

MY INSTANT DEATH ABILITY IS SO OVERPOWERED NO ONE IN THIS OTHER WORLD STANDS A CHANCE AGAINST ME

Author:
Tsuyoshi Fujitaka

Illustrator:
Chisato Naruse

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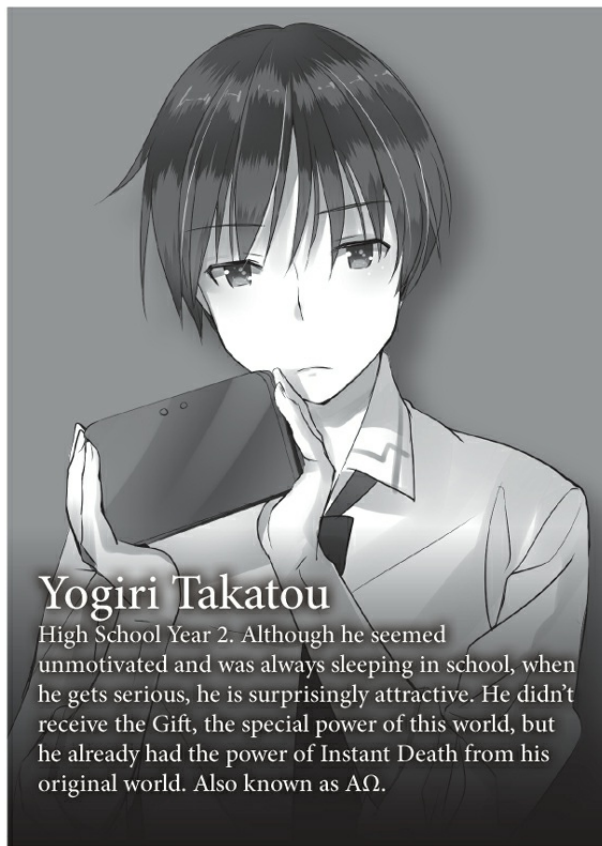


CHARACTERS



Tomochika Dannoura

High School Year 2. Although she looks quite attractive and has quite the ample chest, her role is unfortunately that of the Straight Man. Like Yogiri, she did not receive the power of the Gift, but she is trained in a martial art derived from the ancient Dannoura style of archery.



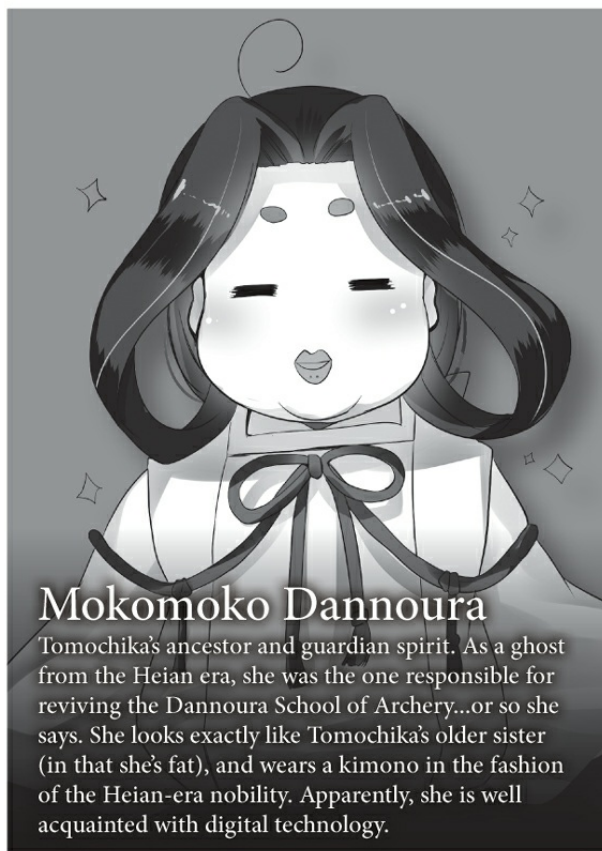
Yogiri Takatou

High School Year 2. Although he seemed unmotivated and was always sleeping in school, when he gets serious, he is surprisingly attractive. He didn't receive the Gift, the special power of this world, but he already had the power of Instant Death from his original world. Also known as AΩ.



Asaka Takatou

A female college student who, while struggling to find work, ended up taking an interview at a suspicious institution known as the Independent Higher Life Form Research Facility, and unfortunately ended up finding work there. She normally ties her long hair up behind her head. At her new work place, she met AΩ, whom she named Yogiri.



Mocomoko Dannoura

Tomochika's ancestor and guardian spirit. As a ghost from the Heian era, she was the one responsible for reviving the Dannoura School of Archery...or so she says. She looks exactly like Tomochika's older sister (in that she's fat), and wears a kimono in the fashion of the Heian-era nobility. Apparently, she is well acquainted with digital technology.



Carol S. Lane

One of Yogiri's classmates. An American who joined their class as she entered high school. Like Ryouko, she was tasked with monitoring Yogiri, but she works for the Agency. Her class in this world is Ninja, and she wears a red ninja outfit and forehead protector when fighting. Her weapon is a ninja sword.



Ryouko Ninomiya

One of Yogiri's classmates. Actually, she was dispatched by the research facility that had hidden him to watch Yogiri. She has a tool designed to monitor him installed on her smartphone. Though she was a ninja back home, in this world her class is Samurai. She fights in a traditional Samurai's garb with two swords.



Haruto Ootori

One of Yogiri's classmates. Actually a bird beastkin, inheriting generations of inhuman blood. He can grow wings from his back and fly. When most of their classmates were killed in the capital and he was gravely injured, a god named Zakuro rescued him because of those wings, and now Haruto has decided to help him.



Daimon Hanakawa

One of Yogiri's classmates. Having been summoned to this world for a second time, he had already reached the highest level as a Healer of 99. As that level is only the limit for humans, he is not actually all that strong. He's a little plump, a big nerd, and speaks in an old-fashioned dialect. Besides that, he has a tendency to be pretty gross.

CHARACTERS



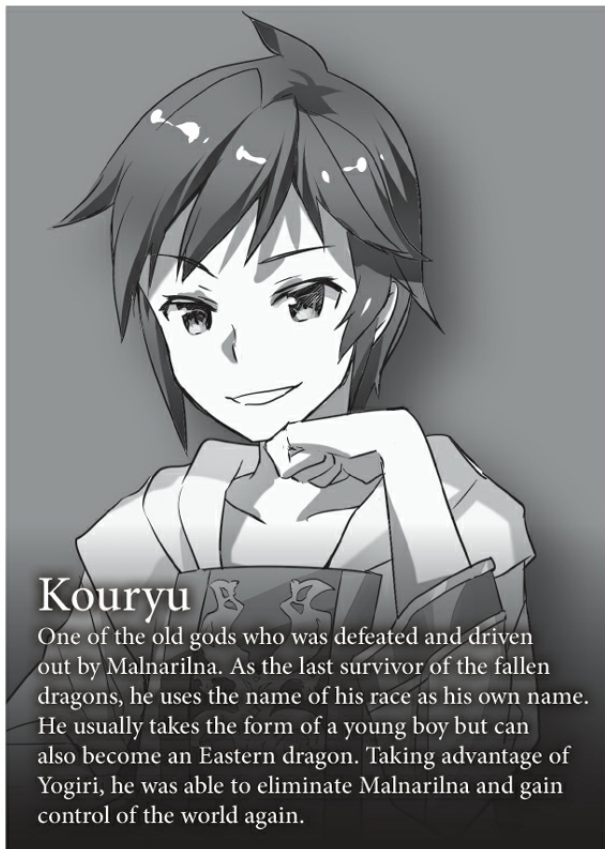
Luu

A goddess created when the Philosopher's Stones that Yogiri's group collected fused together. She started as a baby, but after fusing with seven stones took on the appearance of a twelve-year-old. After that, she merged with another version of herself born from other stones fusing together, but apparently, that was all a dream...



Shigeto Mitadera

One of Yogiri's classmates. His class in this world is Master Oracle. He has the ability to read fate, but the power works like a strategy guide, so it can't deal with unexpected situations. He obtained the World Sword Omega Blade in order to fight the Sages, but it ended up taking control of him instead.



Kouryu

One of the old gods who was defeated and driven out by Malnarilna. As the last survivor of the fallen dragons, he uses the name of his race as his own name. He usually takes the form of a young boy but can also become an Eastern dragon. Taking advantage of Yogiri, he was able to eliminate Malnarilna and gain control of the world again.



Sage Sion

The Sage who summoned Yogiri's class and their bus to this world. She looks about twenty years old. She herself was formerly summoned and became a Sage at the end of her own adventure, but due to her immense magical power, her common sense has lapsed somewhat. After her experience confronting Yogiri directly in the past, she is still suffering from the effects of his power.

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ACT

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Chapter 1 — Something like a Time Loop or a Restart at This Point Feels like a Rather Cliché Development!

Within the tour bus in the middle of an expansive grassland, the Sage Sion faced the students in the middle of their school trip.

“Now then, have you all calmed down?” Her previously arrogant, overbearing behavior nowhere to be seen, Sion waited for the class to quiet down before continuing.

“Who the hell are you?!” Once things had grown quiet, their teacher stood up and shouted at her. He had been seized by fear the moment he saw her, but maybe he had written off the memory of being killed by her as being part of a dream or something.

Sion raised her hand towards the teacher. Tomochika distinctly recalled what had happened the last time, how the teacher’s head had been blown clean off. However, unlike last time, the teacher only took his seat again.

“Explaining everything to the people who died at the start would be a pain, so I put him to sleep for now. I would like to put you to sleep as well, driver, but I will need you to drive the bus, so please cooperate.”

Remembering his own death, the driver responded with a vigorous nod. Last time, he had been killed by one of Sion’s outbursts.

“Now then, I am sure you all still harbor some negative feelings. Some of you no doubt recall fighting each other to the death. However, your taste for battle was an effect of the Battlesong client installed on you. So why don’t we let bygones be bygones? It all happened in a dream, so it has no bearing on reality. It would be quite strange of you to be upset with someone because they killed you in a dream.”

Tomochika couldn’t expect everyone to swallow that so quickly, but if they had really just appeared in this world, then technically nothing had happened yet. Even if they had an impression of how things were going to go, they

couldn't afford to doubt each other. Of course, they couldn't just accept that everything that had happened was a dream, but they needed to hear what Sion had to say, even if they took it with a grain of salt.

"May I ask a question?" Yazaki raised his hand. He was the one who would be given the class of General by the Battlesong system were it to be installed in him.

"Yes? What is it?"

"You said everything that happened was a dream. For now, I'll accept that explanation. But what comes next, then?"

"I see. I am also quite confused by this whole situation, so I was wondering much the same thing. But I have no intention of making you into Sage candidates again, so please rest easy. I have no intention of harming you at all."

"You said you summoned us here to make us Sage candidates, right? If you're not going to do that, can you send us back?"

"My sincerest apologies, but at my power level, sending you back isn't possible."

Her response sent a ripple of unease through the bus, but it was something Tomochika already knew. Sion had irresponsibly summoned them to this world without sparing a thought for how they might get back. In short, even if everything else had been a dream, the main problem hadn't been resolved. They would still need to find a way to survive in this world.

"Then what are we supposed to do? If you're not going to make us Sage candidates, why did you summon us?"

"That is indeed why I summoned you here, but the moment you arrived, I changed my mind. There is no particularly deep meaning to it; just think of it as a whim."

"If this is all based on your whims, what's to say your whims won't make us all kill each other again?"

"I can guarantee I intend no harm to you. I can also provide you with enough power that you can live comfortably in this world."

They could hardly trust what she was saying, but they didn't have much choice under the circumstances. At the very least, the fact that they hadn't been immediately saddled with a mission as they had been during their "dream" was a small improvement.

"May I ask one more thing?" Yazaki said.

"Of course."

"It looks like some of our classmates are missing. What happened to them?"

"Ah, that..." Sion tilted her head slightly, looking towards the back of the bus as she decided how to answer.

Huh? Wait, are you saying? Tomochika thought to herself. It seemed Sion thought Yogiri was responsible for the missing students.

"Perhaps they didn't make it here? The summoning spell I used was quite large in scale, so it is possible it didn't manage to catch everyone," she nonchalantly lied. "Now then, I am sure you all still have plenty of questions, but let us head to the city. Answering your questions in an environment like this will be far too tiring for all of us. I am sure you are still quite confused, but we can speak in greater detail once you have had some time to calm down. Driver, please drive straight ahead. You should find a city nearby."

The driver obediently started up the bus again and began driving. The class was quiet. Their memories of their previous adventure likely gave them a lot more confidence than one would expect from a high school student who had just been transported to another world.

Tomochika looked back at their best defense against Sion: Yogiri Takatou.

"Wait, he's still asleep?!"

Sitting at the far back of the bus, Yogiri was fast asleep. Tomochika suddenly recalled that he had been asleep up until the moment the dragon had attacked them the first time around.



The class arrived in the city and were guided to a hotel. It was the same one where Tomochika and Yogiri had once met an incredibly talented concierge.

While it must have been quite difficult to suddenly accommodate thirty new guests all at once, the hotel managed to find each of them a room. It seemed they were quite flexible when it came to accommodating the wishes of a Sage.

“Man, this is starting to feel really familiar,” Tomochika said as she sat down on the bed in her room. As she did, Mokomoko appeared at her side. Tomochika sighed. “Yeah, right, exactly like that.”

Indeed. This was when I first appeared before you, Mokomoko said.

Tomochika couldn't say whether or not she was in the same room, but it was definitely similar to the one she had stayed in last time. Back then, Mokomoko had just as suddenly appeared in front of her when she had sat down on the bed.

“What is going on? Are we honestly supposed to believe that everything up until now has been a dream?”

We cannot simply accept what Sion says as the truth. We are quite likely still caught within a trap. It is precisely like that situation where one shouts, “This must be the work of an enemy stand!”

“It's not like Sion did anything, though, right?”

Who knows? I have no idea what actually happened. I cannot imagine it happened randomly, so there is no doubt someone responsible. But judging from Sion's reaction, she seems quite confused by the situation as well.

“I kind of want to talk about this. Where's Takatou?” Though he had been fast asleep on the bus, he had of course woken up when they disembarked. He had still seemed a bit groggy at the time, but once his head was clear, he would understand their situation, so she wanted to talk to him about it.

Yes, I have already called him, so he should be here momentarily.

As Mokomoko spoke, a knock came at the door. Tomochika stood up and opened it.

“Hello.” Standing on the other side was Sion.

“Gah.”

“That is not a very polite way of greeting someone. I must admit to feeling

quite hurt.”

“What do you want?”

“I think we have a lot to discuss. Ah, do not worry, Takatou is with me.” True to her word, Yogiri was standing right behind her. “I have prepared a conference room for us, so let us talk there.”

“A conference room?” Tomochika was a bit confused. If they wanted the conversation to remain private, they could have just spoken inside her room. She felt like a whole conference room was overdoing it.

“Let us go.” With that, Sion turned and left.

“What’s going on?” Tomochika asked Yogiri.

“No idea. I met her on the way to your room. But there are a few of us who know more about all this than the others, so she probably wants to talk to us all at once.”

Tomochika and Yogiri followed the Sage through the hotel.

“Were you surprised when you woke up, Takatou?”

“Sure. One minute we were floating in the sky and the next, I was sitting on a bus. What’s going on?”

“Apparently, the floating in the sky part was all a dream.” Since he had been asleep, he hadn’t heard Sion’s explanation, so Tomochika gave him a brief summary.

“And everyone’s dreams match?”

“Yeah. Kind of weird, isn’t it?”

“Doesn’t that mean this is probably a dream too?”

“Ahh...now that you mention it, if you pull that card once, it kind of makes you doubt that anything that happens in the future is real, doesn’t it?”

“Hopefully Sion will explain that to us,” Yogiri said. “Looks like we’re here.”

After walking for a while, Sion stepped into a room.

“Umm! I have absolutely nothing to do with this, so could I perhaps request

that you release me?!”

As they followed her in, they were immediately met with the sight of Hanakawa desperately pleading. There was a large table in the center of the room with a number of their classmates sitting around it.

“He probably just wants to get out of here because he still has his Gift from before, so he wants to be set free to do whatever he likes,” Yogiri explained. “Can you turn off his powers for now, Sion?”

“Oh, yeah! This isn’t Hanakawa’s first time in this world, so he still has his powers as a Healer and that collar that turns people into slaves!”

“Thank you, Tomochika, but I believe that explanation is unnecessary!” Hanakawa complained.

“There is no need for concern. For those who have been to this world before, the backup data of their previous Gift will only be restored if Battlesong is installed in them once again. At this point, Hanakawa still doesn’t possess the Gift.”

“Ahh! As you say, it appears I am yet unable to do anything!” Hanakawa quickly took a seat.

As Tomochika and Yogiri followed suit, Sion sat with them. Tomochika looked around the table. Daimon Hanakawa, Carol S. Lane, Ryouko Ninomiya, Haruto Ootori, Shigeto Mitadera, the Sage Sion, Yogiri, and Tomochika. Eight people in all. Of all of them, Shigeto seemed particularly uncomfortable. After obtaining the Omega Blade, he had acted incredibly arrogant in front of them, so it seemed he was ashamed to face them.

“I kind of get why you called most of these people, but why Ootori?” Tomochika asked. Everyone else seemed to have been picked because they knew about Yogiri’s power.

“Ah, I once requested that he kill Takatou for me,” Sion answered. “The event where Takatou fell off a cliff was his doing.”

“Oh, that was you?” Yogiri frowned. Though he had been able to kill any obstacles that blocked his path, that had been a real pinch for him.

“Sorry about that, but it was all a dream, right?” Haruto seemed more than happy to write it all off as such.

“That’s right. Can we agree not to complain about all the things that happened, then?” Sion looked over everyone sitting at the table. It seemed she wasn’t interested in rehashing their old grudges either.

“We’ll never get anywhere if we keep bringing up stuff like that, so I’m fine with it,” Yogiri agreed.

“Speaking of which! Can we then say that everything I have done previously does not count?!” Hanakawa pleaded, leaning forward over the table.

“I don’t know if I like that, but I guess I don’t have a choice.”

No one objected, so they decided to let everything that had happened between them go.

“So!” Hanakawa continued. “That being the case! Something like a time loop or a restart at this point feels like a rather cliché development! Could you perhaps explain what is going on?!”

“I cannot say my understanding is complete either. That is why I thought to discuss this with all of you. The reason I called you here, and in particular you, Takatou, is that I believe there are merits to taking Takatou’s side.”

“Me?” Yogiri was all questions.

Chapter 2 — It Sounds like You Are Just Giving Us the Highlights!

“Yes, I imagine this situation was brought about by my grandfather. In that case, there is a high chance he and Takatou might become enemies. Should that happen, I believe taking Takatou’s side would be advantageous.”

“Your grandfather? You mean the Great Sage?” Tomochika asked. “We never met him, though.” The Sages were organized in a pseudofamily headed by the Great Sage, making Sion his granddaughter.

“Yes, I imagine at this point grandfather has yet to notice Takatou’s existence. But if you continue as you were, it is only a matter of time before he recognizes you as a hindrance.”

“As we were, huh?” Thinking back on their adventure, which had supposedly been a dream, Yogiri hadn’t intended to do much of anything but had been accosted by all kinds of people. It was hard to say the Great Sage wouldn’t end up interfering in the same way.

“S-So, in short, you are saying you wish to be our ally, Miss Sion?” Hanakawa asked.

“In a general sense, yes. More specifically, I only intend to cooperate with Takatou, but if bringing harm upon his classmates would bother him, then in the end, it means the same thing.”

“So if I said I didn’t care about Hanakawa...” Yogiri started.

“That is too far for a joke, Sir Takatou! Do you have any idea what kind of wicked soul Sion is?!”

“I won’t say it; don’t worry.” He turned back to Sion. “Anyway, what did you want to talk about?”

“First, I would like to get a grasp on the current situation. For starters, speaking as if everything was a dream may lead to some confusion, so let us call

what occurred back then as ‘part one’ instead. The new situation starting from now will be ‘part two.’ We can then call this time reversal ‘the restart.’ How does that sound?”

“Doesn’t sound much easier to understand to me,” Tomochika said, unconvinced.

“There’s a possibility the same situation will occur in the future. If that occurs, having to discuss things by saying ‘the previous time’ or ‘the time before that’ would end up getting quite complex. Numbering them makes it easier to keep things straight,” Haruto said.

Yogiri agreed. If there was a chance of this happening again, Sion’s way of describing things would make it quite a bit easier to understand.

“First of all, I would like to hear about your actions in part one, Takatou. More specifically, could you tell us what exactly you killed?”

“Weren’t you watching us the whole time?”

“I cannot say I was observing everything you did, and I also dropped out halfway through part one, so I do not know anything that happened after that.”

“You don’t have memories of anything past when you died?”

“Correct. I only recall events up until that mysterious goddess emerged from the Underworld. The moment I thought I had died, I reappeared on the grassland, having just finished the summoning ritual.”

“I also died partway through,” Shigeto said bitterly. “After Takatou arrived and stopped the Omega Blade, that Sage girl tortured me to death.”

Yogiri had met Shigeto on his search for the Philosopher’s Stones, but he had only killed the Omega Blade, the source of his classmate’s nigh-omnipotent power. He had departed immediately after taking the stones, but Shigeto had been left with a number of women who held grudges against him. With his powers gone, he had been totally at their mercy.

“There’s nothing I could have done about that,” Yogiri said, recalling their chance meeting. At that point, Shigeto had been riding a power trip after obtaining the powers of the Omega Blade, following his each and every whim.

“And I can only tell you about the things I killed intentionally. I don’t remember the others.”

He looked up at the ceiling, trying to remember. The first thing he had killed was the dragon that had attacked the bus. Next was Ryouzuke Higashida and Yoshiaki Fukuhara, the two who had flown in with Hanakawa. He had killed them when they had tried to harm him first. He had spared Hanakawa, in part to get information out of him, and in part because Hanakawa had been much less of a threat.

“Were this Higashida and Fukuhara on the bus with you this time?”

“I don’t think so,” Tomochika said. No one else had seen them either.

“I see. So it appears that those Takatou killed in part one do not exist in part two after all. That is another thing I wished to confirm.”

“In that case, what about your arms and legs?”



Yogiri recalled his fight with Sion. He had killed various parts of her to threaten her, and when she had fled, he had attacked the man she was with as well. In order to save his life, she had become obedient after that.

“My right ankle, left ankle, right little finger, ring finger, left little finger, right shin, and left earlobe have no feeling anymore, and I cannot move them. It only looks like I can move them because I am using telekinesis to do so with external force. Of course, I cannot stand either, so I float to create the illusion.”

“Although I am aware it is late for this observation, your power truly is terrifying, Sir Takatou,” Hanakawa said. Yogiri remembered that Hanakawa had been with them when they had confronted Sion.

“Of course I do not intend to complain about that now,” the Sage continued. “I was quite lucky to survive with as little damage as I did, and I can only be thankful that you stopped attacking Youichi when you did. With some supplementary magic, we can both live our daily lives unimpeded.”

While it was hard to believe she wasn't upset about the situation, she wasn't showing it in the least.

“Continuing on, then,” said Yogiri.

After arriving in Quenza, they had met the beastkin girl, Mireiyu. After guiding them around town, she had taken them into a back alley where they were accosted by a group of mostly beastkin. Yogiri had killed them in self-defense, but he had used the opportunity to practice killing only parts of people, so there were likely survivors. Thinking it was a bad idea to kill Mireiyu in front of Tomochika when she had been friendly with them before, he had killed her on a delay. They had then left Quenza on a train heading for Hanabusa, but partway there, they had been attacked by a Sage, so Yogiri had killed him too.

“That would have been the Sage Santarou,” Sion said. “He was fighting a robot Aggressor at that time, so I am quite sure of it.”

“Are the dead Sages also not in part two?” Tomochika asked.

“Correct; they do not exist anymore.”

“You know that already?” The Sages all possessed incredible powers. They

likely had any number of ways to disappear and hide themselves, so he found her confidence hard to believe.

“Yes. Before calling this meeting, I did a brief survey of the state of the world in part two. Though I cannot tell you precisely where they are or what they are doing, I could get a quick overview of which areas were under each Sage’s jurisdiction. The area under Santarou’s control in part one is now under mine, and there are no areas under Santarou’s control anymore. As such, the Sage Santarou effectively does not exist in part two.”

After the train was destroyed, Yogiri and Tomochika had continued on to Hanabusa. There, they had met their classmate Yuuki Tachibana and his five slave women. Yogiri had killed some of them when they had attacked him before killing Yuuki himself for ordering bugs to kill them from a distance. Yogiri had then killed a number of zombies, residents of Hanabusa, the leader of the Immortal Corps, Masayuki, and the Sage Lain.

“Tachibana wasn’t on the bus either, right?”

“Right. It seems pretty clear that everyone who’s missing was killed by Takatou,” Carol said offhandedly. Though having lost classmates should have been a big deal, it seemed she wasn’t overly concerned about it.

“You make me sound like the bad guy,” Yogiri protested. “I was just protecting myself.”

“While I agree she could have worded it better, it’s not like she’s wrong,” Tomochika said.

Even if he had known things would turn out this way, he had no way to defend himself other than to kill, and he felt no regret. “So, there’s no Lain in part two either, then?” he asked just to be sure.

“Judging by the areas under their control, the current Sages are myself, Aoi, Shirou, Alice, Raiza, Yoshifumi, Gorouzaburou, Akemi, and Van. Nine in all. The only ones missing are Lain and Santarou.”

“Huh? There are a lot more left than I thought,” Tomochika said, surprised. She remembered fighting more Sages than that.

“We took Raiza’s and Yoshifumi’s Philosopher’s Stones, but we didn’t kill

them,” Yogiri said. “I’ve never heard of Gorouzaburou or Akemi, but Van was in charge of the floating continent, right?” Though they had taken his stone, Yogiri had only killed the individual parts of Raiza’s body, never actually taking his life. Yoshifumi had been killed by the shadow sent by the fox from their own world, so Yogiri hadn’t done anything to him either.

“I met Gorouzaburou and Akemi, but I don’t think I killed them,” Shigeto said. He had also been collecting Philosopher’s Stones and had taken theirs with the power of the Omega Blade.

“The only ones whose location I am aware of are Raiza and Aoi. Yoshifumi is likely somewhere in the capital of his empire. Do you know where Gorouzaburou and Akemi are?” Sion asked.

“No. I used the Omega Blade to teleport to them, so I never really knew where they went. What would you do if you knew?”

“There is a chance they could end up being our enemies, so I want to keep track of their movements.” At this point, Sion couldn’t trust the other Sages either.

“Can I continue?” Yogiri said. “After killing Lain, we went to the Garula Canyon, where we got wrapped up in that Divine King’s Trial or whatever. It would take forever to name everyone I killed there.” Yogiri had used his power quite a bit in the tower. There was no way he would remember everyone he’d used it on.

“Very well. How about you just tell us about the people you believe to be important to the world?”

“I’m not really sure who that would be, though.” From Yogiri’s perspective, anyone who appeared in front of him as an enemy ended up dying without much fanfare, so he didn’t have particularly strong feelings about any of them. However, there were a number of weird ones who stuck out in his memory, so he thought maybe describing some of them would give them some hints. “First of all, there was that golden mage guy, right? The one who said he built the tower.”

“He said his name was Eglacia,” Tomochika added. “You didn’t really listen to what he had to say at all.”

“Eglacia is dead? In that case, it appears the things left behind by those who disappeared in part one have survived to part two.”

“Did you know him?”

“I never met him personally, but there would be no end to the list of things he left behind. For example, the walls of the capital of Manii were his creation.”

“And what’s the situation with those walls now?”

“They appear to be in the same condition as in part one,” Sion answered, looking off into the distance. “I would need to investigate further to tell if they have retained the same defensive properties, though.” It seemed she could view things remotely somehow.

“So, what about the tower in the canyon? Eglacia said he made that.”

“There appears to be a barrier in the same place as there was in part one. I cannot tell if the tower exists inside it from here.”

“That barrier was made to seal away the Dark God, right?”

“That is how it appears. The Swordmaster and the Divine King work hard there on their own, so we Sages did not interfere with them. Our duty was only to repel invaders from foreign worlds, the Aggressors.”

“Yeah, about that,” Yogiri said. “We were told the Dark God came from another world. There was something about long ago, he almost wiped out humanity. Does that not make him an Aggressor?”

“The designation of beings as Aggressors is something that is left up to my grandfather. Roughly speaking, it only seems to apply to those who are looking for something in this world.”

It seemed threats that existed in this world from the start, and those from other worlds who were simply rampaging without cause, were outside of the Sage’s purview. Though Sion didn’t know it, Yogiri had some clues as to what the Aggressors were after: the fragments of the goddess the robot Aggressor had been searching for. In short, they were looking for the Philosopher’s Stones, the god sealed away in this world.

“Anyway, I killed the Dark God, so what is it trapping now?”

“I am sure the situation has changed to make things consistent somehow. If the barrier still exists, there is likely something other than the Dark God sealed within it. Speaking of which, you also killed the Dark God that was responsible for killing me in Manii, yes?”

“Yeah.”

“In that case, it is likely something related to that place. The Underworld still exists, unchanged from its state in part one.”

“Either way, if it’s sealed away we can ignore it, right?”

“But what about the Divine King?” Tomochika asked. “As I remember, she sacrificed herself to seal away the Dark God before.”

“She can stay there. It’s not like we have an obligation to break her out.”

“Huh? You’re just going to ignore her?!”

“It’s not about ignoring her. We just have no obligation to help. Either way, we won’t know the situation there until we look, and that’s not what we’re doing right now.”

“Well...I guess we haven’t decided what we’re doing next...”

Tomochika wasn’t quite sold, but Yogiri continued all the same.

“After leaving the canyon, we headed to the capital, where I defeated a number of our classmates. What were their names again?”

“You don’t even remember their names, huh?” Tomochika sighed. It wasn’t like Yogiri had no interest in the people he killed. It was just that he never knew the names of his classmates all that well.

“In the Underworld, you killed Yukimasa Aihara, Romiko Jougasaki, and Ayaka Shinozaki.” Sion had been keeping track of the battle royale in the Underworld, so she had known his victims.

Yukimasa had possessed a book that could tell him the future and rewrite that future as well to a degree, but Yogiri had never known about it. Romiko could control the spirits of the dead, which he remembered a little since she had used it to control Mokomoko.

“Huh? Didn’t Shinozaki die on the bus?” Tomochika was surprised by the name. “Wait, but she wasn’t on the bus in part two, so that means Takatou killed her?”

Although he hadn’t known her name, Yogiri did recall a girl who had been killed on the bus.

“The dragon you encountered in the Underworld was her,” Sion explained.

“How did that happen?!”

“I do not know the details either, but it appeared she wasn’t a human from the beginning. After eating the dragon that attacked the bus, she took its powers.”

“Okay, I still don’t understand.”

Hmm...that would explain why she failed to receive the Battlesong system in part one, Mokomoko murmured.

“Wait, then did Kiryuu have some reason he couldn’t get Battlesong too?”

Yuuichirou Kiryuu. He was a rude and conspicuous student but had already been impaled by the dragon by the time Yogiri had woken up. Yogiri, Tomochika, Ayaka, and Yuuichirou had all been left behind because they had failed to receive the Battlesong system and thus were powerless. Three of them had clear reasons for that failure, so it seemed natural he would have had some reason as well.

Who knows? He is alive in part two, so perhaps we should just ask him.

“Anyway, after all that happened in the Underworld, some huge woman appeared. I killed her, and then we left the capital.”

“Ah! That’s when we met Risley, right?” Tomochika said. “I wonder what happened to her? If Lain doesn’t exist...”

“Risley?” Sion asked.

Yogiri gave her a brief explanation. The girl, who had appeared out of nowhere and asked Yogiri to marry her, was actually a clone created by Lain. If Lain didn’t exist, it would make sense that Risley didn’t either.

“I see. However, I cannot say for certain that she doesn’t exist. The things Eglacia created in part one still exist even without him, after all.”

“But if Lain doesn’t exist, she definitely couldn’t be a clone of her...so that means someone else would have created her?”

“If you are curious, I can look into her situation as well.”

“Sure, thanks.”

Yogiri couldn’t write the girl off as a total stranger. They had traveled together for a time, so if she was in trouble now, he was willing to offer her a hand.

“Umm! Might I ask something?!” Hanakawa interrupted.

“What?”

“Though it sounds like you are just giving us the highlights, continuing at this pace will still take a colossal amount of time!”

“Yeah, I’m getting pretty bored of it too,” Yogiri agreed. The journey that had led them to the UEG’s death was a complex, winding string of events. The thought of having to describe all of that in detail was rather demoralizing.

Chapter 3 — A Guy like Those Enemies in RPGs Where You Have to Defeat All of Them at the Same Time

“After a brief inspection, it seems the population of the world in part two is roughly six percent smaller than in part one,” Sion explained. “I imagine that is a result of Takatou using his power.”

“Ummm...I am not sure I truly wish to hear the answer, but...what exactly is the population of this world?” Hanakawa asked.

“Approximately one billion.”

“So, six percent of that is...sixty million people?!” Hanakawa’s face went pale as he spoke. “That is absurd! You have gone way too far, Sir Takatou! Even if circumstances required you to eliminate an entire army, surely that would be no more than a million!”

“What kind of standard is that?” Yogiri answered.

Looking around the table, almost everyone had the same reaction as Hanakawa. The only exception seemed to be Sion, who, for some reason, looked proud.

“That’s easy for you to say,” Yogiri continued, “but there was a guy like those enemies in RPGs where you have to defeat them all at the same time or they come back to life. He had sworn to chase us forever, so I didn’t really have any options but to kill him.”

“Do you think everything is a game?!” Hanakawa protested.

Yogiri explained about Hornet, the boy they had met on the cruise ship on their way to find Yoshifumi on the eastern island of Ent. They had been attacked by pirates partway there, and then the people on the cruise ship had attacked him. That had all seemed to be Hornet’s doing, with him using his power to control others. He had used some sort of parasite to infiltrate their bodies and

take control of them.

Not really understanding what was going on, Yogiri and Tomochika had come across him while wandering the ship. He had said he planned to use the two of them as test subjects for his research. Of course, Yogiri wouldn't accept that, so they had ended up fighting. Killing him was easy enough, but Hornet had explained he had clones of himself spread across the entire world. He'd claimed that even if he was defeated there, the clones would pursue Yogiri from around the world.

"However, is the fact he was able to kill a sleeping threat spread across the world before it was able to harm anyone not a cause for celebration?" Sion asked.

Yogiri could have just killed the enemies in front of him, but that wouldn't have really solved the problem. If someone was controlling people from afar, he could kill that particular person, but it seemed that each of Hornet's clones was equal in power to the original, and all of them equally intended Yogiri harm, so he'd had no choice but to kill them simultaneously. It wasn't really something for him to hesitate over.

"Did the Sages know there was a guy like that out there?"

"We do not share everything with each other, but at the very least, I was unaware of it."

If Hornet's grasp had really stretched to the ends of the world as he'd claimed, it wouldn't be strange if at least one of the Sages had known about him.

"I... I ended up becoming a follower of the UEG and killed plenty of innocent people. If that was all a dream, I can feel quite relieved that none of what I did was real. However, even if it was a dream, what you did hasn't disappeared. There's no bringing back the people you killed. How do you feel about that, Takatou?" Haruto asked.

"Nothing in particular?"

"Not even taking the time to think?! Surely you should be agonizing over a situation such as this!" Hanakawa exclaimed.

“Why are you the one complaining when Ootori asked the question?”

“How do you feel nothing at all upon hearing you are responsible for sixty million deaths?!”

“All I’ve been doing is whatever I could to protect myself. As I’ve said before, I’m not going to kill myself. So if anyone tries to kill me from here on out, I won’t hesitate to use my power on them either.” There were certainly those who considered Yogiri’s existence to be a problem. But no matter what the cost was, he had no intention of lying down and dying for them. “If you don’t want me using my power, please solve the problems before I have to.”

“That is hardly the attitude of a hero! Not that I could ever recognize you as one!”

“Ha ha ha, sorry,” Haruto apologized. “I didn’t mean to sound like such a jerk.”

“I don’t mind, but is that what you were doing?”

“Of course.”

Yogiri looked at Haruto’s face, but the other boy’s expression was unreadable.

“While I am aware it is my fault for leading the conversation astray, if we do not move on, we will never reach the end of this,” Hanakawa complained.

Yogiri had long since grown bored of the discussion, but he understood that if he didn’t explain things thoroughly, they wouldn’t be able to plan what to do next. He continued to wrack his brain, trying to remember every detail.

“Uhh...after the cruise ship, we went to an island...”

They had ended up landing on the western side of the island of Ent. Ent was split into an eastern and western side, which were divided by a large chasm. Travel between the two sides of the island was strictly limited. The easiest way they had found to cross to the other side where the capital was situated was to pass through the Elven Forest, so that’s what they had decided to do.

Although a lot had happened on the way, the most relevant thing was the relentless attacks by the apostles of Malnarilna. For some reason or other, the second-largest religion in the world had set their sights on Yogiri.

“In the end, before we could make it through the forest to the east, we found Yoshifumi in some ruins there...”

“I believe my great deeds have been overlooked in your description of events!” Hanakawa interjected.

“What did you do?”

“I was an apostle of Malnarilna myself, and I used my powers to summon Malnarilna to your side, making me instrumental in their defeat!”

“Oh, yeah! That did happen!”

Though Yogiri wasn't really sure how it had occurred, after getting separated from Hanakawa long before reaching Ent, their classmate had popped up again in the Elven Forest. For some reason, he had become an apostle of Malnarilna and had been given powers by them. His new power was to summon anyone or anything.

That said, it required the consent of the person he was summoning, so more precisely, it was only technically the ability to summon anything. Using that power to summon Malnarilna themselves, he had forced them to fight Yogiri head-on.

“You didn't defeat them, though,” Yogiri said.

“So you killed Malnarilna, then?” Sion asked.

“No. One of them ran away, so I let her go. I don't know which was which.”

Malnarilna was, in fact, a pair of childlike twin goddesses named Malna and Rilna. Claiming they could also use instant death powers, they had targeted Tomochika for a demonstration, so Yogiri had responded by killing one of them. The other had then run away. He'd considered killing her as well, since she had been responsible for sending the apostles after him, but had hesitated to kill someone who was running in fear and showing no intent to harm him.

“We tried to get out of the forest after that when some robot showed up and demanded we give it the fragments of the goddess... Oh yeah! The Philosopher's Stones fused together into a baby. What was that about?”

After meeting Sion in the capital, their objective had become to collect the

Philosopher's Stones. Returning to their world would require a tremendous amount of energy, so he had figured the stones held by the Sages would be able to provide that. They had been keeping the stones in their backpack, but at some point, those stones had fused together into a weird lump of flesh. It continued to change, eventually taking the form of a human child.

"Yes, I have heard that the Philosopher's Stones were originally the scattered pieces of some god. Calling them fragments of a goddess seems accurate. With that god's divinity being sealed away, those fragments were nothing more than energy sources...but that must mean the other half of Malnarilna was also killed."

"Really?"

"Yes. Even if only one survived, the seal should have remained intact."

"I don't know much about that, but is there some connection between the Sages and that god? What *are* gods, anyway?"

"That's an interesting question coming from someone who's killed plenty of them..." Tomochika sighed. Of course, Yogiri had no qualms about using his powers against anyone, be they a god or any influential person.

"To answer what a god is, that would be a transcendent being capable of interfacing directly with the underlying building blocks of the world, I suppose. Though Sages are quite powerful, in general, we cannot compare to them. After all, they are beings that can change the rules of the world. That said, the only one who can change the rules of a given world is the god who rules it, so a god from another world would be incapable of wielding their full power if they forced their way in."

"Malnarilna was the god of this world, right? Kouryu said they took the position from him. But if the god ruling a world is so strong, is it possible for another god to take that position from them?"

"If the gap in strength between them is sufficient, then yes. On top of that, my grandfather also played a role in such a changeover."

"Ah, Kouryu did say he had a grudge against the Sages. That explains it." Tomochika seemed to have accepted the explanation. When they'd first met,

Kouryu had said something about Sages dying brightening his day.

“Malnarilna became the chief god of this world, and a contract forbidding the Sages and their fellow gods from interfering with each other was signed. As such, we no longer had anything to do with each other. At the same time, a number of other gods were sealed away. One of them was split up into the Philosopher’s Stones, which were distributed among the Sages.”

“And when Malnarilna dies, the seal breaks. That’s how it works, huh?”

“Even I wasn’t aware of what exactly was sealed away within the Philosopher’s Stones. I certainly did not expect they would return to normal on their own.”

Yogiri gave a rough explanation of Luu, the girl born from the fused Philosopher’s Stones. “The UEG also showed up out of nowhere. Is she another of those sealed gods?”

“Probably,” Carol added. “Ryouko, Haruto, and I ended up becoming her underlings. We were told that was what happened to her.”

To get revenge against the gods who had sealed her away, the UEG had sworn to destroy all life in the world that they ruled.

“Talk about throwing a fit! As those summoned to this world from elsewhere, we had nothing to do with that!” Hanakawa said.

“If Malnarilna died, does that mean Kouryu took back control?”

“That is most likely the case,” Sion said. “There are no other candidates for the position, after all.”

“So now that we’re in part two, Malna or Rilna should be alive again, so are they in control now?”

“If you only killed one of them, that should be the case.”

“So Luu is probably back to being trapped in the Philosopher’s Stones then. Actually, now that there are fewer Sages, what happens to the number of Philosopher’s Stones?”

“I cannot say for sure, but I imagine the number is unchanged. Van has taken charge of the extras, so fewer Sages likely means he is holding more of them.”

“We got so many of them too. Now we have to start collecting them from the start again?” Tomochika muttered. They had only started collecting them partway through their journey but had gone through quite a bit of trouble to get them. It wasn’t hard to imagine she’d feel depressed seeing all that work amount to nothing.

“In that case, I think your situation has likely improved somewhat.” Sion pulled three round, transparent stones out from somewhere and placed them on the table.

“Didn’t you have to take it out of your body last time?” Yogiri remembered that when they had faced Sion previously, she had begged him to spare Youichi in exchange for her Philosopher’s Stone, which she’d had to dig out of her chest to get out.

“Last time it was a last-minute affair, so I had no other choice, but this time I was able to prepare in advance.”

“Why do you have three?”

“They belong to me, Aoi, and Raiza. I thought they might be necessary, so I collected them beforehand,” Sion said as if it had been nothing.

“What was all our suffering for before then?!” Tomochika complained.

“Why suffer if you don’t have to?”

“That’s true, but still!”

“I will do what I can to collect the remaining stones myself. I imagine it should be easy enough to convince the other Sages that have encountered Takatou in the past.”

“Is it really going to be that easy?”

“If she’s going to do the work for us, then we can just leave it to her,” Yogiri said. “So, where was I? I said basically everything that happened in Ent. So, after that, we went to the continent east of there, where we were split across four kingdoms. Dannoura and I stuck together, and even though we thought we had to do something, while we were wandering around, people kept appearing to attack us. The last one we saw was the UEG, I guess. She did some crazy beam

move, which Luu protected us from, but the ground around us was totally destroyed. In the end, she tried to kill me so I killed her first. What was she, though?”

While Yogiri and Tomochika had wandered, they’d been accosted by a prince, a princess, a queen, and a variety of gods, but none of them had left a strong impression on him.

“The UEG? I imagine that was another one of the sealed gods the Aggressors were searching for,” Sion explained. “We knew that we were fighting the Aggressors to keep them from finding something hidden in this world, but we weren’t told exactly what that was.”

“Are you Sages a serious group at all?!” Tomochika blurted out.

“Not particularly. We have the right to live however we wish in this world, our only obligation being to fight off the Aggressors.”

“After I used my power to kill the UEG, this whole thing happened. So what do we do now?” Yogiri finished describing their adventure so far in this world. There were plenty of things he had skipped over, but he didn’t imagine that would be a problem.

“First of all, let us start by summarizing the current situation. The current date on the Holy Calendar is the 1852nd year, Season of the Sun, the First Month, Day of the Tortoise—”

“Wait, hold on! That’s what this world’s calendar is like?!” Tomochika blurted out.

“Of course.”

“Oh, what is this? Were you unaware?” Hanakawa interjected. “Very well, very well. Allow me to explain the long and storied history of this world!”

“Uh, no thanks. I’ll look into it later if I care.”

“At any rate, this is the same day you were summoned to this world in part one. After part one progressed to a certain point, the world was switched into part two, I suppose.”

“Why *did* we end up switching to part two?” Ryouko asked. The explanation

that it had all been a dream was fine for now, but Yogiri was also curious what had led to the switch happening.

It was likely due to the UEG's actions leading the world to a point it was near total destruction, Mocomoko said.

"How did that happen?" Tomochika asked.

The UEG unleashed countless beams of light that rained down on the planet. Luu's barrier was sufficient to guarantee our safety, but the floating continent was effectively annihilated, and the surface of the world had countless holes punched through it. If those beams of light all passed straight through... It is hard to say without knowing precisely how gravity functions in this world, but it is not too hard to guess that it would lead to the total destruction of the planet, no?

"That's how it looked," Tomochika remarked, relaying Mocomoko's explanation.

"On top of that, we were killing people all over the world," Haruto explained. "Though we personally didn't accomplish much, Zakuro wiped out most major cities. In short, the world was basically doomed."

Using her subordinates, the UEG had made quite a bit of progress in wiping out all life in the world.

"Huh? So does that mean the Great Sage saved the world?!" Tomochika asked.

"If the Great Sage is responsible for this, then yes," Sion answered. "I am not familiar with my grandfather's exact powers, but according to the rumors, this world is effectively a dream that he is seeing."

"Uh...what?" Tomochika said. "What do you mean 'a dream he is seeing'? I don't get it at all!"

"I also laughed it off as impossible when I first heard it. No matter how powerful he may be, the fact that I was alive and thinking made it impossible to believe I was a part of someone else's dream. However, now that I have seen this situation, I cannot help but believe that it could be true; hence, the explanation I gave to all of you earlier."

“Saying that we dreamed it all is totally different than saying we’re in someone else’s dream though!”

Hmm...there are similar stories harking back to ancient times, such as myths that the world is the shell of a clam or the dream of a dragon.

“What can we even do, then?! We’re all just sitting in the palm of his hands!” Tomochika cried.

“Yes, you are correct. However, Takatou’s power has shown it is capable of influencing this world, be it a dream or not. Normally one would expect that if the Great Sage were to save the world, he would return it to its original state. But he did not accomplish that. In short, it means his power is not limitless.”

“Ah...”

“That is the primary reason I have decided to cooperate with Takatou in this,” Sion announced.

While everyone else thought deeply about the implications, Yogiri was recalling a game he had once played that took place entirely within the dream of a whale.

Chapter 4 — I Would Be Better Off Throwing Myself in Front of a Truck in Hopes of Being Sent to Another World

“Let us continue putting the situation in order,” Sion continued. “When we switched from part one to part two, time was rewound, but those killed by Takatou were not brought back to life. However, something created by such a person still exists, presumably now created by someone else.”

“Then why did the population go down? If the people Takatou killed couldn’t be brought back, why not make new people in their place?” Tomochika asked.

“It appears that intelligent beings cannot be so easily replaced. I am curious to know what happens to children if their parents are killed, but there is no answering that question without further investigation. My information on the population is only from looking at the statistics for part two.”

“Hearing it as the ability to correct history makes it somewhat more understandable!” Hanakawa said.

“I don’t think it’s a good idea to leave things this ambiguous, but I guess we don’t have the time to investigate more thoroughly.”

If possible, it would be better for them to have had a firmer grasp on the details of part two before deciding how they would act, but Yogiri didn’t figure they had the freedom to take their time. They had no idea what was going to happen next in this world. He felt it was best they began putting plans into action as soon as they were done talking here.

“As much as I said we should put the situation in order, it appears this is about as much as we can deduce here. Does anyone else have something to add?” asked Sion.

“If this world is part of the Great Sage’s dream, and he reset the world to save it, why did he pick this day?” Yogiri asked.

“Yeah, good question. Takatou is more or less responsible for sending this world to its doom, so why not rewind time until before he was summoned?” Carol added.

If the Great Sage had done that, everything would have been resolved. Yogiri’s group would never have been summoned, nothing would have happened beyond the Sages’ expectations, and the world would now be safe from destruction.

“This is just a guess, but perhaps in attempting to rewrite things to prevent a certain event from happening, erasing the cause of the event isn’t possible,” Sion posited. “After all, if he could fully modify the world to his wishes, he could simply make it so Aggressors never showed up in the first place. That said, it is always possible my grandfather let the Aggressors in because he found their invasion entertaining.”

“So just because it’s a dream, that doesn’t mean he can do whatever he wants?”

“Yes, though that is still just speculation. Things get even more complicated when others from outside the world get involved.”

“What do you mean?”

“For starters, let us call the point in time you were all summoned the ‘point of singularity,’ the end of part one can be the ‘part one end point,’ and the beginning of part two can be the ‘part two restart point.’”

“This Sage really likes producing her own vocabulary, does she not?” Hanakawa observed.

“Yeah, it doesn’t really make anything easier to understand, does it?” replied Tomochika.

Despite their rare show of agreement, Sion continued, unfazed.

“So the part two restart point and the point of singularity are the same day and time?” asked Yogiri.

“Yes. My memories of part two begin with the summoning ritual finishing and your bus appearing. There may be a small difference in the exact point in time,

but I imagine it is inconsequential. Now then, a problem arises when someone tries to enter or leave the world between the point of singularity and the part one end point. This appears to be an important span of time, so perhaps naming it is a good idea as well. Since Takatou's arrival is what set the world on its path to destruction, how does 'terminal phase' sound?"

"That's fine." Yogiri didn't much care what it was called.

"If someone were to enter this world from the outside during the terminal phase and then a restart were to occur, they would naturally not exist within part two. They would likely be erased entirely."

"What would happen to them in their original world, then?"

"I imagine the phenomenon is entirely restricted to this world. As powerful as my grandfather is, I cannot imagine his power would be able to influence an entirely different, unrelated world. In short, they would disappear from this world without returning to their previous one. This is merely conjecture layered on conjecture, but it is possible they would then be held in reserve, to appear once the point in time they arrived at in part one recurs in part two."

"I don't think it's a good idea to draw any conclusions when all we've got is guesses."

"Yes, it is perhaps best just to remember this is a possibility." The conversation fell into a lull, no one having any more questions to ask. Then Sion said, "I believe we have a good grasp on the current situation now. I would say there are two broad paths you could take moving forward. The first would be to accept your new life in this world and stay here."

"What?! You mean give up on going home?!"

"Tomochika, Miss Sion already explained as much on the bus," Hanakawa said. Though Yogiri had slept through it, when Yazaki asked about sending them back, Sion had told them she only had the ability to summon them here, not to return them.

"How are we supposed to know whether she was serious or not though?!"

"Please rest assured, nothing I have said in part two is a joke. You can be confident that everything I have told you so far is true to the best of my

knowledge.”

“But still, should we not hear her out?” Hanakawa asked. “It is possible living here could be a better option than returning home!”

“What?! Maybe you’re different, but I have stuff to do in the real world!”

“How rude! Please do not assume that what awaits me back home is such a miserable, pathetic life so lacking in prospects that I would be better off throwing myself in front of a truck in hopes of being sent to another world!”

“I never said that...”

“At the very least, I do not have the power to send you home,” Sion said. “While we can discuss the possibility of finding another way home later, first I believe it is best to discuss the option of remaining here with your classmates. Though your experience during the terminal phase was short, I am sure you are all quite aware of how dangerous this world is.”

“Way too aware...” Tomochika muttered, clearly a lot on her mind.

“However, the majority of that danger can be avoided if you live under the protection of the Sages. If you stay within my jurisdiction, I can assure you I will spare no effort to accommodate you. Luckily, the area under the control of the missing Sages has all been given to me, so you will not need to worry about being overly confined either. And even if you leave my territory, you will be treated as my attendants and so will retain considerable status.”

“But there are some people in this world even the Sages can’t beat, right?” Tomochika asked.

“Yes. In truth, I was utterly powerless against the Dark God sealed in the Underworld. However, those beings only appeared because Takatou was killing people left and right as you traveled around, no? If Takatou decides to stay in one place and live a life of peace, the chances of encountering such beings becomes rather slim. After all, before his arrival in this world, such occurrences were extremely rare.”

Yogiri and Tomochika had been attacked by thugs in the city once, but if they were under the protection of the Sages, that might not have happened. If they became Sion’s attendants, the other Sages would see them as too dangerous to

mess with, and they wouldn't be told to fight each other to the death either. If they traveled around, they might end up in situations like being wrapped up in the trial in the tower or attacked by pirates at sea, but if they stayed in one place and lived peacefully, there wasn't much chance of those kinds of things happening.

If some being sealed away in this world were to reemerge, it could affect the entire world, but beings with that kind of power were kept in check by the gods. As long as the gods were still alive and well, the world would likely remain stable. The gods and the Sages had an agreement not to interfere with each other, so if they were Sion's attendants, they wouldn't need to worry about the gods messing with them either.

"Speaking of which, why did that Dark God in the Underworld get released? I seem to remember Hanakawa saying something about it..." When they had first emerged from the Underworld, the world around them had been covered in a writhing sea of flesh. An enormous woman had appeared from within it. Yogiri still had no idea what had brought all that about.

"That was...err...well..." Hanakawa started.

"Oh, if you don't want to talk about it, that's fine," Yogiri answered.

"Please let me explain it!"

"What's with you? I was trying to be considerate."

"That was just to preface what is to come! You see, after the events at the tower, I was taken captive by one of the Dark God's surviving spawn. He informed me that the two Dark Gods were brother and sister, and that the one sealed at the tower was the older brother of the two. He had sealed his younger sister in the Underworld and so possessed the key to release her, which the spawn retrieved! I was then brought to the depths of the Underworld, where I was made to undo the seal."

"So it was your fault after all."

"What did I do wrong in that story?!"

"Which means if we don't do anything, that seal should stay as it is. If we don't get involved with them, we shouldn't have to worry about other

dangerous people messing with us either. It does sound like we would be able to live a relatively peaceful life here. Not that I care to.”

“Hold on a second. Even if the Sages agree to protect us, we’re still powerless. Can we really survive in this world like that?” Shigeto spoke up. Just because the Sages would take care of them didn’t mean they could live safely. For a world with as much danger as this one, there was no way Sion could keep all of them safe around the clock.

“I still have my power,” Yogiri remarked.

“I have the Dannoura-style archery and a guardian spirit,” added Tomochika.

“I can use ninjutsu and a little Onmyoudou,” Ryouko offered.

“I’m trained with most small weapons in CQC, and of course I have ninjutsu too!” said Carol.

“I’m a bird beastkin, so I can at least fly, I guess,” Haruto chimed in.

Surprisingly, the room seemed to be made up of anything but ordinary, powerless people.

“That doesn’t help the rest of us!” Shigeto snapped back.

“Precisely! Please restore the backup of my Gift at once!” Hanakawa emphatically agreed.

“True, I cannot guarantee your safety in any and every situation. I have no problem reissuing the Gift to those who wish to receive it again.”

“But that will make them more aggressive and violent again, right?” Tomochika asked.

“That was a setting I specifically selected when installing the Gift on you previously. I am more than capable of giving you the Gift without any such mental influence.”

“Really?!”

“However, there is no need to wish for the power of the Battlesong system if you have no intention of engaging in combat. If you are, I believe a degree of mental assistance is called for. An ordinary high school student suddenly given

superpowers will hardly be able to fight effectively.”

“Is there some power you want, Dannoura?” Yogiri asked.

“Uhh, not in particular, but I guess there’s still a bit of lingering trauma from when I got cut off from everyone else... Wait! What about communication? If you get Battlesong, you can understand the language in this world, right?”

“I can already speak the language here, though,” Yogiri said.

“Huh? Since when?”

“I’ve been studying the dictionary that concierge gave us while we traveled.”

When they had first arrived in this world, they hadn’t understood the language at all, so the hotel concierge had acquired a magical translator for them. At the same time, she had given Yogiri a study dictionary.

You did not even consider that, did you? Mekomoko teased her.

“The grammar is pretty similar to English, so once you know the vocabulary, it’s not that hard.”

“Except I’m not that good at English either!”

“Translation devices can be prepared for you. And of course, I can assist you with learning the language properly. So, to summarize, if you wish to live in this world under my protection, you will be able to spend the rest of your lives in comfort. You will attain status below that only of the Sages and gain influence far beyond what you could expect in your home world.”

“That’s kind of hard to picture...”

“But living in this world is still absurdly dangerous, is it not?” Hanakawa said. “We still have pirates and monsters to contend with, no? Even if you promise to protect us all...”

“Yes, you will have to keep those risks in mind. However, there is also the merit of a quiet, peaceful life here being unlikely to draw the attention of my grandfather.”

“But you don’t expect us to live peacefully at all, do you?” Yogiri asked.

“Not especially. I only thought to bring the option to your attention.”

“So what do we have to do if we want to go back?”

“I cannot say I have a guaranteed method of returning you home, but I imagine it will look very similar to what you were doing in part one. I will endeavor to collect as many Philosopher’s Stones for you as I can, and provide as much support as possible. I imagine it will go much smoother for you than it did before.”

“Either way, that means you’ll be helping us. What’s in it for you?” From the conversation so far, it sounded like Sion would just be taking care of them for nothing in return.

“I do not wish to be seen as your enemy. That is the only point in consideration for me. If I can avoid earning your hostility, no amount of effort or expense is too much.”

“Sounds like you think awfully highly of me.”

“I have been made painfully aware of what being your enemy entails, after all.”

“All right. If you don’t attack us, I won’t do anything to you either.” Though he went out of his way to say it, that was no different than the way he ordinarily did things. “I’m going to try to get home, but what about the rest of you?”

“I can hardly choose to act on my own now, can I?” Tomochika responded instantly.

“Oh and by the way, I’m going to be going back as soon as I can, so if you’re not with me at the time, that’s too bad for you,” Yogiri added.

“Still as cold as ever, huh?” Tomochika sighed.

“That’s why I’m asking now. Why should I help them get home if they’re not going to help us at all?” They didn’t even know if the power of the Philosopher’s Stones would be enough to send multiple people back at once. At this point, their only way home seemed likely to cut off the majority of the class anyway.

“I’m fine. If I can get some power in this world, I’m happy to enjoy life here,” Shigeto spoke slowly. Going home sounded nice and all, but he’d had his fill of bizarre incidents already.

“I’m fine staying here too. I’m not exactly keen on getting back to all my family obligations,” Haruto said, seeming to be telling the truth.

“What shall I do?” Hanakawa said, glancing at Yogiri. “I feel like there are risks in either case...”

“Why are you looking at me as you say that?”

“Huh? Are you not going to say something like ‘shut up and come with us!’ as your way of inviting me?”

“Make up your own mind.”

“Hmm...if something dangerous were to happen, perhaps it would be best to stay at Sir Takatou’s side...however, avoiding him seems the best path for avoiding such dangers in the first place... Miss Sion! What are the chances of you providing a harem for me?!”

“You want women to serve you? If that is all, I can provide you with some.”

“Then I shall become a harem king! I suppose that means goodbye, Sir Takatou!”

Tomochika immediately recoiled, as if she were looking at particularly disgusting garbage.

“Would you mind if I accompanied you?” Ryouko asked Yogiri.

“I want to go too,” added Carol.

Ryouko belonged to the Institute and Carol to the Agency, so it was perhaps obvious they would choose to stay with him. Yogiri had dealt with the Institute for a long time, so he knew what they were after, but he knew next to nothing about the Agency or what they wanted from him. Even now, it was hard to tell what Carol was thinking. That said, he didn’t have any particular reason to reject her request to accompany him.

“Okay, then it will be the four of us trying to get home.”

“Understood. Shall we begin by collecting the Philosopher’s Stones as in part one?” Sion confirmed.

“Yeah.”

“As I said before, I will collect as many for you as I can.”

“Are you sure that’s okay? The Sages are your allies, aren’t they? Can you just betray them like that?”

“I do not believe it constitutes a betrayal. Though my grandfather has forbidden us to fight amongst ourselves, we can do anything else we like.”

“So when you say you’re gathering them, you mean you’re going to ask the others to hand them over?”

“Yes. If all negotiations fail, then we will have to rely on you to retrieve them, so please be prepared for that.”

“That’s fine. That’s what we were already doing anyway.”

It was better if they could obtain the stones through negotiations, but if those broke down, they would at least have Sion to guide them to the other Sages. Things would be a lot easier this time than before.

“I believe we will make considerable progress simply by negotiating, but the most difficult person to deal with will be Van. He possesses all of the spare Philosopher’s Stones, so he will ultimately be the main target of our plans.”

“What kind of guy is he?”

“Unlike most of us, he is not a Sage brought here from another world. He is the true grandson of the Great Sage. His abilities are first-rate. As for his personality—”

As Sion began to describe Van, the door to the conference room slammed open.

“My apologies for interrupting! We have something of an emergency and would like to request your assistance, Miss Sage!” It was the concierge, Celestina.

“Well, well. If it is something serious enough to interrupt a Sage’s meeting for, it must be quite the emergency.”

“Yes! Unknown creatures are falling from the sky and attacking the people of the town, transforming them into monsters! Luckily, they move slowly and have yet to make their way into any buildings, but the city is still in peril!”

“From the sky? Let us head to the roof, then.” As Sion spoke, the room around them instantly transformed. The walls disappeared, and they were able to see a great distance. It seemed she had teleported everyone from the conference room up onto the roof of the hotel.

“If you can teleport that easily, why were we walking to the conference room?!” Tomochika cried out.

“There are plenty of risks, from appearing inside walls, to people fusing together, to deflecting off subspace bubbles. It is not an ability that can be used so casually.”

“Then don’t do it without warning us!”

From here, they couldn’t see anything abnormal about the city, but screams and cries of pain could be heard from below. A number of the mysterious creatures falling from the sky had landed on their own rooftop as well. The creatures looked like collections of plants with countless writhing roots and leaves. They were about a meter across each. It didn’t look like they had any way to probe the area around them, but they were all slowly creeping towards the group.

“I will put up a barrier around the hotel for now. Could I ask you to deal with the creatures within it for me, Takatou?”

“You should be able to handle this much on your own...but fine, I’ll do it.”



Yogiri immediately understood what these creatures were. They were the Seyla from the floating continent. They were immortal plants, latching on to other creatures to fuse with and infect them, falling from the sky. Yogiri killed the few bundles of them on the rooftop. Looking up, they could see more of them bouncing off an invisible barrier and falling to the city below. At the very least, it seemed the hotel would be safe.

“This is the Seyla, right? Why is it falling from the sky?”

“If it is from the sky, it must be Van’s doing.”

“Why though?! Nothing like this ever happened in part one!”

“Though Van may appear intellectual and insightful at first blush, he is a rather careless individual. There is a chance he let this happen without realizing what he was doing at all.”

“He sounds like a major pain in the ass!” Tomochika shouted.

Yogiri figured that since the world could end as easily as this, he wished people would stop blaming him for it.

Chapter 5 — I Guess I'll Need Her to Die Again

The classroom in the Suudoria Academy was in total chaos. They were in the middle of their afternoon classes, which was ordinary enough, but every person in the classroom knew something was wrong. Most of them had memories of a giant squid attacking and killing them. Some didn't remember anything but being annihilated by mysterious beams of light, but all of them recalled dying, so why were they here?

Among the chaos, Van alone was calm. Since he knew of the Great Sage's power, his only thought was to wonder why he had been returned to this place.

Hmm...1852nd year, Season of the Sun, the First Month, Day of the Tortoise? We didn't go that far back, did we? Was there something special about this day?

Though there was nothing in the classroom to tell him the date, he had access to the Battlesong system that ruled the world. It wasn't capable of keeping track of every little thing that happened, but finding out the current date and time was easy enough. Yet, even knowing the date and time, he couldn't think of anything in particular that made this day stand out. He had just been in class like usual. Nothing around him seemed out of the ordinary.

Van stood from his seat and left the classroom. It was hard to think in such a loud environment. Plenty of students had run from the room in a panic, so no one noticed Van leaving with them. Walking down the halls, he found the rest of the school was also in an uproar.

This was only the second time Van had experienced the Great Sage's power, and there had been a similar reaction the last time as well. It was normal for people to panic when time was suddenly reversed. But after a short while, their memories of the time before the reset would start to fade. They would recognize this new world as reality and eventually forget everything else like it had been nothing more than a long dream.

Van headed to the cafeteria. With no one else there, it was a convenient

place to think with some peace and quiet. He sat down in a random chair.

“Hmm, what do I do now?” Though everything before had basically been a dream, time *had* just been reversed. At this rate, history would repeat in exactly the same way as it had before. Everyone knew what was going to happen in the future, but if they didn’t pay close attention, they would soon forget it all. They would just write off anything similar happening again as *déjà vu*. In other words, if he wanted to change the course of history, he would have to do something himself.

“First of all, why did the population go down so much? And what was punching holes in the surface? Gramps said that Malnarilna died, so that girl woke up...so maybe I should make Malnarilna immortal?” Van’s thinking was fairly simple. It may have been better to think things through more thoroughly, but he couldn’t be bothered. After all, if he failed and everything went wrong, the Great Sage could just rewind time again.

“Why did Malnarilna die anyway? I guess it doesn’t matter. If I hide them somewhere, they can’t die. And if I tell them it’s orders from Gramps, they’ll probably listen.”

Even the gods Malna and Rilna weren’t exempt from the reset. In short, they should have known that they’d died. There was a good chance that telling them to hide so they wouldn’t die would be enough to convince them.

“But where are they? They abandoned the Heavenly Throne, right? I guess I should check the headquarters of the Malnarilna sect first.” Though he thought that, he wasn’t the kind of guy to move quickly. He figured he had time, so there was no reason to hurry.

“Anyway, this seems like a good time, so I guess I’ll put an end to the Four Kingdoms.”

Van’s abilities as a Sage were to set the rules for a game within a given area. He had set up a game where four kingdoms fought to destroy each other on the floating islands in the sky, but he had been made painfully aware of how much of a failure it had been...

First, the area was way too big. It was far too big for the number of players and factions. There wasn’t any particular reason it had been made that big. If he

had to say, it was just a thought he'd had.

At first, he considered making them use ships to travel between the islands to fight each other, but then he had the idea of connecting all the islands together to make a single large field. That idea alone drove him to stitch the islands together, and he had gotten a bit carried away. It had ended up being a continent two thousand kilometers across and four thousand kilometers long.

Just being big wasn't a problem in and of itself, but Van had added more constraints to try and make things interesting. He had set the bases of the four factions in the corners but was worried that one could just rush down a faction's main base at the start and take them out of the running immediately. In order to avoid that, he had placed movement restrictions on them. He divided the area into hexagons, ten kilometers long on each side, and then limited the amount of force that could enter each individual area. Assigning each unit a cost, he then put a limit on the total cost of units that could enter an area. On top of that, he required that a faction could only enter a given area if they controlled two areas adjacent to it.

That should have been enough to say something was wrong. With that rule set, it didn't seem like the game was going to progress at all. Reducing the size of the continent may have solved the problem, but really, it was a combination of the absurd size of the field and the tiny areas it had been divided into that ground progress to a halt.

And to make matters worse, there was the problem of the Seyla. Seyla was Sage Lain's younger twin sister. The pair had found a relic of some god while they were Sage candidates, which had transformed Seyla into an immortal monster. If left alone, it wouldn't take long for the rampaging Seyla to destroy the entire world. So Van had captured her, locked her away in the world of his game, and then made a plan to stabilize her.

He had been the one to spread the Seyla across the floating continent, but that had just been to liven things up. There'd been nothing on the floating islands before Van got there. He could change the environment a little through the rules of the game, but it was really just a big open field. There wasn't much entertaining about that, so he had figured some obstacle besides the other players was necessary to spice things up for the players.

Though the Seyla was weak, it was immortal. No matter how many times you killed it, it would revive. In short, there was no need to replenish the supply even as it got hunted down. The fact that he could force the players to collect energy from the Seyla as points, which he could then use to sustain the game itself, meant he could kill two birds with one stone. At least, that's what Van had thought, but instead, the Seyla had slowed the game down even more. It spread like a wildfire, infecting all other life on the continent in no time at all. All four factions were forced to move extremely cautiously.

After reaching a certain level of strength, one could fend off the Seyla's infection, but there weren't that many people with that level of power. You could protect yourself from the Seyla by enclosing your body entirely in armor, but that required significant time and effort.

The only thing that had really gone according to plan with the Seyla was the situation with acquiring food. Thanks to the infection, acquiring livestock and produce became extremely difficult. The few untouched areas of the continent became hotbeds for conflict, which was good.

In the end, though, there was hardly anything entertaining about the game, so the Great Sage had lost interest. He had stopped watching partway through. Feeling pushed into a corner, even Van felt there wasn't much chance of things improving at this point. But although he realized that, he didn't have the willpower to bring it to an end.

"I guess I'm already done preparing for a new game by now...and, well, with everything already in chaos, now's as good a time as any."

He could run more than one game at a time, but that would require splitting his resources. If he focused all of his resources on one game, the number of things he could do would increase, so there were better chances of it going well. Though there was no point sustaining a game with no future, Van did still have his life as a student of Suudoria Academy, so he had been hesitant to throw that all away. But now that everything had been plunged into chaos, having a sudden game over couldn't make things much worse, so now was a good time.

"I guess rather than a game over, it's more like a change in environment,

though.”

Ending the game wouldn’t mean all the players would die. All it meant was that the rules and setting would change. The buildings of the academy would still be here, and there would be no direct effect on the players.

Van opened the console menu, which only he could see. Opening the settings menu, he erased the game. Once he had decided to take action, the rest was easy. The game of the four kingdoms on the floating continent ended, and the resources used to maintain it were returned to him.

“I bet they’ll all be really surprised to find out they were actually on floating islands the whole time... Oh.”

The barriers disappeared, freeing everyone to move as they wished. They had thought they inhabited a large continent, so it must have looked like the land had suddenly been divided into numerous small, isolated islands. And that meant the Seyla was now free to move as well.

“Hmm. But the Seyla doesn’t really move on its own, does it? Or wait, did I change it to stop moving with the game rules?”

The Seyla spread its immortality, but it didn’t really change the makeup of the creatures it infected. Plants would move a little to try and catch prey that wandered nearby, but it wasn’t like they could pull up their roots and move around. But that had been because Van had used the game rules to stabilize them. Now free of the game’s restrictions, the Seyla began to rampage anew, fulfilling its natural instinct to grow and spread.

“Did I already screw up? Well, it’s not like the world will end because everyone became immortal, right?”

Van stayed optimistic until the end.



The next thing he knew, Kouryu was walking down a city street. The city was in an uproar, people panicking all around him.

“Hmm, so we’ve gone back in time. That’s too bad.”

Kouryu had killed Malnarilna and retaken his place as this world’s god. A

moment ago, he had been at the center of the world, the Heavenly Throne. He immediately realized this must have been the Great Sage's doing. This wasn't the first time it had happened, after all. If things went well, Yogiri could end up killing the Great Sage before he rewound time. Or possibly, Yogiri would treat the reset as an attack and kill the Great Sage for trying it. That's what Kouryu had hoped, but it seemed things wouldn't be so convenient.

"Well, whatever. I figured something like this might happen." Kouryu immediately recovered. He couldn't help but feel dejected, but now that things had changed, he had no choice but to keep moving forward. Rilna was still dead, so the seal binding Kouryu's powers was already gone. In other words, he had regained a significant amount of his power as a god.

He had always known something like this was possible. There was a good chance that if Yogiri went overboard, the world would be destroyed, and that if it happened, the Great Sage would likely start over.

"I really should have tried to get Yogiri to kill Malna too, huh?" He couldn't quite suppress those sadistic feelings. Though he had a grudge against the Sages, the main target of his hatred was the god who had stolen his position, Malnarilna.

This world was once ruled by twelve gods, of which Kouryu was one. Their control of the world had been firm, but one day, Malnarilna had suddenly appeared. With the help of the Great Sage, they were far too strong for Kouryu's side to handle. Kouryu had himself fought until the bitter end, when Rilna sealed his powers and threw him out into the world. The half-baked seal had effectively been an insult. They had only sealed his powers, leaving him free to wander so they could laugh at him for being helpless.

"Well, killing them once settled the grudge...but that aside, I guess I'll need her to die again."

If Malna died, other Dark Gods and great disasters would also be set free. But if Kouryu was to ever retake his position as the god of this world, that was something he wanted to avoid. In that case, it was most efficient to have Yogiri kill all of them while he was still here. Kouryu wasn't particularly strong for a god. He had little chance against the powerful gods of other worlds.

“If all he did was reverse time, the Great Sage probably doesn’t know about Yogiri yet. That should be more than I need to win.”

For now, he just needed to make sure he didn’t get on Yogiri’s bad side. As long as he didn’t incite Yogiri to action needlessly, the others standing in his way would likely sort themselves out.

The immediate issue would then be how to get rid of Malna, but Kouryu already had a plan for that. Last time, he had used a godslayer who had just happened to wander into this world, but in truth, he had been putting plans in place to kill Malnarilna since long before that. Though they were far from finished, Malnarilna was a pair of twin goddesses. Malna wouldn’t be able to exert her full power with Rilna gone. In short, without Rilna, Malna was less than half as strong. If he only needed to deal with Malna, then the pieces he had in place now would likely be enough.

Kouryu made his way to the Village of the Saints, the organization he had created to kill gods.

Chapter 6 — You Are Being as Much of an Antiheroine as Ever

“This seems pretty bad!” Tomochika said, stepping up to Sion.

“You think so? As far as I am aware, the Seyla only makes them immortal. Most people would be more than happy to receive such a curse, don’t you think?”

“Uhh...I suppose becoming immortal isn’t all that bad. But it seemed like a real problem for Scott...”

Scott was a boy infected by the Seyla who they had met on the floating continent. He was acting as a representative for the residents of an infected settlement. He had asked Yogiri to kill the infected, including Scott himself. The game taking place on that continent had exploited the infected by killing them repeatedly. Unable to bear the endless oppression, they had all wished for a final end. Yogiri’s power was a godsend to them. But barring any special circumstances like that, maybe becoming immortal wasn’t something to be worried about.

“Ah, maybe I’m wrong.”

Everyone followed Sion’s gaze. Plants falling from the sky were attacking people. Anyone they touched underwent an immediate transformation. It wasn’t a particularly drastic one. Humans were still bipedal, and the beastkin still had all of their inhuman parts, but the transformation twisted them in a bizarre way. Some had their arms extended, some swelled to double their original size, some had their arms and legs twist and bend unnaturally, some had their skin turn black as coal, some had ivy begin sprouting from their body. Each person transformed in a strange and different way.

Despite the change in their physical bodies, there didn’t seem to be much impact on their mental state, judging by the shock, lamentation, and fear coming from the victims as they realized what had happened to them.

“That seems much too steep a price to pay for immortality!” Hanakawa complained.

“You’d probably get used to it, right?” Carol remarked, totally unconcerned.

“Are you serious?!”

“There isn’t really a limit to what a reasonable trade-off for immortality is, right? It’s a pretty big deal.”

“I don’t think it’s quite the same if it happens against your will,” Yogiri replied. Whether the trade was worth it or not, the people being attacked now had no choice in the matter. No matter what the result was, he couldn’t think of this as anything but a disaster.

“You’re a Sage. Can’t you do anything about this?” Tomochika pressed Sion. “If this is your territory, don’t you have a responsibility to protect these people? It might not be an Aggressor, but it’s basically the same thing, right?” This situation did look very similar to an Aggressor attack.

“I suppose. I do not like seeing the people in my territory hurt needlessly, so I will protect them if I can. Let us see what I can do.” As she spoke, countless shadowy figures appeared throughout the city and began helping people. Some were knocking the falling balls of Seyla out of the city, others were restraining the infected, and still others guided people who had yet to be infected to the hotel. As the shadows weren’t living things, the Seyla didn’t seem able to infect them.

“Allow me to ask just in case. Is there anything you can do about this situation, Takatou?” Sion asked.

“That would be hard. It’s easy to kill anything that attacks me, but discriminating between the falling Seyla and the infected people would be pretty hard. I could kill all of them together, but that’s obviously not an option.” It would be one thing to kill the people who wished for it, like at the infected settlement, but he couldn’t bring himself to kill the people here without asking them.

“Then I suppose we will just have to manage like this for now.”

“Uhh...I appreciate that you are attempting to help the people, Miss Sion, but

with your immense power, should you not be capable of resolving this whole incident in a flash?” Hanakawa asked.

Now that he’d brought it up, creating familiars to help the people of the town did seem like a rather plain, roundabout way of fixing the issue. Yogiri felt like Sion should have been able to do something more impressive, like teleporting everyone to safety or teleporting all of the infected to a single place to imprison them.

“Actually, among the Sages, I am not especially strong.”

“Huh? But are you not over level one hundred million? Should that not make you immensely powerful?”

“Yes, I am currently level 5.3 billion. Your Discernment skill is likely unable to perceive any numbers over one hundred million, though.”

“Ah, so that explains the joke about being over level fifty-three thousand!”

“My ability as a Sage is that every time my heart beats, my level increases...though you could say that’s *all* my ability is. While my stats may be impressive, I have no other special abilities in particular. Even this barrier is only possible because I have large reserves of magical energy. I am not especially skilled at using magic either.”

“Excuse me, may I ask a question? If your level increases each time your heart beats, with an average heart rate of sixty beats per minute, it would take 170 years to reach that level. Something seems strange to me. Judging by your speech and behavior, it sounds as if you are familiar with modern Japan,” Ryouko said, piquing Yogiri’s curiosity too.

He didn’t know how Sion had become a Sage, but if she had gone through the Sage candidate process, she might have been summoned from Japan like they had. But in that case, that would make her from the Edo era.

“Well, Mokomoko is from the Heian era, but she has managed to adjust to modern times. Maybe it’s something like that?” Tomochika suggested.

I wonder. I have continued to collect information since my life in the Heian era, but if she were to have left Japan during the Edo period, her knowledge of Japan should stop there. Of course, it is possible that she learned some from those she

summoned here.

“Ah! Did I not explain my own situation to you all yet?”

“I don’t think so. If it’ll help, can you?” Yogiri wasn’t sure this was the time to be relaxing and listening to stories, but they had already done everything they could for now, so there was no point in panicking.

“Please wait a minute!”

“What do you want now, Hanakawa?” Yogiri sighed.

“No matter what I speak of, you always tell me you are not interested! Why the sudden interest in Miss Sion’s past?!”

“Probably because we really don’t care about you.”

“Your rebuttal is as cruel as always, Tomochika!”

“Because Sion’s story might actually be useful, unlike anything you ever tell us,” Yogiri answered seriously.

“I would also appreciate it if you stopped trying to rub my nose in that!”

“You’re the one always following us. Anyway, you can ignore him,” he told Sion.

“Very well. As you have guessed, I am Japanese. My real name is Shion Ryuuouin, using the characters for the flower, not the place in Israel. You are curious about when I came to this world, no? I became a Sage a few months after arriving in this world, so your calculation for my number of heartbeats seems more or less correct. As for when I left Japan...I suppose that was shortly after I graduated university...” Using the dates she gave, they figured she had left Japan about two years before Yogiri’s class had been summoned.

“So the flow of time *is* different...!” Tomochika exclaimed.

“You say that as if it is a new discovery, but I believe we established that when we first met!” Hanakawa said.

“Did we?”

“Of course we did! I told you last time I came to this world, I spent a year here, but only a few hours passed in our own world!”

“Well...even if you did explain it, there’s the issue of authenticity...”
Apparently even Tomochika had forgotten about that conversation.

“But that doesn’t line up with the difference Sion had, does it?” Yogiri said.

“In comparing the flow of time between worlds, there is always some fluctuation,” Sion explained. “However you can rest assured that the flow of time in this world is much faster, so you will not end up in an Urashima Tarou kind of situation.”

“Regardless, this conversation has no bearing on our current situation! What are we going to do now?!” Hanakawa asked.

“What do you mean? We’re collecting the Philosopher’s Stones, right?” After the conversation they had had in the conference room, Yogiri had figured that was the natural next step.

“How self-centered can you be?! How is this the time to be collecting Philosopher’s Stones?!”

“Sure, the world seems to be in trouble, but that’s a problem for the people of this world, right?” Tomochika said.

“You are being as much of an antiheroine as ever! In situations like this, the ideal heroine should be saying something like, ‘No matter how short our time together was, I can’t just leave the people of this world to their fate!’”

“But there’s nothing I can do. It would be pretty irresponsible for me to make a fuss over something I can do nothing about, don’t you think?”

“Ugh...you are truly cold through and through, Tomochika.”

“For now, I believe we can leave the other Sages to defend their own territories,” Sion said. “If things get too bad, I am sure time will simply be reset again.”

“That would also kind of be a pain.”

If restarts were going to happen that frequently, everything they did to try and get home would be useless. At the very least, it would be quite irritating.

“Hello, people of the world. I’m a Sage. My name is Van.”

As Yogiri thought about what they could do to start collecting Philosopher's Stones, a voice suddenly interrupted him. It was hard to tell where the voice was coming from. It was almost like it was being whispered right into his ear, despite no one standing beside him.

"Huh? What is this?" Apparently Tomochika couldn't figure out where it was coming from either, judging by the way she looked around confused.

"I made a small mistake, so some pretty dangerous stuff is now falling all over the world. Sorry."

"A small..."

"...mistake." Tomochika and Yogiri muttered together.

"These creatures will infect anyone they touch, turning them into monsters too. On top of that, they're immortal, so you can't get rid of them. If left alone, they'll probably take over the whole world. They can infect your food too, so even if you all hide, you'll probably starve to death pretty quickly. I feel a little responsible for all that, so I have a suggestion for you all."

"He doesn't sound too serious about this, does he?" Ryouko sighed.

"Miss Concierge, how is the hotel for food?" Yogiri asked.

"We have enough emergency supplies to feed the staff for about a week. I am sure the hotel's restaurant has more food as well, but if everyone in the city is evacuated here, the stockpiles will be exhausted in no time," Celestina replied, almost apologetic. Though the barrier Sion had set up protected them from the immediate threat of the Seyla, they wouldn't be able to hold out for very long.

"I'm making a new game, so you're all invited. It's called Cavern Quest. As the name suggests, it takes place underground. It's been separated from the surface, so those dangerous creatures won't be able to make it down there. There's also plenty of food, so don't worry about that."

"I suspect a bit more thought could have been put into the title," Hanakawa complained.

"I don't know, I think a cheap, simple name like that is easier to understand." Yogiri liked simpler, easier titles for games rather than needlessly complex ones.

“Of course, you don’t have to join if you don’t want to. It’s totally voluntary. I’ll tell you how to join, so feel free to do so whenever you like. All you have to do is say, ‘Play Cavern Quest’ out loud. You’ll be transported underground right away.”

“Hmm...that seems quite useful as a mechanism for escaping from dangerous situations.”

“Ah...was there anything else I needed to explain?”

“You didn’t explain anything yet!” Tomochika shouted back at him, though of course he couldn’t hear her.

“Oh, right! If you join the game, you won’t be able to leave. There’s a reward for beating the game, but if you’re joining just to run away from the monsters, then you don’t need to worry about it.”

“But now we’re curious, so could you please tell us?!” she complained again, but no explanation followed.

“Beyond that, he failed to even explain what kind of game it was, did he not?” Hanakawa added.

“If it’s called whatever quest, it’s probably an RPG, right?” Yogiri guessed.

“And we have to decide whether we join based on so little information?”

“A meeting for the Sages has been called. I suppose that is not strange, given the current circumstances. Do you mind if I go?” Sion asked.

“Go ahead. It might be helpful in getting more Philosopher’s Stones.” That would be the fastest way for Sion to find information on the whereabouts of the stones. It would certainly be a lot faster than anything Yogiri or the rest of them could do.

“In the meantime, I guess you will need to decide whether you will participate in Van’s game.”

“I’m pretty sure we don’t have to bother.”

“Your ability to ignore everything around you shines as always, Sir Takatou.”

“I, of course, cannot participate, but for now I will go install the Battlesong

client on all of your classmates. I am sure the difficulty will be such that ordinary humans will be killed almost immediately.”

With that, Sion vanished.

“Then I guess we...uhh, we’ll go back to our rooms for now?” It didn’t seem like there was anything they could do for now. They would have to wait for Sion to return before they made any moves.

“Are you really okay with that?!” Hanakawa sputtered.

“You can go ahead and join Cavern Quest if you want.”

“Absolutely not! I will definitely meet a horrendous fate if I try!”

Despite all his protests, Yogiri felt like Hanakawa still wanted to join.

Chapter 7 — Why Should I Have to Give Them to Some Guy I Don't Even Know?

Returning home, Sion immediately headed to the room she used for meetings. The Sages didn't meet in person, but rather sent projections of themselves to each other, creating a fake meeting of sorts. That way, no one could tell where they actually were. Normally, the Sages did not know where the others were.

After Sion used the spell to project herself, the other Sages appeared in the room with her. Aoi, Alice, Yoshifumi, and Van. The other Sages avoided contact with them at all costs, so it was just the usual group. Raiza never showed up at the meetings, but he wouldn't have been able to even if he'd wanted to. His arms, legs, and other vital organs had been killed by Yogiri, so he had no way of communicating with them.

"What's goin' on here?" Yoshifumi asked Van, though he was much calmer than expected. Normally he would have been more aggressive.

"I ended my game up in the sky, and the Seyla ended up falling off the islands. I was a bit careless."

"A bit careless?" Yoshifumi sighed. Yoshifumi was the type to go to absurd lengths, but he did have some sense of restraint. He never did anything that would impact the entire world.

"Can you not trap the Seyla in another game?" Sion asked. That would be the fastest solution. He had kept it sealed away up until now, so he just needed to do the same thing again.

"I can only bring people into my game if they agree to it. Back when I trapped Seyla in Four Kingdoms, she hadn't spread nearly as much, so she still had a faint consciousness left. She didn't want to cause problems for others, so she agreed to join the game. But now she has no sense of self at all. And with how much it's spread, getting consent from each person would take forever."

“You sound like this is all someone else’s problem,” Yoshifumi grumbled.

“I do feel responsible, though. That’s why I let anyone who wants to join my new game. Normally, I’m much more strict about who gets to participate.”

“Will grandfather not do anything about this?”

“The world isn’t totally doomed yet, right? It *might* be, but he probably finds that possibility exciting.”

“And the stuff has no weaknesses?” Yoshifumi asked.

“Well, I don’t think it’s strong enough to cause problems for you guys. The only thing it has going for it is that it can’t die, so if you lock it away somewhere, you’ll be fine. It’ll stop falling from the sky soon, so after that you just need to find somewhere safe.”

“That’s not the issue, is it?” Alice interjected. “You’re causing huge problems for us. How do you plan to apologize for this?” She was the type to lock herself away in her own world, so she wasn’t directly affected by the Seyla, but even someone like her would feel the need to complain if someone brought a disaster on their world.

“Then why don’t you guys join the game too? It’s safe in there.”

“Like hell we’d join your shitty game!” Yoshifumi shouted.

Even if they were Sages, once they joined his game, they’d be bound by his rules. They couldn’t trust him just because he was a Sage, and they couldn’t entrust the entire world to him, especially after his carelessness had just thrown that world into peril.

“You can’t call it a bad game when you haven’t even played it. I realize Four Kingdoms had a lot of problems, I do, but this time is different. I’ve made Cavern Quest a lot simpler and more straightforward. And I left all the details to Shirou. He’s pretty good at that kind of stuff.”



“I haven’t heard a word from Shirou in so long. So, he was in your Cavern Quest game this whole time?” Sion asked.

The Sage Shirou was in charge of the land of Zabora and styled himself as a researcher. Sion had a general idea of what the other Sages were up to, but at some point Shirou had completely vanished.

“Yeah, he’s working as my Submaster. I’m sure gramps will find it entertaining this time. So, was this whole meeting just to complain to me? In that case, I screwed up. I’m sorry.” Van gave a reluctant apology. Apparently, having his game insulted had upset him a little.

“Did Shirou agree to join your game?”

“No, he didn’t join it. He’s the Submaster, not a player. He’s dealing with managing the resources for the game. He does stuff like resource allocation and object placement.” In other words, Van didn’t have absolute control over Shirou’s life and death.

“Anyway, Aoi called this meeting, right?” Alice asked. “There’s no way you just wanted to mouth off to Van, did you?”

“Right. It’s about Yogiri Takatou. I want to talk about him.”

Yoshifumi clicked his tongue with displeasure. “That dude?”

“Ah...him...” murmured Alice.

“Last time we met, the topic was quite unsettling for you,” Sion said. “Are you okay to discuss it now?”

“I haven’t encountered him personally this time,” Aoi explained. It was said that trauma could physically change the brain. As this Aoi hadn’t met Yogiri yet, her brain was still in its original state. Even if she had memories of the trauma, it probably didn’t feel quite as real.

“You all know my powers as a Sage are my Hero Killer Eyes, right?”

“Yeah, I remember that. The kind of thing that kills anyone just by lookin’ at ‘em, right?”

“Not at all. It lets me see the flow of fate.”

Aoi had two main powers, Hero Killer Eyes and Just World. The eyes let her see fate itself. Just World dragged others into a reality where everything was reshaped to conform to Aoi's expectations. She had used those two powers to kill those who had come close to the abilities of the Sages without joining them, effectively acting as an assassin.

"We agreed to kill him last time, right? But I ended up meeting him, so I guess you failed?" Alice said.

There was a chance that Yogiri Takatou was linked to the death of Santarou and the disappearance of Lain. Though he was no more than a Sage candidate, they had decided that the possibility of a connection was enough to kill him, so Aoi had been dispatched to assassinate him.

"That's right, I failed. I saw him with my own eyes. That thing is the end of this world, the ultimate end of fate itself. No one can beat it. We can't afford to mess with him anymore!"

"Yeah...I get it. We should probably ignore him," Yoshifumi said listlessly, a stark contrast to his usual self.

"So, I have a suggestion. I heard from Sion that Yogiri is collecting the Philosopher's Stones in order to use their power to get back to his home world. We should give him the Philosopher's Stones and get him out of here. We can't afford to let a being like that stay in this world!"

Sion had met Aoi immediately after part two had begun. She had thought it was strange how easily Aoi had handed over her Philosopher's Stone, but it seemed she had thought things through herself.

"I don't mind handin' over mine either. I'm in my palace, so you can come and get it whenever." Yoshifumi had taken a much more far-sighted view of things. It seemed he wanted to avoid dealing with Yogiri as well.

"I shall head there to retrieve it, then," Sion said. "I am our best point of contact with Takatou at the moment. What about you, Alice?"

"What? I'm not strong like you guys! I can't do anything without my Philosopher's Stone!"

The Philosopher's Stones held a tremendous amount of energy, which the

Sages could tap into. But after reaching a certain level of strength, Sages didn't have much need for something that was just raw energy.

"I will inform Takatou of your decision, then. It pains me to betray family, but if he is to threaten me, I have no means of resisting, so I may have to give up your location to him..." Sion replied.

The Sages were forbidden from fighting each other, but that didn't stop them from using proxies to fight for them. However, Sion didn't actually know where Alice was, so it was really no more than a bluff.

"What?! Hmm...I guess I have no choice..." Alice reluctantly agreed to hand over her Philosopher's Stone as well. During part one, one of Yogiri's companions had stolen her stone from her. Maybe she wanted to avoid meeting the same fate again.

"We would like your Philosopher's Stones too, Van. I imagine someone like you doesn't have much use for them anyway, do you?" Aoi asked.

"Hmmm. You're right, I don't really need them, and I was told to take charge of the leftovers, so I'm allowed to hand them over if I really want to. But why should I have to give them to some guy I don't even know?"

"Because if you don't, you'll die. You are underestimating Yogiri Takatou. If the thought occurs to him, he can sentence you to an eternity of nothingness, and you will have no way to prevent it."

"From the information we have so far, he has the ability to inflict instant death at will, regardless of the difference between him and his target," Sion added. "In addition, he can detect killing intent, so killing him preemptively is not an option."

It was hard to get across just how terrifying Yogiri was. Anyone with real power would think of any number of ways to resist instant death, bring themselves back to life, or prevent the attack in the first place. His ability to detect killing intent could be dealt with by using an attack that was fast enough that he couldn't react in time, or with such range that there was no way to avoid it.

Even explaining all of that didn't help much if someone hadn't experienced his

power themselves. Anyone would think they could find a way to manage. Sion had been exactly like that. She had never imagined she herself might lose to Yogiri.

“Honestly, it’s hard to believe there’s a guy that strong out there. If you and Aoi say so, I’m sure he’s pretty tough, but it’s hard to accept it...so how about this? Make Takatou join my game. Then I can see his power for myself.”

“This isn’t the time for games, Van! Yogiri Takatou is a walking disaster! Even the Great Sage’s power can’t undo what he has done! We need to get him out of this world while we have the chance to do it peacefully!” Aoi shouted angrily at him.

“I just want to see for myself a little. Is he really that unreasonable a person?”

“When I met him earlier, it did not seem he had much interest in your game,” Sion said.

“Ah! Then how about I add the Philosopher’s Stones to the clear reward for Cavern Quest?” Van suggested. “That’s good enough for you too, right, Aoi? If he beats the game and gets the stones, he can leave this world. If he can’t, then he can’t have been all that strong, so he isn’t really that much of a threat. And he’ll have to join if that’s the reward, right?”

“Very well. I will give him your answer.” Though it was annoying, in a way, Sion couldn’t help but think it was a decent solution. It was a far better result than Van running away and hiding. With this, there was at least a concrete way of getting to Van and the Philosopher’s Stones. He was a pretty irresponsible person, but he was very strict when it came to the application of his own rules.

“Fine. But please at least guarantee you’ll give him all of the stones if he beats your game. I can’t trust a verbal promise.” Aoi reluctantly accepted Van’s proposal.

“Huh? Am I really that untrustworthy?”

“Course you are,” Yoshifumi interjected. “Do you not remember what is literally happening right now?”

“Fine. Come find me after the meeting, Aoi. I’ll take you to the stones so you can see me set up the rule.”

“I’ll head there right now. This is you we’re talking about. If I wait another minute, you’ll probably forget.”

“I won’t...or at least, I’d like to say so, and it kind of hurts that I can’t. Oh well.” Van didn’t generally lie, but he regularly forgot his promises or changed his mind if they ended up becoming a nuisance for him.

Van and Aoi vanished, having pulled out of the meeting. Aoi would likely contact them once Van had added the Philosopher’s Stone to the rewards.

“I suppose we are done here, then?”

“Yes. Ah, actually! Do any of you happen to know the whereabouts of Akemi and Gorouzaburou?” Sion couldn’t just go back empty-handed. She decided to collect the other Philosopher’s Stones right away.

Chapter 8 — In a World Dominated by the Seyla, I Alone Am Safe

As they descended the stairs from the hotel roof, Hanakawa was deep in thought. After Sion had left for her meeting with the other Sages, they had finished their discussion and gone their separate ways. Everyone else had gone on ahead, so Hanakawa was left walking alone.

“No, no, no! I can understand why Sir Takatou and Tomochika would leave together and why Ryouko and Carol would go with them! But why would Sir Ootori and Mitadera leave together?! And when did that concierge disappear?!”

Everyone had grouped up and left naturally, so he had hesitated to force his way into any of their groups.

“Now then, I decided to stay in this world after all...so what do I do?”

Sion had agreed to build a harem for him, and while he wanted nothing more than to take her up on that offer, it was doubtful whether such a thing was possible in a world overrun by the Seyla.

“Ugh...in a world dominated by the Seyla, I alone am safe. That would make me a true harem king, but there is no way such a convenient coincidence could come to pass. Actually, is it totally impossible that my luck could swing in that direction? For example, I could have some inexplicable resistance to the infection! Geh heh heh! If I could provide them food, no one would be able to disobey me!”

Though he happily entertained the delusion, he had no intention of testing the idea out. All land outside of the barrier surrounding the hotel was dangerous. He wasn't insane enough to intentionally leave.

“I suppose I could head outside, and in the worst case, I have my one chance to join the game to escape harm...”

The mysterious message had said they would be instantly teleported

underground when they joined the game, something most would find impossible to believe. But Hanakawa didn't doubt it in the least. He felt Van wasn't the type of person to lie.

"But it is still a game created by Sir Van, is it not? Though he was quite kind to me at the academy, I am not sure I can trust the games he makes..."

Van had honestly tried to help Hanakawa but had no issues with the idea of brainwashing the people around him to do so. In short, he didn't seem to be the type with a strong sense of right and wrong. It wasn't hard to believe he'd do something unethical in an attempt to be kind.

"The name Cavern Quest does not explain what the game is about, though. Regardless, this place should be safe for now. Though there is the issue of acquiring food, with Miss Sion's ability to teleport us, we should be able to secure foodstuffs without too much trouble! Living the rest of my life here would be too much, but...no matter! I am sure a certain protagonist will clean all of this up sooner or later!"

He had no intention of doing something about the Seyla himself, nor did he have the ability to.

"That said! Wouldn't Sir Takatou be capable of doing something similar?! With his ability to kill anything, the Seyla would prove no hindrance to his movement! Though it seems he has no wish to indulge himself so! I am sure he will eventually reluctantly deal with the Seyla, or alternatively resolve the problem entirely by accident while attempting to help someone else! Had I his powers, I would freely do whatever I wished and earn a peerless otherworld harem!"

Hanakawa continued muttering to himself as he descended the stairs.

"That said, I am not one to hold on to resentment. I am a much more tolerant person now. After all, a harem has been promised to me already."

Putting the important problems aside for now, he decided to enjoy his stay in the luxury hotel. The stores and restaurants were all on the first floor, so he headed there first.

"I wonder, is food still being served in the restaurant? If there is a concern

about food, there is a possibility it will be closed...”

But it ended up being a needless worry. Either the staff had decided there was no point in rationing food or they hadn’t even considered there might be a food shortage. The high-class restaurant was still running in full swing.

“Please bring me your finest dish!”

Without the Gift, Hanakawa had no access to his item box and therefore couldn’t pay for food in any way, but it seemed the staff knew he was associated with the Sage as they immediately showed him to a seat.

“Actually, it has been quite a while since I have had a decent meal, has it not? My expectations continue to grow!”

His chest swelling in anticipation, he began looking around the restaurant. He had boldly given an indistinct order, so he had no idea what kind of food awaited him. There were only a few others in the restaurant. It seemed the evacuees from the city hadn’t come here yet.

Hanakawa looked at a nearby table. A wealthy looking family sat there, food piled up to the point it seemed impossible for their small number to ever finish it.

“Oooh...that is much more wild than I would expect from such a high-class restaurant. A whole roast placed in the center of the table? How does one even begin to eat such a thing?”

Though he didn’t recognize the animal, a four-legged creature of some description lay cooked in the center of their table, giving a bizarre impression to the display.

“Ah...no matter. The aroma alone is enough to stimulate my appetite. I am sure whatever it is, it is delicious!”

Though he was a little concerned now, he forced himself to get over it. He was sure he wouldn’t get something that strange. However, that concern was soon overwritten by another one as, no matter how long he waited, nothing came. No matter how much time passed, no one came to deliver any food.

“Hmm. Perhaps the best dish is the one that takes the most time to prepare.

Perhaps I should order something else in the meantime.”

If it would take that long, it might be best to order something else to tide him over. As Hanakawa hesitated, a large sound came from the kitchen. The sound of something heavy and metal crashing to the ground, the sound of plates smashing, and faint screams.

“I am getting a terrible feeling about this...b-but occasionally, such things are commonplace in a restaurant such as this. Ah! Perhaps a brand new, clumsy yet beautiful chef had been working to prepare my meal, and accidentally threw the entire thing to the floor on her way to present it to me! Such a thing is quite possible! And in that case, said beautiful woman would then be on her way to apologize to me directly, would she not?!”

Fleeing from the restaurant immediately may have been the smart choice. But there was the possibility he would get an apology from a clumsy female chef. As Hanakawa hesitated, the father of the rich family nearby fell face-first onto his table. Food was sent flying in all directions, and his wife and children began to scream.

If that had been all, one could have written it off as a sudden illness, but there was something sticking out of the man’s back. It was like something had erupted from his stomach through his back, and was now squirming around, reaching for the food on the table.

“Ah, such a development is common in zombie stories, is it not? The moment one relaxes, thinking their dwelling is perfectly sealed and safe, one learns there is a member of the infected already inside, driving everyone to desperation!”

Hanakawa felt instinctively that the man must have been infected by the Seyla. He couldn’t imagine some entirely unrelated parasite bursting out of a man in a situation like this. The tentacles sprouting from the man reached out and grabbed the man’s wife and children. Nothing happened to them immediately, but something else underwent a drastic change. Despite being thoroughly cooked and definitely dead, the roast animal on the table started to move. The legs, which had been cut off, regrew, and its roasted skin began to grow hair. A similar change was happening with the rest of the food. Resurrected fish and shrimp flopped around on the plates, something began

writhing within the soup, and the salad exploded outwards, covering the table in greenery.

“Ah! This is not the time to be watching in shock! I must flee!”

Hanakawa rose from his seat and slowly began making his way out of the restaurant. Perhaps luckily, the infected food wasn't aiming for him. It seemed content to attack the people nearby first.

“Without panic, without creating a scene. Make my way to the exit. Perhaps this way I can avoid being attacked?”

But that hope was immediately dashed. Their infection complete, the infected family all turned their attention to Hanakawa as one.

“I suppose it was foolish to think I alone could escape!”

He no longer had the luxury of moving slowly. Hanakawa made a break for the exit, leaving the restaurant and heading to the lobby of the hotel. The infected didn't give chase immediately. It seemed they couldn't move especially fast.

“Are these the classic zombies that will not give chase if one flees?”

However, the panic had already spread to the lobby. People with warped bodies and hollow eyes were attacking everyone around them.

“For now, I must head upstairs!”

There was no point in trying to get outside. The Seyla were everywhere beyond the barrier, and he didn't know if he could pass through it anyway.

Hanakawa ran up the stairs. Something was chasing him, and at full speed.

“I would prefer if you did not mix the running types of zombies together!”

However, the thing chasing Hanakawa was far larger than he was, and that made it quite a bit slower. That said, without the Gift, Hanakawa wasn't particularly fast either.

“Ugh! Two fatties running up the stairs is not a scene anyone wishes to see! Even if my life is on the line here, I do not feel much of a sense of tension...though even if I run at full speed, it will eventually overtake me, and

there will be nothing I can do!”

Even so, he couldn't stop. Hanakawa struggled his way up the staircase.

“These stairs...are...too much...”

It seemed his pursuer was similarly exhausted. The infection didn't appear to be lending them any physical strength.

“That said, I have not yet escaped...however! In times like this, I have my perfect guardian deity! Master Takatou is here, is he not?! I need to reach him somehow. The fifth floor, was it not?”

Having yet to even reach the second floor, the fifth floor seemed impossibly far away.

“W-Well, as long as my pursuer is also exhausted, perhaps I will be able to manage...”

Though he couldn't afford to let his guard down, his outlook was still optimistic, until he heard footsteps coming from behind his corpulent pursuer. The source of the footsteps quickly knocked the larger pursuer out of the way and rushed up towards Hanakawa.

“Ha ha...well...if the only cost of immortality is wishing to spread the infection, then...wah!”

The moment he gave up and came to a stop, Hanakawa felt himself suddenly accelerate. His exhausted body had flown up the stairs and reached the second floor.

“What? Huh? Is this the awakening I have long sought? Has this crisis uncovered some hidden potential within me?”

“I apologize for the rough treatment. Are you unharmed?” It was the concierge, Celestina. Hanakawa looked down the stairs he had come from to see the infected that had been pursuing him collapsed at the bottom, motionless.

“Please come this way.”

Doing as instructed, Hanakawa stepped closer to the concierge, after which fire doors closed to seal the stairway.

“What just happened?”

“That would be this,” Celestina said, holding out a hand. She was holding a bundle of thread so thin as to be almost invisible. “I used this thread to pull you to safety and restrain those chasing you at the bottom of the stairs.”

“Why does a hotel concierge have skills like this?!”

“It is a skill I picked up as a hobby. Normally, it is not particularly useful, but it seems to have come in handy here.”

“A thread user? That gives quite a powerful impression!”

Celestina chuckled. “That is kind of you to say.”

“But if we close these doors, then the people below us...” Though he felt ashamed to say so after he had fled here alone, now that he was safe, he had to admit to feeling a little concerned.

“My sincerest apologies, but there are none but staff and those who have been evacuated from the city on the first floor. The safety of those staying at the hotel is my top priority.” In other words, she had no problem cutting off those who weren’t guests.

“Uhh...does that mean this place is safe?”

“Unfortunately, I cannot guarantee that. All pathways to the first floor have been closed, but the fire doors are not that sturdy. And considering the creature in question, I imagine it will eventually find its way here through the ventilation system.”

“So what should we do now?”

“It is only a matter of time before we are wiped out if we stay here. It would be best if we could find a safer place to hide...though if the enemy is falling from the sky, such a place may be difficult to find. I believe we have little hope now but to rely on the power of the Sages.”

“I suppose we can rely on Sir Van’s proposal. Do you believe it will really work?”

“I suspect you will be teleported, yes. I cannot imagine why he would lie.”

“But is saying something like ‘Play Cavern Quest’ really enough to initiate a—
Uh oh.”

“Ah!” Not expecting Hanakawa to say the keywords out loud, the normally calm and collected Celestina seemed to panic briefly.

Hanakawa’s body began to glow faintly.

“Umm...please be careful.”

“Wait, can you not do something?! I have no desire to go there! Why were the keywords something so simple and easy to say by accident?!”

“I do not believe it is the kind of thing one would say in daily life, but...in any case, I have attached my thread to your body. I imagine I will end up in the same place sooner or later, so when that happens I will endeavor to assist you.”

Hanakawa disappeared from the hotel hallway.

Chapter 9 — It Seems like the Introduction Scene to an Other World Reincarnation Story

Hanakawa was floating in an empty white space. He had expected to be teleported right into the game after saying the keywords, but it didn't seem that was the case.

"Ahh. I have not had this experience myself, but it seems like the introduction scene to an other world reincarnation story. Normally, a goddess would appear to bestow some sort of cheat power on me..."

Hanakawa's previous summonings had all been rather abrupt, the kind where he'd appeared in another world before he had realized what was happening.

"Sorry. Though I might have the dignity of a goddess, it is just me." The Sage Sion appeared beside him.

"Oh! How abrupt! Did you not have something like a meeting to attend?"

"No, this is not my actual self. I told you I would give you the Battlesong installation before, did I not? That is what this is. Van's game uses the Battlesong system as well, so I set it up to interrupt the game's starting sequence with a client installation. I am nothing more than the UI for that installation procedure."

"Did that require you to use Miss Sion's visage?"

"Not at all, but I do have to ask whether or not you would like to install the client. Do you not think a yes or no dialogue box would be a bit unsatisfying?"

"I feel like that would be fine, honestly." Considering all that Sion had put them through, Hanakawa felt instinctively on guard against her. A more mechanical procedure would have actually been more encouraging.

"So, what will it be? If you allow the installation as per normal, you will most likely receive the same class as in part one, though if you wish for it strongly enough, it is possible to obtain a different one. Of course, you can also choose

not to install it at all.”

“Oh? Sir Van told me Sages were capable of freely manipulating Battlesong and could thus give any class or skills they wished.” Back in part one, Van had increased Hanakawa’s level and given him a range of new skills.

“Did he, now? At the very least, such a thing is beyond me. All I can do is give you the randomized Gift from installing the base client.”

“Dammit! So he is that terrible kind of person who believes anyone could do something he alone was capable of!”

“He is certainly like that, though he seems totally unaware of it.”

“In any case, I have no choice but to accept the installation. There are hardly any demerits to it at this point. Ah, but in my case, you said it would be restoring my backup. How will that work?”

“I can restore your backup Gift or give you a brand-new installation. If you choose to restore your previous Gift, you will be guaranteed to have the same class and level as before. If you receive a new installation, your level will return to one, but your class will be determined at random, so it may or may not be useful.”

It was a difficult decision to make. The Healer class wasn’t particularly skilled in combat, but its survival capabilities were incredible. Though he wouldn’t be exceedingly strong, it certainly had its utility. That said, being capped at level ninety-nine meant he couldn’t grow all that much. On the other hand, a fresh install would put him back at level one, and he may not receive any useful abilities at all. It was quite possible he would die helplessly right away. However, there was the possibility of him obtaining the Limit Break skill, allowing him to grow far beyond what he was capable of as a Healer. So the choice was between a class that would be useful and have little future prospects, or getting something entirely random hoping for better growth in the future.

“Hmm...well...Healer did not seem like it was quite sufficient...so I will have to ask for a fresh install!”

“Understood. Would you like the mental assistance turned on?”

“You mean the personality change to be more warlike?”

“Yes. Ordinary high school students would find themselves extremely averse to killing monsters, let alone other people, and would find it very difficult to engage in combat.”

“Then, if you could give me a little bit of that...”

“How about level three? At that level, you will calm down the moment you have resolved yourself to take action and will recover from shock with ease. How does that sound?”

“Out of curiosity, what is the highest level possible?”

“That would be level ten. In part one, I had you all set to level six. At level six, you will lose your inhibition to murder, become easily sexually aroused, and be more likely to resort to violence to resolve any conflict. At level ten, one is willing to resort to killing for something as simple as someone standing in their way on the street and will assault members of the opposite sex on sight.”

“Level three is fine.”

“Understood. Then let us begin.”

“Please wait a moment! I wish to focus myself first! You said strong feelings can influence the class I gain, correct?!”

“I doubt anything you could do now would influence the result.”

“Please do not look down at me like you know I will receive a useless class already!”

“Very well. I will give you one minute.”

Hanakawa started taking deep breaths. He began to imagine what kind of class, what kind of skills he wanted, and focused hard on them.

“Okay, beginning the installation process now.”

“Huh? Has it already been one minute?!” He still wasn’t ready. He tried to stop her, but before he could say any more, his vision filled with strange letters. It was the Battlesong client startup sequence. If the installation was complete, nothing he imagined would affect the result now.

After a short time, the colorful images faded, and his status window appeared. His new class was Monk.

“Oh. Looks like you received a high-level class.” Sion seemed surprised.

“For being no more than a UI, you seem to have quite a bit of variation to your reactions. Well, no matter. My current self is able to forgive anything now!”

Hanakawa had figured his odds were good. He had been a Monk once before, so he could easily imagine what kind of class that was. He had figured that approach was much more likely to succeed than coming up with some vague, powerful class he knew nothing about.

His skills consisted of Limit Break, Heal, Auto Heal, Item Box, Status Discernment, Close Combat, Spiritual Refinement, Spirit Projectiles, Insight, Claw Mastery, Spear Mastery, and Staff Mastery. They were all exactly the same as he had gained when Van had changed his class before. Perhaps these were the starting skills for the Monk class. As expected, his level had been reset to one, but it wouldn't take long for him to surpass his strength as a Healer.

“That is the limit of my intervention. I only interfered with the teleportation process a little, so now that your installation is complete, you will teleport as normal.”

As she said that, Sion disappeared and Hanakawa was standing on the ground again.



Tomochika lay motionless on her bed. She didn't really have anything to do until Sion made it back.

“I kind of hate being stuck in limbo like this...”

If you have nothing else to do, you could always train.

“What? Now? Here?”

All of your training since coming here may very well have been reset. It may be best to confirm that for ourselves.

Tomochika hadn't been trained past the advanced arts of the Dannoura

School before, so Mokomoko had been teaching her as they traveled. The school was broken up into four main levels: beginner, intermediate, advanced, and final arts. Once those had all been learned, one could then learn the final level, the true arts. Mokomoko had tried to teach her the true arts, but it hadn't been successful, so Tomochika had been training in the final arts instead.

"I remember doing it, so it's probably fine..." That said, if everything that happened had essentially been "a dream," it was likely those memories would fade over time. It would be an issue if all that training went to waste, so she stood up from her bed and started going through the movements again. Her body being the masterwork of the Dannoura lineage, it didn't take long at all for her to grow accustomed to the forms.

"Something like that?"

It seems there are no issues. You will likely be able to conclude the final arts and move on to the true arts soon.

"I don't feel like martial arts are going to be all that useful in this world though...huh?"

Is something wrong?

"Something feels off..." Her highly refined senses could pick up the slightest change in the environment around her. Feeling the barest trembling in the structure of the hotel, so faint an ordinary person would never notice it, Tomochika felt a vague sense of danger. "Something's happening below us? That's what it feels like..."

I shall take a look.

Mokomoko slipped through the floor.

"I really don't get what the limits on her movement are...well, I guess she can probably go anywhere in the hotel, right?"

As her guardian spirit, Mokomoko couldn't leave Tomochika's side. That restriction was so powerful it had brought Mokomoko along with her when Tomochika was transported to this world. However, there didn't seem to be much of an issue moving vertically, as she had often gone up into the sky to survey the landscape.

After a short time, Mokomoko returned.

Things have gone quite wrong. The first floor is filled with those infected by the Seyla.

“What? Isn’t the barrier supposed to be keeping them out?”

Perhaps there were some inside before the barrier was erected. For now, the first and second floors have been closed off, but who knows how long they will hold?

The answer to that question came almost immediately, the window of Tomochika’s room shattered as something barreled in from outside.

“You couldn’t even wait two seconds, could you?!”

They seem quite different than what we saw before. On Belm, the Seyla was not nearly this active and had not transformed its victims to this degree.

The creature that came through the window was humanoid in shape, but the ends of its arms and legs came to sharp, bladelike points instead of hands and feet.

Make sure you do not touch it.

“Die,” Yogiri’s voice came from behind them. As usual, the creature that had come through the window collapsed motionless to the ground.

“Takatou!”

Turning around, they saw Yogiri standing right there. The door was off its hinges, so he had likely killed it to get in the room. He had his backpack on, so it seemed like he was planning on running away already.

“You okay?” he asked.

“Somehow, yes.”

The Seyla had broken into his room as well, so he had hurried to her room to make sure she wasn’t in danger.

“It doesn’t look like there’s anywhere safe left for us.”

As they spoke, the sound of screams and glass breaking filled the air.

“The hotel is currently under attack by the mysterious creatures,” Celestina’s voice said over the hotel’s intercom. “We have attempted to erect barricades to keep the creatures at bay, but they are now climbing the walls and infiltrating through the windows, so it has become quite difficult to ensure everyone’s safety. I believe it would be safest for everyone to take up the Sage’s offer. I can confirm that if you say the keyword, you will be immediately teleported away. If you feel you are in danger, please do so immediately. Those who do not wish to teleport, please come to the rooftop.”

“An intercom system doesn’t seem very fantasy world, does it?” Tomochika commented.

There appears to be some technological transfer between worlds.

“Let’s head to the roof,” Yogiri suggested. “We have to wait for Sion anyway.”

Stepping out into the hallway, they headed to the stairs and started climbing to the roof. They came across some of the Seyla on the way, but Yogiri had no trouble dispatching them. It seemed the infected still had a measure of their original personalities, but he had no choice but to deal with them immediately.

They made it to the roof, but the only thing they found there was more infected. Being able to climb the walls of the hotel, it must have been easy enough for them to reach the top. It didn’t seem like there were any other survivors, with Tomochika and Yogiri being the only uninfected in sight.

“Looks like it’s already too late,” Yogiri said. It appeared almost everyone in the hotel had already been infected. How many survivors were still in the building? They could only hope anyone left would teleport to safety in time.

“For now, I’ll clean up these—” Yogiri was about to kill the infected in front of them as usual, but before he got the chance, the Seyla were all blown off the rooftop.

“My apologies for being late. It took longer to rescue everyone than I anticipated.” It was Celestina.

“Did you do that?” Yogiri asked her, confused.

“Yes. Everyone below us has teleported to safety. You two are the only ones left. Will you not go?”

“We have to wait for Sion.” If everyone else had joined Cavern Quest, it made sense that they were the only ones on the roof. But Sion had said she couldn’t join Cavern Quest, so if they teleported away, making contact with her again would be difficult.

“Understood. Allow me to buy you some time, then.” Celestina spun around, lifting her hands into the air. Her graceful, dance-like movements weren’t quite enough to distract Tomochika from the familiar looking object in her hands. A thread, so thin as to be nearly invisible, stretched out from her hands. The thread wove a complicated web over them, creating something like a dome.

“Huh? I thought we saw... Ah! Back in the trial at the tower!”

Teresa of the Thunderous Blade. The woman in the maid outfit who had taken it upon herself to act like an examiner and attacked them. She had used a thin, wirelike blade to fight, much like what Celestina was using now.

“If you are speaking of the tower of the trial, you must be speaking of the trial to become Knights of the Divine King. Have you met my sister, then?”

“Teresa is your sister?”

“Yes, unfortunately. She caused some problems and was forced to retake the trial. I hope she did not cause you undue trouble.”

“Trouble, huh? Wait, didn’t Teresa belong to the royal family? What does that make you?!” Of course, Tomochika couldn’t say they had killed Teresa, so she tried to change the subject. During the incident in the tower, the third prince of Manii, Richard, had told them that Teresa used to belong to the royal family. If Celestina was her older sister, that would have meant she was royalty as well.

“I am just a simple concierge.”

“Can simple concierges make barriers out of thread?!” The infected that had climbed the outer walls of the hotel and made it back to the rooftop were getting caught in her barrier of thread, being immobilized midair.

“I believe such skills are ordinary for a concierge.”

“Concierges in this world are on a whole other level...” As Tomochika muttered in disbelief, Sion appeared beside them.

“Sorry for the wait.”

“How did it go?”

“First, let me give you these. I was able to obtain four stones.” At Yogiri’s question, Sion immediately pulled four round, transparent stones out of nowhere. They were the Philosopher’s Stones belonging to Yoshifumi, Alice, Gorouzaburou, and Akemi. Putting all of them together, they now had seven. Taking the stones, Yogiri put them in his backpack.

“Isn’t that way too many to start with?!” Tomochika exclaimed.

“All that remain are the ones in the possession of the Sages Van and Shirou. Van has put the Philosopher’s Stones he possesses up as a reward for clearing Cavern Quest. Shirou is currently working with Van as the Submaster for the Cavern Quest game as well, so if you wish to obtain any more, I suspect heading underground is our only option.”

“I guess we don’t really have a choice,” Yogiri spoke slowly. Their classmates had already teleported underground, so it wasn’t like the two of them could do much if they stayed on the surface themselves.

“What about you, Celestina?”

“Once you have all headed below ground, I believe I will follow you.”

“Okay. Let’s go, then.” Without any hesitation, Yogiri took hold of Tomochika’s hand.



“Wha?! Why?!” Tomochika immediately became flustered by the unexpected behavior.

“Teleporting is fine, but it’ll be a problem if we get split up. So I figured if we held hands, we might end up in the same place.”

“R-Really?!”

I feel he is just continuing his habit of making any excuse at all for physical contact...

“I cannot say where you will be teleported either, but judging by what I know of Van, I doubt you will be split up.”

But how much could they trust Van, someone they had never met? Just in case, Tomochika accepted the gesture.

“Okay, then, let’s count down and say it together. Three, two, one. Play Cavern Quest.”

The two of them declared their intent to play at the same time.



After a bright flash, the scenery around them completely changed. Under their feet was dry earth, and around them were a number of wooden buildings. They were in some sort of settlement. Knowing nothing about Cavern Quest, there had been a possibility of them appearing someplace dangerous, but it seemed they had landed somewhere people could live.

Looking to his side, Yogiri saw he was still holding hands with Tomochika. He had no idea whether it had made any difference, but he was relieved that they hadn’t been split up.

“You okay?”

“Yeah. I don’t think there’s anything wrong.” Letting go of his hand, Tomochika checked herself over. Her belongings and clothes all seemed to be in order. Just in case, Yogiri checked the contents of his backpack as well, but there were still seven Philosopher’s Stones inside.

Looking up, they could see a glowing orb in the sky, beyond which was a stone

ceiling. Though it wasn't entirely clear at first glance, the game was called Cavern Quest, so perhaps it all took place in this underground cave.

"So, what now?"

"I guess we should check out the buildings in front of us first. Looks like there's something written on the sign." Yogiri tried to read it, but the handwriting was so bad that he couldn't make it out. He had spent quite a bit of time studying the language of this world, but he still had more to do.

"Oh, hold on! Let me try reading it!"

"How?"

When we were teleported, she was asked if she would like the Battlesong system to be installed, and accepted. Of course, I made sure it would not affect her negatively, so you can rest easy.

The Battlesong client Sion had given their classmates allowed them to understand the language of this world. They were able to read, write, and speak the language of this world with no problem.

"If Mekomoko says it's fine, then okay."

"Uhh...looks like this is the Adventurer's Guild. Wait, Adventurer's Guild?!"

Once he had heard it from her, Yogiri could piece together the words himself as well.

"After all we've been through in this world, we're getting this cliché *now*?!" Tomochika cried.

"I guess we should go inside and talk with them." Yogiri was somewhat looking forward to the idea of stepping in and registering as an adventurer.

Chapter 10 — Interlude: A Beautiful Goddess like Me Is Accompanying You! You Should Be Moved to Tears!

Darian, the second prince of the Kingdom of Manii, awoke to find himself lying in a tent. He looked around, completely lost. He was totally confused. He couldn't remember when it was, where he was, or what he was doing here.

Vampires... We were hunting half-demons...

But the more he thought about it, the less he was convinced that was right.

"Jolt! Are you here?!" he called out in a loud voice. A large man stepped into his tent.

"You called, Darian?"

Jolt had been reincarnated in this world having retained his memories of his previous life. He had been training his abilities since infancy. At one point, he had come up against Darian and been defeated and had since agreed to work under him.

"What day is it today? Where are we?"

"So you are the same as the rest of us. It is currently the 1852nd year, Season of the Sun, the First Month, the Day of the Tortoise...I believe. We are at the border of the kingdom and set up camp on our way back to the capital."

Darian's group of reincarnated people traveled around the country, trying to improve the world. They were supposed to be in the middle of that, but his memories of what exactly they were doing were incredibly vague. He had the feeling he had heard about some sort of incident and had gone to resolve it.

"Do you remember the incident of the half-demons being abducted?"

"I remember it, but...nothing like that actually happened, did it? Maybe there is some kind of gas having a mental effect on everyone here. Everyone in the

camp seems off.”

If they knew about what was going to happen in the future, they might have been sent back in time. No normal person would think of that possibility, but it was a natural thing for Darian to consider. After all, he had the ability to go back in time and redo things.

However, the limit to his ability was to go back ten days at most, and he couldn't bring others with him. It also was normally accompanied by side effects, a vicious headache and terrible nausea. While he was confused, he didn't feel unwell at all. In other words, things didn't line up with his own ability being used.

Darian felt a vague sense of unease. “Just in case, let us begin preparations to leave this place.”

“Got it. By the way, do you know anything about a guy named Robert? There shouldn't be anyone called that in our group, but for some reason I feel like there was someone with that name always with us...”

“Robert?” Hearing the name, Darian immediately recalled one of his followers with a cruel personality that had been with them from the beginning. But strangely, he also knew there had never been anyone in their group with that name. “I seem to remember him falling from his horse...”

Go for it. If you're going to kill someone, see if you can take me out!

He had then boldly moved his horse forward. He'd been facing a black-haired Japanese boy.

“That's right... That boy...”

Don't remember.

Alarm bells rang in his head, demanding that he stop thinking, but like ripples on the surface of a pond, the memory of Robert started bringing forth all kinds of other memories. They had been pursuing the stolen half-demons when they had come across a vampire. The vampire was with that boy. Darian had demanded they return the stolen half-demons, and the boy had refused. Darian had demonstrated his power by erasing a nearby mountain, but the boy's will remained unchanged. And then, the boy named Takatou had said he could kill

anyone just by thinking it.

That's right. I saw him do it. He killed a number of us without doing anything.

But Darian had still thought he could win. He had the power to stop time. No matter how powerful the boy was, if time was stopped, his power would be useless. Deciding to kill the boy, he stopped time.

Stop. Don't remember any more.

The warnings rang out more intensely. But the flood of memories was unstoppable. The moment he had decided to kill the boy, they had appeared. Countless eyes filled the space around him, every single one of them staring at Darian.

"Huh?" Darian was pulled out of his thoughts by the sense of someone nearby.

Eyes.

Eyes.

Eyes.

Countless eyes in countless shapes. In the space right beside him. On the ceiling of his tent. On Jolt's back as he made to leave. There were eyes everywhere.

Darian screamed.

"Darian?! What's wrong?!" Jolt ran to his side.

Darian had remembered. There was a being in this world that absolutely must not be interfered with. Once he had realized that, no matter where he went, no matter how far back in time he went, there was no escape.

It didn't take long for him to lose his sanity again.



The next thing Lynel knew, he was standing among ruins—not some run-down wooden shack, but a decrepit stone building overflowing with history. For a moment, he was confused, but he recovered surprisingly quickly. Lynel had experienced a similar thing countless times before through his Random Walk

ability. He was used to randomly appearing in new places.

“Huh? Didn’t the goddess say she took away my Random Walk ability?”

Even if he had used it, Random Walk only activated when he died. He didn’t remember being in a situation that would have killed him. After he had watched the battle between the UEG and the Divine King and his luck had been reversed to become great fortune, nothing of note had happened. The last thing he remembered was being in the middle of eating, but he highly doubted he had suddenly died of food poisoning.

“Umm. I guess I should get out of here to start with...but where am I again?”

Lynel recognized the spot. It was a ruin a short distance away from the capital of Manii. There was basically nothing here, so people never came by. There shouldn’t have been anyone here now either. Lynel had come here specifically to find a place with no one around. He was being chased, and anyone around him would likely be attacked just for being near him. His pursuer had killed him numerous times, forcing him to try again and again to find a way to escape. Trial and error had brought him here.

“Huh? But, wasn’t this place...”

In the end, this place had been a failure as well. His pursuer had found him and slashed him to pieces. He did remember surviving a bit longer than usual, though. Spending time in old ruins like this gave his pursuer a chance to lose sight of him.

“All right! Calm down! I know what’s going to happen next, so I might be able to avoid it...so...”

If this was the same situation that had ended in his death before, his ability to remember the details of that event precisely would be the key to his survival this time. He concentrated, trying to remember anything that stood out. The events immediately surrounding his death were relatively easy to recall. The ceiling had been caved in, letting him see a blue sky. Light was filtering in, illuminating a small statue.

Lynel looked around. He appeared to be standing in some sort of hallway. The walls were run-down enough to let in some light, but the ceiling was intact and

there were no statues. In other words, it didn't seem like there was an immediate threat of him dying. But if he just stood around dumbly, the enemy would likely find him.

Lynel began to proceed with caution. He remembered running in a panic last time, but right now he felt rushing recklessly was dangerous. After walking for a short time, he found a stretch of corridor with a caved-in ceiling through which he could see a bright blue sky. There were no statues here, but he now remembered there had been another problem. As he had run in a panic, the floor under him had collapsed. Looking closely, he could see cracks running through the floor. He carefully stepped along the wall, avoiding the cracks.

"Looks like it worked. There's no guarantee avoiding that place will save my life, but..."

But the best he could do was avoid the future he knew about. Keeping his eyes and ears peeled for any signs of others nearby, he continued through the ruins. He turned a corner to find a dead end, where someone was standing.

Lynel was shocked. It had appeared with no warning at all. It was a monster covered in blades. The Hedgehog. The creature that had been chasing him up until now.

"Oh."

Lynel was dead. The Hedgehog was incredibly fast, and its wicked blades could slice through any kind of armor like it was paper. It was far too close for Lynel to have any hope of escaping, so Lynel knew he'd be dead within moments.

He closed his eyes. He knew he couldn't win and couldn't escape. At this point, he just wanted to get it over with. But after waiting for a while with nothing happening, he hesitantly opened his eyes.

The Hedgehog was standing still. Its masklike face made it impossible to tell what it was thinking, but it didn't seem like it had even noticed Lynel's presence.

Can I escape if I just slowly back away?

Lynel stepped backwards, a loud cracking sound coming from the spot below

his foot. He had stepped on a weak point on the floor. By the time he realized what he had done, it was already too late. The floor had collapsed under him, sending him hurtling down with a large pile of debris.

Luckily the next floor down wasn't particularly far. With his terrible luck, it wasn't strange for Lynel to die from falling two or three meters, but he had survived with only a few scratches. He couldn't say his luck was any better, though, as the collapsing floor had dropped the Hedgehog down there with him.

Of course, after falling like that, the Hedgehog couldn't remain motionless. It slowly picked itself up off the ground, turning to look at Lynel.

"Goddess Beam!"

The moment Lynel thought it was over, he heard a woman's voice. A beam of light fired from behind him, striking the Hedgehog directly and sending it flying. The machine smashed through the wall and flew off, disappearing into the room beyond.

"Long time no see!"

Lynel turned towards the carefree voice. A woman was standing there. Her clothes were gaudy and revealing, and she was covered from head to toe with flashy jewelry and ornaments, accentuating her voluptuous body. Swords, spears, and shields floated in the air around her as if to protect her. Lynel recognized her immediately. She was Vahanato, a goddess who had a deep connection to him.

"Huh? What? Didn't Rick kill you? Oh right, I went back in time."

"This isn't your Random Walk. That just sends your soul to a parallel world with different possibilities. What happened this time is a much bigger deal. It was like the whole world was rewound or something."

"Sure, but isn't it weird for you to show up now?"

"Yeah. Normally, I wouldn't show up until later. But for people like me who got erased by the rewind, there was a waiting room for us to sit in until our time to show up came."

“A waiting room?”

“But I’m a goddess, you know? I just forced my way out.”

Lynel couldn’t really understand what she was talking about, but as a goddess, he was sure she would find a way out of it. “Anyway, time has been reversed. So why are you here?”

“Ah! Sorry. Did you think a beautiful goddess came to meet you? I was actually here to give that thing a beating.” Though Vahanato had been killed by Richard, the third prince of the Kingdom of Manii who had inherited the title of Swordmaster, it had been the Hedgehog that had weakened her to the point where she could be killed at all. She must have come here to take revenge on it.

“Uhh, actually, I was kind of hoping we’d never meet again...” Lynel said. Though she was the goddess that had given him his powers, she had only done it in order to revive a Dark God. Lynel had been no more than a puppet in her scheme. He had lost any and all respect or admiration for her. “That said, no matter what the reason, you saved me, so thanks. I’ll be heading out now.”

“Hold on.” As Lynel made to leave, Vahanato stepped in front of him.

“Do you still have some business with me?”

“I forced my way into this world by piggybacking on our connection. I don’t have that much freedom until the normal timing for my arrival comes.”

“What? Wait, you don’t mean...”

“Congratulations! A beautiful goddess like me is accompanying you! You should be moved to tears!”



“Whaaaaat?!”

Though he complained, he knew nothing he said would change it. As an ordinary human, there was no way he could disobey a goddess.

“Besides, your luck is so bad that you’d probably die if you were alone... Huh? Wait, why is your luck so good all of a sudden?”

“Ah ha ha...well, uhh, I don’t know if you could consider this situation lucky...” Though now that he thought about it, having a goddess show up to rescue him from a precarious situation at the last second was a pretty convenient development. As for why his luck had improved, he had an idea. The UEG had improved his luck.

“I see. Some god somewhere changed your luck, and it didn’t change back. Even if time got rewound, you still have memories, right? Do you remember anything like someone messing with your luck or your soul?”

“I guess so. Either way, it’s a pretty big help.”

“Anyway, let’s go!” Vahanato grabbed Lynel’s hand and pulled him along behind her as she walked.

“Where?”

“To find that spiky guy! A beam like that wouldn’t kill him, so I’ve gotta make him regret stabbing me!”

“It kind of looks like a robot. I doubt it has the ability to regret anything...”

“Who cares?! I’m gonna smash it to pieces!” Vahanato continued walking at a healthy clip, heading for the hole in the wall she had made with the Hedgehog’s body.

“Uh, is this a good idea? That thing is really strong, right? Didn’t you already lose to it once?”

“I was distracted that time because my darling was dead! There’s no way I’d lose to that thing when I’m in perfect condition!”

Passing through the wall, they found another small room. Some broken parts of the Hedgehog lay scattered on the floor, but otherwise it was empty. Fallen

debris blocked the other exits of the room, making the hole in the wall the only way in and out of the room, but regardless, the Hedgehog was nowhere to be seen.

“Did it teleport or something?”

“That thing is fast, but it can’t teleport. If it could, you never would have been able to get away from it.”

“If you’re a goddess, shouldn’t you be able to track it or something?”

“Right now my existence is pretty limited, so I can’t do everything I could in my own world. We’ll have to look for it the old-fashioned way.”

“Then I guess that’s goodbye, then?”

“Why? We’ve got lots of people we need to get revenge on! Like the guy who killed me in the end, and the guy who killed my darling!”

“Ugh...”

Lynel really didn’t feel like his luck had improved all that much.



Did the Hedgehog really have a mind?

In the end, it had to have one in some way. After all, the fact it had been caught up in time being reversed had left it in a state of total confusion. A regular machine wouldn’t even have noticed. If time were rewound, it would simply find itself in a previous situation, and there would have been no contradiction in that.

But the Hedgehog had self-awareness and a progressively changing memory. It had something akin to a soul, and it had memories beyond those stored in its computational structure. So it was confused. From its perspective, the environment around it had suddenly transformed.

The Hedgehog had been defeated by some god and fled in scattered pieces. Seeking new power, it had fused with a being calling itself a Demon Lord. Immediately after that, someone had destroyed it. That’s what it remembered, but the next thing it knew, it was back in its original form, standing in some building.

The Hedgehog pushed its mind to the limit, trying to get a grasp on its current situation. It had decided to leave dealing with the human nearby until later. However, it had been unable to form a consistent explanation for what had happened, failing to understand the situation. The floor had then collapsed, and it had been sent flying by an attack from a god. Unable to respond, it had taken the attack head-on.

The already damaged Hedgehog was broken even further. It had been thrown into this world without being properly adjusted, its multiple processors running independently of each other, failing to integrate properly. A number of those processing units had been destroyed.

Normally, that would only serve to accelerate its collapse. However, this time it was different. With a number of its processing units gone, the surviving units could think more clearly. In other words, it had regained some measure of sanity.

“Now then. I thought about trying to get that goddess on my side, but it looks like you’re closer to what I’m looking for.” A boy was standing at the collapsed Hedgehog’s side. “My name is Kouryu. I’m a god, but I’m a different genre than your target, right? I think we can probably work together. How about it? If you work with me, I’ll get you out of here.”

Up until now, the Hedgehog had attacked any god it laid eyes on. But now it was able to think more clearly and logically. With its current strength, it couldn’t beat the god before it. Defeating the goddess that had attacked it a moment ago would also prove difficult.

In that case, there was only one choice. Failing here was not an option.

The Hedgehog took Kouryu’s hand.

ACT

2



Chapter 11 — A Guild Card Made with Inscrutable Technology, Somehow Recognized across the World, and Impossible to Forge

Yogiri and Tomochika stepped into the adventurer's guild. The first thing they saw inside was a large set of doors in front of them. It made them feel like they might have come in through the back entrance.

The next thing they noticed was the noisy area to their right. A number of tables were lined up, and waitresses were going back and forth between them and the kitchen. People looking like adventurers were eating and drinking at the tables. Though a fair number had likely teleported here before the two of them, a look around the room didn't turn up any faces they recognized.

"Looks like it's got a bar built into it," Yogiri observed.

To the left of the entrance was a counter with five reception areas.

"Ah, welcome! I don't recognize you two. Are you newcomers?" A nearby waitress called out to them.

"Is this the adventurer's guild? I have no idea what you guys do here," Yogiri asked.

"First of all, as you can see, we serve food and drinks here," the waitress answered. "But we also offer support for quests."

"You mean like Cavern Quest?"

"That's right. Though there are also other quests, like monster extermination and item collections quests. Either way, if you want to play Cavern Quest, you need to register with the guild."

"Oh, really? Should we?" Yogiri asked Tomochika.

"Either way, I'd like an explanation," she answered.

"Okay. If you're brand new, please go to the leftmost counter!"

Doing as they were instructed by the waitress, they headed for the counter, but someone stepped in their way to block them.

“Hey, hey, are kids like you really trying to sign up to be adventurers? Don’t insult us like that. You’ll just die anyway. If you wanna survive, you’re better off trying to curry favor with us in hopes you get some of our crumbs.”

“Well, isn’t this a cliché development?!” Tomochika exclaimed. Standing in front of them was a man wearing leather armor, looking every bit an adventurer.

“What do we do, then?”

“Ignore him, I guess.”

There was no need to entertain the man. Yogiri tried to step around him to get to the counter, but the man moved to get in his way.

“Come on, get out of here while I’m still in a good mood. You’re not gonna survive out there with just a little scrape.”

“What happens to us is none of your business.” Yogiri’s words were met with laughter from all around. At some point, other adventurers had surrounded them.

“If you want to go get killed, fine. But we don’t need you feeding the monsters.”

“That’s right. All you’ll do is make the monsters level up.”

“There’s plenty of work besides being an adventurer out there, at least for you, girl.”

“Yeah, that’s right. Just turn around. The prostitute guild or the slave guild would be more your style!”

The men’s faces lit up with vulgar smiles.

“I seriously don’t know what to do,” Yogiri said. He couldn’t just kill them because they were standing around him. “If they had planned to kill us, I could have used that as an excuse, though.” Judging by their behavior, the situation here likely wouldn’t escalate to anything beyond punches. Yogiri’s automatic self-defense wouldn’t trigger for something like that.

“Definitely don’t do anything!” Tomochika said. “I’ll take care of this!”

“Are you sure? If they have the Gift, I don’t know if your martial arts will really be a match.” Ordinary thugs would be no match for Tomochika, but this world was full of twisted people with all kinds of abilities.

“This doesn’t seem like the kind of situation where people would be using their powers, does it? Though if it comes to that, I’m sure you’ll do something.”

Tomochika disappeared. It took Yogiri a moment to realize what had happened, but she had feigned collapsing, dropping to the floor and sweeping the legs out from the man in front of her.

The Dannoura style was to start the fight in the middle of the conversation. Her unexpected movement would cause others to lose sight of her. The sweep threw the man off-balance, sending him stumbling into the man beside him, creating a domino effect that knocked the whole group down. They were now all lying on the floor in a ring around them. Their arms and legs tangled together, they couldn’t figure out what had happened.

The technique is not useful against anyone of comparable skill, but against a large group that seeks only to restrict your movement and has no intention of killing you, it has its uses, Mokomoko remarked.

Each of the men struggling to stand were tripping up the others around them, effectively immobilizing the whole group.

“That went pretty well for a first try.”

“You’ve never done that before?”

“You can’t really get a big group of targets like that for training.”

“That was impressive.” Another adventurer approached. “After that, I doubt anyone else will try to stop you. Of course, I won’t either. I won’t ask you to forgive these guys, but I hope you at least understand they’re desperate to survive down here too.”

“Huh? All they were doing was trying to stop us from registering, though, right?”

“That’s true, but they have their reasons. Go ahead to the counter, they’ll

explain it to you.” After saying that, the man left.

“What was that about? Whatever, let’s go.” Tomochika stepped over the tangled mess of adventurers, and Yogiri followed her. They went to the leftmost counter as instructed.

“Would you like to register together?” the receptionist asked them.

“Yeah, if that’s not a problem.”

“Understood. The registration itself will be extremely quick. Please place your hand on this crystal.”

One at a time, Yogiri and Tomochika put a hand on the crystal ball the receptionist had indicated.

“Next, can you please give me your names?”

After giving her their names, their registration was complete.

“Very well, allow me to explain Cavern Quest—”

“Ah, I’ll do it. Can you two come up to the second floor, please?” A man dressed like nobility behind the counter interrupted her. He was a young man, with blonde hair, blue eyes, and a gentle smile.

“Very well. Do you mind if the guildmaster explains the rest to you?”

They didn’t know why the guildmaster himself had come out to talk to them, but they had no reason to refuse his request.



After receiving the Gift from Sion, Hanakawa found himself facing a settlement of wooden buildings built on dry earth. There was no sign of other people outside. The Seyla incident seemed to be a worldwide one, so Van must have given his message to everyone across the world. In short, one would have expected a large number of people to appear here, driven out of their homes by the Seyla. But there was no one. He found it a little bit strange.

“There are some buildings nearby, so I suppose that is an instruction to enter them?”

The buildings had a number of signs in front of them. They seemed to be an

adventurer's guild, a weapon shop, and an inn.

"Receiving the Gift may have been optional, but without it, I would be unable to read a thing here. It seems to have already become quite indispensable. Regardless, let us begin with the adventurer's guild!"

Hanakawa stepped through the doors and into the adventurer's guild. Inside was a bar and reception counter, meaning the part dealing with the adventurer's guild was likely the reception area. He immediately made his way to the counter.

"Wait, is no one going to appear to stop me?! Is it not standard for a veteran to stand in the way of new recruits and to be struck down in turn?!"

He didn't really want anyone to try and stop him, but after getting his new class of Monk, he was letting himself get a bit carried away.

"If you were a cute girl, maybe, but I'll pass on you. Go ahead and register," a nearby adventurer said as he walked by.

Without incident, Hanakawa made it to the reception counter and sat down.

"You wish to register with the guild?" the woman behind the counter asked him with a bright smile.

"Very much so!"

"Then please put a hand on this crystal."

"Oh! This is to discern my stats, is it not? And if the numbers are too high, the guildmaster himself will make an appearance?!"

"No, this is just to record your biometric data for recognition purposes."

"Huh? Then is there some possibility my immense power may cause the crystal to overload and break?"

"If you break it, you'll have to pay for it, so please be gentle."

"Ah, very well." Hanakawa gently placed his hand on the crystal as instructed. It felt a little cool, but nothing of note happened.

"That is enough. Can I also have your name?"

"I am Daimon Hanakawa."

“Thank you. With that, your registration is complete. Allow me to explain about Cavern Quest—”

“Huh? That is all it takes to register?! Will I not receive a guild card made with inscrutable technology, somehow recognized across the world, and impossible to forge?!”

“We do not issue cards, no.”

“Then how will I be able to prove my identity?”

“We recorded your biometric data, so that will be enough to confirm your identity. That is much more convenient than having to carry a card around, don’t you think?”

“That may be so, but then how will rumors spread about those with incredible stats, classes, and ranks?”

“I can’t really say.”

“And how am I supposed to flex my guild rank to get my way?!”

“Guild rank? We don’t really have anything like that...”

“What?! I mean the rank that determines what difficulty of quests you are permitted to accept from the guild!”

“Quests are assigned a difficulty rating, but there is no restriction on which quests you can take.”

“But it is supposed to act as a safety mechanism to protect us from taking quests that are too much for us...”

“If you take a quest that is too difficult for you, your fate is your own responsibility.” The receptionist spoke like she was explaining something totally menial.

“Ugh...but guild rank is such a good measure of a member’s strength...”

“Do you mind if we move on to the explanation?” the receptionist asked, clearly fed up with him.

“Fine. Please continue.”

“The ultimate objective for Cavern Quest is to defeat the Subterranean King

Lasbo. If you defeat him, you will have beaten the game.”

“That sounds rather cheap as a name. Or perhaps I should say it is reminiscent of a certain pet robot?”

“By the way, the quest at the bottom left posted on the wall of the bar is the Lasbo Extermination quest.”

Hanakawa looked over at the bar. The far wall was covered in sheets of paper.

“Huh? I can challenge him at any time?”

“Yes, you can.” The receptionist’s eyes turned cold, as if to say “Why not hurry up, take the quest, and go die?” “Next, allow me to explain how to take quests. On each quest paper is a number. Once you give that number to the quest counter, the large doors in the center of the room will open so you can begin your quest.”

“Huh? I can begin it directly from here?”

“Yes. You will be teleported to the quest field directly. The field for each quest will be clearly labeled on the quest paper, so please make sure you check it carefully.”

“That seems somehow too easy...”

“If you wish to gather allies to take on your quest, we can provide you with a card showing the number of your quest. Please take that to any table in the bar and wait for companions.”

Hanakawa looked at the bar. Now that she had mentioned it, he noticed numbered cards sitting on the tables around the room.

“Aha. I wondered what they were doing in a bar in the middle of the day, but I suppose they are attempting to form parties.”

“The general flow expected is for you to take quests to strengthen your equipment and yourself to the point where you will be able to eventually take on Lasbo.”

“Well...it seems there is not much need to do these quests. Is there some reward for them?” He had come here mostly to get away from the Seyla, so it didn’t seem like there was any real reason for him to actually participate in the

game.

“Yes. Clearing quests will earn you DP. DP is required to pay the Life Tax.”

“Life Tax?” Hanakawa asked in response to the ominous term.

“Yes. Every day, the Life Tax will automatically be deducted from your account. If you cannot afford to pay it, you will die.”

“How can you say something so outrageous so calmly?!”

It seemed he couldn't afford to play around here.

Chapter 12 — I Want You to Figure Out the Rest Yourself

In the guildmaster's room on the second floor, Yogiri and Tomochika were sitting on a sofa across from the young man, a table between them, where they were receiving an explanation of Cavern Quest.

"Sounds like a familiar premise for a game."

"One where you hunt monsters..."

You took a quest, headed out to a field, and after completing your objective, returned home. You collected materials to strengthen your equipment, which allowed you to take on more difficult quests. That was the kind of game Cavern Quest was.

"It's pretty straightforward, right? You get stronger and stronger until you can defeat the last boss. That's all there is to it."

"Then what about those guys who tried to stop us from registering?" Yogiri asked. "We were told to ask the receptionist about it." If the game was that simple, it didn't make sense for that many people to show up to try and stop them.

"I guess I haven't explained about DP yet," the guildmaster answered. "DP is something like money, and you get it as a reward for doing quests. It stands for Drama Points. Basically, you get them for doing something dramatic in the game. They were hoping to get some DP for participating in an event where they mess with new adventurers."

"Huh? You can get money for that?!"

"Yup. You can make a pretty good amount of DP doing stuff like that. It's the only currency you can use in Cavern Quest, so it's absolutely necessary to survive. And just to warn you, arranging things beforehand and just acting it out doesn't work. The Director AI watches your behavior closely, so if you want DP for it, it'll have to be impromptu."

“Hold on, this isn’t really sounding very simple anymore...” Tomochika tilted her head. Yogiri also felt like he understood the hunting game aspect easily enough, but he was starting to feel like there were some unnecessary parts being added on.

“So I understand how Cavern Quest works, but why did you feel the need to explain it to us personally?” he asked.

The guildmaster had given them a good explanation, but nothing that the receptionist wouldn’t have been able to do. It didn’t feel like there had been much point to taking them aside like this.

“Oh! I guess I haven’t introduced myself yet. I’m a Sage. The name’s Van. I wanted to see what the rumored Yogiri Takatou was like firsthand.”

“Huh?” Tomochika blurted out. Yogiri also hadn’t expected the Sage to appear in front of them so quickly.

“I’m not planning on being your enemy or anything, so don’t worry.”

True to his word, he hadn’t shown anything close to killing intent towards them yet. All he had done was explain Cavern Quest.

“If you’re a Sage, that makes things easy. The Philosopher’s Stones are here, right?” Yogiri asked. Sion had said that the clear reward for Cavern Quest would be the Philosopher’s Stones.

“Yeah, I’ve got them right here. Come on in,” Van called out, prompting some others to enter the room. A slender elf, a plump young man, a small but fit older man, a bewitching woman in a wide-brimmed, three-pointed hat, a young man with horns growing from his forehead, and another young man with a sharp gaze. In addition to the six of them, there was a large white dog. They lined up on the side of the room to Yogiri’s right.

“Oh, you’re already here, Hanakawa?” Yogiri remarked.

The plump young man was none other than their troublesome classmate.

“So it appears...though I cannot say I know what is going on,” he answered. It seemed he wasn’t the only one completely in the dark. The others seemed equally confused.

“The Philosopher’s Stones are inside them,” Van said, casually waving a hand. As he did, blood sprayed from Hanakawa’s chest. He crumpled to the ground with a bizarre gurgle as the others around him screamed. A huge hole had been torn in his chest, showing a round stone inside his body.

“Relax, Hanakawa. You’re a Monk now, so you won’t die from that. You can heal yourself too, right?”

“H-Heal...” Hanakawa struggled to speak, but the wound didn’t close right away. Though the bleeding slowed, it didn’t seem like he was going to live much longer.

“Oh! I forgot you were back at level one. No wonder you can’t heal such a wound. Okay, go ahead and use this.” Van pulled a red orb from his pocket and tossed it over. The orb struck Hanakawa and split, spraying him with a red liquid. As they watched, the wound in his chest closed.

“I-I thought I was going to die for sure!” Hanakawa complained as he lifted himself up off the ground. Yogiri could understand his feelings.

“I thought you could take it, so that’s why I did it to you,” Van explained. “The others would have died right away.”

“I do not need that level of trust from you!”

“So you understand now the stones are really inside them, right? Should I open one more up for you?”

“Stop! Leave that dog alone!” Yogiri shouted, sensing killing intent from Van aimed at the dog. He wouldn’t allow a random dog to get wrapped up in this.

“Hold on one moment! Even after seeing blood spray from my chest, you were not the least bit concerned! Why are you so worried about a dog who has yet to be harmed?”

“Because dogs are cute.”

“Only a psychopath would consider dogs more important than people!”

Now that he thought about it, prioritizing the dog’s well-being wasn’t very good of him. Yogiri did his best to restrain his anger.

“I was just trying to be nice, but looks like I made you mad,” Van’s expression

clouded over. Yogiri felt there was something odd about the way he acted.



There wasn't any hatred or malice in his actions. The Sage had just figured showing two of the stones would be better proof than one. That was how his thought process worked.

"You also need to control yourself!" Hanakawa shouted at Van.

"I brought the Philosopher's Stones into the game as bait for you, but just leaving them as the reward for beating the game sounded kind of boring. So instead, I've made them necessary items for beating the last boss."

It seemed things were getting more and more irritating. If all they had to do was beat the game to get the stones, they could go ahead and beat the last boss right away, but now that wouldn't get them the stones. It was easy to predict that those who were trying to clear the game would now start fighting over the stones too.

"It's not quite the same as the completion reward, but since you need them to beat the game, it amounts to basically the same thing. Still, it's definitely not what we agreed to. So as an apology, I'll give you one right off the bat. Go ahead and pick any of them."

"Okay, I want the dog," Yogiri responded instantly. Everyone in front of them would likely be attacked by those looking to steal the Philosopher's Stones. Humans could do something to protect themselves, but a dog would be killed right away. Yogiri couldn't accept that, so he wanted to save the dog if he could.

"Uh, Takatou?! Are you sure that's a good idea?!" Tomochika clearly thought they should have picked a human.

"Wait, wait, wait! Look at me! I am still right here!" Hanakawa cried.

"You're not going to kill the ones I don't choose, right?" Yogiri asked.

"They'll just be sent back to their original channel," Van answered. "Did I explain the channel system yet?"

"No."

"Right now, we're in a place called Base Town, but there are tons of identical places. They're identified by numbers and are called channels. For example, this is channel 141, but Hanakawa was in channel 487."

It was similar to having different worlds or servers in an online game, Yogiri thought. “Isn’t that good, Hanakawa?” he said. He remembered Sion saying Van didn’t think things through very well. If they believed her, they could assume Van wasn’t the type to lie or toy with people.

“You could have at least confirmed that before you made your selection!”

“I knew you would be fine.”

“I feel like a lot of trust is being put in me here, but is anyone taking even a moment to think about what I—” In the middle of talking, Hanakawa vanished, as did all the others, leaving the dog alone.

“You said there are tons of channels, but can we move between them?”

“Yup. It costs DP, though.”

“Does everyone know that you need the Philosopher’s Stones to beat the last boss?”

“I didn’t announce it or anything, but the conditions to beat the last boss change with each season. People will figure it out eventually. I ended up showing you who currently has the stones and I told you what channel Hanakawa is in, so you can consider that a welcome bonus.”

“What do you mean by ‘season?’”

“I guess I didn’t explain that yet either. Once someone beats the last boss, the game starts over. The time between the game starting and the last boss being defeated is called a season, and each new season has different settings. After all, if you could beat him the same way every time, it would get pretty repetitive.”

“If everything starts over when the last boss dies, what’s the reward for winning?”

“The reward for beating the last boss is that I’ll grant any wish that you want.”

“Excuse me!” Tomochika raised her hand. “What did you mean when you said the Philosopher’s Stones are needed to beat the boss? Is it something like needing the orbs of light to remove his cloak of darkness?”

“This time, the last boss has a number of different weapons...but maybe I

shouldn't say too much. I want you to figure out the rest yourselves."

"That sounds like you were about to say something straight from a strategy guide!"

"Getting all the info from the guy who made the game would be boring, right? If you want to know the basics, you can read this." Van put a booklet on the table titled *An Introduction to Cavern Quest*. "If you want info about how to proceed, there are people out there making a living finding that info. Now, what else should I say? I would avoid heading straight to the last boss and killing him if I were you. If you kill it in some way that doesn't use the system, the system won't recognize that he's been defeated. That would make it impossible for the game to be cleared." After saying that, Van disappeared.

"Was that him trying to say you can't use your power to beat the last boss?"

"It sounds like it. He must have heard about my power from Sion." It seemed Van had some knowledge of Yogiri's power.



After Van disappeared, Tomochika and Yogiri returned to the first floor of the guild.

"I guess we should talk about what we're going to do next. Do you think we can use the bar? We don't have any DP yet."

It would be nice to have a place where they could sit down and relax to discuss things, but they hadn't cleared a single quest yet, so they probably wouldn't have any DP.

"Maybe we start the game with some?" Yogiri suggested.

Tomochika also thought it was pretty common for games to start you with a little money, so it seemed best to check.

"Excuse me! We'd like to order some food. Can you tell us how to check how much DP we have?" Tomochika asked someone behind the counter at the bar.

"Welcome! Please touch this crystal."

Tomochika put a hand on the crystal.

“It looks like you have 990 DP. All food served here costs 1 DP, so you should be able to enjoy yourself without worry.”

“Looks like we’ve got a lot. But it’s a pretty random amount for starting cash, isn’t it?”

“Is there a way to tell how we’ve picked up our DP?” Tomochika asked. If DP were “Drama Points,” they may have taken some sort of dramatic action that had earned them points already.

“Yes, you can check using the crystal.”

Tomochika put her hand on the crystal again, and this time letters floated up to the surface.

Visited the adventurer’s guild with a member of the opposite sex: 100 DP

Had a quarrel with members of the adventurer’s guild: 30 DP

Defeated the adventurers (15x): 750 DP

Registered as an adventurer: 10 DP

Called out by the guildmaster: 100 DP

“Looks like there’s quite a bit. Could we not leave and join the guild over and over to make money, though?”

“If you come with a different group, it might work, but the drama value gets pretty weak after the first time, so it likely won’t earn you very much.”

“Ah, so that’s how it works. Okay then, can we order some food?”

“Of course. Please take a seat over here.”

After being guided to a table, the two of them ordered some food.

“So I guess we should talk about our plan now,” Tomochika said.

“Yeah. First of all, we need to name the dog.”

“That’s right. When you start Cavern Quest, you have to begin with naming the dog. Are you being serious right now?!”

“Just setting you up for the joke.”

Setting me up for the joke, indeed, Mokomoko commented.

“Actually, it’s not that much of a joke,” Yogiri continued. “We are going to need to give it a name of some kind.” He pointed towards his feet. The white dog that had been on the second floor had followed them down and was now lying there. Yogiri didn’t know if it was a good idea to bring a dog into a restaurant, but no one had complained, so he figured it was okay.

“We’re bringing it with us?”

“If we don’t, he might get attacked by others.”

“I guess we can’t just abandon him, then. Fine. Let’s come up with a name.”

“Do you have any ideas, Dannoura?”

“Hmm...our dog’s name was Ginta, but do we want a Japanese name or something more Western? It might be better to think of what *kind* of name we want first.”

“My dog’s name was Nikori.”

“Oh? Where did that name come from?”

“Nikori is a Shetland Sheepdog, but Asaka thought she was a collie when we first got her. Nikori sounds pretty close to ‘like a collie’ in Japanese, so it stuck.”

“It doesn’t sound like this Asaka person takes things very seriously!”

Rough Collies and Shetland Sheepdogs looked almost identical, the only real difference being their size, with the Shetland Sheepdog being much smaller.

“But what kind of dog is it?”

“Looks like a Great Pyrenees to me, though I have no idea what kind of dog breeds this world has.” Either way, it was a large dog. If it stood on its hind legs, it might have been taller than Tomochika. It had fluffy white fur and a gentle face. The fact that it was calm and quiet now made them think it had a rather docile personality.

“A name, huh? Maybe it would be best to just rely on intuition and pick the first thing that comes to mind.” Tomochika had every intention of leaving it to Yogiri. He was the one who wanted to bring the dog with them, so she felt it was best he came up with the name.

“Intuition, huh? Hmm...well, he’s white. So Shiro?”

“Don’t you think that’s a bit too on the nose?”

“‘Dai’ means big in Japanese. How about that?”

“Uhh...I guess that’s a little better. Though it doesn’t really solve the problem.”

“Okay, Dai it is. Are you okay with that?”

The dog barked in response.

It seemed the matter was settled.

Chapter 13 — How Did Someone Who Can Defeat Anyone End Up in a Situation like This?

“Now that we have a name for the dog, let’s get to the main subject,” Tomochika tried to get them back on track.

“I guess the first thing we need to think about is if we’re going to take this game seriously or not.”

“I suppose. It doesn’t really feel like we have to, does it?”

“How many Philosopher’s Stones do we even need? I doubt we need all of them.”

“Yeah, we’ve been collecting them this whole time, but never thought of that. We already have eight, right?”

Sion had collected seven for them. Dai, their new animal companion, possessed one more.

“Maybe that’s enough to get home already.”

“But even if the stones hold a lot of energy, how do we use them?” Tomochika asked.

Now that I stop and think about it, we have been collecting them without knowing what we would do with them for quite a while, haven’t we? Mekomoko replied.

“That robot said he’d send us home, right?”

On their journey from Quenza to Hanabusa, their train had been stopped when it had ended up in the middle of a battle between a Sage and an Aggressor. Tomochika was referring to that particular robot Aggressor. According to the robot, moving to a higher world required a tremendous amount of energy.

The robot only said it could give us advice if we were to secure a large amount

of energy and determine the coordinates of our world. The second time we met with it, it did not seem so sure it would be able to help us, Mokomoko warned them.

They had met the creature again in the Elven Forest. After dispatching an army of similar giant robots that had suddenly appeared to attack them, Mokomoko had contacted it. It had explained that the other robots were of the same affiliation but a different faction and had said that it didn't want to fight Yogiri and Tomochika. After telling the robot they had acquired the coordinates and a few Philosopher's Stones to use as energy, the robot had confessed it didn't know how to make use of the stones themselves.

"It said it would talk with its boss about taking us home in exchange for the Philosopher's Stones, right?" It seemed Yogiri remembered the details. The robot had come to this world in search of the Philosopher's Stones, also known as the Fragments of the Goddess. When Yogiri had offered to trade them in exchange for a ride home, it had said it would present his offer to its higher-ups.

"We kind of just left everything to someone else, didn't we? Maybe we aren't taking this seriously enough," Tomochika said.

"But after we met Luu, we kind of changed direction," Yogiri answered.

The Philosopher's Stones they had collected in part one had fused together into a baby. As they gathered more stones, the baby had continued to grow. Apparently, the stones were parts of some kind of goddess, one powerful enough to send them back home if she were restored to her full strength. At that point, they hadn't needed to worry about using the Philosopher's Stones for their energy anymore, so they had completely forgotten about the robot.

"They're not transforming into Luu in part two, and we have quite a few of them, so we should probably think of what we're going to do with them."

"The Sages can probably tell us what to do with the stones, right? I'm sure Sion knows how to use them." Sion was the one who had given them the idea of using the stones as an energy source in the first place.

Perhaps I should contact that robot again. I am not sure if its memories of part one will be preserved, though.

“Are robots different from humans in that?” Tomochika asked.

“Who knows?” admitted Yogiri. “If the reset was supposed to change everything back, it should have changed our brains back too, but we still remember what happened. If the robot’s system memory is the same, it might still remember.”

Unfortunately, it appears I cannot contact it anyway. Perhaps the signal cannot reach it from here or my decryption key is wrong. At this point in part one, we had yet to exchange keys with it, after all.

“I don’t really get it, but it sounds complicated.”

“Oh well,” Yogiri continued. “Let’s assume we need to focus on collecting the stones. In that case, what should we do next?”

“Right, that’s what we’re talking about.”

“If we’re going to take the game seriously, we need to do quests, strengthen our equipment, collect information, find the Philosopher’s Stones, and then beat the last boss.”

“Sounds kind of...annoying.”

“We could technically skip right to the last boss, but we’ve been warned against doing that.”

“But we only want to collect the Philosopher’s Stones, right? Do we really have to fight the last boss?”

“The only problem with that would be, how would we get back to the surface?”

“The surface? Wait, we can’t go back?!” Tomochika exclaimed.

“We teleported here, right? It doesn’t look like there are any exits.”

Tomochika remembered what she had seen outside. They were in a cave entirely enclosed by stone.

“If we can find a way back home from here, that’s fine. But if we can’t, we’ll need to head back to the surface.”

“I suppose so. I get the odd feeling we won’t be able to find a way home from

inside a game someone made.”

“So I figured we could use the clear reward of our wish to get out...but maybe we should start by reading the guide he gave us.”

The guide claimed there was no way built into the game system for players to leave, but as Yogiri had predicted, one could use the wish granted to them after clearing the game to escape. Otherwise, if one cleared the game but wished for something else, they would start the game over from the beginning.

“So he plans to make them play this game for the rest of their lives?! Even those who only came here to get away from the Seyla?”

“I don’t know if ‘the rest of their lives’ is going to mean much,” Yogiri said while reading through the guide. “According to this, you have to pay a daily Life Tax or you die.”

“That seems kind of brutal!”

“The Life Tax is 100 DP.”

“Well, that doesn’t sound too bad.”

“Oh, it also goes up ten percent every day.”

“Okay, that’s just extortion!”

“It really sounds like they’re trying to weed out the lazy players, doesn’t it?”

“But if the cost goes up every day, eventually no one will be able to pay it, right?” There was a limit to how many quests one could do. It was easy to see everyone coming to bankruptcy in the end.

“Yeah. The Life Tax also gets reset every season. So if you want to keep living, you have to beat the last boss no matter what.” When the season ended, everyone’s DP would reset to 0. The Life Tax would be reset, all items and equipment would disappear, and anyone with the Gift would have their level reduced to one again.

“So what would happen if you weren’t able to pay it, Takatou?”

“I don’t know how the system kills people, but I guess it’s possible I could unconsciously end up killing the system itself. I wonder what would happen

then?”

I doubt that would result in everyone being returned to the surface. Everyone would simply be stranded underground. And without the system, the life support it provides would disappear as well. It appears the system is what provides food, climate control, and even lighting down here.

“So I guess the plan is to collect DP, find the Philosopher’s Stones, beat the game, and return to the surface. How does that sound?”

“How did someone who can defeat anyone end up in a situation like this?” Tomochika demanded.

“Just because I can defeat anyone doesn’t mean I can solve any problem.”

Now that he mentioned it, that was true. Yogiri only used his power to defend against people who attacked them. He rarely chose to use his power proactively. If there was a way to solve the problems they faced without his power, he would go out of his way to do it.

The other question is just how far we can trust that Sage. Will he truly let us have the Philosopher Stones? Will he send something to us from outside the game?

“After talking to him for a bit, he doesn’t seem like the kind of person to lie...” Yogiri said.

“Are you sure? He seemed honest enough, but he also seemed like the type who would change his mind on a whim.” Tomochika couldn’t see Van as the trustworthy type.

“There’s no point worrying about that now though. If he breaks the rules, we’ll have to deal with it as it comes.”

“I guess we need to start by trying a quest, huh? Let’s take a look.” Tomochika stood up and Yogiri followed her. They headed to the wall of quests, Dai following quietly behind them.

“There seem to be a lot of hunting quests. The difficulty starts at level one...and wait, isn’t that the quest for the last boss right there?”

The quests weren’t organized at all, with quests of different difficulties

scattered across the wall. Among them was the quest for the last boss, casually posted along with all the others. The difficulty of that quest was ten, meaning ten was probably the highest difficulty possible. The objective was to defeat Lasbo. The field was the Sky Fortress. The reward was 0 DP, so it seemed it just hadn't been set.

"I guess we should start with a 'level one' quest. How about this one? Collect ten herbs. It's in the forest and grasslands. The reward is 10 DP."

"I wonder what the basis is for the rewards. I got 100 DP just for going to the adventurer's guild with a boy."

"Maybe this one is so cheap because anyone could do it. Let's try it out just to get a feel for things. We're supposed to give the number to the reception desk, right?"

"Come on, this is why we don't like newbies. You planning on heading out without weapons?" a nearby adventurer called out to them.

"Huh? Oh! This is one of those drama things again, isn't it?" Tomochika noted. Since taking dramatic actions could earn DP, this may have been a repeat of the adventurers who had accosted them earlier.

The adventurer narrowed his eyes, as if to tell her to play it off normally. Like they had heard before, they had to avoid acting unnatural or planning things out beforehand. She would have to play along.

"Do we need weapons?" she asked.

"Seriously? Monsters always show up during collection quests. You'll be killed right away."

"So how do we get weapons and armor?"

"There's an equipment shop. Low-level equipment is pretty cheap, so if you're going to take a quest, go get geared up first!"

"Got it. Thanks for the help!"

"No problem! I couldn't sleep at night if I saw you go off and die right away. You can't take any quests lightly, even the herb-collecting ones." After saying that, the adventurer left.

“I wonder how much DP we got for that? Asking the staff every time seems like a pain.”

“Hey kid, did you want to find out how to check your DP easily?” another adventurer walking by called out to them.

“They just keep coming!”

It seemed total newbies attracted a lot of attention.



After leaving the adventurer’s guild behind, Yogiri and Tomochika took a look around Base Town. The cavern it was set in was roughly square, about a hundred meters long on each side. The center of the town was dominated by important buildings for taking on quests, like the guild and equipment shop, while the other areas seemed to be for lodging. The lodgings ranged from huge mansions to tiny shacks, but the most common were the inns and apartment buildings. There didn’t seem to be anything like farms or orchards, so there weren’t any people who would work in agriculture either. It seemed that basically everyone in Cavern Quest was an adventurer. Just in case, they took a look at the cave walls around the town, but as expected, there were no exits.

“I wonder how many people live here?” said Yogiri.

It is hard to tell from the exterior of the buildings alone, but it appears this town is capable of housing one or two hundred people. I cannot imagine it holding as many as a thousand, Mocomoko mused.

After taking a look around the town, they headed to the item shop. Rather than large, bulky goods like weapons and armor, the store sold smaller miscellaneous items.

“Welcome! What are you looking for?” The clerk immediately ran to their side. It seemed he was into the role-playing aspect as well.

“We heard you sell crystals that can tell us how much DP we have.”

“Yes, we do!” He took them over to a part of the store with numerous crystals on display. “They all have more or less the same function. The larger ones will be easier to read, and the smaller ones like the rings will be easier to check at

any time.”

“Can I try one out?”

“Please do. Go ahead and pick one.”

Tomochika picked up a crystal about the size of a ping pong ball. The surface lit up with letters.

Entered the item shop with a member of the opposite sex:
100 DP

Received advice from an adventurer (2x): 60 DP

Her total DP had gone up to 1148. It was kind of small and therefore a little hard to read, but not to the point where it was a problem.

“This system really likes it when you travel around with members of the opposite sex!”

“Having a mixed party is quite a boon,” the clerk said. “You can also get quite a boost from swapping your party around while doing simple quests.” He seemed just as quick to offer advice as the adventurers earlier.

“How much is this one?”

“5 DP.”

“I guess I’m happy with this. Is there anything you want to buy Takatou?”

“Hmm. What about one of those bags that can hold a lot of stuff?” The backpack he had now was the one he had brought for their school trip. It was pretty full with the Philosopher’s Stones they already had, so he wanted to do something about that.

“Oh, you don’t have to worry about that,” Tomochika told him. “My class has that.”

“The item box?”

“Yeah, the same one Hanakawa had.”

“Speaking of which, what class did you get?”

“Ahh, so you had to ask, huh?”

“You don’t have to answer if you don’t want to.”

“It’s not really something to hide, but...it’s Ruler of the Battlefield...”

“Sounds pretty rough...”

“Yeah...” It seemed she was a bit embarrassed by the title.

Chapter 14 — I Have a Bit of Experience with Torture

“Well...I figured things would end up this way eventually...”

Hanakawa was walking down a road through the forest, wearing the kung fu uniform of the Monk class. A short distance behind him were three classmates who had forced him to come along.

“Come on, Hanakawa, you should be thanking us for bringing along a loner like you,” Shinya Ushio said behind him, wearing his school uniform. His class was Eroge Master, which gave him the ability to stop time for anything he touched.

“That’s right. Being alone in this world would be pretty tough,” said Keiichi Munakata, likewise in his school uniform. His class was Eroge Meister. His ability was related to turning himself and other things invisible.

“Only otaku like us would ever let you into our group. Be thankful.” The last, bearing just as little equipment as the others, was Mitsuo Yatate, with the class of Eroge Maniac and the tentacles it gave him control over.

They had been called the Three Eroge Nobles in part one. Or so he’d heard. In part one, Hanakawa hadn’t spent any time at all with his classmates, so these were things he had heard secondhand.

“What do you mean, let me into your group? You are using me as nothing more than a canary in a coal mine. And what do you mean by otaku like you? Give me a break.” Of course, Hanakawa spoke low enough that they couldn’t hear him.

Monk was a high-level class, so it would definitely be stronger than stupid classes named after erogé later on, but at level one, there wasn’t much difference between them. Without the Gift separating them, all that was left was physical ability and skill. Apparently, Ushio practiced karate, Munakata practiced boxing, and Yatate practiced Taekwondo, so Hanakawa wouldn’t

stand much of a chance if he tried to fight them. While he was happy to talk in circles around higher beings like gods and Sages, he wasn't so good at dealing with his fellow classmates. They knew the ordinary Hanakawa, so no matter what he said, they would just look down at him and laugh.

"If you're otaku, why are you taking martial arts? You should be doing no more than reading martial arts manga and arguing over who is the strongest." As he muttered, he kept a keen eye on his surroundings. They were in the middle of a hunting quest, so there would be monsters nearby.

"They should be around here, right?" Ushio stopped. Hanakawa considered running away, but if there were monsters around, being alone would be too dangerous. Even if he was being used as bait, bait was useful enough to keep alive.

"There weren't a lot of details in the quest info."

"It was level one though, right? Finding the target is probably the hardest part."

The quest was to hunt ten goblins. The field was an isolated island, surrounded on all sides by the sea. There was a forest in the center, which was apparently inhabited by goblins. Though this was supposed to be underground as well, unlike Base Town, it didn't feel like it was. From the beach, the ocean seemed to stretch on forever with no end in sight.

"Regardless, be it goblins or not, I just need to defeat them so I can level up. I should have no difficulty with the three Eroge Musketeers after that," Hanakawa told himself.

Each goblin was worth 2 DP, but that was only for the person who defeated them. The other three naturally intended to keep the reward for themselves, so he was hoping to sneak in a kill in the confusion.

"Maybe this is the wrong spot. There's a cave over there."

"That must be it. It's like a temple in a video game."

Apparently, Munakata had found something. His x-ray vision let him see through the trees, making him excellent at scouting.

“Hanakawa, there’s a cave.”

“So what?” Hanakawa headed back, rejoining the group. On their left was a stone wall with a clear hole.

“What do you mean? It’s time for you to show us how brave you are. Take the lead.”

“What? Would it not make more sense to smoke them out or block the entrance and starve them to death?”

“We don’t use cowardly tactics like that.”

“Rushing in without a plan seems equally as stupid to me.”

“We do have a plan. First, you’re going to go check things out.” They pushed Hanakawa towards the cave entrance.

With no other options, he walked over. It was wide enough for three people to enter side by side. There were signs of something coming and going, so it was definitely being used by something.

Hanakawa looked inside. “But without light, I will not be able to make much progress. Actually, is it not unnaturally bright in there?” He had expected the depths of the cave to be shrouded in darkness, but when he looked inside, he could see straight to the back.

“Looks like it’s set up like a video game,” Ushio called out from behind him. “It’s nice that you can see everything, right? Go ahead, scout it out. If you find any goblins, come back here, got it? Fighting on your own would be too dangerous.”

“Yes, I have no intention of doing that—” Turning around to look at Ushio and the others, he saw something in the trees above them. They were small, hairless, monkey-like creatures. They wore grass skirts over their faintly green-tinged skin, and they held clubs that seemed far too large for their size. Goblins.

Hanakawa tried to warn his classmates, but before he could speak, the creatures jumped down.

“Gah!” With an awkward cry, Ushio crumpled. The blow had been powerful enough to cave in his head, pushing it down into his neck.

“Huh?” Hanakawa froze at the unexpected development. He hadn’t expected someone to die so quickly out here.

“Ushio! What happened—” A spear emerged from the undergrowth, punching through Munakata’s back.

“Dammit! Tentacles!” Yatate got his bearings, summoning tentacles from the ground. They easily grabbed the club-wielding goblins, but that was all they could do. The goblins were able to shake them off, ripping the tentacles apart in the process. Yatate’s tentacles were thin and weak at this point. He couldn’t summon anything useful at level one. He screamed, sharing his senses with the tentacles he summoned, any pain they suffered transferring to him.

With Yatate and Munakata disabled, two goblins moved in to attack them. The rain of clubs and spears made short work of the Eroge Nobles, but that didn’t satisfy the goblins, who continued to strike them over and over.

“This is all wrong! Was this quest’s difficulty rating not level one?!” Hanakawa cried.

In the end, they had underestimated the game. Their previous experience had led them to be too cavalier about the threat that goblins posed.

“In this situation, the only thing I can do is run— Gah!”

Hanakawa was sent flying as he was struck from behind. Something had emerged from the cave and attacked him. Thrown back to the road, Hanakawa picked himself up off the ground. He hadn’t taken that much damage thanks to the kung fu uniform he wore. He had made it to the equipment shop before Ushio and the others had found him.

“Heal!”

Healing a little of the damage he had taken, he looked back at his fallen party. Three goblins stood there, staring at him. His classmates had been beaten to the point where they were totally unrecognizable.

“I-I am glad I took the time to gather some equipment. They took this world too lightly!” Things had gone well for them in part one, so they had figured they would be fine in their school uniforms. They had even made fun of Hanakawa for trying to cosplay.

“At any rate, I need to find a way out of this situation!”

Hanakawa withdrew a staff from his item box. His item box had been emptied upon entering Cavern Quest, so this was a staff he had bought at the equipment shop. Holding it in front of him, he put up a shaky guard.

“I have Staff Mastery, so I should be a master at this! But it does not seem things are working that way!”

He had figured once the staff was in his hands, he would start using the relevant techniques automatically, but nothing like that was happening. He had no idea what the mastery skill even did. However, it seemed the weapon was causing the goblins to be more wary, as they didn’t rush forward.

“With my healing ability being this weak, I will not be able to force my way through. Spirit Projectiles!” Hanakawa bought time to gather his mind. The power of his Spirit Projectiles increased as he collected himself with the Spiritual Refinement skill. Even at a low level, if he had time to build these skills up, they should still be quite powerful.

Letting go of the staff, he faced his palm towards the goblins. A ball of light flew out from his hand. At the same time, he immediately turned and ran. If he followed the road back, he should make it to the beach, where the gate to the town was. Even if he failed the quest, he should be safe if he could make it that far. Rather than trying to fight against three enemies, escape was the best solution.

However, he quickly found that running wasn’t an option either. An intense pain shot through his right leg, causing him to stumble and fall. After rolling for a short while, he came to a stop. A spear was sticking out of his flesh. One of the goblins had thrown a spear at him, and it had unfortunately hit his leg. Hanakawa tore the spear out and began to cast his magic.

“Heal! Damn, all that does is lessen the pain a little!”

He wouldn’t be able to run anymore. There was no way he could escape with an injured leg.

“Is this...the end? After overcoming so many obstacles! Remembering all that now makes it feel like my life is flashing before my eyes!”

Picking himself up, Hanakawa looked behind him. The goblins were running at him, one unarmed after having thrown its spear, the other two wielding clubs. They had dark smiles on their faces, and something sticking out of their eyes.

“Wait...huh?”

As Hanakawa watched, dumbfounded, the goblins’ heads fell. A red line ran through their necks, neatly disconnecting their heads from their bodies. They dropped to the ground, motionless, blood spurting from their necks.

“Oh! Look, it’s Hanakawa. What are you doing here?”

“Uhh...if it isn’t Carol!”

At some point, Carol had appeared beside him in her red ninja outfit. Standing behind the fallen goblins was Ryouko Ninomiya in her samurai garb.

“You ask what I am doing here, but is this not my quest? How were you able to appear here?” Carol demanded.

“Looks like different quests can still end up on the same field,” Ryouko replied. “We’re here looking for mushrooms.”

“What’s going on?” Hanakawa was still stunned.

Carol had thrown shuriken at the goblins. Once they had struck the goblins’ eyes, Ryouko had charged directly at them, slicing through their necks. It was simple in hindsight, but Hanakawa hadn’t seen any of it happen. It had all been over before he even realized it had begun.

“Are you two not supposed to be level one as well?”

“Yes, but enemies like this are no issue for us,” Ryouko said as she approached.



“Yeah, enemies like this aren’t that difficult even in another world.”

“Ohh...ah! Then could you perhaps help me in hunting goblins?!”

“Sorry, we have to look for mushrooms.”

“We just figured we would help since we saw you being attacked on the main road,” Ryouko added. “We have no intention of staying with you any longer.”

“Th-Then, how about in exchange, I help you with your quest?”

“Is there anything we gain from you helping us? Looks like your friends are already dead, so you should just go ahead and cancel your quest.” Carol spoke with frigid eyes, entirely unconcerned with the deaths of her classmates.

But Hanakawa knew that if Carol and Ryouko left him here, his chances of surviving in this world would drop drastically. Even if he managed to kill ten goblins by himself, despite how powerful they were, he’d only earn 20 DP. If he wanted to live, he needed to pay the Life Tax, so he would need a consistent source of DP. In short, he would need to enter even more dangerous situations, which would require help from someone more experienced. Meeting these two was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He couldn’t let this chance pass him by.

“Ah, merits, you say? You could bring me along as something like a mascot...or perhaps I could walk ahead, drawing danger away from you?”

“Having you around would just drag us down, though,” Carol said casually.

“Ugh, are my own endearing qualities not enough here?!”

“Endearing qualities?”

“Ah, please do not pry so deeply into them. It will only make me more depressed. Oh, that’s it! I may not have physical value to you, but the information I can provide is a different matter! Definitely! For example, I know where Sir Takatou is!”

“Then maybe we’ll just take that information from you and leave.” At some point, Ryouko had appeared directly in front of him, the tip of her sword pressed up against his neck.

“You are quite a bit rougher than I expected, Ryouko!”

“We looked through our channel as much as we could but couldn’t find him. How come you know where he is?”

“If you do not take me with you, then I will say nothing!”

“I have a bit of experience with torture. I’m also pretty good at figuring out if you’re telling the truth.”

“Fine! I will tell you, so please stop poking me with that sword!” Unable to bear the feeling of the sword pressed against his neck, Hanakawa folded immediately. “At some point, someone put a Philosopher’s Stone inside me without me knowing.”

“What do you think, Ryouko?”

“He doesn’t appear to be lying. I guess we’ll have to take him to Takatou after all.”

“Hmm. But the only thing we need is the stone itself, right? We should be able to rip it out of his chest.”

“I cannot stress how frightening it is for you to speak of me like nothing more than a pig!”

“But if we just hand him the raw stone, there is a chance of earning Takatou’s displeasure,” Ryouko disagreed. “Hanakawa *is* technically a classmate.”

“We could just tell him we found him dead on the road, so we grabbed the stone from him, right?”

“Umm, excuse me, Carol. Could you please stop trying to find excuses to kill me? I would very much like to side with Ryouko on this.”

“No, if we can’t pass off the lie, things will get much worse. I think we have to take him with us.” Ryouko sheathed her blade.

“Th-Thank goodness! Would you like me to lick your boots, Ryouko?”

“I never paid much attention to him since he wasn’t interesting in the least, but he really is an annoying person, isn’t he?”

“So will you help me with hunting goblins, then?” Hanakawa asked.

“No. We don’t have time for that; you’ll have to cancel that quest. We only

need two more mushrooms, and then we're heading back."

"Found them!" Carol said, picking mushrooms from the roots of a nearby tree.

"Then it looks like our quest is complete."

"What? Surely there is no need to hurry—"

Suddenly, their surroundings turned dark, prompting Hanakawa to look up. Something enormous was floating in the sky, big enough that he couldn't tell what it was at a glance. To compare it to something, it looked like a collection of huge, raw organs that had been ripped out of someone's body. It seemed to be alive, but besides that, they couldn't tell anything about it as it moved through the sky. Countless entrails followed along behind it, along with something swelling and shrinking like lungs.

"You may have wandered in here without thinking, but there's tons of things like that around, so we don't really have time to hang out," Carol explained.

"Ah, very well. Let us return, then!" Hanakawa suddenly wanted to get back as soon as possible.

Chapter 15 — It's Easy Enough in Games, but Identifying Plants Is Actually Pretty Hard

Cavern Quest was a game that afforded glory to only a select few. The difficulty was so high that the vast majority of players were incapable of dealing with level one quests and would drop out in the first few days. Ordinary people lived life as a desperate performance here. Those running the item shops, the guild, and the bar, those with no particularly standout characteristics, all had to create a character and work hard to afford paying the ever-increasing life tax. Those who were capable of defeating the last boss and starting a new season were truly heroes.

Volf was one such hero, and he enjoyed his position greatly. This world permitted any sort of violence, and he would still earn grateful thanks if he was able to kill the last boss. A fair number of people who cleared the game chose to return to the surface, but most remained underground. Those who wanted to live with absolute freedom only wished for their strength and equipment not to be reset with each new season. That way, they would always be fairly strong, even without any particular effort. They could watch from on high as everyone below them struggled desperately to survive the next round.

Currently, there were twenty such elites in this world, divided across five parties. Though they didn't truly cooperate, they had an unspoken agreement that their groups would alternately defeat the last boss.

There was a rumor that this game was made to entertain a certain person. If that was true, they may have found this development rather boring, but Volf couldn't care less. However, it seemed the people running the game didn't intend to maintain the game in this state and were planning to shake things up a bit.

The easiest change to spot was the explosive growth in the number of channels. Apparently, something had happened on the surface, causing an incomparable number of people to come underground. Most of them were

totally useless, but it was possible there were some powerful individuals among them who could threaten Volf's position.

The number of fields had also suddenly increased far beyond the original three they had used. It seemed there were new monsters on those fields as well, but the elites had yet to fully investigate them. There was an increase in the types of equipment available as well, and by a considerable amount. They all had their own unique abilities and synergies, so it would take some research to find the most effective combinations again. Relying on their old knowledge was likely to trip them up in the future.

The worst of the changes to Volf and the other top players was the gimmick added to the last boss. Previously, there had been tricks like a number of subordinate bosses that had to be defeated before the last boss could be found, or the last boss changing elemental vulnerabilities at fixed intervals, but those weren't especially challenging to deal with.

This time, however, things were a little different. The groups that had left to scout out the last boss didn't return. The scouts' role was only to obtain information about the fight, so they were specialized in survival. The fact that not a single one of them had made it back was bizarre.

In Volf's opinion, it was honestly aggravating. But this world was a game in the end. No matter how difficult it was, it should have still been possible to win. There must have been a hint somewhere. That is what the elites knew from their experience in this world.

Though they acted with audacious arrogance, their position was one supported by a tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience. They knew that if they kept things the same as always, their positions would be threatened. If they wanted to keep the freedom they had won, they needed to find a way to defeat the last boss as quickly as possible.

The other elite players had probably already moved to action. Volf had no intention of falling behind them.



"Is this really what we're supposed to be doing? It just looks like we're taking a dog for a walk," Tomochika wondered aloud.

Yogiri was holding a leash at her side. On the end of the leash was their new dog, Dai, walking a short ways ahead of them. They were walking down a gravel road through a grassland. A small stream ran parallel to the road a short distance away, and a dense forest lay on the horizon ahead of them. Unlike Base Town, it didn't feel like they were underground at all. It seemed likely the nature of this place had been disguised, just like the floating continent.

"No point in rushing now," Yogiri said. He was wearing a type of armor known as Light Mail, classified as leather armor. Critical spots were reinforced with metal, but overall it was a lightweight piece of gear. He had a short sword at his waist. For someone who could kill enemies long before they were even attacked, Tomochika figured the sword was unnecessary, so she guessed it was just for the look. The bag he had been carrying was now stored in her item box.

"Also, I'm not sure how I feel about dancing around in the palm of a Sage like this." Tomochika was wearing an armored dress. Though armor made into the form of a dress didn't look like it would offer much protection, the game mechanics may have been making up for that deficit. If she was accused of cosplaying like Yogiri, she wouldn't really be able to deny it. One of the big reasons she had picked this armor was because it looked cute. Her weapons were leather gloves on both hands. Though they didn't look the part, they were actually gauntlets. She also had other throwing weapons stored in her item box.

"Most of the Sages we've met have been pretty weird, but that doesn't mean we have to fight all of them. Especially since he never attacked us."

Although, as the administrator, he has the ability to do whatever he likes, the fact he has organized this world into a game makes me want to believe he is the type to follow his own rules, Mokomoko said.

"The game is fine, but it's always when we're relaxed and doing nothing that suddenly something ridiculous happens." Tomochika vividly recalled the events leading up to the beginning of part two. They had barely been able to walk around, and before they knew it, the world was on the edge of destruction.

"That's not that big of a surprise," Yogiri said. "There are always people doing things in other parts of the world that we don't know about. It only looks sudden from our perspective."

“Well, I guess we can only do what we can. So, which ones are the herbs we’re looking for?”

This field was a forest and meadow, and they had come here in search of medicinal herbs. If they could find ten and bring them back to the gate, they would clear the quest and receive a reward. The 1 DP they would receive for each herb wasn’t much, but they had been advised to pick a pretty basic quest to help get a grip on how things worked in the game.

“Maybe they’ll sparkle or something?”

“Yeah, that’s a bit too much like a video game.”

“Medicinal herb” is not much of a descriptor either. There are countless plants that possess medicinal properties.

“Telling us to find a plant that could be turned into medicine in this huge field would be way too much.”

“The quest details say the herbs are the materials needed for a Health Potion S.”

“One of these, right?” Tomochika pulled out a potion she had bought at the item shop. It was a squishy red orb made of a gel-like substance and containing liquid. All you had to do to use it was break it open on the injured body part. It didn’t require much force to break, so it could even be used in an emergency by hitting it against someone.

“Speaking of which, how does the item box work?” Yogiri asked.

“Well, uhh, when I want to use it, a transparent window pops up in my vision that lets me see all the items inside. Then whatever item I want to pull out appears in my hand. I can put things in it just by holding on to them and thinking it too.”

“It’s always surprising to see you do stuff like that right in front of me.”

“Uhh, I think what you do is an awful lot more surprising, Takatou.” Compared to the ability to kill with your thoughts, Tomochika didn’t think the item box was an ability even worth mentioning.

“Maybe this potion can be some kind of hint? Like, maybe the plant is red.”

“Oh yeah, it’s not a drink, so they probably wouldn’t add food coloring or anything. Maybe.”

“That said, there’re no red plants around here anyway,” Yogiri observed, looking around. As far as Tomochika could see, the meadow around them was green. There were small yellow and white flowers dotted throughout the grass, but nothing brightly colorful like red.

“Is there a time limit for this quest?”

“Not that was written in the quest info.”

“Mokomoko, can you check from the sky?”

I cannot see anything that stands out in this area. If I were to look from any sort of height, I would not be able to discern between the plants anyway.

“This is actually a lot more difficult than I thought. Maybe we should have visited the info house after all.”

“Isn’t this the kind of thing adventurers would love to tell us about?”

“It’s easy enough in games, but identifying plants is actually pretty hard. Oh, do you think Dai could find them by scent?”

“Uhh, I don’t know about that. Dogs can be pretty dumb if they aren’t trained. Normal dogs can’t track things by smell that well.”

“No harm in trying, right? Can I borrow a potion?”

Tomochika passed the potion in her hand to Yogiri.

“It doesn’t seem to smell like much in this state. Can I open it?”

“If it’s just one, then sure.”

Yogiri broke the potion open on the ground. The orb split, spilling red liquid onto the road. A faintly sweet smell filled the air.

“Dai, can you sniff out the plants that this was made from?”

Dai barked in response. There was no way a dog would understand what it was being asked to do just from words alone, but after sniffing at the ground a bit, he began to walk.

“Are you joking?!”

“Let’s follow him.” Not quite believing what they were seeing, the two followed the dog. He followed the road until it brought them to the edge of the forest.

“I guess there’d be more plants in here, huh?”

“Yeah, so many we wouldn’t know which is which.”

Dai continued plodding into the forest. After walking for a short time, they found a small clearing with a dense patch of red flowers. Dai barked proudly, as if asking for praise, so Tomochika stroked his head.

“Hold on...is this dog actually really smart? Can it understand what we’re saying?”

“Anyway, let’s pick some of these and head back.”

The two of them worked together, pulling up the plants from their roots. The quest only needed ten, so they finished rather quickly.

“What do you think, should we try collecting more?” If this wasn’t the right plant, it would just be a waste of time to go back now. It may have been a good idea to grab a few different kinds of plants.

“It would be nice if there was a way to tell... Ah!” The plants in Tomochika’s hands disappeared into her item box. She then checked the item list, where the plants showed up with the label “medicinal herb.” “That’s kind of lazy, isn’t it?!”

“What’s wrong?”

“Looks like these are the right ones. I can see their name after putting them in the item box.”

“Oh, I see. But does that mean you can pick up anything you don’t recognize and find out its name? Who decides what it’s called?”

“Who knows? I don’t think there’s much point in worrying about it.”

Tomochika put the plants Yogiri collected into her item box as well. They didn’t quite know how the quest would end, but the amount they had collected would be counted as they walked through the gate. In that case, she could just give Yogiri back his half of the plants before walking through the gate. Otherwise,

Tomochika would gain all of the DP herself.

“I guess we really need to stop and think of what we’ll need before we go on quests.”

“Yeah. Without Dai, we would have been in trouble...”

Modern games were quite gracious in providing players with guidance, but Cavern Quest didn’t seem to follow their lead. Just going out and figuring it out on the fly didn’t seem like a very good strategy.

“Okay then, let’s go back—” As Tomochika turned to leave, a huge roar filled the air, causing the ground to shake beneath them. Whatever it was, it seemed to be in the forest close by.

“Huh?! What was that?!”

“Lightning?” Yogiri suggested, looking up. But the sky was blue and cloudless. It was pretty hard to believe there was any lightning coming from it.

“What do we do?”

“I guess we should take a look.” It may have had nothing to do with them, but there was a chance it was related to their quest. The two of them headed towards the source of the sound.

As they got closer, the air began to grow heavy with smoke and heat. Once they arrived, it was easy to tell what the source of the noise had been. A number of trees had been split apart, knocked over, and set on fire. There must have been a lightning strike after all. In addition, there was the person who had been struck by lightning and the one who had fired it. A woman in armor sat on her knees, while a golden dragon hovered calmly in the air above her.

“Huh? Don’t they look kind of familiar?!” As Tomochika spoke, both of the people in the clearing turned to face them.

“Huh? Where did you come from?” Despite having been struck by lightning, the woman seemed fairly healthy as she turned a suspicious look on Tomochika.

“Gaaaaah! Wh-What are *you* doing here?!” Despite its dignified, majestic appearance, the dragon let out a pitiful whine.

“Ah! It’s the guard and the golden thunder dragon!”

Though Yogiri seemed to recognize them, Tomochika didn't have a clue who they were.

Chapter 16 — Okay, We Understand Your Situation. You Can Keep Fighting Now If You Want

“Uhh...golden thunder...ah! From the canyon! The dragon that was flying without its wings!”

After leaving Hanabusa, they had gotten lost in the canyon, where Tomochika and Yogiri had been attacked by dragons. Naturally, Yogiri had dealt with all of them, after which a golden dragon clad in lightning had appeared in front of them like some sort of boss monster.

“Why don’t you two take a break from fighting for now?” Yogiri suggested.

“V-Very well.” The floating dragon lowered itself to the ground, taking on the form of a small girl. According to Tomochika’s memory, the dragon was her true form, and she took on the appearance of a girl to try and curry favor with human men.

“And that person is...right! The person who just watched from the back while we were being attacked by thugs!”

“You make me sound awful...though I suppose what you said is accurate. We were tracking those thugs, trying to find out who was backing them.”

After being abandoned by their classmates, Tomochika and Yogiri had headed to the nearby city of Quenza. A cat-eared girl there had given them a tour of the city, but in the end led them into an ambush in a back alley. Of course, Yogiri had dealt with the thugs no problem, and after he had, this woman had appeared leading a column of guards. She had seen the guards die and, assuming the two of them were responsible, attempted to arrest them. In the end, they were released due to a lack of evidence. Tomochika remembered her being a pain to deal with.

“I kind of remember you guys, but what were your names again?” Yogiri plainly asked what should have been a difficult question.

“I am Atila.”

That is right! I remember this little girl talking like an old man now.

"I'm Edelgart."

"So, what were you two doing?" Yogiri continued.

"I came here on a quest to hunt goblins," Edelgart began. "I then came across a dragon, so naturally we fought."

"Hah. Not that you put up enough resistance to make it a fight!"

"Excuse me?! Did you not see your full-powered attack had no effect on me?! I was just about to strike back!"

"Full-powered attack? Are you serious? That was little more than blowing my nose! And a little sneeze like that has you covered in wounds!"

"What?! Look harder! The burns are only on the surface! An attack like this isn't even enough to make me itch!"

"Oh? Then I must admit to being curious as to why you are on your knees."

"I was charging up! I was going to jump in the air and stab you, so I was building up strength! You're the one who was begging for your life!"

Edelgart held a spear. She may have fought like the dragon knights in a certain game, leaping into the air and slamming back down with her spear.

"Okay, that's enough. Calm down for a bit," Yogiri cut in. Though reluctant, the two stopped arguing. "So Edelgart is here for the same reason we are, to do a quest. But why are you attacking people here, Atila?"

"Because I am also performing a quest, of course."

"Huh? You mean like hunting goblins or collecting herbs?"

"What are you saying? I am on the monsters' side, so of course my quest is to kill humans."

"You have quests for that?! Wait, the monsters have their own side?!"

"Hm? Are you not aware of our circumstances? I belong to the monster guild. The majority of quests we have are killing humans."

The Seyla had fallen all over the world and attacked any sort of life it could

find. Not even the monsters of the world were immune to that. Of course, Atila would feel pushed into a corner. Even if she could fight off the falling Seyla, a single touch meant it would all be over. There was no way she could remain on guard against it all hours of every day. So among the dragons, the ones who held enough intelligence to speak joined Cavern Quest.

They were brought to a settlement of monsters. Beastkin were treated as humans and sent to Base Town, but intelligent monsters were sent to Monster Town instead. Monsters there would register with the guild, take quests, and earn DP. Though they were hostile towards the humans, they were doing much the same thing.

“I see. So it’s a faction warfare kind of deal. But let’s put that on hold for now,” Yogiri said.

“Of course. I have no intention of fighting you, least of all now.” Atila had witnessed Yogiri killing a huge number of dragons instantly. She had always been terrified of him and so was most cooperative.

“By the way, what happened after all that? You wanted to be an attendant for the Knights of the Divine King or something...” Tomochika felt like it was a bit of an awkward question. After everything that had happened at the tower, they had left without seeing her. After the Swordmaster’s death, it was difficult to face her again, but it had left the promise between them sitting in a vague place.

“Ah, yes. After we parted ways, I was almost immediately killed. The next thing I knew, time had reversed.”

“So we wouldn’t have found you even if we went looking.”

“It’s a good thing we ignored her and kept going, then!” Tomochika declared.

“I don’t know if I would say it’s a good thing...but what’s done is done. And besides, that was all no more than a dream, was it not?” It seemed the monsters of the world also had an understanding of what had happened.

“What killed you in that dream, Atila?”

“It is a bit hard to describe. It was like a puppet covered in blades. It stabbed me right through the head. Apparently, it was searching for some sort of

information.”

“Oh yeah, we saw that guy.”

The Hedgehog. An Aggressor they had encountered a number of times on their adventure. It had scattered in pieces after fighting Hiruko, so it was likely in good condition again in part two. It didn't seem particularly capable of speech, so it likely hadn't come into Cavern Quest.

“What are you all talking about?” As they reminisced over their past experiences, Edelgart interrupted.

“I'm guessing things were pretty chaotic on the surface around you, Edelgart?”

“You could say that. I didn't quite believe it myself, but as everyone around me began to disappear one after another, I ended up following suit. I learned quickly that those mysterious creatures could not be fought.”

“I thought you would have been together with your subordinate.”

“You mean Jorge? I haven't met him since coming here. I suppose he was sent to another channel.”

“Just in case, you're not still chasing us, are you?”

“I'm not quite sure. I know I was pursuing you on Lady Lain's orders, but...I also know that Lady Lain doesn't exist for some reason. So I suppose I have no reason to pursue you any longer.”

“I guess we'll be able to get along, then.”

“I cannot say whether we'll get along, but at least we have no reason to be enemies.”

“Okay, we understand your situation,” Yogiri said. “You can keep fighting now if you want.”

“No, we can't!” Atila and Edelgart shouted in unison.

“Maybe Edelgart doesn't have a reason to fight, but you do, don't you, Atila?” Yogiri asked, apparently serious. He didn't seem to think there was any reason for a monster to spare a human if they were in conflict.

“My motivation is gone. You cannot recreate the tension that has already been lost.”

“Well, even if it’s natural for monsters to attack humans, it’s not a great feeling to watch people we know killing each other, so I’m glad to hear it.”

Tomochika breathed a sigh of relief seeing Yogiri was at least taking the human side of the conflict a little.

“Working up the motivation to hunt goblins will be similarly difficult, but I suppose I cannot just give up.”

“Hey, would you mind if we watched?”

“Watch me hunt goblins? I suppose not.” Edelgart walked off, Tomochika and Yogiri in tow. Seeing a monster-hunting quest firsthand would be a good experience for them. They had already decided they would try a hunting quest next.

“We were on a quest to collect herbs and had a tough time finding them, but what about you, Edelgart? Do you know where the goblins are?”

“Hm? Will they not attack us if we wander around for a time? A dragon certainly did.”

“Uh, I get the feeling that was unrelated...” Edelgart seemed a bit too optimistic.

“I suppose you need the help after all. The goblins are over there.” Atila pointed a short distance off the path.

“Speaking of which, why are you here, Atila?” Yogiri asked, surprised. He must have thought they wouldn’t see her again after splitting up earlier.

“I have decided to follow you.”

“Huh?”

“Is it that surprising? If the human side has Takatou, I could never stay on the monsters’ side.” It seemed her fear of Yogiri was still as vivid as ever.

“Deciding to follow us is all well and good, but *can* you?”

“You humans have a gate to get here, no? I will simply pass through that as

well.”

The gate was a door that connected the fields to the Base Town. Each quest spawned a new gate for use by that specific party. Though many parties could operate in the same field, each would arrive from a separate gate and could only return to the town through their own. They wouldn't be able to use gates from other parties. Anyone who walked out of the doors in the town together would be considered a single party.

“Can monsters go through the human gates?”

“You can bring items back through the gates, can you not? You must simply treat me as one of those.”

“So you're an item now?”

“So...you know where the goblins are, Atila?”

“Do not underestimate me. Such a task is trifling for the peerless senses of a dragon!”

If she stuck with them, she would likely prove quite helpful in future quests, Tomochika began to think rather calculatingly.

“Does that not mean selling out your friends, though?”

“What a bizarre question. Why should I consider the goblins to be my friends?” Though a part of the monster guild, she didn't seem to have much of a sense of camaraderie with them.

They headed in the direction Atila had indicated. After walking for a while, they found a large boulder with a small hole at the bottom.

“They're inside?”

“Indeed. Perhaps twenty or so live here.”

“It doesn't look like there's a lot of room inside.”

An adult would have to stoop slightly but would be able to walk inside the hole. It would be far too cramped for all of them to go inside at once, though.

“No matter. My thunder breath can wipe them out in an instant!”

“What are you, stupid?! How will I complete the quest if *you* kill them all?!”

“But it doesn’t look like we can really fight them inside. Do we have a way of luring them outside?” Yogiri sank into thought. They really wouldn’t be able to fight inside if they couldn’t even stand upright. “Mokomoko, do you have some sort of convenient, cowardly Dannoura technique for situations like this?”

Just what do you think the Dannoura School is? In a situation like this, poison gas is likely the most effective solution. The Dannoura Poison Smoke Technique can likely bring them all down in one fell swoop.

“We don’t have the materials for that though.”

“I guess I have no choice. How about I use an extremely weak thunder breath to startle them into running outside?”

“I guess it’s better than nothing. Let’s give it a shot.”

“Why are you acting so high and mighty when you’re the one receiving the help?” Despite her complaints, Atila realized that sitting there arguing wouldn’t accomplish anything, so she stretched her hand towards the cave. Lightning shot from her hand and into the depths.

“Oh, you called it breath, so I thought it would come from your mouth.”

“In this form, it can come from wherever I please.”

After a short time, creatures looking like human children began running out of the cave. They wore nothing but grass skirts and wielded clubs, spears, and swords. Realizing they were under attack, they were already in fighting formation. It took Tomochika a moment to realize they were monsters. Their skin was faintly greenish, and they seemed a bit too muscular for their size. Otherwise they looked perfectly human.



“Hmm. Ten exactly,” Edelgart observed.

“The remainder are likely noncombatants,” Atila said.

“I have no need to kill the women and children. Clearing the quest is enough for me. You can all watch from here.”

“You can take ten of them by yourself?!”

“Enemies like this will be no challenge at all!” Spear in hand, Edelgart charged.

The battle didn’t take long. Without attempting to dodge a single return blow, Edelgart rained attacks down on the goblins. As small as they were, the attacks from the goblins’ steely bodies must have been plenty powerful. However, even though each attack looked like it was enough to crumple her armor like paper, Edelgart ignored them entirely. No matter what she was faced with, she just responded with a straightforward attack. The last survivors seemed terrified, losing all will to fight as they were cut down.

“I suppose such a result is to be expected. Though it was little more than me blowing my nose, she still survived my thunder breath unscathed. A goblin’s attack would be as nothing to her.”

“Huh...she’s a lot stronger than I thought, isn’t she?”

“But does that make sense from a martial arts perspective?” Yogiri seemed unconvinced by her style of fighting. It looked like she had just gone totally berserk on them.

It has a sort of logic to it. If their attacks will not harm you, there is no need to dodge them. A fighting style like this is more efficient.

“Okay! Done!” Edelgart declared. Dead goblins lay in pools of blood all around the cave entrance. Though made to look like a game, this was still reality. Dead monsters didn’t just disappear.

“By the way, these goblins were associated with the monster guild,” Atila said. “They did not live here. They had been given a quest that would earn them DP if they could survive a given length of time.”

Tomochika figured it would have been smarter for them to live on the run in that case, but it was possible the area of their quest had been restricted to

force them into fighting.

“Then what was the point of bringing noncombatants with them?”

“DP cannot be traded, so each person must earn their own. And they must pay the Life Tax, no?”

Apparently, things were much the same for the monsters as they were for the humans.

Chapter 17 — It All Feels as If We Are Being Looked Down Upon Just for Being Monsters

Even if she looked like a young girl, Tomochika wasn't sure it would be possible to bring a dragon into Base Town. However, they were able to pass through the gate with no problem, so it seemed the restrictions were pretty lax.

"So this is the human's adventurer's guild!" Atila seemed rather taken in by the sight of the bar from her spot atop Yogiri's shoulders. Tomochika now held Dai's leash.

"You sound less like a dragon and more like a country bumpkin, getting so excited over a normal bar." Edelgart had arrived through the gate a short time after the rest of them. She had been on a different quest from Yogiri and Tomochika, so her gate had been somewhere else.

"Say what you will." Apparently in a good mood, Atila was unfazed by Edelgart's clear animosity.

"The herbs we had disappeared, so I guess that counts as delivered?" Before stepping through the gate, Yogiri had been holding five of the medicinal plants they had found. The ones in Tomochika's item box had also disappeared, so it seemed she didn't need to bother pulling them out.

"We don't need to report to the reception desk or anything?"

"We can just check our DP," Yogiri said, taking Atila off his shoulders.

Tomochika checked her DP crystal.

Quest reward: 5 DP

Befriended a dragon: 500 DP

It seemed the quest was completed the moment they stepped back into town.

“The quest reward is as expected, but we got 500 DP just for bringing Atila with us?”

“Let me check too.” Tomochika handed the crystal over to Yogiri. “I’ve got some too, but...it’s not quite the same.”

Quest reward: 5 DP

Befriended a dragon: 500 DP

Added a second harem member: 100 DP

“I guess Atila coming with us means she joined our party. And since I’m the only guy in the group, it’s treating it as a harem?”

“Sounds like an unsatisfying explanation to me,” Tomochika complained.

“Then let’s try this and see what happens. Hey, Edelgart.”

“What is it?”

“Would you like to join our group?”

“Hmm. Why not? Goblins are no issue for me, but that was only a level one quest. There is no telling what the future holds, so there is no harm in having more companions.”

“Thanks.”

Tomochika peaked at the crystal as Yogiri checked his DP again.

Added a third harem member: 200 DP

“The more members you add, the more each is worth?! Also, hold on, I don’t like being treated as the first member of this harem!”

“Does Dai not count as a member of our group?” Yogiri asked.

“He’s probably treated as a pet, right?” If Dai was treated as a companion, he would need to earn DP and pay the Life Tax like the rest of them. Tomochika felt like that was asking too much of an animal.

“By the way, what are you going to do, Atila? You’re a member of the monster guild, right?”

“True; however, I have heard no rule barring me from joining both. Reception is over there?” Atila immediately walked over to the reception counter. After a short discussion with the receptionist, she put her hand on the crystal offered to her and then made her way back. “Now I have registered. That makes me an adventurer!” She sounded awfully proud despite having done nothing but put her hand on a crystal.

“I’m starting to get the feeling this Cavern Quest was put together pretty sloppily...” Tomochika said.

“They probably never expected a monster to make it here and register.”

“So, what do we do now?”

“It’s getting pretty dark out. Maybe we should call it a day.”

Though they were underground, they could see through the windows of the guild hall that it was sunset.



After sitting down for a meal, the group headed to find a place to stay for the night. There was a wide variety in the quality of available lodgings, but in the end they decided to go for the lowest rank. Though it was the cheapest available, it wasn’t the kind of shack Tomochika had expected and was actually pretty comfortable. It seemed Cavern Quest was happy to provide the basic necessities to everyone effectively for free, as the cheapest equipment available all cost 1 DP, food cost 1 DP, and the cheapest accommodations were the same. Yogiri and Dai took one room, Tomochika and Atila another, and Edelgart took a third by herself.

“Are you really okay here, Atila? What about the other dragons?” Tomochika asked as she sat down on her bed.

“The majority of them are incapable of speech and would not be able to make it into Cavern Quest in the first place,” Atila said, jumping on her bed. Just like at the bar, she was totally unfamiliar with human culture, so everything she saw was a new experience.

“Is that a fact?”

“I imagine you saw a similar thing on your side as well. Even among the few of us capable of speech, many doubted the words of the Sage. And besides, I have almost no subordinates anymore. Those killed by Takatou did not return to life, remember?”

“Uh...” Tomochika gave a brief explanation of her understanding of the restart caused by the Great Sage.

“I see. Though if that is the case, would it not be more accurate to call this part three?”

“Did something like this happen before?”

“I suspect that it did, though it is little more than a hunch. If your speculation is correct, as time passes, our memories of previous parts fade like dreams, correct? There is no way to be sure anymore.”

“So you’re pretty old, then?”

“Indeed. Old enough that I cannot recall my own age.”

“Are you a pretty big deal among dragons?”

“Who knows? I spent my entire life living in that canyon, and all the dragons living in that area were under my control, so I suppose in a manner of speaking I was. But really that only applies within the canyon itself.”

“You said you wanted to be a Knight’s Attendant, right? Isn’t that a demotion from being the boss of the dragons?” Tomochika thought she remembered Atila saying that when they first met, but now it sounded like a rather strange thing to wish for.

“I was bored. What fun is there in sitting in an empty canyon, lording over lizards who cannot even speak? I wished to boldly stride into human society.”

“If you can transform into a human, couldn’t you have gone any time you wanted?”

“You fool! That would be terrifying! I know nothing about the human world. I would be discovered and driven out immediately! However, were I the attendant of a Knight of the Divine King, I would only need to follow said Knight!

No matter what blunders I made, the Knight would be able to take responsibility in my stead!”

“That’s a pretty proud declaration for something so pathetic!”

“Regardless, that is why I endorsed you for the trial. Though if that was all but a dream, there is no need to do so again. This situation is interesting in and of itself.”

“So you plan on being an adventurer for real now?”

“Of course! I cannot say I know how they will treat my current quest of killing humans, though.”

“That’s a good question. You can’t take more than one quest at a time, so I wonder if they’ll treat you as being stuck in the middle of one.”

“Hmm. In that case, I suppose I would need to cancel my previous quest. Either way, I will have to test it out tomorrow!”

“Out of curiosity, how are things on the monsters’ side?”

“It is difficult to describe. It feels like we are being insulted.”

“Insulted?”

“We were given a small branching cavern to live in and told to just pick a spot!”

“And the monster guild? Does it have a building?”

“Of course not. The cave we were provided has a large tree in it. That tree is used to register for the guild and provide quests. As for the gate, there is a large puddle. We must jump in it to get to the fields to perform our quests. It all feels as if we are being looked down upon just for being monsters!”

“So it’s pretty sloppy over there too, huh?”

“There is one group that built a castle for themselves, and that alone feels different. But of course, it is work the group took upon themselves. If I had not made it here, I likely would have attempted to join them.”

“So there are different factions among the monsters too?”

“Perhaps. There are many monsters who are far simpler in mind than

humans, so they will not act in a way that could form a proper society.”

Though monsters like goblins seemed simple-minded enough, there were highly intelligent monsters as well. Atila herself was capable of thinking like a human, so there were likely those who could predict what the humans would be doing.

“Well, I’m sure things will work out with Takatou around...though I don’t want to rely on him too much.”

They couldn’t just leave everything to Yogiri. Tomochika resolved to do as much as she could herself.



A week had passed since everyone’s arrival to Cavern Quest. By the seventh day, the automatically collected daily Life Tax had increased to 177 DP. It was still at a manageable level, but if it continued to increase at the same rate, it would eventually be impossible to afford. That said, the players were still optimistic. They expected the elites would deal with the last boss soon enough. Under normal circumstances, the last boss would be defeated within a month of the season starting. Even Yogiri’s group wasn’t putting much thought into defeating the last boss, just performing their ordinary quests day in and day out.

They learned a number of things over the course of that week. The first was that Atila was able to take quests and get rewards like normal. They didn’t know what was going on with her monster quest, but it didn’t matter if she could get rewards for her adventurer quests.

In addition, they found that any monster killed by Yogiri’s power wouldn’t count towards their quest completion. It seemed the system was observing their actions, and being unable to draw a causal connection between Yogiri and the monsters’ deaths, it would treat their enemies as having died of natural causes. Even if he used his power to kill parts of the monsters, the system would treat such unexpected behavior as an error and fail to reward anyone for dispatching them. It seemed the system didn’t just check the life and death status of the monsters, but also who killed them and who contributed to the kill. In short, if they didn’t fight properly, they couldn’t get any rewards for

extermination quests, so things weren't that easy for them.

"Even so, it still feels like you're cheating. If this were a real game, I wouldn't see the fun in it." The pigman, also known as an orc, swung its axe down. Tomochika blocked the strike with her left arm, delivering a swift kick to the bottom of its jaw, which crumpled, spilling uneven teeth everywhere. The impact of the kick must have made it to the creature's brain, as the orc collapsed motionless to the ground.

"But our lives are on the line here." One of the two orcs that had gone for Yogiri suddenly dropped to the ground. It had swung a sword, and Yogiri wasn't able to dodge it. Seeing its companion suddenly fall, the last orc hesitated, an opening that Yogiri used to deliver a swift chop with his sword to the orc's neck. The wound wasn't fatal, though. As the orc moved to counterattack, one of Tomochika's knives sank into its skull.

Atila and Edelgart cleaned up the remaining orcs in the area. The dog, Dai, wasn't participating in the fight, lounging on the ground nearby. They were in a set of ruins, so run-down that nothing but lonely support pillars remained, where they had a quest to hunt ten orcs.

"So you *were* the ones who killed those thugs in the alley back then, weren't you? You said they just collapsed." Edelgart seemed unhappy. They had told her about Yogiri's power. Though she didn't believe it at first, after seeing enemies die of their own accord over and over, she wasn't able to deny it for long. It seemed she had finally accepted it as the truth. Of course, that made her want to complain about what had happened back in part one.

"You wouldn't have believed me if I told you the truth, right?"

Yogiri fought without actively using his power, letting his automatic defenses protect him. He could read the killing intent from his enemies, so he dodged when he could and blocked if he thought it was possible. If it ever appeared he might lose, the enemy would die on its own, so he was able to fight from perfect safety. Even landing a single blow counted as contributing to the kill, so out of the 100 DP awarded for defeating each orc, Yogiri would receive about 20.

I would have expected fighting under such lax conditions to be useless for

training, but it seems you are making considerable progress. Mokokoko was surprised. Without fear of enemy attacks, Yogiri was able to fully concentrate on what he was doing. And since there was no fear to cloud his judgment, he could accurately gauge their actions. In short, he was learning to fight quite quickly.

“I can get stronger in this game, so it seems worth it to try,” Yogiri said. In Cavern Quest, equipment was extremely important. A significant portion of a player’s strength came from their items. Though it still required skill to use the equipment properly, it meant that even without the Gift, Yogiri was capable of reaching a level of strength comparable to the other players.

“You haven’t killed that many of them, though. Are you doing okay?”

“I’m fine for now. I’ve hit enough of them that it shouldn’t be an issue, and if I don’t get enough DP, I can just do some egg collecting. I can make quite a bit from those quests.”

“That also feels like cheating.”

The egg-collecting quest only required you to bring eggs back to the gate. Naturally, the parents of those eggs were monsters who would try to attack and take them back, but Yogiri could kill them without issue. There was no reward for killing monsters on collection quests.

“That makes ten.”

After confirming the orcs were dead, they gathered the monsters’ equipment, which could be used as-is or to strengthen their own equipment. It was standard practice to collect as much of it as possible. Since Tomochika had the item box ability, she took everything to divide up later.

“Okay, let’s head back,” Yogiri suggested now that their objective was complete.

But Tomochika seemed interested in searching the area a bit more. “There could be some refining materials in the ruins. Maybe we should take a look first.” Though they hadn’t known at the start, they found that if you paid close attention, you could find refining materials lying around everywhere.

“I do not believe we should be wasting any time here,” Edelgart disagreed.

Fields were home to powerful monsters besides the ones present in their quests. It was standard practice to return to town as soon as possible after completing one's quest.

Dai barked happily, eager to have something to do. He was particularly good at sniffing out specific materials they were searching for.

"It appears something has arrived before we'll have a chance to waste any of our time," Atila said, prompting Yogiri to follow her gaze. She was looking at the entrance of the ruins. Though the buildings had lost all of their form, the front door was still recognizable. With no walls or ceiling, one could come and go from wherever they pleased, but it still felt proper to call that the entrance. Four adventurers had arrived.

One of them seems far above the rest, though I suspect you do not need my expertise to spot that.

Mokomoko was likely describing the large man at the front of the group. He wore metal armor, though he walked as if it weighed nothing at all. He had a sword so large, it was impossible to hide it, even behind his considerable bulk. At a glance, Yogiri thought he looked fairly strong.

"Hm. I cannot imagine someone who brings others around in chains is a good person," Atila observed.

Behind the first man were two others who appeared to be his companions. Their wicked sneers gave the impression of them being little more than lackeys. Their final companion was an elven girl with pointed ears and a collar. A chain was connected to her collar, the other end of which was being held by the lead man.

"Oh! She's one of the people we saw at the guild!" Yogiri remembered her. She was one of the six Van had shown them who had Philosopher's Stones buried inside them.

"Yo. My name is Volf. Things'll be a lot quicker if you already know me," the man said, stopping a few steps away from them.

"I don't, but I get the feeling I won't like where this is going." Yogiri stepped forward to speak for their group. For some reason, he had been designated the

unofficial leader of their party.

“Let me get straight to the point. Hand over the dog. And the women too.”

“I don’t know if you can get more obviously evil than that!” Tomochika cried out instinctively.

Chapter 18 — I Am the Ruler of the Battlefield!

Behold My Power and Despair!

“If you’re after the dog, does that mean you’re after the Philosopher’s Stones?” Yogiri asked. The elf chained up behind Volf had a Philosopher’s Stone embedded in her. Van had planted one each in six people and a dog.

“Oh? I’m impressed that newbies like you know about them. You must be the ones the guildmaster spoke to.” After saying that, Volf delivered a swift kick to the elf behind him. She was sent flying by the blow but could only go so far thanks to the chain fastened to her neck. Naturally, the sudden force caused her neck to snap with a gruesome noise. As she was moments from death, Volf tossed a potion at her. It must have been a considerably powerful item, as she was immediately restored to health. Tomochika was taken aback by the sudden display. She had no idea why he had done that.

“Damn elf. You knew these guys, didn’t you? I thought you said you told us everything.”

“S-Sorry! I’m sorry! Please, forgive me!”

Volf lifted the chain in the air, dangling the elf by the neck as she desperately clutched at her collar to try and support her weight.

“I specifically asked you if you knew them.”

“I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I didn’t remember! It was so sudden! I didn’t know what was going on at the time!”

“Tch. Whatever. Be grateful I’m so kind.” Volf lowered the chain, dropping the elf to the ground. “Now, let’s continue. We need the Philosopher’s Stones to beat the last boss. You won’t need them for anything. Hand yours over and leave the boss to us. I have experience taking out the last boss, so it’s not a bad deal for you either.”

“What was all that about ‘hand over your women,’ then?!” Tomochika could understand why he would want the Philosopher’s Stone, but the rest seemed

totally unrelated.

“Huh? Come on, you should be smart enough to figure that out. Having a way to relax and recover will be useful in beating the last boss. What else would dumb bitches like you be able to contribute?”

“Okay, this guy’s head is in a totally different dimension.” Tomochika sighed. It didn’t seem like Volf was trying to antagonize them. He actually seemed to believe what he was saying.

“Hey, is she the only Philosopher’s Stone you have?” Yogiri asked, a little irritated.

“I’ve got two,” Volf answered. “The other was in some old guy, but I couldn’t be bothered to bring him around everywhere, so I killed him and took the stone out.”

It didn’t seem like he had any problem talking things through.

“So with ours, that makes three. What about the others?”

“There’s one party that has two, and two more parties that have one each. We’ll have to form a raid group to take on the last boss with them, which will reduce the amount of contribution our party gets, but it should be fine if our party provides three of the stones.”

“I see. Looks like it’ll be surprisingly easy to get them, then,” Yogiri commented.

“Huh?”

“I’m not handing over our stone. Actually, you’ll have to give me yours.”

“That’s not funny,” Volf replied.

“It wasn’t a joke.”

Negotiations immediately collapsed. The first to act was Atila. Lightning shot from her hand.

“No warning at all?!”

“He who strikes first wins!”

Volf swung his greatsword down. Though the logic was hard to follow, it

seemed his slash split the lightning in two, sending it flying off to either side. Edelgart then dropped down from the sky. She had leaped up into the air together with Atila's attack. Her timing made it a perfect surprise attack. He wouldn't be able to move immediately after swinging his sword like that. Whether he tried to dodge or block the lightning, it would create an opening for her to strike.

However, Edelgart's spear didn't hit its mark. Her attack collided with a shield, sending her flying away. Though she was able to land on her feet, she was unable to hide the fact that she was thrown off-balance. She never would have guessed a shield would appear from thin air. Volf hadn't been carrying one. It was just now hovering in the air above him.

"So Edelgart actually did have a charged jump attack."

"Is that what you're worried about?!"

Yogiri had figured she was making it up to look good in her encounter with Atila.

"I applaud your effort, but that's all you can do. If you give up now, I'll at least let the women live." It wasn't just a shield. At some point, swords, spears, and axes had appeared as well. And it wasn't just a few either. Countless weapons blinked into view in the air surrounding him. "My class is Weapon Master. I can equip any number of weapons and can control all of them at once."

He was likely going out of his way to explain his ability to try and intimidate them into surrendering so he could capture the women without injuring them. At the very least, Atila and Edelgart were clearly shaken.

In a game where one's abilities come primarily from equipment, being able to equip multiple weapons at once feels like cheating...

"Not much different from the enemies we've faced so far, though." From Yogiri's perspective, Volf wasn't a particularly threatening opponent. For that matter, Tomochika had never seen Yogiri afraid of anyone. "Dannoura, if I kill him, will everything in his item box be lost?"

"Yeah. If it works the same as mine, you need the Gift to pull items out of it."

In short, they couldn't just use Yogiri's power to kill him. If they did, one of

the Philosopher's Stones might be lost forever.

"So...do you mind if I take care of this?" Tomochika seemed pretty confident in herself.

"Are you sure?"

"If things get bad, you can kill him for me."

I must say, I would appreciate it if we could engage in battles without such a huge margin of safety.

"Okay, I'll leave it to you."

With Yogiri's agreement, Tomochika stepped forward to confront Volf.

"What are you up to, kid?"

"I have the Gift too. Mekomoko!"

Very well!

Tomochika called out to her guardian spirit, who moved between her and Volf.

"What is that?!"

"What the?!"

It seemed Edelgart and Atila could see the ghost. Mekomoko had changed somewhat. Normally, she wore informal Heian-era robes, but now she looked like a god who had stepped right out of Japanese myth.

"Is Mekomoko going to attack him?"

"No. Not even close," Mekomoko answered. Instead of the telepathic voice she normally used, she had spoken out loud.

"So what? You've got one more fatty on your team?" Volf sneered at her.

Truth be told, Mekomoko appearing didn't change much. No matter how strong she may have been, she couldn't fight against the countless weapons Volf wielded.

"Don't worry, the fatty is just going to watch."

"Why are *you* calling me that?!" Mekomoko complained.

“If you’re scared, you can feel free to run away. Oh, but leave the Philosopher’s Stones behind, okay?”

“I suppose there are idiots like you out there, people who don’t understand anything that’s going on. Fine, I’ll teach you just how weak you are,” Volf responded to Tomochika’s cheap provocation.

“Hah! Those words amount to a declaration of war! I am the Ruler of the Battlefield! Behold my power and despair!” Mekomoko shouted as if sealing a pact. As she did, everyone around her was blown away. Yogiri, Atila, Edelgart, and Volf’s henchmen were all knocked back.

“What the...” Yogiri stretched out a hand, but found himself blocked by some sort of invisible wall.

“This is our battlefield, a space restricted to create a one-versus-one environment. It will not allow anyone else to interfere. And now!” Mekomoko reached her hands towards the sky. Light poured out, filling the space around them. Enveloped by that light, the weapons hovering around Volf dropped to the ground one by one. “Special abilities are forbidden in this space! The Gift is forbidden, as are the abilities of all equipment! Your formidable armor is now no more than a lump of steel!”

Tomochika’s Gift, Ruler of the Battlefield, allowed Mekomoko to modify the world around her to create a place where Tomochika could shine. Of course, such an absurd power was not limitless. There were a number of restrictions on activating it. The opponent had to agree to the fight, and the battlefield would trap both participants inside until the one-on-one battle reached a conclusion.

“So what? You can’t use your powers either. It’s now all about skill and equipment.” Volf was strong enough to walk in full plate armor with ease and to swing around an enormous greatsword. None of that came from his special abilities. Even without his Gift, he could defeat most of his enemies relying on that strength alone.

However, that wasn’t enough to match the Dannoura family’s martial arts. In the blink of an eye, Tomochika delivered an explosive side kick to Volf’s stomach. From outside the range of his greatsword, she had closed the gap between them and struck before he could react.

Dannoura School Final Art, Extreme Arrow Step. While it could be described as little more than lunging forward at incredible speed and delivering a kick, it contained secrets gleaned from numerous ancient martial traditions. Her movements slipped through the gaps in their opponent's awareness. The attack couldn't be perceived, much less evaded.



The impact would be felt through any sort of armor. Delivering strikes that penetrated armor was an elementary part of the Dannoura way. Volf dropped to his knees before crumpling to the ground.

“The victor is decided!” At Mokomoko’s declaration, the battlefield vanished.

“That was kind of impressive, but what do we do with him now?” Yogiri asked. Though he was unconscious now, the man would have full use of his powers when he awoke. Restraining him wouldn’t mean much against someone with the Gift. At least, that’s what Yogiri thought, but Tomochika’s Gift had already taken all of that into account.

“Don’t worry about it. Losing inside my battlefield turns you into a prisoner of the winner. I can seal his powers permanently and force him to obey me.” Passing out or admitting defeat made you into a prisoner of war, surrendering control of your own life to the winner.

“That would be pretty scary if you lost...”

Of course, if she had lost, Tomochika would have met the same fate. That was the cost of her power. Such a colossal weakness was needed to afford the tremendous control her power granted her over her opponents.

“No way.”

“Volf lost?”

As Volf’s henchmen tried to flee, Atila fired a bolt of lightning at them. The strike disabled them immediately.

“It seems the other two were not that strong.”

“Umm, what should I do?” The elven girl was in a state of total confusion.

“Are we adding this girl to the harem?” Yogiri asked. They couldn’t just rip the Philosopher’s Stone out of her, so it seemed they didn’t have many other choices.



After receiving the other stone from Volf, they brought the elven girl back with them to the gate leading back to town.

“Looks like we’re up to ten stones in total now. I get the feeling we probably have enough at this point.”

Tomochika had eight in her item box. Two more were still inside the elven girl and Dai. Volf had also given them the information they needed to track down the other four. The current holders were all famous players, so tracking them down likely wouldn’t be that difficult. They hadn’t really put much thought into how they were going to go about getting the other stones, so this gave them a clear path. They didn’t know whether they would be able to resolve things through negotiations or if they would be forced to fight, but if they knew where the stones were, things would ultimately work out in the end.

“But that aside, we might have to defeat the last boss to get out of here.”

“You sound like you’re enjoying yourself, Takatou.”

“Do I? Even if they’re monsters, I can’t really get used to killing with a sword like this.” Though he said that, he still seemed to be enjoying the process of strengthening his equipment.

“Now then, I suppose we should get going. Can we just bring the elf girl back through with us?”

“It’s kind of hard to ask her to go back to the gate she came from, right?” They had left Volf and his henchmen in the ruins. There was a chance the elf would run into them again if she had to use the gate she arrived from to get back, which would be bad for everyone.

“Umm...so, you’re saving me, right?” the elf asked, finally having calmed down somewhat.

“I guess you could say that...” Yogiri trailed off. Their intention hadn’t been to save her at all. All they were after was the Philosopher’s Stone she held.

“By the way, what’s your name?” Tomochika asked.

“My name is Sakut.”

“That sounds somehow familiar.” Back in the Elven Forest, they had met a girl named Fuwat. Maybe all elven names followed a similar pattern.

“Walking around with a dog is fine, but I don’t know how I feel about bringing

an elf with us everywhere just because she has one of the stones we need,” Tomochika said.

“I don’t really want to force her to come with us either,” Yogiri agreed.

“No, please, let me go with you! If I don’t, more strange people will show up to attack me! You people seem way better than them, comparatively!”

“U-Uhh, I feel like there was a better way you could have worded that.”

“All right, let’s go back.”

Their group passed through the gate, returning to the adventurer’s guild instantly. However, they were immediately greeted with a scene dyed red.

“Excuse me?” Tomochika blurted out in confusion.

The bar was in total chaos. Tables and chairs had been smashed and bits of flesh and blood had been scattered everywhere.

“What happened here?”

The answer became clear rather quickly. They noticed a group of goblins, orcs, and trolls inside the guild, all monsters they had fought on quests in the past. Those monsters were toying with the humans, smashing them to pieces, ripping them apart and eating them. Yogiri’s group had been dumped right in the middle of that nauseating, hellish scene.

“How are there monsters in the adventurer’s guild?” Edelgart muttered in shock.

“Is it...my fault?”

“No, I don’t think this has anything to do with you, Atila.”

However, if a dragon like her was able to pass through the gates and make it into the adventurer’s guild, it was possible that was how the other monsters had made it in as well.

As they were all frozen in shock at the scene playing out before them, the monsters turned and rushed towards them, eager to be the first to reach the fresh prey.

“Die.”

With one word from Yogiri, they all dropped to the floor. “Now what are we supposed to do?” he asked.

“Yeah, good question.”

Yogiri and Tomochika found themselves at a loss.

Chapter 19 — What a Disappointment. Or Are You Still Planning Something?

The Village of Saints was the dark side of the Axis Church, an organization designed to create people like Divine Kings, Swordmasters, Fist Masters, and Saints. It was an organization that operated in the shadows, unknown to the believers in the church.

The Axis Church was the religion with the largest influence in the world, and the Village of Saints had played a role in its establishment. The founding of that organization had been a plot devised by Kouryu. In effect, the Axis Church was an organization formed by his actions.

The Malnarilna Sect was a religion in this world that worshipped their titular god. Since Malnarilna governed the world, there normally wouldn't be room for another religion to take root. So Kouryu had developed the Axis Church to focus on spiritual improvement and mutual cooperation, ensuring it did not come into direct conflict with the Malnarilna Sect.

The reason the Axis Church had ended up becoming so influential was the benefits afforded to those who joined. Malnarilna was irresponsible as a god. Worshipping them didn't earn much of their favor, and the Sect itself wasn't particularly well organized. If Malnarilna had truly wanted to, they could have crushed the Axis Church with little effort. But they had little concern for human affairs and couldn't care less about gathering worshippers.

The event that showed this most clearly was the incident with the Dark God Albagarma. When the Dark God had moved to wipe out humanity, Malnarilna had done nothing. They had left him to his own devices. Humanity had only survived thanks to interference from the Great Sage. He had reset the world and taught the Divine King how to deal with the Dark God.

Though the Great Sage had saved the world, it hadn't been clear exactly what he had done, so with the Axis Church actually carrying out the sealing of the Dark God, it had earned a tremendous amount of support from the people.

That may have seemed strange to those who knew of the relationship between Kouryu and the Sages, but it was possible that the Sages weren't aware of the relationship between Kouryu and the Axis Church. Even if they were, it was likely they weren't concerned about it. The story of the assailant forgetting the conflict while the victim remembers it for all time is a common one.

Malnarilna's negligence, leading to the expansion of the Axis Church's influence throughout the world, was nothing but a boon to Kouryu. He intended to use the church to destroy Malnarilna and take back his position as god of this world. Though he had numerous plans, he had been met with a sudden stroke of good luck from outside of all of them.

Rilna was dead, the seal on Kouryu's powers was gone, and Malna had come to the Heavenly Throne. Within the Throne, Kouryu was quite powerful and was capable of defeating her. Thanks to the help of a godslayer who had happened to be nearby, Kouryu had managed to take back his position and powers as god.

However, after time had been rewound, things were different. It was highly unlikely Malna would go to the Heavenly Throne now. She would have full memories of what had happened before the reset, so it was unlikely she would fall into the same trap again.

So Kouryu decided to put one of his original plans into action. Using a magical formation woven from the altars placed by the Village of Saints throughout the world, he would manifest a Sacred Ground and use that to suppress Malna's powers while strengthening his own.

The largest problem in this plan was finding Malna herself. Malnarilna was a fickle god, often moving around the world. The ritual used in Kouryu's plan would take a number of days to complete, so in order for it to succeed, he would need to nail down Malnarilna's exact location.

To that end, Kouryu was trying the brute force solution of building altars everywhere that Malna might go. Though it would take a huge amount of work, he had all the time in the world. He had no expectation of his plans coming to fruition in the near future. The building of altars was only one of many plans he was executing at the same time.

There was no need for him to rush things. He could wait until his preparations were complete before taking decisive action. That said, he did feel it was best to resolve things as quickly as possible.

That was because Yogiri Takatou was still in this world. He was collecting Philosopher's Stones in an attempt to return to his own world. The experience he had retained from before the reset would make collecting them much faster this time.

So there was some need for him to hurry. The chances of everything going smoothly if he took his time and moved slowly were incredibly small. But if he could make use of Yogiri, he would be able to solve many of his problems all at once. If he let that chance go, Yogiri would never return to this world. This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Though it might have been pushing his luck too far, Kouryu resolved himself to settling things immediately.



In the space between dimensions, beyond the reach of humans on the reverse side of the world, a small island floated in the void. The tiny house and garden was one of Malnarilna's many bases. Though their many bases were all built with different ideas in mind, the prevailing thought behind this one was to look cute. Considering how much time the twins had spent here, this seemed to be one of their preferred spots.

Kouryu knew that Malna had been staying there for a considerable amount of time. Since Malna made no effort to hide herself, it wasn't especially difficult to find her there. The issue was how long she would stay.

While Kouryu could make a Sacred Ground that would function as his territory temporarily, the ritual to do so would take a number of days to complete. Once it had begun there was no stopping it, and if Malna moved somewhere else while it was in progress, all of his effort would be wasted. He could target all of Malna's known dwellings as a precaution, but that plan would fall through if she moved somewhere new. But Kouryu still tried. Being weaker than her, he had no way of keeping her in a given place.

The ritual had already begun and was entering its final stage. He now awaited its completion, looking down at Malnarilna's dwelling from above. Around him

were numerous weapons and their wielders. Each of the weapons were legendary artifacts said to have killed gods in the past, though he had been unable to confirm the authenticity of those legends. The wielders were reproductions of the heroes who had wielded them. He had no idea whether they would be effective, but this was the greatest firepower Kouryu could bring to bear.

If this wasn't enough to defeat her, nothing Kouryu could do at this point would work. If he spent more time preparing, he might have been able to gather more strength, but if he didn't defeat her now, he wouldn't be able to make use of Yogiri. He had to bet on defeating her here.

"So, it looks like she didn't go anywhere in the end. I thought she might have noticed I was up to something."

Malna was the god governing this world. She could obtain any information she wanted about the world on a whim. There was no doubt she could find he was doing something suspicious if she took the time to look. But she was still inside, showing no sign of moving. Her angels were nowhere to be seen, so it appeared she wasn't even on guard. As the ritual completed and Kouryu's Sacred Ground was deployed, there was no hint of any change.

"Whatever. Could you go take a look for me?" Kouryu asked the humanoid machine at his side, the Hedgehog. It had used its self-repairing ability to restore its original form. In the past, it had acted almost at random, following some vague plan, but now it was functioning much better. At the very least, it seemed to recognize the deal it had struck with Kouryu.

With a faint nod, the Hedgehog disappeared. At the same time, the building below them exploded and the ground beneath it split apart. It had likely just charged straight into the building. Kouryu had never expected the first attack to go so well.

"Are you stronger than before somehow?"

The Hedgehog had been on the verge of losing to Vahanato. Seeing that, Kouryu hadn't expected much from it, but it now looked like it would at least be able to give Malna a run for her money.

However, as Kouryu thought that, the battle had already concluded. The

Hedgehog returned, Malna's small body limp in its arms. Slash wounds covered her from head to toe, and a large hole had been torn open in her chest. Her divine core was clearly visible, and anyone would be able to tell that it had been destroyed. The Hedgehog had defeated her instantly.

"What a disappointment. Or are you still planning something?"

"You again?" Malna's voice was weak, though that was to be expected with her on the verge of death. There was no resentment or hatred in her voice either. "Rilna is really gone. I thought she would be back if time got reversed..." The only thing to be seen in her expression was despair. There was no particular reason she had chosen to stay here. She just didn't have the willpower to move.

And then she stopped moving altogether. The Hedgehog let her go, and her body dissipated into the void.

"That went well. Oh, don't worry, I didn't forget our deal," Kouryu said, feeling the Hedgehog staring at him.



With Malna's death, all of the seals put in place by Malnarilna came undone. Naturally that included the Philosopher's Stones, which began to retake their godly powers. The stones held within the bodies of other living things were unable to act on the bodies enclosing them, but those that had been extracted began to transform.

There were now eight such stones, all inside Tomochika Dannoura's item box. The stones fused together into a lump of flesh and began to transform into the shape of a person. While it took the same form as the girl Yogiri had known as Luu, there was something distinctly different about her. The part containing her memories was included this time. In other words, she understood why she was in the state she was, in addition to her memories from before the reset. Her sense of self, which had been diluted by the passage of time, came back stark and clear.

Her first reaction after her memories returned was to scream. But although she tried to expel all the muddled darkness within her, no matter how much she screamed, those feelings didn't change, the storm of emotions inside her continuing to rage. Anger, sorrow, loss, frustration, and shame flooded her as

one, filling her to bursting. And among them all, one dark emotion shone stronger than all the others: jealousy.

She and the woman known as the UEG had been sealed away. That meant *the other woman* had *his* affection all to herself. She would have to die. She would erase her, bring her back to life, and then throw her right back into hell.

But she would need to get her powers back in full to do that, and then obtain more power besides. Though driven mad by rage and jealousy, she didn't recklessly attack. The three goddesses had fought while at full strength, and Luu had lost. She would need more power if she was to be sure of winning.

First, she would need to regain the lost parts of her body. That said, she hesitated to tear the two stones out from the bodies of those nearby. They had been fused into the hearts of their hosts. If she did that, the girl and dog would die. That would make her daddy sad, and that would make her sad. That feeling hovered in the back of her mind.

So she decided to leave those two stones until last. At some point, as her memories integrated with her body, her faint feelings for Yogiri would begin to fade. She would stop caring about him being sad or whether he lived or died. She would have plenty of time after that happened.

With that thought in mind, she set off in search of the other parts of herself.

MY INSTANT DEATH ABILITY
IS SO OVERPOWERED,
NO ONE IN THIS OTHER WORLD
STANDS A CHANCE AGAINST ME!

Side Story

Disciple

On the last day of March, Tomochika was fully enjoying the lazy days following her graduation from middle school. Having finished lunch, she headed to the dojo.

The Dannoura family's house was a rather large, Japanese-style construction, and had an archery range and martial arts training room in it. She was currently heading to the martial arts dojo, walking through a passage from the main building. She had been told to go there after lunch by her grandfather. Though the dojo looked like a building with a long history, it had actually been built somewhat recently. Rather than the straw of traditional tatami mats, the floor was made of colorful artificial mats with built-in cushions, the kind used for Judo. Though it might have seemed like an odd choice for a family with traditions stretching back to the Heian era, it had been built this way to cater to students from the general public. Real training in the Dannoura arts took place outside, on the ground with shoes on.

Tomochika arrived at the dojo to find it empty, so she sat down on the matted floor. After a short wait, her grandfather arrived. Michizane Dannoura, Tomochika's grandfather on her father's side, was the current head of the Dannoura School. Though he was approaching eighty-eight years old, his body showed no signs of withering. Though his face was of course deeply wrinkled, nothing about the way he carried himself gave the impression of an old man. By the way, despite meeting in the dojo, neither of them wore training outfits. Michizane was wearing a polo shirt and jeans, while Tomochika was wearing a tracksuit.

"I don't mind, but why here?" Tomochika asked. The Dannoura School accepted any and all students. Teaching others from outside the family would help their art spread, but in the end they had considerable difficulty attracting newcomers. Right now, the dojo was mostly used when others came to challenge the Dannoura School itself.

“We haven’t used this room for a long time, so I felt like we should,” her grandfather replied.

“Does that mean we have a new student?”

“Yes.”

“So, why am I here?”

“Hmm. Where do I begin? I guess it’s not that complicated. In short, the new student is a girl. I was worried she’d be too afraid of me.”

“Ah!”

“The fact you accepted that explanation so easily is somewhat irritating.”

“I mean, the reason none of my friends are willing to visit is because of you, dad, and my brother. Everyone thinks we’re a yakuza family.” The men of the Dannoura family gave a stern impression. Their expressions alone were enough to intimidate most people. “Everyone who sees you always ends up asking how many people you’ve killed.”

“Well...I guess I can’t say I’ve never killed anyone.”

“Wait, seriously?!” That was the first Tomochika had heard of it. That said, she had figured as much, so it wasn’t all that much of a shock.

“It’s not really something that is appropriate to talk about.”

“Okay, I’ll pretend like I never heard that. At any rate, why do we have a student now? I thought we had given up on that.”

The Dannoura School did not keep their teachings a secret, and any of their children who were willing to learn were taught. Fearing their arts would eventually be lost to time, they had begun trying to find ways to preserve them in the modern era. That was why they had begun taking on new students, but the Dannoura School operated on the presumption that one possessed the powerful body of the Dannoura line. Most ordinary people were incapable of adopting their techniques.

“Yes, well, this is a request from an old friend...”

It sounded to Tomochika like this was a bit of a sore spot for him. “But it’s just

a normal kid, right? I would have expected you to turn him down.”

“Unfortunately, I owe him some money. I couldn’t really refuse.”

“You owe him money? Are we that poor that we need to borrow money from people?”

The Dannoura house was in the middle of a large city, in an area that ranked very highly in popularity. Having such a large house in such a popular spot would cost a considerable amount for upkeep. The fact that they had managed to maintain it meant they must have had some considerable wealth. Tomochika didn’t really perceive her family as being wealthy, though. She didn’t live a life of luxury at all. The only real difference between her and everyone else was that her house was larger.

“The family is fine, but that doesn’t mean I personally have money.”

“Yeah, since grandma takes care of the money for the house.”

“To keep things simple, I lost a lot on the FX.”

“Are you stupid?!” Tomochika immediately shouted. The FX, or Foreign Exchange, was a way for people to invest in foreign currencies, but for an amateur it was little more than gambling.

“That’s easy for you to say! But that’s exactly why I can’t just use the family’s money to pay off my loans!”

“I’m telling grandma!”

“Please, don’t!” As Tomochika stood up, Michizane desperately tried to stop her. Tomochika finally understood why he had wanted this conversation to happen in the dojo. Her mother and grandmother almost never came here. “The situation is under control! In exchange, he just wants me to teach his granddaughter some self-defense.”

“So why do I have to help when you’re the one who screwed up?” Tomochika asked, narrowing her eyes at him.

“I promise I’ll make it up to you! So please, help me!”

“But I don’t really know that much. What do you want me to teach her?” The Dannoura School was broken up into four levels: beginner arts, intermediate

arts, advanced arts, and final arts. Tomochika had only learned up to the intermediate arts, and it was hard for her to say she took her training all that seriously.

“The intermediate arts give you a strong grasp of the fundamentals of martial arts, so it should be plenty for you to teach a little self-defense.”

“Actually, now that I think about it, we call this archery, but I’ve barely learned any techniques that use a bow...” Though Tomochika was comfortable enough with a bow, that was no more than ordinary archery. She felt like there was no way the Dannoura School of Archery was just a normal archery school.

“You will learn more once you start learning the final arts, so don’t worry about it.”

“That’s not going to be for a while, though, right?”

“If you started practicing seriously, it probably wouldn’t take that long.”

“Not that I’m all that interested in using a bow.”

“Either way, let’s leave the bow talk for now. You can do it however you like; please just teach her some self-defense.”

“Well...I guess I have no choice...”

Michizane gave Tomochika money in exchange for her participation in practices. That was the main reason she practiced at all. That money came from Michizane’s personal funds, meaning any money he made indirectly benefited her as well. And besides, if her grandfather really needed her help, she couldn’t just ignore him.

“But if he just wants her to learn self-defense, why does it have to be here?”

“This isn’t just for some peace of mind. He wants her to learn something serious and practical.”

“Well...that narrows down her options quite a bit.”

The term “self-defense” encompassed a wide range of things, but the majority gave little more than peace of mind. Giving people a false sense of confidence like that could actually prove dangerous in some situations.

“So when am I supposed to start, and who am I teaching?”

“Have you heard of the Gokurakuten family?”

“Not really. Sounds like a pretty easygoing name, though.”

“I guess ordinary people wouldn’t know much about them. They are one of the richest families in Japan and are even pretty highly ranked in wealth across the entire world. I’m friends with the head of that family.”

“Sounds fishy to me. Why would someone like that be friends with you?”
Tomochika asked.

“I worked as a bodyguard for him once.”

“If he’s that rich, why doesn’t he hire bodyguards for his granddaughter?”

“Of course he is doing so, but the girl is a bit of a nuisance herself. She doesn’t like the bodyguards being nearby when she’s walking to her elementary school.”

“So she’s an elementary school student?”

“Her name is Fukura Gokurakuten. In April she will begin her fifth year in elementary school.”

“Is there any specific danger she’s in? What should I be preparing her for?”

“Kidnappers, perverts, random attackers, and assassins. Stuff like that.”

“Uh, I don’t think learning self-defense will really help against an assassin...” If someone was willing to go to any lengths to kill you, there wouldn’t really be a way to defend yourself. There were plenty of methods that would be entirely impossible to protect against, like long-distance sniping, poison gas, or explosives. Attacks like that needed power on a political level to fight against, not just personal skill.

“Of course. You don’t have to make her invincible.”

“Hmm...how hard should I be on her?” What could she do with an eleven-year-old girl? She tried to come up with a rough idea.

“I also made sure he was aware that if we taught his granddaughter, she wouldn’t come out unscathed. It’s okay if she gets injured as long as it’s

something she can recover from.”

“I’ll probably need to get a scary person to help at some point, so you might have to join in anyway.”

“That is fine. I just thought it would be best if you led the training.”

Tomochika couldn’t help but agree. Having a scary looking person show up every once in a while would be a lot less stressful than having him teach her constantly.

“But if you want someone scary, Yoshimoto would probably be more useful,” he added.

“So now we’re getting my brother wrapped up in this?”

“He’ll do anything you ask of him, I’m sure. Either way, I’ll leave it to you! She’ll be coming here starting tomorrow!” After saying that, Michizane hastily made his departure. It seemed his intention was to push the problem onto everyone else.

“But what am I supposed to actually teach her?” Tomochika had never taught anyone before, but she’d have to figure it out now that it had been asked of her. She began thinking hard to come up with a plan.



The next day, Tomochika headed to the front gate of the Dannoura household at the scheduled time, where she found a young girl with long hair waiting for her. The girl wore a long dress and a backpack and was about a head smaller than Tomochika herself, as was to be expected of an elementary school student. This must have been Fukura Gokurakuten.

“Hello, Master!” the girl greeted her with a cheerful smile.

“Ah...I see why they were worried about kidnapping.” Tomochika found herself taken aback. Fukura was quite possibly the prettiest girl she had ever seen.

“Um?” the girl tilted her head in confusion. Even the slightest movements she made were adorable.

“Oh! Sorry! I was a little bit distracted!”

“That is okay. It happens a lot.” She gave the impression of being somehow detached, possibly due to the slow, calm way in which she spoke.

“It happens a lot?”

“Yes. They say I’m too cute.” There wasn’t an ounce of humility in her voice, but Tomochika could understand why after seeing her. False humility from someone who looked like her would just make her more enemies.

“I’m Tomochika Dannoura. I was asked to teach you self-defense. Is that right?”

“Yes. I am Fukura Gokurakuten. It is nice to meet you.”

“Yeah, nice to meet you! Okay, let’s go to the dojo.” Passing through the front gate, they headed towards the martial arts dojo. It was a bit of a walk, so Tomochika decided to try starting a light conversation. “So, the training we do here is pretty rough. Did they tell you that?”

“Yes. Grandfather told me that I should be prepared to break a few bones.”

“Uh, I don’t think it’ll be that bad...hopefully.” She couldn’t entirely deny the possibility. If things didn’t go well, her student could end up with far worse injuries than a few broken bones. “Are you here because your grandfather sent you?”

“Yes, but I am also interested in learning myself. Things seem rather dangerous these days.”

“Were you not a bit confused when they told you we do archery here?”

“Yes, I was. I thought it was strange to learn archery for self-defense, but it came with my grandfather’s recommendation.”

“Apparently, our founder used a bow as his main weapon, but using a bow these days is kind of difficult, right? We’ve changed things a lot to keep up with the times, to the point where basically anything goes now.”

The founder of the Dannoura School had used a bow because it was the most powerful weapon at the time. Though there were situations where a bow would be useful in modern times, they were pretty limited. As such, the bow techniques of the school were taught fairly late, so Tomochika herself only

knew the basics.

“So this is the dojo. Did you bring a change of clothes?” Tomochika asked as they stepped inside.

“Yes. Are my school gym clothes acceptable?”

“Yeah, we don’t have any set uniform here,” Tomochika said, wearing a tracksuit herself. Though that was what she wore while training, she also often wore it while lounging around the house.



“The changing room is in the back, so go ahead and get changed.”

Fukura headed to the room as instructed. The dojo was fully equipped with heating and air conditioning, and the changing rooms had lockers, bathrooms, and showers. It had all seemed like a waste to Tomochika since no one ever used them, but at least now the building was going to get a little use.

After a while, Fukura returned wearing her school gym clothes.

“Uhhh, so once again, I’m Tomochika Dannoura of the Dannoura School. You can call me whatever you like. You called me ‘master’ earlier, right?” The two stood facing each other at the center of the dojo.

“Yes, Master!” Fukura seemed pretty into it, so Tomochika decided to leave it at that.

“Okay. What do you think self-defense means?”

“I looked into it, and I found it is best not to think of defeating dangerous people in combat, but to endeavor to avoid dangerous situations entirely. Things like not walking around at night or in dangerous places. And when you meet a dangerous person, your first action should be to run away.”

“Yeah, that’s right. That’s what it’s all based on. But no matter how careful you are, you can always end up in a dangerous situation where you have to fight. I will try and teach you something useful for situations like that.”

“Okay!”

“The Dannoura School has a lot of different techniques, but I want to narrow those down to three main points for you: readiness, mobility, and throwing projectiles.”

“Excuse me,” Fukura interrupted. “Are you not going to teach me how to break out of someone’s grip, or how to twist someone’s arms to disable them?” It seemed that when Fukura heard “self-defense,” she imagined something like Aikido.

“Nope. Think of it like if they’ve grabbed you, you’ve already lost. Everything I’m going to teach you is to stop them from grabbing you or hitting you in the first place.”

“I see!”

“So, first, readiness. Come on in!” Tomochika called out to the door leading into the main building of the house.

A man in a black suit immediately stepped into the dojo. He was large, muscular, and wore an intimidating expression, having an air of brutal ferocity about him. The man boldly stepped into the center of the room and stood facing Fukura.

“HEY! FOU BOOL! BAB A DO FOIN GA! KA GILL GA!” he roared with a volume that made Tomochika feel like her eardrums would burst.

Fukura’s face immediately filled with terror, her whole body going stiff. She immediately wet herself, making Tomochika feel a little guilty for bringing this on.

“Sorry, Fukura,” Tomochika apologized. “Let’s go and get you changed. Yoshimoto, go grab a cloth and wipe this up.”

The man who had thoroughly terrified Fukura was Yoshimoto Dannoura. He was the eldest son of the Dannoura family, Tomochika’s older brother.

“Tomo...making me do stuff like this to such a little kid is really painful for me...” Despite his aggressive appearance, he immediately deflated.

“Yeah, I thought the first impression would be really important.” Tomochika took Fukura to the shower room, where she lent her some of her old elementary school gym clothes. By the time Fukura had finished changing and they made it back to the dojo, Yoshimoto had finished cleaning everything up.

“So, to start over,” Tomochika began again, “just like you experienced there, girls are normally really weak to people who act violently like that. They’ll panic just from someone shouting at them in a loud voice.”

“Okay...” Though she had calmed down somewhat, Fukura still looked to be on the verge of tears.

“Uh...also, the fact he was shouting total nonsense was another one of our techniques. It makes you want to stop and try to figure out what he was saying, right?” She had wanted Yoshimoto to represent a dangerous person she

couldn't understand. "That's how we're going to practice readiness. You'll get used to stuff like that happening. This scary guy will shout complete nonsense at you all the time, but I promise he'll never hurt you, so don't worry."

If you panicked in the face of a dangerous person, you couldn't fight or run away. Tomochika had figured it would be best to start by getting used to dealing with violent people first, but it seemed like she had gone a bit overboard.



The next afternoon, the Dannoura family's doorbell rang.

"Man, I was afraid you wouldn't come back." Tomochika headed to the front gate, where she found Fukura waiting for her.

"I very much hate losing."

"Well, I'm glad you're back." She had no idea what would happen to her grandfather's debt if Fukura gave up on the training. Tomochika regretted starting so strongly the day before.

"I have brought many changes of clothes this time!" Fukura declared.

"I don't think that's the part you need to work hard on!" Tomochika brought Fukura to the dojo and had her get changed. "Okay, today we'll work on mobility. That said, we'll be staying in the dojo, so it's not going to mean a lot. Okay, why don't you try running from one wall to the other?"

The dojo was about fifteen meters across, so it was a fairly short distance to run. But that wouldn't be a problem for now. Tomochika gave a demonstration, running across the room while facing Fukura behind her.

"Huh?"

"You're going to do backwards running. Run while facing backwards."

"O-Okay!" Fukura immediately tried to run while facing backwards, but fell after only a few steps. Tomochika rushed to her side and helped her up.

"Falling in here doesn't hurt much, right? Once you're used to it, you're going to go full speed outside." There were cushions built into the mats of the dojo. Falling here wasn't a big deal.

“Excuse me, but why are we doing this?” Fukura asked.

“You were surprised when I suddenly started running backwards, right?”

“Yes. Huh? Is that the reason?”

“Yeah. But this is also pretty important. If you force someone to do something they weren’t expecting at all, they’ll hesitate. On top of that, it lets you run away while keeping an eye on the person chasing you. That lets you use throwing weapons against them while you try to escape.”

“I see...”

“Either way, this is the first step in mobility training. You’ll also be learning sideways running and vertical running.”

“Vertical running?” Sideways running made sense, but it seemed Fukura had trouble imagining what vertical running would look like.

“Yeah, like this.” Tomochika ran towards a nearby wall. She then ran up the side of the wall, kicking off of it to grab one of the ceiling beams. “Like that.” Letting go of the beam, she dropped gracefully to the ground.

“Umm...I don’t think I could do that...”

“Don’t worry, it’s just a matter of getting used to it. Once you’re familiar with the method, you’ll be able to do it like it’s nothing. But first, let’s focus on backwards running.”

“Okay!” Though still a bit bewildered, Fukura turned her attention to learning backwards running.



A week had passed since Fukura began her training. Tomochika had expected her to quit rather quickly, but she had obstinately refused to give up. The week consisted mostly of practicing backwards running and running through obstacles to build stamina, with a bit of intimidation from Yoshimoto mixed in. She appeared to have grown quite used to Yoshimoto’s yelling, as she no longer seemed afraid of him at all. Tomochika felt like it was time to move on to the next level.

“So today we’re going to start with throwing practice!” As always, the two

stood facing each other in the dojo.

“Okay!” Fukura replied energetically. Despite the incident on the first day of training, she had grown to enjoy the practice quite a bit.

“This is what you’ll be throwing,” Tomochika said, bringing out a tub. Inside it was a collection of random objects, such as rocks, coins, television remotes, shuriken, wooden swords, stuffed animals, concrete blocks, scissors, and compasses. “Basically, you want to look at anything you can find lying around that you can pick up easily. Something like a five hundred yen coin that you can carry with you everywhere is perfect. It’s hard, has a bit of weight to it, and most importantly, no one will be suspicious if they see you carrying it.”

“Excuse me, is there much point to throwing a stuffed animal at someone?”

“There is. If you throw it at someone’s face, they’ll reflexively try to dodge, and that will buy you some time. If you toss it to them, they might try and grab it out of the air, and if you throw it at their feet they could slip and fall on it.”

“I see!”

“You might find things like this wooden sword lying around that you’ll want to just hit people with, but you definitely can’t. If you try to hit someone with a weapon you’re not familiar with, you’re just as likely to hurt yourself. As I’ve taught you with everything else, forget about trying to win in close quarters. Even if you get the chance, never try to hit someone that close to you.”

“So basically, no matter what I pick up, just throw it?”

“Yeah. It takes different techniques to throw objects with different shapes and sizes, but first we’re going to train your readiness to throw things at people. So look over there. Those are our targets, Hit-me and Stab-me.” At the edge of the dojo were a man wearing a business suit and a woman who looked to be a housewife on her way home from shopping.

“Huh? Are those...”

“Don’t worry, they’re super realistic but they’re just dummies.” With that, Tomochika grabbed a remote control from the tub and hurled it at the man.

“Gaaaah!” the dummy cried out in pain.

“So, yeah, something like that. They’re super realistic dummies that even breathe.” A cord ran from the dummies’ feet to the outlet in the wall behind them.

“Uhh...I’m supposed to throw things at them?” Fukura asked.

“Yeah. If you can get used to throwing things at them, you should be able to throw things at real people too.”

“But...some of these things could really hurt people if they got hit by them,” Fukura said, pulling a shuriken out of the tub. The long, sticklike shape came to a sharp point, and it had enough weight to it that if thrown properly it would stab rather deep into its target. Depending on where you hit, it could definitely be fatal.

“Yeah, but don’t worry! Anyone bad enough to attack an elementary school student deserves to die!” Tomochika replied instantly.

“What?!”

“If it’s to defend yourself, never hesitate! If you try and go easy on them and end up getting killed or kidnapped, then it was all for nothing. If you’re going to attack someone, do it like you’re trying to kill them. Legally speaking, that would probably be classified as excessive force, but you’re just an elementary school student. Your family is super rich too, so they can probably hire great lawyers and put pressure on the police, so you’ll be fine.”

Disabling someone without injuring them would be the ideal solution, but doing that required an overwhelming difference in ability. If Fukura continued training, she could reach that point someday, but that was a discussion for the future. At this point, Tomochika felt like fighting with the intent to kill was the only option.

“Okay, let’s go ahead and get started, then! We’ll begin from two meters away. Try and hit them in the eyes.”

“Okay!” Fukura walked up to one of the dummies and threw a rock. The rock flew true, striking the dummy right in the eye.

“My eye, my eye!” the expressionless dummy cried out in agony.

“Whoa, you’re good! They’ll scream like that whenever you hit them in the eyes.”

“Excuse me. This is really uncomfortable.”

“Don’t worry! Once you get used to it, you won’t feel bad about it at all!”

“O-Okay!”

Tomochika put a strong emphasis on her student getting accustomed to everything.



A month had passed since Fukura began her training. Once spring vacation ended and school started again, her sessions had moved to the evening, but that didn’t stop her from coming to the Dannoura household every day.

“Hey Grampa, what happened with that money you owed?”

“I’ve managed to recover somehow. It’s all been paid back now.” Grandfather and granddaughter sat lazily watching TV in the living room.

“I’m glad to hear it, but training is taking up quite a bit of my time now. I seem to remember you said something about paying me back for it...”

“Well, uhh...I’ll give you the entire monthly fee they’re paying, so that should be good, right?”

“Is that really the issue?”

“Er, well, uh. If anything happens, I’ll help you. So you can think about it as if I’m still in your debt.”

“I guess that’s fine.” Recently, Tomochika had started to really enjoy her practices with Fukura. Though she wasn’t of the Dannoura bloodline, Fukura’s physical abilities were fairly decent, but more importantly, she was smart and learned quickly. The way she absorbed everything she was taught made Tomochika want to teach her even more.

“Hey, that’s a local elementary school, right?” her grandfather said. Tomochika looked at the TV, where she saw an aerial view of a school.

“This afternoon, a man with an edged weapon attacked an elementary school

in H Prefecture, Seishin City...”

The evening news was telling a story about an intruder entering an elementary school.

“Huh? Wait, that’s not Fukura’s school, is it?” Tomochika looked at the clock. Normally, Fukura would have arrived ages ago. The thought that something might have happened to her had Tomochika suddenly feeling nervous.

“Who knows? Maybe I’ll give Gokurakuten a call.”

“I will too—” As Tomochika pulled out her phone to call Fukura, the doorbell rang. She hurried to the front gate, where she found Fukura standing there like normal. “Thank goodness. I thought something happened at your school.”

“Yes, there was an incident today. That is why I am a little late.”

“Huh? The one with the intruder?”

“Yes. That was my school.”

“Are you okay?!”

“Yes, my practice with the Dannoura School has already paid off!”

While she was in her classroom participating in club activities after school, a man with an edged weapon had walked in. Fukura had thrown five hundred yen coins at his eyes and then hurled desks and chairs at him until he stopped moving. She and her friends and teachers were able to walk away quite calmly and call the police. The man’s intentions were still under investigation, but there was no damage done to the school or its students.

“I thought it would be a good idea to teach you how to throw chairs and desks since you would be spending so much time at school. Looks like it really *was* a good idea...”

“The man had a survival knife, but compared to a katana, it was not scary at all.”

“I guess that’s true, but still!”

Recently, Fukura hadn’t been bothered by Yoshimoto’s presence at all, so he had started coming at her with swords and model guns.

“After all that, it seems like he will still survive. People are a lot sturdier than I had expected. You really cannot be too careful,” Fukura said with an angelic smile.

Meanwhile, Tomochika had to struggle to suppress the feeling that she had given birth to a monster. Still, in the end, anyone who would attack elementary school students couldn't be anything but evil, so if the Dannoura School had saved even a single student's life, that was good enough.

At least, that's what she tried to tell herself.

Afterword

And that was volume 12. Every book breaks my record for published volumes in a single series, but it looks like I'll be able to break that record a few more times still. In truth, I had expected the story to start wrapping up around volume 10, so I figured we would be more or less done by volume 12. There is a lot more that goes into a novel getting published than the author's desires, so after giving it a lot of thought, I figured it would be best to end the series around then.

However, luckily, I was told I would be able to release a few more books still, so I decided it would be okay to introduce some slower developments to the story so that it could continue a little longer.

That said, the development in question has propelled the story into its endgame, so we are still getting quite close to the end. I would be grateful if you'd stay with me here for a little longer.

Speaking of which, the total sales for the series passed 850,000 copies a little while ago. Maybe it's not much compared to the books that sell millions of copies per volume, but in today's publishing environment, perhaps it's still pretty impressive. We've already made it this far, so even if it's the total sales of all the volumes put together, I'd love to hit that dreamlike number of one million!

Finally, my thanks.

To my supervising editor. Thank you for your work every time. I feel like I did a little better on the scheduling this time.

To the illustrator, Chisato Naruse. Thank you for the wonderful illustrations you always create for us. I don't feel like much changed with the schedule for you this time, so I apologize for forcing such a tight deadline on you again.

Next is volume 13. I hope you stay with us all the way to the finale!

Tsuyoshi Fujitaka

藤孝 剛志

Hello, this is the illustrator, Chisato Naruse.

After doing the insert images for Instant Death, I noticed there are an awful lot of characters who I see and think, "Wait, they're showing up again? And they're doing what...? (*shiver*)."

Then again, maybe Mr. Fujitaka had it all planned out in his head from the start ha ha.

Atila and Edelgart are shining examples of that in this volume. By the way, Edelgart's design was made by Miss Nanto, the artist for the Instant Death manga.

At first, I was a bit disappointed that characters I had worked so hard on designing were cut from the story after a single appearance, so I was happy to see them come back, but I also find myself thinking, "Hey, we weren't supposed to see you again..."

By the way, the coriander plant I was raising has transformed into a paradise for spider mites and aphids (continued from cover comment).

CHISATO NARUSE





My Instant Death Ability Is So Overpowered
No One in This Other World Stands a Chance Against Me!
Illustration: Chisaki Nakamura



MY
INSTANT DEATH
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ME!

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Tsuyoshi
Fujitaka

Illustrator:
Chisato
Naruse

Bonus Short Stories

Question Corner 7

Tomochika: Okay, hello! I'm Tomochika Dannoura! Welcome to Question Corner 7. I thought we'd be done with this by now, but we're still getting published, so I guess the show goes on! We were so close to the conclusion of the story that I figured we probably already had enough questions, but as it looks like the series is going to continue a little longer, we've started collecting questions again!

Mokomoko: *Indeed. We feared we would not have a chance to share all of the questions we received, but that ended up being for nothing! We need more questions!*

Tomochika: If you're wondering why we've decided to do these question corners at all, we thought it was a bit rude to write something related to the main story that would only appear in special bonus stories that not everyone could read. This was our way of making something that wouldn't impact the story!

Mokomoko: *We also intended it as a way of being lazy, but it has proved to be a significant amount of work...*

Tomochika: A-Anyway! Let's get started!

Q: When athletes or fighters start putting on weight, I figure it's because they either need to be heavier (for example, sumo or pro wrestlers), or because they've retired and just let themselves go. Which of these is it for Tomochika's sister and Mokomoko?

Vitch

Tomochika: That is an awfully personal question! I feel like it might even

touch on my future a bit!

Mokomoko: *There is no need to fear. As long as you do not neglect your health entirely, you will likely maintain your current build.*

Tomochika: So, how did you end up like that, Mokomoko?

Mokomoko: *In my case, I was always like this! That aside, I lived during the dawn of the Dannoura School, a time of trial and error for us. Though it was not my intention to grow this large, it was the natural result of eating mountains of food and fighting.*

Tomochika: So is my sister just a case of inheriting your traits?

Mokomoko: *Well, the Dannoura family has gathered numerous bloodlines in order to produce a body that excels in physical activity, but in its current state it produces primarily children of two distinct types. The first is a speed type, slender and comparatively smaller in build, like yourself. The other is a power type, boasting a larger and thicker build.*

Tomochika: So my sister is...

Mokomoko: *She is just the result of a lack of training and poor health.*

Tomochika: So what was that explanation for, then?!

Q: Hey, what is night mist? Are these eyes really his? Or can he not see them?

Adam KNK

Tomochika: What?!

Mokomoko: *Hmm...judging by their name, the questioner appears to be a foreigner. Perhaps they used some sort of translation software to submit their question?*

Yogiri: I'm not sure, but it seems like they might be asking about my true form.

Tomochika: I get the same impression, but is that something we can really answer?

Mokomoko: *If it is something that relates to the main plot, then we cannot.*

Yogiri: Well, you can ask me what my true form is, but I'm not really hiding it or anything. I'm me; that's all I can say.

Tomochika: And you're not just trying to avoid the conversation?

Yogiri: Nope. It would be the same as if I asked what your true form was.

Tomochika: Yeah...I feel like that's a bit different...

Mokomoko: *At any rate, even if we had such an answer, we would be unable to give it to you. So this is the end of the Question Corner! We thought we were beyond the need for more questions, but we were clearly wrong, so please feel free to keep sending them!*

Question Corner 7 Extra Edition

Tomochika: Okay, hello! I'm Tomochika Dannoura! This is the Question Corner 7 Extra Edition. As always, the questions we weren't able to fit in the normal Question Corner 7 are going in here, but you probably don't need that explanation anymore!

Mokomoko: *I am sure you have heard this explanation countless times. Let us just begin!*

Q: What would happen if Yogiri tried to kill himself? Would he just die? Or would his power activate to kill his own attempt to kill himself, making it so he never tried to do so? Or would something else happen?

Okaichi

Yogiri: No idea. I've never tried to kill myself before, and I doubt I ever will.

Tomochika: That doesn't really answer the question at all!

Yogiri: I can't help it. If I don't know, I don't know.

Q: In the story, the first person to really understand how dangerous Yogiri is

was Mokomoko. After that was Aoi, but very few people seem to be able to tell just by seeing him. (Maybe the Jet Black Witch was the only other person who could?) Is Mokomoko actually really impressive? Or was it just because she saw him use his power from up close?

Panda

Mokomoko: *Of course that is because I am extraordinary!*

Tomochika: What?! Really...?

Mokomoko: *Why do you doubt me?*

Tomochika: I seem to remember you just being scared...

Mokomoko: *What is wrong with being correctly afraid of a legitimate threat?! Is that not part of excellence?*

Tomochika: How much did you actually understand the threat he posed, though?

Mokomoko: *Well...if all I saw was people dropping dead around him, I would not have much concern for fear. However, I saw him extinguishing all sorts of spirits without him even realizing it!*

Tomochika: That's the first I've heard of it!

Mokomoko: *Indeed. While you are under my protection, the young man appears entirely defenseless against spiritual attacks. As such, lesser spirits often attempt to meddle with him...but then they vanish, as if they were nothing at all...*

Tomochika: Do these spirits really attack people that often?

Mokomoko: *That is how it appears in this world. As such, the residents of this world typically bear some sort of blessing to protect themselves. By the way, the Gift itself provides a minimal level of spiritual defense on its own.*

Tomochika: And there you have it! The answer is: she was just scared after seeing other spirits disappearing around him!

Mokomoko: *Surely you could find a better way of putting that...*

Tomochika: Okay, that's all for the extra edition! We're still accepting questions, so please send them in any time!





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My Instant Death Ability Is So Overpowered, No One in This Other World
Stands a Chance Against Me! Volume 12

by Tsuyoshi Fujitaka

Translated by Nathan Macklem Edited by Tess Nanavati

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