of effort for this.”

“Grevanas...”

It was the Grand Wizard himself. He had appeared by the door at some point and now leisurely approached Ralgwin. He had the wrinkled face of a mummy, but there was a sharp gleam in his eyes. To Ralgwin it looked like he was excited.

Seeing that, Ralgwin smiled wryly once more. “If you’re going to show your face, I guess it means the time has come.”

Seeing the normally calm Grevanas so excited, Ralgwin sensed his fate. Yet he remained cool—he had already resolved himself after making his deal with the wizard.

“Indeed, but...” Grevanas calmed down, doubtful about Ralgwin’s reaction.

“What’s the matter? Not happy?”

“I expected you to attack the moment I entered, seeing as it is your last chance.”

Grevanas couldn’t understand why Ralgwin wasn’t resisting and simply appeared to be accepting his fate. It felt different from the man he had known so far.

“I am ready.” Even now, Ralgwin was calm. Contrary to the suspicious Grevanas, he revealed his inner thoughts while keeping his cool. “Besides, I doubt you’re lax enough to have cast a spell that would allow me to resist.”

“You are correct.”

Ralgwin’s calm came from more than just his resolve. He was certain that Grevanas had taken all measures necessary to prevent his escape. If Grevanas could compel him not to attempt suicide, he could prevent him from launching a surprise attack. That was why Ralgwin did nothing. He knew it was meaningless.

“It would be foolish to try to haphazardly fight back for naught, only revealing my intentions,” he explained.

“That is certainly true...but you won’t get any more than a haphazard chance.”

“I am talking about possibilities and strategies. Rather than struggle in vain now, I would rather resist when some kind of distraction arises.”

“So you would rather attack me during chaos, would you? That indeed makes sense.”

Even if he tried, there was next to no chance of Ralgwin being able to escape right now. Grevanas was on the alert, with countermeasures in place. But what if some unexpected trouble occurred? In such a case, escape might be possible. That logic made sense to Grevanas too.

“Of course, it may be a very small chance,” Ralgwin pointed out.

“I shall take that as a compliment.”

“Vexingly so.”

Grevanas had been suspicious of Ralgwin’s behavior, but his doubts had now been cleared up. *Resist for naught or hope for the one-in-a-million chance for something bigger... It is a bold decision, but Ralgwin would have no choice but to gamble on that. Now that he mentioned it, it is a strategic way of thinking...*

Ralgwin was making sense, and the situation would only allow him to act in the way he had noted.

“Very well. Come with me, Ralgwin-dono.”

“Yes. At least let me walk at my own pace.”

Grevanas chuckled. "I am, oddly enough, in a hurry."

"Because you'll be able to meet your lord for the first time in two thousand years? It's not like I don't understand, but let me give you a warning."

"And what is that?"

"Don't get too involved with Maxfern. Those sorts of feelings are the reason I'm here. There are times when you should give up, even if it is your lord."

"I will keep that in mind."

Walking on his own power, Ralgwin Vester Vandarion headed for the end of his path.

Preparations were complete. An intricate pattern was carved into the floor as a magic circle. It was already activated, flickering as if it had a pulse. When Ralgwin stood on top of it, the circle started shining brighter and pulsing faster.

"Please sit down on the seat in the middle of the circle," Grevanas instructed him.

"Okay..."

Ralgwin headed for the throne situated at the center of the magic circle. As he did, Grevanas moved closer to the surrounding equipment and did...something. The equipment was all products of Forthorthe's latest science and spiritual energy technologies. Magic alone wouldn't be enough to resurrect Maxfern. It would have been enough to bring back someone who had just died by healing the body and returning the soul. But Maxfern had perished two thousand years ago, and gathering a fragment of his body, let alone the soul, would be a challenge. Instead, Grevanas would use Ralgwin's body and soul as a base to revive his lord.

"It would appear I lost the gamble." Ralgwin sighed.

"So it would."

Grevanas turned his scrawny face toward the control room of the base they were currently at. Far, far past it was the planet of Forthorthe. But the control room was silent. There was no fleet bearing down on them. In the end, no

distraction that Ralgwin had hoped for happened. So with a wry smile, he sat down on the throne.

“This is goodbye, Ralgwin-dono.”

“Does it hurt?”

“If it’s going to hurt anyone, it will be Maxfern-sama.”

Maxfern’s resurrection would take place in three stages. First, Ralgwin’s body and soul would be separated. Next, using the gathered technology, his soul would be overwritten using fragments of Maxfern’s soul in order to reconstruct it. And finally, the reconstructed soul would be reconnected to the body. Based on the experiments he’d performed, Grevanas knew that the reconnection stage was accompanied by intense pain. Since the body was responsible for sensations, Ralgwin shouldn’t feel any pain upon being separated from his body. And it wouldn’t be Ralgwin who was being reconnected afterward.

Still, I am sure you will feel intense fear and mental pain from having your existence overwritten... Grevanas chose not to say anything about the mental aspect aloud. It wasn’t wise to risk destabilizing the sacrifice before the ritual.

“I see. So it’s decided,” Ralgwin stated.

“Do you have any final words?” Grevanas asked.

“I’ve already taken care of that. Didn’t you do the same before you started your rebellion?”

“Ah, how nostalgic. You are right. Two thousand years ago, I made a vow to Maxfern-sama and had a long discussion with him before we raised our forces.”

“You should have another long discussion later.”

“I believe I will. Now then, Ralgwin-dono, it is lamentable...but this is the end.”

“Hmph...you don’t lament it in the slightest.”

“How harsh. Well, once again, goodbye. Or perhaps I should say, see you in a moment.”

“Sure.”

And with that, the two said nothing more. After working on the equipment, Grevanas stood at the edge of the magic circle and began his incantation.

“O spirits of mind in the depths of the heart! O spirits of the soul that sit on the throne of the soul! Heed my call!”

He used the same ancient magic language as Harumi and gestured with his hands at the same time to cast his spell. Grevanas would go on to use several spells. From high to low, from strong to weak. It was like a song, except his undead voice was horribly dry, twisted and stagnated. There wasn't the slightest fragment of elegance one might find in a song.

Ralgwin found himself in darkness. Having been separated from his body, his senses were no longer working, and he couldn't perceive anything. But he could still think. Despite being only a soul, he had maintained his ability to think.

It seems he wasn't lying...

Like Grevanas had said, there wasn't any pain. But he still felt fear. It was terrifying to think that he was being overwritten by someone else. He might have resolved himself to it, but the fear was inescapable. That and the mental strain were so bad that if he could have moved his body, he would have tried to run away in a disgraceful manner to escape it.

“So, you are Ralgwin,” a voice rang out nearby.

He focused on the sound and a figure appeared in the darkness. It was a large, old man wearing very old-fashioned clothes.

Uncle?! No, you're not him...

For a second, Ralgwin had thought it was his uncle, Vandarion. But when he looked into those eyes, he realized it was someone else. They had the same dark gleam as Grevanas's eyes.

Are you Maxfern? Ralgwin couldn't speak, but he could think, and the old man nodded as if he'd read his mind.

“That's right. I am Violbarum Maxfern, the man who was the Holy Forthorthian Empire's prime minister. And henceforth I will stand at the top of

Forthorthe.”

The old man didn't answer out loud either, but they were able to hold a conversation. Their souls were communicating.

I thought you were a more intellectual man than that, Ralgwin replied.

He knew about Violbarum Maxfern, someone spoken of in history lessons, and he'd looked deeper into him after meeting Grevanas. Since Maxfern had been the prime minister, Ralgwin had assumed he was more intellectual. Yet now he saw that he was a man of ambition, with a strong will.

“Hahaha, history is so fragile. It twists so easily with a little bit of force. Illusions are also mixed in from other people's desires. You can tell as much from Grevanas, no? He was more intellectual than that.”

Knowledge of Maxfern hadn't reached Folsaria, so it was assumed that Grevanas had rebelled on his own. As a result, people's recognition had twisted and influenced him, turning him into something closer to Maxfern. The fragility of history had changed Grevanas.

True, he did say that he was being eroded by your existence and history, Ralgwin commented.

“This situation is much the same. Like Grevanas, the information that makes me who I am has been eroded and changed. From here on, you will become me.”

Maxfern “spoke” in a harsher tone as he closed in on Ralgwin. It felt like he was telling him that he would crush any resistance.

Do whatever you want. My fate reached its end long ago. Ralgwin's response was indifferent, as if to say that he had no interest in his destiny.

Maxfern found that frustrating. *“Are you giving up? You are my descendant! Keep it together! Try to fight back!”* The lack of resistance bothered him. He wanted Ralgwin to crawl desperately across the ground, even if he was at a disadvantage—to fight back. That was how Maxfern himself lived.

Don't you want to take me over?

“They are two separate issues. I do not want to see my descendant fall so low.

After all, my desire is eternal prosperity!”

Maxfern’s goal was to become the ruler of Forthorthe, which also meant that his family would thrive. That included distant relatives like Ralgwin. He was taking over his descendant’s body, but his mindset remained his own.

Do you think that’s possible? When you’re going up against the Blue Knight? Ralgwin wondered.

The royal family and the Blue Knight would stand in Maxfern’s way when he tried to take over the country. The Blue Knight with the sword of kingship was particularly troublesome. Ralgwin recalled when he had cut down his uncle. It had been a powerful blow, as if to cut the planet in half. He could imagine that it wasn’t something the Blue Knight could use whenever he pleased, but he should be expected to bring out that move when true danger was upon him.

In other words, he was a singular enemy who could use a strategic weapon without warning. That was why Ralgwin had needed time to prepare and why Grevanas had ended up taking the initiative. Naturally, Maxfern was likely to face the same problem.

“I will show you! I will be the one to seize the heavens! Even if I face the Blue Knight or the Goddess of Dawn! I will trample all my enemies and seize everything!”

Maxfern was resolved. He was going to fight, well aware of the powers of the Blue Knight and the others. Making up for his failure two thousand years ago, he would bring the Blue Knight and the royal families to their knees. His eyes burned with the powerful ambition to seize it all.

Everything, huh? Ralgwin narrowed his eyes.

“Indeed, everything! I will turn Alaia, the Blue Knight, and everyone who failed to acknowledge me into ashes and create a new world from them!” Maxfern was excited and overlooked the change in Ralgwin.

You are similar to my uncle, Vandarion, but you really are different enough...

Maxfern and Vandarion were similar, from their appearances to their behavior. In fact, Ralgwin had confused them for one another when he first saw Maxfern. However, there was a difference between the two. True, Marswell

Daora Vandarion had been a man of ambition, prepared to take Forthorthe no matter the cost—but there had been an exception. He had been kind to his friends and family, and had had a compassionate side when it came to them. That included his nephew Ralgwin and his old friend Grenado Valkyris.

In contrast, Maxfern was different. He would give everything he had, likely including his friend Grevanas. History proved that. Maxfern had even used his niece, Lidith, for the sake of his ambition, attempting to kill her in the end.

“Isn’t that obvious?! Do not compare me to a man who failed to seize the heavens!”

Vandarion attempting to lay claim to everything was fine. As Maxfern’s descendant, it made sense. But he had failed and fallen on the path. It was a detestable folly.

You were no different. Ralgwin knew Maxfern had been bested by the Blue Knight and banished beyond space-time. He had died with despair in his chest.

Those words enraged Maxfern. *“I, Violbarum Maxfern, intend to correct that mistake!!! I am nothing like your uncle! I will be the one to seize everything!”*

He was furious because it was a stain on him. He knew he was no different from Vandarion, which was why he had to prove that he was superior by resurrecting and taking over the country—that *he* was the true champion, not the Blue Knight.

Then I look forward to the moment you and the Blue Knight cross blades, Ralgwin said with a faint smile. He was convinced that Maxfern would have the tables turned on him.

Maxfern didn’t like that expression, and his tone grew harsher. *“I look forward to it as well! Of course...as someone who is going to disappear, you will never live to see it!”*

Ralgwin didn’t answer. He simply stared at Maxfern for a while with his faint smile. It was as if he was looking down on him.

Frustrated, Maxfern brought their discussion to an end. *“Now, you will hand over that throne! It belongs to me! I will be taking your body!”*

And then, in an instant, large amounts of information were written over Ralgwin's soul. Or perhaps the information that made up Ralgwin was being erased. He felt an intense sense of loss and the fear of being turned into something else. Even so, his expression never changed. The situation was going as Maxfern and Grevanas wanted, but Maxfern was displeased that at the very end, he had been unable to erase Ralgwin's smile.



When he first woke up, Maxfern didn't know where he was. It was a place unfamiliar to him, and with his outdated knowledge, he didn't even know what material the wall was made of. The only impression he had was that the room was unnaturally bright.

But before long, he was given the information he needed. It was a Vandarion faction headquarters on a certain planet. The wall was made of a resin created by processing petroleum, and the light was coming from the latest in lighting technology. No one had told him this, nor had he studied it. For some reason the information was simply flooding into his mind. It was like reading an encyclopedia.

"How infuriating..."

Those were his first words upon waking up. He was vaguely aware of the source of the information, which was why he was frustrated.

"Maxfern-sama?! You have awoken!"

Grevanas reacted to his voice and ran up. Maxfern was sitting on the throne in the middle of the magic circle.

"It has been a while. But...your face looks terrible, Grevanas."

"That phrasing! You truly are Maxfern-sama! Finally... Finally, I can see you again!" Surprisingly, Grevanas was crying. His dried-up body didn't have any way of shedding tears, but his expression and words made his emotions clear. "It has been so long, Maxfern-sama! I am overjoyed to see that you are the same as always!"

Grevanas had sworn loyalty to him and made an oath to take over Forthorthe with him in the past. But in the end, they had failed, and Grevanas had died with regret. Years had passed before an occasion for him to be resurrected had arisen. And now he had finally managed to bring back Maxfern as well. It had been a long journey, and at times, he had been forced to retreat. But he had overcome it all to reach this point.

Although it might sound like an exaggeration, Grevanas had achieved his life's goal. And from there on, he would proceed with Maxfern to accomplish the goal from their past. It was not surprising that he would cry now.

“Not quite. The memories of that man...Ralgwin, I believe, have been mixed in.”

Maxfern was unhappy at the moment. His knowledge of this place had come from Ralgwin, which meant that the man’s soul must have mixed with Maxfern’s to some degree.

“Please be at ease, Maxfern-sama. There is no intermixing of the soul.”

“What? What do you mean?”

“In the process of your resurrection, I archived Ralgwin’s disposed soul.”

“What for?”

“So that you would be able to live in this era without any inconvenience. You will be able to find any information you need by searching the archive.”

“But does that not mean that Ralgwin is inside of me?”

“An archive is nothing more than the word suggests. It doesn’t run on its own, and nothing will appear unless you wish for it yourself.”

Maxfern had lived two thousand years ago, so if he had simply been resurrected with no plan in place, he would have been thrown into a world where he knew nothing. For instance, how an automatic door opened or what traffic signals meant—there was too much information needed to live in this age, and it would take a long time to remember it all, just like it had for Grevanas.

Even now, Grevanas’s knowledge was lacking in places. If the same thing happened with Maxfern, their plans would be delayed. So Grevanas had stored Ralgwin’s soul, which held information pertaining to his personal experiences and what he had studied. It had been unnecessary for Maxfern’s resurrection, but it couldn’t be discarded entirely, considering how important information warfare was. By archiving the soul and giving Maxfern free access, there was no concern that he would feel inconvenienced by this era.

“I see, so it’s like I have a library of Ralgwin’s memories...”

“An apt description,” Grevanas agreed.

Maxfern laughed. “Grevanas, you’ve turned into a lich! You’ve always been as

lively as the dead, but you've really taken that and run with it!"

Ralgwin's memories included how Grevanas had been revived. Maxfern accessed those memories and laughed out loud again.

"Still, it seems some of what makes me up was mixed in with you."

"I have a more self-assured personality like yours, Maxfern-sama."

"You always were something of a worrywart, so this should be an improvement."

"Perhaps so. But right now I am worried about you, Maxfern-sama. How are you feeling?"

"Hmm...better than expected." Maxfern looked down at his body and confirmed his condition. It was his first time going through a resurrection, so he could understand why Grevanas might be concerned. He checked over his body like the lich wanted.

"Do you feel sick or have a headache?"

"No, I actually feel great."

Maxfern couldn't sense any problems. If anything, he felt better than before, having acquired a younger body.

"Are there any signs of the previous owner rejecting you?"

"No, there aren't. I am the only one in here. I can freely control my body."

Since he was taking over someone else's body, one might expect resistance from Ralgwin, either intentionally or instinctively. But Grevanas needn't have worried; he felt nothing like that. Maxfern appeared to have complete control over his new form.

Hmm, this is somewhat anticlimactic. I took Ralgwin for a man with more backbone...

Grevanas did find the situation odd. Before performing the resurrection, he had conducted many experiments under similar conditions. During those experiments, many test subjects had resisted. Their will could make it harder to move, or cause split personalities or more. The lack of conflict was a rarity.

Or perhaps he is confident that we will be defeated by the Blue Knight. If that is the case, you underestimate Maxfern-sama, Ralgwin...

Grevanas could think of several reasons for Ralgwin's lack of resistance, but he couldn't know for sure, which was a point of frustration to him, especially since it concerned the well-being of his lord.

"Perhaps you are a good match or Ralgwin gave up from the beginning," he mused. "Regardless, it is something to rejoice over."

Grevanas decided not to tell Maxfern about his misgivings. There was nothing the other man could do about it, so it would only worry him for no reason.

"You are still as cautious as ever, even with some of my components mixed in."

"Well, it concerns you rather than me, Maxfern-sama."

I hope nothing happens... These are just my usual fears. Right now I should simply celebrate the resurrection of Maxfern-sama!

It could simply be a matter of Maxfern and Ralgwin being particularly compatible. Although there had been few experiments without resistance, it wasn't unheard of, so Grevanas chose to bask in the joy of Maxfern's return and push his doubts into a corner of his mind.

After witnessing Maxfern's declaration of war, Koutarou's concerns grew deeper and more difficult. As expected, Ralgwin's capture had meant Maxfern's resurrection. Moreover, Maxfern wanted to conquer Forthorthe, so the empire would once again be plunged into war.

Could this have been avoided if I had abandoned Fasta-san? But would that have been the right thing to do? Wouldn't it have gone against Her Majesty Alaia's ideals? But...at least it would have prevented people from losing their lives in battle. Just as she hesitated to raise an army, maybe I should have accepted Fasta-san's death? No, that's...

War would start again, and Koutarou should have been able to prevent it. If he had let Fasta die and kept Ralgwin, this wouldn't have happened. However, that was not what he had done. It would be more accurate to say that he hadn't

been able to make a decision, which was why he hadn't stopped Ralgwin. And the people of Forthorthe would pay the price. Because of his decision, war would break out. Ralgwin and many citizens would lose their lives. But what sin had Fasta committed? Would letting her die really have led to peace and prosperity? At least it would have prevented a war...

Koutarou's thoughts were running in circles.

"It's not your fault, Koutarou. It's that magical uncle's fault for pushing the choice onto you! And the war too," Sanae-chan said in anger, putting her hands on her hips. She wasn't angry with Koutarou, but rather the methods the enemy had used.

"Veltlion understands that too. But he is the Blue Knight, so..." Clan could understand what troubled him. During their journeys two thousand years ago, she had come to understand what Koutarou treasured.

"He is trying to protect everything that Empress Alaia wanted to protect. But doing that brings about another problem," Theia noted. She was well-versed in the legend of the Blue Knight and had also spent a lot of time with Koutarou. Like Clan, she understood how he felt. Koutarou continuously fought in order to keep from betraying what he shouldn't betray.

"It is impossible to protect everything. As we are humans, we will eventually hit our limit. But Satomi Koutarou does not settle for that," Kiriha explained.

"Satomi-san can't compromise between Satomi-san himself and his hero self," Yurika added sympathetically.

Koutarou acknowledged that he was a normal person. Yet he was trying to live as a hero and carry the responsibilities that entailed. He felt that it was his duty to live this way after bringing war to so many people. However, there was a gap between a normal person and a hero. He had his limits as a person, and there were lives he couldn't protect. Situations that made Koutarou choose who would die would always trouble him. He constantly asked himself if he had been wrong, if there hadn't been a better way, was there really nothing he could have done. He couldn't be pragmatic about it. It was an ideal quality for a hero but also a cross to bear. All of the girls wondered whether he would be able to carry it.

“After all, Master is far too serious...” Ruth was strictly concerned. The clumsy Koutarou was committed to being a hero through simple honesty and had walked right into a wall. But he had no other way of doing things, which was why he would get increasingly hurt. Ruth couldn’t help but worry about that.

“Is watching all we can do? Can we only wait for time to pass?” Maki was gritting her teeth. Not being able to do anything frustrated her. The problem Koutarou was carrying was just too big and heavy, and she didn’t have an answer. Not being able to do anything for her beloved bothered her.

Everyone is too worried about Satomi-kun to do anything... I will have to do something, even if it's impossible. Like Maki, Harumi had no answer. But if she did nothing, Koutarou would only continue getting hurt, so she needed to put in effort to prevent it. Harumi, or perhaps the other girl inside of her, made that decision.

At that moment...

“Jeez, he never improves...” Kenji, who had been looking on from a distance, scratched his head and started walking. He had intended to leave it to the girls, but he couldn’t keep quiet. “No, I guess it’s the other way around. This is his worth. I guess it can’t be helped... I’ll take care of this, everyone.” He pointed at Koutarou and walked past the girls.

“Mackenzie-kun, wouldn’t it be better to let him be, right now?” Shizuka called out. She thought it would be best not to irritate him and give him time.

“This isn’t that kind of situation,” Kenji disagreed. He had decided to go talk to Koutarou after thinking things through. He figured that if Koutarou was left alone, it would lead to a lot of problems.

“Maybe so...but...” Maki understood that too, but she loved Koutarou. She couldn’t make a decision that might hurt him.

“It’s okay, Shizuka-san.” Kotori smiled at the worried Shizuka.

“Kotori-chan?”

“I can tell. My brother is different from his usual self. This is the brother I respected for so long, so I’m sure he will be able to do something.” Kotori was strangely overflowing with confidence. She was convinced that with Kenji as he

was now, everything would be okay.

“Hey, don’t put me on a pedestal.” Kenji smiled wryly. And yet he was aware that this was the first time in a while he’d been so serious.

“More importantly...please take care of Kou-niisan,” Kotori pleaded.

“Yeah, I know.” Kenji nodded.

“I will ask you the same. He is my—no, all of Forthorthe’s heart,” Theia added.

Koutarou’s slump was their slump, as well as a slump for the royal families. It was even a slump for the citizens who believed in him. Like Shizuka, Theia struggled to take action, so she could only pin her hopes on Kenji.

“Leave it to me. We’ve known each other for a long time,” Kenji reassured them. His eyes were surprisingly convincing. Like Kotori had said, there was something different from the usual Kenji, and Theia nodded. “This is an exception, though. Next time, you girls will have to do something about it. It should already be your responsibility, to be honest.”

He was taking action because of the current situation, but it should have been the girls’ job. They had chosen to support one another. Kenji looked at those who had gathered out of concern for Koutarou and smiled.

“Kenji...I understand; we will take that to heart.” Theia nodded. If they couldn’t save Koutarou, who would? This time, their lack of involvement couldn’t be helped, but it was no doubt their responsibility.

“All right, see you in a bit,” Kenji replied in a light tone. And with equally light steps he walked up to Koutarou like he was going to have a casual chat with a friend. His first words were the same as usual. “Hey, Kou. What’s with the serious face?”

That was similar to what he always said. While the line might have changed slightly, that was typically how their conversations began.

“It doesn’t concern you,” Koutarou said, rejecting the attempt.

He leaned back against the sofa and fell silent. That was different from the norm.

It’s been a while since he’s been like this. It’s really doing a number on him...

Koutarou's reply had given Kenji insight into how deep his friend's worries ran. Truthfully, it didn't have anything to do with Kenji personally. It was, in part, meant to push him away from danger. Even so, it had been a long time since Koutarou had raised a wall between them.

"You think that reply is going to work on me? Has that ever made me shut up and go away?" Kenji asked.

Koutarou stared at him wordlessly.

"Jeez, you never grow up."

Kenji smiled wryly at him. At that moment, he had given up on using words to make his case. In the end, words were nothing but logic, and it wasn't logic that Koutarou was agonizing over. It was the idea of being unable to protect what he wanted to—in other words, he was stressing over the difference between himself and the Blue Knight.

Kenji decided to rely on an old trick. "Come on, Kou, let's go," he urged him, grabbing hold of Koutarou's arm and pulling him up.

"Hey—"

"You shouldn't be sitting around acting all gloomy in a place the sun doesn't reach. Come on already. Let's get some fresh air."

Kenji ignored his friend's resistance and practically pulled him out of the room. The girls stared with wide eyes as he did.

"It would have been easy for him to free himself if he wanted..." Nana muttered.

Like she said, it would have been simple for Koutarou to shake off Kenji. The fact that he hadn't meant that he didn't have any intention of breaking free.

Koutarou was dragged into the palace courtyard, where the sun was shining. This was where Elfaria's greenhouse was, but it also had a large garden. Once there, Kenji gave him something.

"Here."

"What..."

He had given Koutarou a baseball glove. Koutarou looked at the glove in surprise.

“It beats just standing there. Play with me,” Kenji said.

After a moment of confused silence, Koutarou eventually put it on his left hand. He didn’t know what Kenji was thinking, but he was tired of his thoughts running in circles, so moving his body wasn’t a bad idea.

Seeing that, Kenji walked several meters away and faced him.

“Here it comes, Kou!” Koutarou didn’t answer, but Kenji didn’t hesitate to throw the ball. With a thwack, Koutarou caught it and tossed it back. His body was reflexively moving on its own to play catch.

Thwack.

“Nice ball.”

Thwack.

The two continued their game. During that time, Koutarou was silent and Kenji was the only one to speak. Even so, Koutarou was spontaneously playing along.

Thwack.

“Your control is lacking. Have you gotten rusty?”

Thwack.

By the time the ball had been thrown back and forth a hundred or so times, Koutarou finally spoke up.

“I wanted to save them. Both Fasta-san and Ralgwin.”

Thwack.

Although surprised by the sudden statement, Kenji answered with a light smile.

“Fasta-san is one thing, but wasn’t Ralgwin going to get the death penalty anyway?” he asked, secretly relieved that Koutarou was finally speaking his mind.

Thwack.

“Even so, that’s far better than ending up as he did. It’s unfair,” Koutarou protested.

Thwack.

“And with your way, Fasta-san might even have been able to break him out, huh? You’re strict but kind, Kou.”

Thwack.

“Mackenzie, do you think I was wrong?”

Koutarou held the ball for a short while, and in that brief break, Kenji could tell that this was the problem that was bothering him the most. After thinking it through, he stopped moving around and gave an honest answer.

“I can’t say. When reality is so complicated, what’s right and wrong is based on hindsight.”



Since it was something so troubling to Koutarou, he knew he couldn't give a casual answer and had to admit that he didn't know.

Thwack.

"I see..." Koutarou's shoulders dropped slightly at Kenji's answer. There hadn't been much change in his demeanor because he'd expected that sort of answer. So he didn't stop playing catch.

Thwack.

"But there is one thing that I can say that you're wrong about for sure." Kenji couldn't answer Koutarou's question, but there was one thing he knew, and he felt he had to tell Koutarou about it.

Thwack.

"And what is that?"

Thwack.

"You've stopped moving."

That was the mistake Kenji had picked up on.

"Mistakes happen; nothing you can do about it. And thinking about how to improve is right, but it's wrong to get stuck," he clarified.

A human couldn't do everything perfectly, and it was fine to worry, but Koutarou had come to a standstill as a result, and Kenji thought that was a mistake.

Thwack.

"But—"

"Don't you get it, Kou?! If you don't take action, Fasta-san will go it alone! But her enemy is strong! If she does that, Ralgwin's determination will go to waste!"

The world was still moving while Koutarou stayed in place. The moment of battle was getting closer, or perhaps Fasta was going to save Ralgwin or at least recover his body. If left to her own devices, she would die too. That wasn't an outcome Koutarou wanted.

“Right or wrong, good or evil, no matter the conclusion, don’t stop moving, Kou. If you move, Forthorthe will move in that direction too. But if you stop, a lot of people will be lost and more will suffer—Fasta-san, the army, and probably the civilians too. Don’t forget that you’re standing at the front!”

It wasn’t just Fasta. If Koutarou failed to act, the people following him would lose their way, and their lives would be in danger. So he needed to continue even if he was carrying a heavy weight. That was the duty, and responsibility, of those who stood at the front.

“Mackenzie...”

“That’s about all I can say.”

Kenji had said everything he wanted. Koutarou looked down at the ball in his hand and pondered for a dozen seconds or so before finally looking back up.

“Hang with me for a minute, Mackenzie.”

“Idiot, that’s what I’ve been doing all this time.”

“I guess so. Then here I go, Mackenzie!”

Koutarou pulled his arm far back and threw a shockingly quick fastball.

Thwaaack.

“You idiot! Who throws a serious ball with no warning?!”

Thwaaack.

“Shut up! You just need to catch it, you lady-killing bastard!”

Thwaaack.

“Oh, now you’ve done it! How could you say that to your best friend!”

Thwaaack.

“Who cares! Haaaaaaaahhhh!!!”

Thwaaack.

Koutarou and Kenji went wild, throwing the ball back and forth at full force. There was no technique or worries in those balls, and they continued playing catch for a while.

The girls looked on with concern, but when the pair started throwing the balls so hard, the atmosphere around them softened. It felt like the real Koutarou had come back.

“Koutarou-sama actually wanted help...and only Mackenzie-san understood that...” Nalfa said, wiping her tears. She’d been worried sick about him, and now the built-up tension had been released through tears of relief.

“My brother can handle things when he sets his mind to it.” Kotori puffed up her chest. That was her brother, the Matsudaira Kenji that she knew. Her evaluation of him had been in a steep decline recently, but with this, it had returned to its former place perfectly.

Theia nodded along with her words. “It’s frustrating, but I have to admit, we are no match for Mackenzie.”

Kenji had been able to do what they had not in less than an hour. Theia had to acknowledge that difference. Since she hated losing, it had a profound impact.

“I agree. But, Theia-dono, you don’t intend to let things end like this, do you?” Kiriha fearlessly smiled.

“Of course not! I will become a woman who can support Koutarou. I don’t know if there will be another time, but Mackenzie won’t get a turn if there is!” Theia declared.

“Hehe, agreed.” Kiriha smiled.

They were no match for Kenji yet. However, if there was a next time, they would resolve it themselves. After all, they had chosen to live together and support Koutarou. All the girls present were overflowing with resolve.

“Now then...I have work to do,” Clan announced.

“Allow me to come with you, Clan-sama. See you later, Your Highness.” Ruth bid her farewell.

“Very good. Go work hard.” Theia nodded.

“Now that I’m so relieved, I’m getting hungry,” Sanae said.

“Me too! Let’s go eat something!” Yurika agreed.

Shizuka stopped them. “Ah, wait up, you two! I’m coming also!”

“Kasagi-san, what about your diet?” Maki asked.

“Aika-san! Don’t make me remember that!”

“That reminds me, the people at the operations department wanted to talk with you, Harumi,” Maki pointed out.

“Me? Why?” Harumi asked.

“It seems that they want to make an exclusive flag for you,” Maki explained.

“Why would they want to make something like that?!” Harumi shouted in surprise.

“Nal-chan, why don’t we film that while we’re here?” Kotori said.

“Yes! I will go get the equipment right away!”

Leaving behind Koutarou and Kenji playing catch, the girls scattered. Koutarou was back to normal, which meant a lot of things would begin to move. And the girls had preparations they needed to make.

Around the same time that Maxfern, looking like Ralgwin, made his declaration of war, Fasta was trying to get up. Her objective was clear.

“I must recover Ralgwin-sama!”

She wanted to take back Ralgwin’s body. Maya had said that he had been captured in order to save Fasta’s life. If so, it was her responsibility to get him back.

“Hold up! If you try to move with that injury, you’re going to die!” Maya shouted. She grabbed hold of Fasta’s shoulder and stopped her. Although Fasta was alive thanks to Ralgwin, she was seriously injured and in no position to go rescue him right now.

“But...”

Fasta tried to go even so. She shook off Maya’s hand and attempted to raise her body.

“You will fail if you go with that injury. I understand your frustration, but

you'll die for nothing."

"Ugh..."

"Right now you need to calm down and focus on recovering. Your injuries were forcibly opened up with magic, so they're healing slowly."

"Urgh, dammit... I never thought this would happen..."

With Maya's persuasion, Fasta lay back down, vaguely understanding that she would die needlessly if she went now. She covered her face and tears welled up in her eyes as she bit her lip in frustration. She'd gone to save Ralgwin, yet she had pulled him down, and now she couldn't even go save him. It was the biggest regret of her life, and her tears of frustration were overflowing.

"We need more time, Fasta-san. Not just for you to recover, but to make preparations to save Ralgwin," Elexis told her.

His words made Fasta show her face once more. "What? Is that possible?!"

She was shocked. She had planned to retrieve Ralgwin, but the only thing on her mind was securing his body. She had no idea how to restore his soul.

"Darkness Rainbow—no, I suppose they are the court magicians now. Anyway, they might be able to do it if they prepare a large-scale ritual," Elexis explained.

He glanced over at Maya, who firmly nodded. Like he said, it would take time, but the court magicians should be able to do it.

"With magic?" Fasta's eyes opened wide. She knew about magic, so it wasn't the ritual itself that surprised her, but rather that Elexis and Maya had a connection with the court magicians.

"Maxfern took over Ralgwin's mind with magic, so it should be possible to reverse it. But a large-scale ritual is needed, so it's not something that can be casually attempted. It would have been impossible for me to do alone back when I was a magician. We would need the court magicians at the very least," Maya said.

Returning Ralgwin to normal should be possible by following the steps taken to revive Maxfern, so it wasn't impossible. Chances of success were particularly

high for Ralgwin. He was a modern human and traces of his soul were everywhere. Moreover, he had a lot of acquaintances. However, it needed a major spell, and at the moment, the only possibility was to request the court magicians' aid. They were an agency of Forthorthe, but Ralgwin's return should benefit the empire as well, so they would likely cooperate.

"Can I ask that of you, Courier?" Fasta swiftly made a decision. She would hire Elexis and Maya once more, and use their connections to rescue Ralgwin.

"This one will cost you. We would be going up against a legendary tyrant, after all." Elexis shrugged.

Maxfern had chased out the royal family and temporarily ruled Forthorthe with their authority. Now that the tyrant had been resurrected and was leading a rebel army under the name of the Forthorthe Liberation Army, the danger of assisting Fasta was immeasurable. Without a sufficient reward, it wasn't worth the risk.

"I know, but I don't have the room to care about the cost," Fasta said without hesitation. Rescuing Ralgwin was her top priority; money was not a concern to her.

"Very well." Elexis nodded solemnly. He could understand her resolve, but that was as serious as he'd get. "So how much should we charge, Maya?"

When he turned to Maya, he was back to the usual Elexis, and he asked his partner the question in his usual carefree tone.

"Wouldn't a few bottles of good wine do?" Maya was unfazed by his behavior. Having seen through his intentions, she gave her usual response.

"That's a good idea. Let's go with that. So there you have it, Fasta-san. Your price will be a few bottles of fine wine."

"Are you serious?! This job should cost much more than that!" It was Fasta who was shocked. As an adjutant and agent, she had access to Ralgwin's secret accounts, which had a large amount of money. She'd feared even that might not be enough, so their reaction was completely unexpected.

"Maybe so, but you heard what Maya said."

“We actually have a reason to fight too. If Folsaria is to return to Forthorthe, we can’t have a rebellion spreading. If the Grand Wizard causes a tragedy, the people of Forthorthe will turn against Folsaria. Besides, we want the court magicians to be safe,” Maya explained.

Elexis had said the price was high to test Fasta’s resolve, though in reality, he’d been planning on cooperating with her from the start. He and Maya had their own reason to fight, so some bottles of wine were more than enough.

“Besides, I’m sure Koutarou-kun will foot the bill,” Elexis said.

“You idiot. It would have been an emotional scene if you hadn’t said that!” Maya shouted.

“Haha... Hahaha...”

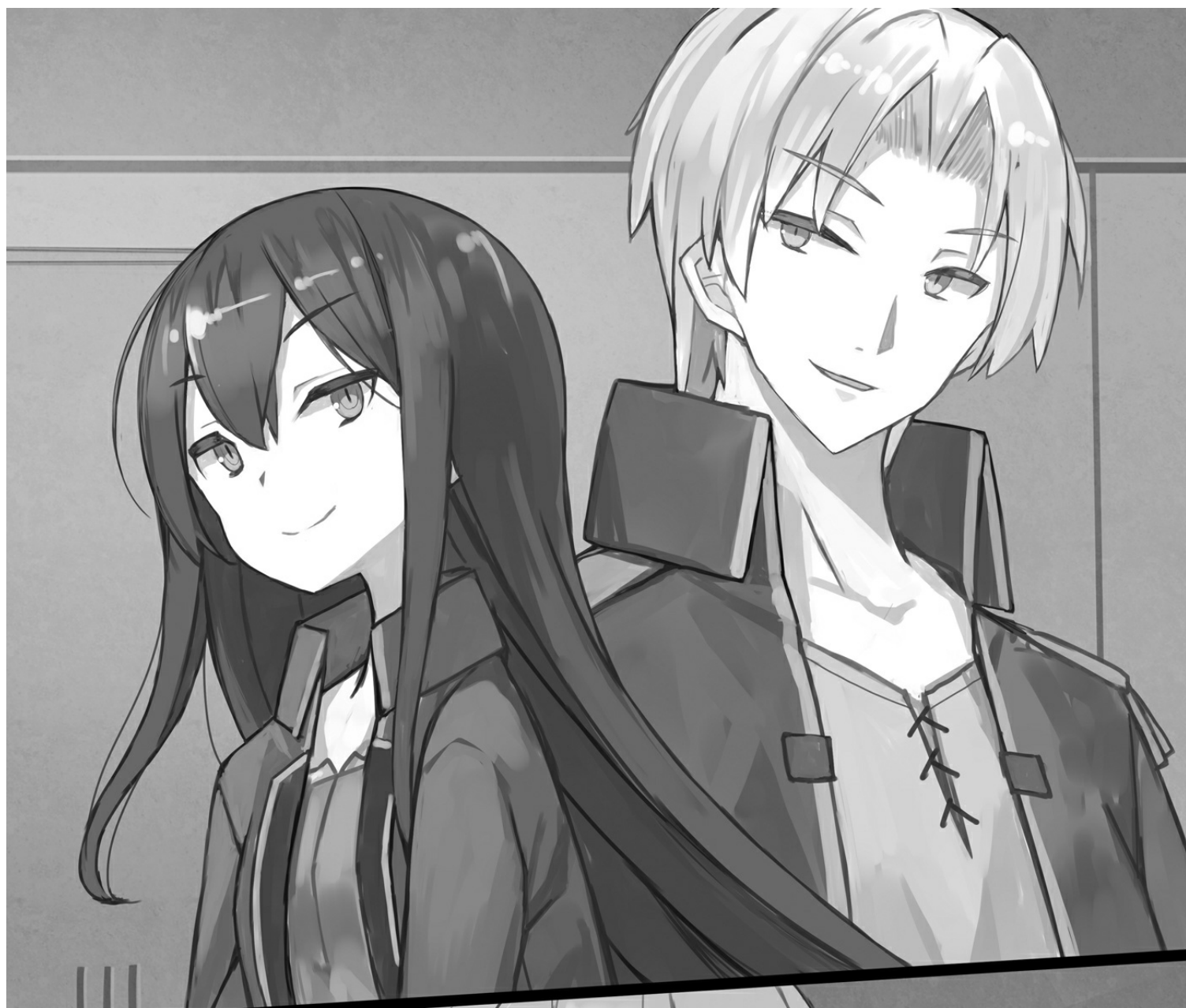
Looking at the pair, a laugh finally escaped Fasta’s lips. It wasn’t like she was feeling refreshed, but she wasn’t feeling as cornered anymore.

Seeing the change in her bearing, Elexis and Maya exchanged looks.

Why are we doing this? Elexis wondered.

This is all that boy’s fault! He’s even got us acting strange! Maya grumbled internally.

Complaints and dissatisfaction were whirling within them, but it didn’t feel all that bad.



Anti-government Forces

Tuesday, November 15th

Koutarou had been throwing the ball at full force until he was exhausted. Kenji had accompanied him until the end. And once Koutarou was lying down on the ground, Kenji told him, “Good work, see ya,” and left. He hadn’t said anything unnecessary, and Koutarou was grateful for it.

“I’m no match for him...”

Koutarou looked up at the sky. It was a beautiful, clear blue sky, with a small cloud drifting across it. Exhausted, he stared at the cloud and sighed. Ever since Ralgwin had been taken away, it was all that had been on Koutarou’s mind. Even when he went to bed, he struggled to sleep well.

But it was different now. Thanks to Kenji, he had been able to clear his head, although at the moment, he was so tired that even thinking was an effort.

“It wouldn’t hurt for a little while...” he murmured, gradually growing sleepier. Since he’d been sleeping so poorly, his eyelids felt heavy, and he had no reason to resist their pull. Leaving himself to the sky and the breeze, Koutarou fell asleep.

He didn’t know when, but at some point, something warm had enveloped him. Past the warmth, he could hear a faint sound; it had a rhythmic beat like that of a drum or a clock. He didn’t know what the sound was, but neither it nor the warmth were unpleasant. If anything, he wanted to entrust himself to them forever.

But something interrupted him—the sound of metal clanging against metal. It wasn’t unpleasant either; rather, it had a clear and beautiful tone. When he realized it was the sound of a bell, Koutarou’s consciousness rapidly rose back to the surface.

He moaned as bright light flooded his vision when he opened his eyes slightly.

After blinking a few times, he adapted to the light and opened his eyes fully. As he did, he saw that the beautiful sky was still above him, but it had turned orange. Time had passed, and the sun was starting to set. When he looked away, Koutarou realized that someone was looking down at him.

“Are you awake, Layous-sama?”

It was a calm and kind voice. Golden hair brushed his cheek, and slender fingers stroked his chest. His first thought was of an energetic girl, but he quickly realized it was someone else.

“Elle?” he asked.

Elfaria Dana Forthorthe. She was the ruler of this galaxy, the Empress of the Holy Forthorthe Galactic Empire. But right now, her eyes were fully focused on Koutarou, as if everything in the galaxy were before her.

“Yes.”

“So it was you...”

She was letting Koutarou rest on her lap. The warmth he had felt had been hers, and the sound was her pulse.

“Huh?”

“No, it’s nothing.”

“What a strange one you are, Layous-sama,” she answered with a laugh.

The busy empress was going out of her way to spend her time tending to him, so he must have made her worry quite a bit.

“Sorry for showing you this pathetic sight,” he apologized. Now that it had come to it, he could only give Elfaria an earnest apology.

The empress was exuding a strange sense of relief. “No, not at all. You are only human. It is only natural that you worry about the path paved for you. Anyone would be troubled in your position,” Elfaria told him with a smile. At the same time, her slender fingers stroked his chest.

Koutarou didn’t understand the meaning behind her actions, but they were strangely calming.

“At the moment...I am the only one of those around you who could play your mother. I would have no leg to stand on if you didn’t show me a pathetic sight or two.” Elfaria’s smile deepened.

It was like she was forgiving and accepting everything. Her words and smile told him what she was thinking. He had never mentioned his mother to her, but it wasn’t hard to imagine that one of the girls had talked about her. Moreover, if Koutarou were to marry Theia, Elfaria would become his stepmother. Right now, he was in the process of experiencing what that would mean.

“I never imagined you would do something like this,” Koutarou said.

While Elfaria had suggested that Koutarou marry Theia, she had always maintained a distance from him herself. She would stop at the line she’d drawn and never tried to go beyond being an empress to his knight. But right now, she had taken a large step over that line. She was going beyond the role of empress, and even beyond the role of stepmother. It was like she was trying to become his real mother.

“As empress, I might not have...but you have always called me Elle,” she explained.

“I guess so...”

If Koutarou had treated Elfaria as an empress, she might not have gone so far. But by calling her Elle and acting casually around her, he hadn’t made her feel like she was an empress, but rather the same Elle he had met twenty years in the past. Thanks to that, Elfaria had been able to interact differently with him.

“Have you made up your mind?” she asked.

“Yeah.”

“Then allow me to accompany you.” Elfaria’s smile changed. It was just as kind as before, but now it had resolve and trust in it as well.

Your Majesty, Alaia?

Koutarou had seen that expression before; it was very similar to the smile that Alaia had shown him. Although perplexed by that, he asked her a question back. “Do you know what I’m going to do?”

Considering her position, she shouldn't have been able to easily accompany anyone, so Koutarou imagined that she must have known what he was thinking.

She shook her head. "No. I understand how Layous-sama thinks, but not Koutarou-sama." She looked at him with gentle eyes. Elfaria didn't know what Koutarou was going to do, but she knew that he was troubled by the difference between the hero and his everyday self.

"That reminds me, you've been calling me Layous."

"Yes, though I am thinking of stopping that. I felt that the empress's words wouldn't reach Layous-sama..."

Elfaria put a little more strength into her fingers as she stroked Koutarou's chest, as if to grab at him, but the only thing she grabbed was his clothes. Yet, to Koutarou, it felt like she had grabbed his heart. It wasn't unpleasant in the slightest, and it was similar to how Theia made him feel.

"So you're speaking with that in mind."

"Yes. I will accompany you to the end, no matter what."

Elfaria had been calling Koutarou "Layous" to create some distance from him. She didn't want to be a burden. But no matter how talented she was, there were things she couldn't understand from that distance, things she couldn't reach. Right now, that distance was an obstacle, which was why she was trying to cross the finish line. She had to stay near Koutarou and support him in carrying the weight that Forthorthe had placed on him, like Alaia had done in the past.

"Don't say something so important that easily." Koutarou furrowed his brow. Elfaria was the empress, and the meaning behind her decision was heavy. It wasn't something to decide lightly.

"It is not easy. It has taken over twenty years for me to be able to say this." Elfaria smiled wryly.

Koutarou's interpretation was wrong, as it was based on the decision of the woman known as Elfaria, which was different from a decision of the empress.

"You..." he began.

It appeared Elfaria was closing the distance to save Koutarou, not the Blue Knight. With that, he gained a vague understanding of what lay behind her smile.

“You *really* shouldn’t say something so important that easily.”

This came with a large problem of its own. A woman like Elfaria making such an important decision was a serious matter.

She chuckled. “Like I said, it took twenty years.”

Elfaria had kept her distance from Koutarou because she felt she wasn’t worthy of him, and because she wanted to leave him to her daughter. But after her daughter had scolded her the other day, and after seeing Koutarou suffer, she had given up on that idea. She would do her best to be of help to him. If she didn’t, she would never be able to save him.

“Why do you all throw yourselves into things so easily?” he muttered.

“Well, why are you so determined to play the hero until the end?” Elfaria replied.

“I... That’s...”

At first, Koutarou had tried to sacrifice himself to be of help to Alaia. But after coming into contact with the people of the empire, he had come to care about the empire itself. So he had decided to take responsibility by playing the hero and seeing it through. When Elfaria and the girls had learned that he was a normal human merely trying to play the hero, they had wanted to help him, just as Koutarou had wanted to help Alaia.

“Everybody loves you, including the people desperately trying to live,” Elfaria told him.

“You guys are stupid. You should be more selfish and chase after your own happiness...”

“This is where our selfish desires have led.”

“Then you’re really stupid.”

“How could you say that to the Empress of Forthorthe! Haha, you actually understand, don’t you?”

“It might take me twenty years to accept it...”

Normally, he would try to play it off, but this time he affirmed Elfaria’s words. She wasn’t someone he could deceive, and he didn’t want to lie when it came to this topic.

“Twenty years pass by in a flash.”

“Fine, fine. I’m no match for you.” Koutarou smiled wryly. If she was doing the same thing that he had in the past, there was nothing he could say to change her mind, so after scratching his head, he shot up to his feet. “Right, then let’s get this started, Elle.” He reached out a hand toward Elfaria. He had no doubt that she would grab it.

“Yes, Koutarou-sama.” Naturally, she squeezed his hand without a moment’s pause. Although she kept it a secret from Koutarou, she had resolved to never let go.

As they held hands, they headed out to settle the greatest undertaking in two thousand years.

After his resurrection, Maxfern spent a lot of time shut up inside a room with Grevanas. The reason was simple: there was much that they didn’t know about this era, and they needed to study. Using Ralgwin’s knowledge would help to a degree, but it was like reading a textbook at best. As a soldier, Ralgwin’s knowledge was also lacking when it came to politics, economics, and science. So there was a lot for a politician and a leader to study.

“To think I would have to learn politics, economics, science, and military strategy all over again at my age,” Maxfern griped after finishing the day’s lessons.

Two thousand years ago, no one had been more knowledgeable. But that wasn’t the case anymore. In this era, his knowledge was rather lacking. As someone who always wanted to be first, he hated that.

Grevanas chortled. “The world two thousand years later is completely different. It is inevitable. Besides, we can’t make a move until we can gather soldiers.” He was serving as Maxfern’s teacher. Having been resurrected earlier,

he was ahead in his studies, and calling in a teacher from the outside would have raised suspicion. Their study sessions were being referred to as “a war council” between Ralgwin and Grevanas. Unsurprisingly, these sessions were a massive pain.

“This sure is going slow. We declared war, you know,” Maxfern said, wondering if they should be leisurely studying after such an event.

“That was more of a signal to gather soldiers. Moreover, the royal families already know about us, so a formal declaration doesn’t have much meaning,” Grevanas explained.

There were two reasons for their actions. The first was, of course, the importance of declaring the start of a war. Without it, a sudden assault would be seen as a terrorist attack and thus lose them the people’s support. The second was to gather forces. By making such a clear statement, they would gather other anti-government forces. Maxfern’s old Vandarion faction, now the Forthorthe Liberation Army, was lacking in numbers, so replenishing their troops was a must.

“Our enemies are the Blue Knight and the empress. Of course they know that our goal is to usurp the throne,” Maxfern said.

“They will already be making preparations for that scenario, so our declaration of war will only serve to gather allies,” Grevanas answered.

This approach had the disadvantage of giving the enemy time to prepare, but the Imperial Army already knew what Maxfern’s side was planning, so it was ultimately nothing more than a means to recruit soldiers.

“Hmm, and how many soldiers have gathered so far?”

In war, military force played the biggest part. Without soldiers, they could accomplish nothing. Maxfern only had old military knowledge, but certain facts remained true even in modern times, so he was interested in hearing about their progress.

“It is proceeding extremely well. The old Vandarion faction soldiers who were hiding all over, as well as those from other anti-government forces, are rallying to our cause,” said Grevanas.

All of the other players were gathering under the banner of the Forthorthe Liberation Army, the biggest faction. They had been operating individually and been suppressed without accomplishing much, so by joining together, they would be more efficient. For now, the situation was proceeding as Maxfern and Grevanas wanted.

“I see. And what about weapons?”

Their second concern was weaponry. Unfortunately, they couldn't measure up against the largest military force at present. They were facing an empire that ruled half a galaxy, so their weapons needed to be equal or superior to their opponent's at the bare minimum. With that, they could hope to make a breakthrough and outwit the other side.

“They are being gathered. We have weapons of this age, as well as spiritual energy weapons,” Grevanas stated.

Maxfern and Grevanas had lost two thousand years ago because they hadn't had equal armaments. So far, they only had magic and alchemy, prototype spiritual energy technology, while the Blue Knight had the latest spiritual energy technology and two thousand years of scientific advancements. So Grevanas was currently devoting himself to weapons. He was making preparations of his own, and with Maxfern taking over Ralgwin's body, they had claimed the old Vandarion faction's facilities. Since Forthorthe had not announced spiritual energy technology to the public for security reasons, Maxfern's side, which could actively make use of that technology, had an advantage.

“What about normal weapons... Has magic been used on them?” Maxfern asked.

“Naturally. That is our strength, after all.”

Grevanas's long-developed magic power had been added to the mix. Since magic was deployed by people, it wasn't suitable for mass production. Grevanas had brought the magicians who revived him back to Forthorthe, but there was a limit to their numbers. Instead, they were being deployed at critical points. For example, they were using magic to resolve bottlenecks in performance, including strengthening bolts in fightercrafts. They could also apply magic to weapons used by elite forces. By efficiently employing magic, they were

elevating the capabilities of the Forthorthe Liberation Army.

“But that is not enough to win,” Maxfern said.

“You are talking about Signaltin, the sword of kingship.” Grevanas nodded.

Signaltin was a sword of legend in Forthorthe. Back when Forthorthe had been a small country, it was the sword the rulers had wielded, a symbol of the crown said to have the power to tear open the heavens and earth. Having fought against it, Maxfern and Grevanas knew its power well.

Signaltin was present even now, two thousand years later, in the hands of their detested enemy, the Blue Knight. It was fundamentally different from a normal magic weapon, and it was clear that it was connected to something larger. Without any countermeasures, they would be defeated once again, since they wouldn’t be able to stop the Blue Knight from making a breakthrough. In fact, that was why they had lost two thousand years ago.

“It won’t be a problem. I will face the Blue Knight,” a figure stated.

This time, Maxfern and Grevanas had a trump card. He stepped out from the shadows and showed himself.

“It’s you, Gray One. Can you do it?” Maxfern asked.

“My sword has powers equal to his.”

Their trump card was the Gray Knight and the gray sword at his waist. In contrast to Signaltin, this sword had the power of chaos. If Signaltin was the sword of one who stood at the top, this blade was the power of everyone else. It should prove a match for Signaltin.

“How reassuring. But I still don’t trust you. You might be from a different world, but you are the man who banished me from this one.” Maxfern wasn’t happy about the situation. The Gray Knight was the Blue Knight from a different world. Even though he had followed a different path, he was still a hated enemy.

“That goes for the both of us. But our interests are aligned when it comes to wanting to defeat the Blue Knight. Grevanas should have told you this already.”

They might have been enemies, but just as they needed the Gray Knight, the

Gray Knight needed them. They required a large battle for their goals, but there were also tactical considerations. The Gray Knight could fight against the Blue Knight, but he would need to get through a lot of soldiers to reach him. He wanted Maxfern and Grevanas to handle that. It was for this reason that Grevanas and the Gray Knight had chosen to cooperate. The Gray Knight figured that the same applied to Maxfern.

“Your promise to Grevanas doesn’t matter. That’s what I would like to say, but you would have to search far and wide to find anyone who has remained loyal for over two thousand years, so I will oblige out of respect for you, Grevanas.”

Grevanas didn’t like that they were working together either, but he knew it was necessary, so Maxfern held his anger in and chose to honor the truce for the benefits it brought. That said, he was still displeased.

“Thank you very much, Maxfern-sama.” Grevanas’s wrinkly face twisted into clear relief. If they broke apart here, the structure of the coming battle would change, and they would have to throw out all their plans. It would be a big step back for their goal of domination and would practically spell defeat since they had made their declaration of war already. He was very relieved that they had managed to avoid that result.

Still, Maxfern-sama is right that we can’t let our guard down around him. We’ll have to dispose of him when the time is right. After we’ve killed the Blue Knight? No, he will surely be thinking the same thing. Then what about during battle when they are both weakened?

Grevanas schemed in his mind. There was no telling how long the Gray Knight would be their ally, so behind the relief on his face, Grevanas was considering how to get rid of him.

After watching Koutarou and Kenji play catch for a while, Theia moved over to the control room in the royal palace. She had preparations to make for when Koutarou made his move.

“Sheesh, how dare he make me worry...” Theia griped as she looked over the report the computer’s AI had put together. But contrary to her words, she

wasn't unhappy. If anything, she had a bright expression from the relief she felt.

I'm glad we brought Mackenzie with us. If it had just been us, it would have taken longer.

The girls had completely stopped when they saw Koutarou so down. And they hadn't been able to help him. They all had important posts, which meant that their choices would affect the people of Forthorthe and Folsaria too.

Fortunately, Kenji's help had kept the situation from becoming dire. Theia was relieved about both Koutarou's recovery and the stability of the world.

"Did you say something, Your Highness?" the artificial intelligence asked, having picked up her muttering. It believed that her words might have been an order.

"It's nothing. A worry was just resolved, so I let some words of relief slip," Theia answered with a smile. A little earlier, she might have said something harsher in irritation.

"Is that so? I am happy to hear it."

"By the way, Blue Knight, there don't seem to be a lot of reports on the Forthorthe Liberation Army."

The artificial intelligence had been installed in the space battleship, the Blue Knight. After the war, the AI had been moved over from the destroyed vessel to the palace during the control room's renovation. At the same time, its dialogue model and data points had been updated. It was eventually expected to be moved over to the rebuilt Blue Knight when it was finished.

"The Forthorthe Liberation Army has strict control over information, and no vital information has been discovered yet."

"I suppose Ralgwin's efforts are still alive and well," Theia mused.

"However...it is possible that the declaration of war has made way for an opening."

"Hmm, what are you thinking?"

"First, the empress and Lord Veltlion are entering the room," the AI reported.

As Theia asked the Blue Knight for a detailed explanation, the door to the

control room slid open and two voices could be heard.

“You have a nasty personality,” Koutarou said.

“How could you say that to an empress?!” Elfaria demanded.

“You only ever act like an empress at moments like these.”

“If anything, I should be acting like the empress right now. You should act properly too, Koutarou-sama.”

“Oh, we’re already at the control room.”

“The empress and Lord Veltlion have entered the room!” the AI reported.

The soldiers in the control room stood up and saluted the pair. Koutarou and Elfaria were the commander-in-chief and empress. They had the highest authority of anyone present.

“You are finally here. Good grief...” Theia sighed in relief after seeing them enter. She was especially relieved to find that Koutarou’s expression was back to normal.

“Everyone has been worried about you, Koutarou-sama. Shouldn’t you say something?” Elfaria asked.

“I know, don’t worry. It’s like you’re—” Koutarou began to say.

“Yes?”

“No, it’s nothing. You get it together too.”

“Yes, leave it to me.”

The two were talking about something, but they split up and took their seats. The control room’s seating was generally split between military and government seats. They both sat down at the most senior positions. Behaving as the Blue Knight and empress would be necessary from here on.

“Still, hahaha... ‘Koutarou-sama,’ is it, mother?” Theia laughed.

Elfaria had been acting normal as they entered the control room, but she had called him “Koutarou-sama,” and then there was the casual glance she’d given him when they’d parted ways. Theia understood what that meant better than anyone. And because of it, she was in high spirits.

Koutarou and Elfaria calmly sat down, but then Koutarou stood back up. “First I would like to say a few words to you,” he began.

At that, the room fell silent, and everyone present stared at Koutarou. There were a few dozen people there, from government officials to soldiers to security personnel.

“As you know, I have been off-kilter of late. I was acquainted with Ralgwin, having fought him for a long time, and I have my own opinions about his body being stolen. Especially when the one who stole it was Her Majesty Alaia’s and my bitter enemy, Violbarum Maxfern. As a result, I was shaken up and distanced myself from my duties for a while. First and foremost, I would like to apologize for that.”

Koutarou was following Elfaria’s recommendation and speaking to the people present. Like she’d said, he felt like he needed to apologize for falling apart for a while.

“The problem is inextricably linked to my being a knight. Is it really right to sacrifice a life to prevent my enemy from being resurrected? I do believe sacrifice is unavoidable when fighting to prevent evil, but can you really force someone to sacrifice themselves outside of that fight? Is there any meaning in a victory like that? Then again, it might mean that the people suffer less. It is a very difficult problem. And when faced with it, I was unable to move forward.”

Koutarou spoke his mind honestly. He hadn’t touched on the details, like Fasta’s involvement, but he still told them everything he felt. It was the sincerity he showed those who fought alongside him.

“But my friend taught me that there are times when you can’t tell what’s right. And that you should stand back up, even if you can’t find an answer. That is why I am back here. I still have no answer to the problem, but as a knight of Forthorthe, I have work to do.”

Even if Koutarou stopped to worry, others were still moving around him. Fasta would be trying to get Ralgwin back, and the enemy wasn’t going to wait for him. At times, he needed to stop trying to find an answer to focus on his immediate responsibilities.

“I have once again been reminded that people have their limits. There are

problems that can't be answered or solved on your own. That is why I need your help. If someone ends up in a rut, unable to find an answer, somebody else might have the solution, or at least something close to it. We should give each other a hand and advance together. Just like Her Majesty Alaia and the royal families want!"

The biggest help in such moments were allies. Kenji and Elfaria had taught Koutarou that. It wasn't like Kenji had an answer for Koutarou, nor did Elfaria. However, Kenji had shown him the path, and Elfaria would walk it with him no matter what happened. The same could probably be said of everyone in the room. They would show Koutarou the path and brave it with him.

"So let us begin. Our enemies are Grand Wizard Grevanas and Violbarum Maxfern! We will defeat them and protect the people of Forthorthe!"

There was no changing what had happened. But even without an answer, they needed to stop Maxfern's ambitions. They could save Ralgwin in the process. That was what they could do right now. As a knight, Koutarou no longer had any hesitation.

"I have high hopes for your work! That is all!"

When Koutarou finished his speech, cheers broke out in the control room. Even though the Blue Knight was a legendary hero with a track record of saving the country twice, he'd had his own doubts, which had stopped him, worrying everyone. But those in the room no longer had any such worries. They understood that the hero they all believed in had stood up once again, so there was no need to hesitate. They would fight and win together.

After Koutarou was done, a spirited discussion began. Government officials and soldiers made all sorts of reports and exchanged opinions. The consensus was that Ralgwin had been a tough opponent, and with him gone there might be an opening to exploit.

"Ralgwin had strict information control, frustrating as it is to admit. But now that he's gone, that control appears to be coming apart at the seams," Theia remarked.

"What do you mean?" asked Koutarou.

“The old Vandarion faction, or the Forthorthe Liberation Army, as it is being called now, has changed command from Ralgwin to Maxfern. Because of their differences in thinking, the control of information now has a slight opening. Clan, if you would,” Theia said. She was the one who had gotten hold of the information, but Clan was more knowledgeable about the topic, so Clan would explain to Koutarou in her place.

“Ralgwin split each stronghold into several layers, with information freely shared only within each layer. Information and goods were only shared between layers at specific places and times, which allowed them to avoid our...um, the intelligence department’s pursuit.”

Clan was working with the government’s Ministry of Science and Technology and the military’s intelligence department. Her exceptional skills were wanted by both sides. But even with her powers and the involvement of both organizations, they hadn’t been able to get a lead on the old Vandarion faction. At best, they could penetrate the first or second layer, leaving them in the dark regarding what lay beyond that. They hadn’t even known how many levels of control there were.

“But after the declaration of war, their perfect defense has wavered,” Clan continued.

“The declaration of war? That had something to do with this?” Koutarou asked with a perplexed look.

Clan nodded in return. “That is right. We believe it was an appeal to the people and anti-government forces.”

“I get it. I mean, I understand; we know what they’re after, so it has no effect on us.” Koutarou changed his way of expressing himself. They were in the middle of an important war council, so he needed to act like a proper commander.

“Yes, we are ready for battle. The only ones who do not know are the people and various anti-government forces,” Clan explained.

“I can understand telling the citizens. Starting a war without warning would be terrorism,” Koutarou agreed.

It was said that war was the last resort for diplomacy, and since it was a matter of diplomacy, there was a proper procedure in place. The first was a declaration to announce entering a state of war. Beginning a conflict without that was a war crime. Any actions would not be a war coming from failed diplomacy but rather acts of terrorism out of self-interest.

“That is generally correct, but in this case the latter, the anti-government forces, are important,” Clan corrected him. She operated the computer to change the hologram in the center of the control room. It had been displaying info on the old Vandarion faction, but it changed to show information on anti-government forces.

“There are a lot of them. So, information on anti-government forces was being suppressed to this degree,” Koutarou muttered.

There weren’t one or two organizations; there was instead so much overlapping information on them that it was impossible to get a grasp on all of it.

“Yes, they are very assertive. But they don’t have the level of self-restraint that Ralgwin had. So it wasn’t all that difficult to get leads on them,” Clan explained.

As people who wanted to change the empire, the faction was always sharing its opinions. By following that information, the empire could track their movements. Ralgwin’s forces preparing for battle without such expression of opinion had been an exception to the rule.

“Haven’t you dealt with them?” Koutarou asked.

“We have. This is what’s left,” Clan explained.

“I see. A large galaxy can be troublesome.” Koutarou sighed. This was the problem with Forthorthe being too big. As the empire spanned half a galaxy, anti-government forces expanded on the same scale. Moreover, those with the same ideas came from all over. Because of that, there was an exceptional amount of anti-government activity.

“That said, only a small percentage of them are capable of carrying out military operations,” Clan added.

“That was frightening. I thought those were all our enemies.” Koutarou smiled wryly.

There were aggressive and peaceful anti-government forces, and among the aggressive ones were those that would carry out military operations. In other words, there was maybe one anti-government force per solar system that could instigate armed conflict.

“These are the forces that can actually carry out military operations,” Clan said, and a large amount of information disappeared from the hologram.

Only a few dozen now remained, so the information no longer overlapped, but it was still a lot. The others were not seen as threats at the moment, and measures were being taken only against the groups currently being displayed. Forthorthe allowed freedom of expression, and merely expressing dissent against the government wasn’t enough to be punished.

“The problems start here.” Clan’s expressions returned to normal, and a vast amount of information was displayed once more. “Many of these anti-government forces have become more active due to Maxfern’s declaration of war. They must see the situation as an opportunity.”

If Maxfern—or Ralgwin, as the anti-government forces saw him—was gathering soldiers, the empire would be thrown into chaos sooner or later. That made it easier for other anti-government forces to make a move and gather more allies. While they might not stage an armed uprising, it was their chance to expand and promote their views.

“Many of the organizations have taken a particular action,” Clan said.

“Which is?” Koutarou asked.

“Joining forces with the Forthorthe Liberation Army. They are making contact with Maxfern and Grevanas and trying to affiliate themselves with them,” Clan explained.

The majority of the armed anti-government forces and a few of the unarmed forces were trying to make contact with the Forthorthe Liberation Army. Naturally, Maxfern and Grevanas would have expected as much. It wasn’t hard to imagine that preparations had already been made to welcome them into the

fold.

“I see, so this is the opening you were talking about.”

With that, Koutarou could understand where Clan was going. She nodded at his words.

“That is correct. Grouping up means the movement of soldiers. By tracking moving anti-government forces, we should be able to find Maxfern and Grevanas!”

Even if Maxfern and Grevanas’s information control was strong, and Clan and the others had been unable to get insight into it, right now soldiers were gathering under them, and that meant the empire should be able to find the enemy’s stronghold by following the tide. Attempting to gather a large number of forces at once created an opening that Ralgwin had never allowed.

“That is a good plan. So, are you going to slip a spy into the anti-government forces?” Koutarou asked.

If they planted a spy in their midst, then all they had to do was wait for a report. But Clan shook her head.

“Not yet. Moreover, I can not imagine they would overlook that risk when there are so many.”

“Well...that’s true,” Koutarou agreed.

Unfortunately, a spy hadn’t infiltrated the anti-government forces yet. There was a limited number of agents available to the intelligence department, and most were gathering information on the Forthorthe Liberation Army. As for the other armed anti-government forces, the agents were close to them, but keeping their distance. Moreover, if Ralgwin had been the leader, he wouldn’t have gathered troops in such a forceful way. With that in mind, Clan and the intelligence department hadn’t assigned enough personnel. But no one could have predicted that Maxfern would take over Ralgwin’s body.

“So you’ll be sending someone in now, then. What do you think, Aika-san?” Koutarou asked.

“Someone very skilled would be needed. They would probably be fine until

they depart, but when they arrive, I'm sure there will be checks using all available techniques and technology," Maki replied with a stern expression.

Even if Maxfern and Grevanas weren't as careful as Ralgwin, they weren't going to take in soldiers without vetting them. They were sure to use spiritual energy, magic, and Forthorthe's science to examine everyone.

"So, we'll track spaceships going to group up with them?" Koutarou asked once again.

"I wouldn't recommend that, Blue Knight," Alunaya interjected. He normally didn't have much to say on these topics, but he felt a need to interrupt now.

Shizuka gave him a perplexed look. "What do you mean, uncle?"

"We are able to see the waves when your spaceship transitions. I believe you call it 'space distortion navigation' whenever it breaches the wall of dimensions. If Grevanas has a magical beast with an ability similar to mine, it will be spotted right away," Alunaya explained.

Alunaya was the Fire Dragon Emperor. With his powerful magic, he had the ability to jump through space-time, and in order to safely use that gift, he needed to be able to observe the area where he would appear. It was an instinctive ability, so the range wasn't all that large, but that made it more accurate and sensitive. If Grevanas had made a magical beast with a similar ability into his familiar, the empire's pursuit would fail.

"Does that apply even to my Hazy Moon?" Clan asked.

"It is faint, but I can see it."

"Then there is nothing I can do. Good grief...to think a magical beast's intuition would overcome my technology..."

Even the highly stealthy Hazy Moon couldn't evade Alunaya's senses even though he was not an expert in detection. So they should assume that Grevanas could do the same. Clan sighed and her shoulders dropped as she realized there was nothing she could do.

"Then we need someone to infiltrate the anti-government forces in the end," Harumi summarized.

By infiltrating, a spy could accompany the anti-government forces and be taken to Maxfern and Grevanas's stronghold. Depending on the situation, they could acquire information without going there, through bugging or interrogating more influential people, but infiltration was necessary regardless.

"Even if someone can infiltrate, who's going to go?" Sanae asked. Like Maki had said, it would require a high degree of skill, especially when trying to exfiltrate.

"Someone adaptable is preferable. To be frank, I wouldn't be able to," Theia admitted with a sour look.

Thinking about it, someone from Koutarou and the girls' group should go. It was too much for a normal soldier to go up against Maxfern, and the agent needed to be versatile and resourceful. Theia had grown to the point that she could acknowledge her own faults, but she was still bitter about it.

"I shall go. It will be the first time in a while that I can be of use," Kiriha suggested. She was quick-witted and could respond to any situation. She wasn't quite as strong as the others in battle, but it wouldn't be a problem if they carefully selected other members to accompany her.

Koutarou nodded, but a fierce objection came from the government's side. "Please hold on, Kiriha-dono! If you were to leave now, the many problems within the nation will come to a standstill! Please spare us that by choosing someone else for this mission!" the Interior Department Minister pleaded.

That was the consensus among everyone on the government's side. With the restoration of the country and a new enemy appearing, there were a lot of situations that relied on Kiriha's brains. The Departments of Economics, Domestic and Foreign Affairs, and Defense were all borrowing her mind. Even if it was just for a few days, Kiriha leaving the imperial palace would be a heavy loss. Losing her was second only to losing Elfaria, so she was indispensable at such a critical juncture.

"Hmm..."

"Give it up, Kiriha. You are too much of a genius. You will have to house-sit with me," Theia said.

“I suppose I have to.” Kiriha smiled wryly. She agreed with Theia. Since she was usually on the back lines, she had hoped to be of help standing beside Koutarou, but that wasn’t going to fly. That saddened her, but since Theia was holding her emotions in, she would do the same.

“Then this is where Nana-san comes in!” Yurika suggested. In contrast to Kiriha, she was in high spirits. If one genius couldn’t go, it made sense to send another. It was a simple idea, and Yurika probably wanted to brag about her master, but it was a suggestion that everyone could agree on.

“Can we rely on you, Nana-san?” Koutarou quickly asked. He had no objections to her going. Kiriha was a strategic genius, and Nana was a tactical genius. While perhaps not on Kiriha’s level, Nana was smart, and when it came to combat ability, she overwhelmed Kiriha. She was a good pick for the mission.

“I’m fine with that if you come with me, Satomi-san,” Nana answered. She had no problem with the mission itself, but she thought her youthful appearance would be a problem. It would no doubt get in the way of trying to infiltrate a military organization. Someone tall, preferably a man, going with her would be a big help. That meant Koutarou was the most suitable of everyone present.

“That was my intention from the start,” he immediately answered. He didn’t want to push dangers onto others, so he had been planning on going along regardless. Truthfully, he was concerned about leaving Nana alone. Inside, Nana was a child trying to push herself beyond her limits. He couldn’t forget that just because she was a genius.

“Oh, really? Then that’s fine...” Nana hadn’t been sure that he would accept. Koutarou was as important as Elfaria, if not more so. His instant response was a bit anticlimactic to her.

“Then I will come too. You should have a magician with you,” Maki offered. She wanted to be there to protect Koutarou. She couldn’t handle him being hurt somewhere she couldn’t reach.

“Yes, that would be best,” Nana agreed with a nod.

Everyone was capable of fighting. Maki would take care of magic, while Koutarou could handle spiritual energy, and Nana would take control.

Calculating their strengths in her head, Nana figured that their group would do fine.

“That sounds good, Aika-san,” Koutarou said.

“Yes!” Maki nodded strongly at his words.

There were no objections from anyone else either. And with that, it was decided that Koutarou, Maki, and Nana would go together to infiltrate an anti-government force.

Infiltration

Friday, November 18th

The solar systems in Forthorthe that were considered frontiers lay on the outer edges of where movement was possible. But surprisingly, they were neither too far nor too close to the Forthorthe system. This was because of the history of the space immigration age and the influence of scientific and technological developments.

When it had first entered the space immigration age, Forthorthe had developed planets that were within easy travel distance. But warp technology at that time could move ships only a fraction of how far it could now. It was a simple matter of output, but open space was necessary for warp margin of error, and such space was not always in range. As a result, development had been limited to specific areas.

However, as time passed and technology advanced, the range of warp dramatically expanded. The time and cost between uses was also reduced, allowing them to reach a distance far beyond what they originally could. That led to the desolation of the solar systems that had served as staging grounds for long-distance travel. Those systems had only been valuable because of their locations, and had been developed through supplies and commodities that were brought in, so when more and more ships passed them by, they naturally became desolate.

These systems had been left behind when it came to development, and from an economic perspective, they were unattractive. But they *were* extremely attractive to anti-government forces. These places didn't see a lot of traffic, yet their access to the Forthorthe system wasn't bad. It wasn't as though the locations themselves were lacking; it was just that people didn't stop there.

"It's a similar situation in Ikoran, where I've been before," Koutarou muttered after getting an explanation about their destination.

The whole matter reminded him of the planet Ikoran. The Dalgamaran system, which Ikoran was a part of, was rich in minerals and had been developed as a relay station at the beginning of the space immigration age. But as technology evolved, fewer people had come around, and only transport ships really showed up to carry away the minerals. Ralgwin's production facility had been based there.

"It is not just a matter of the passage being convenient; there are also unused buildings and ports. It makes for a perfect place for armed anti-government forces to hide," Theia explained with a frown. As royalty, she had her opinions on anti-government forces.

In response to that, Harumi raised her hand to ask, "Theiamillis-san, if they're unused, doesn't that mean that it's old equipment? Will it still work?"

Since the remote regions were gradually being depopulated, many buildings still remained in good shape. However, even the newest were decades old, so Harumi wondered if the equipment still functioned.

"There will be few machines in perfect function. But if they gather functional equipment from multiple buildings, they should be able to use it even if it's somewhat inconvenient," Clan answered.

It would certainly be difficult to find perfectly functional equipment in abandoned buildings, but they could move gear from multiple buildings to create a single facility. Many organizations that were hiding out operated in such a fashion.

"Do they match the current standard?"

"The protocols should be backward compatible. The empire being as big as it is, there will be differences in technology from edge to edge, but for spaceports, standards would match for several generations," Clan said.

Modern technology was preferred, but given how vast space was, keeping everything up-to-date could be difficult. Not to mention different regions developed things in their own ways. By keeping things backward compatible, it was possible for all that equipment to operate in tandem. A typical example was a spaceship automatically landing at a spaceport.

“I see...so a galactic scale even comes with those kinds of problems...” Harumi said in admiration.

That was when Ruth spoke up from the operator’s seat. “We can now see planet Taurus Cobon.”

The Hazy Moon’s camera could see Koutarou and the others’ destination. It was where the anti-government force in question was hiding.

Taurus Cobon, as its name suggested, had been developed by a man of the same name. He was the first leader of the pioneers, and through his strong leadership, they had made it through the difficult settlement period. He was still respected as a great man, which was why the planet had been named after him in later years.

This planet, like Ikoran, had been developed as a relay station. However, its key industry was agriculture, and during the early years of warp travel, they had grown food for surrounding planets in order to make a profit. As a result, even as they’d fallen behind in technological developments, they hadn’t seen as big of a decline as Ikoran. The volume they handled had decreased, but the people of the surrounding planets would always need food.

“I thought the same when I saw it from above... This really is a beautiful planet,” Koutarou noted.

He and the others had already landed. Since the world hadn’t declined to Ikoran’s degree, there were still plenty of ships coming and going. Koutarou and the others had gotten into a transport ship from the Hazy Moon and easily managed to land. Their current target wasn’t as cautious as Ralgwin had been, but they would still proceed with caution.

“Their key industry is agriculture, so the planet was chosen for its environment,” Ruth explained. However, she wasn’t with them on the surface. Instead, her voice came from a small rabbit robot that she had prepared for the sake of the mission.

Maki narrowed her eyes as she looked at Koutarou and the talking rabbit. She had seen it before, as it was a reconnaissance robot that had accompanied them on a previous undercover mission. According to Theia, Ruth had said that

she'd been too embarrassed to show Koutarou.

Good for you, Ruth-san... Maki thought.

Ruth had finally gotten to show Koutarou her cute rabbit robot. And it would surely be of use to him. Maki could imagine her getting excited on the other side of the call.

"So, where should we go from here?" Koutarou asked as usual, unaware of how Ruth felt.

As someone who knew about Ruth's feelings, Maki felt a little vexed, but she also understood that it was a necessary phase. Instead, she walked up to listen in on the explanation. As she did, her eyes met Nana's, who was doing the same thing, and they exchanged a wordless smile.

"There is a forest up ahead, and inside is an abandoned spaceport. It is a relatively small one that a corporation once owned, but it's now the military base of the Dawn Corp of Taurus Cobon," Ruth explained.

"The Dawn Corp of Taurus Cobon?" Koutarou tilted his head. He hadn't heard the name before.

"It is an anti-government force. They carry out all kinds of activities under that name," Ruth said.

"Based on the name alone, they don't sound like villains," Koutarou remarked.

"They don't see themselves that way either. They want to eliminate the evil royal families and create a new world."

"They sound sick in the head..." Koutarou sighed. He could understand if they just wanted to overthrow the imperial government. There was no right answer for a system of government. For example, any democratic system during Japan's Warring States period would have been destroyed. There were efficient systems of government for different situations, and it just so happened that the imperial system had worked for Forthorthe for a long time. But that didn't mean that it was the correct one. So wanting to try out a different option wasn't a bad idea in and of itself.

If they were simply spreading their ideas to gain public support for a peaceful transition, Koutarou had no objections. Alaia probably wouldn't have had any complaints either. However, they were claiming that they wanted to eliminate the evil royal families. How exactly could they see Elle, Theia, or Clan as evil? Even without Koutarou's bias, their assertion made it clear that the Dawn Corp of Taurus Cobon was acting on emotion.

"However, this time their one-sided sense of justice is helping us out," Ruth said.

"Because they chose to join up with the Forthorthe Liberation Army."

Koutarou nodded. He and the others were here because the Dawn Corp had decided to seek allies. By joining hands with a larger group, they hoped to eliminate the royal families. Thanks to that, Koutarou and the others had a lead on the Forthorthe Liberation Army.

"So, would that make Satomi-san something like a demon to them?" Nana mischievously asked. She'd been making a joke, but it probably had a hint of truth to it.

"So it would seem. They associate blue with the color of an evil knight, but it's not something the people support," Ruth explained.

"There is a complete record of Satomi-san's activities, after all. Of course it wouldn't get support," Nana added.

Since they saw the royal families as evil, they equally despised Koutarou, who was an ally of the rulers. Considering his strength and influence, perhaps they really did think of him as a demon. But the people were different. This era had all kinds of records, be it live footage, coordinates, or otherwise, and they all proved what kind of person Koutarou was. This group frantically brandished everything as conspiracy theories and fabrication, but the laymen knew that wasn't realistic.

"Dark Knight Layous, huh? That sounds cool." Koutarou smiled.

"Please be more serious, Master," Ruth scolded him.

"Sorry about that."

"Make sure you never remove that bracelet, Satomi-kun," Maki instructed

him.

“I know. I don’t want to put myself in danger either,” Koutarou answered.

He and the others wore bracelets made in preparation for the mission. They were magical bracelets that made them look like other people, but the ones wearing the bracelets could see one another’s true appearance. It was a laborious task that Yurika and the court magicians had undergone together to create. They’d taken the utmost care to ensure that the disguising magic couldn’t be detected, and that concealment had taken the bulk of their efforts. Because of that, they hadn’t been able to make any spare bracelets. Normally, people who weren’t known by the enemy were sent to infiltrate, but their foes’ abilities meant that Koutarou and the others had to go instead.

“Then let’s set out,” Nana stated. Once she had a grasp of the situation, she jumped up from the ground.

According to the intelligence department, the Dawn Corp would be moving soon. So they couldn’t afford to take too long. The rabbit robot sat down in front of Koutarou and lowered its head.

“I will take my leave now, Master,” Ruth said with a tone of regret through the rabbit.

“Thank you. I’ll see you later.”

“Yes, I wish you the best of luck.”

With those words, she cut the transmission. They couldn’t use communications from this point on, as they couldn’t let the enemy detect any communication waves. The rabbit shifted to autonomous mode and would be gathering information while leading Koutarou and the others.

“All right, let’s go, Ruth-san.” Koutarou stood up and started walking. The mechanical rabbit hopped after him.

Being able to do that so naturally is why everyone loves you, Satomi-san... Nana thought. Koutarou had called the rabbit “Ruth.” It hadn’t been anything deliberate on his part—that was just how things had flowed. But Nana thought that when Ruth checked the records later, she would rejoice. With a slight smile she chased after Koutarou.

According to Ruth, there was a small spaceport, but that wasn't the case from what Koutarou could see. As he looked at the top of a small hill, the edges were hazy so it was hard to tell, but...

"Isn't that huge?" Koutarou asked.

No matter how he looked at it, it was larger than any airport in Japan. It far exceeded what he had imagined.

The rabbit's AI answered in Ruth's voice, "This spaceport has the capacity to service a number of large transport ships. But it is a rather small spaceport for transporting grain."

Just like maritime transport ships on Earth were huge, the transport spaceships were also huge. There were several ships the same size as the destroyed Blue Knight. At an industrial scale, several such vessels were necessary for business, which meant that a spaceport needed to be several kilometers long at the bare minimum.

"Is the spaceport in Fornorn even larger than this?" Koutarou asked.

"That's right, Master. When standing at the landing site, everything you can see is the spaceport," the AI explained.

Fornorn, the capital of Forthorthe, had a spaceport as well. But its size was far larger than this one. What Koutarou had thought was an amazing city was merely the spaceport.

"I was fooled by the spaceport being made on Earth. That really is the bare minimum, huh?"

The spaceport being made by Japan was the reason for Koutarou's difference in perception. At the current moment, there was no economic trade between Japan and Forthorthe. Because of that, the port was only being used by inspection teams and transfer students. Being able to service one or two smaller passenger ships was enough, so it wasn't all that different from an airport.

"But, Satomi-san, it seems they're only using part of it as a port. It looks like the rest is a training facility," Nana observed.

With her good eyes, she'd noticed right away. The facility was large, and seeing it appear through the trees had been shocking, but only two ships were parked there: a relatively small warship, most likely a destroyer, and a medium-sized transport ship. It was too small to call an army, but it was a lot for an anti-government force. The rest of the spaceport was being used as a training facility, storage, and space for tents.

"I see. I guess that's an easy way to use it..."

Koutarou could understand why anti-government forces would choose a place like this. It was far easier to set up such facilities at a spaceport than to have to cut down a forest. It was hard to imagine until he could see it for himself.

"If they're about to group up, those ships must be heading for the Forthorthe Liberation Army," Maki pointed out.

"I think so," Nana agreed. "However, that transport ship is a little suspicious, so if we're going to sneak in, it should be through the warship."

Nana agreed with Maki, but she feared the transport had only been carrying supplies in. It was more than possible if they intended to maintain the spaceport after joining the Forthorthe Liberation Army. For the enemy, this location was excellent in terms of ease of use and location.

"Then it's decided. We'll sneak onto the warship," Koutarou concluded.

A warship would no doubt be used after grouping up with the Liberation Army. They would want every warship they could get their hands on, so it made sense for the group to get onto that ship. From there, they only had to remain hidden and they would be taken to the Liberation Army's base.

Maki and Nana came from military organizations, so they knew what they needed to do and what to avoid in order to sneak on board. The rabbit robot was also gathering information from its surroundings at all times. Koutarou left everything to them while he focused on the spiritual energy around them.

Are these beasts? It's probably a pack of something like wolves. From this sensation, they probably won't attack unless we get close.

Life was abundant in the forest, with all kinds of spiritual energy around it.

There were some types to be cautious of, chief among them predators and humans. Predators could attack them, so the group needed to avoid stepping into their territory and aggravating them. Humans were more troublesome; not only would it be bad news if Koutarou and the others were discovered, but the enemy had also set up surveillance. Being discovered by either method would mean the mission would fail, so it was extremely important that they weren't found.

"Satomi-kun, stop!" Maki warned.

"Whoa," Koutarou breathed.

"Be careful. There's a wire at your feet," she explained.

"Thank you, Aika-san. It didn't have any spiritual energy."

Koutarou had almost fallen for a wire trap. It must have been set up a while ago, so there were no remnants of spiritual energy around it, and he had failed to see it with his Spirit Vision. Spiritual energy tended to remain in things that someone had put a lot of thought into. In other words, the more something lingered in the user's memory, the easier it was for spiritual energy to remain. So there was almost no spiritual energy in something that had been quickly set up through menial labor. It was a flaw of Spirit Vision, and Koutarou would have been in danger if not for Maki.

"Anyway, I'm glad you're safe," Koutarou told her. Maki smiled with relief.

"Hehe, you really are sensitive to Satomi-san's safety, Maki-san," Nana giggled.

"Ah, uh, that's..." Maki blushed. Everyone knew that she was fully devoted to protecting Koutarou, but it was still embarrassing to have it pointed out. She was normally very composed, so it was a rare chance to see her acting like a normal girl.

"Oh, you don't have to be embarrassed. You saved us," Nana said. She had actually noticed the wire too. She had drawn her laser gun, which was her usual magic gun disguised to look like it had been made in Forthorthe, to shoot the wire. Since lasers didn't have any impact, they were well suited to dealing with wire traps. But Maki had stopped Koutarou before that, so she hadn't needed

to pull the trigger. Therefore, she pretended not to notice in order to avoid diminishing Maki's efforts. Nana smiled as she subtly returned her gun to its holster.

At that moment, Koutarou's and Nana's eyes met. It was just for an instant, and Koutarou didn't say anything. Nana wondered what that was about while returning to her own role. Since there was a trap, they were already in enemy territory.

Suddenly, a large hand landed on top of her head.

"Huh?"

The hand belonged to Koutarou. It moved ever so slightly, patting her head. That was all he did before quickly removing his hand and taking the lead once more.

Come on, Satomi-san...

Nana was too surprised to say anything. She was lauded as a genius, but in that moment, she had forgotten the situation. If they had been ambushed by the enemy just then, she would have no doubt been taken down.

If you do things like that so naturally... she thought. Even I will begin to feel things...

Koutarou knew that Nana had noticed the trap and that she'd kept quiet for Maki's sake. So he'd patted her head without saying anything to thank her for her consideration for Maki.

Because of that, Nana was struggling. If she didn't calm her pounding heart, she wouldn't be able to complete the mission.

But it wasn't that simple.

By the time Koutarou and the others reached the Dawn Corp's site, Nana had returned to normal. She'd gone ahead to scout and come back with her usual light steps. She had gone out to scout alone, taking the rabbit with her, but that had helped her get a handle on her feelings.

"Sorry to keep you two waiting. Like I thought, we should be able to infiltrate

up ahead,” Nana reported.

When they’d been on top of the hill, they had found a place they might be able to infiltrate from. Nana had scouted ahead just in case and confirmed that their observation was correct.

“How did things go over here?” she asked.

“There seem to be patrols but not that many. It’s a big place, so unless we really stand out, we should be fine,” Koutarou answered.

“And there are no signs of magic. As expected, it hasn’t been deployed to anti-government forces,” Maki added.

Koutarou and Maki had been checking the base for spiritual energy and mana. Fortunately, they hadn’t found anything irregular, nor had anyone detected them, since security wasn’t all that tight.

“They don’t seem to be very skilled. That’s fortunate for us, but...”

Nana was a little unhappy. Although they were enemies, she was irritated by the lack of caution. The patrols were too irregular for the size of their base, and any traps were exceedingly simple. The defense of one’s base was an important factor affecting the lives of allies, and as a former genius magical girl of justice, she couldn’t just ignore it.

“Now, now, they might be an anti-government force, but only a few go through proper training. They’re trying for amateurs, right?” Koutarou attempted to soothe Nana.

According to information they’d gathered ahead of time, there were only a few who had proper military training, and there was a limit to training in such an enclosed area. It was only natural that they wouldn’t match up to Nana’s standards, which were on the level of the Nefilforan unit and Folsaria’s armies. If anything, for amateurs, they were trying their best to keep up appearances.

“He’s right, and with this, we should be able to proceed without trouble,” Maki said. She was siding with Koutarou. The less skilled the enemy, the safer it was for them. It wasn’t like she couldn’t understand Nana’s frustration, but Maki welcomed the safety.

Nana relented. “Well...I guess so. I wouldn’t want to get into it with normal people, even if they have extreme ideas...” She had started to show her feelings more through her interactions with Koutarou and the others, but deep down she was still a magical girl. She valued love, courage, and justice above all, and a smile ultimately returned to her face.

“For now, there don’t seem to be any problems...so let’s wait until the sun sets as planned,” Koutarou suggested.

Since there were no other concerns, he wanted to stick to the plan. Nana and Maki agreed.

“Let’s hide behind those rocks until then,” Maki suggested.

“Yes, since this is a good break, why not eat something? We may not get time for it later,” Nana added.

The plan was to infiltrate at night. While the Dawn Corp might have their guard down, it wasn’t wise to move in broad daylight. It was best to play it safe, and there should be proper soldiers among the Dawn Corp members as well, so it was safer to wait until there were fewer people out and about.

Since the site was several kilometers long, the fence around it was a simple partition. The total length exceeded twenty kilometers; it would take too long to install alarms and high-voltage currents everywhere, and since it wasn’t a military base, nothing had been installed in the first place. At best it had cameras at important locations, and even those had degraded over time, with only few still functioning. As such, it would cost the Dawn Corp too much to install new devices, not to mention it would need a large-scale generator to power them. But the biggest reason was the enemy’s lack of caution. If they had understood the threat at hand, they would have patrolled in larger numbers.

“Let’s go. It should be safe for a while,” Koutarou reported to Nana and Maki after observing their surroundings with Spirit Vision.

The robot rabbit was doing the same. “Beginning countdown. There are roughly fifteen minutes until the next patrol.”

While Koutarou and the others were hiding behind the rocks, the rabbit had

been gathering information in a grassy area near the base. As a result, it had a good grasp of the patrol schedule.

“That’s more than enough time,” said Nana. Based on her experience, there was almost never a moment when they would have more than ten minutes of leeway. She also had experience infiltrating important bases on high alert when she’d only had twenty-eight seconds, so she couldn’t help but feel let down.

“Let’s proceed with caution. Outside is one thing, but once we get in, there might be soldiers who understand the dangers,” Maki answered seriously as she gave Nana a small device. It was a small plasma torch to cut through the metallic fence.

“That’s true, we should account for the quality of the soldiers being better. We’ll have to assume they are well trained. All right, let’s get started,” Nana stated, accepting the torch. She must have used one several times before, since she handled it without hesitation.

Next to her, Maki was holding her staff up high. “Create Darkness.”

She cast a spell that brought forth darkness. Since they would be infiltrating from the back of a building, there was almost no concern that the soldiers would directly spot the light from the torch, but it might still light up its surroundings. That was where the darkness came in. By expanding it in a dome around Nana, the light was blocked out.

“We’ll keep an eye out,” Koutarou said.

“As you wish, my lord.”

While Maki and Nana worked on getting through the fence, Koutarou and the rabbit observed the location. Since the dome would hinder their vision, they were on either side of it to cover any blind spots.

It didn’t take long to hear the sound of the torch cutting the fence. It was surprisingly noisy and could be heard from twenty meters away, but that sound soon disappeared as well. Maki had used a spell to stop it. Still, that was a double-edged sword. By cutting out both light and sound, the pair inside the dome had no way of knowing what was happening on the outside, which meant that Koutarou and the rabbit’s mission was very important.

“Alarm Message. Enemy soldiers approaching from ten o’clock.”

That was when something unexpected happened. The rabbit’s ears shot up and delivered its report to Koutarou while turning around. When he heard that, Koutarou immediately poked his head into the darkness.

“Stop working! Someone is approaching!”

“Got it!”

Nana swiftly turned off the torch and lay down. Koutarou and Maki followed suit, and the rabbit jumped into the darkness. Once she’d confirmed that, Maki moved her staff ever so slightly and shrank the dome so that it would only cover them. At the same time she canceled the sound-obstructing magic, as it would get in the way of detecting the enemy.

“They’re muttering about something,” Nana whispered. Her hearing was sharp.

“I will enhance and relay the sound,” the rabbit announced. With its large ears it could pick up sound better, and after getting rid of the noise, it conveyed the results to the others’ bracelets.

“God dammit, why do I have to be the one to get the booze!”

“Booze?”

Koutarou’s eyes opened wide as he heard the soldier’s voice. Maki, lying down next to him, did the same. Nana gave them a wry smile.

“It’s a very stressful environment; let them have their drinks.”

She understood what happened on the battlefield. The lives of your allies were always at risk, which ate away at the mental strength of soldiers and stressed them out. Troop deployments weren’t always being changed merely for strategy purposes, but to alleviate stress as well. Yet there were times when the situation wouldn’t allow for such measures, like when they had to hold out until reinforcements arrived. At such times, soldiers often relied on alcohol. Nana thought drugs would be going too far, but she did feel that a reliance on alcohol was inevitable. The Nefilforan unit also had quite a few alcohol-loving soldiers.

“Is that how it works?” Koutarou wasn’t even twenty yet, so it didn’t feel real to him.

“It is, normally. You and Maki-san end up supporting each other, so you might not notice,” Nana explained.

Koutarou and Maki exchanged a glance and blushed slightly. They and the others also felt stress, but they didn’t need alcohol. Like Nana said, their presence healed one another. Then again, they weren’t always on the battlefield, which was a big part of it.

“Still, nobody’s going to notice if I pilfer some bottles for myself, so it’s all good.”

“This soldier’s destination appears to be the storage unit right in front of us,” the rabbit reported.

“I see...so this building is a good storage space,” Koutarou confirmed.

The building in front of them was hiding them from the soldiers. Koutarou could vaguely sense some spiritual energy coming from it as well. Food and alcohol had an easier time leaving spiritual energy behind. Vegetables and fruits were still alive, and fermented foods were also alive with microorganisms. Fresh meat and fish likewise had spiritual energy. Meanwhile, tools and weapons had next to none. At best, they had some spiritual energy left behind from the people who handled them, but the difference between tools and food was clear. In summary, the soldier hadn’t noticed Koutarou and the others—he simply had some business at the storage building.

“Let’s wait until he leaves,” Nana whispered. Since the soldier was getting closer, their voices might reach him.

“True, it would be better for us if they all got drunk,” Koutarou whispered back.

If the soldiers were drinking, there was still time before the departure. With some luck, they would drink and pass out, so it was safer to wait a bit before going.

“Maybe it would have been better if we had some booze...” Just sitting around and waiting was rough, so Koutarou made a joke.

Nana grinned in response. “Oh my, Satomi-san, you’re going to make girls drink after dark?” She hit him back with a joke of her own. That was certainly one way to interpret it.

“That’s not what I—” But before he could finish his answer, Koutarou realized: *This is one of those times when there’s no right answer.*

If he denied it, it would be like saying that the girls had no feminine charm. They would sometimes surprise him with a question that had no good answer, so Koutarou carefully picked his words to try to minimize the damage. “Well, maybe a little, just in this situation.”

“Hehe, what a bad boy, Satomi-san,” Nana scolded him, although her tone suggested she was doing anything but.

“Hahaha.” Maki looked back and forth between Nana and Koutarou and laughed.

Seeing that, Koutarou let out a small sigh of relief and smiled along with them. After waiting for the soldier in question to pass by, he and the others infiltrated the Dawn Corp base. Fortunately, after getting through the fence, they weren’t discovered by anyone and successfully reached the warship.

“As I thought, they’re not very skilled nor are they on guard,” Nana observed.

She was watching soldiers coming and going from behind piled-up goods. Yet despite their success, she was a little unhappy. She gave the base a failing grade by her own standards. Their patrols were lackluster, and so were their numbers. Enemy or not, it was too much to bear.

Koutarou smiled wryly. “Nana-san, you can’t compare civilians to the Nefilforan unit.”

No unit would match up to the skill of the Nefilforan unit. The Glendad family was renowned for its military arts, and their most elite unit carrying their pride received training that was of exceptional quality and frequent. It would be cruel to compare them to civilians who had the bare minimum of training.

“Even then... Oh, come on, make sure your light reaches the corners! Good grief!”

“So, it’s this perfectionism that beat magic into Yurika,” Koutarou murmured.

“I think I can imagine how it must have looked,” Maki added.

Seeing the small Nana so frustrated was adorable. Imagining her doing the same when teaching Yurika made the other two smile.

“Oh, I haven’t had a student as excellent as Yurika-chan, you know?” Nana really was unhappy, and she’d have loved to have had several soldiers like Yurika.

“Really?” Maki asked.

“She could do anything I taught her on the first try. If she couldn’t she wouldn’t have become an arch-wizard in such a short amount of time.”

Nana and Yurika hadn’t been together for that long. They had trained less than a year in total, yet Yurika had finished her training and even been appointed arch-wizard. When it came to magic, she was without a doubt a genius.

“I guess that makes sense.” Maki nodded. Although she didn’t doubt it now, when she had first heard how short Yurika’s training had been, she hadn’t believed it. Her frank impression had been that there couldn’t be such a genius.

“Of course, she was no good at anything but magic...” Nana smiled wryly and dropped her shoulders. All kinds of troubles stirred in her memories. Food being burned into charcoal had happened more than a few times. When she’d tried teaching Yurika how to handle a knife for self-defense, Yurika had cut her own finger. She really was a bad student when it came to anything but magic.

“I can imagine...” Koutarou couldn’t help but smile again. At the same time he was shocked that despite Yurika’s many flaws, the top brass had had no choice but to make her an arch-wizard. In other words, that was just how amazing her magic was. It was proof of her talent and the reason Nana had trained her as a magical girl. The idea of the enemy using her frightened Nana.

“Getting back on topic...the enemy are neither geniuses nor elites; they’re just civilians with some training in how to handle weapons. Isn’t it better that we don’t have to fight them?” Maki asked.

Their foes weren't professional soldiers. They were no different from armed civilians, so Maki felt it was good that they wouldn't have to fight.

"Well...I guess. Yeah, I'll think of it that way," Nana replied.

She really was a former genius magical girl. The teachings of love and courage were still alive and well within her. Since their enemies were civilians who had taken up arms due to their ideology, a magical girl should proceed while avoiding any fights with them.

"Now then, this is where it gets hard. Nana-san, how should we sneak in?" Koutarou asked, pondering the situation. There were fewer soldiers moving about at night, but goods were still being carried into the spaceship. It would be hard to get in without being discovered.

"We'll have to put our trust in this bracelet that Yurika-chan created, or alternatively search for a different entrance that doesn't stand out as much," Nana told him as she held her arm up, showing the bracelet.

If they were going to infiltrate while carrying goods, the bracelet that changed their appearance was perfect. But they could also look for another entrance. If there was a way in, away from prying eyes, there would be no need to worry about anyone seeing them.

"Let's use magic as a final resort. It will carry a risk from here on," Maki suggested. As someone who was usually on the side of infiltrating, she had experience with defenses against specific methods. Because of that, she operated on the assumption that Maxfern had given the enemy tools that would detect magic. If those tools existed, they were most likely by the entrances.

"That's true. Let's do that." Nana nodded. She was more on the defensive side, so she could only agree with Maki's opinion. Maki had more experience when it came to infiltrating.

"Okay, then let's go around." Koutarou had no objections either. He trusted their decisions.

They settled on using the engine maintenance hatch as their route. Maintenance personnel used it as an entrance, but at night it had far fewer

people coming and going.

“It seems only the space distortion navigation maintenance staff are working overnight,” the rabbit reported.

“Clan also said that kind of maintenance takes a lot of time,” Koutarou commented.

The slightest error in space distortion navigation could be fatal, so maintenance took a lot of time. It also required its own fuel and catalysts, as well as spare parts. As a result, the maintenance staff were at their busiest just before departure. Conversely, after departure, the computer handled most of it, so they could relax. It was a profession that had big ups and downs.

“So we should get away from the engine quickly,” Nana hurriedly announced. The bracelets might hide their identities, but a stranger lurking at the engine block would be suspicious. Since it was a specialized profession, the workers would know one another, so Nana wanted to move somewhere else.

“Affirmative. This ship doesn’t have a habitation zone, so I recommend moving to storage,” the rabbit explained.

“Ruth-san, do you have a schematic of the ship?” Koutarou asked.

“Of course, Master.”

The rabbit sent the ship’s schematic to the others’ bracelets as requested. The destroyer was from three generations ago, with the last of its generation being phased out of the Imperial Army over a decade ago. However, the army still had the data on the ship, and Ruth had gathered it all ahead of time.

“Hmm...it’s pretty different from the Hazy Moon,” Koutarou noted.

“I recommend the water and propellant storage,” the robot suggested.

Water was simply for the crew on board to use day to day, and the propellant was used to move the ship during standard flight. Both were put in large tanks, and they had specific storage spaces.

“Why there?” Maki asked.

“Both have hoses connected to the tanks, so even during transport, people won’t show up. At most, staff will come to check that things are still working

after their shifts.”

Outlets for water and propellant typically had a port on the outside of the ship for the sake of convenience. So they weren’t carried in like all other supplies, which was why not many people would be around.

“Right, then let’s go with that. Thank you, Ruth-san,” Koutarou replied.

“It is an honor, Master.”

Koutarou was still calling the rabbit “Ruth.” Since it had her voice, it felt right. They followed its advice and made their way to the storage area for water and propellant.

“All right, let’s go,” Koutarou said.

“I will take the lead. Maki-san goes to the back,” Nana added.

Maki nodded. “Got it.”

“What should I do?” Koutarou asked.

“Stay in the middle and use your Spirit Vision just like before, please. We want to avoid people, if possible,” Nana answered.

“Got it.” Koutarou nodded as well.

Their formation for infiltrating was the same as before. Nana and the rabbit took the lead, while Maki took rear guard. Meanwhile, Koutarou was in charge of using his Spirit Vision. The enemy might not be very skilled, but there was no room for carelessness.

Their group headed for the propellant storage. Water had a purification facility, so more people were likely to be there. Meanwhile, as long as they got past the initial safety checks, no one was likely to come to the propellant storage.

“We managed to sneak in, but when does the ship leave?” Maki wondered.

The group had made it to the storage unit without being discovered. In front of them were several propellant tanks. Fortunately, there hadn’t been any real obstacles, and they had arrived while avoiding the enemy. Infiltrating while

everyone was busy carrying in goods had been a success.

“According to the intelligence department, it will be tomorrow...but they don’t know the exact time,” said Koutarou.

Maki shrugged at his words. Now that they were here, they needed to stay hidden. Since propellant was still being added, people might still show up. Moreover, there was no telling how long it would be until they grouped up with the Forthorthe Liberation Army after departing.

“Let’s find some place that doesn’t stand out. I’m sure there’s a maintenance corridor or a room to store tools,” Nana suggested.

Rather than hiding in the storage space itself, she felt like a small room was safer. If they found an area like that, they could cast a barrier to keep people out.

“Affirmative. But before executing that plan, bring me to the communications port by the wall, please.” The rabbit’s AI supported Nana’s idea, but there was something it wanted to do first.

“What do you mean?” Koutarou asked, lifting the rabbit up. He started walking toward the wall before it even answered.

“I will infiltrate the system and gather information,” the rabbit stated.

“Can you do that?”

“Affirmative. I am capable of breaking through the security of a standard Imperial Army warship.”

It was out to gather information. The ship was a type that the Imperial Army had once used, and the Dawn Corp of Taurus Cobon must have gotten their hands on one through the black market. Because of that, it wouldn’t be hard for Ruth’s and Clan’s technology to break through the security of an old-fashioned Imperial Army vessel. That was also one of the reasons Kiriha had narrowed down the candidates to anti-government forces that were using ships that were easy to hack.

The rabbit’s right leg changed shape, and a port for communication appeared. It stuck it into the port in the wall. Normally, it could be connected wirelessly,

but the AI chose to connect directly in order to avoid any unnecessary radio waves.

“Departure will be in twelve hours, but for security reasons, the destination has not been listed. Based on the amount of goods loaded, it is within two days’ journey,” the rabbit reported.

The easiest indicator of their destination was the amount of food being loaded. The destroyer had a crew of two hundred. Six hundred meals were necessary every single day, and the ship was loaded with twenty-five hundred meals—roughly four days’ worth of food. That might suggest a journey of four days, but typically one stocked twice what was necessary due to imperial regulations so that rescuers would have enough time to make it if something went wrong. Of course, anti-government forces were piloting the ship now, so they might have less spare food. Even so, the journey shouldn’t be longer than three days.

“Two days... So they’ll warp twice.” Koutarou counted on his fingers.

The primary method of space travel in Forthorthe was warping. Ships skipped from safe area to safe area with a warp once a day.

“That’s some good information, especially when combined with the amount of propellant.” Nana folded her arms as she thought. Although it depended on the performance of the warp drive, Forthorthe’s space travel didn’t allow full freedom. Due to the distribution of safe areas, there were trafficked points through which a lot of ships passed, so two days of journeying meant that the destination couldn’t be far from one such place.

That allowed them to narrow down the list of possible destinations. Of course, once their infiltration mission was a success, they would get their hands on more detailed information. But right now, the kind of details they had would be useful for escaping, and for Theia and the others who were pursuing them.

“I will send a small drone to share this information with the operator,” the rabbit said.

Koutarou nodded. “That’s Ruth-san’s hard work for you! You’re not only cute, but excellent as well.”

A part separated from the rabbit and fell to the ground. A moment later, it changed shape into a smaller rabbit that ran out of the building. It was a small multipurpose drone that would be taking the information with it outside. It made sure to record Koutarou calling it “cute” as well.

The warship departed twelve hours later and journeyed for two days, just as the rabbit had predicted. Once they approached the port, the ship suddenly got a lot busier, which was typical, and the soldiers were filled with anticipation and anxiety over grouping up with the Forthorthe Liberation Army. It was only inevitable that things would get noisy.

“Master, it appears procedures for docking are taking place on the bridge. We will be landing in roughly fifteen minutes,” the rabbit reported.

“Got it, then we should get ready too.” Koutarou nodded. He and the others were calmer than the crew despite being uninvited guests. They’d taken various precautions, but it had still been two and half days of tension building up, so the relief of being freed from the sealed space was huge. Relieved that they would finally be able to get out, they gathered their belongings in preparation to disembark.

“Please be careful, Satomi-kun. There are a lot of cases of being tracked after making camp,” Maki said. Since she was good at pursuit and infiltration, she knew that there tended to be a lot of clues at a hideout. They couldn’t leave any trash, they were not allowed to drop anything, and everything had to be returned to its original place. That was an ironclad rule for these sorts of missions.

“Got it, I’ll be careful,” Koutarou said. He knew about these things too, but most of his knowledge came from two thousand years ago. He felt that he should obey the experts of this age and agreed with Maki.

“Still...that went surprisingly fast,” Nana said. Having spent so much of her life on the battlefield, she was calmer than anyone. After becoming the Blue Tower’s arch-wizard at a young age, she’d had a long military career and gained lots of experience, and having been stationed on the front line where she had experienced bombings for weeks, she wasn’t fazed by the current situation.

“I’m glad you’re with us, Nana-san,” Koutarou said.

“Oh my, thank you, Satomi-san. I’m happy to hear you say that. But...” Nana kicked Koutarou. She didn’t put a lot of force into it, but simply exaggerated the motion. Because of that, her intentions were clear.



“I’m glad you’re with us, Aika-san,” Koutarou said.

“Satomi-kun! Hahaha, me too.”

While surprised by the strange flow of events, Maki quickly understood what was going on and smiled. *But the most surprising thing of all is seeing Nana-san doing something like that to somebody... It’s a good thing...*

Maki looked at Nana. She’d never seen her kick Koutarou before. It was a sign that she was starting to depend on people other than Yurika. Nana had gone through a rough childhood in a different way from Maki, so Maki was concerned about her.

“Is something the matter, Maki-san?” Nana asked.

“No, I was just thinking that you are cute today too, Nana-san.”

“You’re starting to sound like Satomi-san,” Nana remarked.

“Ahaha, yes.”

Their feelings were mutual, since Nana was concerned about Maki too. She felt that they had similar circumstances, which she couldn’t ignore.

“I want to hurry back home and take a bath,” Maki noted.

Nana nodded. “I can agree with that.”

The two girls whispered to each other. Koutarou and the others had been hiding in a corner of the storage for propellant, a small room for storing maintenance tools. It was a room even smaller than room 106, and it was very cramped for three people and their belongings. Moreover, there was no bath or shower. Although they were used to military environments, the desire to take a bath was inescapable. Even more so since Koutarou was with them.

“That should do it,” Koutarou announced.

While the two were whispering, he had finished cleaning up his own luggage, then returned the hand truck to where it had been after they’d moved it in order to create more space. With that, unless someone had a special ability, there was no way they would be able to tell that people had spent the past two days there.

“This is where the problems start, Satomi-san,” Nana said with a serious smile. Now that she’d finished cleaning up, she wore the face of a warrior.

Koutarou followed suit and straightened up, nodding at her words. “They should be much more cautious than before,” he said.

“I can’t sense any mana yet, but it would be a bad idea to assume that there’s nothing.” Maki also had a stiff expression. Depending on the circumstances, she might have to contend with Grevanas’s magic. As a former evil magical girl, she understood how dangerous that really was.

In that moment, there was a rumble as the warship, which had spent all of its time quietly flying, shook. It was the landing gear making contact with the space port. They had arrived at the stronghold for Maxfern’s forces.

The first bit of information Koutarou and the others needed was where exactly the warship was. Fortunately, they were able to get that information through the rabbit. It pulled data from the navigation computer’s data bank and sent the information to them.

“It looks like we’re inside a base,” Koutarou said.

“I think it’s going to be a challenge to get out of here...” Nana noted.

Unlike a normal space port, this one had a roof that only opened when a ship entered or left. That meant it was a very large-scale base, much bigger than what they had expected.

“Ruth-san, can you send out another small drone to contact Theia and the others when you get a chance?” Koutarou asked.

“As you wish, Master.”

The original plan had been to escape after arriving and make contact with Theia and the others who would be following behind. But it was questionable whether such a thing was possible. Even if it was, the task was monumental, so Koutarou wanted to use another drone as insurance.

“How about we stay hidden and leave after they set out?” he suggested.

It was unlikely that the warship would stay at the base forever. And Koutarou figured they would be able to get out when that happened, but Nana shook her

head.

“If this ship is going to be useful in the war, it will need a major renovation. It would be dangerous to stay hidden inside,” she said.

A ship that saw daily maintenance would be ready to set out immediately, but that didn’t apply to the ship they had been on. It was something that an anti-government force had haphazardly been using, and it was very unlikely to reach military standards. It wouldn’t be setting out again until it did, so staying in hiding until then would be next to impossible.

“Then we’ll need to get out of the ship,” Koutarou concluded.

“The crew should be getting off, so we can blend in with them,” Maki suggested.

Just as the ship had to be maintained, so too would the soldiers be registered and have their health checked. The infiltrators could disembark alongside them and go into hiding before they were discovered.

“It’s a little reliant on luck, but I guess we have to,” Nana agreed.

“Aika-san, let’s put our trust in Yurika and Crimson’s efforts,” said Koutarou.

“Yes, I agree.”

They had no objections, so they set out to infiltrate the base. They would step off the warship and get inside that way. Although it sounded simple, it was exceedingly dangerous, so before they set out, they inspected the footage the rabbit had sent them. If there was no place to hide nearby, they would be trapped with no way of escaping.

“Could we hide behind this container? It’s not that far from the ship’s hatch either.” Nana had set her eyes on a container near where the ship had landed. It contained replacement parts and ordinance, so it was large enough for their group to hide behind.

“But there’s no cover on the way there,” Maki said.

In order for the container to be kept out of the way, it had been placed a distance from the ship, and there was nothing but open space between it and them.

“We’d have to blend in with the soldiers and hope we can get close... Two hundred people, huh?” Koutarou folded his arms and pondered. While the crew was getting off the ship, they could blend in, but their numbers worried him a bit. Two hundred was the equivalent of a company in the military. Typically the people in that company knew one another for the sake of better cooperation. That meant that even with Yurika’s transformation bracelets, it was dangerous. It was easy to imagine someone walking up to them after failing to recognize them. Even if Koutarou’s identity wasn’t exposed, it was still risky.

“Even if we use the bracelets to blend in, we’ll have to hope that they don’t fully know one another on account of being a mishmash of people,” Maki commented, sharing Koutarou’s opinion. With just the bracelets, they would have to hope that the two hundred among the Dawn Corp didn’t know one another. It was essentially a gamble.

“There’s also the option of taking a chance and using magic,” Nana suggested.

So far they’d used the bare minimum out of fear of being discovered, only detecting mana and using a barrier to keep people away. Since Grevanas might have spread countermeasures for magic, they wanted to avoid using it wherever possible, but Nana felt that they had good reason to use it now.

“So we go in relying on luck or magic, huh? Which is more dangerous?” Koutarou frowned. It was a problematic question. They could be seen through, or Grevanas might have taken countermeasures. They needed to compare such vague possibilities and choose the best one. Moreover, they had to make a choice soon. The soldiers were getting off the ship even as they spoke.

“Satomi-san, you choose,” Nana said.

“That’s so reckless,” Koutarou retorted.

“Nana-san and I won’t regret it no matter what you choose. We all know that you’re always doing your best,” Maki told him.

Maki had an indigo-colored crest on her forehead. Nana had entrusted herself to Koutarou after removing all of her prosthetics. Both had required resolve, and that resolve hadn’t changed.

“All right, let’s use magic. We’ll turn invisible and go behind the containers,”

Koutarou decided.

“Are you sure?” Nana asked.

“Yes; rather than giving up the initiative, I think it’s better to use magic.”

In the end, he decided to rely on Maki’s abilities. Rather than going with the flow, he felt it was better to take action to resolve the situation. The decision was very much like Koutarou.

The soldiers were instructed by the broadcast on the ship to gather at the cargo space. If they were all going to get off at once, using the hatch there would be fastest.

“When you get out, line up in your platoons. There will be registrations and checkups after that,” someone announced.

Like Koutarou and the others had expected, the soldiers would be registered and checked. The ones gathered in the cargo space were currently exchanging words with their comrades. Koutarou and the others were watching them from the shadows in order to find the best timing for Maki to use her magic.

“It’s been ages since I had a health checkup.”

“Didn’t you get one when you joined?”

“I joined five years ago during a merger.”

“Oh, you’re a former Wind of Sashuyan.”

“How nostalgic. It’s been a while since I heard that name.”

“By the way, what kind of people are the Forthorthe Liberation Army?”

“Apparently, they’re remnants of the Vandarion faction, but they didn’t like his methods.”

“I was pretty freaked out too, disgusted even, especially by that huge weapon...”

The soldiers had their own opinions on the matter. Merging and splitting up was common among organizations, as well as a source for problems. They understood that well and felt uneasy about it.

“They look like normal people,” Koutarou remarked as he watched them.

They were an anti-government force, but they didn't look like violent people to him. They just looked like normal folks you would find anywhere. That perplexed Koutarou.

"There are people joining organizations like these just to survive in any era," Maki said with her eyes cast down. She had been one such person with no other place to go. Be it poverty, a lack of food, or something else, there were all kinds of reasons for joining anti-government forces aside from one's principles.

"Now that you mention it, it was the same two thousand years ago..." Koutarou recalled there being people like that in ancient Forthorthe, like the fourth son of a farmer or those in serious debt. There were also people from villages that Maxfern had destroyed. Even Forthorthe's army had been that way, so it was certainly possible for anti-government forces to take on such refugees.

"I can imagine those who lost their jobs because of the civil war joining because they had nowhere else to go," Nana said.

Some people had joined anti-government forces to make a living. After last year's civil war there were some who couldn't make ends meet anymore. People like that were victims of political marginalization. Koutarou had complex feelings on the matter. He didn't think that Theia, Elfaria, and Alaia were at fault.

"It's not your fault, Satomi-kun," Maki said. "Nor is it the fault of the people important to you. It's just impossible to save everyone at the same time."

Only a god would be able to save everyone without exception. Yet a god wouldn't do that, since it would be like making all humans into puppets. Since people had free will, it was impossible to save them all.

"You can hold your head high, Satomi-kun. You can keep saving the people in front of you, just like you saved me," Maki continued.

It was impossible to save everyone, but they could at least aim for it. And even if not everyone made it, they could be happy about the lives they had saved. Maki wanted Koutarou to be proud of what he'd accomplished. After all, he was the one who'd rescued her from the darkness.

“Thank you, Aika-san. I guess I got a little fainthearted.” Koutarou sighed and gave her a small smile.

That’s it, that’s fine. I am only human...

It was something he was always thinking about as well. He wanted to save the people in front of him. It was arrogant to think that everyone could be helped.

“It’s okay to get fainthearted. If not, there would be no point in us being here,” Maki replied.

Seeing Koutarou acting like a normal person, she flashed him a smile. Not everything went as they wanted, which was why people supported one another. It wasn’t just Koutarou saving Maki, but the other way around as well. That was how it should be.

“Haha...” Nana looked over the two with a calm stare. That was a problem she had run into before. The magical girl of justice had agonized over wanting to save everyone.

“Information Message. The soldiers have begun moving.” As the rabbit’s voice interrupted, the three put on serious expressions once more.

“Satomi-san!” Nana called out.

“I know. Aika-san, if you would.” Koutarou nodded.

“Yes!” Maki acknowledged. She wanted to protect as many people as possible.

They understood the situation well. After confirming with them, Maki began the incantation for a spell to turn them invisible. When it came to turning them invisible and covering up traces of mana, the latter required more mana. The invisibility wouldn’t last even a minute.

Koutarou weaved his way through the soldiers of the Dawn Corp and left the warship. Then he made his way to the container they’d agreed on.

It looks like they both made it too...

They couldn’t see each other, since the invisibility hid them even from infrared sensors and they were impossible to see with the naked eye. However, Koutarou could still see their spiritual energy. Thanks to that, he knew they’d

managed to follow. The girls also had a rough idea of where he was, since the rabbit could detect the flow of air around his body.

There was some anxiety. *The problem is the moment the spell was cast...*

Even though the mana was being concealed, the moment of casting allowed some to leak out. There was a slight delay before the concealment magic started working, and if that was detected, they would be found out.

“All right.” Koutarou nodded and ran behind the container as Maki and Nana followed behind. A few seconds later they reappeared. The spell had ended.

“Don’t move, you two!” Koutarou said. They pushed themselves together and froze. If the mana had been detected, their actions would be pointless, since soldiers would come rushing in at any moment.

Please let it be needless fear!

Koutarou could only pray. It was unclear how valuable this base was to Maxfern and Grevanas, so the security setup was unknown.

“It looks like we’re good...” Nana said.

“So it seems.”

They were both stiff, but there was no sign of the enemy coming, nor were there any alarms.

“I can’t sense any hostility. It went well,” Maki concluded.

As a magician who manipulated the mind, she didn’t have to use a spell to sense the surface of a person’s mind. That power told her the atmosphere of their surroundings. Maki could only sense the vague tension between the visitors and the people already there. There was no feeling that one typically had when discovering an enemy.

“Good grief,” Koutarou sighed.

“This kind of thing is always stressful no matter how many times you do it...” Nana said.

They were finally able to relax a little. They weren’t in a situation where they could let their guard down, but at least they were safe from danger for the

moment. It appeared there were no countermeasures against magic at the landing site.

“Welcome, Dawn Corp of Taurus Cobon. I am Claisen. I oversee the Human Resources at Wiesalam. The Forthorthe Liberation Army welcomes you with wide arms!”

The atmosphere softened for more than just Koutarou’s group. With the Forthorthe Liberation Army’s representative welcoming them, the soldiers’ anxiety calmed. The foot soldiers didn’t know exactly why they were joining the Forthorthe Liberation Army, so when a field officer welcomed them, it helped alleviate their fears.

“Information Message. Wiesalam is the fourth planet of the Varkala system. Not much of the area has been developed, and this base is likely to be in the surrounding region,” the rabbit reported.

“Okay, we’ve accomplished our goal! Now we just have to get home!” Koutarou said.

Ralgwin’s faction had never let the empire get a lead on them, but now that the leader had changed to Maxfern without anyone’s knowledge, the imperial side had finally succeeded. Since this was a base that accepted soldiers, it would be exchanging information with other bases, so infiltrating it was the first step in cornering Maxfern—although that did require Koutarou, Nana, and Maki to escape first.

“Releasing drone, and attempting to establish contact with the outside,” the rabbit reported. It released a small drone once more. Like before, this would attempt to carry information to the outside. It was the same information that Koutarou and the others would bring if they managed to escape, but it was best to relay the details as soon as possible.

The drone crept from shadow to shadow like a mouse, jumping on a container being carried outside.

“I hope it will make it out...” Nana knew that it was just a machine, but its cute appearance made it look like a living animal, so she couldn’t help but worry that it might get scared, crushed, or lost.

“I do not know if it will be able to get outside, but this is an espionage mission, so chances of being discovered are believed to be very small,” the rabbit assured.

If a drone from the Imperial Army was discovered here, they would be in danger, and it would also inform the enemy that their base had been discovered, in which case bringing back information might be useless. That was why they had relied on subterfuge. Depending on the circumstances, they might even have to give up on escape and wait in hiding somewhere. Covering their presence was their foremost priority, so chances were high that both they and the drone would be safe.

“I see. I’m glad to hear that.” Nana smiled.

Much of Nana-san’s body is machines... Koutarou felt like Nana was worried about the drone not just because it was cute, but he chased that thought out of his mind and focused on the dangerous situation they were in.

“From here on, you will receive a health checkup and register as soldiers. This — Hm? What is it?” The officer called Claisen was continuing his reception of the Dawn Corp, but then a subordinate of his came up from behind and whispered something into his ear, prompting Claisen’s expression to change. “What?! What does that mean?! Why do I have to do something like that?!”

“I do not know, sir. Those are the orders from above...”

“Nothing will come from arguing with you. I will go to them directly. Excuse me, it appears there has been some sort of mistake on our end. Once preparations are done, you will be guided in order, so I ask that you wait here a little longer,” Claisen said before he shuffled down from the platform he’d been standing on, heading for the exit of what was likely the hangar. It was hard to tell from a distance, but Koutarou could tell that his voice, expression, and aura had all turned more severe.

“It looks like the situation is getting worse...” Nana couldn’t sense auras, but she felt the same thing as Koutarou. Some trouble that Claisen hadn’t anticipated must have occurred.

Maki tilted her head in confusion. “But this is strange. It doesn’t feel like they’ve found us. What do you think, Satomi-kun?”

“I don’t think so either. There’s nobody focusing on us.”

The first thought that came to mind was that they had been discovered. If he was coming to fight them, Maxfern would have given orders that would confuse the general troops, since magic and spiritual energy weren’t known to typical soldiers. But it would still mean that someone was aware of Koutarou and the others, and hostility or caution would be directed toward them or the ship they had been hiding in.

Yet Koutarou could sense neither, so it was likely some other trouble. It made not just them, but also the soldiers of the Dawn Corp anxious.

“What is going on?”

“Is it the enemy?”

“In that case, we should be sent out too, but I don’t hear any combat either.”

“Yeah, it’s strange.”

“But that officer made it look like it’s a big deal.”

The anxiety only spread as they spoke among themselves. That emotion was conveyed to Koutarou and Maki, whose anxiety over the situation had nowhere to go.

“Information Message,” the rabbit said. “I have deciphered the order that was given to the officer. It reads, ‘Shut off the air conditioning system immediately.’” The robot was gathering information even now. It only had access to junior officer security clearance, but a new order had come down.

“Shut off the air conditioning?! But why?!” Koutarou was so confused he almost shouted out loud.

“Is it some sort of epidemic?”

The first thing Nana suspected was a contagious disease. Hospital wards that specialized in disease were isolated from the outside world in order to keep anything from escaping through the air. Although turning off the air conditioning wasn’t completely airtight, it was still a possible countermeasure for a contagious disease.

“No...Satomi-kun, something is happening!” Maki felt a strong disturbance of

feelings from outside the hangar. It was a terrible confusion with a strong sense of fear and survival instinct mixed in. But those emotions were gradually disappearing. The speed of disappearance was also accelerating. It was clear what that meant—people were being slaughtered. And before long that tsunami of death crashed into the hangar.

“What the?! You damn idiots! Maxfern, Grevanas, are you insane?! What the hell are you thinking!!!”

At that moment, Koutarou understood everything: why the air conditioning had been stopped, why anti-government forces had been so easily accepted, why they didn’t care if the soldiers were untrained or ignored security—it was all so they could do this.

“What is happening, Satomi-san?!” Nana frantically asked.

“It’s the zombies we fought before! Maxfern and Grevanas are going to convert all of the Dawn Corp into zombies!”

Crashing into the hangar were soldiers from the base. At the front was Claisen, but he looked wrong. His skin had darkened, and his eyes were sunken and had a threatening glare to them. With his Spirit Vision, Koutarou could tell at a glance that these were zombies created by the waste from before.

“You mean they think untrained soldiers would be more useful as zombies?!” With Nana’s quick wit, she could understand the situation based on Koutarou’s brief explanation. Maxfern and Grevanas had never intended to accept the Dawn Corp as allies. They knew the Dawn Corp’s security and fighting power were so lacking it would only hold them back. So instead they had called them to a convenient planet to turn them into zombies.

Since zombies didn’t communicate, there would be no issues with security. Moreover, they fought on instinct, so the lack of training didn’t mean anything. The air conditioning had been stopped so that the waste wouldn’t escape outside. At the moment, it hadn’t spread through the air, but it could still spread from splashes or through small animals. The sewage had probably been sealed off as well. Of course, that wasn’t meant as a safety measure but rather to prevent the spread of the infection, which would practically broadcast their location to the empire.

“So, it’s a factory for making zombies?!” Maki couldn’t hide her astonishment. It was an evil deed so cruel that it made even her, a former executive of Darkness Rainbow, shudder in fear.

Darkness Rainbow had used zombies too, but only the dead, not those made using living people as material. Yet that was exactly what was happening here. The loose elements that were anti-government factions were being called on to be processed into zombies. It resolved a lot of problems in one fell swoop, but it wasn’t something any sane person would even think of.

Technical Difficulties

Monday, November 21st

The horde of zombies that rushed into the hangar attacked the soldiers of the Dawn Corp of Taurus Cobon. The soldiers were unarmed—since they'd been planning to go through health checks and registration, they hadn't brought any equipment with them. Their weapons and armor were in personal lockers, and the soldiers had been ambushed. Without any training, the outcome was unsurprising. It was a one-sided slaughter, and the fallen soldiers soon stood back up as zombies to attack their former comrades in arms. It was a nightmarish sight.

Deaths were piling up, and fear and panic were swelling, worsening the situation. The soldiers tried to push everyone else away and scramble for safety, but there was nowhere to run. All exits had been locked. The hangar had been sealed ahead of time, and there would be no escape until everyone was a zombie. Even so, they desperately tried to escape. They stepped over their fallen comrades and pounded on doors, screaming for help. They just wanted to survive, yet the doors wouldn't open. The increasing number of undead were killing the soldiers from one edge of the hangar to the other. Calling it a nightmare wasn't enough to describe the situation. The sight was a scene straight out of hell.

"You were right, Mackenzie," Koutarou muttered. "Hesitating for even a moment in front of Maxfern will cause something like this to happen..." Resolved, Koutarou stood up and put his hand on the sword at his waist.

"Hold on, Satomi-san! What are you going to do?!" Nana put her small hand over Koutarou's, trying to stop him from drawing his sword. She understood the purpose of his action, but there was still something she wanted to confirm first.

"I can't let this happen! I'm going to save the people who are still alive!"

"But then our presence will be exposed!"

The problem was that if Koutarou did something, their infiltration would be discovered. It would mean that everything they'd done to get there would be for nothing. Naturally, they were in danger too. If the only thing they wanted to do was beat Maxfern, then escaping without ever being discovered was what they should focus on.

"I know that! They're the enemy, and this might just be strategically wrong. But I still can't leave it like this! It's not fair! And there's no time to hesitate!"

The Dawn Corp was their enemy, and they needed to focus on the mission. Even so, Koutarou wanted to save them. Some soldiers dying in battle was inevitable—he wasn't happy about it, but he could understand—but this was different. They were suddenly being assailed by an irrational death, not to mention it was their supposed allies who had sent that death their way. No one could comprehend what was going on. To Koutarou, Maxfern and Grevanas were trampling over people's lives and dignity.

"And I'm sure that those precious to me wouldn't say it's okay to overlook this! Isn't it the same for you, Nana-san?!"

Theia, Clan, and Elfaria probably agreed. No matter how much time passed, they had the same ideals as Alaia. They would protect their citizens against pointless deaths, even those who were enemies. Sanae, Shizuka, and Kiriha wouldn't rejoice over their deaths. Consequently, the Blue Knight and Koutarou himself had the same desire. So the only thing left was to step forward without hesitation, even if it was a mistake. Just like Kenji had said.

"So lend me your strength, Nana-san!" Koutarou pleaded.

"Hehe, as long as you understand. Let's do this!" Nana replied.

Nana pulled out her beloved gun, Over the Rainbow, and threw away her disguise. There was a strong will present in her profile. Like Koutarou said, she wanted to help too. But she didn't want to let emotions get the better of them and push them into making a mistake. So she had needed to confirm that it wasn't a choice they would regret.

The result was precisely what she had expected. No, Koutarou's answer had *exceeded* her expectations. His answer had filled her with motivation.

“Aren’t you going to say something like that to me, Satomi-kun?” Maki asked mischievously. Her clear eyes told Koutarou that she understood everything, thus her reply.

“I don’t have to say anything for you to. Well, no, that’s not right.” Koutarou drew his sword. There was no longer anyone who would stop him.

Nana readied her gun next to him, and Maki faced him with her staff in hand.

“Come with me, Aika-san,” he said.

“Yes. Anywhere you go...” Maki firmly nodded with her clear eyes staring at Koutarou. Sure that their mission would fail, they resolved to save the Dawn Corp.



Since the soldiers were unarmed at the moment, it made sense for Maxfern and Grevanas to strike now. But there were exceptions to everything. Some slouches had kept their guns in their holsters instead of putting them away, so they weren't entirely unprepared. For the same reason, some were still equipped with distortion fields. The majority of those "slouches" were relatively skilled soldiers. Being armed was a daily thing for them, so they would never remove their weapons. Because of that skill, they were able to take action despite the danger.

"Those aren't humans?!"

"What are those monsters?!"

"They're moving too fast! They must be clocking in at over a hundred kilometers per hour!"

"Quit talking and start shooting! The people in the front won't be able to hold out!"

Most soldiers were panicking, but some were starting to focus. They gathered together and took up formation. Those armed with metal pipes and hammers were given distortion fields and stood at the front. Those with guns stood behind them, firing at the undead. And those who were totally unarmed were even farther back. The Dawn Corp might have been a lackluster organization, but they treasured their allies, and they were desperate to make it out of the situation together.

"It's no use! I can't hit them!"

"I should have practiced shooting more!"

"Quit complaining! If you stop now, we'll be overrun!"

But the situation was terrible. The undead were attacking the panicked soldiers, so not many had joined the formation, and as expected, making noise made them bigger targets. Even so, they were just managing to keep the enemy away. The corpses were strong and the bullets fired were few. Anyone could tell that the soldiers were at a disadvantage.

Will we run out of bullets first, or will the enemies increase first? What do we

do after this?! How are we going to survive?!

The squad leader giving directions was racking his brain. The situation was awful. Their unarmed comrades were checking nearby hatches, but all of them were sealed. Despite the nightmare before them, they were unable to retreat. At this rate they were going to be wiped out.

The Liberation Army planned this from the start! They brought us here to turn us into those monsters!

The squad leader could vaguely guess why this was happening. He knew that they weren't particularly skilled. He had wanted to join the Forthorthe Liberation Army to fix that. But that wasn't what the Forthorthe Liberation Army wanted. Looking at the monsters in question, he could understand that they were something like a biological weapon and the Dawn Corp was being used to increase their numbers.

As the squad leader was about to fall into despair over that realization, a lone soldier shouted out, "You can't be serious! Is my life going to be this useless?! At least let me die fighting enemies! Why do I have to be food for monsters!"

The soldiers had all kinds of reasons to fight. Although some held their ideals close to their hearts, others struggled to live and had joined to survive. But they were all prepared to die. They knew it was all the more likely to happen because they were weak. But this kind of death wasn't what they had been prepared for. They had never imagined dying while turning into monsters. They had envisioned more meaningful deaths.

The soldier raising his voice wasn't the only one who felt that way. It was the shared feeling of all those present.

"Good. Looks like some of you still have some pep in you."

A lone young man appeared before them. He was very young, likely just having come of age, maybe even a little younger. In his hand was an old-fashioned knight's sword. Shockingly, a single, graceful swing of the blade mowed down several zombies that were approaching. At that moment, the decoration on the sword lit up from a reflection of light.

When he saw that, the squad leader's eyes shot wide open. "Impossible!

You're—"

The ornate but subdued decoration was recognizable to every Forthorthian. The squad captain immediately looked at the face of its owner. Just like the decoration, every Forthorthian knew it.

"The Blue Knight! It's the Blue Knight?!"

"There's no way the Blue Knight would be in a place like this!"

"Then come over here and see for yourself!"

As the soldiers noticed him, more and more voices sounded, but they were confused. They didn't understand the situation or why the Blue Knight was there. Logically, they could conclude that the Blue Knight had come to attack them, and after reaching that conclusion, they turned their guns on him.

"Calm down. If you shoot me, you'll run out of bullets! Use them to defeat those monsters!" Koutarou instructed.

"But you're the enemy!"

"Yeah!"

"Is now really the time for that?! Do you want them to eat you alive?!" With those words, he managed to stop the soldiers. They understood how bad the situation was; even if they took Koutarou down, the undead would still be there. Even if they succeeded in killing Koutarou, it would be for nothing.

"If you don't want that fate, then lend me a hand! We'll take them down together!"

"Who would want to team up with you?!"

"Yeah, you're just the royal family's dog!"

They could understand reason, but their emotions got in the way. The Blue Knight telling them to cooperate wasn't going to convince them so easily, and the soldiers voiced their objections.

"You don't have the time to say something like that!" Koutarou said and slashed with Signaltin. When he did, the hatch to the ship was split in two. The hatch the soldiers had been unable to budge was easily opened. "Decide who

you're going to fight right here! I can't let those things get outside! So they have to all be defeated here and now!" He raised his voice once more, turning his back to the hatch and facing the soldiers again. "What are you going to do?! You didn't come to join the army just to die here, did you?!"

"Fine... We'll cooperate with you." The squad leader made his decision in place of the soldiers, who had frozen where they were. He decided to work with Koutarou.

"Squad leader, are you serious?!"

"Calm down! I feel the same way you do! But he's right, we can't let these things get outside! Nor do I even want to think about becoming one of them!"

He didn't want to entertain the idea of working with the Blue Knight, but right now it was absolutely necessary. The soldiers had joined the Dawn Corp for all kinds of reasons, but they worked to free Forthorthe from the grasp of the royal families and create a better world. Considering that, they couldn't afford the zombies—not that they knew what they were—getting outside. If they multiplied, it was clear the world would be a worse place. Moreover, the Dawn Corp dying and becoming part of that catastrophe was out of the question. Though it was a difficult decision, joining forces with the Blue Knight was preferable to that.

"However, I will tell you this, Blue Knight! Our cooperation will only be temporary! Once this is over, we will return to being enemies!"

"That's fine. I won't hold back when that happens either," Koutarou retorted.

"Then it's decided! Men, go get your weapons! We're fighting back!"

"Yeah!"

The soldiers made up their minds as well and lowered the weapons they had trained on Koutarou. They then entered the hatch he had cut open. Inside the ship were the weapons they'd stored. As they entered, their expressions were somewhat brighter than before. If they got their weapons and worked with the Blue Knight, they might be able to succeed. A small hope budded in their chests.

After Koutarou joined the soldiers, their defense fell for a while. Soldiers at the front had left to get their weapons ready, but the enemy wasn't going to

wait. Manpower was necessary to fill the holes the soldiers left, which was what Maki and Nana were doing.

“The soldiers are coming back.” Nana glanced behind her and confirmed while she repeatedly fired Over the Rainbow and defeated the undead. Soldiers with distortion fields and laser rifles were starting to gather.

“Satomi-kun too.” Maki nodded, having transformed her staff into a great sword, which she used to cleave through their foes.

That was when Koutarou ran over to them. “Sorry to keep you two waiting! You’ve been a huge help!” he said.

He had been protecting the hatch, since if the zombies got in, the soldiers would be wiped out. But once they had managed to arm themselves, Koutarou left the defense to them and headed for the two girls.

“And this is the squad leader for these men... Um, I didn’t get your name yet.”

“It’s Barklane. Nice to— No, never mind.” Barklane stopped himself from telling the girls it was nice to meet them. He had quickly realized they were originally his enemies and swallowed his words.

“Nice to meet you, Barklane-san. I am Nana.”

“Hello, you can call me Maki.”

The girls, however, had no problem being friendly, greeting him with smiles. They no longer thought of him as an enemy.

Are these people sane? Barklane was puzzled by the situation. The Blue Knight and the two girls serving him had easily welcomed him and his men. However, the Blue Knight was the symbol of the royal families’ military force, and Barklane’s group was part of an anti-government force that was drawing its blade on the royal families. They were enemies by nature and therefore had to be wary of one another.

“Does it strike you as strange?”

Maki’s words sent a chill down his spine.

Can this girl read my mind?!

Barklane's bearded face twisted in shock. Maki could only read his hesitant surface feelings, but through good timing and a careful choice of words, she had surprised him.

"I was the same. In the past, I was Satomi-kun's—um, His Excellency the Blue Knight's enemy."

"What?!"

Her words surprised him even more. Like him, Maki had once opposed the Blue Knight. That was a big shock. But what shocked him the most was what she said next.

"To be honest, the princess was too."

"Impossible!"

If Maki was speaking the truth, the Blue Knight had opposed the royal families at first. But Barklane had no idea how he had then become their protector.

"Barklane, how is the situation on your warship?"

His surprise lasted only for a few seconds as the Blue Knight in question called out to him and he remembered their dire situation. Now wasn't the time to worry about relationships.

"I just received a report from my men who went inside. It seems it is still locked under the traffic control's authority. We won't be able to move it anytime soon."

Like Earth airplanes, Forthorthe spaceships had automatic mechanisms for landing and entering ports. Control of the craft was temporarily given to traffic control. Normally, that control could be returned with the press of a button, but it had been locked down when control was handed over, so it would be a lot of work to unlock it. It wasn't something that could be done in the middle of a battle.

"Then they really were planning on doing this from the start..." Koutarou's expression turned severe as he heard the report. Measures had been taken to keep the Dawn Corp from escaping.

"We'll need to make a bold move. What are you thinking, Blue Knight?"

Barklane asked.

If left alone, the unarmed soldiers would die and the enemy would only multiply. He wanted to use the warship's weaponry to deal with the undead, but it had been disabled ahead of time, so some other plan was necessary.

"We will lock them down, and you guys finish them off," Koutarou stated.

Using his and the girls' strength to stop the enemy and having the soldiers' firepower finish them off was a simple diversion tactic, but it would be effective here.

"We might shoot you, though," Barklane warned him. They might have temporarily become allies, but they still had strong feelings about Koutarou, so some might turn their guns on him and the girls.

"Do whatever you want. But in return, you'll have to take responsibility for it by wiping out the rest of these." Koutarou was well aware of the risks, but he didn't have time to worry about it. Their top priority was saving the soldiers who were in danger and stopping the zombies from escaping. Trying to care about anything else right now would just increase the number of victims.

"Understood. We'll take down as many as we can," Barklane conceded.

"I'll leave it to you. Now let's go, you two!" Koutarou said and started walking with Signaltin in hand.

The horde of zombies had grown by absorbing a lot of the soldiers, and they were gradually shifting their focus to Koutarou and those working with him. The horde needed to be stopped no matter what.

"This is where it gets serious," Nana remarked. Her beloved gun in hand, she followed after Koutarou. Right now he wasn't wearing his usual armor, so he needed someone to cover his back more than usual, and Nana would do exactly that even if it cost her her life.

"We'll leave the rest in your hands." Maki slightly bowed her head to Barklane and then followed the other two.

The Blue Knight seems quite different from what I've heard...

All kinds of rumors had floated around in the Dawn Corp. Like how he was a

merciless monster who slaughtered all who stood in his path, or a demon that specialized in trickery. In general it was nothing but negative rumors. However, the Blue Knight in front of him gave off a completely different impression. If anything, it felt like the good rumors that Barklane and the others had dismissed as propaganda were closer to the truth.

“All hands, move forward in attack formation! The Blue Knight will stop our enemy! You will shoot them when they’re stopped! Whatever you do, don’t hit our allies!” Barklane shouted.

“Does that include the Blue Knight?” a soldier asked.

“As much as I hate it, he is on our side for now. If you shoot him, we will die here too.”

“I understand. Registering the Blue Knight and the other two as friendlies on our identification signal.”

Having met Koutarou directly, the other soldiers felt some confusion, just like Barklane. At the very least, it didn’t seem like most of them would shoot at Koutarou regardless.

The zombies had been created by the waste that Grevanas had. Upon coming into contact with living or dead people, it created negative spiritual energy in their bodies, transforming them into undead. More waste was created inside the corpses, which would increase in number as they came into contact with different people. Since that was how they multiplied, they had a tendency to be attracted to positive—in other words, normal—spiritual energy. They wanted to infect living creatures with positive spiritual energy, and overly powerful spiritual energy had the power to destroy the waste. For those two reasons, those with positive spiritual energy were easily overcome. Essentially, those with strong psychic powers could serve as a lure to draw the undead in.

“We should put the spiritual energy generator in my body into overdrive.” The first thing that came to Nana’s mind was using the spiritual energy generator in her artificial limbs. They typically ran on batteries, but they had a generator as a supplemental power source. By putting that into overdrive, they could generate a large amount of spiritual energy which should attract the zombies.

“It’s dangerous for you to be the decoy when your weapon is a gun. Not to mention the strain it puts on you is dangerous. I will do it.” Koutarou rejected her proposal. With a horde of enemies pressing down on them, they needed someone who could cleave through them, which Nana would struggle to do with a gun. Moreover, when the generator was in overdrive, it was unstable. He was worried about her body.

“But...” Nana had largely suggested she be the decoy because she didn’t want Koutarou to do it. So she wasn’t backing down. She was being very emotional for a genius.

“I know how you feel, but Satomi-kun is right. It would be better for you and me to protect him.”

When Maki, who made protecting Koutarou her top priority, told Nana the same thing, she realized that she was being unreasonably selfish.

“Okay, let’s go with that,” Nana relented. She regretfully dropped her shoulders before slapping her cheeks and pulling herself back together.

After seeing Nana ready her gun, Koutarou stepped forward. “I’m going. I’ll leave the backup to you!”

“Be careful, Satomi-kun!” Maki pleaded.

“We have your back, so don’t worry!”

Maki and Nana kept some distance from him as they followed. Having Koutarou at the front with the two girls backing him up was the most stable formation.

“They’ve multiplied a lot... We have to stop this before the soldiers are wiped out...”

There were a lot of zombies in front of them. Most had their backs to him, attacking the defenseless forces. The panicked soldiers’ screams were attracting them.

“Come at me!”

The zombies suddenly turned around to look at Koutarou, or rather, the spiritual energy that was gathering in his left hand. In the blink of an eye, they

started dashing straight at Koutarou. From ten to twenty, their numbers increased. More than half of the undead attacking the soldiers began running toward Koutarou.

“How about this!” Seeing them gather, Koutarou detonated the spiritual energy in his hand. To a normal human it merely looked like a little light, but to zombies that saw everything with Spirit Vision, it was like staring straight into the sun.

“Gyaaaaaaaaaahh!”

Deprived of their vision, they screamed, although they didn’t stop moving.

“Summon Strangler Vine - Modifier - Area Effect - Large.”

Maki’s spell put a stop to them. They had run into vines that had suddenly sprouted in front of them. The vines were thorny and slithered like snakes. The undead were entangled by the vines and immobilized. If they hadn’t been blinded, they might have been able to avoid the magic, but since they’d been blinded, the majority of them were caught.

“Good job, Aika-san! Keep it up!” Koutarou praised her.

“Yes!” Maki had conjured the vines with her spell, and combined with Koutarou’s detonation of spiritual energy, the enemy had been stopped just as she’d hoped. Not all of them had been entangled, though. Some were still outside of the effective area, and as they got their vision back, they headed straight for Koutarou again.

“The rest is up to me!” Nana was in charge of taking down those that hadn’t been caught. Zombies moved fast, but they were still partially blind. Moreover, she fired spiritual energy bullets, which could home in on targets to some degree. Coupled with her skills, she was able to take down their foes one after another.

“That’s a former genius magical girl for you...”

Koutarou smiled and swung Signaltin. Since Nana was taking down the enemies to his sides, he could focus on the ones in front of him. With the shock wave magic imbued into the sword, he could send the zombies flying. Normally, Saguratin would be more effective, but that wasn’t going to work this time.

Since there were a large number of them, Koutarou needed to be able to defeat entire groups, and Saguratin was also constantly releasing spiritual energy, which would make him stand out too much, making it difficult to be a decoy. If he only wanted to draw in the enemy when he desired, he would need to wield Signaltin and use his left hand to gather spiritual energy.

“Fire all at once! Don’t let this chance go to waste!”

The soldiers helped to make up for the lack of firepower. They were finishing off the zombies caught in the vines, as well as the ones Koutarou and the others had missed. Their cooperation was exceedingly effective, and the enemies were dropping like flies.

As more of the zombies were wiped out, Koutarou’s group was able to rescue some survivors. There were only a dozen or so at the moment, but more and more were being saved. Combined with the soldiers from the start, there were now several dozen soldiers. But it wasn’t all good news. As the rescue proceeded, they caught the attention of a certain individual.

“Well, this is indeed looking interesting. You did well to notice, Grevanas.”

“Ohohoho! I checked the cameras after realizing that the processing hadn’t been completed as expected and discovered them.”

Once Koutarou had defeated a number of zombies, a large monitor installed in the hangar they were trapped in lit up, revealing two people. When he saw them, he forgot that he was in the middle of a battle.

“Maxfern?!”

On the screen was Ralgwin, but even through a monitor Koutarou could immediately see the hatred and desire burning in his eyes, which didn’t belong to Ralgwin, but to Violbarum Maxfern, a man whose ambition had led him to almost destroy Forthorthe.

“How nostalgic! Blue Knight? How long has it been, two thousand years or so?”

Maxfern laughed with Ralgwin’s face. Yet it didn’t feel the slightest bit like Ralgwin to Koutarou. If anything, it only strengthened his impression that Maxfern really was back.

“It’s not the slightest bit nostalgic for me,” Koutarou retorted.

“Apparently it hasn’t been more than a couple of years for you. How irritating. I would love to give you a taste of the hardship we endured.”

Maxfern’s twisted face distorted into a terrible, evil, and abhorrent expression. Whether that was from the hardships they’d endured or the influence of being forcibly resurrected two thousand years later, Koutarou had no way of knowing.

“So you’re going to challenge me and the royal families again?”

“But of course! I have longed for this moment for so long! Ever since arriving in the wasteland you banished me to with no way of returning home! The dream of trampling your corpse and forcing the royals to the ground was the dream I clung to until the day I died!”

Maxfern’s eyes shone with his dream. But it was anything but a positive dream. It was a terribly dark dream that clung to him and burned.

“After two thousand years I finally have a chance to fulfill that dream! Yet you think you can avoid challenging me, Blue Knight?!”

Maxfern and his alchemists had been banished by Koutarou and Clan to Earth ten thousand years in the past. The despair they’d felt had been overwhelming. Earth had still been in the remnants of the Ice Age when winters were harsh. Used to living in luxury in a castle, they had been forced to live in a cavern to survive the cold. They’d had no decent food and were frequently attacked by wildlife and locals. For people from a developed civilization, it was an overly harsh world, and many of them had perished. Yet they’d still managed to survive through the power of technology and alchemy—the beginning of spiritual energy technology.

Even so, they’d found no way to return home. At that point, they had put their focus on trying to survive in this new world, but Maxfern was different. He never abandoned his wish to return. To take revenge on the Blue Knight and the royal families and steal Forthorthe for himself. His wish had endured, even as he grew old and sick, unable to walk on his own. Until he drew his last breath. He’d died cursing the royal families, and especially the Blue Knight. His dream of trampling his enemies had lasted until his death.

“I will never let you fulfill that dream.” Contrary to Maxfern, who was having an emotional outburst, Koutarou’s words were quiet.

I understand, Satomi-kun. We just need to defeat this guy... Maki thought to herself while mowing down zombies that were trying to jump on Koutarou. Maki knew that the angrier Koutarou was, the quieter he became. And it was rare to see him this angry. Seeing that, she was convinced that Maxfern was exceedingly dangerous and couldn’t be ignored.

“Can you stop me this time, Blue Knight? Unlike last time, there’s no difference in strength now! Hahahaha, no matter how you try, Forthorthe will be consumed by the flames of war!”

“No, nothing about you has changed. Including your end.”

“Then try it, Blue Knight! This time, I will steal everything from you! You will not be able to protect anything!”

So far, every enemy had had a line they wouldn’t cross. Even the brutal Vandarion had treasured Ralgwin and his family. But Maxfern was different. He could do something others would hesitate to do without a care in the world. That much was clear just from looking at the state of the hangar. Maxfern—the greatest enemy of Koutarou and the royal families—was back.

Barklane had been watching the two, but what confused him was how Maxfern, who he saw as Ralgwin, was acting completely different from when he had publicly declared war. It was like a whole new person was displaying his hatred for the Blue Knight. What confused him even more was the truth of their current battle, which Maxfern himself spoke of.

“Why would you do something like this, Maxfern?!”

“Haha, we were struggling with how to handle these anti-government forces. Sure, we need soldiers, more than anything. But training takes time and money, not to mention their security is lax, as shown by your presence here. It is clear what would happen if they were taken to an important base, don’t you think?”

“So you’d turn them into monsters?! To save on time and money?!”

“It’s two birds, one stone. We will save on effort, and there is no fear of information leaking. No, now that they’ve brought you here, it’s three birds

with one stone.”

Barklane had been suspicious that the air conditioning had been shut off so quickly. Not to mention that if an enemy was attacking, there would have been no need to lock down the destroyer. So he’d had his suspicions, but he had assumed that his allies would never do such a thing. Hearing the truth from Maxfern’s mouth, his trust for his allies was shattered. There was no longer any doubt that joining the Forthorthe Liberation Army had been a lure to draw in the Dawn Corp and turn them into biological weapons.

“I need to decide who we are supposed to fight...” he mumbled.

“Squad leader?”

“No, it’s nothing. Let us survive this, men!”

“Hear, hear!”

“We’ll pass on dying in such a stupid fight!”

One more thing was clear. Maxfern’s words meant that he planned on killing everyone present. Having revealed such a fatal truth, the only way to keep the secret was to kill everyone who had heard it. Barklane and his men were well aware of that and resolved themselves to an even fiercer fight.

Barklane’s prediction was spot on. After Maxfern revealed the truth, more biological weapons broke into the hangar. But they looked quite different from what one might expect. At first glance, they looked like fully armed modern soldiers to Koutarou.

“What are those soldiers...” Koutarou was perplexed by their appearance. He couldn’t understand why normal soldiers would be sent in after the waste. Zombies didn’t distinguish between friend and foe, so these new arrivals would be attacked too.

“Excellent things are often simple, Blue Knight. Just like that PAF that uses force fields for artificial limbs,” Grevanas laughed, satisfied with their reaction.

At those words, Koutarou took another look at the new soldiers. “What?! Those are living soldiers?! You armed them?!”

He could see negative spiritual energy squirming inside of them. They were

also zombies. But he didn't understand the point in arming ones that moved purely on instinct. Even with guns, they would use them as makeshift clubs at best.

"That's not right, Satomi!" Maki corrected Koutarou. As an excellent magician, she could see something else. "He is using magic to control them! They used mind manipulation magic to burn the model of a soldier's movement into them!"

Maki could see the indigo mana of the spells she specialized in. She could also see the purple mana of necromancy. Being able to move on instinct meant that these undead had an ego. So unlike zombies made from magic, mind manipulation spells worked on them. That meant their movements could be modeled on the behavioral patterns of a soldier, just like skeletons. Maki couldn't make a detailed analysis at the moment, but she was convinced of it after seeing how the mana flowed.

"You are correct. It would appear that you have a knack for this," Grevanas confirmed. He seemed to be enjoying that a magician had been able to see through his spell. But that was all the more reason for him to act fast, and he moved to attack. "Go on, give the Blue Knight a grand welcome!"

The undead soldiers spread out and prepared to fire. Seeing that, Koutarou's eyes opened wide.

"They're fast! What is with this speed?!" He was shocked by how quickly they spread out. Despite being fully armed, they moved just as fast as the zombies. It took no time at all for them to enter a stable firing position.

The undead soldiers opened fire without hesitation. Their timing was perfectly synchronized, and Koutarou was caught in their assault.

"Dammit, they're using special bullets too!" He hadn't worn his armor because it would have gotten in the way of their infiltration, but he did have a military-grade PAF. However, its guard was broken in an instant. Their aim was abnormally accurate, and they perfectly tracked him. The bullets were also special, using spiritual energy and magic. So even a military-grade PAF only bought him enough time to dodge. If Koutarou's reaction had been just a little slower, he would have been killed then and there.

“These soldiers are pretty good, aren’t they?”

Grevanas was being more talkative than normal, like a child bragging about his toy.

“Not many soldiers can react as fast as these. They also have some consciousness left, so they can be flexible when new situations arise.”

Grevanas had a reason to brag. It sounded simple to use magic to make zombies behave like soldiers, but it was exceedingly complicated. Magic was used to combine a zombie’s speed and reaction with the obedience and cooperation of soldiers to make the best of both.

“Moreover, they use human equipment, so the logistics are unchanged. But their biggest flaw is their inability to infect their victims with the same fighting power.”

These undead soldiers could use weapons and armor without needing them to be specially made. They could use the same weapons the Dawn Corp’s soldiers were using and become powerful soldiers. Because the equipment was compatible, logistics could continue as normal, making them easy to deploy for a long time on the front. If they had a weakness, it was that even if they touched a human, they would only create a normal zombie. The additional magic wouldn’t spread. But it wasn’t like equipment multiplied, so that wasn’t a big deal.

The undead soldiers opened fire once again. But this time they weren’t after Koutarou. Realizing it would be disadvantageous to go after him, they were aiming for the Dawn Corp behind him instead. By eliminating them first, the number of zombies would increase faster.

“Whoa!”

“Dunbark! Are you okay?!”

“They’re hitting from this distance— Agh!”

The zombies made use of cover and were extremely accurate. So the unskilled Dawn Corp was being one-sidedly defeated.

“Dammit, at this rate the soldiers will be wiped out!”

Koutarou, Maki, and Nana could fight against the undead, but the Dawn Corp soldiers couldn't. The undead's abilities were on a different level. They surpassed the living soldiers in every regard, and there was no way of reversing the situation. That made it an exceedingly difficult scenario for Koutarou and the girls.

"How does it feel, Blue Knight? This is how we felt whenever we fought against you. It fills you with despair, doesn't it? Hahahaha, ahahahaha!"

Maxfern laughed in satisfaction as he watched them struggle, just like when Grevanas had resurrected and fought them, or in the final battle two thousand years ago, or when Dextro had captured Alaia with a steel giant. Despite foolproof plans that had been sure to bring them victory, they had never worked against Koutarou's side. But this time was different. If they set up for victory, they could expect to win. The large gap between the two sides in the past had finally been bridged after two thousand years. The fact excited Maxfern and he couldn't stop laughing.

"Satomi-kun, let's go back the soldiers up!" Maki suggested.

"I will go and crush those zombies," Nana offered.

Koutarou responded, "All right, don't force yourselves, you—"

"Not so fast," interrupted Grevanas. "I figured you would do that. So I have prepared a different opponent for you. Well, it is very much a failure as a weapon..."

The actions they wanted to take were the same ones Maxfern and Grevanas had taken, providing backup to keep the front from collapsing. It was only natural, which was why Grevanas could predict them.

A large hatch in the floor of the hangar opened up to reveal a metallic wall ten meters high. With large fixtures, it was supporting a metallic dragon.

"What is this... The mechanical dragon from back then?" Koutarou asked.

"It is pretty small for that. It looks more like an antipersonnel weapon?" Nana suggested.

The mechanical dragon looked like the one that Vandarion had controlled in

the past, but it wasn't as big. And the weapons it had equipped weren't meant for mobile weapons, but for people. The mind naturally turned to helicopters or tanks.

"I can sense mana from it too. I have a bad feeling about this, Satomi-kun..." Maki said anxiously. She sensed something abnormal about the dragon. There was mana, but the way the dragon was fixed was bizarre. Rather than being put up for maintenance, it was more like it was chained up to be restrained.

"You really do have a good eye, girl." Seeing Maki's reaction, Grevanas laughed in satisfaction once more. "No matter how strong it may be, I have no interest in a weapon that can't be controlled. Without control it is meaningless. We are trying to lay claim to Forthorthe, after all. But in the process of making controllable weapons, some failures that are only useful in particular situations occur," Grevanas explained.

With that, the fixtures were released and the dragon's generator started up, filling its body with energy. Before long, its eyes started glowing red and it opened its mouth and roared.

"I put it in contact with the waste in order to gain control of its nervous system, but that was a complete failure. It is unable to distinguish between friend and foe. But it can differentiate between the undead and living, which is why I had it appear here," Grevanas explained.

The dragon had been made in the process of creating undead soldiers. It was a test model for the creation of weapons using the waste. The dragon had magic enhancing it, but no magic was used to control it. It had been a test to enhance machines with the waste. Or, more specifically, directly connecting the mind of a human infected by the waste with the fire control system in an attempt to use its advanced recognition and reaction speed. It had been made in the hopes of faster tracking and faster actions, but in the end it had been rejected.

Since it used a special dragon series as its base, its performance was above expectations. But using the nervous system of a zombie had backfired, as it was unable to distinguish between friend and foe. What one wanted from a weapon was destruction that could be controlled. If everything was destroyed, there

was no point in battle, in which case they might as well just use bombs. It had been chained up because it couldn't be controlled. Originally the dragon had been intended to remain sealed until its nervous system rotted, without ever activating.

"The cause of its failure is that it prioritizes those with large amounts of spiritual energy as targets. It doesn't care whose side the target is on. But right now, it will only target one person," Grevanas gloated. In just this moment, he knew who the dragon would target, which was just what he hoped for as he released its seal.

"ROOOOOAAAAAAR!" The giant dragon stared at Koutarou and roared once more. It rejoiced over finally being freed, having found prey.

"Me..." Koutarou sighed.

"Indeed! You have the most spiritual energy out of anyone here! In other words, at this one moment, it will function as a weapon, Blue Knight!"

If there was someone on a battlefield with a lot of spiritual energy that they wanted removed, that was the only time the condition for the dragon to function as a weapon was fulfilled. Once that target was eliminated, the dragon could self-destruct. All they had to do was attach a bomb to the nervous system. In other words, the mechanical dragon's sole purpose was killing psychics. But it cost far too much unless it was a very important target. For example, the Blue Knight.

"Now, run wild, Elder Dragon Type Zero! I will witness your final battle!"

"ROOOOAAAAAAR!"

Released from all restraints, the giant mechanical dragon, Elder Dragon Type Zero, attacked Koutarou. It moved at terrifying speed. If a normal person had been riding it, the acceleration would have knocked them out.

As Koutarou was being attacked by Type Zero, the Dawn Corp was in a critical situation. Barklane was desperate to escape.

"Fall back and use cover! You will only get sniped in the open!" he shouted.

"But if we move away our accuracy will—"

“Now’s not the time for that! What good will accuracy be if you’re dead?!”

“Understood! You heard him! Everyone fall back! Get some distance!”

While under fire from the undead, Barklane made the decision to fall back. They had advanced to wipe out the zombies, but if they stayed in a place where there was no cover, they would just be easy targets. First they had to fall back to cover and protect themselves. The soldiers immediately followed orders and retreated while dragging their injured comrades.

“What about the Blue Knight?!”

“He is being attacked by the dragon-type mobile weapon and can’t move!”

“Looks like we can’t count on him for reinforcement.”

Barklane glanced over at Koutarou while falling back. Koutarou was fighting a mechanical dragon with just a knight’s sword. The situation looked grim. It was clear to anyone that he was being overwhelmed.

“If anything, it’s hard to believe that he’s still alive...”

“Did you say something, sir?”

“No, it was nothing. More importantly, have those with nothing else to do find any kind of launchers! We won’t be able to beat those soldiers with a weapon we need to aim with!”

“At once, sir!”

Barklane and his soldiers had avoided using explosives. As their comrades were being attacked by zombies, there was a chance they could get caught up in the fight. But in their current situation, they needed to be prepared for that. Now that the Blue Knight couldn’t help, if Barklane and his men were wiped out, so too would be their allies. So the undead soldiers needed to be taken out before that happened. He didn’t know if explosives could take out the undead, but he resolved himself to use them.

Ever since the battle had begun, Koutarou had been stuck on the defensive. The enemy’s attacks were coming too fast, and it was a little different from the Type One Revised that he had fought in the past. The Type One Revised had

analyzed information to predict his moves, but Type Zero read Koutarou's spiritual energy to make the first move. So Type Zero was even faster, and Koutarou was stuck merely blocking its attacks.

“ROOOOOOAAAAAR!”

The Type Zero roared and opened its mouth wide to fire a laser cannon. The light-based laser attack hit at the same moment the target could see it. It was a fitting weapon for Type Zero, which had excellent reflexes and tracking abilities.

“Ugh, I'm counting on you, Signaltin!”

Koutarou was unable to dodge and instead unleashed the mana within Signaltin. The sword answered his wishes and activated a defense spell and a smoke screen. The barrier protected him while the smoke screen greatly weakened the laser. Through that, the PAF's defenses were able to hold up.

“Information Message. PAF's remaining battery at sixty percent,” the rabbit at Koutarou's feet reported. Since he didn't have the time to check the battery himself, he was grateful for the report.

“I won't be able to deal with that attack many times!”

Thirty percent of the battery had been drained by a single attack. And that was with two spells adding to the defense. As expected, going up against a ten-meter-tall giant without his armor was difficult.

“Grevanas has made a real monster!” Koutarou exclaimed.

“I take offense to that. There are not many monsters quite like you. We are desperately trying to make countermeasures for you,” Grevanas stated.

To him, Koutarou had used forbidden moves first. Koutarou was armed with science and spiritual energy technology that hadn't existed two thousand years ago. So it was only natural that they would want the power to stand up against him.

“That's your one-sided interpretation!” Koutarou yelled.

“Satomi-kun!” Maki called out.

“Whoa!”

There was more than just Type Zero targeting him. The zombies were still charging him, and the undead soldiers would shoot at any opening they saw. This time a group of them attacked Koutarou, which required that he use his sword to deal with them. Koutarou's blade sent them flying. But that was only the beginning of the problem.

“ROOOOOAAAAR!”

The instant his attention shifted to the zombies, Type Zero spun around to attack with its tail. Koutarou was struck hard by the tail whip and struggled to breathe.

“Ugh!”

“Satomi-san!” Nana yelled.

“Alert Message, PAF's defensive functions have seized. The remaining battery is almost at zero percent,” the rabbit reported.

“Ugh, dammit...”

Fortunately, he'd been protected from instant death in exchange for the PAF's remaining battery. But he wouldn't get another chance. After following his will and forcibly pushing Koutarou's body up, the PAF quietly ceased to function.

This is bad... To think they had a secret weapon like this...

Koutarou readied his sword while clicking his tongue in his mind. Not even they had imagined this was a factory for biological weapons with hidden test equipment. They had underestimated how evil Maxfern and Grevanas really were. But it wasn't a miss on their end. Who could imagine someone taking such wicked means in a modern war? It went against the rules of engagement, be it on Earth or Forthorthe.

“Hahahaha, it's finally time to pay the piper, Blue Knight! I never imagined the conclusion would come this quickly!” Maxfern laughed. He had figured that the battle against Koutarou and the royal families would be drawn out. One of his goals was to hurt the people through a long war. Yet, he hadn't even set a trap; Koutarou and the others had walked into danger themselves. Maxfern couldn't stop himself from laughing. At the same time, it did feel like a bit of a letdown.

“But I would be very grateful if you died here. You can leisurely watch our domination from hell!”

Maxfern was convinced of his victory. They were even on a technological level, and Koutarou had committed a strategic blunder. With those two factors, he was certain of success. Even Koutarou had to acknowledge that. But that was only if the circumstances remained the same.

“I’ve kept you waiting, huh, Koutarou?”

“You’re finally here!”

At last the moment Koutarou had been waiting for came as Theia’s voice sounded through the comms. The base was being jammed in order to keep the Dawn Corp from being able to send any messages. Because of that, radio waves and gravity waves had been jammed from the start, and mana and spiritual energy had been blocked once combat had begun. So Koutarou had been unable to use Signaltin to contact Harumi. Yet despite that, Theia’s voice could be heard because she was close enough to get through the jamming.

“Impossible! How did you do it?!” Grevanas’s expression twisted. He couldn’t believe it. There was no way that anyone from the outside should have been able to know Koutarou’s group was in danger.

“It was simple, really. Something managed to escape this location. That is all there was to it.” Clan shrugged as if to say it was nothing.

The small rabbit drone that Ruth’s rabbit had ejected had managed to get outside. And while they hadn’t been able to directly communicate, Harumi had felt that Signaltin’s mana was being used. The contract of the sword connected them through dimensions. With those two sources of information, the girls had been able to determine that their friends were in danger.

“You again! The Blue Knight’s servant!” Grevanas spat with a bitter expression. Clan had gotten in his way both two thousand years ago and in the current age. She was also the one who created the bomb that had banished him. To Grevanas, Clan was just as hateful of an enemy as Koutarou.

“Be quiet, you filthy slaughterer! You should already know who I am!” Clan shouted.

“Clariosa Daora Forthorthe! You won’t get away with this, especially since you are royalty!” Grevanas exclaimed. He was normally calm, but right now he bared his true emotions.

That was when something pierced through the roof of the hangar and entered.

“What?!” he shouted in surprise.

“I have made a new weapon,” Clan explained.

What had entered was the five-meter-tall mobile weapon Warlord III Rev. Its armor had been painted a vivid blue just for Koutarou’s use, and its backpack had an indigo stripe.

“Warlord III Rev, Navy Line...this craft will banish you again!” Clan triumphantly said.



“You little brat, watch your mouth!”

Although Warlord III Rev had undergone significant modifications that had almost completely changed it, it was technically a weapon made by Elexis and not Clan herself. But there was no reason to tell that to Grevanas and Maxfern, who were raging at her words.

After launching Warlord III Rev at the location Sanae had pointed out, Ruth launched a drone that originally accompanied infantry. Its job was to deploy a distortion field to close the hole opened by Warlord III Rev.

“Ohohohoho, I wonder how long that dragon of yours will last!” Clan laughed.

“Grevanas, destroy that thing and shut her up!” Maxfern commanded.

“As you wish!” Grevanas said.

“Your Highness, the hole has been sealed! There is no fear of the waste getting through,” Ruth reported. Fortunately, she was able to do her work thanks to Clan attracting all of the attention. That was in part due to Maxfern and Grevanas being elsewhere and unable to get a full grasp of the situation. While reporting to Theia, Ruth lightly waved to Clan, who waved back without saying anything.

“Good job, you two! Ruth, pass the weapons control system to me! We have guests! Leave things below to Koutarou and the others, and we’ll handle this!” Theia said.

“As you wish, My Princess!”

Although Maxfern and Grevanas were using the base to create biological weapons, it was still a military base. And it had weapons for intercepting enemies. Of course, since they were using the hangars to create zombies, they only had anti-air guns. But with the Hazy Moon appearing above the base, fighters had been sent out from other places. Theia and the others would need to deal with those.

Koutarou, there might be no end to your worries...but continue forward, together with us! Theia thought.

Thanks to Sanae, she could tell what the others were fighting and what

terrible things were happening. She also knew how much it bothered Koutarou. Even so, he had to fight. Her feelings were directed toward Koutarou, but they were also meant to rouse her too.

Koutarou had been dumbfounded when Warlord III Rev had come flying through the roof. They had been fighting to keep the waste contained, so he had never expected such a thing. But he was relieved when a distortion field quickly covered up the hole.

“Koutarou, Maki, fall back!” Shizuka shouted.

“Satomi-kun, hurry! The big thing is going to attack!” Sanae added.

The biggest relief was seeing Sanae and Shizuka come out of the ship. Since it could fit two people, Kiriha had sent them over as a bonus. It wasn't their strength that relieved him, but their energetic appearance.

“Still, the other side isn't going to let themselves be defeated so easily.”

Warlord III Rev had been sent in with Sanae's Spirit Vision as a guide, but they couldn't tell exactly what was going on and had ended up landing in a kneeling position some distance away. Because of that, it had landed among the zombies and undead soldiers. In order to get on board, Koutarou had to break through.

“Those of you with the strength, forward! Back up the Blue Knight's advance!” That was when unexpected reinforcements appeared. Barklane led the Dawn Corp's soldiers to eliminate the enemies in front of them. If they hadn't retreated and preserved their strength, they wouldn't have been able to provide backup. Of course, there was a price to pay. Enemies started turning on them, and they started losing men.

“Thank you, Barklane!” Koutarou called out.

“It's not for your sake!” Barklane wasn't overly happy about helping him. Losing comrades to provide backup was vexing. But in order to save more lives, he believed it was necessary.

“That's it! That's what it means to protect your country!” Koutarou nodded and ran toward Warlord III Rev. Thanks to the backup, the enemy wasn't able to get in the way as much. Before long, he reached the craft.

“Protecting your country, huh?” Barklane muttered. “You’re saying that to an anti-government force like us...” He had been so irritated just a moment ago, but right now those feelings were starting to wane.

Koutarou got into the cockpit and sat down; Maki jumped over him and sat down in her own seat. The Navy Line had a special seating, and once seated, Maki had her back against Koutarou. She needed space to chant and make gestures, so it was a trick to create more space for her.

“All ready, Satomi-kun!” she said.

“All right. I’m bringing up the machine!” Koutarou closed the hatch and grabbed Warlord’s control stick. Warlord was already on after entering the hangar, so moving the stick made it stand up.

“Go get him, Koutarou! Beat that dragon up!” Sanae cheered.

“Hurry up and help, Satomi-kun! This dragon is as extreme as always!” Shizuka shouted.

Sanae and Shizuka had been fighting Type Zero in Koutarou’s place. No one aside from them could handle it. Even so, it wasn’t looking good for them. The Type Zero was moving too fast.

“Aika-san,” Koutarou called her name, omitting everything else.

But that alone told Maki everything she needed to know. “Yes, you can focus on fighting, Satomi-kun,” Maki said. “I will match you.”

“I’m counting on you! Now let’s go!”

After checking on Maki, Koutarou pushed Warlord forward. In its hand was a huge sword. Signalin was placed within the sword so that Koutarou could wield its power even inside the machine. He unleashed its power, covering the blade in a powerful electric field and causing it to glow.

“Eagle Eye, Lighting Reflex, Raven Wisdom.”

Maki cast spell after spell on Koutarou. Since she was just going along for the ride, she didn’t need the spells’ effects, so she was just focusing on casting. Maki cast spells to improve Koutarou’s eyesight, his reflex speed, and his thinking speed, all spells that were part of the mind manipulation magic she

specialized in. The plan was to defeat Type Zero with the wide range of enchantments and Signaltin's electricity expanding the sword's range.

“ROOOOOOOAAAAAAR!”

“Whoa now!”

As soon as Type Zero's mouth began to open, Koutarou started evading. So by the time the mouth was open, Warlord was already outside of the line of fire, and the laser hit nothing but air.

“GRRRRRRRRR!”

“Don't expect it to work time and time again!”

Koutarou also dodged the follow-up tail attack. With his enhanced eyes, he didn't overlook the moment the Type Zero's center of gravity changed while it spun.

“You're in range! Go get it, Satomi-kun!” Shizuka unconsciously cheered.

Type Zero was ten meters tall and Warlord was five meters tall, so there was a big difference in size, which also affected their effective ranges. By dodging two attacks, Koutarou successfully closed the gap.

“Right there, Koutarou, take him down!” Sanae cheered him on.

“How about thiiiisss!”

Warlord swung down its sword on the Type Zero that still hadn't stopped spinning. The giant sword draped in lighting approached the Type Zero. The tip cut into the armed carrier resembling a giant wing and cut it in half. Once detached from the dragon, the wing took all of the electricity in the attack and exploded.

“I can do this! I can fight!”

The Type Zero used the momentum of its spin to slash with its claws, and Koutarou psyched himself up while blocking it. However, Maki warned him.

“But you have to hurry, Satomi-kun! We don't have that much time!”

“Alert Message. The pilot's inputs exceed this craft's response time. The strain on this machine is great, and serious damage has been detected in the

structure.”

Warlord was unable to keep up with the enhanced Koutarou’s control. While it could fight on even footing with the Type Zero, it couldn’t withstand its own speed, causing it damage. Moreover, Warlord’s AI was unable to learn everything from Koutarou’s controls at this speed, and its responses ended up being delayed. That said, even with the strain, if Koutarou were to slow down, the Type Zero would overpower him. He needed to keep it up even if it put him at a disadvantage.

“Can you see this, Clan-san?” Nana, who was covering Warlord’s back, let out a sigh.

“Yes, it is quite dreadful, Nana...”

Warlord was already damaged to the point that the damage could be seen with the naked eye. Smoke was coming out from all over, and the joints were heating up. The cooling wasn’t enough, causing the moving parts to burn. Warlord hadn’t been made to move at speeds beyond the human limit.

“This will need some serious modifications,” Nana said.

“To think that it wouldn’t be able to keep up with the two of them...” Clan said in astonishment.

The problems were probably a result of the difference between one person’s design and someone else’s. Warlord III Rev had originally been designed by Elexis. A general purpose weapon had been customized for personal use. In comparison, the Blue Knight had been made with Koutarou in mind, and it could survive his reckless handling. It was an inevitable problem, but since Clan saw herself as Koutarou’s partner, she could only admit defeat.

“Now’s not the time to cry about it! Do something, Clan!” Koutarou shouted. He commanded Warlord to swing its sword, but the movements of its arms were slightly delayed, causing it to miss Type Zero. The heat from the engine room was spreading to the control system, slowing down the computer’s processing speed. It wouldn’t be surprising for it to shut down at any moment.

“Hahahaha, you won’t be able to defeat the Type Zero with some stopgap measures!” Grevanas laughed.

“Grevanas!”

“I was surprised when that giant appeared, but in the end it’s a weapon made for humans! My Type Zero wasn’t made with frail humans in mind from the very start! You have lost, Blue Knight!” Grevanas boasted. He had worried for a moment when Warlord began its counterattack, but he was once again convinced of his victory.

Type Zero was a test bed that didn’t have anyone piloting it, and it had been given the nervous system of a zombie. It exceeded human limits in both ways. Naturally Warlord III Rev, which had its abilities forcibly increased, would lose.

“You are taking more damage than you can deal with your increased firepower. It’s unfit to be a weapon. It’s over, Blue Knight,” Maxfern added.

While the armed carrier had been destroyed, the main part of the Type Zero had barely taken any damage. Meanwhile, smoke was rising up from all over Warlord. The difference was clear to everyone.

However, Clan had a different opinion. “I suppose I don’t have a choice; I will have to be reckless!” She used her computer at blistering speed, causing something unexpected to happen. The mobile weapon plugging up the hole above Koutarou and the others stopped moving and entered a free fall assisted by gravity.

“That girl again?! What is she planning now?!”

“You have less than ten seconds, Veltlion! Finish it within that time!”

Koutarou didn’t know what Clan was planning, but he readied Warlord’s sword once more. “Ten seconds is enough! Do it, Clan!” He was convinced that after Clan said that, he would definitely have his chance.

But Grevanas wasn’t going to sit quietly waiting for something to happen, and he had the Type Zero attack the falling mobile weapon. “Don’t let her do anything, shoot it down, Type Zeroooo!!!” A laser was fired, opening a hole in the center of the weapon.

“And then I do this!” Clan wore a fearless smile. She had expected the enemy to do that. After that it was a battle against time.

There was an explosion, but it wasn't from the mobile weapon. The small explosion was a result of the mobile weapon following Clan's orders, detaching a large tank on the outside of the craft next to Koutarou.

"Now go, Veltlion!"

"Got it!"

Koutarou charged forward. At that moment, the large tank erupted, spreading its contents everywhere.

"Information Message. The craft's temperature is out of the danger zone," the AI reported.

"Good job, Clan!" Koutarou continued his charge. Since he had been prepared for it, there was no delay.

"Impossible, what is happening?!" Maxfern had been looking forward to tearing Koutarou apart, so he couldn't believe what he was seeing, and he couldn't understand it on a technological level.

However, Grevanas, who had been alive for longer in this world, could understand. "It was a tank filled with coolant?! As an unmanned craft specialized in defense, it came equipped with a large tank. We've been had!"

The mobile weapon that had been deployed to set up a distortion field and block the hole in the roof was made for defense and came with a large generator, which in turn was equipped with a large tank of coolant for use in space. Clan had used that tank to cool down Warlord. That said, its effects wouldn't last for long, so Koutarou only had one chance. However, he had waited and believed in Clan, so he didn't hesitate.

"Looks like the difference in engineers is showing, Grevanas! My princess is a genius!" Koutarou shouted.

"Curse you! Not agaaaiin!" Grevanas's expression twisted. But then something that further distorted his expression happened.

"Mending, Cooling, Reduce Friction!"

"Temperature for all parts has reached normal levels, operating at stable levels."

Sensing what Clan was doing, Maki cast several new spells to repair, cool, and reduce the wear on Warlord. Of course, her scientific knowledge was limited, and so were the effects of her spells. But the support she provided was necessary. Thanks to her and Maki's efforts, Warlord was moving like normal again.

"Impossible! How did this happen?! I was just one step away!" Maxfern yelled.

Type Zero repeatedly attacked Warlord as it approached. Lasers, missiles, beam shotgun—all firearms to destroy highly mobile weapons, but they all missed.

"Mirror Image! Blink!"

Warlord wasn't just moving fast; there were also clones of it, and it was teleporting. All kinds of methods were being used to protect it. Meanwhile, the Type Zero had no way of stopping the approaching Warlord.

"Haaaaaaah!"

"Shield!"

Finally, Maki cast a defensive spell, which Warlord kicked off from to make an almost right-angle turn in midair, appearing right in front of Type Zero.

"ROOOOOOOAAAAAR!"

Bewildered by Warlord's movements, all the Type Zero could do was deploy a distortion field. But when faced with Signaltin glowing with lightning, it was far too unreliable.

"Go, Koutarou! Hit a home run!" Sanae cheered.

"It's oveeerrr!" Koutarou shouted.

Warlord approached like a bolt of lightning, swinging the sword down. In the next moment, fire shot out from the Warlord's right knee, and the machine tilted. The final turn had put too much strain on it, and it was at its limit.

Following that was a singular explosion. The Type Zero had been destroyed, as Warlord's last attack had cut it in half. The explosion seriously damaged the hangar, knocking out the power. Fortunately, the chamber retained its shape,

and the hole was quickly plugged up again to keep the waste from escaping. But it wasn't all good news. Maxfern and Grevanas disappeared from the monitor, and even after the emergency power was turned on, they didn't return.

"Satomi-san, we're done over here too," Nana reported.

"Phew, we're finally done..." Hearing that, Koutarou returned Signaltin to its sheath, then sat down on a nearby box with a sigh.

"I will be making my way over to you," Nana said.

"Do be careful," Koutarou warned her.

"Thank you. See you soon."

The battle had ended in their victory. Once Type Zero had been destroyed, the battle had proceeded at their pace. Once Theia had shot down the fighters, more and more reinforcements had come from the Hazy Moon. Maxfern and Grevanas had also lost any means of communication. Without commands from Grevanas, the undead soldiers were greatly weakened, and alongside the Dawn Corp, Koutarou's group had taken them all down. Nana's report was telling them that the final zombie had been defeated.

"Blue Knight." Barklane, the Dawn Corp's squad leader, came up to Koutarou. He knew the battle was over as well, but his expression was still very serious.

"Barklane, how many remain?"

"Fifty-eight."

"I see..."

The Dawn Corp had been two hundred strong when they'd arrived and had been reduced to a mere fifty-eight. Most had been turned into zombies, the rest killed in battle. Many of the survivors had been seriously injured. Considering the circumstances, fifty-eight was practically a miracle. But neither Koutarou nor Barklane felt like celebrating.

"Why are you grieving? The battle is over. We are back to being enemies." Barklane wasn't attacking Koutarou because he wanted to make things clear. They weren't allies, so Koutarou had no reason to be in pain over the soldiers' fates. If things had gone according to plan, he might have been the one to kill

them.

“Maybe. But...Her Majesty Alaia wouldn’t be happy with this outcome.” Koutarou understood that Barklane was back to being his enemy. But he believed that the kind girl he had met two thousand years ago would grieve over their deaths.

“So this is what it means to protect your country...” Barklane muttered as he saw Koutarou’s self-deprecating smile.

“What?” Koutarou had heard Barklane mutter, but not what he’d said.

“It’s nothing. I was talking to myself.” In the end, Barklane didn’t tell Koutarou. Instead, he bid him farewell. “We will be leaving now.”

“I see. See you—no, if possible, I’d like it if you didn’t appear before us again.” Next time, they would meet as enemies and Koutarou would need to defeat him. Like with Fasta, he wouldn’t be very happy if they met again.

“Shouldn’t you be capturing us?” Barklane asked. The Dawn Corp hadn’t attacked yet, but they were at least guilty of preparing for conflict. That was enough to warrant an arrest.

“I’ve had enough fighting for today. Besides, I want to stay true to myself.” Koutarou’s suggestion that they cooperate hadn’t included him arresting the survivors afterward. Barklane must have felt the same, and Koutarou wanted to respect their intentions, just like with Fasta.

“I understand. Farewell,” Barklane said.

“But leave the warship, okay?”

“Don’t worry, we don’t have anyone left who can pilot it anyway.”

“I see...” Koutarou answered.

With that, Barklane and the Dawn Corp left. Oddly enough, their hostility had waned. Even the tone of Barklane’s voice and the look in his eyes when glancing at the Imperial Army wasn’t hostile anymore.

“Is this okay with you?” Maki, who’d been next to Koutarou, asked as she watched Barklane and his men leaving.

“Yeah. Like I said before, I’ve fought enough.”

“I see.” Maki didn’t say much. Instead, she took action. Koutarou was still sitting on a box, and she hugged his head.

“Aika-san?”

“It’s not your fault. You did your best.”

“But I was only able to save fifty-eight...”

“Yes, that is a real shame...but it’s not your fault. Nobody can save everyone.”

“I know that, in my head...”

Maki started crying in place of Koutarou, who was just sitting on the box and staring at the hangar.

Elfaria's Actions

Saturday, November 26th

When Koutarou woke up, he saw Elfaria's face in front of him. With that, he remembered that the battle had ended and he was back at the Imperial Palace.

"Were you having a bad dream?"

Elfaria stroked his chest like she had done before. A short while ago, she'd discovered Koutarou sleeping in the courtyard and had stayed by his side ever since. She felt like Koutarou needed that.

"Something like that..." Koutarou tried to raise his body to talk with her. But in the process he discovered Elfaria's hand pressing on his chest and lay back down on her lap as he started talking. "Sorry, Elle. It was a swing and miss. It's not going easily."

The report should have reached her by now, but Koutarou apologized properly anyway. He and the others had gone to Taurus Cobon to get a lead on Maxfern and Grevanas, but it hadn't gone well. Because of how it was being used, the base they'd discovered wasn't much of a lead. The only thing they could call a lead was the transmission and the log, but the signal had been camouflaged by being bounced off several relay points, and not even Clan could determine its source.

"Not at all. We have learned a lot from this. So there have been results." Elfaria smiled as if to tell him that it was enough, and she stroked Koutarou's chest once more with gentle movements.

"What do you mean?"

"Our enemy will use any means necessary. There are probably several factories like that one."

"So there're a bunch of those..." Koutarou's expression turned dark. If tragedies like that were happening elsewhere too, it was a grave situation.

“But please don’t worry. Thanks to your efforts, we have learned the trends in the supplies that they bring in. Using that as a lead, we should be able to find their other bases.”

“I see, so if you find a ship carrying the same types of supplies to a planet, you’d be able to follow them, huh?”

Sure, they hadn’t found a lead on Grevanas and Maxfern. But through the logs they had discovered, they knew what kind of supplies were brought in and the routes for transporting them. Among those supplies were rare substances that would act as obvious signs. By following those, they should be able to find the other bases. In other words, they had achieved enough for Koutarou not to feel down, which was why Elfaria smiled.

“Not to mention the transport industry is very cooperative with us right now.”

Thanks to the Blue Knight-related business certification mark, transport businesses were cooperating with the government. By pulling some strings, Elfaria should gain their help tracking the rare supplies.

“How wicked you are.” Koutarou smiled wryly.

Noticing that a smile was back on his face, the nature of Elfaria’s smile changed a little. “For your—no, for my happiness, I will even become a villain.”

“The citizens beloved by you must be happy.” Koutarou had recently come to realize that Elfaria was working for the country and its people harder than he’d imagined. Her devotion reminded him of Alaia’s.

“The one I love is you, Koutarou-sama.” That didn’t mean that she didn’t love her country or people. The empress definitely loved her country and people the most. But as a woman, she loved Koutarou.

At those words, any desire to praise her vanished from Koutarou, and he let out a startled cough.

“I will protect your wishes and what you want to protect with my life.” Koutarou loved Forthorthe and the people who lived there, so in the end, and even as a woman, Elfaria would try to protect the country and people. Just as the man she loved wished for the happiness of the country and the people in it, so too did Elfaria.

Koutarou was so surprised he choked again. “L-Love?!”

Elfaria looked at him and laughed. “Hahaha...it was a joke.”

She stroked Koutarou’s chest again. But there was no way of knowing whether that was because he was gasping or because of her deep love for him. Koutarou was busy coughing and didn’t notice the movement of her hand.

“What?! You were just joking?! Don’t scare me like that...”

Elfaria’s words had sounded like the truth to him, which was why he had been surprised. But it seemed he was mistaken. She was just kidding, as usual.

“No, I was serious.”

“I won’t fall for that again.”

“Would you prefer it was a joke?”

When Elfaria said that, her eyes were serious. However, Koutarou didn’t notice and answered as usual.

“If anything...if I keep relying on you like this, I don’t think I’ll be able to recover.”

Koutarou found it strange himself, but lately he felt like he was getting drawn in by Elfaria. Like when she was smiling or wordlessly stroking his chest. It wasn’t unpleasant, but if he left himself to it, time would pass by in a flash, and he couldn’t allow that, given his position.



“So yeah, it being a joke helps.”

“I see...then I will let it be a joke for a while longer.” Elfaria smiled. She looked so happy and full of joy. And her slender fingers continued to gently stroke his chest.

“Ahahaha, I’m no match for you...” Koutarou felt like he was being drawn in even now. If it was a joke, he could leave it be, and sooner or later, it would end. So he closed his eyes as he laughed.

Losing a factory for creating zombies was a painful blow to Maxfern and Grevanas. If anything, it was more of a problem than failing to kill Koutarou.

“How incredibly vexing.” Maxfern leaned against the chair in his office with a displeased expression. The backrest was soft, but it didn’t soften his displeasure.

“Indeed. It would seem they will not just sit and wait.” Grevanas was the same. The unexpected loss was a hard blow to them. But due to a difference in personality, he didn’t show it as much as Maxfern, although the wrinkles in his forehead grew deeper.

“Even so...not bringing anti-government forces directly here was effective,” Grevanas noted.

“So they didn’t get a lead on us?” Maxfern asked.

“Once they showed up, all we had to do was cut off the base. Our caution has paid off.”

“I want soldiers, but keep any information leaks to a minimum. We will need to continue along this course for the moment.”

The silver lining was that the Imperial Army hadn’t gotten any real leads on them. Their side was turning anti-government forces into zombies to avoid information leaks, so there wasn’t any damage beyond losing the facility.

“But being on the losing end doesn’t sit right with me. We should be making a move of our own,” Maxfern grumbled. He wasn’t going to laugh off the loss of the base. He was plotting revenge in his mind. To hit the enemy so that it hurt

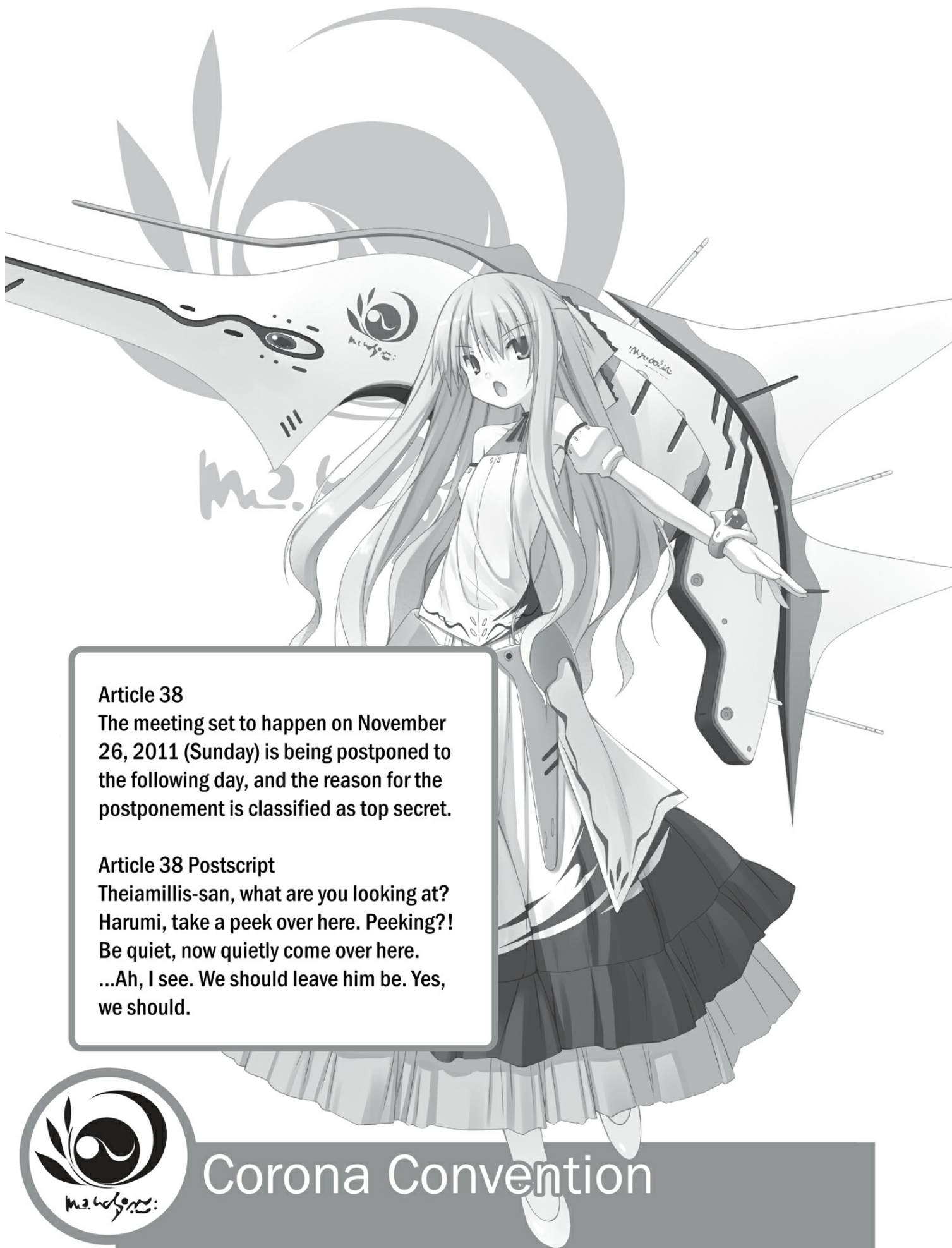
them more than the loss of the base had hurt him.

“What will you do?” Grevanas asked.

“Haha, I will go for their Achilles’ heel. They’ve put you through a lot too, haven’t they?” He then shared his plan with Grevanas.

“Yes...that is certainly where to aim!” Hearing what Maxfern had in mind, Grevanas’s dried-up face twisted into a smile. Their target included someone he had a true grudge against.

“Hahahahaha, what will you do now, Blue Knight?! Can you really protect everything?!” Maxfern laughed as he stared at a hologram displaying the faces of three people: Clan, Ruth, and Kiriha. They were the brains that supported Koutarou.



Article 38

The meeting set to happen on November 26, 2011 (Sunday) is being postponed to the following day, and the reason for the postponement is classified as top secret.

Article 38 Postscript

Theiamillis-san, what are you looking at?
Harumi, take a peek over here. Peeking?!
Be quiet, now quietly come over here.
...Ah, I see. We should leave him be. Yes,
we should.



Corona Convention

New! November 26th, 2011

Afterword

Congratulations! This is the fifteenth anniversary of *Invaders of the Rokujouma!*? and tenth anniversary of the anime, although strictly speaking, that is in July. Long time no see, everyone! Takehaya here. I mentioned this at the start, but as of March this year, this series will have been around for fifteen years. Not many light novels make it this far, so this is all thanks to you. Thank you very much. I will continue working toward bringing this series to a proper ending, and I ask for your continued support.

It has been fifteen years for the light novel, but it's also the tenth anniversary of the anime. Although it's a little early, since it started airing in July, in celebration of this, a Blu-ray of all episodes is being sold. I'm sure you'll be able to find it by searching the web or social media. You will find a retweet on my social media from the makers.

Still, fifteen years is a long time and a lot has happened. At the beginning I was working on visual novels as well, but that was when that industry started to decline. I won't go into specifics, but I'm sure you can guess the circumstances as a lot of makers disappeared. Having experienced that, I decided that I would take responsibility to see this series through to the end. That's why I wrote it so that it could end at any time, and if circumstances were to happen so that the rest couldn't be published, like a meteor falling on HobbyJapan, I was thinking of self-publishing the end. Fortunately, that didn't happen and here we are. In the meantime, major events occurred in the subculture. The first I can think of is developers and publishers being in an uproar as factories stopped due to the earthquake. Lately game regulations are being tightened in China, and people I know are running around in confusion. Even *Rokujouma* was affected by COVID, which delayed the publishing of the English version. So I'm happy we have been able to get this far. I am ever grateful to all of my fans.

Speaking of games, I am actually secretly working on one. It's an adventure game for the general public, but I can't go into any more details due to confidentiality. But considering the timing, by the time this volume is published,

the first bits of information should be out. I still don't know, though. Maybe it's not out yet. Anyway, when it is out, I will be reposting on X (formerly known as Twitter), so those who are interested, please look over there.

Now then, I think it's about time to touch on the contents of this volume. In this volume Maxfern is finally resurrected and begins making his moves. Opposing him are Koutarou and the girls, and the royal families of Forthorthe, resulting in the spotlight falling on Elfaria quite a bit. It goes without saying, but Elfaria is Theia's mother, yet she also has another important role. While it is not on the level of Harumi, she fulfills the role of Alaia's successor. This time, I wanted to touch on Elfaria.

From here on, there will be spoilers, so those who haven't finished, be careful...

Alaia fulfilled her duty as empress until the end, and after passing, she was guided by her contract with Signaltin and reincarnated as Harumi. She became a normal girl and met Koutarou before anyone else, fulfilling her wish through Harumi. However, not all of Alaia's elements were carried over to Harumi. As Harumi was born a normal girl in a normal family, parts of Alaia had faded away. Especially the part of her that is royalty. Harumi inherited some of that, but as a normal girl it couldn't surpass that which Alaia had. Instead, the one who inherited the royal side of Alaia the most deeply is the current empress, Elfaria.

Much of what Elfaria does is what Alaia would have done. She loves her country and her people and is devoted to the development of Forthorthe. She prioritizes it over her life and honor. But Elfaria can be vicious in her tactics, which made it difficult for people to understand her intentions. The difference was a result of her personality; while she inherited elements of Alaia, Elfaria's own personality made her take different actions. Moreover, times have changed. The modern world isn't as simple as the age Alaia lived in, so methods become more complicated.

Despite Elfaria and Alaia being like that, there is one thing they have in common: the feelings they have for Koutarou. Neither one lets those feelings show either. Alaia didn't want to hold back Koutarou, who had to return to the future, and Elfaria is older, formerly married, and the empress, which all bar her

path. In other words, Alaia was stopped by the future, and Elfaria by the past. The two are designed to be mirror images of each other with Koutarou in between them. Alaia overcame the situation by becoming Harumi, and Elfaria, who kept the royal elements, was admonished by Theia to come to a decision. By becoming a hero as a normal human, Koutarou had plenty of concerns, and in order to cure those problems, Elfaria came to him as empress. As a result, both the ordinary girl and eminent empress have resolved the problem...although it may be a disaster for Koutarou-kun.

With that, Elfaria is ready to take the stage as empress of this age. I believe those who have read this volume will understand what I mean. From here on, Elfaria will join hands with Koutarou and the others to fight Maxfern. I hope you will take note of the actions of Empress Elfaria.

In the next volume, our three brains of the series will find themselves in danger. I am still thinking about how to structure it, but the three who are usually in the background will be coming back into the spotlight. Please look forward to the troubles that Ruth, Kiriha, and Clan will encounter.

With that, I am just about out of space, so I would like to move on to my usual greetings. I would like to extend my thanks to everyone at the publishing department at HobbyJapan, and all related businesses, as well as Poco-san, who has been working in tandem with me for these past fifteen years, and finally to all of you who have come along for the journey to this forty-fifth volume.

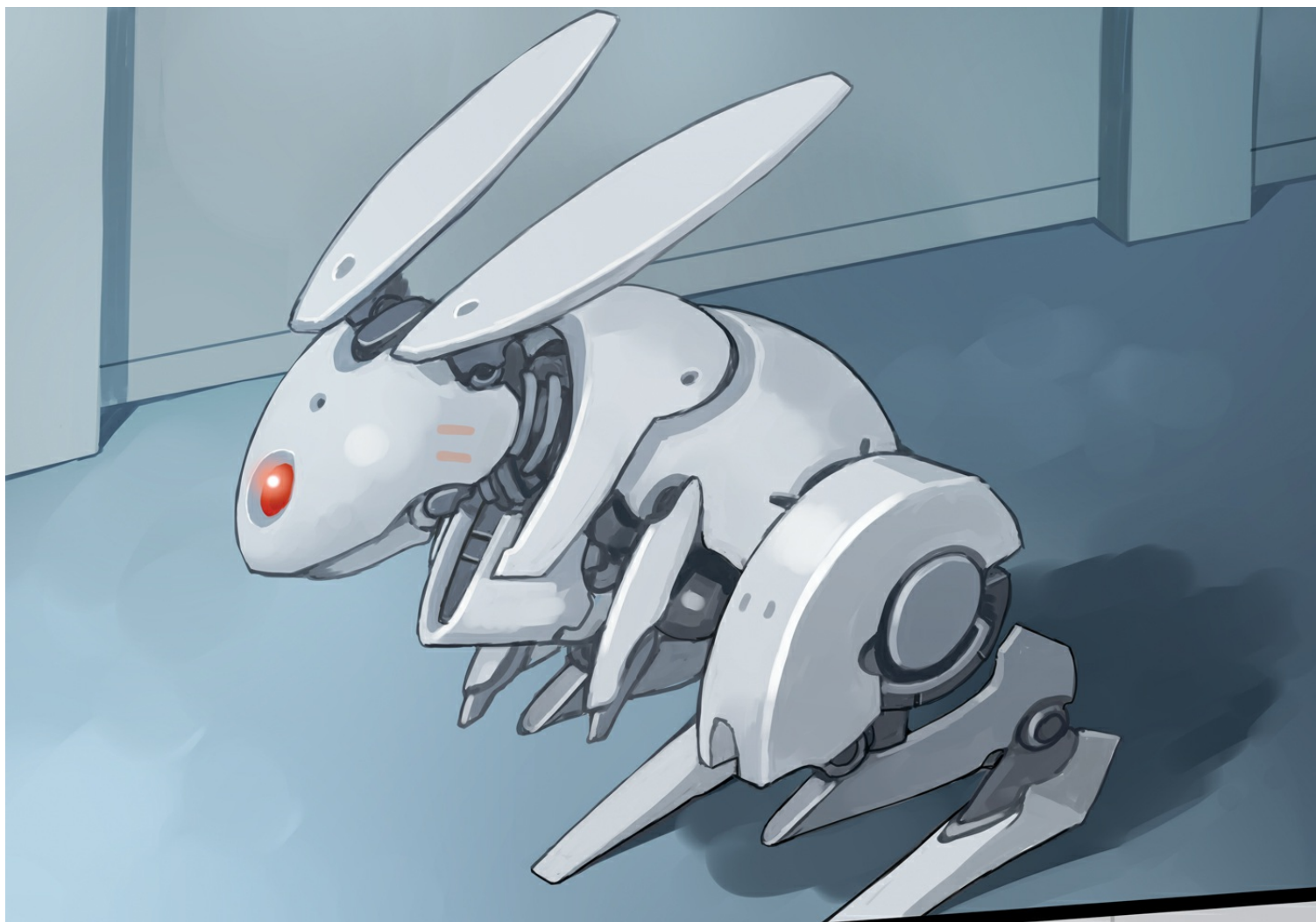
Let us meet again in the afterword for volume forty-six.

February, 2024

Takehaya









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Invaders of the Rokujouma!? Volume 45

by Takehaya

Translated by Warnis Edited by Tess Nanavati

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