


# Another World Survival

Min-maxing  
my Support and  
Summoning  
Magic

9







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Magic

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Hanashi  
MEDIA





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Leen-san touched the water mirror  
placed at the center of our group.

The water's surface rippled, unveiling a vision of  
what seemed to be the mountain our school sat upon.

World Tree's Shrine Maiden

Leen

1st Year - High School Student

Kazuhisa Kaya

World Tree Resident

Rushia





3rd Year - Middle School Student  
Arisu Shimozono

1st Year - Middle School Student  
Shiki Yukariko


3rd Year - Middle School Student  
Tamaki Ryuki



University Student  
& Former Member of the Ninja Club  
Keiko Isogaki

2nd Year - Middle School Student  
Sakura Nagatsuki



A full-page illustration of a young woman with dark hair and a white bow, wearing a blue jacket and light blue pants. She is standing in a forest with sunlight filtering through the trees. The text is in the upper left corner.

I heard the sound of  
grass being stepped on  
behind me. There she  
was the girl I had  
longed to see so much.

1st Year – Middle School Student

Mia Tagamiya

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# ANOTHER WORLD SURVIVAL

MIN-MAXING MY SUPPORT AND  
SUMMONING MAGIC

STORY BY YOKOTSUKA TSUKASA

ART BY MANYAKO





## Chapter 216: The Last Dawn

**A** woman was singing. Though the meaning of the lyrics eluded me, the song felt profoundly melancholic.

I had heard this voice before, just one other time.

It was the third day since I'd been set adrift in another world—when Mia and I had been teleported by a Globster into a cave on our school's mountain.

*Who are you?* I asked her. *Why are you singing me this song?*

And then... a voice whispered, and it sounded like a sigh. A woman's voice was calling my name with longing, with love.

*Ah... now I understand.*

"Mia!" I called.

I could almost feel the singer smiling.

※ ※ ※

I awoke in a dimly lit room, in a treehouse nestled in a hollow somewhere within the great World Tree.

On a shelf sat a magic lantern, casting a feeble orange glow over my straw bed. On either side of me, Arisu and Tamaki were breathing comfortably in their sleep.

Glancing at my watch, I saw it was still before dawn.

A rugged watch. A gift from Mia.

She was gone. Gone to a place beyond my reach.

I couldn't protect her.

I would never see her mischievous smile again, would never hear another of her dumb jokes. The girl who had always clung to me annoyingly was no longer here.

The ache in my chest was so overwhelming, I felt like I wanted to claw my heart out. Frustration at my own helplessness boiled within me. I didn't think I had ever felt this helpless or frustrated in my life.

"Kazu-san."

I glanced over to see Arisu and Tamaki looking up at me with worry.

"Sorry, didn't mean to wake you," I said.

"It's fine, don't worry about that. What's more important—"

"Yeah, I know, I have some things to explain..."

But then Arisu stopped me with a kiss.

Tamaki followed up with a kiss as well, and in the next moment, I found myself being pushed down onto the bed.

"What's this about?!"

"Well, you see, we thought you might be feeling down, so we decided it was important to comfort you properly."

"Whose idea was this? Oh, never mind, I already know." It could only have been Yukariko Shiki. "And Tamaki, you're in on this too?"

"It's a joint effort; we're doing our best to support you... Kazu-san, don't you like it?"

"To be honest, I don't *not* like it."

Arisu and Tamaki gazed down at me, their cheeks flushed. They were so pitifully adorable that I embraced them both tightly. Their warmth and the faintly sweet smell of their bodies made my head spin.

"Sorry. Just for now, let me focus entirely on the both of you."

"Sure, Kazu-san."

"Yeah, we've got you."



Shiki probably had the right idea—what I needed now was to accept their devoted support.

“It’s all right, Kazu-san,” Arisu said as she embraced me after our moment together. “If you’re sad, we’ll lend you our shoulders to cry on. If you feel like you’re about to break, hold onto us. Because we’re all in this together.”

“That’s right, Kazu-san,” Tamaki affirmed. “Remember, we’ll always be here for you.”

As I let the sobs come out, it felt as if something that had accumulated and stagnated at the bottom of my heart was gradually being washed away.

※ ※ ※

At dawn, after summoning water into a bucket to wash my face and body, I stepped outside the tree hollow with my two lovers.

The room we had slept in was situated a little away from the other residences.

“Um, you see, this place is called a ‘lover’s house,’” Tamaki explained, her cheeks flushing. “That means... sort of what it sounds like. Leen said we could be as loud as we wanted here.”

“Rushia said she wanted to have some private talks with her sister,” Arisu added. “She’s leaving you to us.”

“Ah... I see, that makes sense.”

She must have had her own priorities to consider. No doubt Rushia was acting with all our futures in mind.

“I wonder if Leen and Shiki-san are awake yet,” I said. “We have a lot to talk about with them.”

“Oh, yeah!” Tamaki piped up. “We have quite a bit to tell them, too.”

I wondered what had happened yesterday after I’d fallen asleep.

“Um... Where to start?” she mused, as if reading my mind. “Well, I reached Level 46.”

When we'd parted ways yesterday evening, she was at Level 41.

"Did you tackle the ogres on the school mountain?"

"Yes. Tamaki-chan, Rushia, and I teamed up. And Yuuki-senpai and Keiko-san teamed up with Sakura-chan and some other people to defeat a lot of ogres."

Now that Azagralith was dead, there were no more monsters on that mountain that posed a threat to us. Even the Terrasaur Agnamu, a divine-class monster, was no longer a match for Arisu and the others.

"Kazu-san," Tamaki began hesitantly, tugging on the sleeve of my uniform.

"What's up?"

"Ah... um, maybe it would be better if you heard about it from Leen-san or Shiki-san."

"You can tell me about it yourself if you want."

Tamaki crossed her arms, hummed thoughtfully, and then shook her head after a moment. "Eh heh heh, I don't think I can explain it well! I don't really even understand it myself!"

*Ah, so there's some complex situation going on... Man, I'm starting to feel really anxious now.*

※ ※ ※

In front of the tree hollow that now doubled as Leen's living and office space, Shiki was waiting with her arms crossed. When she saw us, her face slipped into a mischievous smirk.

"Feeling refreshed?" she asked us.

"Yeah, very much so, thanks. By the way, are you in the mood for a big breakfast?"

"I knew you'd say that. Love you for it."

*That love is not directed at me, I noted with only a little annoyance, but at the feast I can summon. I get it.*



In addition to Leen, Rushia and Yuuki were also waiting for us inside the tree hollow. Both expressed that it was about time we arrived.

Then Rushia began, “Kazu, I have two things to say.”

“Next is my turn,” Leen added.

“Ah, yes, of course. Just so I know, what’s the second thing?”

“Can you bring out lots of sweet treats for us, please?”

“Rushia-san, you just don’t stop, do you?” I asked, laughing as I glanced at her.

She touched her cheek and smiled back.

*This is... yeah, she’s definitely being considerate.*

“Then, for now, let’s summon food for about ten people.”

I summoned a lavish multi-course meal for the table, followed by an assortment of cakes and desserts that I thought Rushia would enjoy.

Delicious smells filled the spacious cavity of the tree... and in fact, from behind the partition, I could hear Leen’s bodyguards swallowing their saliva.

“Let’s start with the meal,” Leen decided. “We can’t finish all this by ourselves, so is it all right if we share it with the attendants?”

Of course, I agreed. If needed, we could always summon more.

※ ※ ※

Not wanting to waste any time while we ate, I started telling the others about what had happened to me and Mia yesterday evening.

I could hardly believe it had only been a day. It felt like another lifetime.

Mia and I had encountered a strange being in a school built by some peculiar entity in the mountains. Mia and a duplicate of that entity had fused together.

As a result, Mia fell into a situation where, in her words, she “had to transform.”

I also told them that there should be a child of mine inside her.

When I'd finished the story, her brother gave me a light punch in the stomach before offering words of blessing.

"Have you ever heard about Mia's dream when she was in elementary school?" he asked.

"Um, I don't know, but it's probably not anything good, is it?"

"To fuse with Getter and embark on a journey to Mars."

*Wow, I thought, what kind of elementary school student dreams of that?*

Unable to hold it in, he suddenly burst out laughing. Everyone else just sat there looking bewildered.

Somehow, I felt my heart grow a bit lighter.

*Finally, I think I might be starting to come to terms with her being gone.*

That must have been why Yuuki was laughing.



## Chapter 217: The Mystery of the School Mountain

**A**fter breakfast, we once again circled up for a meeting. Naturally, our first topic of discussion was the last thing Mia had talked about.

“The Demon Lord’s jumped to another world from where the school mountain was,” Shiki informed us.

While most of us were immediately skeptical of her words, Arisu and Tamaki seemed completely lost. They clearly didn’t understand the significance of that information.

“And so, there’s a high possibility that the Demon Lord is currently on Earth...” I guessed.

“Yeah, I think you’re right. Good thing for the people of this world. I mean, there’s still the other monsters, but at least we don’t have to be afraid of the Demon Lord anymore... He’ll probably never come back to this world.”

Leen and Rushia nodded in agreement.

Arisu finally understood. “Does that mean...?!”

“Earth is under attack by the Demon Lord!” Arisu finished.

“That sounds like a strong possibility,” I confirmed.

Tamaki raised her hand. “Yup. But, Kazu-san, surely the Self-Defense Forces or someone will do something about it, right?”

Arisu sighed in relief. “Yes, that’s right, but...”

“Remember the giant jellyfish we fought at the Temple of Tepat? It seemed like it was related to something that was related to the Demon Lord. Mia said that the Demon Lord has the same traits as his kin.”

“Uh, does that mean... swords or spears won’t work on it?”

“Yeah, and probably not guns or shells either. Maybe it would be different if we dropped a nuclear bomb on him... but other than that, we shouldn’t hope for much.”

Mia hadn’t gone that far in her explanation. But, you know, given the rules of monsters in this world, if they had traits like those, they would be thoroughly invincible.

“Like we talked about yesterday, there’s a possibility that magic actually exists on Earth too, we just can’t see it. If the Demon Lord invades, maybe there *is* a way to repel him.”

“Uh... like Keiko-san’s master, right?”

“Keiko-san also said she really doesn’t understand it fully.”

Glancing at Yuuki, I saw him nod hesitantly. Apparently, even he couldn’t make a judgment about this situation.

“The first important point is that we finally know the reason your school mountain was transferred to our world,” Leen stated. “The Demon Lord’s transfer and your arrival were simultaneous. It wasn’t that you were chosen; more like you were just caught up in the event. Even so, there are still lots of mysteries, like the White Room. Most importantly, obtaining clues about what’s currently happening on the school mountain is what matters right now.”

“Wait a minute. What do you mean by ‘currently happening on the school mountain’?”

“That’s something we should discuss,” she said before touching the water mirror that was situated in the center of our circle.





The water's surface rippled, then showed what appeared to be the mountain our school sat upon. In the air above this landscape, an intense battle was underway between two formidable presences. A shadowy entity was locked in combat with a grey adversary, their high-speed maneuvers erupting in showers of sparks visible even from afar.

The land, too, had become a battleground: all around our school, vast arrays of monsters were embroiled in fierce skirmishes. On one side, an army primarily composed of animal-like monsters took form, while the other was a ghastly assembly of skeletons leading their ranks. A moment of brutality was captured as a skeleton warrior cleaved a massive bear in twain, only for a horde of wolflike monsters to descend upon it and scatter its remains. Everywhere I looked, another battle raged. The scene was pure chaos.

"Last night, while you, visitors from another world, were busy purging the ogres and orcs, there was a sudden onslaught of monsters," Leen explained. "In the chaos that followed, I quickly ordered a retreat... and then, the monsters divided into two factions and began their own conflict. It's been like this ever since."

My attention was particularly drawn to the aerial duel, and I wasn't the only one. "That's him, right?" asked one of the girls.

"Yes, that's Algrafth, the Black-Winged Mad Wolf. And the only entity capable of standing toe to toe with him would be..." Leen trailed off, the weight of her implication clear.

"The last of the Four Heavenly Kings, who we thought was vanquished in the explosion," I surmised. As unbelievable as it was, the fact that Algrafth had survived lent credence to the possibility of another's endurance. The Four Heavenly Kings were entities of unparalleled might, a fact I had come to understand all too well through my own lethal encounter with Azagralith.

"The Ghost King, Diasnexus," Leen said, nodding gravely. "A sovereign of the undead, the embodiment of death itself."

The final member of the Four Heavenly Kings—an entity synonymous with disaster.



True to his name, The Ghost King, Diasnexus, stood at the pinnacle of the undead. His most troublesome aspect was his mist-like physical form, which made physical attacks even less effective on him than they had been on the jellyfish. Even worse, Diasnexus was a high-ranking mage who layered himself with magic-resistant spells—so he would be immune to the few physical attacks that did land on him, and he was highly resistant to magical attacks as well.

“Um, isn’t this guy a bit too overpowered?” I grumbled.

Shiki sighed. “It’s no wonder he can keep up a fight with Algrafth all night.”

“Considering his level of trouble, he might even surpass Azagralith and Algrafth,” Yuuki pondered, arms crossed.

Yet, for some reason, Diasnexus and Algrafth were still fighting.

“Why are these monsters fighting among themselves?” Arisu asked, genuinely confused. It was a moment that made you want to pat her on the head for her straightforwardness and innocence, although this wasn’t the place for such gestures of affection.

“Based on what Algrafth mentioned the other day, he seems to have broken away from the Demon Lord’s control. He’s leading his own army in rebellion. So, it’s reasonable to assume that Diasnexus is still aligned with the Demon Lord’s forces,” I explained, piecing together the motives behind the clash.

“Algrafth mentioned that he’d be in trouble if this continent sank. So, Diasnexus must be thinking that the sinking of the continent doesn’t concern him,” Yuuki added. In other words, there were two contrasting loyalties here: Diasnexus’s absolute allegiance to the Demon Lord, even at the cost of the continent, and Algrafth’s priorities that lay beyond the Demon Lord’s command.

“If the continent sinks, that would be, uh... a huge problem!” Tamaki exclaimed.

“It seems Diasnexus wouldn’t be bothered by that,” I replied.

“Huh? What do you mean by that?”



“Well, if he’s planning on leaving this world, then why would he care what happens to it afterward?”

Tamaki gasped in surprise. “So, does that mean Diasnexus’s goal is to follow the Demon Lord out of this world?”

“Yes, but that’s just a guess for now.”

Shiki took over the explanation. “So Algrafth wanted to stop that from happening.”

“That’s why he asked us the day before yesterday to stop Azagralith.”

It was all speculation, piecing together various statements and circumstantial evidence, but I had a feeling that we were on to something.

“So, for now, Algrafth is the epitome of ‘the enemy of our enemy is our friend.’”

“Don’t be naive, Kazu-kun. Given how he was the other day, I have a feeling he’d attack us if we got close.”

“Yeah, that makes sense. We should probably avoid getting involved in that fight.”

Instead, we might want to wait and take advantage of the situation. Once one falls, we can try to take down the other one. Although, it was dubious whether we could actually manage that...

“When we fought Azagralith, we had a lot of MP to use. It would be great if we could do something like that again.”

“Kazu-kun’s build does get stronger the more MP he has. Maybe you should ask in the White Room.”

“That might be an option, but without leveling up, it wouldn’t really matter...”

Just then, Rushia’s hand shot up. Her expression was as impassive as ever, but I thought I could sense a hint of pride in it. “I’ve been suppressing our level-ups,” she announced.

“Brilliant!”

*Wow, that is seriously impressive. Rushia-san is something else.*

“With everyone here, not including Leen-san, there are exactly six of us. If Leen-san can’t participate in the meeting, we could continue this discussion in the White Room...”

“Then, I’ll delegate my full authority to Rushia. Please regard her words as my own,” Leen said without hesitation. Observing their mutual nod, I accepted their decision, appreciating the depth of their trust.

“Shall we head to the White Room, then?”

Arisu, Tamaki, Rushia, Shiki, Yuuki, and I quickly formed a party of six.

“Hmm, it seems somewhat out of place for me to intrude upon Kazu-dono’s harem...” Yuuki joked with a sly grin.

“Shiki-san is different,” I laughed.

The urge to punch him was palpable, even with his cheeky smile. Still, being teased about stuff like that hardly bothered me anymore.

## Chapter 218: A New Power

**A**fter gathering all the tokens we'd collected so far and counting them meticulously, we laid them out on the floor of the White Room. Our group had amassed 7,891 tokens, and with the addition of 3,117 tokens brought by Yuuki and Keiko, we had a total of 11,008 tokens at our disposal. The question now was what to spend them on at the Mia Vendor. *Or should we ask the master of the White Room if it's possible to add something new to the Mia Vendor?*

"First, we should ask for everything we want," suggested Yuuki, taking the lead as we divided the tasks and bombarded the PC with questions.

I inquired if it was possible to add items to the vendor that would increase my MP, reduce the MP consumption of familiars, or allow for the transfer of MP between individuals. The answer was a resounding "no" to all.

Apparently, items related to MP management were off limits, likely due to game balance concerns. Considering the game-like nature of our situation, anything that could potentially disrupt the balance, similar to the unique effects we experienced near the World Tree or Mia's recent abilities, had to be an exception.

Then again, this was reality, so perhaps worrying about game balance wasn't so critical. *Hooray for easy mode! Hooray for a casual game!* I thought, despite the fact that our current situation felt more like playing on very hard mode.

Complaining wouldn't solve anything, though. If a direct approach wasn't feasible, we would just have to look for a workaround. However, before we could explore other options, an idea struck me, prompting another question in the Q&A session. The response came quickly.

**Q:** Is the restriction on MP management items because it's systemically impossible?

**A:** Yes.



Yuuki tilted his head, pondering for a moment before typing out a new question.

**Q:** Is it possible to add an item to the Mia Vendor that can store a spell about to be cast and then be activated by a keyword or similar trigger?

**A:** It would be possible for disposable items.

“It’s kind of like the Charge Spell I can use,” I mused. A Rank 6 spell, it allowed the caster to infuse gems with spells. Up to three simple, disposable items could be created this way. Although a variety of spells could be infused, they were typically spells that the caster couldn’t use on themselves, intended instead for use by others. While quite handy, the magic comes with the stringent limitation that only spells up to Rank 2 can be infused. If only it were possible to infuse Rank 3 spells, I could share Deflection or See Invisibility with others...

**Q:** Can the item be made usable by someone other than the person who infused the spell?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Can it contain spells that are normally only usable by the caster, allowing others to use them?

**A:** Yes.

**Q:** Is it possible to remove the rank limitation like the one present in Charge Spell?

**A:** It is possible. It will be listed as such.

Sure enough, at the end of the Mia Vendor’s item list, there was a new item.

“Charged Magic Stone, huh...”

It was a completely disposable item that would shatter to activate the stored spell upon the utterance of a keyword.

I saw that projectile spells such as offensive magic couldn’t be infused into these items; they were strictly for buff purposes. Moreover, the cost was steep—one thousand tokens per item. And, as with other products from the Mia Vendor, it was impossible to duplicate these items using an item duplication set.

“Still, these could be really useful,” I said.

“Indeed. They’re a must-buy,” Yuuki agreed.

“Wait, are we really going to spend that much? Kazu-san, isn’t that kind of a waste of tokens?” Tamaki worried.

“Tamaki, imagine being able to use Accel whenever we want, even as a single use. How about that?”

“Ah... that could be a big help. Maybe we could even stand a chance against the Four Heavenly Kings?”

“Well, even with Accel, the best we could hope for is to survive their attacks,” I reasoned. When I’d fought Azagralith in sync with Sha-Lau, even with Sha-Lau’s significant boost and the use of Accel, it was still a tough battle. The Four Heavenly Kings possessed a level of strength that was truly formidable.

“So, the most promising ones are Accel, like we said before, and of course, Deflection. There’s also Shape Change and True Sight, but...”

“I’m not sure whether we, as weapon bearers, could use our full abilities in another form. But True Sight could be invaluable against opponents using illusions,” Yuuki mused.

“For now, we can probably leave those out of consideration.” While Deflection was not a self-targeted spell, in a melee, it inevitably affected either the caster or a close ally. Its real value emerged when front-liners could utilize it, much like how Keiko managed to contend with stronger foes by fully exploiting such abilities.

“Since our tokens are limited, let’s prioritize Accel and Deflection,” I concluded, and Yuuki nodded in agreement.

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Now, we felt that disposable items alone wouldn’t be sufficient. Ideally, we would have liked to find other items or abilities that could further enhance our capabilities. So, we all gathered around the PC once more for another Q&A session.

“It seems we need new spells,” someone suggested, probably thinking along the lines of added magic to the Mia Vendor, similar to Read Languages or Many Tongues. Until now, all the spells listed in the Mia Vendor had been Rank 3 or below. However, if we could add spells of Rank 8 or 9, we might gain access to magic that could significantly benefit us in combat. After several inquiries, it became clear that existing spells—or ones like them—were off-limits. But then, an idea came to me.

“What about the incredible speed magic that Sha-Lau uses?”

My suggestion was approved by the master of the White Room. Called Shape Lightning, this Rank 9 universal spell was added to the Mia Vendor at the hefty cost of two thousand tokens. Despite its high price, its value was undeniable.

“If anyone’s going to learn this, it should be Arisu,” I suggested.

“Uh... yes, as the frontline mage with magic skills developed up to Rank 9, I’m the only one,” Arisu confirmed. But with her healing magic at Rank 9, she had access to a variety of useful spells. Choosing one to discard for Shape Lightning would be a difficult decision.

“Normally, one would consider dropping a spell targeting the undead...”

“But there’s a good chance we’ll be facing undead adversaries soon.”

Indeed, of the four Rank 9 spells available, two were specifically designed to be used against undead, which we really didn’t want to give up at that point. And the top-tier healing spell, Resurrection, which could cure limb loss and status ailments in one go, was indispensable.

That left us with only one option: to discard Evolution. According to the Q&A, it temporarily induced evolution in living beings. *Wait, what kind of spell is that? Sounds like something out of a fantasy, too incredible to be true.*

*Are they being showered in Getter Rays, perhaps?* The night before, as test subjects, Yuuki and Keiko had experienced some extraordinary transformations for about an hour: growing an extra pair of arms, sprouting wings from their backs to fly. The effects had worn off after an hour, and the outcomes were apparently random. It was an incredibly fascinating spell, and Yuuki looked eager to experience it again...



“We can’t afford to keep a spell for playing around when there are more serious matters at hand... Although I wish we could have more fun with it. It’s really too bad,” Yuuki lamented. “Um, maybe just cast it on me here in the White Room and let me have my fun next door.”

“Will do,” Arisu replied.

Minutes later, in a grassy space next door, there was Yuuki, gracefully soaring through the air. A winged ninja flying jubilantly in the sky was, in a way, a profoundly sacrilegious sight.

“Hey, hey, Arisu, cast it on me too!” Tamaki requested eagerly.

“Okay, but I’m not responsible for what happens,” Arisu warned.

After Arisu cast the spell, Tamaki began to shimmer, and silver fur sprouted all over her at an alarming rate, covering even her face. Her nails sharpened into claws, and her front teeth quickly became fangs. Was this... a werewolf transformation?

“Whaaa?! What’s this?!” she yelled.

“Oh dear, she seems to have regressed to an animal. Quite cute, Tamaki-chan,” Arisu said.

“Huh, why me? No, Kazu-san, don’t look!”

Tamaki, now fully a werewolf, howled and dashed across the grasslands. *Bye, Tamaki. See you in an hour...*

“I wonder if we can dispel Evolution,” Arisu mused.

“Let’s try. Arisu, cast it on Shiki-san,” I suggested.

“Am I your guinea pig now?” Shiki protested. “... Well, okay.”

Shiki’s arms doubled to four, nearly ripping her clothes, particularly around the chest area. But as soon as Arisu cast Dispel, Shiki’s arms reverted to normal.

“I wonder, Kazu-kun, would you enjoy seeing us with cat ears?”

“Unfortunately, that’s not really my thing...”

## Chapter 219: Preparations for the Final Battle

**A**risu decided to replace Evolution with Shape Lightning, acquiring a new skill. We managed to secure eight Charged Magic Stones for our use. After a little more planning, we left the White Room.

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The Charged Magic Stones were all allocated to our group. Initially, I suggested, “Please, Yuuki-senpai, take half of them for yourself...”

“Thanks, but ultimately, the most challenging moments will fall to you and your team, good sir!” he said, shaking his head. “We want to increase your chances of victory, even slightly, with these eight little insurance policies.”

“Yeah, we really wouldn’t be much help in a truly tough fight,” Keiko-san added.

Seeing that neither Yuuki nor Keiko would accept any stones, we gratefully took all eight. Anyway, I had to admit, their reasoning was sound. Six of the Charged Magic Stones we infused with Accel and two with Deflection, then Arisu and Tamaki each took four to carry.

While we were busy with these preparations, a change came over the image in the water mirror. It appeared that the demonic beast army, presumably under Algrath, had launched a bold offensive against Diasnexus’s undead forces. Although they’d managed to breach the undead’s defenses in several places, the beasts had suffered significant losses.

“It seems... the demon beast army’s heading for the high school building. Maybe Algrath’s subordinates have realized something is there,” Rushia murmured.

“Something... Oh, right, there was that mysterious facility under the schoolyard. But we blew that up, didn’t we?”

That moment had allowed us to halt Azagralith's pursuit. Without it, escaping from him would have been impossible. At that time, Azagralith was an untouchable adversary.

"If the demonic beast army is acting this aggressively, there must be something really important there... If it's crucial for us as well, this might be our only chance to intervene," Yuuki speculated.

"Something... like the world ending?" Arisu asked with concern.

"Exactly, Arisu. Thanks to Mia's sacrifice, if the information from Algrafth is accurate, he's different from the rest of the Demon Lord's forces in that he believes the world's destruction would be a problem," Yuuki explained.

It was crucial to understand what they were fighting over. If Algrafth's defeat could lead to catastrophic outcomes for the world, we might need to ally with them, even if only temporarily.

"Let's dispatch a part of our forces near the demon beast army. Worst-case scenario, they might end up as sacrifices," Leen proposed. Then she added, "If we're lucky, Algrafth might reach out to us."

"Wait, then we should go," I insisted.

"That's not possible," the guardian of the World Tree decisively refused. Her dog ears twitched, betraying her unease, and her clear, ruby-like eyes fixed on me. "Kazu, you and your team are our trump card. You're not suited for such a risky gamble."

"I get that, but... it feels wrong to knowingly send others to their potential doom. We have a higher chance of surviving if we're attacked," I argued.

"Still, the answer is no," she repeated, firmly shaking her head.

I glanced at Shiki, only to see her with crossed arms and a stern face, reinforcing the decision.

"Kazu-kun, let's do what we can now," she suggested.

"Like what?"

"If we're going to intervene in that battle, we need to be ready. For starters, how about charms against the undead?"



That made sense. Perhaps we could utilize Kanon Miiko's musical skills. I'd heard her research had advanced since then, including sewing talismans into jerseys to trigger conditional effects.

"How do those talismans trigger?" I asked.

"Here's an example, if the jersey is slashed by an attack, the talisman tears and mitigates the effect, kind of like reactive armor," she explained.

"That sounds like something Yuuki-senpai would come up with," I noted.

Shiki looked surprised. "You figured that out quickly."

"It's getting easier to predict his way of thinking... It's just so like him."

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Shiki and I decided to visit Kanon. When we warped to her workshop, a cabin, we could hear voices singing inside.

"I've asked some other people to learn music skills, for some research," Kanon told us. "They're from the high school section."

"I see. Well, not everyone is cut out for combat," I remarked.

We entered the cabin to see two other girls, a freshman and a sophomore. Both of them, plus Kanon, had raised their music skills to Level 4. Their research showed that singing together could produce a synergistic effect, enhancing their abilities.

"We still haven't managed to combine multiple effects... However, we've been able to enhance the talisman's capabilities," Kanon shared, offering a shy smile as she looked my way. Despite being the youngest among those with musical skills, she was the first to delve into their research, which had naturally made her their leader. I could already tell that the other two girls were the quiet type.

"Leen-san told me about the situation," Kanon continued. "What kind of talismans should we prepare?" In the corner of the room, a hawk lifted one wing sharply. I recognized it as Leen's familiar.

“Can you make something that’s effective against the undead?” I asked.

“Like skeletons...? I’ve heard about them, but I’ve never actually seen one... And you mean for protection, right? Let’s give it a shot.” Kanon placed a bundle of blue-dyed handkerchief-sized cloths on the table, and the three girls began to sing.

The song was “Kimigayo.” Though there was nothing special about their singing, listening to it somehow brought tears to my eyes. I remembered feeling the same way when she sang “Sakura Sakura” the day before. Something deep within me warmed and swelled with emotion. Glancing over, I noticed Shiki was crying too, and I instinctively clutched at my chest.

As the song ended, Shiki and I found ourselves applauding without thinking. Kanon laughed, slightly embarrassed.

“Go ahead and sew these into your shirts,” she instructed, handing us a pile of at least twenty blue cloths. “There’s a sewing machine back at the office, so you can head over there now.”

Before we left, Kanon cheered us on with a “Good luck!” and the two high school girls bowed their heads in respect. If they had any grievances against me, they weren’t showing it. Respect was something I’d grown accustomed to from younger kids, but getting it from peers, or especially from older students, still felt unfamiliar.

In the tree hollow where Sumire and the others were gathered, the sound of a sewing machine hummed steadily. The girl sitting at the machine was skillfully sewing the blue cloths into the inner lining of jerseys that hadn’t yet been touched by my magic.

After she completed her task, it was my turn to apply Hard Armor to them. The procedure could only be done in this order; the sewing needle wouldn’t penetrate the fabric once Hard Armor was applied. Then, although the jersey remained just as soft to the touch, and it folded and stretched just as easily, it could absorb any impact if punctured or struck. I didn’t know exactly how this magic worked, but I had seen it in action enough times to believe it. Thankfully, we had an ample supply of spare jerseys.

Curiously, there were several ninja outfits stored here as well. I found myself wondering who had left these behind.

“Ah, could you set aside one of those ninja outfits? I’ll sew it next,” Yuuki said.

“Sure,” I replied, intrigued by the thought of him joining our next mission. It would be incredibly helpful to have a ninja along.

When I wasn’t lending a hand with the sewing or doing other tasks, I found myself engrossed in a book Leen had entrusted to me, one about exclusive contracts. Each ritual for the contract took about an hour per entity. Though time was pressing, I aimed to complete at least one, ideally two contracts. With five ritual texts from Leen at my disposal, deciding which to prioritize was crucial.

“Frontline or support... Maybe a frontline replacement for Kanarg is the best choice,” I mused, picking up one of the ritual texts to study closely.

I waited until the next stack of jerseys was ready, then after giving them my Hard Armor enhancement, I descended from the tree to perform the exclusive contract ritual on the ground.

## Chapter 220: Algrafth's Proposal

I was planning on performing the ritual alone, but...

"Let me help you," Arisu offered, stepping over to me. Together, we drew the magic circle on the ground with special ink and scattered precious magical materials as a catalyst.

"It feels really refreshing doing this," Arisu remarked with a smile.

*Refreshing, huh? Wasn't she with us during the night of the third day when we formed the exclusive contract with Sha-Lau?*

"That time, it was mostly Rushia-san who did everything," Arisu said when I asked her about it.

"Ah, right, I forgot about that."

"Doing this kind of work with only you, Kazu-san... I think this is our first time," Arisu noted.

Since being thrust into this world together, we'd fought side by side on many occasions. She knew me better than anyone else, and I felt that I'd come to know quite a bit about her as well—for example, her tendency to feel lonely and her lifelong search for a father figure.

"Thanks, this helps a lot," I said, gently patting her head. She closed her eyes in contentment. I couldn't imagine a day without her, even though we'd met just six days ago. Her presence had very quickly become something I took for granted, much like Tamaki and Rushia...

And Mia. The pain of losing her still gnawed at me.

"Kazu-san..." Arisu's face clouded with sadness.

"I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize. Mia did what she had to do," Arisu said.



*Yes, she might be right. If Mia's sacrifice really did prevent the worst from happening... What I need to do is remember that and keep going ahead, together with Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia.*

"Arisu, I'm counting on you moving forward," I told her.

"Yes, of course!" As if to pledge never to part, Arisu hugged me tightly.

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Just as we finished the two rituals, Leen's hawk descended. "We're ready," it announced. "Come with me, please."

"Has the situation changed?"

"It has. Please hurry. I believe you'll be deployed immediately." While the hawk hurriedly conjured a teleportation circle, it relayed, "The Black-Winged Mad Wolf, Algrafth, has requested our cooperation. Shiki and Yuuki wish to respond favorably."

"So, it's come to that..." I said.

"It appears the Ghost King is determined to pursue the Demon Lord, even at the risk of the world's destruction," Leen confirmed via the hawk.

With that, Arisu and I stepped into the teleportation circle.

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Minutes later, nine of us students were standing in the shade of trees at the base of our school mountain, slightly removed from the battlefield. Each of us, Rushia included, donned a jersey with the special cloth sewn into the back. A monster that resembled a black panther stood there waiting for us.

Yuuki had whimsically named it Coeurl, after a creature from classic science fiction. I briefly wondered if this was allowed, then realized that copyright laws weren't exactly a concern here.

Upon our arrival, the seated Coeurl slowly rose to its feet. It scanned us with its red eyes before locking gazes with me, and its telepathic speech echoed in

my mind.

*“You’re the leader, then?”*

I was curious why it had picked me for the leader... though technically, I did hold decision-making authority, so it wasn’t wrong.

“I am,” I replied. “Tell us what you know.”

“The Ghost King, Diasnexus, intends to use a Wedge located in this mountain to transition to another world. If he succeeds, this continent will collapse. My master wishes to prevent that. To that end, we and you could collaborate.”

“Do you have proof of Diasnexus’s intentions?”

Coeurl snorted—perhaps its version of laughter. “Proof is not something readily provided.”

*Right, that figures.*

“I appreciate the honesty. How long does this alliance last?”

“Until my master has vanquished Diasnexus. He is determined to defeat him here.”

“And if he escapes, or if you retreat?”

“Those outcomes are highly unlikely. But if so, our alliance will last until all combat against Diasnexus and his forces concludes.”

That seemed reasonable, though I knew that verbal agreements hardly guaranteed absolute trust.

“All right, we’ll agree to that,” I said. “What do you need us to do?”

“Diasnexus’s elite forces are trying to reach the Wedge. We need you to stop them.”

“Where is it?”

“It’s beneath what you call the main building, in the south wing.”

*The basement of the middle school main building... I hadn’t expected it to be there.*

“How did you find out about this?”

“Our spies infiltrated Azagralith’s ranks.”

“Spies... on our own side?”

*Well, we were potential enemies to them, so it makes sense. Algrafth must have been preparing for something like this for a long time.*

“All the spies we sent to you died,” Coeurl continued.

“The Doppelgängers... You sent them, didn’t you?” This was something we’d realized during our discussion with Shiki and Leen the day before. Despite the Doppelgängers infiltrating the high school section from the second day, but no information had leaked to Azagralith, so it’d make sense if they were Algrafth’s subordinates.

The Doppelgängers had created significant chaos in the high school, and one had even incited unrest while disguised as Shiba... For Yuuki, they must have been particularly detestable enemies.

Yuuki wasn’t saying anything, but when I glanced over at him, I saw him glaring sharply at Coeurl from behind his mask. The monster either didn’t notice or was unfazed by it. Suddenly, Coeurl’s whole body shuddered, its pointed ears standing erect.

“It seems Diasnexus’s elites have headed toward Chutoob. We have no time to waste.”

“All right,” I said, nodding decisively. “We can leave right now. We’re heading to the middle school main building, right?” I turned around to see everyone else nodding in agreement.

Our first party consisted of myself, Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia. The second party included Yuuki and Keiko from the high school, along with Sakura Nagatsuki and the fire mages Yuriko and Shion from the middle school—five in all. Although we were only nine, excluding the ninja duo, all were elites with Rank 9 skills. Any strength that we lacked, we would fill with my familiars.

“Summon Familiar: Heavenly Turtle, Nahan.”

A gigantic turtle, about five meters in length, appeared before us. Atop its shell sat the upper body of an elderly man with dusky skin, dressed in Chinese-

style garments reminiscent of a hermit. His eyes were closed in meditation, and his bald head shone under the light.

Even as the old man remained utterly still, the turtle's head turned toward us and gave a slight nod. I nodded back at Nahan and encouraged everyone to climb onto its vast shell. It's worth noting that this familiar, having been summoned with an enhanced summoning level of 4, was effectively a Rank 9 support unit.

"Nahan, can you carry all of us and go invisible? Not just normal invisibility, but something advanced enough to hide us from the undead?"

*"It is possible, master."*

"Then, let's move that way. I'll give the directions." Two of Leen's hawks descended onto Nahan's shell. Then Coeurl, too—*Bold move*, I thought—leaped onto Nahan's shell. The heavenly turtle ascended into the air.

"It doesn't spin like Gamera, huh?" Yuuki mused.

*What is he talking about?*

"Spinning at high speed would make it impossible to stay on..."



## Chapter 221: A White Room for Four

**M**inutes later, we landed near the rubble where the Cultural Arts Center—the CAC—had once stood. We'd hoped to get closer to the main school building, but were intercepted by magic from below: a rainbow-colored beam spell. If Keiko hadn't warned us in time, one of us might have taken a direct hit. *How did she even notice?* I marveled. *I mean, I guess I knew the Greater Ninja was amazing...*

Thanks to her keen eye warning us, Nahan's shield fully blocked the rainbow beam. However, now that the enemy had spotted us, we had to be careful not to land too close to them. So, we chose the familiar ruins of the CAC as our landing spot.

"The enemy will be upon us soon," Yuuki advised. "My team will draw their attention, so Kazu-dono's team should go ahead."

"Uh, Yuuki-senpai..."

"Worry not, we'll catch up soon."

*Isn't that a death flag? Or, in a sense, a survival flag...?*

"We don't have much time," Coeurl announced, raising its head. "We must prevent Diasnexus's forces from securing the Wedge."

The monster was right; the forest was becoming noisy. It seemed we had no choice but to split our forces.

"Nahan, hide just us with your magic. And could you shrink down?" I requested.

"Yes, master."

The turtle's body shrank to a size I could easily hold in one hand. When I picked it up, it was surprisingly light.

"Let's go, everyone. Grab hands."

Hands linked, the four of us started jogging in single file. I led the way, holding Nahan in my free hand. Tamaki was next, followed by Rushia, with Arisu at the rear.

This arrangement was necessary due to the equipment they carried; Tamaki could strap her sword to her backpack, but Arisu needed one hand free to hold her spear. Coeurl kept pace beside me, glancing over occasionally. The message was clear: even with Nahan's powerful invisibility, which theoretically only I could see through, the monster couldn't be fooled.

I turned around, startled, as a quick succession of explosions came from behind us. The forest had erupted into towering flames.

*All this commotion should draw the enemy toward it, I thought. Maybe now we'll make it to the main middle school building faster.*

Then, Coeurl stopped. "We've been detected. On the right."

"Nahan!" I called, throwing the turtle into the air. Nahan expanded midflight, deploying a shield that blocked the incoming rainbow beam. The deflected beam mowed down a nearby thicket of trees as if they were toothpicks.

Beyond the felled trees stood a robed figure that looked like an undead magician.

"Sheesh, and that was the rebound... Nahan, drop the invisibility. We're going on the attack here. Tamaki, Arisu!"

"We've got it! Arisu, let's go!"

"Yeah, Tamaki-chan! Hold onto me!"

I'd decided to drop the invisibility to avoid friendly fire, but Tamaki and Arisu were ready to spring into action with Shape Lightning.

"Wait!" I said, grabbing the collars of their jerseys to hold them back. "Just to be safe, Rushia goes first."

At my request, Rushia unleashed Prominent Snake. Almost simultaneously, the robed monster began chanting another spell. The second rainbow beam clashed violently with Rushia's flame serpent, creating a massive explosion. Grimacing from the wave of heat, I gave the command.

“Go now, Tamaki, Arisu!”

“Woof!”

“Right. Shape Lightning!” The explosion stirred up dust and debris, obscuring our vision.

Even though the undead are said to detect their targets with special perception, Nahan assured us that the dust and debris would make an effective smokescreen. So, using the dust as cover, the two girls vanished like lightning. We’d often seen Sha-Lau use Shape Lightning, but we’d only recently acquired the spell for ourselves from the Mia Vendor. Even though Arisu had cast the spell, Tamaki was able to move with her since she was holding her hand. The sound of swordplay followed...

As expected, due to their skills, it wasn’t long before we found ourselves heading back to the White Room.

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Tamaki was the one who’d leveled up, catching up to Arisu at Level 46. It was the four of us in the White Room—myself, Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia. Tamaki kept glancing around, as if looking for something she’d misplaced... or someone.

“It does feel a bit lonely,” Arisu said with a wry smile. Rushia, without saying a word, gently squeezed my hand. Silence filled the air.

In moments like this, Mia would always be the one to break the ice. With her teasing, fooling around, and general commotion, she was always trying her hardest to keep our spirits up. Our lives had become significantly quieter without her.

“Kazu.” Eventually, Rushia spoke up, her gaze fixed on me. She started to say something, hesitated, then opened her mouth to speak again... but was interrupted by her stomach rumbling loudly.

“Princess Rushia desires sweets,” I interpreted.

“... Yes,” she admitted, her face flushing red as she nodded.

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Not only Rushia, but Arisu and Tamaki indulged heavily in the summoned feast of sweets, devouring mountains of cream-laden cakes as if they were eating for the one who couldn't be here with us.

"Ah, I'm so, sooo full," Tamaki moaned, rolling on the floor with cream around her mouth.

"Tamaki-chan, you're such a mess," Arisu chided. "Kazu-san is going to be appalled."

"No worries. With Tamaki, it's nothing new at this point," I reassured her.

"Exactly, let's all totally relax, just melt away," Tamaki suggested.

Unfortunately, we couldn't afford to lounge around forever. Exchanging information was crucial. I took the time to explain the cloths sewn into the back of everyone's jerseys.

Rushia tugged at the chest of her jersey, her interest piqued by the material. "It's much more comfortable than I expected," she remarked.

"Right? Jerseys are comfy and easy to move in!" Tamaki agreed enthusiastically.

"But it does kind of outline your body quite clearly, which can be a bit embarrassing," Rushia added, glancing over at us rather self-consciously.

*Is she trying to hint at something? Well, not that I'd mind, but still.*





“Um... shall we get back to the topic at hand?” I suggested.

“Yeah, of course,” Tamaki nodded.

“Arisu, that monster we saw earlier, the one that used magic—did you manage to defeat it?” I asked.

“We took it down first. Behind its hood, its face was a skeleton,” Arisu revealed.

“That’s when I leveled up!” Tamaki added, clearly excited about the achievement.

*So, it sounds like an enemy with a decent number of experience points. We’ve never seen that kind of rainbow beam magic before... Maybe it’s a spell unique to that monster? If that’s a Rank 9 spell...*

“That skeleton mage seemed like it could belong to the divine soldier class, huh?” I pondered aloud.

“More like a demigod class, I’d say,” Arisu replied. “It was probably a High Wizard skeleton, a being straight out of the legends. I’ve heard stories in more than one place of magicians who mastered magic and transformed themselves in search of immortality.”

“That sounds like a tough enemy...”

“We just need to secure the Wedge first. That’s why we’re here, after all,” Tamaki pointed out.

“Tamaki is wise,” I complimented.

“Eh heh heh, praise me more, praise me more.” She beamed.

I patted Tamaki on the head. *She really is adorable...*

## Chapter 222: Revisiting the Middle School Main Building

**“W**e need to figure out how many more bone folks are around here,” I told the group. “Even though we’re elite, there’s not that many of us. We need to find where that Wedge is soon and secure it.”

We were still in the White Room, and with Mia gone, the responsibility of leading the meeting fell to me and Rushia. To emerge victorious, we knew we would have to swiftly reach the main middle school building, locate the Wedge, and overcome any adversaries by isolating and defeating them. We carefully considered our strategy from various angles, and then...

“So, we’ve wrapped up our discussion... right, Kazu-san?” Tamaki cooed, even as Arisu and Rushia came in closer.

“Um, what’s going on here?” I asked suspiciously.

“Rushia mentioned it’s unfair if it’s just me and Arisu,” Tamaki explained.

“Ah, I see,” I realized.

It was then that I noticed Rushia wasn’t looking at me; her eyes were downcast and shy. Without even realizing it, I glanced around the room for someone who couldn’t possibly be here. It was a reflex—she would have been the first to tease us in a moment like that, but that teasing might never come again.

The three girls were looking at me with concern in their eyes.

“Ah, yeah, sure. So, Rushia, would you... comfort me as well?” I asked.

“Yes, gladly.”

I took her hand and pulled her close for a hug.

It felt like we had spent quite a bit of time enjoying ourselves... maybe it was our version of escapism. There was definitely a part of me that wished we could

stay in that room forever. But we couldn't. We were only in this battle because we'd taken full advantage of the opportunity Mia had created for us. With Azagralith gone and the remaining Four Kings embroiled in conflict, a gap emerged in the once-unbeatable Demon Lord's army.

We had to seize this chance; how else would we be able to face her?

*Someday... I'm not sure when, maybe a long time from now... she'll be back. And when that happens, I want to look her in the eye. I can only do that if we go back now. We have to keep fighting. And the girls have given me the energy I need to do that.*

"Shall we go?" I asked. After nodding to each other and making one last check, the four of us left the White Room.

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Back on the battlefield, Arisu and the others quickly annihilated the remaining enemies. In addition to the High Wizard, there were four Skeletal Champions. Upon defeating these, both Rushia and I leveled up.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 57	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 4 (Familiar Enhancement 4, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 1)	

TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 46	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH:	SKILL POINTS:

9	2
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RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 46	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 2

Following our ears to the battlefield, we faced a series of attacks from the undead army. While those encounters were mostly straightforward for us, a few bizarre monsters did appear among them, like skeletons of two-headed giants and horses with human arms.

“Collectively, these are known as Chimera Skeletons,” Rushia informed us.

Though some moved swiftly or possessed formidable strength, they were no match for Arisu and Tamaki, which meant we didn’t have an accurate sense of how powerful they were supposed to be.

Aside from those, there were swarms of Veteran Skeletons and Knight Skeletons, led by Skeletal Champions. We swiftly eliminated them all, doing our best to move forward quickly. During this time, Arisu leveled up twice, while the rest of us advanced by one level.

“Yes! I can finally use a derivative skill!” Arisu announced excitedly.

Arisu had finally reached Level 48. Naturally, the derivative skill she chose was the Holy Spear Technique, a combination of spear technique and healing magic. It’s primarily a skill for fighting by imbuing various types of magic into a spear.

Just because it was a derivative skill involving healing magic didn’t mean it let her... well, stab someone with a spear to heal them—I mean, such an ability did exist, but let’s just say it was unnecessary. However, there were abilities to enhance healing magic. There were also abilities specifically effective against the undead, which definitely seemed like they could help with our current battle. However, abilities tailored for the undead were, by nature, somewhat limited in scope. Annoyingly, they offered absolutely no advantage against non-



undead. There were also holy attack abilities effective against more than just undead. And there was an ability for enhancing one’s own power with a spear; its effect was similar to Enhanced Summoning, easily increasing the spear technique skill’s performance by a rank of 0.5.

“Kazu-san, why don’t you pick?” Arisu asked. “I’ll be happy with anything that can help you.”

“Ah, right,” I replied. I consulted with Rushia, and we ended up choosing the Enhanced Spear Technique and the Spear Shield Technique. The latter let the user infuse MP into the spear, creating a shield similar to Deflection. It came in up to Rank 3, where it could reflect attacks back at the attacker, essentially becoming a complete Deflection. Despite consuming the MP of our healer, it was indeed powerful, and it suited Arisu’s sense and judgment perfectly.

“With this, I can be even more helpful,” Arisu said, beaming happily. She reminded me of a dog wagging its tail in sheer delight—irresistibly adorable.

My Enhanced Summoning reached Rank 5, and my abilities were upgraded to Familiar Enhancement 5 and Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 2. This allowed me to treat Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau and other familiars as Rank 9.5 entities, summonable with 97% reduced MP consumption.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 58	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 1
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 4→5 (Familiar Enhancement 4→5, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 1→2)	

ARISU	
LEVEL:	SPEARMANSHIP:

48	9
HEALING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 1
HOLY SPEAR TECHNIQUE: 1 (Enhanced Spear Technique 1, Spear Shield Technique 1)	

TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 47	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4

RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 47	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4

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As soon as I'd upgraded my Enhanced Summoning, I sent Nahan back and then resummoned him. Now that he was effectively at Rank 9.5, the already diverse range of magic he could use expanded even further. We turned invisible again and moved forward. Despite some delays, we finally caught sight of the middle school main building through the bushes—along with a massive number of skeletons descending from the sky.

Giant bird skeletons circled overhead, dropping skeleton troops from their backs. Those had to be Roc bird skeletons. The skeletons falling from the sky fluttered like leaves—there must have been a mage among them, using some

kind of soft-landing magic. Every second we watched, the enemy forces were increasing.

“Looks like searching for the Wedge at a leisurely pace won’t be feasible,” I remarked.

“Support is coming,” Coeurl informed us.

*Ah, Algrafth is sending reinforcements. How considerate.*

As we spoke, the Roc birds above us were bombarded by a series of lightning strikes which seemed to be coming from some creature at the base of the mountain.

“What kind of monster launched those attacks?” I asked, curious.

Coeurl remained silent.

*Oh well, no harm in asking,* I thought. “Anyway, tell them thanks for us.”

“There’s no need for thanks. We’re allies in this fight,” Coeurl replied.

“That’s true, but still...”

At least one thing was clear: Coeurl was somehow in constant communication with his comrades, even at this very moment. *Depending on how you look at it, he could be a watchdog or a spy... Well, for now, he’s a valuable ally.*

“How close do we need to get to the underground to scout it out, Nahan?” I asked.

*“The closer, the better. If possible, I’d like to use magic inside that steel fortress,”* Nahan suggested.

So apparently, he did have magic capable of scouting the underground... which made sense, I guess. The Heavenly Turtle wasn’t limited to just the four elemental magics; he had learned a variety of useful spells.

“Sure. Let’s circle around through the forest and see if we can get closer to the middle school building,” I decided.

Our recent encounter had proven that invisibility wasn’t absolute. Taking a bit longer but using the trees as cover to get close to the building seemed safer.

As we hurried through the forest, I was thinking to myself that the longer way round was often the safest, when all of a sudden, the ground began to shake violently.

“Get down!” Coeurl shouted urgently, and all of us dropped to the ground instantly.

It was the sixth day since we’d been stranded in this other world. Our bodies had learned to react before our minds—and it was this instinct that had kept us alive. This time, our reflexes saved us again. We ducked and rolled to the ground as a gust of wind passed over us, accompanied by the sound of trees breaking...

Light shone down on us. Looking up, I saw the clear blue sky.

And that was the problem.

“Those trees just got mowed down,” I observed in shock.

“No, Kazu,” Rushia corrected me, standing up with a stunned expression. “They were all harvested... by *them*.”

Following her gaze, I saw three giant skeletons, each wielding a huge scythe, dancing in the air. Each one stood at least ten meters tall, and they all had skeletal wings on their backs.

They weren’t just large; they seemed divine.

As soon as I had the thought, I knew it was true. These guys were of the divine soldier class.

“Gevshar Helix...” Rushia murmured.

## Chapter 223: The Sixth Wedge – Part 1

“**G**evshar Helix... is that the name of the giant skeletons?” I asked Rushia.

“It’s the name of the giant it was based on. Back in the days of myths, they were winged giants who served the benevolent gods. Legends say they reaped all the calamities that the world was experiencing...”

*I see, so that one must be a Gevshar Helix Skeleton. Based on what she’s saying, the original body has to have been from a divine-class soldier or higher. What we don’t know is whether being reduced to bones made it weaker or stronger...*

*In any case, though, three divine-class beings! The inflation in power levels is something else.*

When the skeletal giants landed on the ground, it was like an earthquake struck. All three skulls turned toward us simultaneously, fixing their red eyes on us. They clearly saw straight through our supposed invisibility.

What’s more, the trees we’d been relying on for cover had all been harvested, leaving stumps about as high as our necks. There was no hiding from them now.

“Kazu-san. Looks like we have no choice but to fight!” For some reason, Tamaki was smiling excitedly, brandishing her large sword. *This warrior’s bloodlust...* I thought.





“Kazu-san, we’ll handle this,” Arisu told me. “You go ahead to the school building!” She seemed excited, too.

*Ah, you’ve just acquired Holy Spear Technique and gotten stronger, so you want to try it out, huh...*

“Right, you two just need to buy us some time. Rushia, cover for Arisu and Tamaki. Nahan, let’s go.”

“Yes, Master.” The Heavenly Turtle, with a little help from my Deflection spell, cast Wind Walk on all of us. To guard against any friendly fire, I removed the invisibility from Arisu and Tamaki.

“Take care, Arisu!” I called.

“Yeah, hold on! Here we go, Shape Lightning!”

The two moved like a bolt across the sky, closing the distance to the winged skeletons, then just as quickly maneuvered behind the giants and launched their aerial attacks.

“Prominent Snake!” Rushia conjured a serpent of flame and directed it toward a Gevshar Helix Skeleton.

After a brief glance at their battle, I took the miniaturized Nahan under my arm and set off at a run toward the main building of the middle school. Coeurl ran beside us. I briefly wondered why he wasn’t joining the fight, but then I realized he was there as our guide. Besides, it was hard to imagine him battling divine-class beings.

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We entered a random first-floor classroom through a broken window. Sunlight streamed in, illuminating a chaotic scene of scattered desks and chairs. The last time we’d been in this classroom, there wasn’t anyone in there... at least, not that I remembered. Anyway, there were no bodies lying around now.

Outside, the sounds of fighting echoed, and the ground shook violently. The fierce battle between Arisu, Tamaki, and the three Gevshar Helix Skeletons had begun.

In the classroom, it was just me, Coeurl, a black panther-type monster, and Nahan, the miniaturized Heavenly Turtle.

Coeurl sniffed the air attentively. “There are undead nearby,” he observed.

“Have they come inside already? Can you tell how many?”

“I cannot discern numbers by scent,” Coeurl admitted.

It seemed like it was time to call in the frontline. I decided to summon one of my newly contracted familiars.

“Summon Familiar: Sword of Conviction, Strass.”

A figure appeared before me—a humanoid monster clad in silver armor, about one hundred and eighty centimeters tall. Its features were hidden behind a full-face helmet, though its eyes shone red. In one hand it held a greatsword that was almost as long as its body.

The armor was hollow, making it essentially living armor, though it appeared the sword itself was the real thing.

According to one legend I’d heard, Strass was once a man who’d lost his family due to the whims of the gods. He had forged this sword to eradicate the world’s injustices, eventually becoming one with the great weapon. Another tale suggested that a god, pitying the man obsessed with revenge, sealed his soul into the sword after his death.

That almost sounded more like a curse than a blessing.

I had summoned Strass with Familiar Enhancement 5, same as Nahan. That meant his effective power was at Rank 9.5—he should be capable of annihilating most enemies on his own.

“Strass, be on your guard,” I instructed.

The silver-armored being nodded silently. Strass wasn’t much for talking; even when we’d made our contract, he hadn’t spoken a word.

“Nahan, can you do an underground search from here?”

*“I’ll begin now,”* Nahan affirmed.

The turtle familiar hopped down from my arms, expanding to about two meters in length before beginning to chant a spell in the center of the classroom. Strass silently peered down the hallway from the open door, giving a small nod and readying his sword.

Just then, the clatter of something hard running down the hall reached our ears. Possibly the footsteps of skeletons...

Strass stepped into the corridor, swinging his sword. The weapon was so large that I wondered if it would make his movements slow and awkward. But it seemed such concerns were unfounded for a swordsman of Strass's skill.

A pale shockwave surged down the length of the hallway as Strass began to strike down skeletons. In the classroom, the remaining glass in the windows shattered with a crash. Several shockwaves later, I heard something hit the hallway with a loud thud—and then we were in the White Room, where Tamaki had leveled up.

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Now it was Tamaki's turn to acquire a derivative skill. The one available from her Swordsmanship and Strength skills was Heavy Sword Technique, which focused primarily on brute-force slashing abilities.

"First off, Enhanced Sword Technique purely boosts Swordsmanship skills, so that's essential..." I mused, "but what about the second choice?"

"I want Dragon Slayer Slash!" Tamaki decided immediately. She'd probably chosen it for its cool-sounding name, but that was reason enough.

Dragon Slayer Slash, an ability available up to Rank 3, consumed MP to increase the sword's destructive power. At Rank 1, it used 10 MP and can make a sword able to destroy a castle wall with a single strike.

At Rank 2, Dragon Slayer Slash consumed 30 MP for its activation, and at Rank 3, it required 70 MP to unleash its full potential. However, this ability necessitated a slight charge-up period, which could be risky in close combat where any delay could prove fatal. To me, it seemed best suited for demolishing structures or entities too massive to handle otherwise.

Among Tamaki's other options, Great Sword Technique (which let you wield a sword much bigger than yourself) and Demon Slayer Sword (which randomly dispelled buffs on the target) stood out as particularly useful. Demon Slayer Sword, being an active ability, could be toggled on and off at will. This meant, for instance, to counteract shield spells like Deflection with Demon Slayer Sword, you had to activate it with precise timing in response to the shield's activation, so it took keen reflexes and anticipation.

*This could be an effective counter to the current dominance of Deflection in battle, I thought, although it seems like Tamaki might struggle with the strategic aspect of timing and anticipation.*

"If Tamaki has decided on that, then I think it's a good choice," I declared.

"Yeah! With this, I'll be able to contribute even more!"

With that decision made, I told the girls that Coeurl, Nahan, Strass and I seemed to be managing the lesser skeletons just fine on our own, so we probably wouldn't need any help. Then I asked, "How's the battle outside going?"

"With three of them, it's a bit tough, but not crazy tough," Arisu responded. Despite facing such gigantic adversaries, Tamaki apparently had the upper hand in terms of power, thanks to her Strength skill being at Level 9.

"Do you think you can take them down?" I asked.

"If I can use my magic release at ten times power for one shot."

"One shot's fine. If we can make it two against two, and since both of you have improved your frontline skills, do you think you can manage?"

"Yeah, we'll do our best!"

"Let's do it!"

Charged with enthusiasm, Arisu and Tamaki clenched their fists in front of their chests. *Hmm, it's like having two tail-wagging puppies here. They're so adorable.*

"Just remember, don't push yourselves too hard. If it gets dangerous, let me know. We can make a quick retreat."

With those final words, we exited the White Room.

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TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 48	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH: 9	SKILL POINTS: 1
GREAT SWORDSMANSHIP: 1 (Enhanced Sword Technique: 1, Dragon Slayer Slash: 1)	



## Chapter 224: The Sixth Wedge – Part 2

**R**eturning to the desolate classroom, we found Heavenly Turtle Nahan still in the midst of casting a spell. The Sword of Conviction, Strass, remained in the hallway following his recent victories against the skeletons.

“Ah, could there be more enemies coming?” I asked.

Strass’s helmet turned toward me and nodded. Peering down the hallway, I saw four Night Skeletons sprawled on the ground. As I watched, they vanished one by one, turning into two blue gems each, for a total of eight gems.

Just as we rounded the corner, another four skeletons appeared. They quickly spotted us, drew their swords, and charged. Strass calmly unleashed another one of his shockwaves, and the skeletons fell to the floor in a clatter of bones.

“Are we stuck in some kind of endless loop? This would be great for experience points,” I muttered, and as soon as I said it, I thought of Mia. It was just the kind of thing she might say.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the next wave of skeletons stopped just short of the corner.

Behind the skeleton troops, I could hear voices—and although they were distant and muffled, I could understand them thanks to Many Tongues.

“Can you make out what they’re saying?” I asked Coeurl, curious. After all, he was a fellow monster.

“I cannot comprehend the conversations of the undead,” Coeurl responded, his ears drooping apologetically.

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Nahan was still uttering his long incantation, which reminded me of the Heart Sutra.

While our immediate goal might be a war of attrition, it would be crucial to whittle down the enemy's forces whenever possible, especially since they could call on reinforcements.

Once we'd secured the Wedge, the need to augment our forces would become even stronger.

"Summon Familiar: Divine Winged Apostle Penusa," I called. In response, the quintessence of an angel materialized inside the classroom. Her divine aura overshadowed even her physical allure—she wore a garment that looked like celestial robes, and above her luminescent white hair hovered a soft halo.

Legends speak of Penusa as a divine emissary, a beacon of salvation dispatched by the gods to alleviate the sorrows of the world.

*"I am at your service, my lord. Command me as you wish,"* she invited, and her voice sounded as if it was carried on a celestial melody.

"My request is for your protection over us here. Strass, your orders have changed: annihilate the enemies that are hiding around the bend in the hallway!"

The animated armor acknowledged with a metallic nod before sprinting away—a surprisingly swift occurrence given the heavy armor adorning his form.

Before Strass could engage the skeletons, Rushia successfully vanquished the Gevshar Helix Skeleton, prompting level-ups for both herself and Arisu.

Their victory also granted Rushia access to a derivative skill. "I'm choosing the synthesis of fire and water magic," she decided.

Achieving Rank 9 in two separate magic attributes unveils the potential for composite magic—a fusion of two elements in which the whole is even more powerful than the sum of its parts.

After she'd decided what abilities to acquire, the discussion shifted to the synthesis of magic. "Shall we opt for Cold Inferno and Water Flare Shield?" These composite magics, although technically categorized as abilities, essentially enabled one to learn new spells. Just like frontline combat abilities, each had its own rank.

For instance, Cold Inferno, a spell that would have found itself right at home in a *Dragon Quest* manga, combined mana of ice and fire. Taking this spell up to Rank 3 allowed for a significantly more potent attack compared to its Rank 1 counterpart. However, it demanded a proportionally greater MP expenditure: 10 for Rank 1, 15 for Rank 2, and a steep 20 MP for Rank 3. Pairing this with mana release would result in an enormous consumption, necessitating careful management to mitigate the strain on the body. The balance between attack magic's one-hit power and MP cost seemed strict, though one might wish for loopholes that allowed for easy victories without such considerations.

Water Flare Shield, much like Deflection, created a barrier embodying both fire and water attributes, and it offered formidable resilience. Given what we knew we would be facing soon, Rushia and I had already agreed we would need a defensive spell like that soon. Like Cold Inferno, this spell also scaled up to Rank 3, increasing MP consumption accordingly. Other potential skills included a sword imbued with fire and ice attributes and a bind combining fire and water—though prioritizing pure offensive and defensive capabilities seemed wise.

“Arisu, Tamaki, are you both managing things on your end?”

“Yeah, we can handle it! Just the two of us should be enough to push through!”

With Arisu and Tamaki holding down the fort, I asked Rushia to join us at the school building.

“All right, let's continue as planned, then!” I said.

Now that we were getting closer to securing the Wedge, we had to start thinking about what we would do next—and that meant additional combatants were needed. Penusa's role was to safeguard the group, while Strass would protect our forward position by preemptively dispatching any enemies lurking around the corner.

With the scene set, we all prepared for the challenges that lay ahead, each of us ready to play their crucial part in the unfolding battle.

The preparations in this area had been completed before we set off. Even if we could control the Wedge, its potential uses were unclear. Nonetheless, we

absolutely had to get to it before our adversaries did. During it all, Arisu was accumulating plenty of skill points.

After a brief discussion of our strategy, we returned to our original position.

ARISU	
LEVEL:  49	SPEARMANSHIP:  9
HEALING MAGIC:  9	SKILL POINTS:  3
HOLY SPEARMANSHIP: 1 (Enhanced Spearmanship 1, Spear Shield Technique 1)	

RUSHIA	
LEVEL:  48	FIRE MAGIC:  9
WATER MAGIC:  9	SKILL POINTS:  1
FIRE-WATER FUSION MAGIC: 1 (Cold Inferno 1, Water Flare Shield 1)	

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When we arrived back in the classroom, we were greeted by the sound of clashing swords from down the corridor.

*Oh, they're on it, they're on it...*

Suddenly, the sound of leveling up resonated in my mind.

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“We meet again, Kazu!” Tamaki beamed enthusiastically.

“It’s always like this, but it feels kind of awkward and wasteful to come back to the White Room so soon, like there’s nothing to do.”

“Kazu, you’re such a penny-pincher...”

“Just leave me alone, Arisu.”

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL:  59	SUPPORT MAGIC:  9
SUMMONING MAGIC:  9	SKILL POINTS:  3
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 5 (Familiar Enhancement 5, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 2)	

I quickly peeked into the hallway through the window.

The Sword of Conviction, Strass, had just defeated a skeleton near the corner and was now cutting deeper into the enemy ranks.

The sounds of sword fights echoed, mingled with the chanting of spells. As expected, it seemed there were enemy mages among them... but then the chanting abruptly stopped with a slash. Strass must have taken down a Mage Skeleton mid-incantation. And just like that, back to the White Room we went.

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This time, Tamaki and Rushia had leveled up.

Given that Arisu and Tamaki’s experience points were close, Rushia leveling up simultaneously suggested a significant amount of experience had been gained.

“Kazu! We took down a big bone!” Tamaki exclaimed.

“Yeah, Tamaki and I almost at the same time,” Arisu added.

Ah, they got a *Gevshar Helix Skeleton* on their side, too.

Whenever multiple monsters were defeated almost simultaneously, it seemed we all ended up in the White Room together due to the lump sum of experience points. The ambiguity of this system still baffled me a little.

“Grab the jewels, then come back here,” I advised. “There’s no need to engage with other monsters any more than we have to.”

The skeleton airborne troops were likely to continue invading the school, so there was no time to dawdle.

Since I hadn’t accumulated enough skill points yet, I decided to just check the essentials, then head back to the fight.

TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 49	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH: 9	SKILL POINTS: 3
HEAVY SWORDSMANSHIP: 1 (Enhanced Sword Technique 1, Dragon Slayer Slash 1)	

RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 49	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 3
FIRE AND WATER COMPOSITE MAGIC: 1 (Cold Inferno 1, Water Flare Shield 1)	

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As Strass returned, clanking in his armor with jewels in hand, the chanting of Heavenly Turtle Nahan finally concluded.

*“There’s a vast space underneath this building...”* he reported. *“Something like a complicated labyrinth.”*

*Whatever kind of labyrinth might be down there, it really doesn’t matter to us.*

“Can you dig through?” I asked.

*“Of course.”*

“All right, go ahead and start. Is this the best place to do it?”

*“No, we need to go a bit further.”*

The hallway was still safe for now. Following Nahan’s lead, we were about to move when Rushia appeared at the window.

“Perfect timing,” I greeted her. “Rushia, you’re coming with us.”

“The others should be getting here soon,” she said.

“We’re racing against time; it’s best if we hurry.”

Exiting the classroom, Nahan stopped in the middle of the hallway and began chanting a digging spell. Unlike before, the chanting finished quickly, and the floor in front of us began to disappear as if melting away.

“Kazu!” Tamaki called. She and Arisu had just entered the building through the windows of another classroom.

“Good timing, Arisu, Tamaki. We’re about to head underground.”

We all peered into the hole. It was pitch dark inside, so I activated night vision for everyone using the Deflection Spell from my night sight. About twenty meters down, it looked like there was a large stone-lined space.

“So there really is an underground...”

“I’ll go check it out!” Tamaki, who had gotten Wind Walk earlier, immediately jumped down—or rather, ran vertically down into the hole.

*Hey, wait a minute! Ah, seriously, I’ve stressed this in the White Room so many times: don’t rush ahead!*

“Let’s follow her. Nahan, give Wind Walk to Strass, too.”

*“Will do.”*

The Winged Apostle Penusa could fly on her own.

One by one, we descended into the hole.

## Chapter 225: The Sixth Wedge – Part 3

“It’s like being inside a pyramid,” Arisu marveled as we descended into the mysterious space beneath the middle school building.

The space indeed resembled a dungeon from a computer game. It was made entirely of stone and was about half the size of a classroom, with ceilings five meters high and passageways leading off in several different directions—each one splitting in two a short distance away.

“Ugh, it’s a labyrinth,” Tamaki lamented.

“Do we really have to wander all over the place?”

“Let’s skip the hassle. Nahan, we’re right above our target, right? Dig us another hole,” I instructed.

“*As you wish,*” Nahan replied, and so we followed the hole dug by Nahan, descending further and further. *Dungeon attacks? No way we have time for that now!*

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Finally, we arrived in a dome-shaped space large enough to fit our entire school campus inside. The ceiling must have been thirty meters high, and the floor was exposed red soil. By my estimation, we had descended more than one hundred meters to reach this point. Had we actually navigated through the labyrinth, it would have taken us hours, so I was grateful for the shortcut.

And there, near the center of the vast chamber, was a giant octahedral gem, nearly three meters across and glowing a deep red.

“No mistake about it, that’s the Wedge...” Rushia murmured in astonishment. Her usually flat voice was feverish with excitement; I wasn’t sure I’d even seen her this stirred up.

“The Sixth Wedge,” she breathed. “So, it truly exists.”

Among the Wedges anchoring this continent to the surface, this one had remained a phantom; until now, we hadn’t been able to say for sure whether it was real. Given that Rushia was elf royalty, and the elves were the guardians of the underworld tree, her surprise was understandable.

“Rushia, can you do it?”

“Yes, I’ll try.”

She hurried over to touch the Wedge, closing her eyes for a moment.

But nothing happened.

“Is it... no good?”

“No, it won’t activate. Either it’s sealed, or there’s some other...”

Just then, Leen’s hawk familiar arrived, landing before Rushia on the ground. Its eyes gleamed eerily in the gem’s light. Was it releasing magic? Near the hawk, a familiar teleportation gate appeared. With a flash of pale light, someone stepped through the gate—it was Shiki!

“Shiki, isn’t it dangerous for you to come here?”

“Leen asked me to,” Shiki replied. “She gave me a magical tool for controlling the World Tree.” With that, Shiki produced a dagger with a blade stained dark red. She handed the ominous-looking weapon to Rushia.

“It controls it... how? Rushia, do you know how we use this?”

“Rituals like that are highly confidential; I’ve never been shown them before.”

“Don’t worry. Leen explained it to me,” Shiki said, briefly outlining the ritual with gestures.

Then, the Celestial Apostle Penusa looked up toward the dome ceiling we had breached.

“Are enemies coming?” I asked.

*“Indeed, Master. Formidable adversaries are drawing near.”*

“Okay, Rushia, let’s hurry up, please!”

Rushia nodded and began following Shiki's instructions. She nicked her left middle finger with the dark red dagger, applied a drop of blood to the dagger's tip, then plunged the knife into the colossal ruby. The dagger submerged effortlessly into the ruby, eliciting a surprised gasp from Rushia. At the same moment, the garnet octahedron began shining even more brightly.

"Is that it? Great! With this..."

*"They are upon us, Master,"* announced Penusa. I looked up, just in time to witness two figures, one gray and one black, plummeting through the hole in the ceiling. The gray apparition was a luminescent, semi-transparent skeleton adorned in radiant robes. With every illumination of its hefty staff, thunderbolts targeted the black figure—which was unmistakably Algrafth, the black-winged Berserker Wolf.

"Um... then, that partly transparent skeleton is..." It seemed the only plausible conclusion.

"The Ghost King, Diasnexus," Shiki whispered, following my gaze skyward. Indeed, two of the Four Heavenly Kings were embroiled in a fierce conflict right above us. Their energy beams clashed near the ceiling, generating a powerful explosion.

"Wait, not here!" I cried as all of us were thrown backward by the blast. *This is dangerous*, I thought. *Shiki-san is unprotected...*

*"I've got this,"* declared Heavenly Turtle Nahan, positioning himself in front of Shiki and creating a barrier. A moment later, a wave of intense heat engulfed us, blasting everyone away with cries of dismay.

"Ah!"

"Rushia!"

*This is not good at all; Rushia's let go of the dagger!* After being hurled several meters and tumbling to the ground, Rushia struggled to lift her head, moaning in pain. The dark red dagger had slipped from her grasp.

"Rushia, quickly!"

“Yes!” Rushia scrambled to her feet and grabbed the dagger. But before she could act, someone else stood before the gigantic ruby. It was a semi-transparent skeleton, cloaked in gray robes. Although its entire form shimmered like mist, there was an overwhelming presence about it, making it difficult to even look directly at it, let alone approach. Within the depths of its skull’s eye sockets glowed a sinister red light.

“Diasnexus...”

Each of the Ghost King’s bony fingers, peeking out from his robes, was adorned with rings, each set with a gemstone that flickered intermittently. *Are these rings magical artifacts activating various effects?* I wondered.

Near the ceiling, Algrafth was entangled with several skeletal giants. Though the giants were blown away by Algrafth in the next moment, it seemed that brief engagement was sufficient for the Ghost King.

“We will not hand over the keystone!”

“You won’t get past us!” Arisu and Tamaki charged bravely at Diasnexus, but their blades simply passed through the skeleton.

“Is the skeleton actually made of mist?” I asked, but no one heard me.

Diasnexus paid Arisu and Tamaki no heed. He reached out one skeletal hand and placed it on the surface of the ruby. Mist or not, he seemed to have absolutely no problem interacting with physical objects. *What absurd trickery...*

*The gems on all ten rings flickered simultaneously, and the ruby emitted a dazzling light...*

“Penusa, Strass!”

“Yes, Master!” Penusa replied. Strass gave a sharp nod, and the two familiars charged toward Diasnexus. Penusa’s slender arm extended, piercing through the Ghost King’s body...

“Barrier Break.” The angel executed her unique magic. Diasnexus groaned as something pale and shining scattered around him. Yes, this was Penusa’s greatest power: the ability to shatter barriers and enchantments with her mana.



In the battle against the Ghost King, who was known for casting anti-magic barriers, I knew her ability would prove invaluable. With that in mind, I had made it a priority to form a contract with her. And so, the barrier had temporarily vanished.

Immediately afterward, Strass swung his greatsword from a few steps away. The blade emitted a white light, connecting solidly with Diasnexus's misty form. The blow only made the Ghost King stagger half a step backward, but that was enough. His hand withdrew from the gigantic ruby.

"Now, Rushia!"

"Yes, Kazu!" Rushia propelled herself off the ground, crashing bodily into the gigantic ruby with the dagger in hand. The ruby's brilliance continued to intensify, until it was too dazzling to look at directly.

"Ah, ah, ahhhh!" Rushia screamed.

"No, it's no good! I can't control it!" The dome filled with white light.

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I heard a song—this was the third time I'd heard this terribly melancholy melody. The first was on the third day in this other world, when Mia and I had been warped by a Globster. The second had been this morning. "*It's Mia, isn't it?*" I asked the singing voice in my mind. There was no reply. I asked again, but all I got in reply was the echo of the song.

*Well, that's okay,* I thought, deciding to simply listen to the song. *What was she thinking as she sang? Why can I hear her song?*

Eventually, the song ended. My consciousness was beginning to come back to me.

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I awoke, startled to find myself gazing up at a dull-colored sky, flanked by familiar concrete walls. *Ah, but this isn't a school building, is it?* Slowly, the

murmur of a large crowd reached my ears. I propped myself up on my elbows, shook my head...

*“Master,”* came the voice of Heavenly Turtle Nahan, and by the time I turned, he was standing right beside me. But it wasn’t just him; Strass and Penusa were there, too.

“It appears we have been transported from the underground cavern. Where might this be?”

“Where?” I took another look around. Amid the hustle and bustle, there was a circle of people surrounding us. The ground beneath us was asphalt, and there were signs and telephone poles sticking out of it.

I even heard a car horn honk.

“What? Could this possibly be...” I stood suddenly, staggering from utter bewilderment. In front of me stood the Shibuya Tokyu Department Store.

## Chapter 226: Return

**“So**, this is Shibuya, isn’t it?” I sighed.

*“Shibuya... What kind of place might that be?”* Nahan asked.

“Well, it’s on Earth... I mean, more specifically, we’re right in front of the Tokyu Department Store, about a five-minute walk from Shibuya Station.”

The first question that crossed my mind was whether this was a fake space. *Could this be a world created with some mysterious advanced technology, kind of like the scene inside that strange dome we saw last night? But there were no humans in that world. The only living thing there, besides us, was a gigantic floating jellyfish.*

Here, there were thousands of people. Surrounding me and Nahan was everyone from office workers in suits to casually dressed teens. And above it all was the familiar yet strangely distant urban environment, filling the air with the sound of car horns and the smell of exhaust fumes. It was all too real, assaulting my eyes, ears, and nose.

“Is this really Japan, for real this time?”

I tried to think through what had happened. The Ghost King, Diasnexus, had touched the keystone beneath the mountain at our school, and right after that, Rushia had tried to regain control of it—but I remembered her screaming that she couldn’t. Apparently, the Demon King had set off for Earth from the point where the school’s mountain had appeared.

“So, were the previous coordinates left behind? Or did Diasnexus do something? Either way, Rushia ended up activating it...” *Did the keystone function as a teleportation device, in the end?*

“Have I really come back?” I should have been overjoyed to be back in Japan, but instead I was overwhelmed by the question of what to do next.

From behind Nahan came a groaning sound. I turned to see Shiki, stirring awake from where she lay on the ground.

*Ah, that makes sense. After all, during that explosion, Nahan was desperately protecting Shiki-san...*

“Um, Kazu-kun,” Shiki said as she stood up. She looked around for a moment with her hand on her waist, then sighed much like I had a few moments before. “Can you explain what’s going on here?”

“Well, it’s pretty much like you see,” I replied.

“I see... This is bad.” She grimaced, quickly realizing the problem but completely ignoring the crowd, shaking her head in frustration. “I wonder if Nahan can use his magic to scan our surroundings. If my hunch is correct...”

Just as she said that, an explosion sounded from a short distance away. We exchanged glances.

“Let’s go check it out. Shiki-san, you stay here and wait...”

“Don’t be ridiculous. I won’t let you leave me behind in a place like this,” she said as she quickly climbed on top of Nahan’s shell.

Fair enough; I wouldn’t have wanted to be left in the curious stares of passersby either. I wondered if Arisu and the others were all right.

“Nahan. Cast Fly on everyone,” I instructed.

“Yes, Master,” he responded. Flying would be more efficient than using Wind Walk, which was only as fast as running. With Nahan’s Fly spell, derived from a Deflection Spell, we ascended into the sky, ignoring the exclamations of “They’re flying!” and “It’s magic!” from below.

Now, the explosion had occurred beyond the station, in the direction of Meiji Street—near the famously tall Hikarie skyscraper, from which smoke was rising. *Shibuya Hikarie, that’s nearly two hundred meters tall, right?*

“Don’t fly too high. We might be spotted by enemies,” I cautioned my familiars.

I glanced at Shiki, who was still atop Nahan’s shell. *Good, I thought. That’s probably the safest place right now.* Just then, another explosion sounded from

beyond Mark City, and another from behind the Tokyu Department Store—where we had just been.

“Maybe we shouldn’t have moved so fast,” Shiki muttered, then shook her head in resignation.

As we flew over the Yamanote Line tracks, we could see several skeletons wreaking havoc on Meiji Street, effortlessly slashing through cars and trucks with their swords.

“So, the opponents you guys were fighting are that strong,” Shiki mused, almost as if speaking to herself. *So, Arisu and Tamaki had been clashing with foes like that, huh...* Thinking back, the Elite Orcs on the first day felt overwhelmingly strong. The people screaming now were just like us before we’d defeated our first orcs.

“We can’t just leave them here... Let’s take them down,” I decided and gave the order to my familiars. Ideally, I’d want to hit them from a distance with magic, but with the chaotic situation and pedestrians running scared, that seemed ill advised.

“Strass, Penusa, target the undead only,” I instructed. The armored knight and the winged angel descended rapidly toward the rampaging skeletons.

“Shiki, join the party.”

“Ah, yes... We need to discuss our strategy,” she agreed.

Strass and Penusa attacked the monsters like birds of prey from above. For her part, Penusa summoned a whip of flame in her hand. While she was primarily a magic-type familiar, she was also capable of close combat. It was a balance somewhat shifted toward magic, similar to how Sha-Lau was a frontline fighter but could also wield magic.

Just as our familiars were about to crush the skeletons, a white beam shot from the side, piercing through the bodies of the skeletons. They collapsed one after another. *That was... Huh? No way.*

“White Cannon... right?” A Rank 9 wind spell. One of Mia’s favorites.

I squinted to see a small figure hovering near Bic Camera. She was a girl with azure hair, maybe ten years old, dressed in a spotless white robe. *Did that magic just now come from her?*

My familiars, witnessing the skeletons being defeated right before their eyes, hovered uncertainly in the air. *Ha ha, a bit of a silly situation... wait, no, what's happening here?*

Ah, the girl seemed to have noticed my familiars and appeared a bit flustered.

"Kazu-kun, we should go talk to her," Shiki suggested.

"Yeah, she doesn't seem like an enemy," I agreed.

As we flew down toward her, the girl noticed us and looked up, her green eyes widening.

Then, she broke into a wide smile and waved so vigorously that I worried her hand might come off.

"She seems normal enough, but..." I began.

"Blue hair and green eyes—she's definitely not from this Earth," Shiki remarked coolly.

"You're so calm about this, Shiki-san."

"After seeing skeletons rampage through the streets of Shibuya, I wouldn't be surprised if sharks started falling from the sky."

*I kind of wish she would be surprised.*

"Papa!" the girl exclaimed, looking at me.

"Uh... what? Wait, hold on."

"Papa! I finally found you! I've been looking for you!"

"Kazu-kun, she's..." Shiki began.

"Well, I do have one guess... but still."

We landed near her, and the girl ran up to us, pulling out a browned piece of paper torn from a college notebook.

"Look, Papa! Mama said if I go to Earth, I absolutely must bring this back!"

When I looked at the notebook fragment, I saw it was written in Japanese, in neat characters, probably with a mechanical pencil.

“Hey Papa, tell me! Kayla needs to go to Akihabara to buy an *ero*ge, right?”





## Chapter 227: Kayla – Part 1

**F**or a while, it seemed my consciousness had drifted away.

“Papa, what’s wrong?” The blue-haired, green-eyed girl looked up at me.

*Ah... Papa, huh... Papa... So, meaning there’s a Mama and a Papa, and two kids, a happy family, a joyful marriage...*

*But wait, this could also all just be a misunderstanding on her part. And yet, how many moms out there would send their daughter to buy an eroge? What’s more, she’s using magic a lot like ours, the visitors from another world, and that was probably White Cannon, the Rank 9 Wind spell...*

*All right, let’s face reality.*

“Well, good to meet you, I guess. My name is Kazuhisa Kaya. Are you my kid, then? What’s your mom’s name?”

“Mama is, well, Mama.”

“Uh, right... didn’t your mama tell you her name?”

The girl smiled brightly, and the gesture was as refreshing as a blooming flower. “Mama said it’s better to stay anonymous when you’re doing something bad!”

“I see, raised in a culture of dubious anonymity...” I muttered. *What kind of education is that woman providing?*

“So, you’re Mia’s child...”

“Yes!”

“My child... with Mia...”

“Yes! I’m Kayla!”

*Kayla, huh. And with my last name being Kaya... Mia, why would you pick that as a name for her? Now it sounds like “Kayla Kaya.”*

Then again, the only time Mia and I could have... was yesterday evening. Although, time in that space was all twisted.

“How old are you now, Kayla?”

“I’m an adult!”

*Your dad wasn’t asking about that,* I thought with a sigh.

“Uh... have you learned any math?”

“I’m good at differentiation and integration!”

“What kind of gifted education is that?”

Kayla flashed a shy smile. “Papa praised me,” she said happily.

*Oh no, she’s adorable. Thinking she’s my child makes it even more... uh, well, I’m feeling incredibly conflicted here.*

“What should we do, Shiki-san?”

“For now, as weird as it may be, let’s just accept that she exists,” Shiki said with a sigh, then bent down to meet the girl’s gaze.

“Hello. I’m Yukariko Shiki. You can call me Shiki, Kayla-chan.”

“Got it, Auntie Shiki!”

“Um...” Kayla quickly covered her mouth with her hand.

“Sister Shiki!”

“My child is quite the diplomat,” I remarked.

“Really, now... So, Kayla-chan, straight to the point, what level are you? Can you join our party?”

Emanating confidence, Kayla puffed out her chest, spread her hands wide, and extended all ten fingers.

“Fifty-one!”

*Why that number with both hands outstretched? And that’s a high level! Higher than Arisu and all of the girls, right?*

“What skills do you have?”

“Wind Magic and Shooting!”

The derivative skills of Wind Magic and Shooting would be Wind Shot Technique, abilities like freely bending bullets to hit targets...

“Mama said this combo would be powerful!”

“Ah, classic Mia-style education.”

“Papa, I’m here to help! Because Mama can’t anymore,” Kayla said.

Shiki and I exchanged glances. *If she can’t help us anymore, does that mean we won’t be able to see her again? What could be happening to Mia right now? Where could she be?*

“Um... where exactly is your mama now?” I asked Kayla.

“She’s in a faraway place!” she answered vaguely.

*Is she dodging the question, or does she really not understand? What was Mia thinking, sending her to us like this?*

“So, for now, can you join our party?” I proposed.

“Yes, Papa!” Kayla eagerly agreed.

By this time, another crowd had gathered around us, murmuring among themselves but maintaining their distance, likely out of fear. Considering Heavenly Turtle Nahan looked like he had popped straight off the screen of a monster movie, and the other two familiars were almost as strange, I couldn’t blame them.

“Shall we move on? So, your goal is just to help me, right?” I inquired.

“Yes, Papa! Use me as you wish!” Kayla responded with enthusiasm.

“Officer, over here, please!” I joked, though the timing was admittedly poor given our current predicament.

The three of us took to the skies, searching for other areas affected by explosions. We quickly saw that something was happening further down Meiji Street toward Ebisu, so we made that our next destination.

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Kayla must have been around ten years old, but she clearly hadn't had what one would call a normal upbringing. From our brief conversation, it seemed she hadn't interacted with anyone other than her mother. Yet, she also mentioned being with dolls, which added another layer of mystery to her background.

I had so many questions, but now wasn't the time to delve deeper. Near Shibuya Station's New South Exit, we soon found a handful of skeletons that were creating mayhem.

As the police officers fired their guns, the skeletons swung their swords, effortlessly slicing through the bullets. With a return stroke from about ten meters away, they unleashed a slashing attack. Blades of light flew out, decapitating several officers simultaneously. The screams of the fleeing crowd filled the air.

*This is bad*, I thought. The panicked crowd had gathered in the narrow streets, becoming virtually immobile. Into this chaos, the skeletons charged, creating a scene straight out of hell.

"This isn't a good scene for a child's education," Shiki remarked.

"As a father, I find it regrettable," I agreed.

"Massacre!" Flying beside us, Kayla glanced at the scene with her eyes shining, seemingly captivated by the carnage. *Ah, right, she's Mia's daughter.*

"Papa, can I go help?" she asked.

"Uh, sure. But, Kayla, you can't do close combat, can you? This looks like it's gonna be a melee..."

"It's okay, leave it to me!"

Kayla sped up, probably using magic to propel herself forward with the wind at her back, moving ahead of us all. Her robe fluttered, revealing that she was wearing nothing underneath.

*Why aren't you wearing underwear...?*

"Officers, over here!" I called out again, futilely.

"Those officers were just slaughtered," Shiki noted dryly.

Wielding a slingshot pulled from seemingly nowhere, Kayla took aim at the skeletons rampaging through the crowd from above. However, the skeletons were moving too erratically to easily target.

“Storm Bind!”

A whirl of air ensnared one of the skeletons. Immediately after, my daughter gave a shout as she released a silver ball, hitting the immobilized skeleton squarely in the head. The projectile pierced through the skull, destroying the monster with a single shot.

“Gotcha! Next one, here we go!”

The petite girl employed the same strategy to take down a second skeleton with a single blow. When a third skeleton noticed Kayla and retaliated with a beam similar to sword pressure, it scattered the instant it hit Kayla’s robe.

“Ouch, that kind of hurt,” she complained, though the attack seemed to have caused only minor discomfort and her robe was just a bit dirtied. A direct hit on a regular person in regular clothes could have resulted in serious internal injuries.

“I mean, if she’s really Level 51, this makes sense...” Shiki noted, but her voice still carried a tone of awe.

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Fortunately, everyone was gathered in the White Room. And by everyone, I mean me, Arisu, Tamaki, Rushia, Shiki, and Kayla—six of us in total. We were all overjoyed to be reunited.

“Kazu-san, Shiki-san, Rushia-san, I’m so glad you’re all safe,” said Arisu.

“Kazu-san! I just don’t know what to think anymore!” Tamaki blurted. Both she and Arisu looked like they were about to cry as they rushed to hug me. Even Rushia appeared relieved.

It was comforting to know everyone was safe. Whether returning to Earth was a good thing for Arisu and Tamaki remained uncertain. For Rushia, this was

an entirely foreign land; I could only imagine what kind of anxiety that would cause her.

“Hey, who’s this girl?” Tamaki asked, looking in puzzlement at Kayla. My beloved daughter flashed a bright smile.

“I’m Kayla! Mama told me to curry favor with everyone here!”

“Wait, ‘Mama’? ‘Curry favor’? Huh?”

“Um... the blonde, silly mama is... Mama Tamaki!” Kayla continued.

“What?”

*All right, Mia, you’re in for it next time we meet.*

“The one with the big boobs is Mama Arisu! The one with long ears is Mama Rushia!”

*I mean, it’s all accurate, but I’m surprised she remembers them by such distinctive features!*

*Mia... you’re definitely in for a punishment when we meet again...*

## Chapter 228: Kayla – Part 2

I quickly explained Kayla's situation to Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia. Well, "explained" was a bit generous given that there was still so much I didn't understand myself.

"Hey, hey! Where did Kayla-chan come from?" Tamaki asked, crouching down to Kayla's eye level.

"From a faraway place!"

"Why did we end up coming to Earth?"

"It was time to dive in because we could make it! And then, I was told to be of use to Papa and the others!"

"Wait, hold on a moment, Kayla-chan," Shiki interjected in a rush. "By 'diving in,' you mean you snuck from that world to this one through a portal, right?"

"Uh, yeah... maybe?"

"When we inadvertently opened a portal to Earth with the keystone's power, you used that transfer to meet us... Is that right?"

Kayla looked puzzled and tilted her head, as if Shiki was speaking a language she didn't quite understand.

Our leader sighed and changed her question. "What were you doing in the place you were before?"

"I was studying and training for this day!"

*This day... Did Mia know we would return to Earth? Or did she just feel like she had to make sure Kayla was a force to be reckoned with?*

I tried to delve a bit deeper with Kayla, but it seemed she didn't fully understand herself. She only knew that there would come a day when her existence would be necessary for us. She had been looking forward to the day she could meet us for a very long time.



“So, Papa!” she exclaimed, hugging me. I hugged her back, and she snuggled up against me, happily sniffing. Her soft cheek rubbed against my chin, and I knew my heart had already fallen for her.

“Hey, hey, Kayla-chan, me next, me next!”

“Ah, no fair, Tamaki-chan. I want to hug Kayla-chan, too!”

“Okay! Mama Arisu, Mama Tamaki! Hug!”

She was immensely popular with both Arisu and Tamaki.

*Well, at the very least, she isn't disliked. I was worried, since, in a way, she's like the child of a previous partner I brought along...*

“Let me get this straight. This is Earth—Kazu and everyone's world, correct?” Rushia asked.

*Ah, right... for her, this place is completely unknown. Though she doesn't seem too shocked, probably because we were trapped in a similar space just yesterday evening...*

“Yeah, this is our real world. Not the fake one from yesterday, but the real Shibuya.”

“I was quite surprised by the number of people. And there were iron carriages... those are called ‘cars,’ right?”

*Okay, aligning her common knowledge with ours is going to take some time.*

Meanwhile, Rushia had asked about our surroundings to find out where we were, and responded, “I found Kazu and the others flying, so I'll head there right away.”

“Ah, Arisu and I are together already. We saw Kazu-san and the others just now, so we'll be there soon!” Tamaki said as she nuzzled Kayla's cheek.

Kayla stayed still, clearly enjoying the physical affection. “I'm happy I have so many mamas!” she declared.

*Ah, what a sweet kid. How could Mia and I have produced such a good kid...? And why would Mia send such a sweet child to buy an eroge?*

“Wait a minute, does she even have money on her?”

“Huh? Mama said to ask Papa for it!”

*Yeah, Mia’s definitely in for some punishment next time I see her.*

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All of us crowded around Kayla’s PC screen. Her skills were exactly as she had claimed: Wind Magic Rank 9, Shooting Rank 9. Her derivative skills included Wind Shot Technique 2, with abilities in Enhanced Shooting Technique Rank 2 and Freeform Bullets Rank 2.

Enhanced Shooting Technique was a standard evolutionary ability common to weapon skills. Freeform Bullets, as mentioned earlier, allowed the shooter to bend the trajectory of arrows or bullets freely. At Rank 1, it could bend up to forty-five degrees, Rank 2 up to ninety degrees, and by Rank 3, it could even make them turn back one hundred and eighty degrees. However, accurate targeting was still essential, which explained why Kayla had focused her shots to hit the skeletons’ heads accurately amidst the chaos. That restraining magic also paired well with shooting. The weapon being a slingshot seemed a bit underwhelming in terms of firepower, though...

“Kayla, what’s with that weapon of yours?”

“This?” Kayla waved her hand, and a Y-shaped slingshot suddenly appeared. “This is my special weapon, made by Mama!”

“Ah, is it enchanted with magic by any chance?”

“You’re darn tootin’!”

*Why does she know such old-fashioned phrases...?*

“What’s the name of that weapon?”

“Slingshot!”

*Right, straight to the point, Mia!*

“How do you manage the bullets?”

“I just pick up stones from around here.”

“Just a regular pebble can explode like that...?”

“I can shoot beams, too.”

*Well, that's no ordinary slingshot...*

“By the way, Kayla-chan. What exactly is this special ability?” Shiki’s question made everyone look at the screen in surprise.

Somehow, Shiki had taken control of the mouse and brought up a special ability window that had been hidden behind other windows. But all that was listed there were incomprehensible strings of characters... *What is this? I can't read it.*

“It’s my special power!”

“What kind of power is it?”

“It defeats the Demon Lord!”

We all exchanged looks.



We gathered all the details we could from Kayla. Her explanations were roundabout, but the gist of it was as follows:

- Kayla, the child of me and Mia, was a bioweapon designed to eliminate a renegade demon lord of the same species that resided in that mysterious building.
- She had the ability to erode the existence of the Demon Lord across space and time by making contact with its true form.
- Likely, no one other than her was capable of definitively ending the Demon Lord.

“I see... Mia, what have you done to our child?”

“I’m useful, Papa!”

“Kayla, are you okay with this? You seem surprisingly happy about it.”

My dear daughter smiled shyly. “I’ve always looked forward to being with Papa and being able to stay together!”

“I can’t for the life of me understand how Mia managed to raise such a good child,” Shiki commented, and her words carried a sharp edge. Still, I’d thought the same thing earlier...

“Just to clarify, Kayla, wouldn’t you be in danger when you confront the Demon Lord?”

“Mama said Papa would protect me!”

“Ah, that... yes, I’ll absolutely protect you.”

“Yay!”

*Still, the Demon Lord, huh? From what we’ve gathered so far, it seems likely it’s on Earth, but where exactly remains a question.*

“By the way, I wonder if Yuuki-senpai and the others have come this way.”

“Uncle hasn’t come!”

“Ah, right, to you, Yuuki-senpai would be an uncle...”

I wondered if the ninja would be disheartened by being called “uncle,” or if he would take it as a compliment. To be honest, he would probably be delighted. For some reason, I couldn’t quite understand why, I felt hesitant to let Kayla get too close to him.

“If that’s the case, it really is just the six of us, totally isolated here and without support. So, we need to plan accordingly. First, we need to gather everyone together, deal with the rampaging skeletons, and then gather information...”

“About that,” Shiki interjected, raising her hand smoothly. “I have a suggestion. There’s a place near here where we can easily gather information.”

“And where might that be?”

“My family’s house is near Komaba-todaimae Station.”

*Wow, that’s just two stops away from Shibuya on the Inokashira Line.*

“Does that mean you’re actually a lady of high society, Shiki-san?”

“What’s with that tone?” She shot me a sharp glare, then added, “Well, yes.”

“You’re not going to deny it?!”

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We spent the time clarifying a few more points, but we also wondered whether we could return to the other world from here.

“I don’t know!” Kayla declared innocently. “But I’m sure we’ll figure something out!”

“Uh, well, if Mia told you so, then maybe it really will work out...” I said.

*There’s also the question of whether we even want to go back. If we defeat the Demon Lord, this world will be safe, and we wouldn’t need to fight anymore... Ah, but still.*

“I want to go back. I want to live in the other world,” I insisted.

Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia all nodded in agreement.

*It's true; we don't have much left holding us to this world. As for my family... well, if I'm being honest, we weren't that close.*

“Ah, but Shiki-san, you have a family on Earth, don't you? If we stay here...”

Shiki laughed me off with a “You're joking!” through her nose. “I have thirty kids to look after! For their sake, I need to go back to the other world!”

*That's just like her, I thought. No helping it.*

We decided to save Shiki's skill points from leveling up for later use.

SHIKI	
LEVEL:  15	RECONNAISSANCE:  6
THROWING:  3	SKILL POINTS:  3

## Chapter 229: The Shadow of the Demon Lord

Once we'd gone back, Kayla quickly eliminated the remaining skeletons, which seemed to be the last of the monsters in this area.

Down at street level, people looked up at us, pointing and talking excitedly. Many of them looked scared, and again, it made sense; our familiars looked like monsters.

"Now that we're not in any immediate danger, maybe we should let the familiars go," Shiki suggested. I nodded, reducing Nahan to a size small enough to fit in my hand and dismissing the others. Maybe Nahan would be less scary if people thought he was a stuffed animal.

"Hey, Kazu-san!"

"Finally caught up with you!"

"Sorry to keep you waiting."

Just then, Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia flew up next to us. They were using Wind Walk rather than Fly, which was probably why it had taken them a bit longer to get here. Beside Tamaki stood a creature resembling a black panther. It was Coeurl.

*You... why are you following along like it's the most natural thing in the world? Well, it's fine.*

"You're safe too, then?" I asked it.

"Um, yes. I presume my master is safe as well... but this world does make one dizzy."

"Aren't you linked with Algrafth?"

Coeurl looked away hesitantly. It was pretty obvious.

"Did the link break? It's okay if you don't want to talk about it."



“I appreciate your concern.”

“Are we still teaming up, then?”

“Without question. After witnessing what we did, my master would undoubtedly say the same.”

Coeurl kept glancing nervously toward the east. I followed his gaze, but all I could see was a massive building—nothing unusual for this part of the city.

Well, we might be spotted by enemies, but we had no other choice. We increased our altitude, with Shiki and the others following.

As soon as we got high enough to see over the buildings, we saw it hovering over Tokyo Bay.

“What... what is that?”

It was a gigantic black sphere, several kilometers in diameter. In the sunlight it occasionally shimmered silver. This clearly artificial object floated hundreds of meters above the sea, and it gave off an overwhelming sense of alienness: there was technology there far beyond human capabilities.

“That’s the Demon Lord!” Kayla cheerfully announced, causing everyone to turn toward her in surprise. My daughter puffed out her chest proudly. “That’s the Demon Lord!” she repeated.

“Indeed, the entity residing there is the Demon Lord. The human girl speaks the truth,” Coeurl added.

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Next, we took care of the remaining eleven skeletons that were still wreaking havoc in Shibuya. In the process, I, Arisu, Tamaki, and Shiki leveled up.

I boosted my Enhanced Summoning to 6, my Familiar Enhancement to 6, and reduced the mana cost for Familiar Maintenance to 3. Arisu’s Holy Spear Technique reached Level 2, with both Enhanced Spear Techniques and Spear Shield Techniques also reaching Level 2. Tamaki likewise improved, her Heavy Swordsmanship to Level 2, along with both Enhanced Sword Technique and Dragon Slayer Slash.

Shiki’s skill points were saved to improve her Reconnaissance skills further. Given that we no longer expected her to contribute to combat, this wasn’t a problem.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 60	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 5→0
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 5→6 (Familiar Enhancement 5→6, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 2→3)	

ARISU	
LEVEL: 50	SPEARMANSHIP: 9
HEALING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 5→0
HOLY SPEAR TECHNIQUE: 1→2 (Enhanced Spear Technique 1→2, Spear Shield Technique 1→2)	

TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 50	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH: 9	SKILL POINTS: 5→0
HEAVY SWORDSMANSHIP: 1→2 (Enhanced Sword Technique 1→2, Dragon Slayer Slash 1→2)	

SHIKI	
LEVEL:  16	RECONNAISSANCE:  6
THROWING:  3	SKILL POINTS:  5

We spent our time in the White Room discussing our situation. I wanted to know why the Demon Lord was there, and what he was doing. Kayla innocently replied, “I don’t know!”

“Sounds like we need to find out what’s happened on Earth since we left,” I said, and the others agreed. That meant our best course of action was probably to head to Shiki’s place as soon as possible.

“Hey, by the way, Kazu-san, why don’t we go to the police?” Arisu asked.

“Given the circumstances, we’d probably be detained, and we can’t afford to be tied up in investigations for days or weeks,” I explained.

“Ah, right... What a hassle, dealing with the police.”

*Well, to be fair, I thought, we are the odd ones out. Disappearing, then showing up with creatures that look like monsters, using magic, scattering skeletons... Really, how did things end up like this?*

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Less than an hour later, we found ourselves in front of Shiki’s house. Since we had flown here invisibly, hopefully no one would identify us as the same group who had caused a ruckus in Shibuya. Her home was in a corner of a neighborhood where old houses lined the streets, just a five-minute walk from the Komaba-todaimae Station on the Inokashira Line. The property was surrounded by a fence, and it boasted a sizable garden.

“Truly a life of luxury...” I commented.

“Come on, if we’re talking about high status, Rushia here is practically a princess.”

“By the way, Shiki-san, are you nervous?”

“Of course I am.”

After dispelling our invisibility, we all stood in front of the gate. To avoid any complications, we’d also sent back all the familiars, at least for now.

Shiki stood frozen in front of the gate’s intercom.

“Even Shiki-san gets nervous, huh?”

“You can tell? Ah, this is so frustrating.”

After ruffling her hair in a burst of frustration, Shiki finally jabbed out a finger to press the intercom. Sounds of hurried movement came from inside the house, followed by a woman’s voice through the intercom.

“It’s me, Yukariko. I’m back.”

“... What? Wait, really? Oh my!”

The hurried sounds turned into heavy footsteps, and after a short moment, the gate opened. A woman in her late forties, rather plump and wearing a floral apron, rushed out and immediately embraced Shiki.

“I’m so relieved. I heard there was an accident at school, and I’ve been so worried... but you’re safe, and that’s all that matters.”

“Mom...”

For a moment, Shiki looked unsure what to do. Then, with a resigned sigh, she wrapped her arms around her mother in return.

“I’m home,” Shiki whispered softly, as if only now realizing it. Strength suddenly surged into her arms. “So, I... I’ve actually come back.”

Tears began to spill from the eyes of our leader, who had always stood firm and resolute. They streamed down her cheeks and landed on her mother’s shoulder.

“I’m finally home...”

I could only imagine what emotions had been pent up inside her these last five days. Once the tears started, they didn't stop, and soft sobs escaped from her.

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A moment later, we were all invited inside the house. Rushia looked somewhat puzzled as we took off our shoes at the entrance, but as she walked on the wooden floors with bare feet, she seemed to understand and appreciate the cultural practice.

We were led to a spacious living room, where Shiki's grandparents sat. They looked surprised to see us. Shiki's mom told the bald grandfather that he should call her dad, who was at work. The man struggled with an old-fashioned mobile phone, apparently unsure how to dial.

Meanwhile, the mother and grandmother went to make tea.

"I know it must feel strange to be here, but please, take a seat," we were told.

The room was large, about twenty tatami mats in size, with a luxurious black table set on the tatami floor, adorned with snacks. The TV was on, showing the news.

I could see my familiars on the screen, along with clear footage of Kayla defeating monsters. And then the camera panned... *Whoa!* Just for a moment, we saw me and Shiki.

"The TV!" Kayla said excitedly.

"Ah, so Kayla, you're familiar with modern conveniences... Have you used a TV before?"

"I mostly only know about them!"

*Still don't know exactly how this girl was raised... but that's not the immediate concern.*

Looking at the date displayed on the TV, I saw that it had been six days since our transition to the other world. Apparently, there was no time difference between that world and this one.

“So, for now...” Shiki began as her grandmother and mother reappeared with tea. “I’m sorry, Mom, Grandpa, Grandma. We’re short on time. Can you give us a quick rundown on what’s happened since we disappeared?”

## Chapter 230: Six Days on Earth

Shiki's grandfather began to speak in a calm tone. His story was a bit lengthy, but to summarize:

On the same day our school's mountain vanished into another world, that gigantic black sphere had appeared in the sky above where it had once stood. The structure hadn't responded to any attempts at contact, but it had slowly drifted southward before moving to the Pacific side of the city.

By the morning of the second day, it had come to a halt over Tokyo Bay, where it was now.

Both the government and media had tried to approach the black sphere with helicopters, but they could only get so close, as if some force was preventing them from seeing what was inside, or warping the concept of distance itself. At least that's what the experts on TV had said.

Drones had also failed to approach, which meant the interference wasn't merely a psychological effect, but... well, magical in nature.

"The government hasn't given any clear explanation of what kind of device that is," Shiki's grandfather sighed.

The girls and I exchanged looks, probably all wondering whether explaining the Demon Lord to Shiki's family would make things better or worse. Shiki gave her head a subtle shake.

"Papa," Kayla said suddenly. She had been sitting cross-legged on my lap, and now she looked up at me, as if bored with the long discussion. Her angelic smile was infectious, and I couldn't help but smile back.

"What's up, Kayla?"

"Demooooon Lord," Kayla said.

"Ah, yeah, we're having a bit of a complex discussion right now, so, uh, Shiki-san?" I looked to Shiki for help.

Immediately catching on, she suggested to Kayla, “Why don’t you go play in the garden over there?”

Kayla shook her head. “Mm-mm,” she said, pointing at the TV.

The screen was again showing the massive black sphere floating over Tokyo Bay. The connection made by the news between the skeletons that attacked Shibuya and the gigantic sphere was, of course, a logical conclusion.

“Let’s go defeat the Demon Lord!” Kayla proposed enthusiastically.

“Well, yes, but before that, we have a lot to... Uh, Arisu, Tamaki?”

“Right! Kayla-chan, let’s go over here?” Arisu suggested, and she and Tamaki quickly got up and each took one of Kayla’s hands, heading for the next room. Shiki had already told us that that room housed a family altar along with kids’ toys, probably for the neighborhood kids to play with. It seemed this house also served as a sort of community center.

“It’s probably best not to ask about that child or the foreigner over there,” Shiki’s grandfather said in a gentle voice.

Shiki smiled sheepishly. “Yeah, let’s leave it at that.”

It was no wonder he was curious. Kayla’s hair was a vivid shade of bright blue... uncommon for humans on Earth, to say the least.

“Long story short, we went to another world and just came back,” Shiki explained simply. “Apparently, the skeletons came back with us... well, it’s been quite an eventful time.”

At this, her grandfather relaxed his shoulders with a sigh. “Another world, huh?”

“Do you think I’m making this up, Grandpa?”

The old man shook his head, turning kind eyes and a gentle smile on Shiki. “If Yukariko says so, then it must be true.”

*Ah... I think I just realized how important Yukariko Shiki is to this family.*

“Thank you, Grandpa. So, besides that black sphere, was there anything else unusual that happened?” she asked.



“Well, not particularly... Ah, but now that you mention it,” her grandfather suddenly remembered, clapping his hands together, “there was that thing in New York.”

“Grandpa, ‘that thing’ isn’t very descriptive,” her grandmother said with a laugh and a dismissive wave of her hand.

*What a nice old couple, I thought. It would have been amazing growing up in a family like this.*

“Right, right, the jellyfish! Jellyfish were attacking cities all over the world; places like New York were in chaos!”

“Jellyfish? You mean, giant flying jellyfish?”

“Yeah, that’s it, that’s it!”

My companions and I gave each other another look. *Flying Jellyfish, huh?* When Rushia asked, “What’s New York?” I explained it was a city on the other side of the Earth.

“So, they attacked, as in they launched attacks?”

“Yes, they suddenly appeared and boom—dropped bombs everywhere. Even when airplanes went to attack them, missiles and guns didn’t work at all,” he explained.

Just as I’d feared, the giant jellyfish seemed to have an ability to completely nullify physical attacks.

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As we sipped tea, we continued the discussion. We were told that governments worldwide had mobilized their militaries to deal with the Flying Jellyfish, but all efforts had been in vain. Even nuclear weapons left them unscathed.

The Flying Jellyfish casually bombarded urban areas with missiles, massacring the fleeing populace. Every city they targeted had been wiped off the map.

Oddly, the Flying Jellyfish didn't seem to operate with grand objectives like destroying nations or wiping out humanity. The day before yesterday, they had suddenly disappeared. Needless to say, a lot of people had a lot of questions.

All this time, the black sphere had remained floating over Tokyo Bay. Many suspected a connection between it and the Flying Jellyfish. However, with no way to approach it and spatial distortions disabling missile guidance systems, the authorities had no viable means of dealing with it. There had even been the idea of dropping a nuclear bomb in Tokyo Bay, but the argument that "nuclear weapons didn't work on the Flying Jellyfish, so they wouldn't work on their presumed boss, the black sphere," was too persuasive.

"So, the thinking was that as long as we don't provoke them, they won't make a move," Shiki summed up as she crunched on *senbei* crackers. Meanwhile, Rushia was eagerly asking for seconds of the water *yokan* jellied dessert that Shiki's grandma had brought.

*This princess... It's like her mind is completely focused on food now.*

Shiki's grandmother laughed, bringing over more treats like *dango* and *konpeito*, all nostalgic sweets. "We've got lots of sweets left over," she said. "Don't be shy, help yourselves."

Rushia, without any hesitation and seemingly oblivious to our conversation, eagerly began to demolish the mountain of sweets with a cheerful "OK!"

"Can I ask something?" I said. "With a thing like that in Tokyo Bay, it seems like people in Tokyo are going about their business as usual?"

"Well, if the trains are running, people go to work, and it's not like schools are closed."

*Ah, yes. If the trains are running, salarymen have to go to work... The fact that Shibuya seemed unchanged until we appeared could reflect Japanese people's—for better or worse—lack of a sense of crisis...*

This indifference had also, inadvertently, led to a massacre by the skeletons.

"But surely now that those monsters have appeared in Shibuya, there will be a day off tomorrow."

“Ah, that makes sense.”

“You all took care of them, right? Thank you.”

It hadn't taken the family long to figure out what role we'd played today. Well, it wasn't hard to guess, especially since Shiki had mentioned, “The skeletons came back with us,” and a bit of thought would lead one to that conclusion. Plus, Kayla's appearance had been broadcast on TV. Honestly, if we were going to walk outside from now on, we would need to disguise her blue hair with some illusion or a wig.

“That child with the unusual hair, is she... from the other world?”

“Uh, it's kind of complicated, but Kayla is essentially my kid,” I explained. And the person from the other world here eating sweets is Rushia.”

Shiki's grandfather's eyes widened in surprise. Rushia sat looking puzzled, a piece of *senbei* stuck to her cheek. Indeed, her hair was a beautiful silver, her eyes red, and her ears came to a point.



“Is one of the girls playing with the blue-haired kid in the other room her mother?”

“Uh, the one who might be considered the mother isn’t with us right now due to... various reasons. Oh, but both of them are my partners. And so is Rushia over there.”

“Kazu-kun, maybe we shouldn’t go into that much detail,” Shiki interjected. “It’s a bit complicated. Uh, Grandpa, we’d appreciate it if you didn’t worry too much about it.”

Her grandfather chuckled and scratched his head. “Being young sure is something,” he observed.

“That kind of acceptance is, well, a bit... uh...” I began.

“So, is Yukariko one of your partners, too?” the old man asked.

“No, she’s not,” I assured him.

Just then, we all heard the sound of a dog barking in the distance. Well, not a dog per se, but Coeurl, who had been hiding outside with magic. It seemed the monster was signaling to us.

Shiki and I exchanged glances and nodded subtly to each other.

It was time to change the subject. Shiki asked, “So, Grandpa, Grandma, who were you calling earlier?”

## Chapter 231: The Magician

**W**e had already considered the risks and benefits of visiting Shiki's family... including the possibility that they would report us to the police. I mean, our group did look quite suspicious, especially with Rushia and Kayla, and our hidden weapons like swords and spears—which we'd stashed in the underbrush of a nearby park. As a precaution, we'd asked Coeurl to wait outside Shiki's house. In our situation, getting involved with the government in any way would simply be too risky.

Clearly, sitting here and having a leisurely chat was no longer an option.

"Kazu-kun, go," Shiki urged without getting up. "Let's do what needs to be done."

"Got it. You take care of things here. Rushia, let's go."

Just as Rushia and I stood up, Shiki's grandfather spoke. "Wait a minute, please. That call wasn't to the police. I'm sorry for not saying anything... but it was a request from the other party."

*"The other party? Wait, Grandpa, what do you mean by that...?"*

Just then, the doorbell rang, and Shiki's grandmother hurried to answer it. "Yes, yes, coming!"

*Ah, well, the way she's acting doesn't really scream "police"... right?*

When the front door opened, I heard the raspy voice of an older man. So, someone else was inside the house now... but I couldn't hear any footsteps.

"Be careful, Kazu. This person is a master," Rushia whispered, tension written plainly across her face.

The seriousness of her warning might have been more impactful if not for the whipped cream smeared across her cheek.

"A master? What do you mean?"

“Let’s at least see who we’re dealing with,” suggested Shiki. None of us objected. After all, if we truly exerted ourselves, we could probably handle even an Olympic level judo or kendo champion.

A moment later, an elderly man walked in, dressed in a suit. Though a head shorter than me, he stood straight with his arms behind his back. His head was completely shaven, but he sported a full beard. His face was stern, marked by a deep scar on his forehead, and his slightly reddened eyes glared intensely at each of us in turn before he shifted his gaze toward our backs.

Turning around, we saw Arisu, Tamaki, and Kayla returning to the room. Arisu and Tamaki looked immediately wary of the old man. Meanwhile, Kayla pointed sharply at him.

“Ninja!”

“That’s not it, not quite,” the old man said, chuckling. “That’s just what my disciples claim to be.”

“So, a ninja master!”

“Hmm, that’s a good title,” he mused, and suddenly he looked much more like a friendly grandfather.

“Wait, did you just say... ninja?”

*Could this really be a coincidence? But that’s just too much for coincidence. What’s going on here?*

My mind was a whirl of confusion. Shiki slammed the table and stood up in frustration.

“Hey, wait a minute, Grandpa, Grandma, what’s going on here?” she demanded, but her grandparents seemed as baffled as she was.

Shiki’s voice rose almost to a shriek as she demanded, “Why is Keiko-san’s master here? Do you two know this person? Why is he acting like he knew we were coming here?!”

The man laughed warmly, unfazed by Shiki’s outburst. “Please, take a seat,” he invited as he himself settled on the opposite side of the table. Even sitting in *seiza* on the cushion and keeping his back straight, resting his posterior on his

ankles as he kneeled, he was shorter than Shiki. He took a sip of the tea Shiki's grandmother had brought, lighting up as if it was the most delicious thing he'd had all week.

*This man... Everything about him seems different from when he first came in. Is he really Keiko-san's master? He speaks fluent Japanese, but didn't Keiko say he was a Chinese Aikido master?*

After Shiki's grandparents excused themselves with a "We'll leave the rest to you," the old man began to speak.

"Is Keiko doing well?"

*Okay, so he is the master Keiko-san mentioned... What should we talk about with him?*

"Papa," Kayla greeted me as she cleverly slid into my lap. Arisu and Tamaki stood behind me, quietly observing the ninja master.

Just as I was about to start the conversation, Shiki halted me with a look. Then she said, "She's doing very well, fighting monsters alongside Yuuki-senpai, even without combat skills."

"Is that so, is that so. I don't quite understand what you mean by 'without combat skills,' but I'm glad to hear it. It seems the training was worth it."

I understood exactly what Shiki was trying to do: to find out if the elderly man was aware of monsters and skills.

"I'll ask you directly," she continued, "are you our enemy or our ally?"

"Ally, of course," the old man replied easily, showing a friendly smile.

All of us felt the tension leave our bodies.

"That's why I came here. I knew you would visit this place within a few days. And no, you don't need to doubt anything about Yukariko-san's family."

While words can easily be manipulated, there was a strangely persuasive power in the old man's speech that made us feel like we could trust him. Yet, Shiki still seemed unsatisfied.

"How did you know we would come?"



“It was a prophecy. Told by a shrine maiden. Oh, and please, call me Wan.”

Wan, a common enough name for a Chinese person... though it sounded like it could be an alias. But that wasn't really our concern. But what about this prophecy and shrine maiden? Our understanding of the world seemed to crumble a little more with each new piece of information.

“So, Mr. Wan, how much do you know about what's happened to us, and what's happening in the world right now?”

“How much, you ask? It's difficult to summarize in a few words. But to put it briefly, this world is under invasion. The source of the invasion is that black sphere floating above Tokyo Bay...”

Invasion—that was a critical piece of information. It indicated that Wan was fully aware of the existence of other worlds.

“That entity, turned into a World Eater, will soon consume this world, that much I can tell you.”

*Ah, another new term has appeared: World Eater. Literally, an entity that consumes worlds... right?*

“I believe it's an entity from the world we were in just a while ago,” Shiki told him. “It seemed to have lost interest in that world. Why does it need to consume this one?”

“Because this world doesn't have a ‘Wedge.’”

*Ah, a wedge. It all comes back to that, but...*

Suddenly, it struck me. Could we all have had a colossal misunderstanding? Assuming the myths of that other world were entirely true?

“What exactly is a ‘wedge’ in this context?” Shiki asked the question before I could. The old man smirked.

“Literally, it's something that binds. It's a restraint that anchors worlds adrift in the void. It has immense energy by nature, but it's also utilized by those who traverse worlds—Planeswalkers—for its energy. They use a tremendous amount of energy to move between worlds.”

Behind me, I could sense Arisu and Tamaki's confusion. Even Rushia looked somewhat perplexed.

Kayla, sitting on my lap, was blissfully eating Baumkuchen.

"So, what exactly are these world-traveling entities... Planeswalkers? That black sphere... the Demon Lord, is it one of those, or is it something else?"

"I can't say for certain. However, this world has experienced visits from such beings multiple times in the past. Once every few hundred years, so this is the first time in the modern era. Each time, people like us have repelled their invasions."

"So, then..."

"But this one is quite special. How it grew into something like that... We have no way of dealing with it."

For the first time, Mr. Wan's tone showed a hint of perplexity.

*Wait, hold on. Are we at a dead end here? Aren't you supposed to be the helper character prepared for us?*

## Chapter 232: The Planeswalker

“There’s always been a limit to what we can do. In the past, we’ve never been able to defeat those kind of beings; at best, we’ve just managed to drive them away.”

*Ah, Mr. Wan mentioned “we” there. So, he’s not alone; there’s some group backing him.*

“Do you think your organization will be able to drive it away this time?” I asked.

“That’s difficult. That’s why I’ve come to consult with you.”

*Wow, if even he says that...*

“We’re not sure how well we can deal with this kind of opponent, either,” Shiki told him. “If we could defeat it, we would have done it in the other world.”

“Indeed. If only there was some way...”

“I’ll defeat the World Eater!” Kayla interrupted cheerfully. She had just swallowed a bite of *Baumkuchen* cake, and she licked her fingers before adding, “That’s why I came here!”

Mr. Wan narrowed his eyes at Kayla, who straightened her back and met his gaze head-on.

“I see, I see.” Eventually, the old man crinkled his already wrinkled face into a smile, and Kayla, catching the mood, grinned back.

*Aww, what a heartwarming exchange...*

“Is that all right with you, young lady?” Mr. Wan asked her.

“It’s what I was born for!”

“Then, I have nothing more to say.”

*Wait, hold on. Doesn’t that sound a bit ominous?*

“Kayla, are you hiding something from us?” I asked.

Kayla tilted her head innocently, and it looked for all the world like she had nothing to hide.

“Kayla, you mentioned that using your power to defeat the Demon Lord won’t cause any bad outcomes. You’re not planning on performing a suicide attack, are you?” I pressed.

“Suicide attacks are romantic, you know?”

“That sounds like something Mia would say... but that’s not the point!”

“Don’t worry. Kayla will be fine,” Mr. Wan said.

I glanced at him, and he replied with only a kind smile.

“We might have different definitions of ‘fine,’” Shiki murmured.

*Ah, should we have considered that possibility too?*

“Kayla, your body, your spirit, they won’t be harmed by using your power to defeat the Demon Lord?”

“Nope!”

“I see... Well, Mia wouldn’t let her daughter do something as dangerous as a kamikaze attack, right?”

*Am I overthinking this?* I wondered. *Well, nothing wrong with that, I guess.*

*But then, what does our conversation with Mr. Wan imply? It’s concerning, but maybe pondering over it won’t help.*

“To get straight to the point, could you tell us what kind of support you can offer?”

“Our direct support in combat might be limited,” he advised.

“What about indirect support?”

“We’re prepared to deploy a wide-area barrier around Tokyo Bay.”

*A wide-area barrier, huh?*

Rushia paused her enthusiastic eating to say, “Barriers can vary. Elder, what kind of barrier are we talking about?”

“It’s called a boundary barrier. It temporarily severs external paths, effectively cutting off the flow of magical energy from rifts used by those who traverse worlds.”

*Boundary barrier. World travelers. Blocking magical energy from world rifts.*

Although a lot of new terms had been introduced, I figured I’d grasped the essence of the conversation. The Demon Lord possessed infinite magical power, thanks to the power of the Wedge. And this barrier would sever the connection with the Wedge, blocking off that source of magic. Having infinite magical power can make any adversary extremely troublesome, as I’d demonstrated yesterday evening against Azagralith. If the flow of magic could be shut out, there might be a sliver of hope against even the most formidable foes...

*With Kayla here, I’d like to believe we stand a chance.*

“When can you activate this barrier?” Shiki inquired.

Mr. Wan replied that the personnel deployment was already complete. His group had been operating in the shadows, dealing with threats on their own if possible, or seeking—or waiting for—those who could. And now, we had arrived, as foretold by their prophecy, leading Mr. Wan to come to us.

*Is it just an incredible coincidence that he’s the Greater Ninja’s master, or was that part of their plans all along?*

“I see. Can I ask something that’s a bit off-topic?” Shiki continued.

“Please, go ahead, young lady.”

“Did you and your group rig the underground of our school?”

“There was a prophecy stating it should be done. However, I only learned of that department’s activities yesterday.”

Shiki and I exchanged looks.

“Does that mean the Wedge too?”

“The Wedge... I’m afraid I can’t say much about that.”

Okay, so Mr. Wan’s organization was only responsible for the cavity beneath our high school campus. They were unaware of the dungeon-like area beneath

the middle school.

This revelation left us with more questions than answers.

“Perhaps during the transition, a fusion of spaces occurred,” Mr. Wan speculated after some thought. I nodded in understanding. Something like the Wedge couldn’t possibly be made in this world. According to the myths, it was gods who had created the Wedge. But there was no point in dwelling on that now.

“What about going back to the other world? Do you know how we can do that? Or how to bring back the kids who are still in that world to this one?” Shiki asked.

“If you can defeat the being that traverses worlds—the Planeswalker—residing in that rift, it should be possible to use it. I don’t know the specifics, though...”

“I see. Thank you.”

Shiki’s reasoning made sense to me. She probably assumed that either Mia or Kayla had secured a way back to the other world. And then, there was what Mr. Wan knew about the two worlds—about moving between them, what knowledge this Earth held, or whether Planeswalkers might act maliciously toward the other world in the future.

This was probably also why she’d asked about the school’s setup earlier. *Either way, she’s determined to get back there, isn’t she?*

*Even with such nice parents and grandparents here; a safe, normal life...*

Shiki chose not the warmth of her family but her subordinates, the thirty-some girls. She was ready to abandon everything, even her loving family, to return to that world of carnage.

All Mr. Wan said was, “Is that so?”

“What about the government’s stance?” she asked him.

“We’ve managed to have them comply with our wishes. Just now, we’ve evacuated all ships from Tokyo Bay. Evacuation orders have been issued for the entire bay area.”

*Wait, these guys can tell the Japanese government what to do?*

“That’s why I’ve come here, now that the evacuation procedures are complete.”

“Everything’s been arranged, then?” Shiki sighed.

It was fine by me, though. In the six days since we’d been sent to that other world, we’d continuously been the ace up everyone’s sleeve, shouldering myriad expectations, sometimes without even realizing it.

This time, it was the same deal. We had to overpower our enemy with our strength alone, even if that enemy was the Demon King.

“It’s too bad,” Shiki sighed. “I wanted to spend some time with my family. I haven’t even seen my dad’s face yet.”

“Oh, Shiki, you can stay here,” I offered. “You’d just be in the way on the battlefield.”

She glared fiercely.

*H-hey, glaring at me like that isn’t going to scare me... much?*

I lost the battle of stares and averted my gaze.

“But, Shiki, it’s true you’d be slowing us down.”

“I know, but! And what about after we defeat it? If we have to go back right away... What do you think, Kayla?”

“Hmm...” Kayla placed her hand on her chin, gazing up at the ceiling. “Probably, not much time?”

“See, I told you.”

“But, it’s just too dangerous...”

At that moment, another of Coeurl’s barks echoed from outside.

This bark sounded different, and we could all feel the tension ripple through the room.

“We don’t have any time to lose. Sounds like monsters have shown up near —”

Shiki's words were drowned out by the ringing of a cell phone, which Mr. Wan took from his pocket.

After a brief conversation, he turned to us. "Bones... Skeletons, whatever they're called? They're heading this way."



## Chapter 233: The Battle in the Neighborhood – Part 1

**“W**e have to defeat the monsters!” Tamaki sprang into action, dashing for the front door.

“Wait, Tamaki! We need our weapons first!”

“Oh, right. Which way was it again?”

“To the right, toward the park!”

Tamaki and Arisu scurried down the hallway, and Rushia got up to join them. Kayla bounced up from my lap and ran off, waving back at me. “I’m off, Papa!”

“Shiki, you should stay here.”

“Wouldn’t I be safest by your side?” she retorted.

“Well... maybe it’s best you have some time with your family,” I hesitated.

Shiki offered a wistful smile. “There’s no time to convince them. I might as well slip away while everyone’s distracted.”

“No, that can’t be the best—” I objected, but she insisted.

“It’s fine. I’m...”

I realized then.

Having heard her true feelings on the second day, I understood Yukariko Shiki hadn’t forgiven herself for her friend’s death. She wanted to suffer. Pointless as it might seem, her zeal in leading and inspiring us all stemmed from this very remorse.

So, I couldn’t just deny her this curse-like passion that pierced her heart.

“All right. Shall we go then?”

“Sure. Mr. Wan, would you...”

“I might be a burden to you, but might I accompany you?” he inquired.

Unlike us, he didn't have a concept of levels, so taking even a single hit could prove deadly for him.

"Well, Shiki will be in the same situation, so sure, you can come with us. Let's go Shiki."

"Okay."

We nodded at each other and filed out of the room. In the hallway, Shiki's mother and grandmother were waiting.

"I'll be back soon," Shiki told them hurriedly before turning away. Her lips tightened, hidden from her family's view.

Of course, it must have been painful. Just when she'd finally returned home to a place where she could relax, she was about to leave it all behind again—and without even a proper goodbye.

"Yukariko," her mother called out as we were putting on our shoes.

"What?" Shiki asked without turning back.

"You'll come back soon, won't you?"

"Yes, of course."

I finished tying my shoes first and turned around. I could tell Shiki was using all her willpower to keep from crying.

*Ah, what an idiot. It would be so much better if she could be more honest with her feelings. But this isn't the place for me to say so.*

"I'm off then."

Her shoes tied, Shiki brushed past me and left, not once meeting her mother's gaze. I caught a fleeting glimpse of the woman's face as I stood by the entrance.

She appeared on the verge of tears, a mirror image of Shiki's pained expression.

*Ah... Of course. She's Shiki's mother. She must have long understood the subtleties of her daughter's heart.* I wondered if Shiki realized how much like her mother she was.

I silently bowed to Shiki's mom before leaving the house and falling into step behind Shiki and Mr. Wan, who was still coordinating with his comrades on the phone.

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According to Mr. Wan's associates, about thirty monsters, comprised of skeletons in robes and skeletons armed with swords and spears, were advancing toward us. They were divided into four teams. "Please, feel free to fight to your heart's content," a ninja master told us. "We've already completed evacuations along their path."

"When did that happen?"

"I had given instructions to my associates before I arrived here," Mr. Wan replied, a gleeful smile on his face.

*Wow, so when he came into Shiki's house, preparations were already underway? They must have targeted this entire area for evacuation... What a feat.*

"By the way, can your organization defeat these skeletons?" I asked him.

"We've had reports of a few being taken down, but at the cost of some sacrifices."

*I see, even Mr. Wan's associates are having trouble with these skeletons. And from the way he's talking, I can tell that whoever defeated them didn't level up. So, the privilege of leveling up is exclusive to us... probably since we were on the school mountain on that day, at that time.*

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Minutes later, we sat in an alleyway, barely breathing as we awaited our enemies. At Mr. Wan's signal, we sprang into action.

Seven skeletons that had entered the one-way street—Rushia immobilized them with a tempest of ice thanks to Frost Storm, a Rank 8 Water spell. Then, Arisu and Tamaki charged in. They had refrained from using attack magic

outright to protect nearby houses, but now they were going all out—presuming Wan’s organization would likely compensate for any damage. With Kayla’s slingshot providing cover, the robed skeletons fell one by one; with Arisu and Tamaki’s level of experience, they didn’t stand a chance.

“Level up,” Shiki announced after our frontline had taken down the fifth skeleton.

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The instant we all arrived in the White Room, Shiki began talking quickly. “Okay, let’s summarize everything we’ve heard so far.”

“Wait, Shiki,” Rushia interjected. “You should sort out your feelings first.”

“Feelings? What do you...?”

“You look like you’re about to cry right now,” Rushia observed.

Shiki bit her lip and turned away. The princess of a fallen kingdom looked at me with a lonely expression, her elongated ears twitching slightly. She probably didn’t want me to say anything unnecessary.

“Shiki, I don’t know what struggles you’re facing inside, because you haven’t shared them with me. Kazu seems to have some idea, so if it helps, you could talk to him...”

“No need. Sorry, just give me a moment,” Shiki said, transforming the adjacent room into a meadow and entering it alone. I could tell from her posture that she did *not* want to be followed—she was determined to resolve this issue by herself.

“That stubborn girl,” I muttered.

“Um... Are you sure it’s okay to leave her alone?” Arisu said.

“It’s okay, Arisu,” I reassured her. “If Shiki doesn’t need us...” Any meddling on our part would only continue to afflict Shiki’s heart, especially since her biggest struggle was her inability to forgive herself.

“By the way, Kayla, I saw Mr. Wan gave you a bag earlier. What’s in it?”

“Sling bullets!” Kayla proudly puffed out her chest, holding up the cloth bag. I peered inside and saw that it was indeed full of silver balls for slingshots.

“I asked for more bullets! They’re more powerful than rocks.”

“You’re pretty clever,” I noted.

“Mama told me you can also turn money into metal!”

*Oh, Mia, what have you been teaching this kid?*

## Chapter 234: The Battle in the Neighborhood – Part 2

A few minutes later, Yukariko Shiki was back in the main room with us, arms crossed over her chest, back slightly arched, and a rather bashful smile playing on her lips.

“Sorry about that. I’m fine now,” she told us, although only she knew whether that was true. The trouble with her was that she was better at hiding her feelings than any of us.

We sat in our usual circle, with Kayla perched on my lap.

“Let’s start by sorting through the information. About what Wan mentioned...” As usual, Shiki took the lead in the discussion, and I think we were all grateful to take our minds off the heavy topics we’d been thinking about. The existence of an organization operating in the shadows against interdimensional drifters was shocking enough.

“Unfortunately, we can’t rely on them. In the end, it seems we’re the only ones who can defeat that crazy black sphere called the ‘Demon King.’ No, to be exact... Kayla, it’s all up to you.”

“Leave it to me!” Kayla threw up her arms in excitement, accidentally hitting my chin with the back of her head. Painful for me, amusing for Shiki.

“Okay, Kayla, listen carefully. We have to defeat the Demon King no matter what. Even if it means putting yourself in danger. Our priority is achieving our goal, not keeping you safe. Is that clear?”

“Wait, Shiki—”

“All right!” Kayla interrupted my protest, again puffing out her chest in pride. “Papa, you worry too much!” she added.

“Well, of course I do. I mean, it’s my daughter’s safety we’re talking about here.”

“I’m gonna become a bride someday, you know that, right?”

*“What are you talking about that for?! You’re like, ten.” And just so we’re clear, I, as a father, will absolutely not allow you to date some random guy. Absolutely not.*

“Anyway, let’s get back on topic,” Shiki said. “Ultimately, Kayla is essential for defeating the Demon King, so Kazu and the rest of us will be sure to protect her.”

“I’m happy to be so cherished!”

“Indeed. Essentially, as Shiki said, our battle strategy will revolve around protecting Kayla and getting her to the Demon King,” Rushia summarized.

“The problem is whether we can even reach the Demon King,” said Shiki. “Surveillance equipment, remote helicopters, drones... None of those could make it to him. We don’t know whether that’s because of space distortion, some kind of field, or magic that confuses perception...”

“Maybe we can get past it with Dimensional Step or Shape Lightning,” I pondered.

“Another issue is the enemy’s strength. If the Demon King sends multiple Flying Jellyfish, we’re in for trouble.”

*Ah, that’s right. Flying Jellyfish are those annoying monsters that are immune to physical attacks. Arisu and Tamaki would struggle. We might manage, sort of, with alternative attack methods, but...*

*The real firepower comes down to Rushia and Kayla’s magic, and my familiars. If the enemy relies on numbers, we’ll be in a tight spot.*

“What’s more, with how many undead there are here, I think there’s a strong possibility that Ghost King Diasnexus is in this world, too.”

“Hey, what about Algrafth? Can’t he defeat the ghosts?” Tamaki asked.

Shiki shook her head. “I doubt it. The fact that Coeurl admitted he couldn’t contact Algrafth suggests he might not have been able to come to this world.”

“So, we have to face the Demon King and one of the Four Heavenly Kings at the same time, huh?”

We'd always known this was a possibility, but it didn't make it any less intimidating.

*Facing the Demon King, a Heavenly King, and the Flying Jellyfish all at once... That's not just difficult; that's a monumental challenge.*

"I'd prefer if we could defeat the Ghost King first, then tackle the Demon King with some breathing room."

"Kazu, do you have any ideas?"

"Maybe if we just keep crushing his minions, he'll get mad and show himself."

It was worth a shot.

Shiki snorted in amusement. *Damn it.*

"So, you have a plan then?"

"I think we should ask Mr. Wan's organization for help."

"Ask them to look for the Ghost King? Think that'll work?"

*The Ghost King has got to be a high level magician, I thought. He's bound to use invisibility, which will make a visual search impossible.*

"Besides, we're short on time. There's probably no way we can organize a widespread search."

"We don't need them to deploy personnel, but perhaps they could use some other abilities they have."

*Other abilities? What's that, being mysterious again?*

"Ah, right, they knew we were coming to Shiki's house."

"Right. So, I asked them earlier in the park if they could use their magic to find the leader of the undead, Ghost King Diasnexus."

*When did she manage that?* I wondered. Then I remembered seeing them talking privately earlier. What an incredibly vigilant person.

"They said it might be possible with a catalyst."

"A catalyst... So, they'd perform some ritual with it?"



“Sounds like it. They said the more closely related to Diasnexus, the better... Kazu, do you have any leads?”

*Hmm, something related to Diasnexus, huh? That sounds tough to find... but wait.*

“I’m curious, will Mr. Wan be performing the ritual himself? I feel like it would be complicated if we had to bring it to a lab or something.”

“Apparently, one of his colleagues is waiting near here. They can use some sort of search magic.”

“All right, that’s convenient then. Let’s ask them for help.”

I shared my idea with everyone.

“Are you sure that will work?” Arisu asked, unusually doubtful of my suggestion.

Well, I couldn’t blame her. The catalyst we were thinking of wasn’t exactly... conventional.

“If it doesn’t work out, we’ll think of something else. We’re not even sure if we can get to the ritual part.”

“But I think Kazu’s plan is worth trying.”

“I think we should try it, too.”

“Yeah, if it works, we’ll be ahead of the game!”

“Papa can do it! Go for it!”

*No, Kayla, that’s not it. Everyone needs to work hard; this can’t just be me giving orders from behind.*

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Following our discussion, Yukariko Shiki looked around at us and said, “By the way... I wanted to ask. Kazu, Arisu, Tamaki—aren’t you going to see your families one last time? I understand you’re ready to leave this world behind, but shouldn’t you at least say goodbye to your families first?”

The three of us that Shiki had named exchanged glances before giving wry smiles.

“Arisu and I are, well, technically part of a foster family, and our relationship with them wasn’t... the best,” Tamaki answered.

“Exactly,” Arisu agreed. “It’s too late now.”

“But, what about you, Kazu? Come to think of it, you’ve never mentioned your family.”

*My family, huh... She’s right, I haven’t talked about them.*

“It’s not that we had a *bad* relationship, but, well, it doesn’t really matter.”

“If you’re just being considerate because of us...”

“It’s not that. It’s really not my problem. A big part of why I went to a private school with a dorm was because my parents wanted me out of the house.”

To them, taking care of me had been more of an obligation they had to fulfill.

I understood how they felt, and I didn’t think it was worth rebelling over. I also didn’t think they were worth hating or getting angry over.

“If I had to say, it’s more like indifference... So, yeah, it really doesn’t matter to me.”

“But you went to a cram school in Shibuya, so you must have lived pretty close by.”

“Well, yeah. But the fact that I don’t feel any inclination to visit says it all.”

Shiki didn’t press any further; she could probably tell how I felt from looking at my face.

“All right. After we defeat the Demon King, we’ll all head back to the other world. As soon as we find a way back, we’ll leave this world behind. That’s the plan, right?”

“Yeah, that’s the plan. Earth isn’t our home anymore. It may have only been a few days, but the other world has become our new home.”

I looked at Rushia. The elf girl gave a small nod and a graceful bow. “As a representative of the other world, I welcome you, visitors.”

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Shiki gained seven skill points, enabling her to increase her Reconnaissance skill to Level 7—which did a lot to enhance her safety and, by extension, the safety of the entire group.

SHIKI	
LEVEL:  17	RECONNAISSANCE:  7
THROWING:  3	SKILL POINTS:  7→ 0

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Back in the alley, the fight continued with five skeletons remaining. Following the strategy we’d discussed, the plan was to reduce the enemy’s numbers swiftly.

“Until there’s only one left, let’s take them down fast.”

“Got it, let’s go!”

“Leave it to us!”

Arisu and Tamaki worked furiously, obliterating the skeletons.

Wan looked on in amazement. “This is... impressive,” he murmured.

“It’s all thanks to our skills.”

“Seeing it in person, it’s truly a remarkable system.”

*Our ability to fight and grow infinitely stronger is all thanks to our skills. And moving forward...*

“Oops.” Tamaki let out a sheepish cry. Her sweeping attack had inadvertently annihilated the remaining two skeletons.

“Sorry, Kazu. I ended up taking down the last one, too.”

“Ah, come on, that was supposed to be about incapacitating it, not killing it. The plan was to use that last skeleton as a catalyst to pinpoint the Ghost King’s location,” I explained with a sigh.

The strategy I had devised was based on the premise that if the Ghost King attempted to evade us, we could employ a detection spell to locate him. Given that Mr. Wan and his group had seen us coming, it stood to reason they might be able to perform detection spells.

When I’d asked him, Mr. Wan had indeed confirmed this, and he’d even agreed to my plan. However, the effectiveness of the detection spell hinged on having a catalyst linked to Diasnexus, hence the idea to capture one of his summoned skeletons.

Now, that plan was in ruins.

We all slumped, disappointment weighing heavily on us. Despite the enhancements granted by our skills, it seemed we were still prone to bouts of carelessness.

## Chapter 235: The Battle in the Neighborhood – Part 3

No matter how good your skills are, they can't make up for a lack of genuine combat experience. Tamaki, despite having engaged in battle after battle over the past five days, simply lacked the judgment that comes from decades of experience. So, I thought, as I watched the skeleton vanish, *it's not entirely her fault that she accidentally defeated it.*

She looked on the verge of tears, and I offered her a forgiving smile. "Don't sweat it. There are still enemy groups out there; just make it right next time."

"Yes, I'll try harder," Tamaki resolved, her fist clenched. *It's kind of cute how clumsy she is,* I thought.

"Clumsy mama..."

"Wait, Kayla! Some thoughts are best kept inside. Don't say them out loud."

"Huh? What'd I miss?" Tamaki asked.

Good, she hadn't heard. *Safe, safe, safe.*

"You all seem close," Wan observed with a smile.

Shiki sighed, hands on her hips. "Sorry for the lack of tension. They're always like this."

"I can see you're not being careless. If anything, you're all on edge. It's just that your bodies are moving a bit too much."

*Too much movement, then? Could this be a drawback of our skills?*

"With time, you'll learn to moderate your actions. You have good intuition," Mr. Wan complimented us.

"Thank you," I managed to say, somewhat awkwardly.

*Arisu, for sure, but Tamaki? No, he's right—Tamaki's reflexes are exceptionally sharp.*

The two of them were just too straightforward. Without a certain aptitude for battle and conflict, surviving thus far would have been challenging. But Tamaki possessed a resilience that didn't falter even in defeat. This was something we all understood well.

"Anyway, we need to eliminate all the enemies... Mr. Wan, where should we head next?"

Each skeleton dropped two blue gems, indicating they were around Level 10. After collecting the tokens, we followed Mr. Wan's directions. He was busily pointing here and there while glaring at his phone screen... which was displaying Google Maps.

*Of course, I thought with an internal sigh. Relying on Google's technology would be more effective than any mystical method of divination. There's really no need... no need to be disillusioned.*

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The next group consisted of six skeletons, none in robes. It seemed like an easy victory until...

"Here I go!"

"Wait, Tamaki, hold on!"

Forgetting the previous incident, Tamaki charged toward the skeleton squad ten meters ahead. Arisu hurried after her. Kayla peeked around the corner, providing cover with her slingshot and pulverizing the head of one skeleton... but then, one of the sword-bearing skeletons began to chant a spell.

*Oh no, I haven't cast any magic that could see through illusions.*

"Take that one down first! It's probably a mage in disguise!"

"Right! Golden Kaiser Ultra Fire!"

"Wait, no, that's not—"

As Tamaki swung her black sword, she unleashed a golden beam.

It was indeed an “ultra golden” beam, but the “kaiser” and “fire” parts were baffling. Perhaps due to being overly charged, the unusually thick beam engulfed the narrow alley. In the process of wiping out the skeletons, it also gouged out about half of a utility pole and struck directly into a building across the street. A cloud of dust rose... and when it settled, the building was left with a large hole in it.

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Shortly afterward, we found ourselves back in the White Room, all silently staring at Tamaki, who stood with her back to us, quivering like a rusty door as she turned around.

“Mama Tamaki, the spacey one!”

“Hey, Tamaki, gonna work off the damage?”

“I can’t cover for that one...”

Kayla, Shiki, and Arisu each shook their heads in their unique way.

“I’m so sorry!”

“It’s a pity, Tamaki. If apologies were enough, we wouldn’t need the police...”

Shiki lightly placed her hand on Tamaki’s shoulder, shaking her head and then offering a smile to the pale-faced Tamaki. “I wonder how much that building will cost. I doubt a hundred or two hundred million would cover it.”

“Eeeek!”

“Just kidding. It’ll be fine; Mr. Wan and his team will handle it. Let’s just say it was necessary.”

“That’s right. Given that we didn’t know what kind of magic the mage might use, acting fast was a good idea,” Rushia added.

It was good to see not only Shiki but also Rushia backing Tamaki up. Yes, perhaps we’d become a bit too complacent since returning to Earth. If this had been the other world, unleashing our full power in the middle of town without hesitation would have been just another day.

“Well, that’s true. If the mage had used a high-powered spell, that whole area might have turned into a sea of flames.”

“Y-Yeah, Kazu!”

“But let’s try to be more aware of our surroundings in future battles.”

“Uh, okay...”

I patted the dejected Tamaki on the head, and the spirited girl happily snorted in comfort.

“So, we have two more groups of skeletons to discover, right?”

“Yep. Tamaki, next time, please be extra careful...”

“Don’t worry! This time, I’ll do it right for sure!”

Perhaps encouraged by the head pat, Tamaki energetically clenched her fist. I glanced at Arisu, who was giving a hint of a smile next to her. *I’ll back her up*, she mouthed.





For Arisu, who supported her endearingly clumsy partner like one would their spouse, failure wasn't an option next time. This was a pair I earnestly hoped would stay together.

*Hold on, who are the couples here again...? I seem to remember that each of them have had boyfriends...*

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This time, it was Rushia and Kayla who had leveled up. With five skill points accumulated, Rushia upgraded her Fire-Water Composite Magic to Rank 2. Her abilities, or rather her magic spells, Cold Inferno and Water Flare Shield, were naturally enhanced.

RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 50	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 5→0
FIRE-WATER COMPOSITE MAGIC: 1→2 (Cold Inferno 1→2, Water Flare Shield 1→2)	

KAYLA	
LEVEL: 52	WIND MAGIC: 9
SHOOTING: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4
WIND SHOOTING TECHNIQUE: 2 (Enhanced Shooting Technique 2, Freestyle Bullet 2)	

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After leaving the White Room, we had a chat with Mr. Wan about the hole we'd accidentally made in the building wall.

"Don't worry," he assured us, "things like this happen all the time. Just focus on defeating the enemies without overdoing it too much."

Tamaki let out a huge sigh of relief. "I thought I was going to be sold off..." she murmured.

In any case, on to the next one. Fortunately, the skeletons didn't seem to have much strength, but this meant we had to proceed with extreme caution.

"Let's head down this alleyway."

"Using Google Maps again?"

"No, my colleague is guiding us this time."

Keeping up the conversation with Mr. Wan, we jogged through the city. He may have been older and dressed in a suit, but his movements were agile. I expected no less from Keiko's master.

"Looks like the next group has about ten; any problems?" Mr. Wan asked. This time, the skeletons were boldly marching down a deserted main street, armed with swords and shields.

"With our forces, we could handle twenty or even thirty."

I could also summon familiars if it came to it.

We watched the monsters from our perch atop a building roof, using True Sight to check if anything more serious was hiding among the skeletons. Nope, they all seemed to be regular skeletons.

"Kayla, can you snipe one at the waist, make it so it can't stand?"

"You got it!"

"Good. Tamaki, dive in with Fly and smash the shoulders of whichever one Kayla hits, then pick it up and isolate it on a roof somewhere. Arisu, take out the rest in the meantime. Rushia, keep supporting us with small-scale magic as needed."

Roles decided, we sprang into action. Kayla's long-range slingshot sniping took one skeleton down. Immediately, Arisu and Tamaki swooped in from above.

"I won't fail this time!" Tamaki cried. Her powerful slash hit the downed skeleton's right shoulder, sending it flying. When it hit the ground, the skeleton crumbled.

"Ah, ah, aaaaah!"

"It's okay, Tamaki, over here!"

Arisu's thrust shattered a skeleton's pelvis. *Nice assist. Now, Tamaki, it's your turn...*

"Whoa, if it's come to this!"

Tamaki dropped her sword and grabbed the fallen skeleton.

"Hey, hey, hey!"

Ignoring our frantic cries, Tamaki gripped the skeleton's sword-wielding hand tightly...

"Take this!"

She crushed the bony hand. A dull, crunching sound echoed as the monster's sword fell to the asphalt.

"Take that!"

Tamaki then shattered the skeleton's shoulder bones with pure brute force. The skeleton was now deprived of its lower body and arms, but it was still trying to bite her...

"Not happening!"

Tamaki firmly grasped the bony neck. She then lifted what was left of the skeleton, just a head and torso, into the air.

"Look, look, Kazu! I did it!"

The powerfully strong girl beamed triumphantly. What a barbaric scene.

## Chapter 236: The Battle in the Neighborhood – Part 4

**T**amaki had finally succeeded in capturing a skeleton, completing the mission. All that remained was to eliminate the rest of the enemies.

“Flame Javelin!” Rushia unleashed a spear of fire.

“White Cannon!” Kayla struck with a beam of white light, turning skeletons to dust.

Meanwhile, Arisu darted around like a whirlwind, her spear felling bones with every thrust. During the fray, Arisu and Shiki leveled up, but opted to save their skill points for later.

Arisu’s level reached 51—her Spearmanship and Healing Magic were both at Rank 9—while Shiki hit Level 18, her Reconnaissance was still at 7 and her Throwing at 3.

Carrying the disabled skeleton, we made our way to the grounds of a nearby school, where a handful of men and women awaited us in the center of the field.

“Are these your colleagues, Mr. Wan?” I asked.

“Yes, that’s correct,” Wan replied. “Ah, Kei-san, this job’s for you.”

A petite woman in her late twenties, sporting round, black-rimmed glasses and a red kimono, stepped forward. She clutched a long staff, and she was dragging her feet in hesitation as she came toward us.

“If you can’t do it, I doubt anyone else can. We’re counting on you,” Wan told the rather unassuming woman.

“Um... And the catalyst would be...?”

“Tamaki.”

“Right here, Kazu-san!”

Our lovable klutz, her blond hair bouncing cheerfully, brought the skeleton over to Kei. Despite lacking limbs, the skeleton was still clattering its teeth aggressively. But caught firmly in Tamaki's grasp, it could do nothing.

"What... what is this?"

"It's the catalyst! I caught it!"

The petite woman flinched back from the thrashing skeleton. *Fair enough*, I thought; *a raging skeleton should scare anyone*. To me, the scene was just funny, but maybe that was a bad thing. Maybe it meant we'd grown too desensitized.

"I've got it pinned, so no worries! Although I have no idea what you're going to do with it."

"Um... Is it safe to touch?"

"Absolutely, go ahead."

Kei hesitantly touched the skeleton's spine, which twitched in response.

"Eek!"

"Oh, come on, be still," Tamaki said, smacking the skeleton's forehead. Of course, the skeleton kept writhing.

Then, an idea dawned on me.

"Arisu, try using Holy Circle."

"Okay!"

Holy Circle, a rank 2 Healing spell, creates a pure barrier. It also has a slight calming effect on the undead—which, until now, had never sounded very useful.

A faint white circle of light formed around the skeleton, which soon stopped moving and slumped lifelessly.

*Hey, we can't have it completely disintegrate on us...*

"What a splendid barrier. With this, maybe..."

Kei cautiously approached the immobilized skeleton and touched its shoulder. This time, the skeleton remained still.

“Here I go.”

With resonance in her voice and determination in her fist, Kei began to sing. It sounded like a flowing recitation of a Japanese poem—*ah, this must be the incantation of a spell*, I realized.

Curious, I activated Mana Vision. Immediately, my field of vision was awash in red light. I was seeing a vast quantity of magical power, and it was centered on Kei and the skeleton.

Then, as the incantation reached its climax, the magic around the skeleton intensified into a towering pillar, piercing the sky and scattering red light in every direction.

Silence returned to the area, but it was a much more profound silence than before—an eerie quiet in which not even the chirping of birds could be heard. The first to sense something amiss was me, using Mana Vision.

Overhead, dark light was converging on us from every direction.

“Everyone, get away from the skeleton!”

Almost simultaneously with my shout, the black brilliance was absorbed by the skeleton, which then exploded with a deafening sound.

Instinct kicked in as Tamaki shielded Kei, taking the brunt of the blast with her back. The rest of us, who were slightly further away, ducked low to withstand the shockwave. Screams erupted all around us.

I looked toward the epicenter of the explosion, dreading what I might find there. Sure enough, within the smoke of the blast, something was stirring.

It was the catalyst skeleton, now enveloped in a black mist, slowly rising off the ground. Deep within the skull, a pair of eyes glowed red.

A chill ran down my spine as those eyes found mine. “You are...?” I muttered. I half-rose, glaring not just at the skeleton, but at the entity it seemed to be concealing.

Around me, only Arisu, Rushia, and Kayla were managing to get up. Tamaki was writhing in pain on the ground, still clutching Kei. Although Kei's torso had been protected in Tamaki's embrace, the woman's limbs were twisted in unnatural directions, and she was sinking into a red sea of blood. It looked like a few others, including Mr. Wan, had also sustained serious injuries. Fortunately, Shiki was slightly removed from the epicenter and remained completely unharmed.

This was a critical situation. Left unattended, the civilians could potentially die. But there wasn't time for Arisu to administer healing. A ranged heal wouldn't even reach them.

The real problem, however, was the skeleton that had been on the brink of death and was now levitating before us. And it was obviously much more than a skeleton now. Likely, that black light had found its way back to us through detection magic. Being familiar with similar spells, I could understand.

"Possession," I muttered to myself. The skeleton before us was possessed by its summoner, which meant...

"You're the Ghost King Diasnexus, aren't you?"

"Indeed," the skeleton replied, with a laugh that sent shivers down my spine. The surrounding area was shrouded in a black miasma... *Ah, I can see it because I'm using Mana Vision!*

"Arisu! Hit that skeleton with holy magic!"

"Right! Holy Ray!"

A white beam shot from Arisu's arm, piercing through the possessed skeleton. The bones disintegrated from the impact, the black aura dissipating...

"We've found him! We've found him!"

A chilling, sinister voice echoed from nowhere. "You need not search for me! Wait in fear!" The words were followed by a mocking laugh that was at once irritating and terrifying, slowly fading until silence once again overtook the street.



As if released from paralysis, everyone began to move. The sounds of pain and screams came back in a rush.

“To think our attempt to locate him through detection magic would lead to him tracing us instead,” I said, shaking my head. “What a hassle.”

“Arisu, Rushia! Deal with everyone’s injuries; start with the civilians!”

“Got it.”

I summoned Heavenly Turtle Nahan and Divine Winged Apostle Penusa to assist with the healing. Penusa, while not as proficient as Nahan in healing magic, was still a capable practitioner. Against Diasnexus, she could be our trump card.

Wan was already staggering to his feet, coordinating with his comrades on the phone. I overheard that a fast-moving object was approaching from the north, and skeletons were emerging from multiple locations, rushing toward our position. The town was in chaos, ravaged by the marauding skeletons. It seemed that evacuating residents in such a short time was only feasible for this immediate area.

“It sounds like the skeletons are trying to surround this school,” Mr. Wan informed us.

“How long until Diasnexus gets here?”

“About ten minutes.”

“Got it. Everyone else should evacuate by then. Shiki, Tamaki, I’m counting on you two to protect them.” Shiki would utilize her scouting skills to locate the skeletons while Tamaki crushed the approaching enemies. This duo seemed able to handle them without issue, and Tamaki’s physical attacks would likely be less effective against Diasnexus himself anyway.

“Kazu...”

“Everyone’s safety is in your hands, Tamaki. Protect Shiki especially.”

“Okay, got it! Leave it to me!”

As soon as they were finished being healed, Wan’s companions got up, and Shiki and Tamaki ran off with them in tow. I just hoped they would be able to

break through the siege without too much delay...

“It would be good if everyone could stay safe,” Mr. Wan remarked.

“Hold on, Mr. Wan, why are you still here? You should be going somewhere safe, too,” I said.

“One of us needs to stay as a point of contact, right?”

*But what’s coming is one of the Four Heavenly Kings!*

Not that he would understand the gravity of that...

“Please, at least find somewhere to hide and, whatever you do, don’t get yourself killed.”

“I’ll try my best to stay out of harm’s way.”

With that, the elder briskly made his way to an empty school building. I wondered if he’d be all right, but now wasn’t the time to worry about others.

I looked over my companions—Arisu, Kayla, and Rushia, along with Heavenly Turtle Nahan and Divine Winged Apostle Penusa. Then, I decided to summon Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau as well.

*All right, I thought with grim satisfaction. This is the lineup for the final battle against the Ghost King Diasnexus.*

## Chapter 237: The Battle with the Ghost King – Part 1

**F**rom his hiding place on the other side of the school grounds, Coeurl howled to signal the enemy's approach. It was too soon for Diasnexus to arrive, so these must have been the weaker skeleton forces.

Soon enough, a squad of skeletons emerged from behind a building.

"Six skeletons! Wearing robes! Carrying staffs!" Kayla called out quickly.

The question now was whether they were actually mages... or something more troublesome. "*True Sight*," I invoked, using the ultimate recognition magic to see through any illusions.

"No, the mages are the three at the back! The one in the front actually has a huge sword!"

This skeleton which also ostensibly wore a robe and carried a staff was in fact clad in heavy armor, brandishing a sword. Behind it, the three other skeletons in robes hovered, staffs in hand.

"Rushia, don't hold back, let them have it. You too, Kayla."

"Got it. Inferno."

"Mm! White Cannon."

A scorching fireball and a white beam assaulted the skeletons. In response, the skeletons at the rear thrust their bony hands forward.

*Oh no, could it have been a reflection?*

"It's a Barrier!"

Kayla gave a command, and a dark wall materialized in front of the skeletons, catching the flames and beam. A violent explosion followed seconds later, and smoke obscured our view of the skeletons.

"How's it looking, Kayla?"

“They’re coming, they’re coming!”

*Are you some kind of a wannabe psychic?* I thought as the skeletons broke through the smoke, flying toward us. Not one of them looked like it had sustained any damage—unlike Deflection, that dark barrier they’d used didn’t seem to require any precise timing to deploy.

Kayla and Arisu asked me questions at the same time.

“What do we do, Dad?”

“What should we do, Kazu?”

They were both looking at me for guidance. I had a few strategies to consider...

“Kazu, how about an Inferno times ten?” Rushia suggested.

It was a viable countermeasure. If the enemy was going to shield themselves, then we could use overwhelming force to shatter their defense. Despite the poor cost-benefit ratio, quickly resolving the fight was crucial, especially with formidable foes ahead.

The downside was clear. With one of the Four Kings soon to arrive, exhausting Rushia now posed a risk.

As the enemy closed in, now less than a kilometer away, I made a decision.

“Kayla.”

“Yeah, Dad!”

“Use Dimensional Step to flank them and hit hard. Take Nahan with you.”

“Roger that!”

Kayla jumped up on Heavenly Turtle Nahan’s shell, grabbing onto his neck and vanishing from sight. Moments later, they reappeared behind the enemy group.

Two white beams, unleashed by her and Nahan, struck the six skeletons...

“They blocked it, huh?”

The three at the back raised another Barrier to deflect the attack. But this maneuver created a significant gap between the enemy’s front and rear ranks.

The frontline skeletons continued their direct assault on us.

“Rushia, cover fire.”

“Got it. Inferno.”

Rushia’s fireball struck an unprotected spot, engulfing one of the skeletons in flames. And then... we were back in the White Room. That skeleton hadn’t fallen yet, so perhaps Tamaki and the others had done something.

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“We all broke through the circle of skeletons! I managed to take down six of them in a flash!” Tamaki boasted with a proud grin.

I praised her generously and patted her head. It seemed Shiki was the only one who’d leveled up this time, bringing her to Level 19.

“I think we’re okay now, so maybe we should send Tamaki back...” I pondered, then changed my mind. “No, let’s not take any chances. Tamaki, why don’t you keep guarding everyone?”

“All right, I’ve got this!” Tamaki responded eagerly.

SHIKI	
LEVEL: 19	RECONNAISSANCE: 7
THROWING: 3	SKILL POINTS: 4

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The second we left the White Room, we sprang into action. Kayla and Heavenly Turtle Nahan used Dimensional Step to move to the enemy’s flank and launch a White Cannon. Almost simultaneously, Rushia unleashed an Inferno...

It wasn't enough to take down the frontline skeletons; however, our concentrated fire forced the battalion of bones to lower their altitude and land on the road, temporarily disappearing from my view.

The distance between us and the enemy was only about three hundred meters, so they were bound to attack the ground soon, but we weren't about to just sit around and wait for them, neither out of leisure nor naivety.

"I want to snipe. Sha-Lau, go with Rushia to the roof of that house over there."

*"All right."*

As Rushia grabbed onto Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau, they vanished in a flash of lightning, reappearing atop the red building I had pointed out—a perfect sniping position. Rushia immediately began to flush out the skeletons with her Inferno spell, while Kayla and Heavenly Turtle Nahan also took aim from above.

"Kazu, can I go too?"

"Nah, stay here. They'll be here soon enough, ripe for the picking."

Well, that was if my guess was correct. Sure enough...

"Just like you said, Kazu—they're here."

The battered skeletons appeared on the ground where Arisu, I, and Divine Winged Apostle Penusa were waiting. These skeletons were probably far stronger than any we had encountered before, with the frontlines being at least of the Godbreaker class. They likely intended to whittle down our forces, but unfortunately for them, we weren't so easily worn down.

"Arisu, go!"

"Right! Shape Lightning!"

Arisu closed the distance to the six skeletons instantly with magic that turned her into lightning, just like Sha-Lau. Timed with her assault, Sha-Lau also launched a surprise attack from behind the skeletons.

Trying to regroup and counterattack, the skeletons faced Arisu's thrust and Sha-Lau's fangs, which shattered the head of the confronting skeletons in one

hit. Just then, the sound of leveling up echoed in my head, and we were back in the White Room.

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This time, Tamaki and I had leveled up. Without much to discuss, we just exchanged information and promptly exited the room.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 61	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 2
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 6 (Familiar Enhancement 6, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 3)	

TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 51	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH: 9	SKILL POINTS: 2
HEAVY SWORDSMANSHIP: 2 (Enhanced Sword Technique 2, Dragon Slayer Slash 2)	

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There were four enemies left. Thankfully, my guardian, Penusa, was constantly on the lookout.

“What’s wrong?”

*"I sense a presence,"* Penusa remarked telepathically.

"Could it be...?"

Penusa affirmed my suspicion with a thought.

I scanned our surroundings, wondering where the enemy could be. Suddenly, Penusa's expression tensed. Before I could react...

*"Master, watch out!"*

She pushed me away just in time. A skeletal arm burst from the ground, its fingertips brushing against my left arm.

The undead-resistant fabric sewn onto my tracksuit sleeve disintegrated into ash in an instant. Even so, my left arm was torn off from the shoulder.

Blood sprayed into the air, and I groaned in agony that felt like searing heat. And then, I saw Penusa.

Her beautiful face contorted in pain, she rolled to my side, revealing that she had lost her left leg from the thigh down.

*Damn it, this was my oversight!*

Lifting my head, I saw a figure shimmering like mist nearby. The red glow deep within the skull glared at me.

"The Ghost King hiding in the ground? That's not very befitting of your reputation."

"Do not let your guard down. You're the man who defeated Azagralith," the skull said, cackling mockingly.



## Chapter 238: The Battle with the Ghost King – Part 2

The Ghost King Diasnexus had launched an attack from below ground while we were busy battling his minions. As a result, I'd lost my left arm, and Penusa her left leg. And it had done so with the briefest of touches from that bony hand.

Well, he was one of the Four Heavenly Kings—not taking any chances, and not even trying for a fair fight, opting instead for a full-force surprise attack against us.

Now, the only ally by my side was the wounded Penusa. The rest were engaged in clearing out the skeleton troops. We were in trouble.

“Perish, summoner,” Diasnexus commanded, extending his bony, mist-wrapped hand toward me. A direct hit would be fatal, I had no doubt of it.

“Transposition,” I instantly cast, swapping places with Sha-Lau. If he caught on to what I was doing, this should...

Having been warped to the roof of a red building, I quickly turned back to the battlefield. An explosion went off as Sha-Lau's lightning strike and Rushia's flames collided with Diasnexus's misty hand. Both Sha-Lau and Rushia had perfectly understood my move, thanks to the trust we'd built together through days of fierce battles. Although our efforts didn't damage Diasnexus, we'd managed to push back his hand slightly...

The Ghost King's form stiffened for a moment.

Then, Penusa beat her angelic wings and charged bodily into him.

“*Barrier Break!*” she called as she detonated her trump-card magic. Something pale and glowing scattered around Diasnexus, erasing the multiple anti-magic barriers surrounding him in one fell swoop.

“Now!”

Before I could stop myself, I was shouting, convinced that the magic would take effect. The white beam, synchronized between Heavenly Turtle Nahan and Kayla, struck the Ghost King, piercing through his nebulous body.

“Take that! Don’t you dare bully Papa!”

Apparently, Kayla and the others, who had been observing from above, had a clear view of what was happening on the ground. *Nice support, my girl.*

Just then, we found ourselves in the White Room.

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I was instantly down on one knee, clutching my arm—from which blood was still spurting.

*Ah... as soon as I let my guard down, the pain became unbearable... I feel like I’m about to pass out...*

“K-Kazu-san! I’ll heal you right now!”

Arisu rushed over in a panic, regenerating my arm with magic.

“Phew, that was really close.”

“What the hell happened, Kazu-kun?”

“Kazu-san, are you all right?”

Shiki and Tamaki, who hadn’t been there with us, had gone pale with worry.

It wasn’t surprising. When we first arrived here, we were in high spirits, thinking it was going to be an easy victory.

All of this had happened in less than thirty seconds.

Shiki sighed after hearing our story. “Maybe it means our opponent is so cornered they can’t afford to care about appearances... From their perspective, you guys are a formidable unit that’s taken down two of the Four Heavenly Kings. Especially you, Kazu-kun; you had the audacity to challenge Azagralith with just your familiar, and you won.”

“I mean, that was because a few different conditions were met, and we specialized in the best tactics for the situation...”

“Even so, you made some incredible achievements. You’re just too strong, and he’s scared.”

*I wish, I thought. In reality, we were only strong enough to be ambushed and battered like this.*

“Papa, are you okay?”

Arisu had already regenerated my arm and begun the healing process, but there was still a bad wound on my shoulder. Of course, once we left this room, I was likely to get seriously injured again...

“Arisu, it’ll be okay if you just heal me after the fight’s over,” I said.

“But... you’re bleeding so much; we need to treat it right away.”

I shook my head. “If we did that, we’d only be giving Diasnexus an opening to exploit. We should strike at the enemy all at once now.”

Several people responded at once, their tones vehement.

“I do *not* agree with that.”

“Okay, so you’re putting up a brave front? Is that it?”

“You seem pretty dissatisfied, Kazu-kun. Do you think everyone can fight with peace of mind knowing you’re so close to dying?”

“That’s...”

I briefly observed everyone in the room. Arisu, Tamaki, Rushia—needless to say—and even Kayla were all looking at me with concern. Although my arm had been regenerated, they kept glancing at the wound on my shoulder.

“You’re the commander, aren’t you? Do you think you can make good decisions while you’re losing blood and in pain?”

I dropped my shoulders and surrendered. “All right, this is annoying, but you’re right.”

Kayla said something unnecessary like, “Papa, you’re being scolded!”

“Right. Arisu, just ignore the small fries and come heal me right away.”

“Got it! I’ll be there in a flash with Shape Lightning!”

“Ah, but which of the enemies are left? There should be about one more, right? Godbreaker or High Mage, which one is still alive?”

“Only the Godbreakers are left. We took down the mage first.”

“Good call. That’s a relief. Then we can leave those guys be.”

“Right!”

Arisu grew visibly happier at the chance to come to my aid.

It was really heartwarming to be so cherished. However, I hoped she wouldn’t make any wrong decisions out of blind faith... Being the commander was a huge responsibility.

“Kazu, it’s exactly because you’re okay that we can fight much at all. It’s because you’re here that everyone can come together. You understand that, right?”

“Yeah, I’ll try to remember that.”

“But no matter how careful we are, it’ll be really hard to prevent surprise attacks like that one we just experienced. It will be really important to always have reserve forces near Kazu.”

This time, we had been saved by Penusa’s dedication. If she hadn’t thrown herself in front of me, I would have been killed instantly by an attack from the ground.

*Facing the Four Heavenly Kings head-on means just that.*

“Maybe we should have summoned Strass, too.”

“I thought the armored knight wouldn’t be useful in this battle.”

“I get that. After all, there’s a limit to Kazu-kun’s MP.”

Shiki was right; my MP was the main issue here. Currently, I was summoning Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau, Heavenly Turtle Nahan, and Divine Winged Apostle Penusa with Familiar Enhancement 6, and Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 3. For each one, my MP was reduced by 91.

At the start of the battle, I was at Level 60, so my maximum MP was 600. Nearly half of that was being used just to maintain my familiars...

“Using 91 for Familiar Awakening and another 182 for Familiar Synchronization, I essentially become a frontline fighter at Rank 11 and can use my magic...”

“When we fought Azagralith, it was that combo that won us the battle,” someone remarked.

“That time, I pushed it to the limit, bringing it up to Rank 11.5, but it was still a close call. Whether Diasnexus is weaker in close combat than Azagralith, we still don’t know.”

The Ghost King seemed like a sorcerer, but that didn’t necessarily mean he couldn’t fight up close. After all, he’d nearly one-shotted me just now.

“What’s different from that time is that now we have Arisu, Rushia, and Kayla with us. With everyone’s support, we might be able to hold our own.”

“It’s wishful thinking, but it looks like that’s all we have to hold onto.”

“Just touching that hand caused my arm to be torn off, so we can’t be careless.”

Penusa seemed unharmed even though she’d plunged her entire body into the mist to cast spells. Probably, there was some sort of magic applied that destroyed whatever part it touched. Mia would probably have called it something like “Whatchamacallit Finger.”

“The important thing is not to give the opponent any time,” I noted. “There’s also the fear that he’ll dive into the ground and escape, just like when he attacked us. He seems like the type who doesn’t care at all about the pride of the Four Heavenly Kings.”

“Was Azagralith strict about that sort of thing?”

“Yeah; after all, he was a battle maniac to the bone.”

With Plant King Aga-Su, he had been mad from the start. In a berserker state, he probably couldn’t even consider the option to flee.

Diasnexus, the Ghost King, was different from the other two Heavenly Kings: all he cared about was winning.

“Is there any way we can make him float in the air...”

“We could use Serenity,” Arisu suggested.

There was a Rank 8 Healing Magic barrier spell called Serenity that enveloped a square space of about twenty meters on each side. Inside the barrier, unclean things—like the undead—became weaker. Additionally, the barrier was closed to both entry and exit.

Unfortunately, for Serenity to be cast, the entire space needed to be open. As long as Diasnexus was touching the ground—and he could do more than that; he could dive into it—it would be impossible to contain him inside the barrier.

“Well, in that case!” Kayla raised her hand enthusiastically. “Leave it to me!”

“Ah, right. With Gravity or Reverse Gravity...”

“Yeah! For a moment, it’s possible!”

*The moment the enemy’s feet leave the ground, Arisu can deploy Serenity...*

*Sweet, I’m starting to feel like this could work.*

# Chapter 239: The Battle with the Ghost King – Part 3

This time, three of us leveled up at once: Rushia, Kayla, and Shiki.

Kayla, now at Level 53, increased her Wind Shooting Technique to 3.

RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 51	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 2
FIRE-WATER COMPOSITE MAGIC: (Cold Inferno 2, Water Flare Shield 2)	

SHIKI	
LEVEL: 20	RECONNAISSANCE: 7
THROWING: 3	SKILL POINTS: 6

KAYLA	
LEVEL: 53	WIND MAGIC: 9
SHOOTING: 9	SKILL POINTS: 6→1
WIND SHOOTING TECHNIQUE: 2→3 (Enhanced Shooting Technique 2→3, Freestyle Bullet 2→3)	

We finished our meeting and...

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... Back on the battlefield, I groaned in agony as pain flooded back to my shoulder. I dropped down to one knee, clutching at the wound.

*It hurts, it hurts, it hurts so much. I'm really glad I asked for Arisu's help...*

A second later, Arisu was flying at me like a bolt of lightning. She was out of breath; she must have used Shape Lightning in a hurry.

"Kazu-san! I'll heal you right now!"

"You don't have to rush so—ouch!"

*No use, I can't put up a front at all. I've never been hurt this bad before.*

Arisu and Tamaki, on the other hand, had already received multiple wounds of this caliber. Suddenly, I had a new appreciation for how hard they'd been working.

While I was contemplating how I wanted to be kinder to them later, a new arm grew from my left shoulder.

"Thanks Arisu, that's enough. Go back to the fight."

"But..."

"Diasnexus isn't someone we can win against without you."

The remnants of the skeletons Arisu had been fighting were now rushing to the Ghost King's side. With a shortage of frontline fighters, Rushia and the others were on the defensive. Particularly annoying was the fact that Penusa's leg was still injured.

"Go, please."

"All right."

Arisu gave me one last reluctant look, then nodded...

"Shape Lightning."



With that, she was gone. The next moment, she appeared directly beside the Ghost King, who was attacking Sha-Lau. Diasnexus seemed momentarily flustered as he glanced at Arisu, and then, deciding she was the more troublesome target, reached out toward her.

“Holy Wave.”

Arisu’s body shone, and a wave of light spread around her. It was Rank 9 Healing Magic, a wave that targets the undead. The Ghost King groaned and continued to advance toward Arisu, but...

“I won’t let you!”

Arisu produced a pale, translucent shield from the tip of her spear, deflecting his strike. This was a spear-shield technique; like Deflection, the shield lasted only a moment, but then...

“Holy Weapon.”

Her spear shone with a white light. This was another Rank 9 Healing spell, and when applied to a weapon, a single hit from it was said to be enough to obliterate ordinary undead.

Arisu’s thrust flowed smoothly, and Diasnexus caught the glowing spear tip with his skeletal left hand. The moment he did, the bone began to melt away. But the Ghost King simply grinned and thrust his right hand toward Arisu.

*He’s planning to sacrifice flesh to break the bone!*

“Mama Arisu, don’t let them bully you!”

Kayla launched a slingshot pellet at the Ghost King’s right hand, slightly altering its trajectory. Thanks to her, Arisu narrowly escaped the same fate as my severely damaged right arm.

Arisu and the Ghost King distanced themselves from each other, each gauging the other’s movements in a standoff.

Meanwhile, Heavenly Turtle Nahan was taking care of the two Skeleton Godbreakers that entered the battlefield. Despite being in a support role, Nahan, with Familiar Enhancement 6, had combat strength equivalent to Skill Level 10. This meant he was able to keep the Godbreakers, who seemed to

have the combat skill of about Level 9, at bay without giving them a chance to close in.

Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau, having swapped with Arisu, had reached the critically injured Divine Winged Apostle Penusa and was casting Healing Magic on her. Although Sha-Lau's Healing Magic was limited to regenerative types, at least it would ensure Penusa didn't die from her injuries.

Once Penusa was healed, Sha-Lau looked toward me for instructions. I waved him over, and he became lightning for a moment. Next, his massive form was beside me.

*"I have arrived, master. How are your wounds?"*

*"Arisu healed them. I want to finish this battle fast."*

*"Understood."*

I cast Familiar Awakening on Sha-Lau, and his body began to glow with a reddish-black brilliance.

*"This power is nearly at its peak!"*

The wise wolf howled mightily. I poured almost all my remaining MP into casting Familiar Synchronization, merging my consciousness with Sha-Lau.

*"Let's go."*

*"Indeed!"*

Sha-Lau leapt from the roof, leaving my unconscious body behind as he accelerated toward the battlefield.

Our first target was the two Godbreakers fighting Heavenly Turtle Nahan.

*"We'll settle this in an instant."*

*"Yes, Master."*

As lightning itself, Sha-Lau collided with them from the air, blowing away one of the Godbreakers. The remaining one turned to face us, sword at the ready.

*"Accelerate."*

The moment Sha-Lau landed on the ground, I used my magic to speed up our consciousness. Timed with the Godbreaker's downward sword strike...

"Deflection."

We deflected the blade with a thin veil. Diving into the off-balanced skeleton, Sha-Lau tore off its head with his sharp fangs, then bit down and shattered the skull.

Turning around, I saw Nahan incinerating the blasted skeleton with fire magic.

In an instant, both had been defeated. Now, only Diasnexus remained.

Arisu and Kayla exchanged a look with me.

"Give us a nod."

"Yes."

As the Phantom Wolf King nodded his head slightly, we all started to move in unison.

First, I commanded Sha-Lau to use his strongest attack magic. His normally silver fur glowed gold, unleashing strike after strike of lightning.

Diasnexus turned to intercept the side-attacking magic with his left hand, but...

"Take this!"

Kayla's subtly timed slingshot pellet curved and hit his left hand. Normally, a physical attack would pass right through Diasnexus's body, but due to the special nature of Kayla's weapon, the pellet exploded upon impact with the Ghost King.

The semi-transparent monster staggered slightly.

Then, Sha-Lau's lightning made a direct hit and Diasnexus let out a muffled groan.

Arisu followed up with a thrust from her spear, enchanted with Holy Weapon.

Unable to withstand it, Diasnexus retreated from Arisu. However, his movements were slightly slower than before, hampered by the continuous Holy Waves emanating from Arisu.

Arisu's thrust was unavoidable. The spearhead pierced through Diasnexus's shoulder, eliciting a low groan from him.

"Now, all together..."

"Don't underestimate me!" the Ghost King cried, his voice filled with anger. He swung his right hand, simultaneously lifting into the air...

It was the chance we had been waiting for. Arisu leaned forward, ready to strike, and called, "Now!"

But—

"Wait, Arisu! Get back!" I shouted, a shiver running down my spine. However, I was inside Sha-Lau's head; he was the only one who could hear my voice.

"Shit, just jump up!"

*"Understood, Master."*

I hated to leave the others, but at least I could save Sha-Lau. Kayla, sensing something was amiss, tried to retreat into the air as well... but it was too late.

Dozens of black arms emerged from the ground, ensnaring Kayla, Arisu, and Heavenly Turtle Nahan by their feet. Even Divine Winged Apostle Penusa, at a bit of a distance from us, was caught by these arms that appeared across the wide expanse of the ground.

*What... is this?! Is it his magic?*

*No, my legs!*

Arisu instinctively reached out toward the Ghost King, disregarding her own safety.

"But, at least—Serenity!"

A rainbow-colored, translucent sphere enveloped Diasnexus and Sha-Lau—and now they were completely isolated for a one-on-one duel.

"So, you think you've trapped me. You are in fact the one separated from your comrades," Diasnexus declared, facing us. The red glow in the skull's eye sockets flickered as if in laughter.

"Don't worry. Attack him with everything we've got."

*“Of course.”*

The Phantom Wolf King kicked off the air and charged at the Ghost King, who thrust his right hand forward. A touch from that hand would be dangerous even for Sha-Lau, but...

*“Accelerate.”*

Once again, I accelerated our consciousness. The Ghost King’s skeletal mouth slowly opened and closed, inducing an instinctive feeling of discomfort in me.

“Lightning,” I commanded reflexively. Sha-Lau obeyed without question, activating Shape Lightning at close range, and swiftly moving behind the Ghost King.

What happened next was abrupt.

A vast, pitch-dark space emerged in front of the Ghost King. The black void sucked in the surrounding air and expanded in a fan shape, shaking the entire Serenity barrier.

*“Wh-what’s happening? It’s getting bigger!”*

*“The barrier will break, Master!”*

As Sha-Lau predicted, the dark space burst open.

A tremendous shockwave followed, and a beam of blackness was fired outside the barrier, flattening houses and buildings in a fan shape.

*That’s bad, I thought. There are refugees in that direction...*

It was as if an explosion of darkness had covered the land. As I watched in horror, a roar echoed from far away.

The darkness subsided.

Buildings had been obliterated, and several square kilometers of ground had been gouged out and collapsed as if struck by a gigantic meteorite.

*“What was that?”*

*“It must have created a void.”*

“You’ve got to be kidding me... breaking through the Serenity barrier and then... hitting those innocent people.”

*“Our battle a moment ago was being observed. That’s why he launched an attack that spread across a wide area in front.”*

“Are you saying it’s my fault?”

*“Calm down. Without your command, by now...”*

*We would have been dead, is that it?*

As I stared blankly at the shattered city, I found my mouth was dry. I had no words.

## Chapter 240: The Battle with the Ghost King – Part 4

**F**or several kilometers in front of me, the magic unleashed by the Ghost King had devastated the streets of Tokyo. Although the hole the Ghost King had made in our barrier was hastily repaired, it became clear that the barrier could not defend against such a powerful spell...

Diasnexus turned to me, his skeletal jaw clacking in what could only be laughter. “Because you dodged, many have died. Now, for another strike.”

The Ghost King raised his right hand. His meaning was clear: every time we dodged, innocent people would get caught in the crossfire.

Behind me was the school where Mr. Wan should still have been at.

*“Master, we must flee.”*

“Wait, don’t move until my signal.”

*“But...”*

Another black spell was unleashed. A wave of darkness began expanding like a black hole.

“Accelerate,” I cast once again. Then, to draw the attack in as close as possible...

“Deflection.”

*I’ll send the strike right back at him!*

The black destructive magic changed direction, heading straight for Diasnexus.

But the skeleton grinned again.

*Yeah, I know. You’ve seen this trick before.*

“Go.”

“Yes, Master.” On my signal, Sha-Lau turned into lightning once again and accelerated, circling behind Diasnexus.

So, the other side possessed Deflection, too. The Ghost King was eager to use it, to bounce our attack back at us once more. However, Deflection was a spell that required precise timing to cast; even a slight miss in timing could be fatal.

And then... at that moment, at the instant Sha-Lau crossed paths with Diasnexus...

The Phantom Wolf King managed to kick the Ghost King’s shoulder ever so slightly. Diasnexus’s body swayed. The hit may have felt like nothing to him, but it was enough to throw off the timing of Deflection.

Right after my accelerated thought ended, right after we appeared behind the opponent...

Diasnexus murmured in astonishment, “No way.”

The next moment, his body was engulfed by the black destructive magic.

As he took a direct hit from his own spell, Diasnexus screamed.

The next second, we found ourselves in the White Room.

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“This is... it’s not because we defeated Diasnexus. He was still alive last I saw.”

Looking over, I saw Tamaki and Shiki breathing heavily, their faces pale.

“What happened, what was it?”

“These shadowy *things* started coming up from the ground... They started killing everyone, one by one.”

“If I hadn’t improved my Reconnaissance skill, I would have been in trouble, too.”

*Was that the same black hand that attacked Arisu and them? I was so focused on the duel with Diasnexus that I wasn’t watching what was happening down there...*



“It was probably the same thing,” Rushia said.

“I think so, too,” Kayla agreed.

As we kept talking, we learned that the black shadows attacking them only emerged halfway from the ground. Apparently Rushia and the others had been able to deal with them mostly thanks to their magic.

“It took quite a few of them to level up, so maybe individually, their levels are low.”

“That would make sense. That’s probably why I was able to detect them in advance with Reconnaissance.”

At the moment, Shiki’s Reconnaissance skill was at Rank 7—and that wasn’t just high compared to ours; it was high, period.

“For now, let’s call those guys ‘Shadows.’”

“No objections here... Well, all right, then.”

“By the way, one of them dropped a blue token. Might have been a Level 5 monster?”

*So, same as an Elite Orc. To us, that might be minor, but for normal people, that’s a formidable enemy.* On the day we’d been transported to this world, Arisu and I had fought desperately against such an enemy and barely managed to win.

“If Shadows are appearing in other places... that could spell trouble.”

“But if they’re about on par with Elite Orcs, I wonder if guns could kill them... I hope so.”

Shiki’s family had evacuated, but they couldn’t have gone far. And she probably had friends in the neighborhood who hadn’t been so lucky—although I hoped not.

“A few people around here died,” Shiki murmured matter-of-factly. I guess she didn’t want to talk about it.

Thanks to Tamaki, they’d mostly been able to deal with the Shadows.

“However, there are quite a few Shadows chasing people who panicked and ran away...”

“Isn’t that bad?”

“It’s really bad. That’s why I’m thinking of improving my Throwing skill. I’ll split up from Tamaki-chan and go take care of the Shadows. Sorry, Kazu-kun, everyone. I know it’s not good for me to put myself in danger right now. But still, I want to protect the people here as much as I can.”

There was no stopping her after she said that.

Given that Shiki’s family’s house was nearby, and she might have known other people who had just been attacked by Shadows, staying calm would be difficult.

“Just be really careful, okay?”

*I know how careful Shiki is. I hope that’s enough.*

It was Arisu and Shiki who’d leveled up. Shiki spent her skill points to raise her Throwing skill to 4. Arisu, having 4 skill points, decided to save them.

“Once we’ve dealt the finishing blow to Diasnexus, we’ll head over there, too. Don’t do anything reckless, okay?”

ARISU	
LEVEL: 52	SPEARMANSHIP: 9
HEALING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4
HOLY SPEARMANSHIP: 2 (Enhanced Spear Skills 2, Spear-Shield Technique 2)	

SHIKI	
LEVEL: 21	RECONNAISSANCE: 7
THROWING:	SKILL POINTS:

3→4	8→4
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We watched as the Ghost King dissipated. With a final scream, his skeletal form faded away until it completely vanished. However, that was all that happened. No gem was dropped, and no one experienced a level up.

“Wait a minute, does this mean... he wasn’t the real one?”

*“No way! If that wasn’t a Four Heavenly Kings–level entity, why would I have had to fight so desperately?!”*

Sha-Lau’s telepathy, unusually agitated, seemed to spread across the sky. I looked down to see several Shadows still wreaking havoc. Because they attacked while half-buried in the ground, even Arisu and the others were having a bit of trouble handling them. For the moment, I disconnected my synchronization with Sha-Lau.

My consciousness returned to my own body, and I rose from atop the red roof. The sudden change in perspective made my head spin for a moment.

“What does this mean? Could it be that the Ghost King was... a decoy?”

*If that’s the case, where’s the real body? Could it be targeting me now, while I can’t defend myself up here?*

I hastily looked around me. There was no suspicious presence. However, from this high vantage point, I could see Shadows attacking civilians here and there. I was powerless to help them; I had no MP left. If I was attacked now, I would be utterly defenseless...

As I was considering this, Sha-Lau appeared beside me.

“For now... since Familiar Awakening will wear off soon, I’ll send you back.”

*“Be cautious, Master. The Ghost King seems to be quite the strategist.”*

“I appreciate the warning.”

After dismissing Sha-Lau and regaining some MP, I thought, *If Diasnexus doesn't attack me here and now...*

“Is Diasnexus’s real body not around here? Then, what’s the purpose of causing all this chaos?” I muttered to myself.

*Was it all just a diversion? If so, what’s his real goal...?*

I looked up at the eastern sky. On the other side of those buildings, there would be a giant black sphere floating over Tokyo Bay.

“Is that where the Demon King is?”

## Chapter 241: The Whereabouts of the Ghost King

I stood on the red roof with my arms crossed, thinking. Even if I wanted to pursue Diasnexus immediately, there was one problem: my MP was depleted. If I were to confront the Ghost King again in my current state, he would make quick work of me.

“What are you pondering?”

I turned to see Coeurl standing beside me. I wasn’t sure how long he’d been there.

“The city is in chaos,” he went on. “Without your instructions, everyone will be immobilized.”

“I was thinking about what Diasnexus wants. Coeurl, what do you think?”

The black panther raised his head and looked at me. “Is that my name?”

“Uh, yeah... Wait, I heard Yuuki-senpai named you that; was I mistaken? Or, did you not like it?”

“No, it’s fine... So, Coeurl, huh?”

Though I couldn’t quite read his facial expression (was it a smile?), his tail was wagging excitedly.

*Damn, that’s cute.*

“Regarding Diasnexus’s objective... He was obsessed with the Demon King. That’s why Lord Algrafth decided to destroy him.”

“So, he really went to the Demon King. Was all this chaos just a way to buy time?”

“If that were the case, there would be no need to use an avatar.”

*Wait, you just casually dropped something pretty significant.*

“What do you mean, ‘avatar’? The thing we just defeated, was that a copy of Diasnexus?”

“Exactly. That was Diasnexus himself and yet also one of the entities that make up Diasnexus. He divided himself in two, attacking you with one half. Therefore, he now has only half of his power left.”

“You could have led with that super important information...”

I sighed with resignation. Looking down, I saw that the battle on the ground had ended. *Ah, there’s Wan coming out of that collapsed school. Good to see that the Greater Ninja’s master survived...*

Seeing the elderly man running toward us completely unharmed, with a smartphone in one hand, truly showed his vigor.

“Let’s regroup with everyone for now,” I decided. I waved to Kayla, and Coeurl and made our way down to street level to join the others. I shared what Coeurl had explained about Diasnexus’s avatar—that there was another Diasnexus still out there.

“He’s still alive!”

Arisu and everyone else widened their eyes in surprise, and Wan crossed his arms and hummed thoughtfully. I could completely understand their frustration.

“That’s right. But dealing with the Ghost King comes later. Kayla, take Arisu and go help Shiki-san. Arisu, can you support Kayla the best you can?”

“Yes! We’re off!”

“We’ll be back, Papa!”

Screams from citizens attacked by Shadows could be heard from various directions, but at this moment, helping Shiki was probably more critical than assisting random people.

Once Kayla and Arisu were gone, the rest of us turned our attention back to Coeurl.

“Coeurl, I want to hear your thoughts again. What do you think Diasnexus will do next?”

The black panther growled softly in his throat, clearly somewhat troubled.

“It’s okay if you’re not sure. But I want to hear any ideas you might have, anything at all. We know next to nothing about Diasnexus.”

“If he creates more undead, it consumes mana,” Coeurl finally responded. “Especially those entities you’ve named ‘Shadows,’ they are formed entirely of mana. Even for the Ghost King, producing so many Shadows is no trivial task.”

*That’s exactly the kind of information I was looking for.*

“So, we can assume he’s somewhat cornered?”

“I cannot be certain, but it’s highly probable. However, he is a strategist. He must have gained some benefit worth the damage he’s incurred.”

“The real question is what benefit he was after, even at the cost of half his being and a vast amount of mana.”

Rushia raised her hand. “Perhaps he wanted to secure mana.”

“Um, what do you mean, Rushia?”

“Didn’t Coeurl mention earlier? That mana is flowing into this world from the Sixth Wedge?”

*Ah, right, I remember now. The story was that the Demon King was using that mana, which comes from the Wedge.*

“Maybe the Ghost King is trying to go to the Demon King after all.”

“That might have been his initial plan. But if the Ghost King realized there was an attempt to sever the connection from the Demon King to the Wedge...”

*Wait, hold on. Ah... Oh, oh.*

“Mr. Wan, the barrier is almost ready to deploy, right? For Diasnexus, since he wants to protect the Demon King and also wants mana, that would be really problematic. If he knows what we’re trying to do...”

“We should get in touch now,” Mr. Wan agreed. But just as he reached for his phone, we found ourselves in the White Room.

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Tamaki had just leveled up, having hunted down numerous Shadows.

“I took down two myself!” she told us excitedly. “I threw knives at them from where they couldn’t see me.”

Shiki puffed out her chest with a bit of pride, but her eyes seemed troubled, wavering as if she was in pain.

“What happened, Shiki?”

“Nothing.”

We locked eyes.

Perhaps it was something I didn’t need to ask about. I might have been meddling too much.

Yet, I wanted to understand what was weighing on her. If she was going through a tough time, I wanted to at least give her a chance to express it.

Thankfully, she was the first to break the silence. She gave a minute shrug of her shoulders and forced a wry smile. “You’re an idiot.”

“Yeah, I’m quite the fool, aren’t I? So, what happened?”

“My mom, grandma, and grandpa were crushed under the rubble. It doesn’t seem like there’s any way they could have survived.”

Everyone gasped.

“I heard someone talking on a walkie-talkie on the next street,” Shiki went on. “It was one of Mr. Wan’s friends.”

“You heard... from the next street?”

“My Reconnaissance skill is high, so I can hear voices from quite a distance. I guess they were going to wait to tell me. They were trying to be considerate... which is unfortunate.” Shiki crossed her arms over her chest and lifted the corners of her lips in a sarcastic smile.

*Ah, this is that thing, I realized. When she’s hurting, when she’s sad, when she wants to scream and cry, she puts on a brave front like this.*



“Just so you know, I don’t need your sympathy or comfort,” she told us. “I don’t regret being the first to head to my house after coming back here. I won’t give you the satisfaction of regret.”

“Always putting on a brave front, then.”

“Of course. I love to pretend I’m stronger than I am. Unless, Kazu-kun, as the leader, you’re going to take responsibility and bring my mom and grandparents back to life...” She trailed off, her expression suddenly freezing as she realized what she had said. “Sorry, forget I said that.”

She looked away from me, biting her lip, her face on the verge of tears.



It was an unusual slip for her. To this day, I didn't believe for a moment that Shiki harbored any resentment toward me. It was just a slip of the tongue, an expression of her emotions boiling over, and I'd long since understood that.

"I do feel for you," I assured her. "But let me say this, Shiki-san. We have to win the battle in front of us, no matter the cost, no matter how many sacrifices we have to make. Maybe your family died because of that strike we allowed the Ghost King to unleash, which *was* reckless of us... But even so, I don't regret letting that happen. It was necessary for victory."

"Yeah, that's true. If anyone complains about the decisions you make on the battlefield, let me know. I'll go out and slap them myself. Your decisions in battle are always right. So, if there's a next time, when a similar situation arises... don't hesitate."

We looked at each other again, nodding simultaneously.

In a way, it was a standoff of pride between two of a kind. But in that moment, what we both needed to do was to keep putting on that brave front, without yielding. Because otherwise, we couldn't remain leaders. We couldn't continue to bear the responsibility of sending people to their deaths.

If it had been just one of us, we would have been crushed by the pressure long ago.

So, surely, there was meaning in the two of us being together.

There was meaning in our continued standoff of pride.

"I can almost say I have no more regrets left on Earth. I feel bad for my dad who survived, though." Shiki clapped her hands together. "Well then, let's begin the meeting. Share all the information you got from Mr. Wan; don't hold anything back."

Following that, we discussed the whereabouts of Diasnexus and our strategies moving forward. Shiki also seemed to agree with the notion that Diasnexus was acting to disrupt the barrier being deployed over Tokyo Bay, intending to aid the Demon King.

*Hmm, but that scenario presents a few different problems...*

“There might be a traitor within Mr. Wan’s organization, or somewhere our information is being leaked.”

“Isn’t it possible that they’re gathering information through magic, Rushia?”

Apart from her, there was hardly anyone who had information about the magic of the other world. However, she only shook her head and said, “I know absolutely nothing about the Ghost King’s magic.”

“For now, we might have to leave it to Wan,” I decided. “Let’s focus on defeating the Shadows while we can and accumulate as much experience as possible.”

“Talking about grinding experience points at a time like this...”

“But this White Room is the most convenient place for meetings, isn’t it?” Shiki said with a chuckle.

*Well, she’s not wrong!*

TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 52	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4
HEAVY SWORDSMANSHIP: 2 (Enhanced Sword Skills 2, Dragon Slayer Slash 2)	

## Chapter 242: The True Enemy

**B**ack in Tokyo, Mr. Wan didn't pick up his story straight away. Instead, he paused and remarked, "Hmm. Someone leveled up, didn't they?"

"Can you tell, even though we went to the White Room?"

"My consciousness shifted for a moment."

*So, he could tell.* I guess I expected no less from Keiko's master. Just then, Wan's phone rang. He only exchanged a few words with the caller before hanging up.

"It looks like they detected an unusual flow of power," the ninja master reported. "The enemy's familiars were lurking all around."

"Familiars..."

"Small familiars. They were referred to as 'bone mice.'"

*So, there are familiars out there that are smaller than the crows I use. They must have been deployed over a wide area... keeping an eye on Wan's whole group.*

This meant Diasnexus had been able to find out about their plans for the Demon King. It was surprising how quickly our speculation in the White Room was confirmed.

*Bone mice, though. They would be pretty convenient for hiding in the dark, but as soon as they're discovered, exterminating them wouldn't be too difficult... Ah, but the problem would be their numbers.*

"It seems we'll need to allocate people to deal with them. We might have to delay the start of our operation."

"Even that would be a favorable outcome for him."

"Yeah, it's frustrating, but that's the situation."

This highlighted the nuisance of facing an enemy summoner who utilizes numerous minions—a tactic I had relied heavily on until now.

“It’s as if Kazu himself has become the enemy,” Rushia pointed out.

“Okay, I know you’re joking, but that still stings a bit.”

The corners of Rushia’s mouth curled into a slight, mischievous smile. For her, that was the equivalent of a neon sign that read “I’m teasing you!”

“It means Kazu possesses a terrifying power,” she continued.

“I’m aware of that. The problem is, if one of the Four Heavenly Kings did the same, it would be way more horrifying.”

“That’s right. The original power of the Four Heavenly Kings is much greater than all of us combined.”

According to Wan, it was possible, in theory, to block familiars with barrier magic. However, setting up barrier magic everywhere was impractical, so there were inevitable limits to preventing eavesdropping. We would just have to be more cautious moving forward.

“We’ll significantly change our personnel deployment and move the starting points of the barriers. That should allow us to cope to some extent.”

“How long will that take?”

“We should manage something by evening.”

I glanced down at the bulky wristwatch. Despite everything that had happened in the battle, Mia’s watch was still ticking.

It was around 3 PM now. I remembered sunset was around 5:30, so that left us with about two and a half hours.

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We went to the White Room a couple of times.

Arisu and Kayla caught up with Shiki, and it seemed like the number of Shadows they defeated had increased significantly. Including Tamaki, who was working separately to them, they said they’d defeated about 25 to 30 in total.

First, Shiki leveled up, then me, followed by Rushia and Kayla. Shiki increased her Throwing skill to 5.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 62	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 6 (Familiar Enhancement 6, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 3)	

RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 52	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4
FIRE-WATER COMPOSITE MAGIC: 2 (Cold Inferno 2, Water Flare Shield 2)	

SHIKI	
LEVEL: 22	RECONNAISSANCE: 7
THROWING: 4→5	SKILL POINTS: 6→1

KAYLA	
LEVEL: 54	WIND MAGIC: 9

SHOOTING:  9	SKILL POINTS:  3
WIND SHOOTING TECHNIQUE: 3 (Enhanced Shooting Skills 3, Freestyle Bullet 3)	

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After we'd cleared most of the Shadows, everyone reconvened. We boarded a ten-seater van arranged by Mr. Wan—even Coeurl piled in—and began our journey toward the waterfront area. The entire vehicle was protected by a stealth barrier, rendering it invisible to scouting techniques.

We turned into a sealed-off side road within a tunnel, where we switched vehicles. This maneuver would effectively lose any potential pursuers.

"It's intriguing to know that secret underground passages really exist," I mentioned.

"They're not particularly long, though," Wan chuckled. The ease with which he utilized a route that presumably required government permission indicated his significant influence, despite his appearance as a simple, kindly old man.

"So, why doesn't the Ghost King directly join forces with the Demon King?" the ninja master asked casually.

"That entity... The Demon King probably isn't someone the Four Heavenly Kings can just talk or negotiate with, right? Am I wrong, Coeurl?"

"Indeed. That is why my lord decided to defect."

Coeurl's telepathy seemed to startle the driver, who caught himself swerving slightly. Coeurl, already looking uneasy, shuddered visibly.

The driver apologized, but the black panther familiar appeared slightly disgruntled.

"Don't you like cars? Sorry about that."

"I acknowledge the necessity of using this mode of transportation. It is not a problem. And I am not frightened."



“Right, got it. Then that’s settled.”

“I *really* am not frightened.”

The whole group was trying hard to suppress their laughter. Kayla, meanwhile, was straining against her seatbelt, looking out the window with keen interest.

*Everything must be so new and fascinating to her,* I realized.

As a parent, I wanted to give her a bit of a tour. Unfortunately, there probably wouldn’t be any time for that.

“It’s okay, Papa,” she reassured me. I wondered what my expression was telling as I sat next to her, looking at her face.

My wise daughter looked up at me and smiled brightly. “Kayla’s so happy to be with Papa right now.”

I couldn’t help but hug her. “Me too,” I said.

“Officer, over here!”

“Enough already, Shiki-san,” I said, rolling my eyes.

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As our vehicle entered the expressway, the TV screen mounted in the front showed the dire situation in Shibuya. Whatever would normally be playing at this hour was interrupted by emergency news broadcasts.

Collapsed buildings. Skeletons and Shadows attacking citizens. The scene was being filmed from a helicopter, likely too disturbing to show what was happening on the ground. Fortunately, we weren’t in the shot—maybe we had been censored out.

*If that’s the case,* I thought, *this whole commotion might also be a kind of camouflage... Yeah, seems like the kind of thing Mr. Wan’s organization might do.*

Haneda Airport had been closed since the Demon King appeared. I guess since he was floating south of Urayasu, the airport would have been a quick trip for

him.

Meanwhile, Kayla had been paying a lot of attention to Coeurl. She seemed to love his fur, hugging his neck and rubbing her cheek against him, calling him “doggy, doggy.” I didn’t bother pointing out to her that, as a black panther familiar, he was more feline...

Coeurl seemed annoyed at first, but eventually he sat still on the seat, enduring Kayla’s affection. “Just don’t touch the whiskers,” he warned. When Kayla’s hand stroked under his chin, he purred for a moment in pleasure before suddenly shaking his head as if snapping back to reality.

“It’s nothing,” he stated.

“Right, it’s nothing,” Shiki managed to reply, barely suppressing her laughter. Coeurl looked bewildered, then he pushed Kayla away.

“I simply cannot treat the boss’s daughter rudely,” he explained.

“Sorry about that. Thanks for babysitting her a bit longer,” I said, ignoring Coeurl’s glare as we continued our meeting.

We were heading toward Haneda Airport, but Mr. Wan, though he was participating in the meeting, kept glancing at his phone screen. Apparently, he was on some app that showed the movements of the others in his organization.

“Don’t you use social media?” I asked him.

“Those platforms have their data mined by the tech companies. We did consider it, though,” he replied. Suddenly, his expression changed. “It seems there’s been an attack on one of our teams by skeletons. A very powerful individual was among them. One team is fleeing right now. Can you help?”

“Where is it?”

“Somewhere near Umeyashiki.”

The rest of us looked at each other, clueless about the geography, then Mr. Wan flicked open Google Maps to show us.

“It’s close. But this is a residential area, isn’t it...?”

“It’s Tokyo. Everywhere is residential,” Mr. Wan said matter-of-factly.

*So... he's basically giving us the green light to engage in a firefight in a neighborhood.*

"Let's go," Shiki declared.

"Whatever their intentions, if we protect the barrier, we'll end up confronting Diasnexus. The worst-case scenario for us right now is facing the Demon King and the Ghost King at the same time."

"That's right. Although this might be a trap."

"Then let's be lured out. Kazu-kun, can you manage your MP?"

I glanced at Mia's watch on my wrist. It had been nearly an hour...

"I've used Deportation to send back all of my familiars, so I think I can manage."

The car stopped at the side of the road, and we got out, along with Wan.

"I'll go with them from here," Wan informed the driver. "You can go back."

"You're coming with us? You know it's dangerous, right?"

"We can't have you getting lost, can we?"

"We're not all Keiko-san, you know."

"And that's probably a good thing," Wan laughed. "But thank you."

The seven of us, including Coeurl and Mr. Wan, took to the air.

To the west, explosions lit up the sky.

## Chapter 243: The Battle at Umeyashiki

The first thing we saw was a pileup at an intersection, which had caused quite a stir. From the onlookers' excited conversations, we gathered there had been a high-speed chase between a ten-seater van and a handful of skeletons.

The pursuing skeletons had all been mounted on horses of bone, and the chase had ensnared at least half a dozen vehicles.

The scene was surreal, but even weirder was that people were saying the horses had the lower bodies of horses... and the upper bodies of humans. Basically, they were skeleton centaurs.

"Let's catch up fast," I suggested.

We flew above the accident, glancing sideways at it. People occasionally noticed us, looking up and shouting, but by now we'd gotten pretty good at ignoring them.

If videos ended up on YouTube, I was pretty sure Mr. Wan's organization would take them down.

Before long, we'd located the site of the car chase and confirmed that yes, it was a squad of centaur skeletons. There were five of them, and each one was a humanoid skeleton mounted on the skeletal body of a horse.

Even as they ran, the centaur skeletons notched arrows into their bows and fired. The van ahead swerved in panic, screeching loudly against the asphalt and narrowly dodging the arrows—but it cost it. As it slowed, the skeletons closed in.

Then, one of the centaur skeletons fired a beam of light...

Just when it seemed all hope was lost, a curtain of rainbow-colored light appeared behind the van and deflected the beam.

Unfortunately, it couldn't escape damage entirely, its rear end exploding with a loud bang. The vehicle spun wildly.

Despite the driver's near-miraculous skill in avoiding the surrounding cars, a major accident seemed imminent.

"Kayla, Tamaki! Stop them!"

"Okay, got it!"

"Mama Tamaki, let's go!"

Kayla took Tamaki's hand and vanished with a Dimensional Step. The next moment, the two warped out in front of the van. Tamaki shouted, "All right!" and positioned herself to block the spinning vehicle, extending her hands forward...

"With all my might!"

There was a tremendous sound. Tamaki firmly grasped the van, stopping its motion completely. Inside, we could see airbags deploying.

"Does Mr. Wan's organization enforce seat belts in the back seats as well?"

"Don't worry, it should be fine. Looks like they had a barrier inside."

"A barrier, for things like the laws of inertia... Ah, well, magic bends the laws of inertia all the time, doesn't it?"

Magic like Gravity, indeed, seemed to directly challenge Einstein.

"Then, like we talked about..."

"Yeah, Kazu-kun, you guys be careful, too."

I summoned the Divine Winged Apostle Penusa for the... how many times today? Then I applied support magic and sent her and Arisu on their way. The skeletons seemed quite formidable, but with their effectiveness against the undead, they should have no problem.

Rushia and I followed after the two of them, while Shiki, Mr. Wan, and Coeurl stayed further behind. Being at a high altitude would probably make them easy targets for magic, so the plan was to descend to the ground at an opportune moment.

*Now, let's see... How would the enemy respond? I wondered. After all, we're dealing with a Ghost King who appears to be quite the strategist.*



There were ten enemy combatants, at least as far as I could see. Five of them were centaur-type skeletons, each carrying a humanoid skeleton on its back.

Among the humanoids, two were clad in tattered robes—probably mages.

After a moment observing what magic they used, I could tell both were High Wizard Skeletons. That meant the remaining three must be Skeletal Godbreakers. It was a similar composition to before, but the strength of the centaur ones was the real issue.

“The Centaur Skeletons, their archery skills are incredibly strong,” Rushia remarked.

“Wait, but they missed their shots earlier, didn’t they?”

“That was probably because Mr. Wan’s friend inside the moving box used magic,” Rushia speculated. Her ability to perceive this was a testament to her specialized training in magic.

“But they’re nothing compared to Mekish Grau,” she continued. “We’ve got nothing to be afraid of.”

“Well, yeah, comparing them to divine soldiers is a bit unfair.”

Just then, Arisu and Penusa charged into the enemy ranks, attacking with anti-undead magic while the skeletons desperately tried to counterattack...

By the time Kayla and Tamaki warped into the fray, the disparity in strength was already evident.

Even the Godbreakers, with weapon skills equivalent to Level 9, were no real challenge for Arisu and Tamaki, who had effectively reached Level 10 in their skills.

The fact that Penusa was on par with them in combat strength meant that, indeed, no foes could stand against them, except possibly the Four Heavenly Kings themselves.

Rushia and I landed a short distance away. The surrounding people had already fled, leaving the shopping street deserted. Shiki's group rushed to the halted van to check on Mr. Wan's people.

Ending this battle could wait, but what his organization's actions mattered for other reasons, too...

"Is someone coming?"

Maybe because it was the second time, I thought I could sense a vague presence nearby. Rushia and I nodded to each other.

"Now!" Shiki shouted from behind. Rushia and I leaped away as if repelled from our spot.

A ghostly figure burst through the asphalt, appearing right where we had been just a moment before.

"The same trick won't work twice, Diasnexus."

*"Let's see about that."*

Before I could even process my surprise, Diasnexus's form wavered like mist and vanished. *Could this be... an illusion?* I wondered uneasily. *Then, where's the real Ghost King?*

The answer came swiftly as Shiki screamed behind me. Turning around, I saw him, emerging from the wall of a building and rushing at her and Mr. Wan.

"Why are you targeting me?!"

*"You are a valuable target they seek to protect; the plan is to start with you,"* Diasnexus declared.

"Oh, really?" Shiki asked him with a defiant smirk. "What about this, then?" She brandished a rainbow-colored gem she had been hiding—a mana storage stone, which she'd gotten from the Mia Vendor during our last visit to the White Room.

"Transposition," Shiki declared, holding the mana stone out in front of her.

The spell activated. Shiki disappeared, and in her place, the Divine Winged Apostle Penusa appeared, ready to launch magic at the approaching Ghost King.

“Barrier Break.”

A pale glow obliterated the vast array of buffs enveloping the Ghost King.

By the third round, caution was expected, which was why a little trickery was in order.

Of course, we’d considered alternatives in case this hadn’t worked, but it seemed the first round of this battle of wits with Diasnexus would go to us.

Stripped of thousands of protective spells at once, the Ghost King was furious.

*“Then, I will eliminate this nuisance of a familiar first.”*

“I’m afraid not.”

This time, it was Mr. Wan who had spoken. The ninja master stepped forward.

Diasnexus showed a momentary flicker of disturbance. He hadn’t expected an old man, who neither belonged to his world, nor was a familiar, nor a visitor from another world, to stand before him. But the moment passed, and the Ghost King’s anger intensified.

*“You dare mock me?”*

A black something came shooting from the palm of Diasnexus’s outstretched right hand—the same devastating attack that had obliterated the vicinity of Shibuya.

“I’m not underestimating you,” Mr. Wan calmly stated, facing the potentially lethal attack without panic. He calmly met the ghostly glare of Diasnexus’s skull, raising his right hand... in which lay the same rainbow-colored gem Shiki had used earlier.

*“What?!”*

“Actually, it’s because you underestimate me that I find meaning in being here.”

This was indeed the second round of the offensive and defensive battle. Fighting normally wouldn’t suffice to defeat this cunningly elusive, most formidable foe.



Thus, the only option was to expose a vulnerability and lure him into a trap.

If Shiki and Mr. Wan remained unprotected behind, Diasnexus would surely target them. At that moment, if Wan could transform into an attacker, even the cautious Diasnexus would forget his defenses and leap forward.

After all, under normal circumstances, such an enticing target wouldn't exist.

It was like a duck bringing its own green onions—especially if the opponent was just an elderly man.

*“What can you possibly do with that one thing?!”*

The black aura spread out in a fan shape, striking with such incredible speed that almost no one would have been able to react to it. Certainly none of us could have.

But this was Wan, the master of the Greater Ninja.

He calmly unleashed the power of the gem.

“Deflection.”

The rainbow-colored gem shone brightly. The barrier that appeared in front of Wan reflected the black aura with perfect timing...

*“Impossible! How could this be?!”* Diasnexus cried, just before he was struck by his own lethal attack, resulting in a massive explosion.

## Chapter 244: Shiki's Revenge

**A**fter the battle in Shibuya, Yukariko Shiki had a request.

"I know I'm being selfish, but just this once, let me fight, too. I want to avenge my mom and grandparents with my own hands."

She had lost three people to Diasnexus, and her only surviving relative, her dad, wouldn't even get a goodbye as she departed this Earth.

Shiki placed a hand over her heart as she continued, "I've been thinking. Should I go back to the other world carrying this hatred? Isn't there something small I can do toward exterminating the Ghost King? I'm lucky—I have Reconnaissance. I can react to Diasnexus's surprise attacks faster than anyone. That's my unique advantage."

In other words, she wanted to be used as bait... to give her all in the fight.

"Or Kazu-kun, do you think going after revenge is pointless?"

"Are you really saying that to me...? And can you stop trying to one-up me?"

"I'm sorry. But I thought you of all people would understand."

My quest for revenge was personal. Hers was triggered by the death of her family. If asked what the difference was... I couldn't deny it now.

"Understood, but..." I glanced at Mr. Wan, who had been listening intently, eyes narrowed. He raised an eyebrow. "Could you protect Shiki?"

"What can an old man without any power possibly do?"

"What if you had power?"

At first, Shiki had been opposed to putting Wan in danger, a sentiment I shared, but ultimately, we both agreed that this was the most effective strategy.

And so, we'd arrived at this moment.

The cunning Ghost King, having his most powerful and formidable magic thrown back in his face by Deflection, was forced to endure the brunt of his own attack.

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The aftermath of the clash caused buildings to collapse. As the black wave of destruction was absorbed into the blue sky, the Ghost King's scream echoed far and wide. Dust rose, obscuring our view. Considering that the last hit from that black wave had devastated half the city, we felt sure this would spell defeat for him.

And yet, when Divine Winged Apostle Penusa dove into the dust cloud, the way she stopped short, her body stiffening, could only mean one thing: the Ghost King was still alive.

"Penusa!" I called, activating Familiar Awakening. When it came to destroying the undead, she was the strongest. I poured all my MP into her.

Glancing back, I saw Arisu and Kayla effectively cornering the skeletons. Tamaki, as planned, was flying back to us.

"Tamaki, help Penusa," I told her. "You know what to do."

"Leave it to me!" With Arisu's Holy Weapon-enchanted sword in hand, Tamaki leaped into the dust cloud.

"Oh, this is..." Mr. Wan began, admiration in his voice as he peered into the dust cloud.

*Wait, can he actually see the battle unfolding inside there? Impressive, to say the least...*

"It seems the angel and Tamaki are focusing on not letting the enemy escape, fighting with emphasis on restraint," he narrated to us.

"Got it. Rushia? Get ready to unleash your most powerful attack magic."

"Will do."

A gust of wind arose, clearing the dust. This must have been the aftermath of Penusa's magic. Suddenly, the battlefield was visible.

Penusa, glowing red all over thanks to Familiar Awakening, was producing countless chains of white light, attempting to restrain the ghostly limbs of Diasnexus.

The chains writhed like snakes, binding the Ghost King one after another. Despite his desperate attempts to escape through continuous magic casting, the chains proved unbreakable, and Penusa repelled attack after attack with a translucent shield.

"Here I go!"

Tamaki charged in, slicing through the misty body with a glowing sword. Once again, the Ghost King's screams filled the air.

"Move aside! I am to become the power of the Demon Lord! Not die here!"

As a member of the Four Heavenly Kings, the Ghost King's frantic struggles were a pitiful sight. His skeletal jaw rattled, and the red light within his skull flickered as if even it was screaming.

Was his immense power waning? And yet, he continued to struggle. Was this a testament to his deep loyalty to the Demon Lord? This was precisely why he needed to be vanquished here...

"Don't underestimate me!"

The moment Penusa's restraint loosened, Diasnexus dove into the wall of a nearby building.

"Tamaki!"

"Leave it to me! Maximum Ultra Gorgeous Deluxe!"

Her finishing move sure had a pretty random name, but Tamaki unleashed the Dragon Slayer Slash. Her target: the building into which the Ghost King had melted.

A golden glow accompanied Tamaki's strike as she literally shattered the building, inflicting massive damage on everything inside.

“Foolish, foolish!”

The misty ghost emerged in agony, spinning in the air as if blown away by the wind, scattering his form. Yet, the Ghost King, driven by sheer obstinacy, was still trying to get away...

“Rushia. Now!”

“Cold Inferno.”

A black flame wrapped in cold air spiraled out from Rushia’s palm.

This was our first use of fire-water synthesis magic in actual combat. Moreover, its power had been amplified tenfold. Black flames collided with Diasnexus, who was already on his last breath. His spectral body stiffened as if frozen, then began to burn, starting with its extremities.

“Foolish... How could I... be destroyed...?”

Diasnexus glared at us, the red light that served as his eyes narrowing sharply.

“So, it is true. You are humans. Beings that experience and grow.”

*Yes, that’s right. We don’t just gain experience through battle. We devise countermeasures for tactics we’ve faced before and always strive to outwit our opponents.*

*King of Ghosts, you might have been a strategist... but surely that was the result of efforts made during your lifetime. After death, you’re like a computer that doesn’t update anymore. Maybe your obsession with the Demon Lord is also due to a spirit that’s become rigid without updates.*

“Demon Lord... my lord...”

With a final deathly cry, Diasnexus vanished. A white gemstone rolled onto the ground. This was truly the moment the Ghost King had exhausted his strength. Judging by the sounds of battle behind us, the fight on the other side had ended almost simultaneously.

And then... we found ourselves in the White Room.

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“It’s over, isn’t it?”

Shiki sighed and flopped down, laughing weakly and looking up at me. “I’m kind of tired,” she added.

“After being targeted by such a formidable opponent, it’s no wonder.”

“That’s part of it, yeah. But thinking that I’ve avenged my family... It feels like a weight’s been lifted off my shoulders.”

I nodded in agreement. Her emotions were something only she could fully understand. If Shiki felt even a little bit relieved, that was a joy for me as well.

She looked up at the ceiling. It was completely all white.

“Now, I guess there’s nothing left for me to regret in this world. The only thing I wanted was to level up a little more. At this level, facing the Demon Lord would be...”

“Impossible, right? The Demon Lord must be on a much higher level than even the Four Heavenly Kings. I mean, it sounds like he operates on a similar system to the monsters and us.”

*Of course, it’s unlikely the Demon Lord would come at us wielding a weapon.*

That aspect of the system still baffled me.

“The system might not be exactly the same. After all, it’s too optimized for us.”

“That’s true. The system fits us so perfectly, it’s like it was made specifically for us. Honestly, if someone told me it was made by a future version of myself...”

Suddenly, I realized something that had been nagging at the back of my mind.

*No, that’s it. Took me long enough, but I think I’ve got it now.*

I sat down in front of a PC alone and began typing.

“Are you Mia?”

After a pause, the response came back: **NO**.

“Are you an entity created by Mia?”

The answer: ***YES***.

I guess they thought I was acting odd, because everyone behind was holding their breath, wondering what was happening.







“Kayla, did you know about this? I mean, that your mom created the master of the White Room?”

My beloved daughter energetically raised her hand high in affirmation.

*So, she knew—huh, I see. I wonder if she would have told me if I’d asked the right questions... because the PC isn’t telling us anything more about this.*

“Do you know how it came to be?”

“Mama spread across the past and the future.”

“I don’t totally understand what you mean, but I get that something incredible happened.”

To summarize what I learned from Kayla: Mia prioritized communication with the beings that govern that space and altered herself in the process. As a result, she became an existence slightly different from us. It seems she became a continuum that broadly unfolds across time and space equally. Thus, she was able to travel back in time and design the core of this White Room system.

Whether it was always meant to be this way, or if she’d chosen for us to be able to come to the White Room... I still had no idea. Actually, it seemed like Kayla didn’t fully grasp what she was saying either; she was more parroting the words Mia had told her.

“Is Mia watching over this room... over us right now?”

“Who knows?”

“Gotcha... I want to see Mia.”

The words slipped out unbidden, followed by a sigh. Kayla reached up and gave my head a gentle pat. “Papa, good boy, good boy.”

“Kayla is an angel.”

“No. Kayla is a daughter!”

Kayla puffed out her chest with pride. *My daughter truly is an angel*, I marveled.

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Now that we’ve covered everything we knew about that situation, let’s shift our focus.

This time, everyone leveled up. Notably, Shiki jumped three levels, reaching Level 25.

I enhanced my Summoning to Level 7 and improved both my Familiar Enhancement and Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction.

Arisu, Tamaki, Rushia, and Kayla each upgraded their respective derivative skills. In Kayla’s case, since Free Bullet was capped at Level 3, she acquired Destructive Bullet at Level 1. Shiki decided to save her points.

We’d dealt with Diasnexus and done what needed to be done. Now, the only thing left was to confront the Demon Lord.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 63	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 6→1
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 6→7 (Familiar Enhancement 6→7, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 3→4)	

ARISU	
LEVEL: 53	SPEARMANSHIP: 9
HEALING MAGIC:	SKILL POINTS:

9	6→1
<b>HOLY SPEARMANSHIP:</b> 2→3 (Enhanced Spear Skills 2→3, Spear Shield Technique 2→3)	

<b>TAMAKI</b>	
<b>LEVEL:</b> 53	<b>SWORDSMANSHIP:</b> 9
<b>STRENGTH:</b> 9	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b> 6→1
<b>HEAVY SWORDSMANSHIP:</b> 2→3 (Enhanced Sword Skills 2→3, Dragon Slayer Slash 2→3)	

<b>RUSHIA</b>	
<b>LEVEL:</b> 53	<b>FIRE MAGIC:</b> 9
<b>WATER MAGIC:</b> 9	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b> 6→1
<b>FIRE-WATER SYNTHESIS MAGIC:</b> 3 (Cold Inferno 2→3, Water Flare Shield 2→3)	

<b>SHIKI</b>	
<b>LEVEL:</b> 25	<b>RECONNAISSANCE:</b> 7
<b>THROWING:</b> 5	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b> 7

<b>KAYLA</b>
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<b>LEVEL:</b>  55	<b>WIND MAGIC:</b>  9
<b>SHOOTING:</b>  9	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b>  5→0
<b>WIND SHOOTING TECHNIQUE:</b> 3→4 (Enhanced Shooting Skills 3→4, Free Bullet 3, Destructive Bullet 0→1)	

## Chapter 245: The Subjugation of the Demon Lord – Part 1

The sun was beginning to reach for the western horizon.

From the closed runway of Haneda Airport, we ascended into the sunset sky. Kayla looked down and waved goodbye to Mr. Wan. We'd decided to meet him back here after defeating the Demon Lord.

I glanced down at the girl standing next to him; Shiki had been asked to stay behind. It was the only way. Even though she'd leveled up rapidly, she was only at Level 25—less than half the level of Arisu and the others.

We couldn't afford to have her die now; there was still so much she needed to do in the other world.

*"Kazu," came a telepathic message from Coeurl. "The Master has sent a message."*

*"Now, of all times?"*

*"It appears that the gate to the other side is indeed open around the Demon Lord. It's only a tiny hole, but it seems the Demon Lord uses it to draw magical power, to sustain its massive form."*

So, this was what Mr. Wan had mentioned—a rift in the world. Soon, his allies were supposed to activate a boundary barrier to sever that connection.

This meant that the recently restored telepathic link between Coeurl and his master, the Black Winged Mad Wolf, Algrafth, was also about to be cut.

*"What's Algrafth doing? Can't he send reinforcements or something?"*

*"The Master is currently focusing all his efforts on maintaining the Wedge."*

*"Maintaining the Wedge...? So, if Algrafth doesn't keep at it, the one in the mountain near our school will..."*

If that one was destroyed, the world we were supposed to return to would face destruction. Algrafth and his monster army were now inextricably linked to our fate.

*“Until the sun sets.”*

*“What?”*

*“The Master said that the limit is sunset, in the time of this place.”*

*“So, you’re saying... Algrafth can support the Wedge only until then. How can we protect it?”*

*“Eliminate the being that keeps draining magical power from the end of the Wedge.”*

Coeurl looked at the massive black sphere floating ahead, several kilometers in diameter.

An unbelievably large structure floating over Tokyo Bay—the Demon Lord.

*“Either way, that’s what we’re about to do. Can you relay that back?”*

*“I have already conveyed it.”*

*“That makes things faster, thanks.”*

Our conversation aligned closely with what Mr. Wan had mentioned, as well as Diasnexus’s actions; the Ghost King had been scheming to waste time and nullify Algrafth’s efforts.

Nonetheless, we had thwarted the Ghost King’s ambitions. Now, only the Demon Lord remained to be defeated.

Suddenly, an overwhelming sensation of cold washed over my entire body.

*“Looks like the barrier’s been deployed,”* Rushia announced.

That should have severed the link between the Demon Lord and the Wedge, but...

Looking at the Demon Lord floating in the distance, I thought I could see its massive body shuddering. Or maybe it was just an illusion. However, it had been right after the barrier’s deployment that the opponent reacted.

Without any warning, flying jellyfish appeared around the Demon Lord.

*The Flying Jellyfish.*

But their numbers now...

There must have been tens of thousands. The sky ahead was filled with monsters, silhouettes against the sunset. The semi-transparent mass glowed an ominously toxic orange.

“This is...” Rushia murmured in astonishment. “This is the Demon Lord.”

We had some understanding of the disparity in strength between us and our foe. We knew it was vast. Of course it was.

Even if direct confrontation was out of the question, we believed that with the right strategy, there was a way to manage. After all, we had somehow made it through until now. We believed it would work out this time as well, somehow.

But this—this scene unfolding before our eyes? It was far too much, far beyond... This was no longer a matter of a disparity in strength. Even if the enemies were giants and we were ants, the difference in power should not have been this immense.

“K-Kazu-san, what should we do?”

“Just give us a command. If you tell us, we’ll do it.”

“No, no, no, charging in without any plan is absolutely out of the question.”

I tried to offer a smile to Arisu and Tamaki, whose faces had gone pale. My face might have been strained too, but I hadn’t lost my cool... I hoped.

At least, I wasn’t acting recklessly. No matter how formidable the enemy might be, we didn’t actually need to defeat all of them.

In fact, we didn’t need to defeat a single Flying Jellyfish.

There was only one enemy: the Demon Lord. And we had an ace up our sleeve when it came to battling the Demon Lord.

“Kayla, how long will it take to infiltrate the Demon Lord?”

“I’m gonna dive inside,” she said, not really answering the question.

“On your own?... No, maybe we can come with you.”

“If it’s just one person, then...”

*Okay, so only one can go with her. Then, there’s only one option.*

“I’ll go with you. Is that okay?”

“Yes, Papa!”

“W-wait, Kazu-san! It’s too dangerous!” Arisu was panicking, but this was non-negotiable.

It was just like when Rushia and I had conducted the infiltration mission. I had my summoning magic.

“Everyone, do whatever it takes to get Kayla and me close to the Demon Lord. Although, since Kayla has Dimensional Step... if we get within about a kilometer of it, she should be able to teleport us directly there.”

The distance Kayla could leap with Dimensional Step increased by one hundred meters per rank. Thanks to the enhancement from Wind Shooting Technique, her effective rank in Wind Magic was now 11.

“The problem is how close the Flying Jellyfish will let us get before they attack...”

“In Shibuya, they started firing at us from quite a distance, didn’t they?”

That was during the incident in a simulated Shibuya... but yes, they had been firing from kilometers away.

“Can’t I close the distance with my Shape Lightning?” Arisu suggested.

*Hmm, that could be an option, but...*

“There might be invisible barriers, like the night before last when we fought the troll in the forest of the World Tree.”

During that encounter, trying to approach with Sha-Lau’s Shape Lightning had ended disastrously.

In the end, it was Mia’s Dimensional Step that allowed us to engage the enemy. That battle clarified that certain spells cast by monsters could create invisible walls, but Dimensional Step could bypass them.



“Should we give it a try?”

“If it works, that would be best. Tamaki, go with Kayla and Arisu.”

If Arisu and Tamaki were together, they should be fine if anything unexpected happened.

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In the end, they couldn't reach the Demon Lord using Shape Lightning.

Arisu and the others appeared at quite a distance from the Demon Lord and were met with concentrated fire from the Flying Jellyfish, left with no choice but to make a hasty retreat.

Fortunately, there were no injuries, but all three were sweating profusely and slumped in mid-air.

“Mr. Wan did mention something about distortions in space preventing planes, and drones, and missiles from getting close, didn't he?”

“Could you have remembered that a bit sooner, Kazu-san?!”

“Well, it's only now that we're seeing it for ourselves that I really get what he meant. Looks like Dimensional Step is our only option... though I'm still not sure if even that can get us there.”

In that case, we would be out of options. No more moves to make.

“It's okay! We can get there with Dimensional Step!” Kayla declared confidently, puffing out her chest.

*Uh, where did you get that info?*

“Mama told me!”

“I wish you'd mentioned that a bit sooner...”

“I mean, she just told me now!”

*What?!* All of us looked at my daughter in surprise.

Kayla hastily covered her mouth with both hands.

## Chapter 246: The Subjugation of the Demon Lord – Part 2

**A**s curious as I was, my questions for Kayla would have to wait. Right then, we needed to focus one hundred percent on defeating the Demon Lord.

“Okay, so now that we know we can use Dimensional Step, we need to get within one kilometer. Arisu, how close did your Shape Lightning get us just now?”

“Um... I think we were about twenty kilometers from the Demon Lord, maybe less.”

“So, we need to cover another nineteen kilometers... surrounded by Flying Jellyfish.”

However, it was only about ten minutes until sunset. There was no time to dawdle.

“It’s rough, but let’s go with this plan.”

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Coeurl would be staying behind. He wasn’t entirely trustworthy, and there were doubts about his combat effectiveness.

“Bye-bye, Wan-chan!” Kayla called, waving her hand energetically at him.

Although he arranged his face into a mask of slight annoyance, Coeurl’s tail and ears drooped sadly. I think he felt left out.

Next, everyone else grabbed onto Arisu. Tamaki and Rushia held onto her legs, I wrapped my arms around her neck from the back, and Kayla hugged her from the front.

It was an awkward arrangement, but it was better than being flung off in midair.

“Here we go... Shape Lightning.”

With the four of us in tow, Arisu turned into lightning and launched forward.

For just a moment, our acceleration was blindingly fast. We covered the kilometers in a flash, then came to a sudden stop.

In front of us, a massive black wall filled our field of vision. *Wait, not a wall*, I corrected myself; it was the Demon Lord, spherical in shape, but so large that it looked like a wall at this distance.

There was something else that surrounded us in every direction: Flying Jellyfish.

Hundreds, or maybe even thousands of them had already spotted us, and they lost no time in extending their tentacles toward us and launching missiles.

Facing such a saturation attack...

“Mama Arisu! Top left! Over there!” Kayla pointed to a corner where the density of missiles was thinner.

“Shape Lightning,” Arisu spoke without hesitation, again turning into lightning, then bringing us to a sudden stop.

When we opened our eyes, a massive explosion was unfurling exactly where we had been moments before, down and to our right.

*Phew, we managed to avoid the first wave.*

Unfortunately, we couldn’t expect that luck to continue indefinitely. As the blast wave approached, Arisu deployed a barrier with her Spear Shield Technique to block it.

“All right, Kazu-san?”

“Yep. Be careful... Kayla, let’s go.”

Kayla and I separated from Arisu, taking each other’s hands.

The smoke from the explosion cloaked our figures.

“Be careful, Kazu-san. Shape Lightning.” Taking Tamaki and Rushia with her, Arisu left to go serve as a distraction.

“Greater Invisibility,” Kayla cast to hide us both within the smoke.

*According to Sha-Lau, the monsters that saw through our invisibility before had methods of detection other than sight, like thermal detection or sound waves like sonar.*

*In this vast space, I don’t think sonar detection is likely. That leaves...*

“Cold Inferno.”

Rushia’s voice echoed from far away. In the direction Kayla and I were heading, the air exploded in a tempest of ice and flame.

The power of the fire-water synthesis magic at ten times the normal consumption was overwhelming. The nearby jellyfish were severely thrown off balance, with some even falling from the sky.

For a precious moment, the enemy ranks were thrown into chaos.

“Let’s go, Papa!”

Kayla and I took advantage of the blast wave to leap forward. Still holding my hand, Kayla initiated Dimensional Step, closing the distance to the Demon Lord in an instant.

The surrounding Flying Jellyfish seemed unaware of our presence; they were too busy dealing with the powerful magic unleashed by Rushia and the others as they retreated.

This might just work. Kayla and I exchanged nods of agreement, but then—

“Ah!” Kayla exclaimed.

“Accel,” I cast reflexively. By accelerating my consciousness to observe our surroundings, I saw that a Flying Jellyfish below us had just launched a missile in our direction.

Kayla had just used Dimensional Step and was still surrounded by smoke. She wouldn’t be able to move us in time. There was nothing else I could do to evade the incoming missile, so...

“Deflection.”

The thin, rainbow-hued membrane was deployed at the last second. Fortunately, this was an impact missile rather than a location-specific one—which meant that it bounced back the opposite direction, falling toward the Flying Jellyfish.

“Dimensional Step.”

Without waiting to see the result of the collision, Kayla moved us to the next location.

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We were detected straight away by several Flying Jellyfish.

As they aimed their missiles at us and fired, our presence was revealed to the rest, leading to a concentrated attack. But again and again, Kayla accurately identified points where the enemy’s attacks were thinnest, using Dimensional Step in quick succession to evade.

In less than a minute, the Demon Lord hovered directly in front of us. Maybe just two short jumps away?

At this critical moment, right as we jumped out, a violent shockwave hit us. I screamed as I held onto Kayla, both of us spinning wildly through the hot air.

It seemed an enemy’s leftover missile had exploded nearby, like the even-numbered shots in the many shooting games I’d played.

“Kayla, anywhere, just jump!”

“Yes, Papa! Dimensional Step!”

Just before we warped, I saw a swarm of missiles heading our way.

This time it was the odd-numbered shots. Had our decision been even slightly delayed, we would have been caught in their explosion.

At the next spot we jumped to, there was a Flying Jellyfish waiting for us. Its tentacles surged toward us.

“Force Field,” I called, deploying an invisible shield to block the tentacles. While the enemy was momentarily disoriented, Kayla found our next warp point.

As missiles again flew at us from all directions...

“Dimensional Step.”

We escaped by a hair’s breadth, landing right in front of the massive black sphere.

Though “in front” still meant a few hundred meters away...

“Papa, behind you!”

I turned to see a Flying Jellyfish stretching its tentacles toward us.

But then, another loud voice could be heard. “You won’t get in our way!”

It was Tamaki.

The Flying Jellyfish was struck from the opposite side, causing its semi-translucent form to stagger.

*Wait, I thought these guys were immune to physical attacks? So how was it... Ah, it must have been that black sword beam, imbued with Dragon Slayer Slash.*

Tamaki had bought us a few precious seconds. I still couldn’t see her or anyone else through the smoke, but I silently thanked them before turning to Kayla.

“Let’s go.”

“Okay. Dimensional Step.”

The final leap.

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We arrived atop a pitch-black floor.

No, this very ground beneath our feet was the Demon Lord’s body. Looking up, I saw an uncountable number of Flying Jellyfish encircling us, directing their tentacles our way.

“What should we do, Kayla?”

“Below the floor!”

Quickly crouching down, Kayla touched the floor. Swiftly, a cut traced through it—transforming rapidly into a circular hole.

Normally, one would fall through such an opening, but Kayla and I were under the effect of Wind Walk... or so I thought, until our bodies dropped sharply.

*Oh no, we're being sucked in!*

“Kayla!”

In a panic, I reached out for my daughter. Our hands found each other as we fell together.

Missiles rained down from above, but before they could reach the Demon Lord's body, the hole closed up tightly, plunging us into blackness.

## Chapter 247: The Subjugation of the Demon Lord – Part 3

I held Kayla close as we continued our freefall into complete darkness.

“Night Sight,” I cast, but our surroundings remained pitch-black.

We had no other choice—I summoned Nahan and Sha-Lau with Familiar Enhancement Level 7.

“Do what you can,” I instructed them.

*“Yes, Master.”*

*“Got it.”*

Sha-Lau immediately cast a spell that caused us to stop falling. Nahan’s magic tore through the surrounding space, and we landed gently on the floor of what looked like a stone building.

“Is this a temple...?”

We were in a mysterious space, surrounded by thick, pure white columns that seemed to stretch infinitely in every direction. The ceiling was about 20 meters high, emitting a light that reminded me of fluorescent lamps. The floor, columns, and ceiling were made of a material that looked like marble.

“Kayla, do you know what we should do?”

“Hmm...” Kayla pondered, her hand on her chin. Just then, the floor trembled slightly.

*“Be cautious, Master! Something is coming!”* came Heavenly Turtle Nahan’s telepathic warning.

Sha-Lau, the Phantom Wolf King, drew closer to us.

Then, the white floor cracked open, and black shadows sprang forth.



The four shapes were like children of the Demon Lord—smaller spheres, but just as dark and inscrutable. Each was about five meters in diameter, and they had us surrounded.

“Let’s call them Baby Devils. Sha-Lau, Nahan, intercept them. Kayla, let’s get some distance.”

“Yes, Papa!”

As soon as I gave the command, everyone sprang into action. By this point, there was no need for detailed instructions.

Kayla took my hand, and we broke through the encirclement with Dimensional Step.

Sha-Lau and Nahan stayed behind, attacking the Baby Devils with lightning and fire magic.

In retaliation, the four black spheres began to vibrate and emitted pale blue beams—but Nahan’s barrier effortlessly deflected them.

Meanwhile, the Baby Devils staggered under the onslaught of the familiars’ magic, their forms beginning to break apart.

Then, Kayla joined the fight. It was as if hundreds of marbles were forcefully embedded into their bodies. One fell to the floor and exploded. After the dust settled, where each black sphere had been, only a yellow gem remained. It seemed these foes were divine-class monsters.

By the time the third demon was defeated, we were back in the White Room.

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In the White Room, it was just Kayla and me.

*Well, that’s not surprising, I guess. We’re too far from Arisu and them, and besides, the inside of this sphere is kind of like being in a different world.*

“Kayla, I want to ask something. When you said you were communicating with Mia... was it before the barrier was deployed?”

“Yes, Papa. Because Coeurl was talking to his master, I thought maybe I could talk to Mama, too.”

*So, Coeurl is still just a pet to her... Well, it doesn't matter.*

“Did you know right away that Coeurl was communicating with Algrafth?”

*Could Kayla have some weird extrasensory perception going on? It wouldn't be surprising, really. Mia did seem to have done some tinkering when she created Kayla.*

Kayla looked puzzled but then said, “I can hear it.”

“So, you can hear it, huh? Well, then I guess that's that.”

I guess Kayla did possess a sense we lacked.

*Papa's going to give up thinking—ah ha ha! Ah, never mind.*

“But you know, Kayla is happy.”

“Really?”

“Soon, Papa and Mama will meet.”

*Soon...? Wait, we'll meet? I can see Mia again?*

“You mean, after we defeat the Demon Lord...?”

“I'll defeat the Demon Lord. Papa, when you go back, you'll meet Mama.”

*Could it be that Mia is outside this world right now, in some kind of external realm?*

I sighed, sat cross-legged on the floor, and beckoned Kayla to sit between my legs. My beloved daughter looked up at me with a shy smile.

“Kayla, can you tell me more about yourself?”

“About me? Like what?”

“Anything. What you like, what you don't like. Fun things, things you want to do... anything.”

Kayla rattled off disjointed stories in reply, jumping from one topic to another, and sometimes I wasn't even sure what she was talking about.

One thing became clear: the “Mama” she spoke of didn’t have a consistent form or shape. Sometimes she was a great tree, other times something mechanical, and at times she took a human form.

Sometimes large, sometimes small. Sometimes she spoke, other times she remained silent.

*Mia, how far have you drifted from being human?*

Perhaps sensing my unease, Kayla looked up at me and smiled. “It’s okay,” she said. “Mama loves Papa very much.”

“Does she?... Yeah, that’s good to hear.”

“Yeah. So, it’s okay.”

As my daughter sat there comforting me, I could only offer a pained smile and shake my head. “Okay, I’ll relax then.”

“Please do.”

“Kayla, you’ll come with me, right?”

She smiled and nodded. Yet, for some reason, her smile filled me with an indescribable sense of unease...

*No, that couldn’t be.* I shook my head, dismissing the budding worry in my heart.

Standing up, I headed toward the PC to leave the White Room.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 64	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 3
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 7 (Familiar Enhancement 7, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 4)	

KAYLA	
LEVEL:  56	WIND MAGIC:  9
SHOOTING:  9	SKILL POINTS:  2
WIND SHOOTING TECHNIQUE: 4 (Enhanced Shooting Skills 4, Free Bullet 3, Destructive Bullet 1)	

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Back on Earth, Kayla stretched up, smiled, and gently kissed my cheek.

“This is special, just for me,” she said.

I was too astonished to move. Kayla took the opportunity to step back.

“Okay, Papa. Bye-bye.”

With a genuinely pleasant smile, my daughter jumped into the fissure from which the Baby Devils had emerged.

“Kayla!”

I rushed toward the edge of the hole. As she floated down, she looked up at me.

“This is my job now. I’ll be okay.”

“Wait, I’ll come with—”

“No!” Kayla called firmly, then in a softer tone, she added, “Goodbye, Papa.”

The abyss that had swallowed Kayla began to close automatically. Within seconds there was no trace of the fissure along the white floor.

*I might have been able to follow Kayla if I had jumped in right away, but my body didn’t move. Was it because I was a coward, or did my instincts hold me back? I knelt on the floor, stunned.*

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I lost track of time. The entire space, with its endlessly extending columns, began to shake.

“Did Kayla win?” I muttered to myself.

Somehow, I understood. Not through logic, but through a kind of sixth sense. My beloved daughter had accomplished what she needed to do.

***“WHY?! HOW COULD THIS HAPPEN?! KAYLA, YOU SAID THERE WAS NO DANGER TO YOUR LIFE! DID YOU LIE? TO ME?! TO YOUR FATHER?!”***

My daughter had scattered herself as the price for defeating the Demon Lord.

## Chapter 248: Beloved One

**B**efore I knew it, I found myself in the middle of a forest.

The sky was tinged with the colors of sunset, a cool wind rustling the leaves of the trees. This place was a lot like our school's forest... or perhaps it was modeled after it.

Behind me, I heard the sound of grass being trampled underfoot.

"Mia?"

"Mm."

There she was—the girl I hadn't stopped longing for since the moment I'd lost her. Mia, looking just the same age as when we'd parted, still wearing our school's PE uniform.

When she looked up at me, it was with her usual indifferent expression. "Kayla said I could only meet you when I go back to the other world. The energy released by the Demon Lord disappearing was a bit too strong. I intervened through the Wedge; I sucked everything inside out, outside the Earth, and just threw it out. In the process, I saved you, Kazu."

"If you could do that, you could have helped from the beginning..."

"There are rules."

"So, you couldn't act until the Demon Lord was defeated?"

"Something like that. It's thanks to all of you guys that I was able to act."

I sighed and sat down. Mia sat down directly in front of me; her bearing was formal, as if we were in a meeting.

"You're quite humble today."

"Mm. It's been a while since I've done this. I'm not used to it anymore."

For me, it had been only a day. But for her? It must have seemed an eternity. Long enough to forget how to use her body, her familiar way of speaking, her sarcasm and wit.

There was so much I wanted to talk about, so much I wanted to say, but first...

"I have two questions," I began. "Can you stay with me from now on?"

Mia slowly shook her head. Although her expression didn't change, her eyes seemed to soften slightly.

"Okay. Second question... Why did you let Kayla die?"

"Kayla exists."

"Wait, but she... When we parted... She was alone..."

"Her new body will be ready soon. Her soul has been retrieved."

I pressed a hand to my forehead. *Wait, just wait, I need everything to wait.*

*What the hell...? I mean, I think I understand what she's saying, but still...*

"Will that really still be Kayla?"

"The essence of her soul remains the same," Mia insisted, tilting her head as if puzzled by my question. There wasn't a trace of jest in her voice; she really didn't see what the problem was.

I let out a heavy sigh. *I'm just so tired... You've... yes, you've been through so much that I can't even imagine. That's why. That's why you're...*

"Kazu, you look like you're about to cry."

Without a word, I hugged Mia tightly. I never wanted to let go.

My chest hurt. There was so much I wanted to say, but no words came out. I bit my lip hard.

"Kazu." Mia wrapped her arms around my back and gently patted—and that was my breaking point. Hot tears slid down my cheeks.

"Kazu, we have to go back. Time flows the same here as it does on Earth. Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia must be worried."

"I don't want to. I don't want to leave."

“We can’t stay.”

Gently but firmly, Mia pulled away from me. Despite her slender build, she was incredibly strong.

Her current form was temporary, created just for this meeting. *She went through all this effort just to see me*, I marveled. I understood her dedication. But still...

“I don’t want to, Mia. I don’t want to be apart from you.”

I cried like a child. Like a petulant, unreasonable toddler. Like a brat who knew nothing of the ways of the world. I simply wailed. I should have been ashamed, but I felt nothing.

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I don’t know how long I cried for, but Mia stayed by my side the whole time, watching with a silent intensity that only she possessed.

Suddenly, I felt a presence behind me. Turning around, I saw Kayla standing there—dressed in a spotless, pure white tunic. It was the same outfit she’d been wearing when I first met her.

“Papa, I’m back.”

“Welcome back, Kayla... Is your body, I mean... Are you okay now?”

“Yes. Kayla is healthy,” she reported with a bright smile. It seemed she remembered everything up until now...

“Kayla, do you remember what you did before we said goodbye?”

“Um...” Kayla looked unsure, and I finally understood.

The final kiss. She’d desperately wanted something that could be uniquely hers.

The girl in front of me was the same Kayla, but she didn’t have that memory.

“Yeah, it seems the White Room acts like a save point, huh?” I asked Mia, but I already knew the answer.



“Mm,” came her voice from behind me. “Correct. As a reward, here’s Kayla as a present.”

“Mia...”

When I turned back, her lips were curled awkwardly into a smile. “Kayla can’t return here anymore.”

“Does that mean... she won’t be revived?”

“The Demon Lord is no more. There was no other way. Sorry, Kazu. It’s true we used our daughter.”

“That’s all right. I mean, no, it’s not all right, but, Mia, from now on...”

Mia shook her head again, as she had done many times before. “I’ll always be watching. That alone makes me happy.”

“That’s not enough...”

“Then, level up.”

*Is she suggesting I go to the White Room?*

“Mm. I’ll prepare a way for you to communicate with me in the White Room. Now that there’s no need to allocate resources to defeating the Demon Lord, I’ll have a bit more leeway.”

“I see. I’m counting on you.”

“And... get stronger. Much, much stronger. Then, maybe someday...” she trailed off.

*Someday, what?* I wondered, but Mia just shook her head.

Perhaps, after we’d leveled up further, our paths could intersect with Mia’s again. Maybe there was more to this system she’d apparently made.

*If so... No matter how long it takes, we will achieve it.*

I stood up, taking Kayla’s hand, and nodded firmly at Mia.

“So, this is just a brief goodbye.”

“Mm. Just for a little while.”

“Let’s meet again, Mia.”

“Bye-bye,” she said. The next moment, my consciousness faded to black.

## Chapter 249: The Armistice

Once again, we were in a pitch-dark space, Kayla and I floating in the void.

Before us loomed a large, dark creature. A great wolf with sharp, blade-like wings and a single horn: the Black Winged Mad Wolf, Algrafth.

Algrafth glared at me with bulging red eyes, then his face contorted into something resembling a smile. The oppressive aura he once had was absent.

*Could it be that he's exhausted? Was maintaining the Wedge that hard?*

*"I have no intention to fight," Algrafth announced. "But if you attack, I will have no choice but to respond."*

"You mean you don't have the energy to fight anymore... Have you been supporting the Wedge all this time?"

*"It was part of a deal."*

"Deal with who?"

*"The god of the Sixth Wedge. The oldest and newest god, as she's called."*

*Ah, that must be Mia.* I had a vague understanding of who created the Sixth Wedge in the middle school basement. Whether Algrafth knew this was the same girl who'd lost her legs that day, it was hard to say.

"So, we've defeated Diasnexus and the Demon Lord. Will you lead all the Demon Lord's forces now?"

*"I only command the monster army. That was true before and remains unchanged."*

"I see... Do you, or your forces, have any intention of making peace with humans?"

Algrafth slowly shook his head. *"Your kind are a natural disaster. To confront a natural disaster head-on is nothing but folly."*

*He seems to be making a much more intelligent point than I could.*

*“No matter how strong you may be, in a hundred or two hundred years, hiding will lead to your extinction.”*

*“Ah, well... whether we’ll just die off normally or if our children will be born with the same powers, we don’t know.”*

*“Then, that will be the time,” Algrafth murmured in resignation. “We shall retreat to the northern lands. Should you pursue us, we will fight until the last one remains, but...”*

*“It probably won’t come to that,” I ventured. “Any monsters outside your army will act independently of the Demon Lord’s command, so we’ll still have plenty of others to contend with.”*

*“That is likely.”*

Algrafth seemed to have anticipated this response. But as he was the only monster to have escaped the Demon Lord’s control through cunning, it was expected.

*So, maybe it’s worth taking a step further.*

*“Hey, just a suggestion, but how about we set up a way to communicate with each other?”*

*“What are you talking about?” Algrafth asked, taken aback.*

*“Coeurl... the name we gave that black panther you sent, how about using him as a messenger? We can just say he’s a familiar I summoned.”*

*“And what benefit does that offer?”*

*“You’ll be able to keep an eye on us from the inside without needing to use a Doppelgänger or anything. We want information about the monster territories and their control structures. We’d really appreciate it if you could provide that kind of information through Coeurl.”*

Algrafth stared at me, dumbfounded, but eventually nodded slowly.

*“If you have that intention, it might not be a loss to try.”*

*“Thanks. Actually, there’s another reason.”*

*“Another reason?”*

“I’ve really started to like him after fighting alongside him. And my kid seems to like Coeurl, too.”

Kayla, who had been listening quietly, raised her hand and exclaimed, “Coeurl is cute! Coeurl is good, good!”

This time, Algrafth’s eyes widened in true surprise. He really seemed at a loss for words. *“Are you all right with this?”* he asked.

“Well, uh, I’m not sure?”

*Sorry, it’s a bit hard to say,* I thought to myself.

“As long as we share the same goal—protecting the Wedge—I think we can keep fighting together. So having some form of exchange could be good for both of us.”

After a moment of silence, Algrafth finally said, *“Very well. If this exchange can produce something fruitful... then let’s try it.”*

With that, Algrafth closed his eyes, signaling the end of the conversation.

“Kayla, shall we go?”

“Yes, Papa!”

Kayla led the way, casting a spell. Our surroundings changed.

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Suddenly we were at the former site of the Cultural Arts Center—back in the other world, not Earth.

It was night, the sky ablaze with stars, and there was no sign of other people or monsters around.

“Looks like it’s quite late—what time is it now?”

I took out the watch Mia had given me, carefully stored in my backpack. It showed 11 PM.

Kayla had just stirred awake, and now she leaned over to look at the watch. "It's bedtime for good kids!" she declared cheerfully.

*Now, what to do...* Just then, the nearby bushes rustled.

The figure that slowly appeared before us was a black panther monster.

"Are you, by any chance... Coeurl?"

"Indeed. I have come searching for you at the behest of my master. You're to rejoin your companions, right?"

"Ah, yes."

Coeurl must have known where people were congregating, because he confidently took the lead as we set off. As we walked, I wondered how he felt about playing the role of a goodwill ambassador and spy in this treaty.

"Are there no skeletons left on this mountain?" I asked him.

"As soon as Diasnexus flew to Earth, all the skeletons stopped moving and turned to dust. It seems they were all familiars under Diasnexus's control."

"All of them, huh... He really was formidable."

*If he had unleashed his full power against us, would we still be alive to have this conversation?*

"By the way, Coeurl, when did you come back to this world?"

"After the sun set, a little while after your companions."

"Ah, so you were with Arisu and them. They didn't give you a hard time, did they?"

"They treated me with utmost respect. As if fearing that harming me would incur the wrath of my master."

"I guess it's more for Kayla's sake..."

"The immature female?"

"You seem to be Kayla's favorite."

"Coeurl is cute!" she piped up.

“Oh?” The black panther glanced back at us with his red eyes for a moment before turning away haughtily. However, his tail was wagging, more energetically than ever before.

“That’s the situation, so please be careful. I’m counting on you to keep an eye on my daughter.”

“Is it not your daughter who will be keeping watch over me?”

“Kayla’s unpredictable with her jumps. You, on the other hand, could definitely act as a stopper for her.”

Coeurl fell silent. Still, his tail continued to wag furiously. It seemed he was quite pleased with the role of watchdog.

Honestly, the idea of interacting with monsters filled me with unease, and I wasn’t without concerns about exposing my dear daughter to them. But well, Kayla was Mia’s daughter, too. I was sure—not out of logic, but by instinct—that pairing her with Coeurl would work out well.

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Near the ruins of the main high school building, a row of tents had been pitched. Several campfires were lit, and in their center, a bluish teleportation gate glowed. Soldiers of the Light Tribe and members of the high school group milled around it.

The first to notice us emerging from the forest were a few girls hovering anxiously around the teleportation gate. I recognized them as being from the CAC group. They shouted something, and Arisu appeared from one of the tents.

She ran toward us half-crying, and collided with me.

“Kazu-san, Kazu-san, Kazu-san! I was so worried!”

“I’m back, Arisu. Is everyone okay?”

For now, I decided to comfort Arisu, whose face was a mess with tears and snot.





## Final Chapter: Between Two Worlds – A Delicate Balance

**W**iping away her tears, Arisu recounted the tale. The massive black sphere into which Kayla and I plunged had crumbled and dissolved into the air as the Demon Lord was defeated.

Arisu and the others panicked—naturally, as Kayla and I hadn't returned.

Then, the barrier was lifted. Coeurl received a transmission from Algrath, informing them of Kayla's and my safety. Thankfully, this stopped Arisu and the team from doing anything rash, and they decided to withdraw.

They had to withdraw, in fact, because the Flying Jellyfish created by the Demon Lord didn't disappear immediately. From what Mr. Wan's organization had observed, these creatures would eventually deplete their magical energy and vanish. However, there was concern that certain nations might intervene and act recklessly...

"This is going to be a headache from now on," Mr. Wan had said with a laugh. "But from here on, it's our job. You all should act before the rift closes."

Before he left, Mr. Wan had handed a scroll to Shiki. It was an old-fashioned scroll, the kind you might see in a period drama, suggesting it could contain secret techniques.

"Please pass this to Keiko, my disciple," the ninja master had said. "It's a certificate of completion."

"Um, for what...?"

"Now that I've heard your stories, I see there's nothing more I can teach her. I've also included some hints about secret techniques. If she masters her true strength through actual combat, she might be able to wield them."

*Secret techniques... like something out of a martial arts manga.*

Shiki, although she found the whole thing a bit funny, had accepted the scroll. It was now in the possession of Keiko, who'd reportedly cried tears of joy upon receiving it, so it must have been a good thing.

"Then Coeurl led us all to a spot near Haneda Airport, by the water," Arisu continued.

Although their ability to fly had expired, Rushia managed to get them through with her water magic.

As if aimed precisely, they jumped through the rift... and found themselves in front of our middle school building, along with Arisu, Tamaki, Rushia, Shiki, and Coeurl.

"But Kazu-san and Kayla-chan didn't return, and even though Coeurl said it was okay, I was so worried... really worried..."

"A lot has happened. But now, it's okay. Everything is over."

The Demon Lord was gone, the Ghost King was no more, and Algrafth was taking his subordinates far away.

The remaining monsters were left unchecked, so humanity in this world would continue to fight on the edge, but at least we'd averted the immediate threat of global destruction.

*Depending on what we do next, our efforts might open up future prospects. No, we'll make sure of it.*

*Because...* I clenched my fist tightly, remembering the promise I'd made to her.

"We have to become much stronger. Much, much stronger."

"Um, Kazu-san, what do you mean?"

"Mia and I made a promise." I then told Arisu about our conversation.

She didn't seem to fully grasp the complexities, but she did understand that Mia couldn't return.

"So, Mia-chan... She gave up everything for us..."

Arisu misunderstood; Mia hadn't become what she was solely out of self-sacrifice.

Probably about 80% of it was what Mia herself wanted. But pointing that out would probably be pointless. Arisu's sensibility wouldn't grasp Mia's psychology.

*This girl... yeah, she understands the world too much through human interactions alone. And that's okay,* I realized, giving Arisu a gentle hug. *Having you by my side is what got me here.*

Without Arisu, I probably would never have thought to go to the CAC. Even if I had known of its existence, I wouldn't have imagined helping a stranger.

*If it weren't for the sake of saving Arisu, I wouldn't have gone to such lengths at that time... In that case, could we have successfully saved the world like we have just now, here in a safe place?*

Most likely, it would have been impossible.

It was by acting on Arisu's wish, for her, that the current me, the current *us* existed.

"Arisu. You probably did more than anyone to help save this world," I whispered. She looked puzzled, but she didn't need to understand.

I silenced Arisu's lips with my own.

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Tamaki, Rushia, and Shiki soon arrived through the teleportation gate, so we ended up retelling the same story over a late dinner. Tamaki started bawling when we got to the part about Mia. Kayla patted her on the head, saying, "Good girl, good girl... Mama isn't lonely. She's always with everyone."

"Always... together?"

"Yeah! Because we'll meet again someday. So, Mama is really looking forward to it."

“Oh yeah,” Tamaki murmured, then gazed up at the night sky for a while. It was a breathtaking Milky Way, a sight that seemed to fill the whole universe.

“We just need to level up, right, Kazu-san?”

“Yeah. Tomorrow, we’ll start fighting again. Are you ready?”

“Of course! I’ll work *much* harder than Mia-chan!”

Wiping away her tears with her sleeve, Tamaki nodded with determination.

“Anyway, the monsters still have lots more territory than we do. If anything, the real battle starts now,” Rushia said calmly, composedly... even as she stuffed her face with cake at an incredible pace, her mouth smeared with cream.

“I like the enthusiasm, but please, let’s not push our kids aside to hunt minor monsters,” said Shiki. “Even though we’ve encountered Rank 9 beings, their average level is still below 20.”

Shiki was still fully focused on the CAC group. After all, she had returned from Earth specifically for their sake. Sharing this with everyone led to tears, apologies, and gratitude—a real emotional moment.

“This’ll make sure they stay loyal to me,” she commented, but I could hear the sarcasm in her voice. After all, Shiki had always been quite the cynic.

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One of Leen’s hawks arrived, requesting our presence at the World Tree for reporting, exchanging opinions, and discussing future plans.

“I know you’re tired, but...”

“I get it,” I interrupted Leen’s voice through the hawk and smiled. “I have things I need to talk about, too.”

“We’ll be waiting for you,” said Leen.

Shiki and Arisu’s group said they wanted to come, too. In the end, we just decided to leave Coeurl behind on the mountain. Considering we’d

encountered Doppelgängers not long ago, it seemed unwise to bring him to the World Tree just then.

“Kayla, can you stay and watch over things with Coeurl?”

“Of course! We’ll have lots of fun!” Kayla agreed energetically. With that, the rest of us stepped through the teleportation gate.

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Consciousness faded, and I found myself in a pitch-black space—where, again, I heard a song. I knew it as Mia’s song. This time, however, it sounded incredibly joyful. It was filled with jubilation and brimming with hope.

“Ah, Mia. You’re happy too, aren’t you? I’m glad.”

*No matter how much time passes, no matter how far apart we are, no matter how much we change. You are Mia, and I am Kazu. The paths we’ve taken apart will someday converge again. After all, it’s only been six days since we started this journey. No matter how long the road ahead may be, we know the future will come sooner than we think. So...*

“Wait for me. Just wait a little longer,” I implored the singing Mia. I could have sworn her song grew louder.

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Thus, our sixth day, balancing life and death, the two worlds, on a scale, came to an end. It was an endlessly long six days that we raced through in a moment. The most intense days of our lives had passed by. And now, a new story was beginning. The start of a journey for awakening, and for reunion.

***In the end, I rejected the idea of min-maxing, of weighing competing priorities on scales. I was determined to claim everything—both worlds and Mia—within my grasp.***

## Extra Chapter: The Wedding

About a month after the end of our six-day battle, a wedding took place.

It was the union of Yuuki Tagamiya and Keiko Isogaki. The wedding of a Ninja and a Greater Ninja was held in a corner of the World Tree, in a modest ceremony that only a few of us attended. In fact, I ended up being responsible for organizing the ceremony.

“Leaving it to Shiki-dono would be the most reliable option,” Yuuki praised me, but as a first-year high school student, I hardly knew anything about weddings. In the end, with the help of Rushia and Leen, we simplified the ceremony, basing it on this world’s customs, and kept it casual. The marriage vows were as simple as “Care for each other.”

Yet, Yuuki and Keiko seemed content.

“A lot of our friends are still fighting in different places.”

“It wouldn’t be right to call everyone back just for us.”

For them, the happiness of everyone else was more important than being celebrated themselves.

“Next, it’s Kazu-dono’s turn,” Yuuki teased. He really had let his guard down, even if only for a day. “Shall we go ahead with your ceremony right now?”

“No, we’re...” Kazu stammered.

“I want to see Papa and Mama in their beautiful dresses!”

“Um, uh, Kayla?!”

Kayla looked up at us—especially at Kazu—with her clear, sparkling eyes. Arisu and Tamaki blushed, not entirely opposed to the idea.

Meanwhile, Rushia was quietly devouring wedding cake. To me she seemed like a bit of a lost cause in some ways, but Leen liked her—I could tell by the way she smiled at her—so I guess that was all right.

“That’s a brilliant idea. You all should take a break for once. How about a week or so?”

I crossed my arms and tried to produce an arrogant smile.

“But Shiki-san, we’re...”

“You want to level up fast to get to Mia-chan, right? I’ve heard it so many times I could grow corn on my ears.”

They had been busily engaged in battle for the past month. Though nowhere near as frantic as those six days, they had spent more time on the battlefield than anyone else from the high school or middle school sections.

Countless times, Leen and I had advised them to take it easier, but these four and Kayla went on fighting as if possessed. I got that they had a goal, but that goal was so far in the future! Pushing themselves to the limit just wasn’t necessary now. Kazu and Rushia, of all people, should know this all too well.

“It’s just, we feel this urgency... like we need to fight more.”

“I get it. So...”

I sighed and nodded at Kayla, whose agreement I had already secured. *If you want to shoot the general, first take out his horse.*

“I want siblings!”

“Whoa!”

“Wh-what are you saying, Kayla-chan?!” Arisu and Tamaki panicked, flailing their arms.

*So adorable.*

“To put it bluntly, you guys are overdoing it. The time when you had to be the aces and handle everything has long passed. The top ranks of the CAC group are already improving their derived skills. You know that.”

“That’s... true, but...” Kazu-kun still seemed dissatisfied.

“It’s an order, Kazu-kun,” I insisted. “It’s perfect timing. You guys are all going to take a break for the next seven days... during which we’ll be ‘borrowing’ Kayla.”

“I’m being rented out!”

“Wait, wait, wait a minute! What does that mean?”

“Just enjoy your newlywed life together. Don’t make me say more in front of Kayla-chan, okay?”

Kayla had always struck me as quite perceptive in the strangest ways. *Well, she is Mia-chan’s daughter, after all. But for now, she’s playing it cool, just smiling innocently. This kid’s a force to be reckoned with.*

“Don’t worry, maintaining the frontlines won’t be an issue. Rushing to liberate more territory only complicates rear support. And... Kazu-kun, Arisu-chan, Tamaki-chan, you all look terrible right now.”

The three of them looked at each other—and Rushia continued indulging in cake.

“Didn’t you notice?”

“I did think Arisu and Tamaki have been sleeping poorly lately.”

“It’s hard to notice when you’re directly involved, isn’t it? Rushia, you were aware, weren’t you?”

Rushia lifted her face from the cake, a smear of cream on her cheek, and nodded solemnly. “Yes. But at the same time, the people were mourning their losses. At least, until now. Maybe it’s time to slow down the battle for territorial liberation.”

“Yes, it’s about shifting down a gear... Sorry, that analogy doesn’t quite work in this world, does it?” I said. Rushia may have seen cars on Earth, but she wouldn’t know what went on under their hoods.

“So... the plan,” I signaled to Leen.

“Leave it to me, Shiki.”

With a smile, Leen instructed her attendants to replace the “Tagamiya Family Wedding” sign hanging on the wall with a “Kaya Family Wedding” sign.

“Hey, wait a minute, when did you make that?!... Hey, Shiki-san, Leen-san. You guys set me up, didn’t you?”



“Unfortunately, yes. Everyone’s in on it.”

“Everyone’s in on it!!”

Kayla joyfully raced around the bewildered Kazu-kun and the others, going round and round and round in circles.

“Even Kayla... Ugh, my daughter is in her rebellious phase.”

“No, Kayla loves Papa very much! ‘The more you say no, the more it’s a yes!’”

By the way, Iyana Kousaka, from the Cultural Arts Center group and a former second-year middle school student, was skilled in sewing.

“The wedding dresses were prepared by Sumire-chan and the others. Just in case something like this happened, they took out samples from the basement of the CAC.”

This time, Keiko didn’t wear a wedding dress. Instead, she wore a light green robe made from magical fibers called “tree bark silk,” which was meant for weddings at the World Tree. It suited her simple charm well, and it looked stunning...

“Hey, Arisu-chan, Tamaki-chan. You wanted to try on wedding dresses, didn’t you?” I asked, already knowing the answer.

After a moment of hesitation, the two blushed and shyly looked down, murmuring, “Y-yes.”

*Heh, too easy. With this, Kazu-kun’s escape routes are thoroughly cut off.*

“So, just give in.”

I placed my hands on my hips and smirked.

Outsmarting Kazu-kun was always a delight. Seeing his face sour like he chewed on a bitter bug melted all the stress of the day away.

## Extra Chapter: Black Leopard Express

In the lands reclaimed after the monsters were eradicated, the people who resettled there—known as the returnees—spoke of rumors too fantastical to be entirely true or false. They told of encountering a group clad in black, calling themselves Ninjas, who vanquished monsters. Another rumor told of a young man commanding countless monsters of his own, battling against a legion of divine-class monsters. Yet another described a petite girl in white, riding a black panther, who, with a shout of “Here we go, Silver!” would dispel a horde of orcs as if it were mere pocket change for her journey.

Life for the returnees was fraught with instability, with monsters often infiltrating and attacking the resettled villages anew. Perhaps, after days upon days that feel like chewing on sand, the ceaseless tales of having witnessed “legendary visitors” served as a balm to soothe the daily trials, a dream-like vista spoken of by those to follow...

The woman had believed this, too, until the day her village was attacked by a horde of Hobgoblins, and she was on the brink of death protecting her children when they were saved by them. Like a shooting star from the sky, they arrived, blowing away the Hobgoblins about to strike with their swords using a tornado spell.

“Here we go, Silver!”

“I am *not* silver. My fur is black. Remember that, female.”

“Hey, come on, we need a battle cry!”

There was a tall black panther upon which rode a young girl dressed in a white robe. The girl’s hair was a striking blue, shimmering in the wind. She looked around ten years old, maybe slightly older, though the way she talked seemed younger...

When one of the surviving hobgoblins, fueled by rage, notched an arrow, and aimed at the girl from behind, she noticed. With a simple wave of her hand, a

tornado appeared, veering the arrow off course.

*Magic*, the woman thought, astonished. The girl was wielding magic without any incantations.

As the hobgoblins turned to flee, the girl declared it unacceptable and proceeded to eradicate them. Beams of light shot from her fingertips, piercing through the backs of the fleeing Hobgoblins one after another. Satisfied as the monsters fell one by one, she collected the gems they transformed into. Then, she turned back to the still-stunned woman.

“Are you hurt?”

“No, I’m fine.”

“Good! Then, be careful going home, OK?”

“Go back? But the village is already...”

“I’ve cleaned it up!” the girl declared, puffing out her chest proudly. While the woman stood blinking in surprise, the girl tapped the black panther’s back.

*“Don’t order me around,”* the panther rumbled, his voice resonating directly in the woman’s mind. She recalled hearing a similar voice earlier—but only much later would she come to understand that this was how monsters communicated.

The panther leaped into the air.

“Bye-bye!” the girl said, waving energetically to the still-dazed woman and her children.

“Next—let’s go!”

*“Enough for today,”* the panther suggested.

“No way, we have to work extra hard for Papa and Mama. It’s like a honeymoon!”

*“I will never understand your customs. Truly baffling.”*

As the black panther soared into the sky, vanishing into the forest, the woman and her children watched in utter astonishment.

“Coeurl, what do you think Papa and the others are doing right now?”

*“There is likely only one thing a pair would do.”*

*“Jeez! You have no delicacy!”*

*“Ouch, hey, stop pulling my fur. Don’t pluck it! I’ll tell Shiki.”*

*“Uh... sorry.”*

*“Female... damn it, why do you react only to Shiki’s name?”*

*“Mama told me to listen to her; just her.”*

*“... She’s vulnerable, though. Her level is lower than the others, isn’t it?”*

*“Shiki has something stronger than power.”*

*“Is that because she’s human? A special kind of strength that comes with it?”*

*“Yes.”*

*“I see... I understand now. Humans are complicated beings...”*

## Afterword

Hello, Tsukasa Yokotsuka here. With this volume, *Another World Survival: Min-Maxing My Support and Summoning Magic* comes to a conclusion.

When it was decided to make a book out of this work, which I had originally posted on the website *Let's Become a Novelist*, my editor initially asked me to keep the style as close as possible to how it was on the web. However, as we progressed to the second and third volumes, my conviction that a book should have a style suited to print grew stronger. In this final volume, I've made quite a few adjustments to the text from its web version. It might be a minor detail that won't be noticed unless compared... but I hope this ninth volume has become slightly more reader-friendly because of it.

As I've already announced on the website, I'd like to mention here as well that I also write under another pen name, Tsukasa Seo. For more details about Tsukasa Seo, please visit my blog at <http://blog.livedoor.jp/heylyalai/>. I've also written articles about the background of this work's creation.

I'm overjoyed at being able to complete this work, which was developed through much trial and error. I hope you've enjoyed the main story and the newly written short stories as well.

I personally really like the system of this work, so I'm looking for opportunities to apply (not recycle...) it somewhere else. For now, I've utilized the experience I gained from this series in a system built for a work published by Fujimi Shobo, titled *The World Continues*. If you're interested, I'd be grateful if you could pick up that work, too. (Shameless plug!)

Until we meet again—whether under this pen name or another, I know not...

# Thank you all

Thank you for reading the final volume of "Another World Survival: Maximizing My Support and Summoning Magic"! We hope you enjoyed our light novel. If you did, please consider leaving a review on Amazon. Your feedback is invaluable to us, helping us improve and guiding our decisions to license more exciting light novels in the future.

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