

# Another World Survival

Min-maxing  
my Support and  
Summoning  
Magic

Author: Yokotsuka Tsukasa

Illustrator: Manyako

8





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Summoning Magic Vol. 8

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3rd Year - Middle School Student  
Tamaki Ryuki

3rd Year - Middle School Student  
Arisu Shimozone

1st Year - Middle School Student  
Mia Tagamiya





World Tree's Shrine Maiden  
Leen

1st Year - High School Student  
Shiki Yukariko

1st Year - High School Student  
Kazuhisa Kaya



"Could that be...  
some kind of doppelgänger  
or something?"

"Probably not."





"I'm sorry,  
Yuuki-senpai."

"I couldn't  
protect her."

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# ANOTHER WORLD SURVIVAL

MIN-MAXING MY SUPPORT AND  
SUMMONING MAGIC

STORY BY YOKOTSUKA TSUKASA

ART BY MANYAKO





## Chapter 187: An Unknown Morning

On the fifth morning, in a room on the second floor of the summoning cottage, I awoke to sunlight streaming through the window.

*Weird...* I thought. *I don't remember dreaming last night. Maybe I did and just forgot.* I remembered reading that everyone dreams several times a night; we just don't always remember what they were.

Despite yesterday's strenuous activities, I didn't feel any muscle soreness. My body must have been getting stronger. The change that came with each level was small—barely noticeable on its own—but as my level grew and grew, from 10 to 20, and now over 40, I could feel myself becoming more and more superhuman—even without abilities.

I rolled out of bed and tried an easy jump. The height didn't seem much different.

*Okay, so maybe I haven't changed that much. Maybe there's nothing remarkable about me, except my survival skills.*

A little discouraged, I made my way downstairs. I found Arisu, Tamaki, and Mia sleeping, slumped on the sofa, just as they had been when Rushia and I got back last night. They must have been very tired. No wonder, considering the exceptionally fierce battles we'd fought yesterday.

All right, so my physical performance might not have changed much, but my body's resilience had clearly improved. Not that that meant any of us were immune to fatigue; I had certainly felt my limits many times. After all, none of our battles had ever been easy...

I decided I'd let the girls rest as much as possible. I probably should have carried them to their rooms, but waking them up seemed too sad. I quietly walked past Arisu and the others and opened the door to the bathroom.

Our little summoning cottage had a simple bathroom with a tub. There was an outdoor tank for storing water, which I had filled generously yesterday. The wooden bathtub had some kind of mechanism for heating the water, but I decided not to bother with it this morning.

I sat in the tub, scrubbing away the dirt with some soap from my backpack. Although my wounds had healed, the dried blood and sweat remained. Not wanting to catch a cold from the chilly bath, I quickly stepped out and opened the door to the adjacent locker room—where I found Arisu, Tamaki, and Mia hurriedly undressing.

“Hey, what are you all doing?”

“Ah, already out?” Mia said, a little disappointed.

“Don’t look at me like that—this bathroom is too small! It’s not made for lounging around!” I protested.

“But we can still have fun!” Mia argued, clenching her fist in determination.

I shook my head in disbelief and looked at Arisu and Tamaki.

“Eh, I just wanted to be friends with Kazu-san. Right, Arisu?” Tamaki asked with an embarrassed grin.

“Ah, um... yes,” Arisu replied, her cheeks flushing. Her hand, which was scratching the back of her head, awkwardly moved around to cover her front.

In fact, Arisu seemed to understand the charm of the situation.

“Sorry, but there’s a meeting with Leen and the others right after breakfast,” I informed the three of them.

“Ah, I should have known...” Tamaki sighed. “Maybe we can relax if we get a break in the morning,” she added hopefully.

Arisu and Tamaki exchanged a wry *it-can’t-be-helped* smile.

※ ※ ※

“By the way, where’s Rushia?” I asked.

“I think she’s still asleep in her room. Should I go wake her up?” Arisu offered.



“No, I’ll do it. Everyone else, get in the bathroom...”

Arisu looked at me with narrowed eyes. “Kazu-san, you shouldn’t play tricks on a sleeping girl.”

“I’m not—promise.”

“Ah, but I don’t mind if you play pranks on me!” Arisu added eagerly.

“What are you talking about?” I asked. Her face had turned bright red, and I couldn’t resist teasing her a little.

“Ah, you can play pranks on me!” she repeated. Then, “No, you *should* make fun of me.”

“Let’s not talk about this anymore,” I said.

Just then, the door to the living-room side of the dressing room opened tentatively, and Rushia peeked out. The silver-haired girl looked at the four of us, making noise in the changing room, and seemed confused.

“Is everyone taking a bath together?”

“No, I was just leaving,” I assured her. “What’s going on?”

Instead of answering, Rushia’s stomach made a cute rumbling sound. She blushed and remained silent.

“Ah. Showing your gluttonous side here, huh? That’s clever—typical of an elf.”

“I’ll get the feast ready right away. Ah, um, including cake.”

“Okay!” I said enthusiastically.

※ ※ ※

After breakfast, we flew back to the treetop city. I’d wanted to go alone, but Arisu, Tamaki, and Mia said they wanted to check on Sumire and the others. Rushia also mentioned that she was hoping to talk to her sisters.

After saying goodbye to the others, I went alone to Leen’s usual place of work in the hollow tree. Although it was early morning, I half expected her to be

asleep. But Leen and Shiki were already there, facing each other cross-legged in the middle of the room.

“We’ve been waiting for you,” Leen said by way of greeting.

“Um, did you and Shiki-san stay up all night?” I asked.

“Don’t worry. We rested for a while.”

*I hope so... They’re known for overdoing things.*

We sat in our usual circle.

“Today, we want to discuss the main plans,” Leen began. “But first, Kazu, how’s your team?”

“They’re fine, mostly. They do all seem pretty frustrated, though.”

“For that, they can vent in the White Room,” Leen said with the calm but stern demeanor of a businesswoman.

“It’s great that the ace team is in good shape,” Shiki interjected. “They must have worked hard last night.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

“Oh, really? You look like someone who fell asleep from exhaustion.”

*Shiki-san, could you please stop trying to read my thoughts from my face?*

Leen chuckled quietly. “Don’t forget to take care of yourself. Your well-being is our top priority.”

“Uh, yeah, I’ll try.” I nodded in agreement despite the unfairness of the request.

*Well, from Leen’s perspective, she’s entrusting us with her dear friend, I thought. But Rushia is ours now, and we’re definitely not giving her back!*

“As for our forest, it’s still surrounded by monsters. Considering the vastness of the forest, there are lots of escape routes... Even though we’ve defeated Aga-Su, be aware that we’re still under intense invasion,” Leen explained, showing us a rough map.



The scale wasn't clear, but the forest stretched far out at the foot of a mountain range, and part of it was the territory of Leen's people, the Light Tribe, which mostly encompassed the World Tree Forest.

In a narrow sense, "World Tree Forest" referred to the area inside the barrier where we'd fought yesterday. The army of the Demon King, which had attacked the forest, had numbered around twenty thousand. In the past two days, we had eliminated about fifteen hundred of those fighters.

The monsters had built twenty-four forts on the flat side of the forest, each with an average of about five hundred troops. The rest of the army was moving around as mobile units. The Arachne unit that we'd defeated on the third night after we arrived in this world was one of those.

"These forts were originally built by the Light Tribe, as strongholds against external enemies," Leen went on. "Recapturing them is now our top priority in planning our counterattack."

"But, Leen," Shiki raised her hand, "even if we retake them, defending twenty-four places is impossible. Aren't your forces already exhausted?"

"If we recapture the fortresses, the monster forces will try to take them back again..."

*Ah, I see.*

Shiki also nodded in understanding. "So, we'll defend the forts and make the enemy bleed," she concluded.

"Yes. That's why it's not necessary to take back all the fortresses. Maybe only three or four. Some of them can be sacrificed to scatter the enemy forces."

*Driving a wedge into the enemy's territory, luring monsters in to defeat them—that's the plan, right? We might even aim to disperse the monsters' forces or eliminate them in mobile combat if the opportunity presents itself. With Leen's teleportation network, we don't need to be stationed at the fortresses all the time. While we can deploy our forces freely, the Demon King's army will inevitably have to spread its forces thin. We definitely want to maximize our mobility advantage.*

“Why not capture all twenty-four fortresses and then abandon some of them?” I suggested. “If it works, we could make a big dent in the twelve thousand monsters holed up in those forts.”

“That’s one approach, but unfortunately not all of the fortresses have secret passageways for infiltration. Some of those passages may have already been discovered,” Leen explained.

*So, it’s like what Rushia and I did yesterday, sneaking in through hidden routes.* At first, I’d been thinking of just putting us on the front lines and doing a direct air assault. I needed to keep my brain from turning into muscle.

“There’s also the option of bombarding them with Rushia’s fire magic, but that’s unpredictable in terms of the strain it puts on her. How is she doing?” Leen inquired.

“Eating sweets seems to have rejuvenated her quite a bit,” I replied.

Leen and Shiki chuckled. They probably thought I was joking. But it was the truth—Rushia got energized every time she ate cake.

“I’d rather not use Magic Release for minion battles. However, I’ve saved up some tokens so someone else could use Magic Release,” I said.

“If you’re willing to share your tokens, we could let one of our fire mages do that bombardment... maybe,” Shiki said, then shook her head. “Let’s not. There’s also the question of level differences. What Rushia can do over and over at Level 36 might be too much for our Level 20 mages to handle.”

“That makes sense. From what I’ve seen with Rushia, the problem seems to be that the MP gets consumed too quickly.”

I suggested that as a guideline, if someone was over Level 30, it might be safe to use a tenfold magic release once per battle.

“I understand. I’ll keep that in mind,” Shiki said with a nod.



## Chapter 188: The Border Fortress – Part 1

“So, how’s the situation with our school mountain?” I asked Leen. I figured she would have her familiar, a hawk, monitoring the situation.

“The floating island is still hovering over the mountain,” she answered. “I can’t see Azagralith, but there are many ogres wandering around the ruins of the school.”

“Do you think they’re still looking for something?”

“Perhaps, but at this point sending forces would only lead to unnecessary exhaustion.”

*Yeah, it would be a suicide mission, no question about it. Even against a weakened Aga-Su last night, we really struggled. Fighting a fully prepared Azagralith amidst a horde of monsters would be recklessly foolish.*

*What worries me is the story about the mountain at our school being one of the wedges supporting this continent.*

“Black-Winged Mad Wolf Algrafth. How much of what he said do you think we can believe?”

“Since I haven’t met him directly... I’d rather hear your opinion, Kazu.”

“My opinion? Honestly, I don’t think my intuition is that reliable.”

Shiki shook her head. “Kazu-kun, for the past five days, you’ve been on the front lines all the time. I’ve heard that it was always a close fight. The intuition you’ve developed under such circumstances is worth trusting. You should have a little more confidence in yourself.”

“If that’s the case, that goes for you, too, Shiki-san...”

“Me?” Shiki raised her eyebrows sarcastically and crossed her arms under her chest, causing a slight tremble. “A person like me, who dragged a friend down

and killed them right in front of their eyes—how can *my* intuition be of any use? I only believe in the rationality of the pieces in front of me.”

“You shouldn’t talk about yourself like that!”

“Oh, Kazu-kun. Your current attitude isn’t that different, you know.”

Shiki and I glared daggers at each other until Leen sighed and clapped her hands, snapping us back to reality.

“Can you save your lovers’ quarrel for another time?” she asked.

“You’re right, I’m sorry. I’ll save expressing my love for Kazu-kun for another time,” Shiki said with a shrug. There was a lot I wanted to say, but I swallowed it. We wouldn’t get anywhere if we continued like this.

*Right, back on topic...*

*Should we trust Algrafth’s words, especially about one of the wedges being at our school’s mountain? Well, about that...*

“Algrafth could have destroyed us if he wanted, but he chose to talk to us. That must mean something.”

“That is true. Go on.”

“But he could have been deliberately misleading us, trying to manipulate our actions. He could have been trying to bind us with his words, to steer us the way he wanted.”

“A monster?”

“An intelligent one, yeah. He seemed quite wise.”

Shiki and Leen exchanged glances, as if unsure how to judge the situation.

“The Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau I contracted with was called a ‘wise wolf.’ Monsters, it seems, vary quite a bit.”

“Yes, indeed. I was told the story of Sha-Lau many times as a child. How could I have forgotten it?” Leen pondered, smiling gently at me.

Shiki nodded in agreement. “Right. We’ll do much better to not underestimate our opponent... So, Kazu-kun, you’re suggesting that even if the school mountain isn’t as crucial as a stake holding the continent together, there



might be something special there, and securing it could align with Algrafth's intentions?"

"Or, that he just wants us to take some action toward getting it back. Like us clashing with Azagralith, leading to mutual exhaustion." Right now, we couldn't possibly match up to Azagralith. If Algrafth was aiming for a mutual downfall, then he must know about our rapid growth thanks to the White Room.

*Wait, that brings another perspective...*

"I just thought of something. Algrafth seemed to know about us beforehand. Not only that, he seemed unusually knowledgeable about a lot of stuff—unlike Azagralith, who didn't give that impression at all. As for Aga-Su... it's too soon to tell. What I mean is..."

"Are you suggesting that Algrafth might have been the one using a spy?" Shiki interjected.

"Wait a moment, Shiki. So, the master behind the doppelgänger is..."

The three of us exchanged looks. Whoever it was knew way too much about us, considering we'd only been in this world for a few days. It was as if he had thoroughly researched us beforehand... Of course, it had to be the demon lord.

"There might be other possibilities, but if Algrafth was behind the doppelgänger that was sniffing around the school mountain and this World Tree area, it would explain a lot of things."

"The ogres' attack on the floating island was haphazard, the monster side was completely caught off guard in yesterday's counterattack... like they anticipated the forces to take down Aga-Su gathering, and then a hole appeared in the World Tree's barrier at just the right moment..." Shiki murmured to herself.

I nodded. Everything had gone too smoothly for us yesterday. All our strategies had hit the mark perfectly. Yet, it was still a series of close calls and tough battles...

"So, Kazu-kun, are you saying that everything we did up until yesterday was being manipulated by Algrafth?"

“I’m not saying that exactly. It’s more like Algrafth was in a position to get such information preferentially and maneuvered skillfully. That’s why he was the only one who didn’t fall for the human army’s traps and survived the self-destruction on the wedge, appearing at just the right moment. It might be a bit too convenient, but it’s a plausible story.”

“It’s so plausible it’s unsettling,” Shiki said with a grimace.

Leen chuckled softly. “You worry a lot, don’t you?”

“It’s reasonable to be worried! I’m cautious, and that’s fine. I don’t ever want to...” Shiki trailed off, shaking her head. “Sorry. We said no more arguing.”

“I understand. You’re worried that Algrafth might still have spies around, right?”

“I think that’s a bit excessive of a concern,” I admitted. To identify a doppelgänger, we just needed to check the color of their blood. Everyone from the Light Tribe and those who’d come from the school mountain had passed that test.

According to Leen, the allied forces hadn’t necessarily been thoroughly checked due to both the sheer number of individuals within those forces and a lack of coordination.

*Also, there are those who resist the notion of Leen from the Light Tribe being in charge... The way I see it, this situation is still complex and uncertain.*

“Yesterday, the fact that every unit operated exactly as planned was nothing short of a miracle,” Leen said, her tone self-deprecating. She went on to tell us that after the success of yesterday’s operation, it was becoming harder to maintain control. It was ironic, really, the way internal conflicts arise even in victory.

“We’ve already received reports of issues and strains showing up in our makeshift organization. I’ve left the handling of those matters to others, as I need to devote my time to planning the counteroffensive,” she continued. The young leader of the Light Tribe shook her head, dark circles under her eyes betraying her fatigue.



Leen also mentioned that there were numerous disputes arising among people of different customs. But it wasn't just the people of this world; conflict was also arising between our middle and high school groups.

"Is that true, Shiki-san?"

"Yes, I've received reports. Don't worry, nothing too troublesome so far. Like, yesterday, during the battle at noon, a group of high school boys nearly went on a rampage fighting alongside a unit with battle slaves."

"Ah, about status and all..."

I remember when Leen first met us here, she assumed Mia, who was wearing a collar at the time, was a slave. Of course, we were just playing around. In hindsight, perhaps it was a bit thoughtless.

"Slaves are treated as expendable resources. Many in this world frown upon this, but their fighting strength is currently invaluable. It seems my expectations were too optimistic," Leen reflected.

"Expectations, huh..."

"I maybe misjudged the situation because I only spoke with the top members like Kazu, Shiki, and Yuuki."

*I see; we might frown upon certain things, but we would usually just leave them be. To manage an organization in a place like the school mountain, crawling with orcs, we had to focus on avoiding fights and utilizing each other's strengths.*

"Is the Cultural Arts Center group not causing any trouble so far?"

"There were a few idiot soldiers who tried to mess with us because we're mostly girls, but Sakura and a few others showed them what they could do before anything serious happened," Shiki explained. I could easily imagine Sakura Nagatsuki reacting instantly if truly irritated.

"Also, last night, I was attacked."

"Wait a minute, Shiki-san, that's not something to mention so casually!"

“It’s okay, Yuuki-senpai and the others protected me. I’m not reckless enough to walk alone at night.”

*Good to know she was safe... That’s a bit worrying, though. She might be above Level 10, but Shiki’s abilities are primarily centered on support.*

“However, such troubles between us and the soldiers of other countries are minor compared to the disputes and grudges between different nations,” Leen said calmly, sipping tea from a wooden cup brought by her fox-eared attendant.

I also tasted the tea, which seemed magically chilled, giving a hint of mint. It was refreshing and somehow calming.

Shiki took a drink and sighed in relief. “For reference, what kind of disputes happen between different countries?” she asked.

“Duels are common. Even with healers ready, it’s not rare for those to result in fatalities.”

*So, they resort to duels after all. If the CAC group gets involved in something like that... Ah, all I can picture is Sakura going on a rampage. With her weapon skills at Rank 9, that would be an ugly scene.*

“It’s not uncommon to hear reports of survivors from two countries that were once neighbors sending assassins to each other after their nations fell,” Leen went on. “Sometimes, people from unrelated countries get caught in the crossfire and lose their lives.”

“That’s just chaos,” I said.

“That’s why we’re currently limiting the teleportation network and arranging separate living quarters for each country,” said Leen.

*It seems like a complex issue that Leen has to manage. All I can say is, thank you for the hard work.*

“That’s why, Kazu, please be extra careful.”

“I’d prefer not to be involved in joint operations with people like that.”

“You’re among our strongest forces. We’ll try to accommodate as much as possible, but there are limits,” Leen said.

*I get it. I knew it, but seriously! Well, I guess I just have to suck it up and keep going.*



## Chapter 189: The Border Fortress – Part 2

Yesterday, we'd won a battle crucial for the fate of the world, overturning a prophecy of doom. Today, a day that wasn't supposed to exist, had come. However, the situation remained grim.

I met up with Arisu and the others who had visited Sumire's cabin.

"It turns out there's no time for a break," I explained. "Everyone, we're deploying soon."

"Got it. Let's get this done quickly!" Tamaki enthusiastically raised her fist, and Arisu nodded beside her. "Let's do our best."

And then there were Mia and Rushia...

"Good. We can earn more experience points."

"I want to level up more."

*No, no, this is bad. Mia is one thing, but Rushia's become obsessed with efficiency, too.*

I felt a sharp pang of sadness.

"Kazu, why are you pretending to cry?"

"Rushia, this is a traditional dramatic art from our country. 'No means yes' sort of thing."

"So, Mia?"

"Go for the attack."

*Absolutely not okay. All right, time to focus...*

"Our mission is to recapture the fortresses on the outskirts of the World Tree. The ones occupied by monsters might have Light Tribe members and refugees who failed to escape. We've been told not to worry too much about their lives."

“But... how can you say that?” Arisu looked up at me hesitantly. The concern was plain in her eyes, and I understood, but...

“Arisu, you’ve seen it yourself. Humans captured by monsters aren’t treated well. It’s often a case of being better off dead...”

“Yeah. On the third day, when you weren’t there, Kazu-san, we and Shiki-san saved people who had been implanted with wasp eggs...”

Arisu clenched her trembling fists. “But we don’t know what it will be like this time. Maybe they’re safe...”

“You’re right, but I can’t allow you guys to be put in danger. What do you think, Mia?”

“Kazucchi being heroic is kinda cute, isn’t it?”

“That’s not what I’m asking.”

*And please, don’t jump to conclusions about someone’s personal tastes.*

For now, I lightly tapped Mia’s head, producing a satisfying sound. She held her head and looked up at me with teary eyes.

“That’s mean.”

“You’re the one who’s way meaner!”

*This conversation is not progressing.* Setting that aside for now, I continued with the details of the plan.

“This time, it’s mainly the middle school division tasked with capturing one of the fortresses. We’ll have some local support, too. Actually, it’s Laska-san and her group from the Storm Temple.”

“Oh, that smelly female warrior.”

*Mia’s lack of filter never ceases to amaze me.*

“Mia, don’t ever say that in front of her. Seriously, don’t.”

“Push the button, but don’t push the button?”

“No, seriously, I’m really asking you not to.”

“I understand. I, the humble ninja, have decided to only crush the spirit of a female warrior in bed.”

*Where to even begin responding to that...* “If you keep saying stuff like that, people will start saying, ‘This is why ninjas’ sisters are...’ you know.”

“That’s harsh! Way too harsh.”

“Kazu-san, that’s really too much.” Even Arisu protested, along with Mia.

*Do they really dislike being associated with ninjas that much?*

“We’ll split into two teams. One will be the infiltration team: us five plus Laska-san’s group. We’ll go into the fortress. The other team will provide aerial support. They’ll use fire and wind magic to bombard and distract the enemy. They’ll also keep watch to ensure no enemies get away.”

Once inside, our team would split further. Arisu and Mia, alongside Laska’s group, would use invisibility to free the captives. The remaining three of us—myself, Tamaki, and Rushia—would cut through the enemy ranks to take down the monster commanding the fortress.

“Based on our recon, most of the fortress’s forces are orcs. Frankly, it should be an easy victory for us now.”

“But if we’re careless, it could be *kukkoro*.”

“Kazu, what’s *kukkoro*?”

“Don’t worry about it, Rushia. I understand you’re warning us, Mia, but let’s avoid slang that others might not get.”

“Mmm.”

*Of course, there’s always the chance of encountering a dangerous monster like Zoraus, hidden among the enemy’s ranks. We should always be wary of the unknown.*

“Could the fortress’s commander be a General Orc or something?”

“No, it seems to be a mage. They were wearing robes, so it wasn’t clear, like Leen said.”

“Oh, she used her hawk for recon?”



Tamaki and Arisu nodded in understanding. They were familiar with such scouting, as I had already done it several times.

“We’ve made a map of the fortress to avoid getting lost, so make sure to familiarize yourselves with it.”

I showed them a detailed map of the fortress’s interior, carefully drawn on copy paper by Sumire and the others. They must have stayed up nearly all night working on it.

“Oh, this is the one that was on Sumire-chan’s table earlier!”

“They seemed really tired... so this was for the operation.”

Sumire and her group were now wrapped in sleeping bags in a hollow of a neighboring tree, resting. I was truly grateful for their hard work.

※ ※ ※

Three hours after sunrise, our group of five plus Laska’s team of three local supporters, eight in total, were teleported near the fortress through Leen’s hawk-based transfer network. The secret entrance inside the forest was hidden in a dried-up well. We walked briskly for about five minutes through an underground passage that started from a hidden door at the bottom of the well, then we had successfully infiltrated the fortress.

Almost as soon as we made it inside, the fortress shook violently. It was probably the aerial bombardment by Shion and Yuriko, the fire magic users, teleported by a different route. The rest of the Cultural Arts Center group was also likely pouring all their magic into the attack.

“This is incredible... It’s like the sky is falling,” one of Laska’s team members commented in a shaky voice, understandably made uneasy by the intense tremors.

From several directions came a cacophony of monsters’ screams and growls. Fortunately, the corner of the fortress in which we found ourselves seemed to be unused by them.

“Let’s summon the familiars here.”

We couldn't use Sha-Lau in the narrow passageways, so it was time for the Paladins to shine. I summoned two Rank 9 Paladin familiars, and two men appeared. They were clad in steel armor, their faces hidden behind helmets. Laska and her team looked nervous and took an instinctive step back.

"It's okay. They're soldiers, and they're loyal to me. They don't even get angry when I use them as targets for magic practice in the White Room."

"That sounds... a bit pitiful, doesn't it?"

*Yeah, I have been feeling kinda guilty about that.*

I cast the standard Support Magic on everyone, including Laska. Considering the possibility of facing something like the Zoraus, I also added Isolation and Fire Resistance. Then, on myself, I cast True Sight, a Rank 9 support spell that allowed me to see through mana, illusions, and any magical concealment.

This last one was just in case we encountered someone like Volda Aray from the Storm Temple, who could disguise themselves as a lesser monster.

"Okay, then, Kazucchi, we're off."

"I'm counting on you, Mia, Arisu. And you, too, Laska-san."

"Yep, leave it to us!"

Laska looked a bit conflicted being entrusted with the task—probably because, in terms of ability, she and her fighters were more of a burden. Well, not just them; virtually everyone from this world, except for the "Elementals," was in a similar situation. But we needed their help with things like caring for the captives.

Mia silenced their movements with a Silent Field and made herself, Arisu, and Laska's team invisible with Greater Invisibility. Only I could see them, thanks to True Sight. Just before they started moving, Arisu glanced back at me and gave a smile and a nod.

The five of them dashed off, gradually fading into the distance. As the effect of the Silent Field lifted from our area, Tamaki and Rushia exhaled in relief. It's tense when you can't hear anything.

"All right, Kazu-san, let's go!"

“Ah, yeah.”

I glanced at the hawk perched on Rushia’s shoulder, a familiar of Leen that served as a means of communication—and a kind of worst-case-scenario teleportation insurance, which I had requested after we’d been caught in the Globster’s forced teleportation on the third morning. With Leen’s familiar, if anything truly crazy happened, we could open a transfer gate and return to the World Tree.

*Though, I highly doubt we’ll encounter any teleport traps...*

“Our destination is the grand hall on the third floor of the main building,” I told Tamaki and Rushia.

If the enemy boss was anywhere, it would likely be there. The secret door wasn’t too far from there, located on the opposite side of the main entrance route. Given that the hidden passage was designed to avoid enemy invasion routes, it was no surprise it led directly there.

“There’s something up ahead,” Rushia announced.

“Doesn’t matter what, we’ll take it down.”

In the passageway, we encountered three orcs—which Tamaki cut down almost before they’d registered our presence.

In front of the stairs, two elite guards turned, growling and raising their swords threateningly.

“All right, that’s the end of th—”

Before she could finish, Tamaki’s sword had beheaded both of them. It really was staggering how much our abilities had progressed. Here were enemies we had struggled with on the first day, and now they were falling before they even had a chance to scream.

“Bit late to ask, but do you need Haste?”

“Sure, why not!”

“Okay,” I said, casting Haste from my Deflection Spell. The two Paladins, who hadn’t been much use so far, now moved with more agility.

Tamaki took the lead, and we rushed up the stairs, straight to the third floor. In front of us stood a waiting room, and just beyond it was the grand hall.



## Chapter 190: The Border Fortress – Part 3

**W**hen Rushia and I, along with the two Paladins, reached the top of the stairs, the two Elite Orcs that should have been there had already been taken care of by Tamaki. The pig-faced humanoid monsters, now separated from their heads, faded away.

We stepped into the antechamber, where no other monsters seemed to be present. It was a robust, stone-built room that must have looked quite impressive once. The grand hall, our destination, lay just beyond the large door in front of us. According to Leen, this room and the adjacent grand hall were used to welcome dignitaries from other nations.

Perhaps that explained the assortment of high-end decorations like red curtains, carpets, and paintings—but all of them had been brutally destroyed. The carpets and curtains were torn to shreds. The once-magnificent paintings were split in half by an axe and discarded on the floor.

“I’ll open the door, Kazu-san!” Rushia volunteered.

“No, there might be a trap. Let the Paladins handle it.”

It would be a huge problem if our strongest member was incapacitated. Tasks like this were always best left to expendable pieces.

The two Paladins pried open the large door, and fortunately, there was no trap. The room that unfolded before us was about twice the size of a school classroom, adorned with luxurious curtains along the stone walls, and sunlight streamed in through the windows. The curtains and walls were a bit grimy, but unlike in the waiting room, they were undamaged. In the center of the spacious room stood a solid stone table.

Five women standing near the table turned around. They were all clad in wide robes and held staves in their hands. Their faces were hidden under deep hoods, making it impossible to discern their expressions.

Two black orcs, likely generals, appeared from both sides of the grand hall, as if to protect the women.

*And the women themselves...*

True Sight revealed their deception to me. The women were, of course, not as they appeared. In fact, their size, robes, and even the staves they held were all illusions. That's because all of these women were actually large serpents.

Although they lacked hands and feet, their faces were somewhat human-like, with eyes glowing a bright red and wide mouths filled with sharp teeth.

Graceful women standing upright; serpents rising vertically. To my eyes, these images overlaid one another, creating a surreal vision.

The humanoid serpents with snake bodies and human faces hissed at us in high-pitched tones, their mouths forming words that made no sound.

*Is something wrong?* I wondered. *Are they trying some kind of mental magic on us? If so, lucky for us, it's not working.*

Preparing for this operation, I'd had to decide between prioritizing Isolation for mental defense— against monsters like Zoraus, I had been thinking—or Share Field for telepathic communication.

Isolation had turned out to be the right choice. With creatures like these around, I wouldn't want to be dropping it anytime soon.

"Kazu-san, can we take down those women?"

"They're actually serpents... no, Nagas."

Nagas are serpent deities from Indian mythology. Of course, this world didn't have Indian mythology, but the name referred to a similar type of monster.

Interestingly, the central Naga wore a circlet on her head.

*Is she the boss... maybe?*

"Snakes, huh? So, we just take them down, right?"

"Yeah. The one in the middle seems to be the boss."

"Got it!"

As Tamaki stepped into the room, I cast Haste on everyone. Two General Orcs moved forward to protect the Nagas, and the one with the circlet muttered something. The orcs' bodies were enveloped in a red glow.

"That's... Kazu, they have Haste, too!"

"I know! Paladins!"

On my signal, the two Paladins closed in on the General Orcs. With both sides under the effect of Haste, the conditions were equal. The Paladins and the orcs were likely of similar weapon ranks, but the Paladins had the advantage of my other supportive spells.

Tamaki wasn't the only front-liner we had.

"Tamaki, go!"

"Aroo!"

Howling like a dog, Tamaki darted forward. She slipped past the General Orcs, who were busy fending off the Paladins, and approached the Nagas.

"I'll give support. Fireball!" Rushia called, attacking the Nagas. She must have used a Rank 5 fireball so as not to harm Tamaki; even with Resist in place, friendly fire was still a concern.

If Arisu were here, she might have boldly suggested burning both her and the enemy. But Arisu was on a separate mission, and our only healing spell here was Rushia's Flame Heal. With that in mind, we couldn't afford to be reckless.

Rushia's fireball was about to hit the Nagas when a rainbow-colored barrier appeared in front of the Naga leader.

"Damn, it's Deflection!"

My shout and the fireball's reflection off the barrier happened almost simultaneously. Rushia stepped in front of me.

"Ice Shield."

A wall of ice materialized, large enough to cover us completely, and absorbed the fireball's explosion. The blast brushed past us, charring the wall black.

"Damn it, if they have Deflection, we can't just attack recklessly..."

As the ice wall disappeared, the situation ahead became clear. The two Nagas attempting to counter Tamaki's attack with Deflection were swiftly cut down due to her staggered timing technique. The girl with the silver sword ignored the reflective shield, just altering her timing ever so slightly.

"There's no way I'll fall for the same trick twice!" Tamaki, splattered with blue blood, shouted defiantly.

Now, only two Nagas, plus the central one wearing the circlet, remained.

"Kazu, their leaders are called Royal Nagas," Rushia told me. "That one must be the Royal Naga."

While Tamaki was dispatching the other two serpent creatures, the Royal Naga muttered something, glaring at her. Suddenly, the red glow of Haste enveloping Tamaki disappeared.

"What... No way!"

"Dispel? Tamaki, what about the other spells...?"

"Bad news, Kazu-san, I feel like my strength's dropped, too!"

*If her strength's dropped, then Mighty Arm must have been dispelled. So, this Naga can dispel multiple spells at once! She's the worst type of magician. And the biggest concern now is the possibility that our Isolation has been dispelled. We can't be careless, or Tamaki might end up controlled.*

"We need to take down the Royal, even if it's by force!"

"I know, but..."

The remaining two Nagas stepped forward, dropping their illusions and arching their upper bodies. Their sharp fangs glinted menacingly as they prepared to bite down on Tamaki from above.

Normally, such foes would be no match for Tamaki, but her movements were sluggish, probably due to the sudden drop in her physical abilities.

Caught off guard by another of the enemy's Deflection spells, Tamaki stumbled. The Royal Naga then cast another spell.

"Ugh... Ah!"



Tamaki's body jerked as if struck by an electric shock, and for a moment she remained frozen. The two remaining Nagas seized the opportunity, biting into Tamaki's shoulder and side through her gym clothes.

Tamaki let out a scream as her blood splattered dramatically.



“Tamaki!”

“I’m okay!”

Tamaki had skillfully twisted her body at the last moment, narrowly avoiding a fatal hit. The bites weren’t bad, and they didn’t hinder her movement.

“You’ll pay for this!” she cried, charging forward.

*That’s the worst possible reaction to this situation, I thought nervously. She needs support right away.*

“Rushia... !”

When I turned to look for her, she was already gone from her spot. The princess of a fallen kingdom had acted swiftly and was now right next to Tamaki. Her staff had transformed into a Bone Whip, lashing out and striking one of the Nagas attacking Tamaki.

Rushia then turned to the other Naga. “Water Bind!”

A large, viscous orb of water hit the Naga’s lower body. The orb burst, spraying a sticky liquid that glued the Naga’s lower half to the floor. The snake monster struggled desperately, but the adhesive kept its lower body firmly in place.

I marveled for a second at the effectiveness of this Rank 6 water spell, new to actual combat. Water Bind required the target to be in contact with something, like a wall or floor. It was less effective against bipedal humanoids due to their smaller contact area with the ground. However, the Nagas, with their serpentine lower bodies, had a large surface area in contact with the floor, making them ideal targets.

“Thanks, Rushia!”

“Tamaki, focus on the enemy in front of you...”

“Right!”

Tamaki regained her stance and stepped forward, darting between the two Nagas. Her lightning-fast strikes hit each of them...

The Nagas' severed heads bounced off the floor. In an instant, Tamaki had advanced to stand directly in front of the Royal Naga.

"Amazing. To move like that without any enhancement spells..."

*No, Tamaki must have been aiming for this from the start. She trusted Rushia's support, knew a momentary opening would come, and had been conserving her strength.*

At this critical moment, she had unleashed all her power. It was a perfect display of teamwork built on trust.

The Royal Naga muttered something, and a rainbow barrier formed in front of her, but...

"If I know it's coming..."

Tamaki's strike, timed precisely to exploit the moment just before Deflection ended, was unleashed. With a single blow, she split the Royal Naga in half. Witnessing such an incredible hit, I involuntarily let out a breath in admiration.

Immediately after, we were back in the White Room. It seemed Rushia had leveled up.



## Chapter 191: The Border Fortress – Part 4

In the White Room, Rushia, Tamaki, and I let out sighs of relief.

“That was close!” Tamaki exclaimed. “All the magic Kazu-san gave me wore off. If the Naga boss had done something else, I would’ve been in trouble.”

“Even knowing that, you pushed forward. Well done, Tamaki.”

Our human missile smiled sheepishly at my praise.

Arisu and Mia, who hadn’t been in the final confrontation, looked puzzled. Since our five-person party hadn’t disbanded, they too were gathered here in the White Room.

“How did it go on your end, Arisu, Mia?”

“We secured the captives and did some healing, but... it’s going to be difficult for them to move right away.”

“If any enemies come your way, just take them down. We’ve defeated the boss, so we’ll mop up the rest and then meet up with Sakura and the others... What’s wrong?” I asked, noticing Arisu’s downcast expression.

She looked up at me, her lips pressed tightly together. “It’s just that...”

“The captives were in pretty bad shape, and it seems to have shocked Arisu,” Mia explained.

“Oh... I see. That must have been tough.”

These people had been held captive by monsters for a long time. Which was precisely why we’d sent Arisu, with her high healing magic, to help them.

“It was a bit too gruesome even for me,” Mia admitted.

“We didn’t need that level of detail!”

“Specifically, Arisu had to work hard regenerating skin and limbs... Apparently she used quite a bit of MP.”

“That would be Revive,” I guessed.

Revive is a Rank 7 healing spell. Given that Arisu’s level was 37, her MP was 370, so she regenerated enough MP for one Revive spell approximately every two minutes. However, casting it repeatedly at a rate faster than her recovery could definitely lead to fatigue.

“How many survivors were there?” I asked.

“There were seven in total... but only three of them were brought back to their senses with Cure Mind,” Mia answered.

“None of them had swollen bellies,” Arisu added.

I could imagine the kind of treatment the prisoners had received from the way the girls described it. They hadn’t been used as breeding grounds for wasps or anything of that sort. Perhaps those who were subjected to such treatment didn’t survive. The fortress had fallen around twenty days ago, and considering the number of orcs, the survivors had done well to last this long.

“Also, one of the captives said they had a message for our leader.”

“Oh? Some kind of information?”

“They seemed to be a survivor from another country, and something about a saint... and she’s around my age—she’s a loli.”

None of those details seemed important to me, but...

“Did she say she was a saint?” Rushia asked, perking up. “If so, she might be from the Lognia Theocratic State... A child would mean the missing Second Saint. I can’t believe she’s alive!”

“What kind of person is Lognia’s Second Saint?” I asked.

“The saints of Lognia are all unique magic users. The Second Saint’s magic is particularly distinctive... but to you guys, it might not seem like much.”

*So, magic that’s not a big deal for us despite being special and unique in this world?*

“I’m not sure what to make of that.”

“If I were to describe it using the White Room’s skill system, it would be Many Tongues.”

“Being able to talk in any language *is* handy. But wait, if an entire nation like Lognia used it to systematically interrogate monsters...”

“Could it be that the Lognia Theocratic State was capturing monsters for interrogation?”

“There were rumors about it. Shortly after they spread, the Second Saint disappeared.”

*That girl might hold incredibly important information...*

“What do you think happened?”

“Until now, we’ve had no idea. I heard that Lognia’s information-gathering efforts on the demon army stalled after she disappeared... And now, the nation itself is gone, situated in a valley that’s difficult to escape from, so most of those involved shared the country’s fate.”

*That sounds quite suspicious.*

*And this crucially important girl has something she wants to tell me...*

“Mia, I’d like to hear your opinion.”

“It’s probably something really critical.”

“Right.” My shoulders drooped in disappointment. I’d thought this extermination mission would be a piece of cake, but then a potential bombshell had dropped. “We can’t just ignore it, though.”

“I know. Information is power. Mia, can you bring the saint here? Leave the guards to Arisu and the others. The path is secure, and with Invisibility and running, we shouldn’t have any issues.”

“You want me to carry each person one by one? With Kazucchi’s Support Magic, I guess it’s doable.”

By the time Mia got to the third floor, I figured, we would be done cleaning up here. There might have been things the saint couldn’t discuss in front of the other captives. It would be even harder to talk back in a safe area. With the

current chaos and lack of attention from other countries, this was our best chance.

Then I caught a glimpse of the hawk familiar and had a thought. “Rushia, do you think it’s okay for Leen to hear about this?”

“Well, we should definitely tell Leen, but maybe the hawk should stay hidden.”

*That makes sense. It would mean deceiving the saint, but it might make things smoother.*

“However, while our interests align with Leen’s for now, it’s not guaranteed that things will stay that way forever. We’d better be careful...” she advised.

“That’s not it, Rushia,” I said, shaking my head. “It’s about all of our interests, including you... and Leen.”

“Yeah, you’re right, Kazu.” Rushia nodded, her expression unchanging, but I thought I saw a slight softening of her cheeks, a faint blush.

After a silent moment of mutual understanding...

“Shall we have a meeting about our future family planning?”

“Mia, you have a talent for ruining the mood.”

“No need to praise me so much,” Mia said shyly.

I was so tempted to smack that grin off her face.

“Just so you know, I wasn’t jealous. I just couldn’t resist making a joke.”

“Why are you so keen on self-deprecation...”

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Since it was our first visit to the White Room today, we decided to make it fun. Despite the tense situation outside—or rather because of it—we needed to let off some steam.

We transformed the next room into a pool, changed into swimsuits, and went swimming. Rushia hadn’t known how to swim until she met us, but after a brief



lesson, she had quickly mastered the crawl, then was soon posting the best swimming times of the whole group.

*Her athletic abilities really are remarkable, I thought. Maybe because she was raised as a warrior, so she knows how to use her muscles effectively.*

Mia was the second-best swimmer. Despite being a shut-in otaku, the ninja's sister also had exceptionally developed athletic skills. *Now that I think about it, she's the best at flying techniques too.*

"Kazucchi, are you admiring me?"

"Your form is impeccable, yes, absolutely. It's truly amazing."

"Are you implying my lack of curves is ideal for swimming?"

Mia had just returned from two lengths of the fifty-meter pool. She looked up at me, slightly out of breath, her cheeks flushed. "Kazucchi, Kazucchi," she beckoned with a quick wave of her hand.

*This definitely means she's up to some mischief... Well, let's see.* I intentionally let my guard down and approached Mia at poolside.

Mia grabbed my hand and yanked me into the pool with a "Heave-ho!"

"I knew you'd do that!"

*Never underestimate me!* As I plunged headfirst into the water, I wrapped my arm around Mia's neck. We tumbled into the water, entangled. Underwater, I gazed at Mia struggling, and then... I gently kissed her on the lips.

Mia froze in surprise.

"That was... unfair..."

After surfacing, Mia was unusually quiet, her head down. Tamaki, looking concerned, spoke to her.

"You handled that well," Rushia whispered to me as she passed by.

*Oh no, she saw that!*

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No one gets hungry in the White Room, but we can still enjoy food. We switched the adjacent room from a pool to a grassland and used Summon Feast. Then we relaxed under the enigmatic blue sky, leisurely enjoying our meal. Rushia, in particular, indulged herself in sweets like cakes, pies, and cookies.

“I wish we could stay in this room forever,” Arisu murmured softly. “If I could spend all my time here with Kazu-san and all of you...”

“Spending decades in this room and then going home as high school and middle school students... That has its own romance, but it feels like it could lead to a period of ennui. And... it feels like we’d be running away.”

“Right... I guess so.”

Her suggestion was tempting, but it would likely make the pain of leaving this room even greater. Everything here was, after all, a kind of dream.

“I’d rather grow old with everyone, living out the time we have together,” I said.

Hearing this, Arisu flashed a bashful smile and nodded in agreement.

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Refreshed in spirit, we left the White Room.

Now, back to our harsh reality. As for Rushia, she predictably increased her Water Magic to Rank 7.

RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 37	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 6 → 7	SKILL POINTS: 8 → 1

## Chapter 192: The Captive Saint

Back in the grand hall, the battle resumed. But the only enemies left were two General Orcs—which were no match for Tamaki. After we’d defeated one, we returned to the White Room to find that Arisu had leveled up.

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“Mia, are you ready to bring over our guest?” I asked.

“Just about to head out with our customer.”

“Sounds like a delivery service.”

We chatted briefly before returning to the border fortress.

ARISU	
LEVEL: 38	SPEARMANSHIP: 9
HEALING MAGIC: 7	SKILL POINTS: 3

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Immediately upon returning to the grand hall, Tamaki dispatched the second General Orc. That concluded the combat. The Royal Naga dropped five blue gems, while the other Nagas dropped two each. The generals, as before, each yielded four blue gems. All up, the battle resulted in an impressive total of two hundred and ten tokens.

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Keeping an eye out for any further monster attacks, we awaited Mia's arrival in the grand hall. Above us, the sounds of bombardment continued, and the fortress occasionally shook from some impact. Yuriko Takahashi and Shion Mogami, aka the YuriShio Combo, were apparently putting in a lot of effort. Mia had come up with the nickname for this duo. She'd also made an inappropriate comment, which I decided to overlook for the sake of their dignity.

Rushia explained the situation to Leen via her hawk familiar, and the bird gracefully ascended from her head, hiding discreetly behind the tattered curtains in a corner of the room.

By the way, Leen also told us that the saint had something to discuss with us.

After a while, the sounds of the bombardment that were coming from the stairwell ceased abruptly.

"Silent Field," I said.

A few seconds later, the silent barrier approached us. The silence and invisibility dissipated, revealing Mia carrying a naked young girl on her back.

"Here's your delivery! Thank you for using our service!"

"Again with the references that people of this world won't get..."

Mia gently placed the pale, fragile-looking girl on the floor. She looked to be about Mia's age and was shockingly thin, with long, disheveled hair that reached her waist. The girl's cheeks were hollow, suggesting severe malnutrition. Even though she'd received Arisu's healing magic, she still looked distressingly weak; I could hardly imagine the terrible state she'd been when Mia and the others first found her.

She looked up at me calmly with her light green eyes. Although she'd endured horrific abuse from the orcs, there was a strange sense of composure about her. She radiated a different aura than the defiant yet dignified relatives of Rushia we had encountered in the underground temple of Rown. Not a sense of nobility, but something more... spiritual.

"Kazucchi, Kazucchi. At least summon a cloth to cover her," Mia reminded me.

*Right.* I had been so caught up in staring that I'd neglected her immediate needs. Objectively, this could be seen as subjecting a vulnerable young girl to a humiliating situation.

That could be a serious problem—not simply a lack of tact, but a clear misstep. I quickly apologized for my thoughtlessness and summoned a white cloth to cover her. The girl, still seated on the floor, wrapped it around herself and gave a slight nod.

“Do not worry about it. My days as a captive have led to many valuable experiences,” she said.

*What's she saying? That sounds almost like the sarcastic comments one might hear from Shiki-san. We really don't need another self-deprecating woman in our group!*

“So, uh, my name is Kazuhisa Kaya. You can call me Kazu. And you are...?”

“My name is Pokuru Harara. I am known as a saint, though the nation that bestowed that title upon me has long since perished.”

*So, she is the saint... And she has magic similar to our Many Tongues.*

“What do you wish to convey to me, Pokuru?”

“Visitor from another world, Kazu, I have overcome numerous hardships and trials to speak with you, to convey these words to you. I have endured countless indignities and infinite suffering, all for this moment.”

A single tear rolled down her otherwise expressionless face. A shiver ran down my spine.

“Visitor from another world, Kazu, listen carefully to these words and ensure they are not leaked to others. The Demon Lord is also a visitor from another world like you. His goal is to return to his original world.”

That was indeed a bombshell revelation—a highly dangerous one that couldn't be carelessly spread.

The saint, perhaps due to the exhaustion of her long ordeal or the release of tension after conveying her message, lost consciousness a few seconds later.



The rest of us exchanged glances, all of us feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the implications of her words.

The hawk flew out of its hiding place and perched on Rushia's head.

"We must not let our guard down; we're still in the middle of a battlefield," it reminded us.

*That's true, I thought, the battle for the fortress is still ongoing.*

I decided it was probably time to end the bombardment. Stepping out into the corridor and poking my head out of a window, I turned on the transceiver.

After a brief exchange, the magic attacks ceased.

"Currently, Sakura and her team are exterminating any monsters attempting to flee the fortress. Please proceed."

Hearing the composed voice of the Light Tribe's young leader, I felt reassured. It seemed like they had everything under control.

"I'll leave it to you guys outside, then," I told Leen.

"Yes, no problem. Can we send troops inside now?"

"We've dealt with the boss group, but there might still be strong ones left. Be careful."

Considering the generals were estimated to have weapon skills around Rank 7, it was preferable to have at least one person of equal or higher rank in a direct confrontation. The Cultural Arts Center group was beginning to see more members achieving Rank 7 in weapon skills—apart from Sakura, who had already reached Rank 9. She could probably handle solo operations, but...

This time, the plan was to seal both entrances of the fortress and annihilate any escaping monsters. However, this strategy inevitably led to some teams operating without their top members. If there were still multiple Generals and they converged at a single exit, we couldn't afford to be too complacent.

For now, I gently picked up the saint... and was surprised at how light she felt.

Having endured so much with such a frail body, she had indeed shown remarkable resilience.

“We’ll need to hear more from her later. About this situation, Leen...”

“I shall keep it confidential,” Leen promptly reassured me.

That was a relief. The revelation that the Demon King was a visitor from another world, just like us, and desired to return to his original world, was a volatile piece of information. It could easily lead to misconceptions about our connection with the Demon King, potentially causing problems with the factions already skeptical of us. Leen and I had understood this immediately. Rushia, though silent, was perceptive enough to grasp it, too. Mia, of course, was already aware. I made a mental note to explain it to Tamaki later, and to Arisu when the time was right.

“We’ll regroup with Arisu before leaving the fortress. We should take her to Leen’s place,” I suggested, already turning to walk away. We weren’t expecting significant resistance anymore, but we needed to remain vigilant.

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Thirty minutes later, we were back at Leen’s office near the center of the World Tree. The battle at the fortress was still in progress, but with Sakura in charge, the others were more than capable of handling nearly anything, even divine-class soldiers.

The saint, still asleep, was now in the care of Leen’s personal physician. Her physical wounds were perfectly healed, and any psychological trauma should have been addressed by the Cure Mind spell. Despite the severe torture she’d endured, the spell’s potency in previous cases suggested that it should have alleviated most of her mental anguish.

We were discussing the inevitable lingering effects after the healing, like fatigue and muscle weakness. When I brought this up to Arisu, she assured me, “In terms of muscle deterioration... well, it won’t be a problem in her case.”

“Wait, what does that mean? Is that good or bad?”

“Ah, umm...”

“It’s because her limbs were torn off,” Mia said bluntly.

*Oh, that's right. I almost forgot.*

There was no point in mulling over such a horrific fact. Expecting monsters to show any sort of conscience would be a waste of time.

If she wasn't going to have any muscle fatigue, at least that was a silver lining to the horror of losing her limbs earlier.

"Mmm. Want more details?" Mia asked.

"Nope, I'm good!"

*Thinking about it now, her bluntness really is something else!*

# Chapter 193: Continuing the Operation to Retake the Frontier Fortress

Even after we’d seized control of a frontier fortress, our mission pressed on. We took only a brief pause, long enough for two cups of tea, before hastening to the next fortress. As the enemy’s key forces were only guarded by an orc-centric unit, and our CAC group was adept in orc warfare, we easily replicated our earlier success and wiped them out.

This time, instead of using a hidden route, we launched a direct assault with Greater Invisibility and Silent Field, but our overall strategy remained similar. The commanding orc at this fortress was a mage, the strongest we’d faced yet. We were thinking he used psychic attacks, but because our Isolation spell nullified those effects anyway, we couldn’t be certain.

In a nutshell, it was an effortless victory.

We named this orc the Wizard Orc. He dropped four blue gems, suggesting his power level was on par with a general. Tamaki, Mia, and I all leveled up.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 47	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 4

TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 38	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH:	SKILL POINTS:

7	3
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Mia	
LEVEL:  38	EARTH MAGIC:  7
WIND MAGIC:  9	SKILL POINTS:  3

Unfortunately, there were no human survivors in the fortress—all had been brutally killed. It was a harrowing scene, but I couldn’t help wondering whether a prolonged and painful captivity would have been any better.

“Kazu, let’s not get bogged down in thoughts like that. We should focus on getting more experience points to level up even more,” Mia suggested.

I couldn’t help gazing at the decayed corpses in the dungeon. Mia tugged at the hem of my clothes. She looked up at me, trying to maintain her usual demeanor. It must have been her way of showing concern... I guess.

“Or are you continuing your game of imagining despicable acts upon seeing these terrible corpses?”

“My lips are sealed,” I responded firmly, giving her head a light tap.

“Ow. Lately, Kazu thinks my head is some kind of musical instrument,” she complained.

Tamaki, who had been sweeping the upper floors, came bounding down the dungeon stairs excitedly. “Ah, Kazu! The sword that the general had earlier can actually emit beams! Beams! Can I keep it as a spare weapon?”

One of the Orc Generals we’d defeated in the great hall had wielded a black sword. During the fight, the sword had shone with a dazzling golden light and fired a beam. That beam, however, was redirected by the Deflection spell I’d hastily cast, rebounding at the general himself and severing his left arm in a single strike.



It was likely a weapon of considerable power—akin to Sakura Nagatsuki’s spear that could launch energy-intensive long-range attacks. Tamaki held the sword, her eyes sparkling like a child with a new toy, eagerly awaiting my answer.

“Instead of it being your backup, why don’t you make it your main weapon?” I suggested. “It should handle a lot like a regular sword.”

“Hmm, maybe I will,” she pondered.

For the time being, I cast Hard Weapon on the black sword in her hand. True, it was already a magical weapon, but my enchantments seemed to layer on top of the magic. I wasn’t sure how much more powerful it had become, but Tamaki did say it felt stronger.

*Currently, our best way to get stronger is to take the weapons from monsters and use them. As for armor, due to sizing issues, there’s not much we can do... Oh wait, Leen and Shiki mentioned they wanted to try something... I’m curious, but I won’t get my hopes up.*

We still had a long way to go before we would be strong enough to face the undefeated Four Heavenly Kings head-on.

Tamaki opted to use her newly acquired black sword, while carrying her silver sword on her back. She had been quietly discussing something with Mia when she suddenly turned to me.

“Hey, Kazu, which sounds better—Golden Spiral Strike or Golden Smasher?”

“Are we actually naming special moves now...?” I mused. *If she starts shouting these during battle, I’m definitely going to pretend I don’t know her.*

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By late morning, we had conquered another fortress, this one dominated by Hobgoblins. There were dozens of them, and they were a type we hadn’t seen before—smaller, almost like regular goblins.

There were Captain Hobgoblins, mages wielding advanced magic, and what must have been a King Hobgoblin, leading them all. The king seemed to be

around Rank 8 in terms of power, but he still didn't stand a chance against us now. He became prey to Tamaki's Golden Death Flash from a distance, and was easily sliced up close.

Interestingly, Tamaki's sword was now being referred to as the "Annihilating Golden Sword" on its second use as she continued to come up with new names. When we'd finished conquering the fortress, each of us gained a level.

Finally, my skill points were over 5, which meant I could obtain the skill Enhanced Summoning.

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In the White Room, I suggested, "This is the first time we've dealt with a derivative skill, so let's check it out together." I showed the laptop to everyone.

On the right side of the skill tree section, there was the label *Enhanced Summoning*. Clicking on it prompted the message, "*Please select an ability.*"

Abilities—apparently, this was what set derivative skills apart from the rest. Instead of merely increasing a skill's rank, one could choose two abilities from several options at each rank to enhance oneself.

For Enhanced Summoning Rank 1, my options included:

- ***Familiar Enhancement 1:*** As the name suggested, this ability strengthened familiars—by about half a rank. For instance, Sha-Lau's weapon skill could be equivalent to 7.5. This ability could be stacked for further enhancement to Ranks 2 and 3. You could obtain consecutive levels in a single rank-up, but the maximum amount was capped at the current rank. So currently, only Familiar Enhancement 1 was available. Additionally, as the familiar's effective rank increased, so did the mana required to maintain it.
- ***Reduced Mana for Familiar Maintenance 1:*** This ability reduced the mana needed to maintain a summoned familiar. The maximum rank was 5, with a 10 percent reduction at Rank 1, and up to 50 percent reduction at Rank 5. The other limitations were similar to Familiar Enhancement.

- ***Familiar Ability Granting 1:*** This ability existed up to Rank 5. It allowed the transfer of personal or party member skills to a familiar during summoning. The mana cost for maintaining the familiar increased by 20 percent per rank of the transferred skill. At Rank 1, skills up to Rank 1 could be transferred, and up to Rank 5 at the maximum. For example, by raising this ability to Rank 3, I could let a familiar use Arisu's healing magic at Rank 3, increasing the maintenance mana cost by 60 percent.
- ***Familiar Synchronization 1:*** This ability, which only went up to Rank 3, allowed for syncing one's consciousness with the familiar. When synchronized, maintaining the familiar required double the mana. At Rank 1, it was possible to synchronize the five senses, akin to an enhanced version of Remote Viewing. At Rank 2, one could speak through the familiar and control its physical movements. By Rank 3, I would even be able to use my skills and magic through the familiar.
- ***Familiar Size Alteration 1:*** This one was also limited to Rank 3. At Rank 1, it allowed for shrinking a summoned familiar by increasing its maintenance mana by 20 percent. While the miniaturized familiar became correspondingly weaker, there were situations where this could prove advantageous.

There were several other abilities, but these would likely be my choices for now. Mia raised her hand.

"Um, sir, I have a suggestion."

"What's that, Mia?"

"About Familiar Size Alteration, it mentions enlarging at Rank 2, right?"

"Yes, it does."

"Can you enlarge just specific parts, like, um, the chest?"

"What would you do with that?" I asked, amused. After a playful Q&A, we confirmed such specific enlargement was impossible.

"That's a shame," Mia said.

“It’s not a shame at all!” I retorted. “Anyway, strengthening the familiar seems essential, right?”

“It does. Being able to summon a stronger familiar is an obvious benefit.”

“For the one point that’s left, we could either focus on reducing the mana cost for maintaining the familiar or pick a more utility-based ability,” Mia offered.

She was right; it essentially boiled down to those two choices.

“Considering the increased maintenance of MP due to Familiar Enhancement, I might wanna focus on reducing the mana cost,” I pondered.

“But it’s hard to turn down the ability to grant skills. In situations like we just had, where we were on two separate operations, making sure there’s a healer on every team would offer a lot of peace of mind.”

*That’s a valid point. However, I have some thoughts regarding healers.*

“Leen is looking for an exclusive contract scroll. If we can find a familiar capable of healing magic within that...” Rushia echoed my thoughts perfectly.

*Although, since we just started looking yesterday, I’m not sure how soon we’ll find one.*

“If a familiar can use it on its own, something like See Invisibility would definitely be attractive. But that’s assuming we raise it to Rank 3,” I said.

Of course, a familiar can’t perform summoning magic independently; that would lead to infinite reproduction.

“For now, I’m thinking of choosing Familiar Synchronization. Reconnaissance is vital, after all. Any objections?”

No one raised their hand. Both Mia and Rushia seemed to agree with my choice, while Arisu and Tamaki didn’t usually give their opinions on such matters anyway.

So, with my new power acquired, I continued fighting—or more like exterminating—the monsters.

<b>LEVEL:</b>  48	<b>SUPPORT MAGIC:</b>  9
<b>SUMMONING MAGIC:</b>  9	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b>  6 → 1
<b>ENHANCED SUMMONING:</b>  0 → 1 (Familiar Enhancement 1, Familiar Synchronization 1)	

<b>ARISU</b>	
<b>LEVEL:</b>  39	<b>SPEARMANSHIP:</b>  9
<b>HEALING MAGIC:</b>  7	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b>  5

<b>TAMAKI</b>	
<b>LEVEL:</b>  39	<b>SWORDSMANSHIP:</b>  9
<b>STRENGTH:</b>  7	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b>  5

<b>MIA</b>	
<b>LEVEL:</b>  39	<b>EARTH MAGIC:</b>  7
<b>WIND MAGIC:</b>  9	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b>  5

<b>RUSHIA</b>	
<b>LEVEL:</b>	<b>FIRE MAGIC:</b>

38	9
<b>WATER MAGIC:</b> 7	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b> 3

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By late morning, we had successfully conquered three fortresses in total and returned to the World Tree. While we were having a light lunch, we received a message from Leen: the saint had woken up.



## Chapter 194: The Saint of Lognia, Pokuru

**P**okuru Harara, the second saint of the Lognia Theocracy, was one of the few survivors of a fallen kingdom. The second time we met the saint, it was in a different setting—not in Leen’s usual office within the tree hollow, but in a small, isolated room in another tree hollow.

Sitting up on a bed that looked modest to us, Pokuru Harara was clad in the standard attire of the Light People, similar to traditional Japanese clothing, but it looked rather tight on her. Magical candelabras in each corner of the room cast an orange glow, highlighting her pale, beautiful blue hair. Only now did I realize how dirty she’d been when we first met her.

In the room with her were Leen, Rushia, myself, Shiki, and Yuuki. The latter’s enigmatic ninja outfit, complete with a mask, seemed to make the petite girl more than a little nervous.

“I apologize for this; I will show my face now,” Yuuki said, quickly removing the mask.

Suddenly, a handsome young man with a kind smile and a rugged look stood before us. In fact, for everyone except Mia and me, it was their first time seeing Yuuki’s face.

“Oh, he’s quite handsome, isn’t he?” Shiki commented, eyebrows raised in surprise.

Indeed, I had initially thought he was an attractive businessman visiting our school. He had a deeply chiseled face, reminding me of a character from a Showa era *tokusatsu* series.

Yuuki’s smile had a calming effect, which had also reassured me when I was in a dire situation. And it seemed to have the same comforting effect on the young saint, who must have been no older than twelve or thirteen.

“It’s all right now,” he reassured her with a gentle smile.

I couldn't help but wonder about him. *Was he really not involved in intelligence work? He seems so skilled at winning people's hearts. And normally, he hides this advantage completely behind his mask. Why is that?*

"I am Pokuru Harara. First, let me express my gratitude. Thank you for saving me," the saint began, nodding slightly to each of us in turn.

After glancing over everyone, her gaze met mine. "May I call you Kazu?"

"Ah, yes, that's fine."

"Then, Kazu. I have a request for you and your group. There's a place I would like you to go to. It's currently enemy territory, but given your strength in conquering fortresses, I believe it's not impossible."

*Sure, with our current capabilities, especially using Leen's familiars for pinpoint assault tactics, we could probably take over most places. Whether we can maintain control is another question, especially if the Four Heavenly Kings were to show up.*

"Is this about the Demon King?"

"Yes. According to information I extracted from monsters, deep within the Ghostly Wetlands, in a place once known as the Temple of Tepat, there is said to be a treasure of the Demon King. The monster I spoke with used to guard that area."

"The Demon King's treasure..." I repeated under my breath.

Like us with Many Tongues, Pokuru could speak any language she wanted. Apparently the Lognia Theocracy had been using this ability to gather information from captured monsters.

The reason she'd been in that fortress was to convey important information to us. *The Demon King's treasure.* And the earlier information about the Demon King being a visitor from another world.

*The Temple of Tepat. What could possibly be there?*

"Considering the typical patterns in stories, maybe there's a collapsed and abandoned department store on the site," Yuuki mused.

"Yuuki-senpai, you really are Mia's big brother," Shiki said with a grin.

The people of this world looked confused, which was fine. *But saying the Temple of Tepat is like a department store... That's a worryingly plausible idea.*

"Based on this information, I've already dispatched several familiars to the Ghostly Wetlands. I used the closest ones available, but it will take a little more time to gather information," Leen said. True to her role as a bio-teleportation network manager, she was always quick to act.

*So, we're already set on investigating? Makes sense, considering anything related to the Demon King is extremely important.*

"I am deeply relieved to have conveyed this information to you, visitors from another world. The painful days I endured seem to have led up to this moment," Pokuru said softly, her face breaking into a faint smile.

Within seconds, though, silent tears were streaming down her cheeks, painting a picture of loneliness and sorrow. "With no country left and my protectors gone, only I remain. Perhaps it's fortunate that the monsters who occupied the fortress noticed my powers and kept me alive to extract more information. I'm sorry. Could I please be alone for a while?"

The rest of us exchanged quick glances before getting to our feet. Yuuki and Shiki seemed to have more questions, but had decided to save them for later.

As we stepped outside the tree hollow, we could hear faint sobs coming from inside.

"No matter what, we have to make use of the information these people sacrificed their lives to protect," Yuuki remarked quietly. Everyone turned to look at him, and we were all surprised to see that he had already put his mask back on.

"Well then, we'll return to our task of reclaiming the fortresses," Yuuki continued. "Kazu-dono and the others would do well to take a short rest first."

"No, before that..." Leen interjected. "Kazu, Shiki—there's something I want to show you both."

"Oh? Has there been any progress with the project?" Shiki asked.

“It’s gone well. We’ve already reached a stage where it’s practically usable...”  
Leen and Shiki shared a heavy expression.

*What’s going on here? Was there some secret project going on that no one told me about?*

“Could we take some of your time?” Shiki asked me.

“Ah, yes, but what exactly is it...?”

“Just come along. You’ll understand when we get there,” she answered with a mischievous grin.

Her expression almost made me want to punch her in the stomach. Of course, I wouldn’t really do that—the aftermath would be too scary.

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Using the usual warp, we arrived in another forest. It looked almost exactly like the one we had come from, but this time, instead of treehouses, there were huts on the ground. We descended to the forest floor using a nearby wooden elevator.

I heard a sound from one of the huts—specifically, it was a song. And not just any song, but one that was very familiar to me. It was my school’s song. *What in the world is happening here?*

“Right this way,” Leen said, opening the door to a hut.

Inside, a girl in gym clothes was singing. I immediately recognized her as being from the Cultural Arts Center group. I couldn’t remember her name, but she was one of the students rescued from the orcs, a third-year middle schooler. I knew she had always been quiet and not much for fighting, so she’d been working in the rear with Sumire and others as part of the support team.

When she caught a glimpse of us, her face lit up with joy—though she continued singing.

On the wooden table in front of her laid five amulets, the kind you might buy at a shrine for traffic safety. These amulets were emitting a faint silvery glow as if in response to her song.

“What are those...?” I asked.

“They’re related to the Music Skill,” Shiki whispered.

“She acquired the Music Skill?” I’d always thought that was a nonessential skill, but perhaps they were experimenting with it.

Noticing my confusion, Leen smiled gently. “My people have developed magic based on the song of the World Tree. It is a form of primal magic. When I heard about the Music Skill, it occurred to me that it might be possible to apply that magic.”

*Right, the World Tree itself has been singing for the past couple of days. I should have realized the connection between it and the Music Skill back then.*

“Does the Music Skill do anything besides make things glow?”

“It does. After several experiments, we found that it can produce effects similar to your Support Magic.”

*Ah. That could be a big deal.*

Shiki gave a hesitant nod. “The exact correlation between the specific songs and their effects isn’t clear yet... That’s why we’ve continued to keep Kanon under the care of Leen and her team.”

Now I remembered—the girl singing was Kanon Miiko. I think I’d heard from Arisu or someone that she was in choir.

“Just today, she said that the emotion she puts into her singing directly influences the effects of the enchantment.”

“How does that work...?” I wondered, intrigued.

Kanon had just finished singing the school anthem. She turned toward us, offering a shy smile. I remembered Tamaki mentioning how introverted she was.

“I sang with the hope that magic wouldn’t harm Kazu-san and Arisu-chan,” Kanon explained.

“After several trials, we discovered that by focusing on specific conditions, the granted abilities could be enhanced,” Leen added.

“So, for instance, if she sings while thinking about being resistant to fire, the song could make someone resistant to fire?”

“Yes, but for Kazu, given that you can adapt Support Magic to specific situations, that kind of specialized use might not be necessary.”

*Attribute resistances are effective for defense against known attacks. Then, if Support Magic can't cover everything, having items for general magical defense could be beneficial.*

*But this doesn't quite seem like Leen's approach. It's more like a gaming strategy...*

“This was Shiki-san's idea, wasn't it?”

“Yes, and I'm glad you recognize that.” Shiki stood with her hands on her hips, looking quite pleased with herself. “Let's do a little experiment,” she suggested, walking over to me and hanging one of the traffic safety amulets around my neck.

“Wait, wait. What kind of experiment are we talking about?”

“Don't worry, Kazu. I won't use any painful magic,” Leen reassured.

“That's not reassuring at all, Leen-san!”

Leen began chanting a spell. I was panicking, confused... but ultimately, I had no choice but to brace myself for whatever magic she was about to cast.

A moment later, I felt a slight haziness clouding my mind... and then, suddenly, I snapped back to reality.

“What just happened to me?” I asked, still trying to grasp the situation.

Leen hummed thoughtfully, nodding to herself, then offered me a reassuring smile.

“Ah, well...” I began, still a bit dazed.

“Now, try removing the amulet,” she instructed.

“Um, maybe we should discuss this first...”

I had no choice but to go along with the plan. After I'd taken the amulet off and put it back on several times as part of their experiment, it became clear



that the traffic safety amulet (with anti-magic defense) did indeed provide some level of resistance to magical attacks.

*Oh man, I've had enough of being a guinea pig for today!*

## Chapter 195: Defending the Border Fortress

**W**hile Leen was using me as a test subject (with significant implications), the situation outside seemed to have changed. Leen suddenly tilted her head, interrupting her incantation. Was this related to her familiars monitoring the situation?

“Monsters are approaching the fortress you all retook,” she announced.

“That’s sooner than expected,” Shiki said. She’d been standing with folded arms, enjoying my suffering under the spells, but now she looked tense.

Leen’s expression was serious, too, but I was just confused. How many enemies were we talking about? It hadn’t been many hours since our surprise attack. Mobilizing a significant force to retake the fortress in such a short time seemed unlikely... The rapid deployment of the Light Tribe’s forces had only been possible thanks to Leen’s teleportation network of familiars.

*Could it be that several divine-class enemies are launching an attack? Still, with our current strength, we could probably handle two or three of those...*

“A fast-moving combined unit has been identified,” Leen reported. “There are four Mekish Grau, with two of them carrying Legend Arachnae on their backs. The Mekish Grau are said to be flying.”

Four Mekish Grau and two Legend Arachne—this was no small threat.

“Six divine-class enemies in total...” Shiki murmured.

Suddenly I noticed another critical detail in Leen’s report. “What do you mean by them *flying*?”

A Mekish Grau is a four-armed centaur-like monster, six meters tall and ten meters long, with a variety of weapons such as flaming arrows and thundering swords. However, the ones we’d encountered so far had never flown.

“They don’t seem to have wings, but they move through the air as if traveling on an invisible path. It could be some kind of ability,” Leen speculated.

“Maybe it’s Wind Walk,” I mused.

Wind Walk, a Rank 5 wind spell, allows you to walk on the air as if it were solid ground. It lasts twenty minutes per rank. With Mia’s current level, for example, the effect could last for three hours on her.

Had some magical monster cast this on the Mekish Grau before the mission? It was a viable tactic. With those monsters’ speed, they could cover a considerable distance in three hours.

“But there weren’t any divine-class soldiers in this area until two days ago, were there?” I asked.

“Maybe they were summoned by a Globster,” Shiki suggested.

“So, they quickly redirected the divine-class soldiers they’d originally planned to use for offensive operations to retake the fortress?”

“That’s one possibility.”

“So, if we were to intercept them... Facing six at once is too much for us alone.”

“We’ll send the second team with Sakura-chan. We should also ask Yuuki-senpai and Keiko-san for help.”

If the enemy was deploying divine-class soldiers by flying, it meant that they were trying to maximize the speed of their forces to retake the fortress before we could fully prepare our defenses.

I didn’t have a mind for strategy, but I understood that this fortress was a crucial point in the enemy’s encirclement. The Demon King’s army must be feeling the pressure of having such a vital location compromised.

Just a few days ago, his seemingly invincible army had been in disarray. Sending six divine-class soldiers unaccompanied seemed reckless, even for him. He must have been quite desperate.

For the people of this world, who had been on the defensive, constantly being overrun, it might have felt like a significant achievement to see the enemy acting in desperation—but it wasn’t enough. We couldn’t rest on our laurels; we had to continue to win and eliminate the threat of the Demon King’s army.

“What should we do? Create two formations to counterattack? But we probably don’t want to increase our numbers too much.”

“Yeah, let’s limit it to about ten people,” Shiki said. “You all will be the first party, and the second party can have Sakura-chan, Shion-chan, Yuriko-chan, and the two ninjas. How does that sound?”

The combination of Shion and Yuriko, both Rank 8 in Fire Magic, and Sakura Nagatsuki, Rank 9 in Spearmanship, was the ace team of the Cultural Arts Center group—aside from us, that is. In yesterday’s battle against Aga-Su, they’d incinerated many lesser opponents, clearing the way for us.

“All right, I’ll gather the people Shiki suggested. Kazu, stay here a little longer. Let’s have Kanon create another protective spell with her song. Kanon, are you up to it?”

“Yeah, I think I still have enough MP.”

*Oh, so Kanon’s Music Skill uses MP? That makes sense; it’s practically a form of magic. Music-related skills were always a bit vague in the White Room Q&A.*

“Kazu-san, what kind of spell should I make?”

“Let’s see...” I started to puzzle over that. Any attack from the divine-class enemies would be extremely dangerous, but the most dangerous among them could be...

“In a melee, the more people we have, the more problematic it’ll be to deal with all the steel threads of the Legendary Arachnae,” Shiki said.

“An attack with threads... Got it,” Kanon replied.

After Shiki left, Kanon placed ten amulets for safe childbirth on the table and began to sing. It was “Sakura Sakura,” a song so familiar that it can be found in schoolbooks. I wondered why that particular song came to mind at that moment.

Regardless of my curiosity, her singing seemed incredibly skilled to my amateur ears. But the effectiveness of the musical skill probably didn’t depend on the singer’s degree of natural talent.

As Kanon sang “Sakura Sakura,” the melody resonated deeply and washed over me in gentle waves. Before I knew it, tears were streaming down my face. *Why am I crying?* Glancing to my side, I saw Leen nod slightly.

“Kanon’s singing touches the heart,” she said thoughtfully. “Whether that’s due to her skill or something unique to her, I can’t say. It’s a beautiful song.”

“Yes,” I agreed wholeheartedly.

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During our tests, we’d learned that using multiple amulets didn’t increase the effect by much. Leen mentioned something about “interference of waves” leading to malfunctions, which sounded a bit like having only one slot for amulets in a game.

Also, the amulets degraded with each use and eventually broke. This made them kind of like consumable items with limited use—yet another thing reminiscent of game mechanics. In fact, the entire system of the White Room felt like it was borrowed from a game.

“Good luck, Kazu-san!” Kanon said, clenching her fist tightly in a gesture of encouragement. In her eyes I could see boundless trust and respect for me. I couldn’t help but wonder how Shiki had managed to instill such feelings in the young people of the Cultural Arts Center...

By the time I reached the designated meeting place near the World Tree’s teleportation gate, everyone else was already assembled.

“Sorry to keep you waiting. Can I have everyone put these on?” I asked, handing out the safe childbirth amulets to all ten members of our departure team.

Rushia examined her amulet curiously. “I wonder what kind of original blessing this amulet holds,” she mused.



When I answered vaguely, Mia covered her mouth with her hand and laughed inappropriately.

“I see, so Mia finds this sort of thing amusing,” Rushia observed.

“You’ve really come to understand Mia quite well,” I commented.

“Yes, but she’s a bit predictable, isn’t she? Rather ‘One Note,’ one might say.” Rushia sounded strangely out of place at the end.

“But my One Note nature allows me to find my reliable way of life,” Mia replied sagely.

“That way of life should just burn out,” Rushia said, and I think she was only half joking.

While we were engaged in this lighthearted banter, we used the hawk familiar’s teleportation to arrive at the fortress.

Inside, about two hundred soldiers were busy at work. Their assortment of ears, tails, and other animal-like features indicated that they were all of the Light People. Since the fortress had originally been a defense point for the People of Light, it made sense that they would be defending it.

Mages worked with earth elementals to repair the damaged parts of the fortress, while ordinary soldiers cleared away the rubble. Unfortunately, against Mekish Grau, stone walls would be virtually useless. They didn’t call them “divine soldiers” for nothing; a Mekish Grau could obliterate an entire hill in a single blow.

To be honest, these soldiers seemed more likely to be in the way during battle. It would be annoying to have to protect them.

“Leen, can you evacuate them?” I asked.

Rushia nodded; it seemed she’d had the same thought. She asked the hawk perched on her head.

“It’s all right to use them as bait,” came Leen’s reply.

“A decoy... Ah, I see. If they keep working like nothing is happening, it might cause the enemy to let their guard down a bit... and then we strike.”



I toyed with that idea in my head for a moment. We knew from experience that both Mekish Grau and Legend Arachne had the ability to detect hidden enemies. We also knew that a Mekish Grau's detection range extended to about one hundred meters.

If the enemy were to detect a presence within the fortress, the Mekish Grau would likely begin with long-range attacks to eliminate the threat. Their flaming arrows and infernal blasts had an effective range of over a kilometer. Even a greeting shot could critically damage the fortress.

*But that's where we come in. If we hide in the forest nearby, we could strike just before the enemy unleashes its infernal blast. With Rushia's Fire Magic boosted ten times for a preemptive strike, we could take down two Mekish Grau at once, including the riders. Meanwhile, our melee team would charge in...*

However, it was impossible to predict when the enemy would launch the infernal blast. If we evacuated the soldiers, the enemy would quickly realize that the fortress was empty. They might become cautious and even retreat.

*But would they still destroy the fortress? It would be fairly easy for the Mekish Grau, and it might be a good strategic move for them.*

Looking up, I realized that everyone was waiting for my decision.

I took a deep breath, cleared my throat, and announced, "Let's have the soldiers work inside the fortress or in places where they can quickly take cover. We'll defend the fortress while we draw the Mekish Grau in for a counterattack."

I said this confidently, even as I solidified the strategy in my mind.

## Chapter 196: Divine-Class Unit – Part 1

*The key here is to understand the victory conditions. For the enemy army, us controlling this fortress is a big problem. Our goal is to inflict significant damage on the enemy at that fortress. That way, whether the fortress has people inside or not, our only option is to defend it. If we're looking to the future, we should seize every opportunity to win decisively. While this might have been a daunting task in the past, now we have the strength to face six divine-class enemies—provided our tactics are sound. The plan needs to be meticulous, but our execution has to be bold.*

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After a short time, I stood with Mia, Shion, Yuriko, and Keiko on the fortress's watchtower, watching the Mekish Grau fly closer and closer over the dense forest. At first, they were just tiny specks, but within minutes, we could make out the shape of them.

"They're coming," I murmured.

Even from a distance, the contrast with the trees made the size of the four approaching monsters clear. Mekish Grau are centaur-like monsters with four arms; the lower arms held bows and arrows, while the upper right hand wielded a sword, and the upper left held a shield.

"It's about time," I said.

"Let's do our best," Mia and Keiko replied together, soaring up with Fly to position themselves in front of the fortress.

The Mekish Grau paused in their advance for a moment, their forearms readying their bows and enveloping the arrows in crimson flames.

Evil Flame Strike was an attack of mythical power, known to unleash hellish flames and incinerate all in its path. It unleashed via a simultaneous volley of

four toward our fortress. A single direct hit from any of these arrows could easily level the fortress.

I shouted for the Light People working inside the main fortress compound to get down.

*Then...*

“Tempest!” Mia shouted at the crucial moment, creating a massive storm in front of us. The fiery arrows were caught in the storm, slightly altering their trajectories.

Unfortunately, one arrow that was barely affected by the storm was still heading straight for the fortress. In response, Keiko moved with incredible speed to intercept it...

“Deflection.” She timed it perfectly. This instantaneous judgment was something only Keiko could accomplish. The rebounded Evil Flame Strike reentered the storm, this time drastically changing its course.

“Now, you two!”

“Right, Bright Shield!” Shion and Yuriko acted in unison, creating a huge, glowing shield of flames that covered the top of the watchtower.

Immediately after that, several explosions occurred. The remaining three arrows tore through the forest and hills behind the fortress. The reflected arrow exploded in midair, showering the trees with fiery rain. Fortunately, recent heavy rains had soaked the area, making a forest fire unlikely... but the situation remained critical.

The blast shook the watchtower. The building creaked under the strain, but the flame shield created by the two fire mages protected us from the shockwave and the intense heat. While some of the workers inside may have been singed, the sturdy fortress itself remained unscathed. This level of attack wouldn’t shake our defenses. It would be nice if the enemy felt the same way.

“They’re going to fire again!” Keiko’s warning brought our attention back to the forest.

The Mekish Grau drew their bows. Mia's Tempest and Keiko's Deflection intercepted the four fiery arrows sent their way and ricocheted them all away from the fortress. The fire mages' shield protected us from the blast waves. Sniper attacks from a kilometer away were no longer effective against us. However, arrows that landed hundreds of meters away caused huge explosions, quickly transforming the land around the forest into a barren wasteland.

"If this keeps going, won't the fortress lose its strategic importance?" I wondered aloud. The fortress's location on the map was crucial as a chokepoint against the enemy army. But if it lost all its surrounding cover, what good would it be?

*If the Demon King's army has anticipated this and uses the Mekish Grau as a heavy artillery strategy, we will be in trouble. I can only hope that isn't their plan.*

After the monsters fired a third volley, Mia and Keiko were left alone again. The explosions from the impact on both sides of the fortress wiped out more hills, blew away trees, and carved deep into the ground.

*What should we do? If the enemy's only goal is to "neutralize the fortress" which would "eliminate its strategic value", they could easily accomplish their mission...*

At that moment, however, the Mekish Grau stopped firing and began to close the distance to the fortress.

"This might actually be a good thing," I said.

"Yeah, it's better for us," Rushia agreed.

The one-sided artillery barrage almost decided the battle on a strategic level. Or maybe the enemy never considered such a scenario a condition for victory.

"Bring them closer," Keiko-san said nonchalantly.

Our offensive magic didn't have a very long range; its effective range was about one hundred meters. The Mekish Grau, capable of striking from a kilometer away, were truly in a different league as strategic weapons.

*Oddly, they were abandoning their advantage as long-range artillery and moving closer. Why?*

“They’re probably targeting us,” I mused.

“Me and Kazu specifically,” Rushia added.

“Sounds about right,” I agreed.

The enemy probably knew that we had repeatedly defeated divine-class soldiers, even killed Aga-Su the night before. They likely weren’t used to having their Evil Flame Strikes deflected multiple times. And so, they were trying to drive out our elite unit with long-range attacks. Now, just as they had planned, we were right here.

“Did we just walk right into their trap?”

“Tee-hee, let’s say we walked into it willingly,” Keiko replied playfully.

“Well, that’s one way to put it,” I said, keeping my tone light even as the Mekish Grau closed in on us... Their proximity was actually to our advantage.

The moment they crossed the two-hundred-meter line from the fortress...

“Inferno!”

A wall of flame erupted from the dense forest at the feet of the giant centaur-like monsters. The Rank 9 fire spell, large enough to engulf a human being, came from Rushia, hidden and waiting on the ground.

The tenfold-amplified Inferno collided with one of the Mekish Grau, creating a massive fireball that engulfed our entire field of vision.

*Yes! That should have taken down that one for sure.*

Of course, it wasn’t over yet. This was our carefully planned surprise attack, and this moment was our golden opportunity. We had to maximize our gains here.

Out from the cover of the explosion jumped four little shadows—Arisu, Tamaki, Sakura, and Yuuki. The four of them, aided by the magic of flight, quickly closed the gap on the Mekish Grau that the Legendary Arachnae were

riding. Arisu and Tamaki formed one pair, while Sakura and Yuuki formed another.

Divine-class monsters could see through invisibility, although technically, it was more of a sixth sense that let them detect illusions and hidden magic.

Fortunately for us, the remaining forest's dense canopy of branches and leaves acted as a natural barrier, leaving the Mekish Grau clueless to the approach of our four warriors. Arisu and her team quickly moved in close...

Tamaki struck first, decapitating the Mekish Grau with a swift blow. The Legend Arachne riding atop it began to unleash a barrage of sticky webs, but...

"Whoa, whoa!" At that moment, the safe childbirth amulet around Tamaki's neck, imbued with Kanon Miiko's song, began to glow blue-white.

The amulet burst a second later, forming a barrier around Tamaki that deflected the sticky web.

"That was close!" Tamaki exclaimed in relief as the now-powerless steel threads fell limply to the ground.

"Arisu!" she called.

"Right, my turn!" Arisu replied, ready to make her move.

Arisu lunged into the opening created for her, holding her spear horizontally in front of her. With a fierce battle cry, she thrust the spear into the Legend Arachne's chest. Both of the girls' strikes appeared to be fatal.

"Good, that's two down!" Tamaki exclaimed.

My gaze shifted to Sakura and Yuuki—just as they were sent flying backward—hit so hard that they were spinning through the air—by a peach colored barrier enveloping the entire Mekish Grau.

"Whoa, what was that?!" Yuuki exclaimed in surprise.

"A new trick?" Sakura questioned.

As I stared at the Mekish Grau, a robed figure materialized atop it. The figure swung its arms wide, and immediately afterward...

“Ugh... !” A bolt of lightning struck Sakura, who let out a cry and her body contorted in agony.

Just like that, the situation had become dire. The enemy’s tactics were evolving, and we needed to adapt fast if we wanted to survive.





“Ugh, this isn’t good! Nagatsuki-dono, are you okay?” Yuuki picked up the limp form of Sakura and quickly retreated from the scene—a wise decision, considering we knew nothing about this new opponent.

The robed figure looked in our direction, and for a moment, it seemed to smile.

Suddenly my surroundings changed, and I was in the White Room.

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Rushia and Arisu had leveled up. Rushia was panting heavily, obviously still recovering from the tenfold Inferno she’d unleashed. I didn’t want to push her any further in a battle like this. Ideally, this would have been the end of her role, allowing her to rest, but...

“Unexpected forces came into play, huh?”

“Looks like it. It was close back there. This break will actually be good for us.”

“Yeah. We were not prepared for that.”

We all took a deep breath.

“But we should have seen this coming. I mean, how were the Mekish Grau flying? We just assumed that whatever mage cast the flight spell was waiting at a distance. Or if it was a mage with wind magic, they could have used invisibility or something like that to stay close.”

“Did that mage look like it was providing support?” Mia asked, tilting her head.

“Arisu, Tamaki, you were closer to them. What did you see?”

“Um, well... We were concentrating on defeating the enemy in front of us...”

*Right, they couldn’t have afforded distractions at that moment.*

“What about you, Rushia?”

“The explosion made it hard to see anything. All I saw was Sakura and Yuuki getting blown away by something...”

Still, it was clear that there was another enemy hiding among them.

The fleeting glimpse I had of that figure suggested they were the one who'd deployed a barrier, hindering the attack from Yuuki and Sakura.

So far, our count of defeated enemies included one Mekish Grau from Rushia's initial explosion, and then one Mekish Grau and one Legend Arachne taken down by Arisu and Tamaki's successive attacks. That made three down, leaving three more, as far as we knew.

*Plus, there's at least one other monster still out there that we haven't seen. Could it be another divine-class? It seems unlikely they'd all be that powerful.*

"Let's come up with a plan based on what we know so far," I suggested, looking around at everyone.

## Chapter 197: Divine-Class Unit – Part 2

**“F**rom what we’ve seen, that humanoid monster uses two types of magic: a long-range barrier and invisibility,” I summarized.

“If it’s invisibility, Kazu can see through it with See Invisibility, right?” Tamaki suggested.

“Even if I can see through the concealment, it’s hard for me to make out details on a target hundreds of meters away,” I admitted. Maybe we should have used a familiar for reconnaissance beforehand. But then again, it would probably have been spotted and shot down by either the Mekish Grau or the Legend Arachnae, as had happened many times before. I remembered hearing that even Leen’s hawk could only observe from a distance for the same reason.

“If they’re hiding behind a Mekish Grau, we won’t know until we get close,” Tamaki added.

She made a good point. A creature as big as a six-meter tall, centaur-like Mekish Grau could easily hide something or someone, especially if it was intent on hiding itself.

“As for the barrier, it glowed a sort of peach color. If it’s visible, persistent magic, Arisu’s Dispel or Greater Dispel should be able to cancel it.”

“Yep. As soon as the explosion clears, I’ll cast Dispel,” Arisu confirmed.

“That by itself won’t be enough for peace of mind. We’ll come to you right away with Mia’s Dimensional Step,” I decided.

Dimensional Step, a Rank 9 wind spell, allowed Mia to teleport herself and two others she was holding hands with to a visible location within nine hundred meters. In this particular situation, the limitation of only being able to take two people wasn’t a disadvantage. It was still risky to bring Shion and Yuriiko into a melee; they would be better off staying close to the fortress.

“Besides, it’ll be a fight on the fly,” I told them.

“Given our limited information, it’s the only option we have,” Rushia agreed. For now, I decided to keep her on standby. In the worst case, she could be our trump card, and if she wasn’t needed, there was no point in pushing her too hard.

ARISU	
LEVEL: 40	SPEARMANSHIP: 9
HEALING MAGIC: 7	SKILL POINTS: 7

RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 39	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 7	SKILL POINTS: 5

With their updated stats from leveling up, we left the White Room.

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The battle resumed, and I quickly ordered Shion and Yuriko to stay put. Shion nodded, grasping the situation. “Okay, please be careful!”

Then, using the Fly spell Mia had given me earlier, I soared into the sky along with Mia and Keiko. I grabbed Mia’s left hand while Keiko held her right.

“Let’s go,” I said.

“All right. Dimensional Step.”

Our surroundings shifted in an instant, closing a distance of two hundred meters and bringing us straight to the battle’s front lines.

We landed in air thick with the smell of burned earth and dust, which made it difficult to keep our eyes open. I instinctively held my breath.

“Kazu-san, let’s go!” Arisu, who had just defeated the first Mekish Grau, turned to the Mekish Grau protected by the barrier and held out her hand.

“Greater Dispel.”

As she cast the spell, the light pink barrier vanished in a puff. The robed figure on the back of the giant centaur-like monster scrambled to cast another spell, but...

“Not so fast.”

From a distance of about ten meters, Sakura Nagatsuki thrust her spear forward, speaking a command word. A wave of energy shot out of her spear’s tip and hit the mysterious figure.

A sharp male cry pierced the air.

“Good...” Sakura nodded confidently. The girl might have looked small, but I’d come to realize that she held intense emotions inside.

The figure that stood on the Mekish Grau’s back reeled from the direct hit of Nagatsuki Sakura’s energy wave. But that was all.

Recovering, the mage raised its head, and the hood of its robe fell back. Bathed in the light of the midday sun, a pale face was revealed. At first glance, he looked like a handsome man with long silver hair that reached to his waist. But his eyes were blood red, and his mouth, wide open in a bestial snarl, revealed sharp fangs.

“It’s a vampire!” Rushia exclaimed.

“Probably one of the highest types, a No-Life King! Be careful, this one is—” Yuuki began, just to be cut off.

“All right. From now on, we’ll call him the No-Life King,” Mia explained.

“Damn it, Mia beat me to naming it!”

*Guys, really? This is what you’re competing over?*

Vampires are a well-known fantasy race—in stories, they range from being undead humans to some other species. Many myths have them feeding on human blood to add to their race, and their special abilities include turning into bats and charming women.

At the same time, they often have weaknesses such as sunlight, the inability to cross flowing rivers, and an aversion to crucifixes or garlic... But how much of this applied to the vampire before us, the “No-Life King”?

For one thing, judging from the fact that this guy was openly basking in the sunshine, that one big trope from home clearly did not extend to vampires in this world.

The No-Life King glared at Sakura, his undead eyes giving off an eerie glow. Was he launching some sort of attack? But Sakura seemed unaffected, probably thanks to the Isolation spell that protected us all. Mental attacks wouldn’t work against us now; in fact, a good old showdown with fists would have been more appropriate.

*Who am I kidding? I’d rather he didn’t attack at all and just quietly accepted defeat.*

“In that case, it’s my turn,” Yuuki declared.

The next time Sakura unleashed a beam from her spear, Yuuki seized the moment to circle around to the opposite side of the Mekish Grau. Wielding the same white sword as Tamaki, he attacked the No-Life King.

The vampire reacted instinctively, turning and extending his sharp claws to meet his assailant.

The Mekish Grau was the platform for their duel, and it wasn’t idle either. One of its four arms swung a sword and launched a slashing attack at Sakura from a distance. A thick bolt of lightning shot from the blade’s edge—an Evil Thunder Slash.

Anticipating this, Sakura quickly dropped down to avoid the attack, hiding under the trees for a moment. Converting her potential energy to kinetic, she jumped out from a distance—only to find herself targeted by steel threads fired by a Legend Arachne riding another Mekish Grau.

“Not on my watch!” Tamaki cried. She swung her white sword, cutting through the steel threads and protecting Sakura, who had lost her footing. “Sakura-chan, support Ninja-senpai!”

“Got it, Tamaki-senpai.”

The enemy’s remaining forces consisted of two Mekish Grau, one Legend Arachne, and the No-Life King, making a total of four opponents. On our side, Rushia and the other two fire mages were out of the fight. That left seven of us, including myself. However...

“We should think before we go out there to support them,” I said.

“Yeah, it’s quite a challenge in such a chaotic battle. I’d be okay if I accidentally hit my brother with a beam, but I’d rather not get the others involved,” Mia joked.

“Mia’s friendly fire could be a compliment, but we’ll pass for now,” Yuuki quipped.

*These siblings...* But they were right. The rapid shifts between offense and defense in the melee meant we couldn’t just jump in recklessly.

Anyway, the five on the frontlines mostly had the fight covered. Mia only stepped in with Tempest when the Mekish Grau tried to use their bows.

Soon, however, it was clear that the battle was at a stalemate. It looked like I would have to rely on my trump card to break it.

“Summon Familiar: Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau.”

A massive wolf with silver fur appeared in the air. However, no sooner had Sha-Lau appeared than he began to plummet toward the earth.

“Oops, I forgot we were in the air.”

“Wind Walk.” Mia quickly cast the spell on him.

Sha-Lau’s paws found their footing in the air.

“Kazu, did you forget we were flying?”

“Uh, yeah, kind of.”

*“No problem. It took me by surprise at first, but with my current strength, I can cast a spell to fly on my own,”* Sha-Lau reported.

“Because of the familiar enhancement?” I asked.

*“Yes, that’s right,”* Sha-Lau confirmed, now steadily flying beside us again. The addition of the Phantom Wolf King, capable of flying independently, could be just what we needed to break the deadlock.

If what the Q&A told us about Familiar Enhancement was correct, that meant Sha-Lau was now another half rank stronger—and the enhancement had probably increased his magical abilities as well.

After quickly giving him the standard Support Magic, I explained our strategy. “Right now, all four enemies are coordinating well. We’ve got to disrupt their formation.”

“Master, where should I aim?” Sha-Lau asked.

The enemy’s tactics seemed to revolve around the No-Life King and the Legend Arachne providing support, while the two Mekish Grau kept Arisu and the others at bay. Yuuki and Keiko occasionally tried to engage the No-Life King, but the coordinated defense of the human-spider hybrid and the centaur-like monsters prevented them from isolating him.

I took a brief moment to think, then nodded decisively. “Target the Legend Arachne. We’ll separate it from the others. I’ll ride on your back.”

*“That might be a little dangerous,”* Sha-Lau cautioned.

“I trust your back to keep me safe,” I reassured him, patting his fur. The giant wolf narrowed his blue eyes.

*“Very well, I honor your bravery, my master, and wish you boundless happiness.”*

“Here, use this,” Mia said, taking off her safe birth charm and hanging it around Sha-Lau’s thick neck after lengthening the string.

*Was she thinking about doing this all along?* I wondered.

*“Lady, thank you for this wonderful gift.”*



“Oh wow, he talks like a gentleman. Kazu, maybe you could learn a thing or two from Sha-Lau...”

“All right, all right, let’s go.” I climbed onto Sha-Lau’s back and threw Haste as a signal. The wolf’s silver fur glowed red.

*“Then, we shall take off!”* Sha-Lau raced forward in a blur of light.

For a brief moment, my consciousness faltered...

Then came a powerful impact. Sha-Lau had charged straight into the Legend Arachne. The headbutt sent the creature flying off the Mekish Grau’s back, and the spider humanoid spun wildly through the air.

I almost got thrown off of Sha-Lau’s back, too.

“Whoa!” I clung desperately to his fur, buffeted by the fierce wind.

Looking up, I saw the Legend Arachne glaring at me with its fiery red eyes.

“Shit, above us!”

The spider-humanoid spread its arms wide. Sticky threads fanned out like an umbrella, coming straight for Sha-Lau and me. Just then, the safe-childbirth charms emitted a double burst of pale blue light and exploded.

This sudden defensive move was our saving grace against the unexpected attack from above. But now more than ever, we needed to act quickly and strategically to turn the battle in our favor.

## Chapter 198: Divine-Class Unit – Part 3

**A**s soon as the Arachne's sticky threads hit the blue light that emanated from the magic-filled charms, they lost their force and scattered to the side.

However, it seemed this wasn't the first time this Legend Arachne had seen such a trick. Hardly missing a beat, the monster opened its other hand.

We had no more charms, and the Arachne knew it.

That was fine though; we'd bought ourselves a short reprieve by deflecting her initial attack.

"Accelerate," I whispered, hastening my consciousness.

The air around us suddenly felt thick, binding my body. I gritted my teeth and watched the Legend Arachne's movements slow down, as if in a slow-motion replay.

This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Steel threads shot toward me, much slower this time, from the spider creature's outstretched hand.

*Now!*

"Deflection!" I announced, at the same time releasing my hold on Sha-Lau's fur.

A rainbow-colored shield materialized in front of me, repelling the Legend Arachne's steel threads. I wished they would do some damage in return, but unfortunately, Arachnae are immune to their own threads, so they passed harmlessly to either side of the monster. But fending off the attack was all I needed.

Released from Sha-Lau's back, I was launched into the air. My body spun in a complicated yet controlled manner as the effects of Accelerate stopped and time returned to normal.

I found myself looking down on the fierce battle below.

Sakura and Keiko impaled the unguarded No-Life King from both in front and behind.

Almost at the same time, Arisu and Tamaki beheaded one of the Mekish Grau. Then, it was on to the White Room.

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The ones who’d leveled up this time were Tamaki and Mia.

“Kazu, you were flying pretty high; are you okay?”

I gently stroked Tamaki’s head, acknowledging her concern. “I’m a little dizzy, but I think I’ll be fine.”

After a brief discussion, we returned to our original positions.

TAMAKI	
LEVEL: 40	SWORDSMANSHIP: 9
STRENGTH: 7	SKILL POINTS: 7

MIA	
LEVEL: 40	EARTH MAGIC: 7
WIND MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 7

Back above the battlefield, I was still spinning like a top. As I tried to regain control, Yuuki successfully cut off the sword arm of the remaining Mekish Grau, and Arisu and Tamaki quickly pounced on it. Sakura and Keiko went after the Legend Arachne that Sha-Lau had blown away, while the Phantom Wolf King skillfully dodged the Legend’s steel threads and kept a safe distance.

“Electric Stun!”

With Sha-Lau out of the way, Mia’s precision lightning attack struck the arachnid humanoid, and it froze for a moment.

“Do it now!” I called.

The Greater Ninjas didn’t miss the chance. Keiko swung her white sword and released a shock wave. Sakura uttered a command word and shot a powerful beam from her spear.

The Legend, powerless against two simultaneous attacks, was propelled backward.

The last part was no big deal. Tamaki took down the last Mekish Grau, while Keiko split the Legend Arachne’s torso in two.

And with that, all the divine-class units that had attacked our zone were wiped out. The No-Life King transformed into a gem of the same yellow color as the other divine-class units, indicating its similar status.

Now that we’d defeated the last Mekish Grau, we were once again transported to the White Room. This time, I was the one who’d leveled up.

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Somehow, we’d managed to wipe them all out: four Mekish Grau, two Legend Arachnae, and one hidden No-Life King. In total, seven divine-class units, each powerful enough to annihilate an entire army of regular soldiers.

It was an impressive victory. But most importantly, there had been no casualties on our side. Everyone had survived, gaining experience and growing stronger.

It was clear that following this battle, we would be able to progress the war more favorably.

“Still,” I mused, “I remember once saying something like, ‘Yuuki-senpai and Keiko-san might handle lesser foes, but they’re at a disadvantage against stronger enemies.’”

“Wow, Keiko-san is really strong,” Tamaki said, laughing freely.

“Not just in creating chaos—she even lands the finishing blows on divine-class units.”

“Yeah, it’s incredible. Keiko-san is truly formidable.”

*Yuuki-senpai makes sense, with his Swordsmanship... but Keiko-san, she doesn’t have weapon skills.*

“She must have mastered a martial art called aikido,” Rushia said, nodding in agreement.

*No, that’s not right. Aikido isn’t supposed to work like that. And here I thought I knew what aikido was.*

“This is just my guess, but perhaps aikido evolved as a martial art for assassination?”

“Uh... Really?”

“Well, she moves so nimbly, and she has a natural knack for cloaking herself in mana. Both of those are best suited for assassin roles.”

*Wait, did Rushia just casually suggest something quite unusual?*

“A technique to cloak yourself in mana?”

“Yeah... Now that I think about it, Kazu, there was no magic in your world, right?”

“Yes, that’s right... but it seems like something she would do subconsciously.”

*Because she’s a ninja, I added mentally. When things get that unbelievable, it feels like the only explanation is “because she’s a ninja.”*

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 49	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 3
ENHANCED SUMMONING:	

1 (Familiar Enhancement 1, Familiar Synchronization 1)
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After the battle, we collected the Mana Stones, leaving the soldiers to clean up the rest. Then we returned to where Leen was waiting for us in the usual teleportation zone.

“Welcome back, everyone. I have some good news,” Leen said with a smile, handing me two parchment books.



“I was just negotiating with someone from another country, and I borrowed these. They contain rituals for making exclusive contracts with high-ranking familiars. They were kept in a temple.”

“Two books means two familiars, right?”

“Yes. We’ve been asked to return the originals after the rituals.”

Once the rituals were completed, there would be no use for these books, so that wasn’t a problem. The problem was that each ritual would take about an hour...

“We will help with the rituals to a certain extent,” Leen said. “However, Kazu, you have to read the contents of these books thoroughly first.”

“Ah, I see. I guess it’ll be after I earn some more experience points and go back to the White Room.”

“That would be advisable. Fortunately, my familiar will soon reach the depths of the Ghostly Wetlands.”

*Ah, the Temple of Tepat... There might be a clue about the Demon King there.*

“By the way, what kind of familiars are in those two books?”

“They are the Conquering Dragon King Kanarg and the Heavenly Turtle Nahan. Both are famous in fairy tales.”

Leen looked at Rushia, who gave her a confident nod.

“I’ll tell Kazu the stories in the White Room.”

“Thanks, Rushia.”

*Dragons and turtles, huh? The idea of having a dragon as a familiar... I don’t know what dragons look like in this world, but it’s exciting to think about. Not sure about the turtle part, though.*

“Anyway, let’s take a short break,” I suggested.

“Sure,” Rushia agreed. “I didn’t use much MP this time, but I definitely need to rest my body.”



We descended to the forest floor, making sure not to disturb the other soldiers, and sat at the corner of a large tree. I summoned an impressive array of sweets with Summon Feast.

“Wow, this is great. I love sweets!” Keiko said enthusiastically.

As always, Rushia’s eyes got a sheen and new color to them as she attacked the cake...

*Yeah, let’s pretend I didn’t see that.*

## Chapter 199: A World Transformed by Another Realm

**W**e decided to rest under the trees, not in the Light People's homes. We put a plastic sheet on the ground, and the girls indulged in the sweets I'd summoned.

Yuuki was quietly working on his weapons. He seemed to be using a variety of them now, including a silver sword similar to Keiko's, as well as daggers and throwing knives. I wondered if there was a particular reason for his expanded arsenal, or if it was just what ninjas preferred.

I flipped through the contract books for the Conquering Dragon King Kanarg and the Celestial Turtle Nahan. The ritual seemed to be similar to the one I'd used for Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau, but there were some differences that I'd have to check in the White Room.

"Kazu-dono, if I remember correctly, you should have Adjustment, and it has a duration of twenty-four hours. If your MP is fully recovered, I'd like you to cast it on us now," Yuuki suddenly suggested.

Adjustment was a Rank 8 Support spell that helped you adapt to any environment. For example, it allowed you to breathe underwater, but that wasn't all. According to the Q&A, it could even be used to survive in space. Strangely, however, it didn't protect against environments like poisonous fog.

"The Ghostly Wetlands we're about to enter have been transformed by another realm," Yuuki added.

"Transformed by another realm?" I echoed.

I remembered what Leen said yesterday: "Lands long ruled by monsters are undergoing a grotesque transformation." *What exactly happened there?*

After we rearranged the group, I went around and cast Adjustment on everyone who was about to embark on the journey. Overall, it would be the

same two groups of ten that had faced the divine-class units earlier—the top members of the CAC group and the high school group—plus Shiki.

My party would consist of five members: Yuuki, Keiko, Sakura Nagatsuki, the fire attribute duo of Yuriko & Shion, and Shiki.

We were pushing ourselves a bit, but we needed to know the truth about the Tepat Temple in the depths of the Ghostly Wetlands, which was rumored to be connected to the Demon King.

Of course, Leen would also be helping by supplying valuable information through her familiar. This time, the sages from various regions were gathered in her office to provide live commentary and insight into our actions. It felt like an event on a streaming platform. I chuckled to myself as I imagined the sages of the world leaving comments like *“What are they doing?”* and *“Seriously? lol,”* complete with emoticons.

*What am I thinking about?*

“Kazu, why are you smiling like that? It’s a little creepy.” Tamaki looked at me with confusion, her mouth full of cake.

*Oh no, please don’t look at me like that.*

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About an hour later, as soon as Leen gave the signal, we hurriedly started getting ready. When we flew back to the treetop town, Leen and Shiki were waiting for us.

“Shall we leave then? Can I join Kazu’s party?” Leen asked.

“Oh, are you coming to interfere with my harem?” I replied jokingly.

“Don’t let me get in the way of your flirting,” she replied. “But there are some things I’d like to discuss.”

Fair enough; she probably had things she wanted to say to me without interruption. Besides, her leveling up would be beneficial to us as well. After adding her to the group, I cast Adjustment and other standard Support Magic on Shiki.

One hawk landed on Rushia's head, and another landed on Shion's—an emergency measure, in case we needed to ask Leen to teleport us out of a sticky situation.

“You can leave now,” Leen told us, and we passed through the World Tree's teleportation gate...

There was the usual dizzying sensation of teleportation. When I regained my senses, the scenery had changed.

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For a moment, I thought we had entered hell.

The sky was covered with red and black clouds, and stretching to the horizon in every direction was a muddy wetland.

The hard rock on which our group of eleven stood, about the size of twelve tatami mats, seemed to be the only dry ground. The surrounding muddy water was as black as coal tar, bubbling with foam.

A gray mist hung in the air.

The submerged trees twisted grotesquely, their sparse leaves shimmering in strange iridescent colors.

There was no sign of life as far as the eye could see.

It was a scene straight out of a nightmare, and as I looked around, I saw I wasn't the only one shivering.

“Is this... a world transformed by another realm?” I muttered involuntarily.

Everyone else just stared in stunned silence.

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The first to recover were the Tagamiya siblings.

“Hmm. They're like demons...” Mia uttered, her voice tinged with surprise.

“Stop it, sis. For me, it's more like the realm of the Daedra...” Yuuki said.

“Truly, I’m deeply impressed by your attitudes,” Shiki commented with a wry smile, crossing her arms and slightly puffing out her chest. “Well, I suppose that’s reassuring in its own way.”

*Yeah, you’re pretty reliable yourself, you know.*

“Ugh, this is really creepy,” Tamaki shivered.

“I know. It feels like ghosts could show up at any time,” Arisu added nervously.

*Well, at least those two’s reactions are reassuring.*

The YuriShio combo also seemed pretty frightened. Sakura, as always, was expressionless and unresponsive. Rushia and Keiko, on the other hand, were looking around with curious expressions.

In other words, each of us was acting normally. Somehow, I found this quite reassuring.

“The compass doesn’t work,” Shiki noted, having taken one out at some point; the needle was just spinning aimlessly.

*Reminds me of the rumored Aokigahara Forest by Mt. Fuji... but isn’t it true that it’s not as mystical as people say?*

I looked down and noticed a third hawk, the one that had prepared our destination teleportation gate. It took off, flew over our heads, and landed on a tree above Keiko, crying softly as if to command silence. We all turned to look at it.

“I will show you the way,” the hawk said with Leen’s voice.

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Mia cast Wind Walk on all of us. This time, it was a better choice than Fly because of the duration of the effect. Fly lasted only nine minutes, while Wind Walk could last up to three hours.

Of course, you can move much faster with Fly. But that was okay, as Wind Walk was just a precaution anyway.

“Summon Flying Ship,” I called out. In response to my Rank 8 Summoning spell, a craft resembling a ten-meter motorboat appeared in front of us. However, this boat floated about twenty centimeters above the ground. Its body looked to be made of wood, with a small, almost apologetic-looking balloon attached to it.

According to the Q&A in the White Room, this balloon magically supported the entire boat; if the balloon was damaged, the boat would disappear. It was actually a replica of a “Ship of the Gods” built by an ancient civilization; until the balloon’s energy was depleted and the boat ceased to exist, it could fly at sixty kilometers per hour for about thirty hours.

I had also asked if there were any monsters capable of flying at sixty kilometers an hour, but the answer was vague, indicating that not many such creatures exist. This was to be expected, as my question was somewhat ambiguous. When I’d asked Leen and Rushia, they’d said they didn’t quite understand what “sixty kilometers per hour” meant.

*Anyway, back to the topic at hand...*

“Ah, sixty kilometers per hour is about the speed of a wild horse running at full gallop,” Yuuki casually mentioned.

“I should have asked you in the first place,” I laughed.

“If that’s the case, then creatures like griffons or wyverns wouldn’t be able to catch up. Perhaps only the larger dragons, which are fantasy species, could match that speed,” Rushia pondered, tilting her head. Leen, via the hawk, voiced her agreement.

*Well, that sounds safe enough, I guess.*

“However, based on what we saw in yesterday’s battle, both Legend Arachne and Mekish Grau can run much faster than a horse. So be careful,” Yuuki warned.

“Divine-class units are... well, they’re beyond normal standards,” I agreed.

*If we can outrun a swarm of lesser enemies, that’s fast enough. Having a safe escape route increases the range of our possible actions.*

I decided to use Summon Flying Ship once again. Although one ship could hold all eleven of us, it would be a tight fit. More importantly, it seemed prudent to have a backup in case of emergency. If we needed to move from one ship to the other, we could always use Wind Walk.

By the way, these flying ships had already been tested in a room next to the White Room. As Mia and Arisu had turned out to be good at piloting them, we assigned them as the main pilots.

Rushia and I possessed decent piloting skills, so we were designated as backups.

As for Tamaki—well... to put it one way: even if we went back to our home world and I ended up living with Tamaki, I would *never* let her get a driver's license. Never ever. Let me repeat that to be sure it's clear: never.

Really... there are things some people just aren't cut out for. And that's okay. That's just the way life worked.

## Chapter 200: Flying Ship

The two flying ships, named *Alpha* and *Beta*, soared over the miasma-spewing Ghostly Wetlands, gliding about five meters above the water's murky surface.

*Alpha*, piloted by Arisu, had me, Yuuki, Keiko and Shiki as crew members. *Beta*, under Mia's command, carried Rushia, Tamaki, Sakura, and YuriShio.

The reason for this arrangement was Mia's refusal to occupy the same ship as Yuuki. According to her, "The two of us together might joke too much and get nothing done," which I found quite convincing. In addition, having Yuuki, Shiki, and I on the same ship meant the commanders could talk.

"Indeed, airships are the romance of fantasy," Yuuki explained, striking a pose at the bow of the ship.

*Yeah, I could see that a ship shared by him and Mia would probably lead to more play than work.*

"I'd hoped to send familiars deeper in, but there are too many monsters ahead, so we had to give up on that idea," Leen announced through the hawk.

The Flying Ships could move faster than the birds, so maybe it was for the best.

"How long until we get there?" I asked Leen.

"Probably less than thirty minutes in your time measurement," she replied.

*Well, in that case, speeding up the ship seems like the best option. The main thing we have to worry about is being attacked by monsters...*

"Here they come. Arisu-dono, hard to starboard," Yuuki instructed casually from his forward position. *Reliable as always*, I thought, feeling reassured by his ninja skills. But then...

"Uh, starboard... which side is that again?" Arisu asked sheepishly.



By then it was too late to adjust. As the ship sped straight ahead, the water in front of us split open and a massive snake—big enough to swallow a person—reared its head. It opened its mouth and spat out a huge ball of water. Our ship, with us aboard, was heading straight for it.

“Deflection!” called Keiko, leaning out from the bow.

The water ball hit her shield and bounced directly back into the snake’s head. There was a sizzling sound coming from the snake’s head.

*Ah, acid. An acid ball, huh? Getting hit by that would have been bad in our current state.*

Unfortunately, the ship was still moving straight toward the snake. Arisu quickly turned the helm to the left, narrowly missing the monster.

Behind us, the crew of *Beta* launched three fireballs. All three hit their target, and the giant snake’s head was blown off. The mortally wounded creature slumped lifelessly into the murky water.

“Arisu-chan, let’s start by remembering ‘starboard’ and ‘port’,” I suggested.

“Yes, I’m sorry!” she replied quickly.

“Don’t worry about it. It wasn’t really anyone’s fault,” Shiki said with a shrug.

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The experience points from this encounter went to the second team, and Yuriko and Shion leveled up.

There was a girls’ meeting in the White Room, and Yuuki felt a little out of place. I guess even a ninja like him wouldn’t be too affectionate toward other girls in front of Keiko.

“By the way, we named this monster Acid Serpent,” he said.

“You named it... but it’s a monster from this world, right?” I asked.

“It seems that information about monsters that live in aquatic areas is scarce,” Yuuki explained.

*So... we know some things about river monsters, but the ones that lurk in seas and lakes are largely a mystery.*

*It's because humans are at a disadvantage, right? We struggle on land, but when we face creatures that thrive in water, it becomes even more difficult. We can barely stand up to them, let alone learn about them.*

"We didn't get to see any other attacks besides the Acid Ball since that encounter was so short... I wonder if there are other monsters with long-range attacks here. We'd better stay alert in case there are," I advised.

"Allow Keiko and I to serve as your guards," Yuuki said to us.

*Good idea, leave it to the ninjas.* At first, I'd thought eleven people would be too many for this trip, but having the two of them with us had proved to be a real blessing, especially since our own reconnaissance abilities were limited.

"Well, let's have a meeting while we can..." Shiki began. "Yuuki-senpai, Keiko, could you update us on the issues that are happening in the high school section?" she asked.

This was indeed important information.

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According to Yuuki, last night's battle had resulted in four deaths and seriously disturbed several high school students. Apparently, willingly going into battle and dying was another thing entirely to being slaughtered by orcs.

It seemed there was a general war weariness among the group.

In addition, there were those who were unhappy with the current situation. For example, some argued that the middle school group hadn't suffered any casualties because the high school group had been assigned to more dangerous locations.

"That's a fact," Shiki sighed, crossing her arms. "Even though we had our meeting, I won't deny that we avoided the hardest parts. And we won't apologize for it."

“Oh well, it’s natural to protect our younger brothers and sisters, isn’t it?” Keiko added. She laughed, but her eyes were not smiling at all. In fact, she seemed to be quietly seething. “Yuuki-kun, you shouldn’t let rumors like that spread so much.”

“I know, Keiko! *Personally*, I share Keiko’s opinion,” Yuuki replied. His emphasis of the word ‘personally’ suggested that as a leader, he had to take a different stance.

“Leen-san,” I called out after a moment of thought, looking at the hawk perched above Keiko’s head. “Right now, you’re projecting an image onto the surface of the water and watching us through the hawk’s eyes, right?”

“Yes, Kazu. That’s right,” Leen answered.

“How about letting some people from the high school see what we’re up against? I hate to involve them in our complicated situation, but...”

Yuuki turned to me. “Is that okay?”

“A lot of people in the high school group don’t know about the dangerous situations that the middle school group faces every time,” I explained. “That might be the reason people keep saying that.”

“That’s true. You and your companions are always facing the most dangerous enemies...”

“And you and Keiko-san aren’t far behind.”

Leen’s reply came promptly. “Understood. I’ll send someone to the high school area right away.”

“We’ll leave the choice of who to observe to the Deputy Leader, Akira Narimiya. This mission should be kept confidential,” Yuuki decided.

That made sense. We didn’t know what we might find in the Temple of Tepat. Akira had seemed reliable when we’d met before and would probably handle the responsibility well.

“By the way, there’s a monster,” Keiko suddenly warned, peering into the distance through the gray fog. It was hard to see, but if a Greater Ninja said something was there, something was probably there.

“There’s a presence. We’re being targeted, so be careful,” she added.

I glanced at Shiki, who listened intently for a moment before giving a slight nod. “I can hear the flapping of wings carried by the wind. And it feels ominous.”

“Yes, indeed,” Yuuki agreed.

Now that all three of our scouts with detection skills felt something, there was no doubt.

“There’s only one,” Keiko announced. “It’ll strike when it passes by.” She positioned herself at the bow, ready for action.

Our ship was traveling at sixty kilometers per hour, about five meters above the water’s surface. If an enemy were to attack us, it made sense they would use a hit-and-run tactic during a quick pass.

The fog had thickened considerably, reducing our visibility. By the time we saw the enemy, it might be too late to react.

At this point, there wasn’t much I could do.

“Arisu, let’s switch. You take the front,” I suggested.

“Okay,” she replied quickly.

After checking that everyone was ready, I took over at the wheel. The controls reminded me of a car’s steering wheel, albeit larger and made of wood.

Arisu hurried to the front of the ship, armed with a spear and ready to engage the approaching threat.



The ninja duo of Yuuki and Keiko was already in position, waiting. I had to be ready to maneuver the ship at a moment's notice in case any instructions were given.

Then our opponent made its move; something massive burst through the fog and plummeted toward us.

“Wait, isn't that way too big?!” I exclaimed.

The gigantic bird, big enough to cover the entire ship, came down from above at an angle.

*Ah, that creature... It's the same one Arisu and I saw the first night. The huge bird that flew into the sky with an elephant in its talons, that we could see from the mountain near our school. Yuuki-senpai told us it's called a roc.*

Now, this roc was swooping down from above the fog, seemingly trying to crush us.

*But...*

“Deflection!” Keiko called, summoning a magical shield that repelled the roc.

Unable to break through the barrier, the monster was sent flying backward with the same force it had attacked with, spinning off into the mist. A couple seconds later, I heard a splash.

The roc had fallen into the murky waters below.

## Chapter 201: Monsters of the Submerged Forest

There were several more attacks on *Alpha*. Keiko reflected half of them with her Deflection spell, while *Beta*'s continuous fireballs took care of the rest.

"It looks like Keiko-san was able to do it all by herself," I muttered, only half joking.

"That's a severe case of Kazu turning into Mia," Shiki commented.

"This is outrageous. Really outrageous," I replied, but not without a hint of humor.

"It's good, isn't it? It means you feel comfortable," she observed.

*Comfortable... Well, having a really skilled ninja like her certainly brings a sense of security.*

Her ability to sense crises was incredible—and she had good intuition and was sharp in battle, even if outside of battle she was a bit clumsy.

And then there was Yuuki, with Mia, Sakura, and others ready to back us up. It felt like a foolproof setup.

Little did I know, that feeling of security might just be wishful thinking.

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A few minutes into our conversation, we were startled by a sudden jolt to our ship. It sounded like a massive object had hit the bottom of *Alpha*, and we were thrown skyward.

"Wait, what..." I began as my body spun through the air...

"Kazu-san!"

Arisu, who was also spinning, reached out her left hand to me. I grabbed it, and together we managed to stabilize ourselves in the air—just in time to be

picked up by the other Flying Ship.

“What in the world was that...?” I wondered aloud, still trying to process the sudden turn of events. Still, I ordered, “Mia, full speed ahead!”

Mia accelerated *Beta*. Whatever it was that had bumped us, I know we could have fought it and won, but the enemy lurked in the ominous, murky waters—and we had no intention of going in there if we didn’t have to.

“This is all because we let our guard down,” I remarked.

“That’s right. It feels like the enemy took advantage of our moment of relaxing.”

Once we’d put a safe distance between ourselves and the threat, everyone breathed a sigh of relief.

“Exactly. We need to refocus,” Yuuki said.

“My brother being serious is kind of creepy,” Mia commented.

“Hey, no need for such harsh words,” Keiko scolded.

“Sorry,” Mia apologized with a bow to Keiko.

“Hm... you’re pretty obedient to Keiko-san,” I noticed.

“It’s just adapting to the social context,” came Mia’s surprisingly mature response.

“All right, let’s get another ship,” I decided and summoned *Gamma*.

The crew of *Alpha* transferred to the new ship, and we traveled for another half an hour until...

Finally, we reached land.

The end of our journey was in sight.

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As the fog parted, dry land came into view, complete with a wooden pier. A squeaky clean, shiny wooden pier.



*Wait... Why would a pier be so well maintained in such a place? Something feels wrong here.*

As I pondered this, our ship grew closer and closer to the pier.

“Wait,” Yuuki said, “I’ve got a bad feeling about this...” But his warning came a little too late.

From the pier five meters below us, countless black, rodlike appendages reached out toward the *Gamma*. The next moment, our ship was hit with a massive impact.

Arisu and Shiki screamed.

“Arisu, get out of there now!” I shouted, lunging toward the dazed Shiki. I grabbed her, jumped into the air, and began running away from the ship as fast as I could.

When I looked back, I saw that Yuuki and Keiko had also managed to escape from the ship. And just in time, as the next moment the ship split down the middle.

“An attack’s coming!” I shouted as at least a dozen of the black tentacles protruded from *Gamma*’s deck.

One of them impaled Arisu, who had hesitated to let go of the helm on the deck. It speared her through the chest, and her scream pierced the air.

“Arisu!” I shouted.

Her beloved spear lay abandoned next to her, rolling away on the tilting deck. The rest of the tentacles wasted no time, curving toward the rest of us to continue the attack.

Arisu lay writhing in pain, but I had no time to help her. I had to focus on protecting Shiki—and trust my comrades to help Arisu.

I cursed under my breath as I realized the limitations of Wind Walk—not flying meant we couldn’t move fast enough to get away from the pursuing black spears.

Three of the things were after me, and they would catch me soon. I had to act fast.

“Accelerate,” I muttered and stopped walking. Immediately my consciousness sped up.

Letting go of Shiki, I turned to face the oncoming spears. Upon closer inspection, their tips were sharp and spinning like electric drills, probably made of metal.

“Force Field,” I said, holding out my left hand. The Rank 7 Support spell conjured a cone-shaped energy shield, a little bigger than a soccer ball. In the past, such a shield had never been much help in battle. But this time was different. In those tense moments, I had the power to counter the crisis.

The three black drills had slowed down slightly.

*Yes... I can do it*, I thought.

I moved my left hand to redirect the first drill with my Force Field, and it bent under the impact. Then I adjusted to push away the second.

The last drill was aimed at my right side...

“Deflection,” I said, summoning a rainbow-colored barrier with my right hand to reflect the final tentacle.

The third drill recoiled with a high-pitched sound, snapping from the force.

As Accelerate faded, time returned to normal.

Now was my chance. I grabbed Shiki, who was still standing in the air with a vacant expression on her face, and I took off running again.

*So soft...* I realized I was touching her chest. But now wasn’t the time for those kinds of thoughts. I had to focus on getting out.

When I looked back toward *Beta*, I saw that it was heading toward the wreckage of *Gamma*.

*Good, they’re determined to save Arisu. They seem like they’re up to the task.*

“White Cannon!” Mia’s white beam hit the spear embedded in Arisu’s torso. The deadly wind magic split the black drill in half.

“Gah... I’m going!” Gathering her strength with a beastly roar, Arisu ripped the drill from her right shoulder—along with a chunk of flesh.

“Arisu, are you okay?” Tamaki rushed to her, holding her sword in her right hand while supporting Arisu with her left arm.

Just then, the black drills from the pier began attacking them again...

“Flame Cutter!” Yuriko and Shion’s fire magic collided with the drills, crushing them.

“Inferno!” Rushia unleashed a torrent of flames, incinerating the remaining drills in a massive explosion.

Tamaki, still holding Arisu, spun through the air.

“Good! Keep up the bombardment!” I shouted. The true nature of the enemy was unclear, but they were not to be underestimated, given what had happened to Arisu. This was the moment to go all out.

“Mia, clear our view with wind. Rushia, time to launch a Triple Prominence Snake. Target the pier.”

“Got it,” Mia replied.

“On it, Kazu,” Rushia added.

I continued to give instructions as I moved to the rear. The enemy’s counterattack was momentarily halted, probably due to the obscuring blast.

In the midst of rapidly assessing the situation, I heard a voice near my stomach.

“Hey, wait a moment,” it said.

“Oh, right,” I realized, looking down. There was Shiki, whom I was holding tightly in my arms. Her face had turned pale.



“Sorry, I forgot that you’re still uncomfortable around men,” I said. “But more than that... Sorry, I completely forgot about you.”

“Did you now? I was expecting a more passionate embrace,” she replied. Her lips were trembling, but she still managed to smile sarcastically.

*Guess she’s doing her best to stay composed despite the tension.*

While we had this exchange, Mia used Tempest to blow away the smoke. At the same time, Rushia unleashed a Triple Prominence Snake with her mana release. A massive snake made of flames engulfed the pier the drill tentacles had emerged from, causing a huge explosion.

A moment later, I found myself in the White Room.

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It was probably Rushia who had leveled up. I was close to leveling up, too, but I’d decided to let my teammates finish off the enemies in this quick mission. After all, it’s important to share experience points.

Then I noticed that everyone was looking at me. Even Arisu, who was tending to her own serious wounds, was staring at me intensely.

“Kazu, um, I really appreciate the passionate love call,” Shiki said, leaning back against my chest.

*Oh, I forgot. I’m still holding her, aren’t I?*

## Chapter 202: The Truth of the World

Trying to ignore the disapproving looks everyone else was giving me, I let go of Shiki. I wanted to make it clear that I didn't enjoy the feeling of her chest pressed against mine, but I decided the best way to avoid further misunderstandings was to keep quiet.

Shiki, obviously still uncomfortable with male contact, tried hard to hide her trembling. She bravely crossed her arms over her chest and managed a sarcastic smile.

"I owe you one, Kazu. Honestly, at my level, I probably would've been killed if I'd been hit even once."

"Maybe. What level are you now, Shiki-san?"

"I've now made it to 14."

*OK, so she leveled up this time, but she's only just reached Level 14...*

That made sense. Shiki hadn't even gotten proper sleep these last few days; she'd dedicated herself to strategizing and commanding troops. No way would she have had time to level herself up.

She'd joined this mini-adventure partly due to the absurd idea of "holding a quiet meeting on the battlefield." The other reason was so that she could lend her expertise to evaluate the ruins firsthand.

"Sorry for being a burden. Anyway, Arisu, how are your wounds?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. I'm used to these kinds of injuries."

This time, Arisu had sustained a severe injury—and by "severe", I meant having a significant portion of your shoulder being torn off and a gaping hole in your chest.

In our original world, Arisu's injuries would have been considered life-threatening, but here, where healing magic existed—and Arisu herself had

powerful healing abilities—anything short of instant death wasn't a big deal. In the minutes since we'd arrived in the White Room, her wounds had already completely healed. We were kind of like zombies; as long as we didn't disintegrate, we could keep resurrecting. However, these last battles had been frightening, with the very real possibility of being torn to pieces.

"Then, Kazu. Who do you want to cozy up to first? Arisu and them, or me?" Shiki asked mischievously.

"Don't say anything disturbing, please," I replied. "But before we have our meeting, let's compare notes about this fight."

"That's right. We managed to defeat it, but we don't really know what kind of monster it was," Shiki said.

For my part, all I knew was that the pier had suddenly turned into dozens of drill tentacles and attacked us. We only assumed it was a monster because killing it had given us experience points.

Monsters weren't the only things that gave experience points though. For example, I knew that killing people from our world here would also give me experience, like when I killed Shiba. According to what Yuuki had told Shiki yesterday, he'd had a similar experience.

This meant that Yuuki, like me, had killed another human and gained experience from it. Whether killing the people originally of this world also gave experience points, I had no idea; and frankly, I hoped I would never find out, although I suspected that Yuuki might have secretly experimented with this grim hypothesis, given his pragmatic nature.

Gathering everyone in a circle, I shared these thoughts. For some reason, no one seemed that surprised when I got to the part about Yuuki, not even Mia.

"So, there's a tiny chance that what we fought was a non-living entity capable of granting experience points," I speculated.

"Even if it's less than a one percent chance, we can't say it's zero," Mia chimed in.

"Stop it," I said, guessing that Rushia, unfamiliar with our cultural references, was probably completely confused. Maybe she was trying to lighten the mood

with her comments.

“Aside from the fact that my brother is a ruthless, cruel villain as usual...” Mia began.

“You’re really hard on Yuuki-senpai,” I observed.

“He’s a necessary evil,” she replied matter-of-factly. “We’ll use him and discard him when the time comes.”

I couldn’t help but think that Mia might be the most ruthless among us.

“Anyway, Kazu. I think that thing might have been some kind of Mimic,” Shiki suggested.

“A Mimic... like those chests that turn into monsters?”

“They can mimic physical objects, a lot like doppelgängers. Depending on the game, they can disguise themselves as doors or even entire rooms.”

*Mimicking an inanimate object... that makes sense.*

“So, a monster that mimicked a pier... That’s pretty big,” I mused.

“It was strong, too. We had to use a lot of fire magic from our ship. Considering how Arisu was speared, it must have been high-level, but not as powerful as a divine-class unit,” Mia added.

I winced at the casual way she referred to Arisu being “speared.”

“We’ve always been at a disadvantage, and yesterday was the first time we really took the offensive in the monsters’ territory. We’re not used to their defenses,” Rushia reasoned. This seemed to me to be a good explanation as to why this monster wasn’t known in this world.

“We’ll probably keep encountering new monsters as we go on,” I remarked. “Oh, and about what I saw during the acceleration... Those black rods or spears were spinning at the tip, like drills.”

“That’s intense. Arisu, are you really okay?” Tamaki asked worriedly.

“It hurt, but I’m not dead. I’m fine, Tamaki-chan,” Arisu reassured her, but she winced as she spoke, probably remembering the all too recent pain. We all knew that as soon as we left this room, she’d feel those wounds again.



“I’ll be fine,” Arisu said again. “I can take the pain!”

“Arisu, always so tough... and always there for Kazu...” Mia started to tease.

“Not everything has to be risqué, you know,” I interjected, giving Mia a light pat on the head to cut her off.

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The conversation shifted to Keiko. In this encounter, she had impressively defended *Alpha* against every attack. Even those who had been in *Beta* had witnessed her valiant efforts.

“What’s wrong with her, really?” Shiki asked.

Mia sighed, crossed her arms and thought deeply. “Should I really say it...?”

“If it’s a secret you have to keep, you don’t have to tell us,” I said.

“You can torture it out of me if you want,” Mia replied playfully.

*That’s definitely not an option*, I thought, sighing inwardly and wishing this conversation would get back on track.

“All right, I guess it’s okay to tell. It’s not like I’m sworn to secrecy,” she said.

“Really? So does she really come from a long line of ninjas or something?” I asked half-jokingly.

“That might actually be true.”

*That’s a scary thought.*

“But it’s not that she’s a ninja. It’s her aikido teacher who’s suspicious. He’s Chinese, and Keiko-san calls him ‘Shifu.’ I think he’s probably the weird one around here.”

I remembered hearing something similar the other day. “Right, the martial art Keiko-san practices doesn’t really seem like traditional aikido.”

“My brother told me that Keiko-san was possessed by spirits one time, and it was this Shifu guy who exorcised them,” Mia shared.

“Wait a minute. Mia, does your brother believe in ghosts and stuff?” I asked, intrigued.

Mia snorted dismissively. “A realist like my brother would never believe in anything like that.”

“Maybe it’s more about psychological healing, like removing false beliefs or something. Like using the concept of exorcism to overwrite what the person thinks is wrong with them,” I suggested, remembering something I’d read.

Mia shook her head slowly. “Shifu told her, *‘Demons favor you, so be careful.’* He warned her never to be alone and to learn exorcism techniques for self-defense.”

“Why does it sound like Keiko-san’s life is the plot of a supernatural thriller?”

“It doesn’t make any sense,” Mia said, looking serious.

I was at a loss for words. It felt like I’d been tricked by a ghost story.

“Can I join the discussion?” Rushia interjected, raising her hand. “There’s no magic in your world, is there? No gods, no monsters. That’s the basic understanding, right?”

“Yeah, of course. In our world, there’s no magic, no gods, and no monsters,” Shiki confirmed, though her tone held a hint of doubt.

“I heard something this morning,” Rushia went on. “My sister mentioned, after she’d only watched her for a short time, that Keiko seemed unusually good at channeling mana through her body. She wondered if Keiko was really a *marebito* like you guys. At the time, I thought it was unlikely, but...”

Now that she mentioned it, I remembered after the battle with the divine-class units, Rushia had commented on Keiko’s skill with mana, citing her sister’s observation.

“In our world, there’s a martial art that involves borrowing the power of spirits and wrapping yourself in that power. I don’t fully understand the concept, but experts in that technique, like Keiko, are constantly enveloped in mana,” Rushia explained.

*I see... All this time, we thought Keiko-san was doing it naturally, but maybe there's something deeper going on.*

"Are you suggesting that Keiko-san might be suspicious?" I asked.

Mia shook her head slowly. "No, it's not that Keiko-san is an enemy spy or anything like that."

"I agree. I don't think she's lying. But that doesn't mean she's told us everything," Shiki added thoughtfully.

"What do you mean?" Tamaki asked. Both she and Arisu looked confused.

I thought about how to explain it to them. "Do Arisu and Tamaki use this technique to cloak themselves in mana?"

"No, according to my sister, there's no trace of a technique like that in the way they fight. That's why she was confused," Rushia explained.

Everyone fell into deep thought. The more we learned about Keiko, the more doubts seemed to arise.

"Hey, Kazu. I don't really understand all of this, and I'm sorry if my gut is wrong on this..." Tamaki started hesitantly.

"It's okay, Tamaki," I encouraged her. "Just say what you're thinking."

"Well, was there really no magic in our world?" she wondered.

That question... I thought we'd all laugh it off as Tamaki's usual naivete. But the moment she spoke, the room fell eerily silent. Everyone stared at her intently.

"What? Why are you all looking at me like that? I was just wondering, ha-ha. Sorry if it was a stupid question..."

"That's it, Tamaki! The underground cave under the high school campus! The mysterious stone tablet!" I shouted, and I could tell the others were thinking of exactly the same thing.

"It wouldn't be that strange if our world actually had magic."

## Chapter 203: Through the Swamp

*The world has its hidden sides. If there's even a shred of truth in tales of monsters lurking in the shadows of buildings, or wizards fighting under the cover of night, it could fundamentally alter many of our assumptions.*

"For example," I mused, "maybe our school's mountain was transported to this world by some mechanism that had to do with us. That begs the question: were we sacrificed, or was it some sort of accident?"

"That's a disturbing thought," Shiki admitted. "But we can't rule out the possibility that bringing our school's mountain to this world could benefit someone from our world."

This conversation was broadening our perspective, but it left us with no clear answers.

"We should ask Keiko-san for more details. Without her input, we can't say much more," I concluded.

"Yeah," Shiki agreed. "Whether she'll tell us or not is another matter."

"Mm-hmm. She's a tough nut to crack. But we can hope that Yuuki-senpai can persuade her," Mia added.

"Speaking of persuading a female ninja... That sounds a bit risky," I joked.

"I was thinking the same thing, but I wasn't going to say it," Shiki chimed in.

"I thought so too, but kept quiet," I admitted, sharing a moment of mutual understanding with Shiki.

Mia pouted, obviously annoyed by our reactions.

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Since the adjacent room had once again been transformed into a swimming pool, I told the others they should relax there while Shiki and I stayed in the

White Room for a private conversation.

“I’m sorry for taking up your time,” Shiki began.

“No, the commanders need to coordinate their views and share information,” I reassured her. After all, it was crucial that we at least agree on the basic strategies. “What exactly did you want to talk about?”

“First, let’s talk about Sakura-chan. She wants to join your team,” Shiki said.

“As the sixth member, huh?” I said, mulling over the idea.

Currently, Rushia, Mia and I were the rearguard, with Arisu and Tamaki in the front. Sakura, who was skilled in Spearmanship and very agile, was a sturdy frontline fighter. Her unique skills and Rank 9 Spearmanship meant that she wouldn’t be left behind in our team.

With her on board, Arisu would be able to step back and focus more on healing. “It’s a welcome option, but not a good long-term one,” I mused.

“So you don’t want her in your harem?” Shiki teased.

“It’s not like that,” I shot back with a glare. Shiki crossed her arms under her chest, which, intentionally or not, accentuated her figure. *Is she teasing me, or is this a façade of bravado?*

Not long ago, she’d been trembling in my arms, but now it seemed she was trying to gain the upper hand.

“But on missions like this, I’d rather she prioritize guarding the second team,” I clarified.

“I was thinking the same thing,” Shiki said. “Right now, Arisu, Tamaki, and Sakura are our only frontline fighters with Rank 9 weapon skills.”

“If things get bad, I can always summon Sha-Lau again or call in other familiars for support. We have several combat options at our disposal right now,” I pointed out.

“That’s true, but relying too much on a trump card like that is risky.”

“The important thing is to have that trump card. For the CAC group, Sakura could be that decisive advantage.”

While Sakura could certainly increase the overall strength of our team, her role in supporting the backup team might be more critical. Of course, situations like the Aga-Su battle, where we would need to consolidate our forces, would require her to join the main team.

I shared these thoughts with Shiki and explained my reasoning.

“I’ll take that into consideration,” she said, nodding. “Let’s move on to discussing Sumire-chan...”

We continued our exchange of information, discussing each of the more than thirty members of the CAC group in detail. I was impressed with how much Shiki knew about all of them.

“You have an almost devilish knack for understanding people,” I commented.

“Don’t say it like it’s a bad thing. Understanding people is fundamental to my position,” she replied with a wry smile, brushing back her hair in a way that I found disarmingly charming. “And I’d rather not be lectured to by someone who manipulates girls with his physique.”

“That’s a different situation! You know that!” She was practically backing me into a corner.

“Oh, so you’re saying you’re a natural charmer?”

I had to admit that I was no match for her in this verbal spar.

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After my meeting with Shiki, I turned my attention to the books about the exclusive contract rituals with Conquering Dragon King Kanarg and Heavenly Turtle Nahan. Rushia had already given me a brief overview of those entities, which would be helpful in deciding which one to choose for my next exclusive contract. I’d asked Shiki for advice, but she’d just said to make a decision based on the circumstances at hand. And she was right; a familiar is a lifeline, a final fortress of defense.

Meanwhile, Tamaki asked Shiki about her skill focus. “Shiki-san, are you working on improving your Reconnaissance or Throwing skills right now?”

“I’m focusing on Reconnaissance at the moment,” Shiki responded. “It’s at Rank 5 now, and my Throwing’s at 3. I’m planning to continue enhancing Reconnaissance to ensure my survival.” As I listened, I found myself agreeing with her. Her survival was essential, and I hoped she would continue to reduce my burden as much as possible. So, after we’d finished up in the White Room, Shiki updated her skills, raising her Reconnaissance to 6.

RUSHIA	
LEVEL: 40	FIRE MAGIC: 9
WATER MAGIC: 7	SKILL POINTS: 7

SHIKI	
LEVEL: 14	RECONNAISSANCE: 5 → 6
THROWING: 3	SKILL POINTS: 1

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After the explosion subsided, the pier on the shore had completely disappeared, confirming our suspicion that it was a monster in disguise. In its place lay six blue gems.

“Each blue gem represents about five levels, so it was a Level 30 monster?” I speculated.

“That seems about right,” Arisu agreed as she resumed her self-healing.

Standing on the shore and looking out over the fog to the land beyond, we saw a dense, lush green forest. A stone path, about five meters wide, cut

through it. Although it looked like the plants had never been tended, the path was unnaturally free of overgrowth.

“Look over here! There are some markings on these stones,” called Keiko, who had ventured down the path to do some recon. We all looked where she was pointing. On some of the stones at the edge of the path, there were patterns...

“It looks like writing,” Yuuki-senpai said.

“Yeah, it does, doesn’t it?” I said. What’s more, we had seen those characters before.

“Huh... It’s the same as the writing on the stone pillars, isn’t it?” Tamaki noted. Arisu and Mia nodded, while Shiki pulled out a photo for comparison.

I cast Read Language to try to work out what the markings meant. However...

“I can’t make it out,” I admitted, puzzled. That had never happened before with that spell.

“It’s probably because they’re part of a magical formula,” Rushia said.

Her explanation made sense. These markings weren’t just a language, but part of something more complex, possibly a magical script beyond the capabilities of my spell. This discovery hinted at deeper mysteries awaiting us in the forest ahead.

Rushia continued. “If those inscriptions are both script and magical formula, I believe they’re from ancient times. I’ve heard of formulas like that being used in the past, special characters bestowed by the newer gods.”

“The newer gods... The ones who are supposed to have created this continent, right?” Tamaki asked.

“Yes, they descended to this world after the departure of the old gods, the ones who created our broader human race.”

While the accuracy of these legends could be debated, the existence of such magical writings was at least plausible. But there was no point standing there wondering about it.



I cast Mana Vision to see the magic at work. Immediately, our surroundings lit up in a vibrant red. After a moment of blinking in surprise, I examined the area carefully.

“Ah, yes. It looks like there are barriers on both sides of this stone path, covering the whole path,” I observed.

“That could explain why no trees or plants have grown over it for so long,” Shiki speculated.

“It’s possible,” I admitted, still unsure.

To test whether the path itself was a trap, I summoned a wolf and let it walk along the path. Nothing unusual happened.

“Hmm, it seems safe to go ahead, but I still wonder if it’s really safe to go all the way through...”

“I still think it would be risky to go directly along the path,” Yuuki advised. “Wouldn’t it be better for everyone to fly roadside, over the forest?”

“Ah, that sounds like a trick for a game, doesn’t it?” Tamaki said enthusiastically.

## Chapter 204: The White Aberration's Hand – Part 1

**A**fter a brief discussion, we decided to abandon the Flying Ship and instead have everyone use Fly. The ship, though small, was too conspicuous, and we hoped to avoid detection in the thick fog that surrounded us.

According to Leen's old map, our destination lay directly along the path, a quick five-minute flight at the speed provided by Fly. We rearranged the order of our group, combining Deflection spells with Fly. We kept Wind Walk as a safety measure, just in case the Fly spells ran out midway.

Keiko, with her high Reconnaissance skill and keen sense of awareness, led the way. I had a lot of questions I wanted to ask her about her mysterious master, Shifu, but I knew this wasn't the right time.

We flew in two vertical columns, hovering about two to three meters above the treetops, adjacent to the left side of the path. I flew second from last, next to Shiki, with Rushia and Mia as our rear guards. We'd chosen this formation on the assumption that attacks from behind would be unlikely while we flew along at sixty kilometers per hour.

Shiki was at a significantly lower level than the rest of us, so I was prepared to protect her with my body and use Deflection if necessary, in the event of a large attack.

"It's touching that you're willing to risk your life for me, Kazu-kun," Shiki said.

"Should I just leave you then?" I joked.

Once we were flying, I noticed something strange: the lush green trees below us were swaying slightly, even though there was no wind.

"Ugh, that's creepy," Tamaki said with a shudder.

"We definitely don't want to fall into that forest," I agreed.

As we continued our midair conversation, about a minute into our flight, Keiko suddenly called out in a tone that indicated trouble.

*This could be bad*, I thought, bracing myself.

From the depths of the forest path to our right, amidst the thick fog, a slew of white, spear-like objects emerged—targeting not only Keiko at the front, but all of us.

“Deflection!” Keiko quickly unfolded a reflective shield. Yuuki, Arisu, Tamaki, and Sakura responded by parrying the objects with their swords and spears. I grabbed Shiki’s hand and pulled us behind Mia for safety.

“Gravity,” Mia called, creating a gravitational field as a shield. However, the white spears seemed unaffected by the spell and advanced closer to us.

Rushia stepped in to protect us. “Bright Shield!” A blinding shield of flames materialized in front of her, shielding me, Mia, and the others behind her. The white spears struck the fiery shield with a high-pitched clang, bouncing off.

The force of the impact sent Rushia spinning through the air. As we watched the now stationary white spears, we realized what they were.

“Tentacles!” The tips of the tentacles twisted and holes opened at their ends. The shape they formed was rather obscene—but that was of little concern at the moment.

“Mia, I need you!” I quickly handed Shiki to her.

We were in the midst of a sudden and intense battle, each of us using our skills to fend off this new threat from the mysterious tentacles in the forest.

Mia, understanding the urgency of our situation, quickly took hold of both Shiki and Rushia.

“Dimensional Step!”

With this spell, they all teleported away to safety, leaving me alone to confront the onslaught from at least ten tentacles.

The next moment, a volley of explosive sounds echoed from the tips of the tentacles. I instantly activated Accelerate to enhance my cognitive speed. It was then that I realized the tentacles were like rifles, firing bullet-like projectiles in rapid succession.

I knew dodging them all would be impossible. Even my Deflection and Force Field spells couldn't protect me from every angle.

In desperation, I used Summon Fortress—a Rank 9 spell I'd mostly been using for conjuring cottages, but which could also create fortifications. In the air appeared a sturdy stone wall, which should have shielded me from the incoming fire.

To my dismay, the bullets penetrated the thick stone wall as if it were paper, relentlessly advancing toward me.

“Shit, this is bad!”

I instinctively shielded my vital areas with my arms. As the effects of Accelerate wore off, I was left vulnerable to the impact of all dozen or so projectiles.

“Ugh... Aggghh...”

Bracing for the pain, I realized my defensive strategies were woefully inadequate against this powerful and unexpected adversary. The dull impact and searing heat spread throughout my body as I was violently thrown into the air. I knew immediately that this was serious.

“Kazu-san!”

Tamaki's scream echoed in my ears. As I tumbled, I saw her, Arisu, and Sakura also hit by several bullets each. Sakura's left arm was blown off, blossoming into a spray of blood.

A moment later, agonizing pain seized my limbs. Gritting my teeth against the pain, I assessed my injuries.

*Left leg is gone from the knee down...*

The bullets had also hit my left arm. The puncture wounds were gruesome, but my high level of nearly 50 had saved me from a more catastrophic fate.

If it had been Shiki, even a graze might have caused catastrophic damage. It was clear the creature behind these tentacles was at least divine class, if not higher.

Trying to push the pain out of my mind, I quickly weighed our options. We hadn't even seen the enemy's main body yet. In such a situation, the best course of action was...

"Retreat! Create distance!"

The command came from instinct, and everyone understood immediately. With Tamaki and Keiko covering our rear, we turned to flee.

But I was still spinning uncontrollably... until I felt someone grab my right hand. It was Mia, who had teleported back to us. She looked at me and nodded. We both knew what was coming next.

Just as a barrage of bullets was about to hit us...

"Mia, escape..."

"Dimensional Step!"

In the nick of time, we teleported away to safety.

The move took us a few dozen meters away, making us narrowly escape the lethal barrage. I looked back to see the projectiles that had targeted us explode in midair.

"Whoa, different type of bullets this time!" I realized in alarm. They could prove deadly if we were caught off guard.

One projectile was headed toward Keiko. As I watched, she extended her Deflection barrier, and the bullet exploded just before reaching it. Still, she was blown several meters backward. Our enigmatic enemy was already adapting to our tactics.

At the rear, Keiko and Tamaki were taking the brunt of the enemy's concentrated fire. Tamaki was engaged in a form of dual-wielding, holding her black sword in her left hand and using her silver sword in her right to launch long-range attacks. As she furiously countered the bullets, explosions erupted all around her, obscuring the enemy from our view.

As it turned and flew toward us, Rushia approached me. "Kazu, I'll heal you now, at least enough to close the wounds."

As she applied Flame Heal, I sighed in relief. Instantly, my pain began to dissipate.

“Phoenix,” Rushia said next, invoking a regenerative fire spell that slowly restores health, and could even regrow severed limbs over time.

*If only we could all retreat successfully...*

“Let’s provide support,” I suggested. More white tentacles continued to pierce the smoke, relentlessly pursuing us.

Mia unleashed her Storm Bind, engulfing the tentacles in a ferocious tornado. The strategy was clever; the lightweight tentacles were helplessly caught in the storm, preventing the enemy from firing its projectiles.

“Did we get it?” Mia wondered, looking at the chaotic scene we had created.

“Seriously, why the heck would you make an issue of this situation?!” I asked, exasperated.

“It’s just a waste of time anyway,” said Mia.

Her words were frustratingly accurate. For a second, the tentacles emitted a faint silver glow. Then the storm evaporated.

“Is that a debuff?”

“Probably.”

*Must be some kind of dispel. Should’ve expected as much from a deity-level opponent. Well, let’s just hope the tornado caused them enough confusion for us to get out of here.*

Keiko and Tamaki, who had been covering the rear, finally reached us.

“Arisu, take care of healing Sakura first,” I instructed.

“All right, sure.”

“Keiko, do you have any idea what the enemy really is?”

“Well, I couldn’t see its main body at all...”

*That figures.* I turned to Rushia.

“Do you know what kind of monster that could be, based on any legends or anything?”

“Well...” For a moment, Rushia stood deep in thought. “Unfortunately, I have no clue about an aberration like this...”

Well, that was troubling...

## Chapter 205: The White Aberration's Hand – Part 2

Once we'd all retreated another fifty meters or so, the tentacle attack ceased. Maybe we'd gone beyond its intercept range? Fortunately, it didn't chase us... which gave Arisu time to heal everyone's injuries, including mine.

*Now, about how to deal with this thing... First, we need to figure out what it is we're dealing with.*

"Mia, can you use Wind Search? I think it might be on the path..."

Mia shook her head. "I've already tried; it's no use. I think the fog's blocking detection magic."

*Wow, she's quick.* "Hmm, a magical fog..."

I attempted True Sight, but my vision was instantly engulfed in red. I quickly deactivated it, and my sight returned to normal. Wiping the sweat from my brow, I admitted, "This is bad... In Mia-speak, it's 'rekt.'"

"Are you seriously talking like Mia now..."

*Damn it, even Yuuki-senpai is snarking at me. We're still in combat, I shouldn't be too casual... Oh, and now YuriShio looks exasperated.*

Clearing my throat, I steered the conversation back on track.

"Right. How about Mia disperses the fog to show us where the enemy is, and then we use Dimensional Step to launch a surprise attack with Tamaki and Arisu?"

"So, a direct assault," Mia said, furrowing her brow. "I'm a bit concerned about the opponent's high offensive power. Do you think Keiko and I could also engage in close combat?"

"Then let's summon Sha-Lau. Yuuki-senpai and Keiko-san, why don't you grab onto Sha-Lau." I called forth the Phantom Wolf King, stacking the summon



enhancement as well. Then Mia and I applied the usual suite of enhancement magics to him.

“I’m counting on you, vanguard leader,” I told Sha-Lau, giving him a pat on the neck.

“Got it.”

This time, we decided to leave Sakura in the rear guard while the remaining four front liners plus Sha-Lau advanced. Immediately after delivering Arisu and Tamaki, Mia would return using Dimensional Step. Staying midway could lead to being riddled with holes by those tentacles.

“All right, let’s go. Tempest!” The violent storm blew away the fog, drastically improving our visibility...

Finally, we could discern the form of the enemy.

“A jellyfish?”

Indeed. It was a gigantic jellyfish floating languidly in the air, about half a kilometer away. The translucent body alone must have been over ten meters long, with countless white tentacles extending from it. Jellyfish didn’t typically have eyes, but inside this colossal one, numerous orbs fluttered around like eyeballs, glowing red as they all converged to face us directly. It felt as if we were being glared at, and it sent a chill down my spine.

Hardly a moment later, the giant jellyfish turned every one of its tentacles toward us.

*Crap, it’s going to fire from this distance!*

“Everyone, grab onto Sha-Lau!” I shouted in panic, clinging to the wolf’s neck. “We need to retreat!”

The tentacles, at least a hundred of them, all fired at once.

At nearly the same moment came our shout, in unison...

**“Let’s go!”**

Sha-Lau darted sideways with magical acceleration, away from the enemy’s line of sight.

“Ugh...” The g-force was intense enough to almost knock me unconscious. Girls’ screams echoed behind me, probably Yuriko and Shion. Then, an abrupt stop. Inertia sent a girl tumbling forward in front of me—it was Shion.

“Uh, looks like everyone’s okay.” I raised my head and looked back.

At the same moment, a thunderous explosion sounded. In the space where we’d been just a moment before, all the bullets exploded in a chain reaction. The trees were torn apart at the site of impact, and clouds of soil were sent soaring into the sky. Then the blast wave reached us, nearly throwing all of us off Sha-Lau’s back again. I shuddered to think what would have happened to us had we stayed put.

*This place isn’t safe either, then. But, wait a minute...*

“Where are Mia and the others?”

“They went on the attack,” Keiko replied.

I quickly looked up to see Arisu and Tamaki, then Mia, appear above the giant jellyfish, diving down to strike its massive body.

The jellyfish failed to react in time and took a solid hit... but it looked like only a small part of its jelly mass was chipped off.

The creature frantically pointed its tentacles upward. The red eye-orbs inside also seemed to be looking up.

“We have no choice but to go,” Yuuki said in a solemn voice.

I looked at him. When our eyes met, I could see deep determination.

“OK. Stick to the plan, please. Actually, Sakura, you go with Yuuki-senpai.”

“Is that okay?” she asked.

“Yeah. Anyway, you can’t defend against the enemy’s long-range attacks. We’ll manage here somehow.”

Sakura nodded in agreement, gripping onto the backs of Yuuki, Keiko, and Sha-Lau.

“Then, let’s proceed,” Sha-Lau exclaimed and disappeared in an instant. The next moment, they stood directly in front of the enemy. An all-out battle began.



A gigantic flying jellyfish was surrounded by five humans and a giant wolf, all attacking it from the air. The front-liners mainly struck from above, while Sha-Lau bombarded the jelly-like body with electric magic.

However, the physical attacks were soon shown to be quite ineffective; the enemy didn't seem to be taking any damage from them.

"What do you think, Mia?" I asked her. She had just returned to my side, having rescued YuriShio from spinning endlessly in the air.

Mia frowned and gave a little groan. "Hmm, it seems like it has physical resistance? Sha-Lau's magic is doing more than Tamaki's sword, which isn't normal."

"That's true..." Electricity was new to the Phantom Wolf King's magical repertoire, which had grown around twentyfold due to my familiar enhancement.

One of his new spells, a lightning attack, seemed particularly troublesome for the giant jellyfish—which now had most of its tentacles focused on Sha-Lau.

Of course, Arisu and the others were trying to prevent this, but their swords and spears were hardly even annoying the jellyfish.

The battle had reached a stalemate.

"All right, then it's our turn to act. We're still at least five hundred meters from that thing, and we can't get any closer without risking those tentacles attacking us... Rushia, can you fire a Prominent Snake at triple power?" I asked.

"Sure can," Rushia replied, focusing intensely to cast one of her most impressive fire spells. After about three seconds of aiming and locking on, the giant serpent of flame, once unleashed, would automatically pursue its target—even half a kilometer away—minimizing the risk of accidentally harming allies in the chaos.

"Prominent Snake!" Rushia called. The triple-powered fiery snake soared above the treetops, slamming seconds later into the jellyfish's main body.

Despite having withstood all our previous attacks, the giant jellyfish now writhed in agony as it found itself engulfed in flames. A piercing, unpleasant sound filled the air, followed by a powerful shockwave.

The explosion violently threw back Arisu and the others who had swarmed around the jellyfish. That might have given the jellyfish the upper hand for a moment, but the creature, now critically weakened and still trembling in the grip of the flames, could do nothing. Finally, it plummeted to the ground, sending up a massive cloud of dust.

“This is it, the chance we needed!” I called. “Mia, take YuriShio and teleport. Get within a hundred meters of it. Then use all your attack magic!”

“All right, will do,” Mia agreed. She grabbed the two fire mages’ hands and used Dimensional Step to close in on the enemy.

I turned to Rushia. “Can you keep going?”

“Absolutely, I can do triple power again. We’ve got to press our advantage.”

“All right, one more time!”

The battle quickly turned one-sided. The giant jellyfish was tough, but it couldn’t withstand the relentless assault of fire magic and was left unable to retaliate.

“Look, Kazu-kun, the heat’s making those tentacles shrink. Heat must be its weakness.”

“Could it be a water attribute creature, and that’s why it’s vulnerable to fire?”

Shiki and I could afford such casual analysis, almost forgetting the terror we had just experienced. But that jellyfish was a real nightmare for first encounters.

“What should we do about naming it? Rushia and Leen don’t seem familiar with it. Should we just come up with one on our own?”

“Maybe ‘Flying Jellyfish’ would work. It’s straightforward.”

“Sure, let’s go with that.”

Of course, it was possible that we'd never encounter another Flying Jellyfish. Still, having a name would be useful for future reference.

Eventually, the jellyfish monster perished, disappearing and leaving behind a single yellow gemstone.

"So, it was divine class," I sighed in frustration. "Random encounters with divine-class monsters are really something else..."

Whether this had been a random encounter or some sort of guardian remained unclear. But the thought of facing more creatures like it was not something I wanted to entertain.

As for the experience points, they went to the second party, with several members leveling up. A pity, but during the Aga-Su encounter, it was our party that had reaped the benefits, so I guess that was only fair.

I then passed the token to Yuuki.

## Chapter 206: The Temple of Tepat – Part 1

**A**fter the battle, we flew for a few minutes along a path until, finally, we arrived at the Temple of Tepat. The structure was at least as big as a baseball stadium, and its rainbow shimmer made it look strangely out of place amidst the dense trees. It was topped with a massive dome, its colors pulsating at irregular intervals as if the entire thing was some living creature.

*Could that actually be a living entity? Whatever it is, it wins the prize for weirdest thing I've seen today.*

"Rushia, Leen-san, is this...?" I asked the two inhabitants of this world, but unfortunately, I didn't get any promising answers.

Sha-Lau also shook his head and said, "Such an entity does not exist in my memory."

"Hmm, this feels like something that would directly bury your SAN value," Mia commented.

"I want to make a comeback to Mia-chan, but to be honest, I was also thinking maybe... it's something like that," Shiki said with a dry laugh.

Even I was beginning to think that this place had that kind of vibe. But really, what was this place?

"According to Saint Pokuru Harara, the Demon King is storing something important here," Leen spoke through the hawk. "The temple is strictly off limits, even to his monster minions."

"Why would the Demon King need something like that?" Shiki wondered aloud.

"It was once a Hobgoblin who was assigned to guard near the Ghostly Wetlands," Leen replied.

*Well, Hobgoblins do seem like they would make good guards. And as guards, it makes sense that they would know a lot about the territories of the monster*

army.

*So, that jellyfish we encountered, in a place where even the Demon King's minions are forbidden to approach... Could it have been a particularly special guardian? No way it just happened to live there, right?*

"For the time being, shall we try using a familiar to scout?" I suggested.

We hid in the shade of trees, a short distance from the rainbow-glowing structure that reminded me of Tokyo Dome. While Yuuki and Keiko kept watch, I summoned the usual grey wolf. This time, I disconnected myself from isolation and employed Familiar Synchronization.

Now I was in complete sync with the wolf's senses, including hearing and smell—sort of an advanced version of Remote Viewing. Thinking that it might be dark inside the dome, I went ahead and cast Night Sight on the wolf, then let it approach the temple.

Since there was no entrance visible from our position, I started by having the wolf wander the perimeter. As it approached a few steps from the dome, a part of the wall smoothly shifted, creating a semicircular opening. Beyond that was pitch black.

"An automatic door? It's like a UFO," I muttered. I was giving the others a bit of live commentary. I hadn't reached the second stage of Familiar Synchronization, Conscious Synchronization, so I couldn't give real-time instructions, but the wolf was under orders to go inside if it found an entrance.

The wolf cautiously entered the dome... and then our synchronization abruptly ended. I waited about thirty seconds, but the connection wasn't restored.

"Did it die...? No, it's alive. I know that much since I'm the summoner... but what happened?" I wondered.

"It must have entered an area within some kind of barrier," Leen suggested.

*Ah, that could be it... Well, it makes sense that this world would have measures against reconnaissance magic.*

“If our standard familiar recon won’t work, what should we do next?” I asked everyone.

“Nothing else to do,” Mia declared. “If familiars are no good, we have to go ourselves.” The petite girl puffed out her chest in a show of courage. “Unless you say we don’t need any information about the Demon King, that is.”

“That’s... true. Now that we’ve come this far, turning back isn’t an option,” I agreed.

Unfortunately, that meant I couldn’t take the low-level Shiki with us. Yuriko and Shion would also be a tough call. We should probably limit it to six people in one party.

“It might be best if Shiki-san steps out from our party, and Yuuki-senpai or Keiko-san joins in,” I suggested.

“I agree,” Shiki said. “I have no intention of diving into such a creepy place at Level 14.”

“I’ll go. Someone with high Reconnaissance skills is probably the best choice,” Keiko chimed in. I remembered that she had focused on building up her Reconnaissance, now at Rank 7, which was reassuring.

“As for myself, I would like to observe the interior with my own eyes...” Yuuki pondered.

“Nope. Yuu-kun, you’re the leader,” Keiko interjected.

I agreed with her. It would be strange for a leader to put themselves out there in reconnaissance missions. And yet, here we were, with the leaders of both the high school division and the Cultural Arts Center group in the same party...

“For now, let’s just take a look inside,” I decided. “If we can retreat, we’ll do it right away.” In a situation with this many unknowns, there was no need to push too hard; we could take our time to stay safe.

I sent Sha-Lau back for now, and then equipped our recon party of six with Night Sight.

“Don’t overdo it,” Yuuki warned.



“Be *really* careful,” Shiki added, and the others murmured their agreement. I nodded gratefully at the group before I stepped toward the rainbow-hued dome.

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As we cautiously neared the dome, just like when the grey wolf had approached, a semicircular hole slid noiselessly open for us. The interior was as black as a moonless night.

*But we have magic for this...*

“True Sight.” I used the Rank 9 spell, which saw through everything including cloaking spells, but it revealed nothing but darkness through the hole.

*Hmm, this is...*

“It’s totally dark because it absorbs light and doesn’t let it escape,” Mia muttered quietly.

*Like a black hole, then,* I thought. “So, the entrance is only one way?”

“Seems like it.”

“Honestly, I don’t want to go in there.”

“Then, should we stop?”

“You know the answer,” I shrugged.

Indeed, that option was off the table. *Otherwise, what would have been the point of coming all this way?*

“If it comes to it, we’ll use Rushia’s magic enhanced tenfold to break out from the inside,” I suggested. There was a silver lining: the link with my familiar was still intact, even though the synchronization had stopped. The fact that my grey wolf was still alive meant there were no fatal traps... yet.

Just to be safe, I cast Fly on everyone on the infiltration team, and we held hands. Then, we stepped into the hole together.

Amidst the usual disorientation caused by teleportation, we suddenly found ourselves in a bright space. Judging by the position of the sun, it was around

noon. We were standing in a deserted cityscape, nothing like the fantasy world we were used to by now. And yet, our concrete surroundings looked strangely familiar.

Directly in front of us stood a large sign with “109” emblazoned on it.

“What...”

I turned to see the entrance to Shibuya Center Street and the Scramble Crossing. Instantly, my head was flooded with memories of studying for private high school entrance exams at a nearby prep school and coming to this station four times a week.

*Wait, wait, wait. This doesn't make sense. An empty Shibuya at lunchtime is bizarre enough, but more to the point, why are we even in Shibuya? And wasn't it almost evening just a little bit ago?*

“Wow, it's Shibuya!” Keiko's voice, surprisingly relaxed given the weirdness of the situation, broke my train of thought. While everyone else stood there dumbstruck, she had begun to wander around in curiosity. Keiko stopped in front of a building, then looked puzzled when the automatic doors failed to open.

“These should open when you stand in front of them, right?” she mused. “Maybe the electricity's out. Strange.”

“Keiko-san, that's not the issue here!” I said.

“Really?” I couldn't believe how nonchalant she seemed about all this. But as I pondered the situation, a thought struck me.

“Mia, what do you think about this?”

“It's probably not the real Shibuya.”

“Wow, Mia-chan, you've been to Shibuya? That's amazing!” Arisu exclaimed.

*Hold on, Arisu, that's not the point. And please, don't start showing off your natural powers, too.*

“Kazu-san, have you been to Shibuya?”

“That’s not exactly the point right now, Tamaki... but, for the record, yeah, I used to come here all the time in middle school.”

“Wow, that’s awesome! You’re so fashionable!”

*This is bad... This conversation is getting way off course.*

Mia was giving me a stern, don’t-say-anything-unnecessary look, but then she asked, “Kazu, could you repeat what you just said?”

“Huh? No, I just mean, we have more important things to talk about right now than what I did in middle school...”

“But Kazu, are you familiar with Shibuya? Familiar enough to recreate this scene? I’m from Saitama, so I didn’t go south of the Yamanote Line much.”

“Ah, well... since my cram school was in Shibuya, I did wander around quite a bit... Oh, I get it!” I suddenly understood, clapping my hands together. “That’s what you’re talking about. So, this Shibuya could be a reconstruction from my memories.”

“Or some kind of collective hallucination. But you still have True Sight active, right?”

“Yeah, it lasts for a while thanks to my level, so the chances of it being an illusion are pretty low.”

Mia crossed her arms and nodded in agreement. “But that makes it even more baffling... Instantly recreating a world like this from my memories... What kind of magic is that?”

“Maybe...” Mia began.

“What’s wrong? Go ahead and say it.”

“Well, I’ll say it, but it’s just nonsense, okay?”

*Wow, she seems so serious for someone who usually talks about inconsequential stuff.* “It doesn’t cost anything to tell us,” I encouraged her.

“It feels like something can directly bury my SAN value, and I don’t like it,” Mia finally said.

“I really don’t like that!” I agreed.

## Chapter 207: The Temple of Tepat – Part 2

*Before we go any further, I think I should briefly explain the internet slang “SAN-value direct burial.”*

*In the famous tabletop roleplaying game Call of Cthulhu, characters who encounter terrifying experiences lose a parameter called “Sanity” (SAN value). Eventually, they go insane, and the character is no longer under the player’s control.*

*Deities and monsters from the Cthulhu Mythos can drive people to madness just by being seen. Even a glimpse at one can do it. They’re embodiments of primal fear, ominous and immense.*

What Mia was suggesting was the very unpleasant theory that such an entity might be behind everything here.

“Weren’t we thinking the Demon Lord is behind this place?” Arisu asked.

“Logically, you’d think so... but if the Demon Lord is the one who created this pseudo world, then it’s something way beyond our control,” I replied.

“Hmm. World creation is serious. It’s so serious that even Buddha would bow down.”

*You should be the one bowing down to Buddha,* I thought.

“Um... Is that really true...?” Arisu muttered.

While Mia and I were panicking thanks to our gaming knowledge, it seemed Arisu and Tamaki didn’t quite grasp the gravity of the situation.

“Arisu, for example,” Mia began, “how much MP do you think it would take Kazu to create a huge mansion... or maybe a building? Whatever created this place must have at least enough power to make an entire city, and they did it the moment we teleported here.”

“That’s right. I checked the time before we left, and basically no time passed until we got here,” Keiko mentioned.

It was then that I noticed that the hawk familiar perched on Rushia’s head hadn’t spoken a word since we arrived. Although it still looked as intelligent as any familiar, it was probably disconnected from communication magic—just like my wolf.

“For now, *Fly*,” Mia said, soaring into the sky. She had cast the spell earlier, but I guess we’d been standing there talking for at least ten minutes.

Mia ascended in a spiral to the top of the building and surveyed the “city.” She twisted her head, looking down at us.

“Hey, come up!” she called with an encouraging nod.

The next moment, her body exploded. Her right arm and right leg were blown off.

“Wha...?”

With a look of sheer disbelief on her face, Mia plummeted from the sky.

“Not good!” Now Keiko panicked. She kicked off the wall of the building next to us and ran up vertically. When she reached the third floor, she dived down to grab hold of Mia with her right hand.

With her left hand, Keiko shot a wire to a utility pole, changing direction. She kicked off the wall at just the right moment to descend and landed back on the asphalt.

“Arisu-chan!” she called.

“Yes, coming! I’ll heal her right now!”

Arisu rushed to the limp Mia and began casting healing magic, alternating between physical regeneration and healing spells.

Meanwhile, Tamaki and Rushia kept watch.

“Let’s move into that building’s shadow for now. We’re too exposed here,” I said, leading everyone to an alleyway. Thankfully, I knew the area well.

I breathed a sigh of relief at Mia, who seemed to have narrowly escaped death, before turning back to the rest of the group. “Keiko-san, did you see what attacked just now?”

“Hmm, probably one of those jellyfish’s bullets.”

“Ah, the Flying Jellyfish... the one from before.”

*A divine-class monster hiding in this space that mimics the modern world? Even for us, facing something like that unprepared could be catastrophic. This was completely Mia’s oversight... No, it was my fault for letting her act recklessly.*

“No, Kazu. It’s not your fault. I was the one being dumb,” Mia said, practically reading my mind.

“That’s right. Mia-chan, you can’t make us worry like that. Naughty girl,” Keiko playfully scolded her. “I’ll go and check it out. Can you cast Fly on me?”

“All right... Be careful. Fly.”

Indeed, having Keiko scout the area seemed the best course of action.

I summoned a raven to cast Remote Viewing on it and have it follow Keiko’s orders.

“All right, little raven, let’s get you up here,” Keiko said, taking the familiar and gently placing it on her head. “I’ve been wanting to try this, like Rushia-chan.”

The raven accepted its new position without complaint.



“I mean, there’s fine, but...” I hesitated.

“Tee-hee, or maybe you wanted to be nestled in my cleavage?” Keiko teased.

“I’d rather not be killed by Yuuki-senpai later, so I’ll pass on that,” I replied, noticing that Arisu and Tamaki were glaring at me.

“Ah, um, Kazu-san! You shouldn’t make moves on someone else’s girlfriend!” Arisu protested.

“That’s right, Kazu-san! We’re working hard here!” Tamaki added.

“Why does no one trust me?” I asked in genuine confusion.

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After moving a short distance away from us at low altitude, Keiko spiraled upward to the top of the buildings.

Through the eyes of the raven, I surveyed our surroundings. The Tokyo cityscape was recreated as far as my memory allowed... but only our immediate vicinity was clear. The further away you looked, the blurrier the scene got. Beyond the edge of our vision was just pure whiteness... like a movie with a special effects budget that ran out mid-production.

*Ah, there’s Mount Fuji to the west. So, in my mind, west just means, “there’s Mount Fuji”, and that’s it...* My lack of detailed memory was discouraging. But that wasn’t the main issue.

The problem was to the north. A gigantic jellyfish, the one that had shot down Mia, was swaying and closing in with its numerous tentacles.

In that moment, every tentacle simultaneously fired a bullet at Keiko. Unfazed by this barrage, Keiko called, “Deflection!”

The bullets were reflected with a perfectly timed magical shield, exploding in rapid succession in midair. Still, the shockwave spun Keiko around like a top.

As expected of a Greater Ninja, Keiko skillfully controlled her body even as she spun, quickly maneuvering behind the shadow of a building. The next second, a follow-up shot exploded into the side of the building.



Immediately, the building began to collapse, scattering debris and leaving a trail of destruction across the cityscape below.

“Wow, this is a disaster... It’s like a monster movie, Kazu-san,” Tamaki commented lightheartedly.

Since my vision was coming through the raven’s eyes, I was trying to keep up with Keiko’s rapid movements, but it was making me dizzy...

Finally, Keiko stopped and floated still. *Maybe it’s stopped attacking?*

“Hmm, looks like it attacks whenever a face appears above the building. It’s like an automatic reaction,” came Keiko’s voice, still relaxed, through the raven.

*So, she deliberately put herself in danger to test that theory. Reckless, but... I guess it’s something only Keiko-san or my familiar could do.*

*Wait, wouldn’t a familiar by itself have been enough for this?*

Well, for acquiring real-time intel, maybe Keiko was the better choice.

A moment later, she descended and returned to us.

“Thanks for your hard work,” I told her. “Before we go over what you saw... Mia, are you okay now?”

“No problemo. At this point, losing an arm or two isn’t going to shake me.”

*What’s with the tough guy voice? And she’s puffing out her nonexistent chest... Maybe she’s trying not to worry everyone.*

“I didn’t see any other monsters,” Keiko reported. “Maybe we should deal with that jellyfish fast.”

“Right... Our long-range firepower is lacking compared to when we were fighting in the forest. Rushia, can you handle a tenfold consumption of Prominent Snake?”

“Yeah, let’s snipe it from somewhere nearby for a one-shot kill.”

“Getting closer will help. It’s too far right now.”

*We could use Dimensional Step, but...*

“Let’s try this first,” I said, attempting to summon Sha-Lau. I was a bit anxious about whether I could summon the Phantom Wolf King in this space, but...

Sure enough, the giant silver-furred wolf appeared just like normal.

Sha-Lau seemed a bit off however.

The Phantom Wolf King looked around restlessly and wrinkled his nose in discomfort. His fur bristled, and he let out a growl.

“Did you notice something?” I asked him. “Well, it’s no surprise in this city of buildings. This sight must be strange for you.”

*“Regarding the scenery, that’s one thing, Master, but I sense an anomaly in the mana constructing this world.”*

“An anomaly in the mana? What do you mean?”

Sha-Lau asked us to fill him in on what we had seen first, after which he nodded in understanding.

Now that I thought about it, he was also known as the Wise Wolf. I should have consulted him from the start.

*“In a nutshell, the mana that constructs this world is unlike anything I know.”*

“Could you be more specific?”

*“There’s one more thing I have to tell you, Master. I am currently under attack.”*

*Wait, hold on, what does that mean?* I watched as Sha-Lau’s body flickered a few times. *Does that mean... he’s using magic?*

“I’m being eroded by a type of mental probe magic. I’ve cast a counter spell. Master, is your defense adequate?”

“Uh, yes, I’ve put Isolation on everyone... Oh, wait!”

I looked around at the party. The first to realize something was amiss were Rushia and Mia, who both looked awkward.

“I apologize, it was my responsibility to notice,” Rushia said.

“No, it was my place to react,” Mia argued.

“No... it’s actually my mistake,” I insisted.

Everyone else just looked puzzled, so I shrugged and explained with a wry smile. “It’s about why this world is based on my memory of Shibuya. I’d turned off Isolation for myself so that I could share thoughts with my familiars... so the enemy must have been stealing my thoughts freely.”

## Chapter 208: The Temple of Tepat – Part 3

Isolation had a significant drawback for us: it blocked even beneficial mental contact magic.

Once we'd entered the dome, reestablishing magical contact with the grey wolf would have undoubtedly provided valuable information, so it wasn't a complete mistake to have disabled Isolation...

"But let's take this as a lesson for next time," I said, casting it once again on myself and Sha-Lau. "All right. Now, whatever's monitoring this space won't be able to steal our thoughts anymore..."

Suddenly, the ground beneath our feet sank with a grinding noise. Startled, I looked up to see that the sky had been dyed a dark red, and the buildings around us were beginning to warp.

"What is this?!"

"What the meow?! I hate this!"

Arisu and Tamaki screamed. I quickly turned to Mia.

"Is this because of the Isolation?" she asked.

"Seems like it. Since it can't read my mind anymore..."

This entire bizarre world was already starting to self-destruct. Since this "Shibuya" had been created from my memories, it was probably inevitable.

I tried to maintain my calm as I contemplated whether to keep Isolation active or not.

What would happen to us if I made the wrong choice...?

Someone grabbed my arm. It was Rushia, fixing a hard stare at me.

"Kazu, let's make a choice and stick with it. Whatever you decide to do, we'll follow you."

“That’s right, no hard feelings,” Keiko added.

Rushia and Keiko seemed pretty calm. Of course, whether they felt that way on the inside, I couldn’t tell. They were controlling their expressions perfectly.

I took a deep breath and made my decision.

“All right. We’ll stay right here. Mia, cast Fly,” I ordered before getting my own spell ready. “Deflection.”

“Got it. Fly,” she cast, and all of us rose into the air.

With both of those at our disposal, even if the ground collapsed, we wouldn’t be caught off guard. We ascended slowly, watching the destruction of the Shibuya cityscape unfold...

With the disappearance of the buildings, our view cleared.

Under the dark red sky, the enormous silhouette of the Flying Jellyfish became visible in the distance.

*Ah, this could be bad... Is it going to attack?*

The Flying Jellyfish pointed its mass of tentacles at us, readying its bullets.

“Everyone, hold onto Sha-Lau!” I shouted, signaling the Phantom Wolf King closer.

The strategy was familiar enough by now that detailed instructions were unnecessary.

With a resonating blast, dozens of bullets flew toward us...

“To the right, slightly forward.”

“Got it.”

Sha-Lau moved swiftly to two o’clock.

There was the usual abrupt acceleration, but by this point, we were used to it. We clung to the wolf’s fur, holding on tight against the inertia.

We arrived about a hundred meters away from the Flying Jellyfish, hovering in midair. I looked down to see that the ground had completely collapsed, revealing an abyss of pure darkness.

“What happens if we fall down there...?” I muttered nervously.

“Don’t even want to think about it,” Tamaki said nonchalantly from where she hovered beside Keiko.

“Later, I’ll stack Wind Walk on top,” I said. “For now...”

From the spot we had occupied just a moment ago came a series of violent explosions.

“Now’s our chance. Rushia, get the Prominent Snake ready at tenfold power. Fire after our next move.”

“Will do.”

“Sha-Lau, if bullets come, time your escape. Focus on shifting laterally.”

*“Yes, Master.”*

The vanguard had no part to play this time.

From the earlier fight, we knew that the best strategy against the jellyfish monster was to keep our distance and attack with magic. There was no need to take unnecessary risks.

While Rushia prepared her magic, we kept a vigilant eye on the Flying Jellyfish. It seemed to lose sight of us for a moment, but then...

All at once, the numerous red orbs inside its translucent body turned in our direction.

“It’s spotted us. Here it comes.”

The tentacles assumed a firing position and rained bullets upon us. Sha-Lau accelerated instantly. We endured the arm-wrenching force of inertia momentarily...

And then everything came to a stop.

“Rushia!”

“Prominent Snake!”

A massive serpent of flames appeared before us, heading straight for the Flying Jellyfish. The enemy was too big and slow to get away...

There was a collision. A tremendous explosion rocked the air.

And then, we were in the White Room.

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It was Arisu and Keiko who had leveled up. Keiko had told us just a few moments before that she needed experience equivalent to forty-nine orcs to level up...

“So, that monster was at least level 49...”

“Yeah. And I believe it, based on how strong it was—but it feels like it’s not just a simple matter of levels,” Mia said.

I agreed. There was something about the Flying Jellyfish that felt different from our previous encounters. It wasn’t just its strength...

“It had a cosmic feel to it.”

“Mia, it pains me to agree with you,” I told her, “but I think so, too.”

“Um, Kazu-san, what does ‘cosmic’ mean?” Tamaki asked.

I wasn’t quite sure how to succinctly explain “cosmic”—not that I needed to give a fancy explanation right then. “It seemed resistant to physical attacks, but weak to magic.”

“Yeah, Rushia’s attack might have been overkill.”

“I just wanted to finish it in one shot this time. Next time—if there is a next time—we can try different approaches.”

“I mean, I hope we don’t meet it again.” Keiko laughed.

I wholeheartedly agreed. “By the way, Rushia, are you feeling okay?” I asked.

Beads of sweat stood out on Rushia’s forehead; other than that, she seemed fine. The strain of her spell was diminishing with time. Today she’d only used a single tenfold power release, which wasn’t nearly as bad as the double release yesterday.

“I’m good,” she responded. “I think I could handle three in a row today.”

“That’s good to hear, but seriously, don’t overdo it. Keep me updated on how you’re feeling.”

“Okay, Kazu. I’ll refrain from doing anything that might worry you.”

“Really?” I looked closely at Rushia’s surprised face. “Seems like you’re really okay...”

“Kazu is so suspicious...”

“Hey, hey, are you really saying that after you pushed yourself so hard yesterday?” Mia teased Rushia in a strange tone.

The elven princess gave a slight nod. “Now I understand how much trouble I can cause my comrades.”

“Ah, you’re such a good girl,” Mia remarked, trying to pat Rushia’s head. When she came up a bit short in height, Rushia stooped down accommodatingly.

“That’s a good attitude to have,” I said approvingly. “While you’re at it, let her touch your ears, too.”

“Okay!”

“Ah-ha-ha, you’re getting along well,” Keiko said.

I understood that Mia sometimes subtly acted as a lubricant in our group dynamics. She was quick-witted and observant, always keeping an eye on those around her. I didn’t praise her outright, though; I didn’t want her to get carried away.

“Is this the right spot? Here?”

“Ah, wait, Mia.”

“How about this, Kazu, right here, is this good?”

“Hey, don’t go crazy.” I grabbed Mia by the scruff of her neck and pulled her away. Rushia was blushing fiercely and panting.

“Nyaaan,” Mia only said in reply.





“Don’t try to distract me with the same trick twice,” I said.

“Just a bit of playful banter between ladies. It’s all lilies and roses here!”

Keiko exclaimed, “Oh my, oh my!” as I tossed the flailing Mia toward her.

“Could you give her a little ninja punishment, please?”

“Me? I wouldn’t do such a thing.”

*Damn, I thought maybe Keiko-san’s “punishment” might make Mia think twice.* Instead, Mia was using Keiko as a shield, sticking her tongue out at me.

“Are you a child?” I asked her.

“I *was*—until about six months ago.”

“All right, all right. Mia, I do appreciate you playing the fool for us.”

“Whoa, Kazu’s being sweet! Everyone, Kazu’s being sweet!”

“That’s why our relationship doesn’t go anywhere, because you react like that to everything I say.”

“Now I’ve really taken a hit,” Mia cried, clutching her chest and collapsing to her knees. Keiko, caught in the crossfire, also ended up face down on the floor.

“Ugh, this is just like how I always goof off when it matters most with Yuukun...” Suddenly Mia was crying heartily.

“Hey, how did things get like this?” I complained, dismayed.

“Kazu, making a woman cry is not a good habit,” Tamaki scolded me.

“That’s right,” Arisu agreed. “You should be kinder to everyone, Kazu-san.”

“Damn it, Mia,” I muttered, but I still apologized profusely.

“No, Kazu! That’s a bit of unjust blame,” Tamaki insisted, indignant.

“I know!” Mia looked up at me with a deadpan expression, giving a thumbs up. “It’s because Kazu won’t go on a date with me; this is karma.”

“I haven’t had the time...” I said in my defense. “Except maybe here in the White Room.”

“Spending time here only leaves us with memories,” Mia said, nodding sagely.

*Yeah, I understand what she's getting at. The White Room is a kind of fictional existence. Being here feels like a dream. We could hide here forever, free from the threat of monsters, living in peace, but that's nothing more than an escapist fantasy...*

"So, Kazu, I'm not asking for the impossible, just a promise."

"What is it?"

"Just a little bit of time, the next chance we get. Just the two of us, alone."

I looked at Arisu, Tamaki, and even Rushia, who were all nodding.

She had already talked to them about this...

"You're cunning, getting everyone on your side."

"Call it good communication skills. What do you say?"

"All right, I'll try to find some time after this mission."

Mia's face retained its usual lack of expression, but she nodded contentedly.

"Promise?"

"Yeah, yeah, I promise."

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After letting the atmosphere relax, I steered the conversation back to the main issue. I asked the group the crucial question: how should we act in this bizarre space, since we still hadn't gathered much information?

"Maybe someone should disable their Isolation?" Keiko suggested.

"That's one option," I nodded.

*Those streets in Shibuya obviously disappeared because I reapplied Isolation, which completely blocked everyone's thoughts. If we lifted that shield on someone, would the enemy recreate the city...?*

*But the real question is...*

"Is it really an enemy?"

“Uh... what do you mean, Kazu-san?”

“Well, I’m just wondering. Whatever it is that created that fake Shibuya, is it really an enemy to us?”

If their intentions had been hostile, we likely would have been attacked much sooner.

*Essentially, we’re in the belly of the beast right now. They have the power of life and death over us.*

“Wait a minute, Kazu-san. Then why did they make a replica of the streets of Shibuya?”

“I... have no idea. Mia, throw out any hypothesis, no matter how wild.”

“If an unidentified alien does something we don’t understand, it’s usually their way of trying to communicate.”

I nodded. She’d actually provided a plausible hypothesis on the spot, but I expected no less of this media fanatic well versed in story patterns.

“It’s not entirely impossible,” Keiko said, touching her chin and tilting her head slightly. “But probably, it’s something slightly different.”

“Oh, do tell, big-sister-in-law. What do you think?”

“It’s just a hunch.”

*Wow, a hunch, huh?*

*But this is Keiko-san’s intuition we’re talking about. Honestly, I’m more inclined to trust her sixth sense over any logical argument, especially in a situation like this.*

## Chapter 209: The Temple of Tepat – Part 4

**W**e all turned our attention back to Keiko, who tilted her head inquisitively. “Hmm?”

“I have a question,” I told her. “Did you know about magic before you came to this world, Keiko-san? Not that it matters what you knew or didn’t know, but just to understand and acknowledge it as a piece of information.”

Keiko placed a hand on her chin and looked thoughtfully up at the ceiling. “Well, if I were to think about it, maybe it’s aikido.”

“May I ask why you refer to your martial art as aikido?”

“I mean, it *is* aikido.” Keiko laughed awkwardly.

None of us found this amusing.

“Well, I can’t help it,” she said, noticing our serious expressions and shrugging her shoulders. “You might have heard some things from Mia-chan, but I learned aikido from a rather unique master. He told me I have a disposition to be involved with demonic entities, so I needed a power to protect myself.”

“Demonic entities?”

I wondered if this meant that in our original world, there was something akin to magic, or if we had entities similar to monsters.

“I don’t really understand what ‘demonic’ refers to,” Keiko went on, “but the aikido I learned supposedly has the power to exorcise those forces.”

“Who exactly was your master?”

“I don’t know. He was a withered old man. A while ago, he said he was going back to China to exorcise something.”

Clearly, Keiko’s master was a strange person. Still, her abilities, and apparently those of her master, had been crucial in helping us...

Keiko didn't seem like someone who would lie about something so important. *But what does she mean by "exorcise something"? Was her master really like a character from a light novel?*

"Is that all you wanted to ask?"

"Yes, well... It's just made things even more unclear."

"Yeah. The mystery only deepens."

We all looked from one another and sighed.

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Putting aside Keiko's story for now, the top priority was resolving our current situation.

"Maybe we should try removing the thought block again. I can reapply Isolation right away if necessary."

Arisu and Tamaki objected to my suggestion, considering it too risky, while Keiko agreed with me.

Mia thought a moment, then said, "Kazu, let's remove my Isolation."

"What are you aiming for?"

"We already saw what happened when the enemy read your thoughts. Now we should try with someone else. If that's the case, I'm probably the most chaotic option."

"Chaotic, huh... I see your point."

Mia understood herself well! *And indeed, when it comes to decision-making, she might be the most reliable among us.*

I nodded slowly in agreement. "All right... go ahead. But if there's even a *hint* of danger..."

"I'll ask for Isolation again right away."

We refined our plan further, taking breaks and even having a small party in between. Rushia, as usual, indulged in an astonishing number of sweets.

Finally, Arisu used her accumulated skill points to upgrade her healing magic to Rank 8...

And we returned to the red skies of the battlefield.

ARISU	
LEVEL: 41	SPEARMANSHIP: 9
HEALING MAGIC: 7→8	SKILL POINTS: 9→1

KEIKO	
LEVEL: 29	RECONNAISSANCE: 7
SUPPORT MAGIC: 5	MOVEMENT: 2
STRENGTH: 3	SKILL POINTS: 6

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We were still floating in the pitch-black space, surrounded by yellow gems dropped by the slain monsters. Arisu reached out and grabbed one of them.

“Okay, Mia. Ready?”

“It’s my first time, so be gentle.”

“Come on, don’t be annoying.” I lightly tapped Mia’s forehead and removed the Isolation spell from her.

“If there’s any contact with Mia now...”

“It’s there,” Mia whispered. She gently closed her eyes and looked down.

*Wait, what?* There had been no change in our surroundings...

“Hey, Mia!”

“Just wait a moment.”

I instinctively reached out to touch Mia’s shoulder... and my hand grasped at thin air.

“What?! Wait, Mia!”

Mia’s body was starting to turn translucent.

*Is she... disappearing?*

“Arisu, can you touch Mia?”

“What’s going on?!”

“Look, Mia’s body is turning transparent!”

Keiko was the only one of us who seemed relatively unbothered by Mia’s sudden transformation. But that didn’t matter now. *What should we do? What can we do?* I thought frantically.

“Mia, answer us!”

“Mmm.” Mia raised her head reluctantly, then met my gaze and gave a slight nod, as if to say she had this under control.

I trusted her... but then I realized, no, I couldn’t leave everything to her alone.

“No, this isn’t right!”

I made a split-second decision and removed the Isolation spell from myself. Then I tried again to touch Mia, who was fading away.

This time, I managed to grab her soft arm.

“Mia!”

“Hey, Kazu, wait...” Now Mia seemed panicked. She must have intended to bear the danger alone.

*No way I’ll allow that.*

“Master!”

“Sha-Lau!”



The Phantom Wolf King lunged toward us, but his front legs passed right through my body.

Arisu, Tamaki, Rushia, and finally even Keiko were all panicking, but...

"It's okay," I told them with a reassuring nod. "I'll figure this out with Mia, just the two of us."

No sooner had the words left my mouth than my consciousness faded to black.

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Upon awakening, I found myself outside my school's Cultural Arts Center, up on the hill. The sun had tilted slightly, suggesting it was around 3 PM. Beside me stood only Mia, who appeared unusually cheerful, her gaze locked on me.

"What's the matter? Aren't you scared?"

"Kazu, you really are silly. The experiment would have worked with just me."

"I thought it would be safer to have someone else who could cast Isolation, in case you ran into any trouble," I explained, then added, "It's not like I thought you'd feel lonely or anything..."

"Trying to act tsundere isn't cool anymore. It's just cringe."

"I guess I was wrong..."

There's nothing more awkward than a joke falling flat. I did my best to shake off the embarrassment and scanned our surroundings.

The Cultural Arts Center before us bore no signs of the recent battles—neither around the building nor in the front plaza.

"The school's mountain, the Cultural Arts Center, huh?"

"Most likely a copy."

"Let's check."

Taking Mia by the hand, I circled to the back of the Cultural Arts Center. If this were the same place we knew, there should be a girl's grave here.

We found nothing.

“So, it’s like we suspected...”

This place was not the same as the one in our own world.

This world had been crafted from either Mia’s memories or my own, a faithful recreation of the time before the orcs attacked our school. However, my first visit to the Cultural Arts Center had been with Arisu, so it was likely that the memories forming this place belonged to Mia.

“Are you relieved?” she asked me.

“I don’t know,” I replied. “The Cultural Arts Center before the orc attack is a totally unknown place to me.”

“So, this place is constructed from my memories.”

It seemed likely.

“I wonder if the entire school mountain has been reconstructed,” I mused.

“Could be. The Shibuya we saw was pretty extensive.”

“Mia, you’ve been to the high school section a few times, right? You would roughly know the layout of the buildings... Maybe we could confirm that by flying around.”

Mia slowly shook her head. “That’s an option, but it’s probably not important.”

“Then, what are you looking for? And, before we warped here, when you closed your eyes...”

Mia looked up at me, expressionless. We stared at each other for a moment.

“No way,” I breathed as I began to realize what had happened.

“I heard a voice,” Mia confirmed. “Probably from the thing that was probing our minds, calling out to me.”

## Chapter 210: Alone on the School Mountain

**M**ia went on to tell me that she'd started hearing a faint voice calling to her, coming from nowhere.

"It's like a whispering voice. Even when I listen as hard as I can, I can't tell what it's saying. But it's definitely someone's voice, trying to tell me something."

"Could it be the master of this ruin, the Temple of Tepat?"

"Hard to say. But..."

Mia opened the back door to the Cultural Arts Center and stepped inside, and I quickly followed.

The corridors were illuminated only by the sunlight streaming in from the windows. There was no sign of anyone else, no trace of human habitation. Yet, there was no dust, either.

"Of course, there's no sense of life. This world has just been created," Mia stated calmly, glancing back at me.

It felt strange... She was too composed. A hint of unease crept over me. "Did you notice something?"

"Probably, the thing doesn't have evil intentions."

"You mean the thing that created this space and teleported us here? We were attacked by that jellyfish in Shibuya."

Mia stepped onto the staircase leading to the second floor, turned around to me, and slowly shook her head. "Just because it doesn't want to hurt us doesn't mean it can't. Like, we step on ants all the time without even realizing it. It's probably something like that."

"Isn't that still dangerous, though?"

“This entity is highly intelligent. It’s trying to talk to me. It recognizes us as individuals. It understands our existence—or at least, it’s trying to understand.”

By now Mia and I had reached the second-floor landing, and I followed as she started up the next flight of stairs.

“Next time, it might try to kill us more effectively,” I said.

“If it wanted to kill us, we’d already be dead. After all...”

“It’s capable of instantly creating this world and teleporting us here,” I finished, nodding. I understood what she was getting at. But that didn’t mean we could lower our guard. Right now, she was being a bit reckless for my liking.

“What’s the rush?” I asked.

“To convince it that this approach is right before it changes its mind.”

“So, you think this whole situation is just because of this entity’s whims?”

By way of answering, Mia passed the third floor and continued climbing.

I’d stopped, momentarily distracted by my thoughts, and by the time I caught up, she was opening the door to the rooftop.

As the door swung open, a gust of wind hit us.

Under the blue sky, a girl who looked exactly like Mia stood in the middle of the rooftop.

“She looks like me,” Mia commented without surprise.

“Yeah. Is that... a doppelgänger or something?”

“Probably not. But just in case...”

Mia pulled out a knife and made a small cut in her fingertip.

Blood oozed out, forming a droplet.

She pointed her bleeding finger at the other Mia.

The doppelgänger, after a moment’s confusion, pressed her right hand to her left wrist and sliced it open.

Blood spurted out like a fountain.

“Wait, hold on! A normal person would die from that!”

“Uh-oh,” Mia said.

The Mia Doppelgänger exclaimed, “Oh!” in realization. She hurriedly picked up her severed hand and reattached it, and the bleeding stopped.

“Good,” I said.

“Not good at all,” Mia retorted accurately.

The doppelgänger stood for a moment, downcast and frozen, then slowly lifted her head and gazed at Mia.

“Huh?”

Mia tilted her head inquisitively at her lookalike, who mirrored her gesture, tilting her head the opposite way.

“Trying to act like nothing happened with the hand? Well, okay then.”

*Is that really okay? Still, this doppelgänger is as nonchalant as Mia... It's almost anticlimactic.*

Mia slowly approached the doppelgänger and stopped just in front of her, extending her right hand. The doppelgänger mirrored her, extending her left hand...

“Hey, isn't this a bit risky?” I called to her.

“We have to try. After all, the other party is in a way better negotiating position.”

“That's true, but still...”

Mia's courage always amazed me. No way I could have made myself do what she was doing now.

*But that's Mia for you—somehow, she always manages to pull things together. I do trust her in that regard, but still...*

As Mia and the doppelgänger's hands touched, the other being staggered, trying to merge with her.

“Ah, that didn't work,” Mia muttered.

The next moment, the doppelgänger's entire body dissolved away like melting snow.

"Hey!"

No, it hadn't dissolved, exactly. As I stood there wide-eyed, I realized what had happened: *Mia* had absorbed it into her own body. Mia stumbled unsteadily.

"Mia!" I rushed over, catching her before she could fall.

Mia looked up at me with a dazed expression. "Made a little mistake. Take care of things for a bit."

"What exactly just happened...?" I asked, bewildered.

Without answering, Mia closed her eyes, and breathing grew shallow as she drifted into sleep.

"What's going on here...?" I asked no one in particular, taking stock of our surroundings. The rooftop was smeared with blood from earlier, a clear reminder that this wasn't a dream... but it was all too confusing.

"My head's about to explode," I mumbled dizzily. I hoisted the limp Mia onto my back and went back inside.

I found a suitable room with tatami mats and laid Mia down. Fortunately, there was no need for a futon—this was the tea ceremony club's room.

"This is just... unbelievable." I stood there, arms crossed, looking down at the sleeping Mia.

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I sat in that room until the sun went down, but Mia remained asleep.

"Looks like we're in this for the long haul..." I finally disconnected the link with the grey wolf and re-summoned Sha-Lau.

"Master, what's happening?" the Phantom Wolf King asked, concern evident in his eyes.

“Well, um...” I struggled to find the right words. When I finally managed to explain the situation leading up to this point, I asked him what had happened on his end after Mia and I disappeared. His response was... unexpected.

“We were gone for *less than a second*? So, what, time flows differently here and there?”

“It appears so.”

“Hmm. At least Arisu and the others won’t be worried about us if we take our time here.”

*This world might be similar to the White Room in some ways. If so, could the creators of this place be related to whoever’s behind the White Room?*

*No point in overthinking it now.* I decided to leave Sha-Lau on guard and lay down next to Mia on a futon.

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The next morning, Mia still hadn’t regained consciousness. I left her resting in the tea ceremony club’s room and walked around with Sha-Lau to explore the surroundings. This space only replicated the area around our school’s mountain; just a few square kilometers. There was no one else around, not even the Flying Jellyfish.

There wasn’t much more I could do on my own, so I performed the Familiar Contract ritual. Fortunately, I had all the necessary materials in my backpack, probably thanks to Sumire and the others. I successfully contracted with two familiars, but they weren’t able to help either.

Without anything else to do, I went back to the CAC and waited for Mia to wake up.

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On the third morning, I awoke in the tea ceremony club’s room to find Mia standing over me, staring intently.

“Mia... is that you?”

She slowly tilted her head to the side. “Maybe?”

“Uh... what does that mean?”

“It seems like things got mixed up inside me,” she said, then plopped down on the floor. I sat up to meet her gaze.

“Tell me more about it.”

“Okay,” Mia nodded and began to explain.



## Chapter 211: The Combined Mia

“The memories of that other entity have merged with mine. But they were so alien to me that it was hard for me to understand very much of it.” Mia spoke slowly, as if deliberately choosing each word. As she looked up at me, her gaze looked normal, but her tone lacked its usual confidence.

“What I did understand is that they came from a different world, not here. And a part of *them* was separated and came to be known as the Demon Lord.”

“The Demon Lord... Wait, what do you mean by *them*?”

“Beings, intelligent life forms, but their existence is very different from ours... *Alien's* the only way to describe it.”

“Is it something like... a SAN value decreasing?”

“Kazu...” Mia gave a wry smile. “This isn’t a game.”

“That line definitely gets the ‘you shouldn’t be the one to say that’ award of the year!”

Mia chuckled, which made my heart skip a beat.

*Wait... what's this feeling? Mia's being somehow... straightforwardly cute?*

*That's absurd.*

“They’re not evil,” Mia continued. “They don’t have malice. They’re living beings, just like us. Encountering them might cause friction, but for them, it’s not as fatal as it is for us. So, the Demon Lord continues on. They don’t fully understand their essence. They’re just going off instinct.”

“Mia...”

“*They* had a safeguard—or rather, *they* used to. Originally, they had a transformative function, a feature meant to facilitate mutual understanding. However, the Demon Lord was separated from that, or more accurately, left it behind. The Demon Lord’s original intention can’t change anymore, so *they*

waited. They couldn't do anything else. After a long, long time, we showed up. *They* wanted information. I accepted *them*, and that's why... I'm like this now."

Mia smiled, a bashful, simple smile.

*Wait... what's happening here?*

"The part of *them* inside me says the Demon Lord isn't in this world anymore."

"What does that mean?"

"Gone. No, more like moved on. As proof, a sixth wedge, which shouldn't exist, was driven into this continent."

I gasped. The sixth wedge... I remembered it from what one of the Four Heavenly Kings, the Black-winged Mad Wolf, Algrafth, had mentioned yesterday.

"Moved on? To where?"

"Somewhere else. Not this world."

According to Algrafth, the sixth wedge was in our school's mountain.

"When?"

"Five days ago."

"So, the Demon Lord left this world, and *that's* why our school appeared here?"

"Based on the circumstantial evidence, yeah. And that means Azagralith's reason for coming here is also..."

"Possibly..."

I swallowed hard. A thought crossed my mind.

"So, Algrafth, the contract holder of the Demon Lord, came to our school mountain chasing the Demon Lord? And because we were in the place where the Demon Lord was supposed to be, it tried to eliminate us?"

"That's the logical conclusion. The Four Heavenly Kings were beings in an exclusive contract with the Demon Lord. If they knew the Demon Lord left on its

own, it makes sense they'd follow, and that explains our situation."

"So, the world the Demon Lord went to..."

A cold sweat broke out on my skin. I had reached a conclusion, but I didn't like it one bit. If our school mountain had appeared in this world as a sort of exchange...

"Okay, it's reasonable to think the Demon Lord went to our world if there was a swap, but there's no definitive proof."

"Can our world... *handle* the Demon Lord? Is it something we can deal with?"

Mia shook her head. "I don't know."

"I see. Yeah, that makes sense. Either way, we can make a few educated guesses. Like, the Flying Jellyfish we fought, it really was immune to physical attacks. It was like a guardian of theirs. The Demon Lord might have similar characteristics."

Immunity to physical attacks.

Weakness to magic.

*If a being like that went to our world, a world with no magic...*

"Ah, but wait," I remembered. "If what Keiko-san said is true, our world might actually have magic after all."

Mia nodded slowly. "That's why we can't be sure. There's nothing we can be certain about. Whether I've fully understood what they wanted to convey..."

"So, we can imagine the worst-case scenario, but it might not necessarily be the truth." Every possible anxiety-inducing possibility was, in fact, flooding my mind just then.

"So, Kazu..." Mia reached out to me, and before I knew it, I was pushed back onto the futon.

"What—" *Mia, what are you doing?* I asked her silently, blinking in surprise.

Mia floated into the air. It was like she was using wind magic, but I hadn't seen her cast any spells.

Mia sat on top of me, light and graceful, as I lay on my back. For some reason, I couldn't seem to move my limbs. She gently kissed my lips.

"Let's do it."

"Wait, Mia, this is... out of nowhere..."

"Just... trust me."

Mia looked straight at me, and her expression was nothing like what her face normally held. As I looked into her obsidian eyes, I found myself overwhelmed by a sudden dizziness. *What's happened to her? Is this person straddling me actually Mia?*

Suddenly, I could move again. I grasped Mia's hand.

"You haven't been... taken over by something, are you?"

"Not at all."

"Are you... okay with this?"

Mia nodded. "This is what I want."

Our lips met again, this time more intensely. As her tongue intertwined with mine, a sweet, tingling sensation coursed through my body, sending shivers down my spine. And yet, my heart was in turmoil.

"Kazu..." Mia smiled, a hint of sadness in her expression. "Don't cry."

"I'm not... the type to cry."

Her fingers gently stroked my cheek. Only then did I realize my cheeks were wet.

*Why am I crying? I don't understand.* We shared a third kiss. Mia made a request, and I accepted. We became one, melding together repeatedly, seamlessly.

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When we grew tired, magic provided us with meals. The rest of the time, we remained inseparably close, not saying any more than we had to.

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Days passed like that, our connection unbroken. With each moment together, I felt something flowing into me from Mia—a transfer of something intangible. As the days went by, our words dwindled even more. We understood each other without needing to speak, instinctively sensing that this phase was nearing its end. How many days, or maybe even weeks, passed in what seemed like an instant...

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One day, after separating from me, Mia stood up, drenched in sweat. With the same soft smile she had been wearing recently, she looked down at me.

“This is the end.”

“Mia...”

“Kazu, thank you for everything.”

*Wait, Mia. Don't talk like that.* I wanted to shout, to express my feelings, but I held back.

“Kazu, you're holding an incredible amount of MP right now. You realize that, right?”

“Ah, yeah.”

*So this is MP. Mia's been sharing it with me this whole time; every time we became one, it increased.*

“So, now I have many times the normal limit of MP,” I began tentatively. “But this... it's something that only works in this space, right?”

“Right. Once we leave here, it'll fade away. Maybe in about an hour.”

If my capacity for handling MP was limited, and this power would soon disappear, what was the point of all this?

“Kazu,” Mia continued, “I can draw power from them just once. I can use that to take you anywhere.”

“Anywhere...?”

“Yeah, anywhere in this world. I can’t do it for anyone else—just for you.”

Suddenly, I understood exactly what Mia wanted me to do... what I needed to do.

She smiled gently, taking my hand and helping me stand up. She felt surprisingly strong, formidable even.

“I understand,” I said, nodding as I strengthened my resolve. Mia had made her decision, and so had I.

“To the school mountain,” I declared. “No, to where Azagralith is. Unlike the rest of our group, I have a way to convert all this MP into pure power. With this much MP, only now do I have the chance to defeat Azagralith.”

“Got it.” Mia nodded, as if reminding herself this was the right choice. Then, she gently stroked her bare stomach.



“Wait, so then...”

“I wanted this. One last time.”

The finality in her words was slowly dawning on me. I began to protest, to try and stop her, but swallowed my words. I knew it would be futile, and it would only distress Mia further.

“What will happen to you now?” I asked her.

After a brief silence, she answered, “I’ll change a bit more.”

“What do you mean...?”

“If I don’t transform properly, I can’t fully confront them. It’ll take time, not just in this space but in the real world, too. A little longer. Without it, they and the people of this world will keep inflicting unhappiness on each other.”

“But why do *you* need to put yourself through this...?”

Mia’s face turned serious. “It’s not like that, Kazu,” she said slowly. She shook her head, like an adult explaining a rule to a child. “I want to do this.”

“Mia!”

“It’s not about escaping or becoming a sacrifice. This is moving forward. So, please, let’s say goodbye with a smile.”

With that, Mia, the usually blank Mia smiled as dazzling as a flower newly blossoming.

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I got dressed and prepared the best I could. I slung the backpack over my shoulder and cast ample buffs on myself. Mia cast Fly and Wind Walk on me, and we swapped wristwatches.

Mia’s watch was a rugged black timepiece. “It’s also waterproof,” she told me with a faint smile. Meanwhile, she held my watch, a cheap one from a store, as if it were precious.

“Tell my brother to just... handle it.”



“I might get punched for this.”

“Probably, but it’ll be fine. Sorry, though.”

“It’s okay. I’ll face him properly.”

When it was time to go, I kissed Mia one last time.

“Maybe... someday,” she said quietly.

“I love you.”

“Along with Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia, that is, right?”

“Yes.”

Mia smiled. “I’m glad.”

“So am I.”

“Then, let’s go.”

Mia closed her eyes. “Kazu, I love you, too. Always have.”

With those final words, my consciousness faded away.

## Chapter 212: The Lone Battle in the Floating Fortress

I found myself materializing in a forest at twilight—but this was not the forest on our school’s mountain. The broad-leaved trees here were massive; a lot of them must have been over a thousand years old.

*This must be the forest of the floating fortress*, I thought. It seemed Mia had chosen this location carefully.

My MP was a staggering 1800, more than three times my usual amount. My head felt dizzy, as if I was drunk. I knew Mia had been right; I could only keep this up for about another hour at the most.

No time to waste. The enemy hadn’t seen me yet, so I needed to use this time to prepare. I set the timer on Mia’s watch for one hour and pressed start.

“Summon Familiar: Heavenly Turtle Nahan.”

A gigantic turtle, about five meters in length, appeared before me. Atop the shell sat a human upper body, distinct from the turtle’s face. The human part had dark skin and white hair, and was dressed oddly like a hermit in traditional Chinese attire. Its arms were crossed and its eyes closed in meditation. Then the lower face, the one on the turtle’s shell turned toward me. It bowed up and down in acknowledgment, its large black eyes gazing at me.

A raspy voice echoed in my mind, *“Master, at your request, I have arrived.”*

Nahan was one of the two familiars I’d recently formed an exclusive contract with, and he was especially skilled in magic. As I cast the usual support spells on him, I explained that we were in enemy territory and that the primary foes were ogres.

*“Then this falls within my area of expertise,”* Nahan said confidently.

“All right, let’s get started.”

The Heavenly Turtle cast Fly on himself and ascended into the air, and I followed. However, we stayed below the treetops. The huge trees provided

excellent cover, which would come in handy for our scouting.

*“This way,”* Nahan guided, veering slightly to the left. His magical ability to detect living beings around us was superior to Mia’s Wind Search spell, functioning well even beyond natural environments.

“How many enemies?”

*“There are sixteen, and they all seem to be ogres. Shall I initiate a preemptive strike?”*

“Go ahead.”

Hovering at about five meters, Nahan began chanting a spell with his human mouth. Eight fireballs, each about a meter across, materialized in front of his human form.

“Rahhhh!”

As he shouted, all eight fireballs were launched, avoiding the trees and heading in the direction of the enemies. Seconds later, I heard a series of resounding explosions in the distance.

*“Eight targets eliminated,”* Nahan’s voice resonated in my mind.

Suddenly, I was in the White Room thanks to a level-up.

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Alone in the White Room, I looked around and sighed.

“Thinking about it won’t help.”

I sat down at a computer to check my status. My level had increased by one, meaning I’d reached Level 50. Good, now I could upgrade my Enhanced Summoning to Level 2.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 50	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC:	SKILL POINTS:

9	5 → 0
<b>ENHANCED SUMMONING:</b> 1 → 2 (Familiar Enhancement 2, Familiar Synchronization 2)	

After completing the upgrade, I returned to the battlefield.

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Back from the White Room, I directed Heavenly Turtle Nahan to begin chanting the next spell. The remaining ogres were charging toward us. Brave creatures, considering we’d eliminated over half of their number. In previous battles, mages had fled, but lower-rank ogres tended to stand their ground to the end. Whether these ogres were in fact brave or just too stupid to know what was happening, I wasn’t complaining.

As the remaining eight ogres came into view, I didn’t see any mages among them. Nahan’s magic was ready before they could reach us, and eight more fireballs incinerated the last of the ogres.

I leveled up again.

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<b>KAZUHISA</b>	
<b>LEVEL:</b> 51	<b>SUPPORT MAGIC:</b> 9
<b>SUMMONING MAGIC:</b> 9	<b>SKILL POINTS:</b> 2
<b>ENHANCED SUMMONING:</b> 2 (Familiar Enhancement 2, Familiar Synchronization 2)	

I quickly left the White Room.



I sent Nahan back and then immediately resummoned him using Enhanced Summoning 2. Now effectively a Rank 8 familiar, he likely had access to more powerful magic. I also summoned the remaining two familiars: the Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau and the other of my newly contracted familiars, the Conquering Dragon King Kanarg.

With my enhanced abilities and my formidable familiars at my side, I was ready to face whatever challenges awaited in the floating fortress.

Kanarg, a gigantic serpent with a coiled body, bore a resemblance to Eastern dragons. His body was thick enough to swallow me whole without breaking a sweat, and if stretched out, it would easily be ten meters long. His forelimbs extended like thin arms, tipped with sharp claws, and his mouth was filled with razor-sharp fangs.

Kanarg's magical abilities were limited to just two: a specialized flight spell for himself and a debuff removal spell. However, his direct combat capabilities were second to none. He could also spit acid.

In terms of frontline combat and pure destructive ability, Kanarg was superior to Sha-Lau. In our mock battles post-contract, Kanarg had dominated in close combat. However, Sha-Lau's advantage lay in his lightning-fast movement magic, which allowed him to execute effective hit-and-run tactics. If Sha-Lau resorted to purely magical combat, leveraging his speed, Kanarg stood little chance.

Nahan was entirely specialized in magic, and without a frontline to protect him, he could be easily overwhelmed by Kanarg and Sha-Lau. However, with a defensive class like a paladin as a shield, he could hold his own even against those two.

Each of my three contracted familiars had unique characteristics, and it was up to me, the summoner, to best utilize their strengths.

Here in the forest of the floating island, ogres were roaming around in groups of ten to twenty. My task was to clear them out while searching for Azagralith

using Nahan’s scouting magic.

After I quickly cast some support magic, we began moving. The enemies, unaware of our presence, stood no chance. With Nahan’s magic for bombardment and the combined assault of Kanarg and Sha-Lau, even Mage Ogres were easily defeated, and Ogre Captains couldn’t withstand more than three hits from Kanarg.

Kanarg located a blue-skinned Ogre Captain and pounced. The serpent’s forelimbs snapped out sharply like rubber bands, slicing through the ogre’s skin with deadly claws. Then, Kanarg’s thick fangs clamped onto the ogre’s neck, tearing out flesh. The Ogre Captain let out a death cry as it collapsed.

*With Support Magic applied, Kanarg’s raw power could almost rival a Rank 9 creature,* I mused.

This was incredibly reassuring. In a blink, we’d defeated two groups, with 21 ogres, three Mage Ogres, and one Captain reaching 54.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 54	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 8 → 3
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 2 → 3 (Familiar Enhancement 3, Familiar Synchronization 3)	

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And then, it arrived: the anticipated assassin, far from its usual fodder.

*“Master, something massive is approaching,”* Nahan alerted.

“Terrasaur Agnamu?”

As I spoke, a dinosaur-like monster emerged, smashing through the nearby trees on four massive legs. Over ten meters long, it had reptilian scales and a neck as long as a giraffe's.

It was charging toward us like it wanted blood.

*"I shall engage it,"* declared the Conquering Dragon King Kanarg.

When the Terrasaur Agnamu extended numerous tentacles, Kanarg was unbothered. *"Those are merely an annoyance."* He opened his mouth wide to unleash a stream of acidic breath. Caught in the powerful acid, the tentacles hissed and burned. The Terrasaur Agnamu screamed in noisy agony.

"Nahan!" I called.

*"Yes, Master."*

With our exceptional coordination, Nahan completed chanting the necessary spell, a flame spear piercing the Terrasaur Agnamu's thick scales, causing its blue blood to gush out.

*"Coming through, Master!"* shouted Sha-Lau.

The Phantom Wolf King collided with the giant dinosaur at the speed of lightning, causing the Terrasaur's body to reel.

*"Now, leave the rest to me,"* Kanarg pronounced as he launched himself forward like a spring.

His sharp fangs bit deeply into the long neck of the Terrasaur Agnamu, while his forelimbs savagely gouged at its eyes, a critical vulnerability.

The once-formidable reptilian monster screamed in agony and fell to the ground, causing the earth to shake and kicking up clouds of dust.

This victory marked another level-up for me.

# Chapter 213: The Final Battle, Azagralith

Alone in the White Room, I sat at the PC, handling some Q&A before finalizing my level-up process. With my skill points increased to five, I upgraded Enhanced Summoning and Familiar Enhancement to Level 4. After some deliberation, I also invested in Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 1. Then, I went back to keep scouting.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 55	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 5 → 0
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 3 → 4 (Familiar Enhancement 4, Familiar Synchronization 3, Familiar Sustain Magic Reduction 1)	

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Back in the forest, where massive trees littered the ground like discarded toys, I applied Deposition on all three familiars and sent them back. Then, I resummoned them with Familiar Enhancement 4. The sustained MP was increased by 40 percent, but that wasn’t a big deal. Urgency was the priority.

The battle with the Terrasaur Agnamu had been loud and conspicuous. It was likely that Azagralith, one of the Four Heavenly Kings and the boss of this area, knew of our presence by now. And I had to defeat this monstrous being—so powerful that our entire party had struggled against it, and even Tamaki at Rank 9 could only buy time—with only the help of my familiars. This was the vow I’d made to Mia.



Ideally, the enemy would approach from their end. I glanced at the watch I'd gotten from Mia and saw that nearly thirty minutes had passed since the warp. In another half hour, the MP boost she'd given me would expire. If I missed this opportunity, I stood no chance of winning alone.

Even with Arisu, Tamaki, and Rushia helping, defeating Azagralith probably would have been impossible without the extra MP. I quickly applied support magic to my familiars: Keen Weapon, Physical Up, Mighty Arm, Clear Mind, Smart Operation, and Haste. This time, I decided not to use Isolation. It was a gamble; I assumed Azagralith, being a musclebrain, wouldn't employ magic or mental attacks, so I was planning my tactics accordingly. From our previous encounter, I had a general understanding of his temperament: he was a battle maniac. He might even come alone, leaving his subordinates behind.

Only a creature like the Terrasaur Agnamu would be capable of following him into this battle. Such a reckless fighter wouldn't bother to fight alongside his tentacled dinosaur-like subordinate.

And then, as expected:

*"Master, something is approaching quickly,"* reported Heavenly Turtle Nahan.

*That'll be Azagralith.* I exchanged a nod with Sha-Lau, who had also experienced the previous battle.

"Any companions?"

*"Seems to be alone."*

"I figured. Kanarg and Sha-Lau, take the front. Nahan, stay back a little and provide support as needed."

Using Haste from the start had been the right decision. This battle was going to be over quickly. So, I decided to use another skill in my arsenal: Familiar Awakening.

As I activated the skill, all three familiars glowed with a dark red aura and let out ferocious roars, unable to contain their surging power.

I had dedicated the majority of my surplus MP to this, naturally. The cost to summon and maintain a Rank 9 familiar was 81. With Familiar Enhancement 4

and Familiar Maintenance Magic Power Reduction 1, it totaled 102. So, that was the base multiplier, but...

Earlier, during a Q&A, I'd inquired about the maximum multiplier for Familiar Awakening. Familiar Awakening was a skill that utilized extra MP to draw out a familiar's inherent power. Hence, using it on a familiar like a paladin, already at its limit, would be pointless...

So, how far could Heavenly Turtle Nahan, Dragon King Kanarg, and Wolf King Sha-Lau go? The answer I received was, "With Familiar Enhancement 4 applied, I could stack Familiar Awakening up to three times." However, this was near the limit, so the effect might not have been worth the MP it cost—I'd have to use three times the MP for that full effect.

After changing my questioning approach, I'd managed to find out that with Familiar Enhancement 5 applied, instead I'd spend two times the MP for Familiar Awakening. With Familiar Enhancement, familiars' abilities roughly increase by half a rank each time. Thus, the limit for my three might be equivalent to Tamaki or Arisu using the same abilities at Rank 11.5. In other words, they were incredibly strong.

Yet, I understood that even in this immensely powerful state, they probably wouldn't match Azagralith, whose combat strength was truly off the charts. Only in this extraordinarily enhanced state might we stand a slight chance against Azagralith.

I poured three times the 102 MP, a total of 306, into each of them. Taking into account the original maintenance cost, the MP consumed for the familiars was now 1224. My enormous initial MP of 1800 now dwindled to just under 500—but the familiars now possessed the strength to defeat Arisu and Tamaki instantly in one-to-one combat.

*Will that be enough to defeat him? No, I have to believe it will be.* Shaking off all the negative thoughts, I prepared myself mentally.

And then... he arrived.

Bursting through the underbrush, a gigantic black mass lunged at me. It soared like a bullet, heading straight for me...

*"I won't allow it!"*

Kanarg intervened in its path, the slender dragon colliding with the dark shadow in an ear-splitting *pop!* Kanarg was sent spinning through the air. Even the mighty Dragon King seemed unable to stop the shadow.

But... it wasn't over yet.

*"Now it's my turn!"* shouted Sha-Lau, leaping at the black shadow from behind Kanarg. The Phantom Wolf King bit the monster's shoulder, his fangs sinking deep into the flesh.

"Ugh... Argh!"

The charging shadow let out a groan. Most likely, it had been Kanarg who had significantly reduced the monster's momentum. The black giant halted in its tracks, and I could see without a doubt that it was the pitch-black ogre, Azagralith.

His bare hands still poised for battle, the ogre demon general stared at me with a sinister grin.

"The whelp, huh? You've grown quite a bit since yesterday morning."

"Don't run away, Heavenly King. I've come for your head."

"Interesting. Try me!" Azagralith gave a hearty laugh and grasped Sha-Lau's head in his massive hands. As he tore the great wolf from his shoulder and hurled him aside, Sha-Lau's teeth ripped through the giant's flesh, blue blood flying.

Unfazed, the pitch-black ogre took a step forward... And then, a serpent of flame, unleashed by the Heavenly Turtle Nahan, struck him directly. The demon general was engulfed in fire.

*"Did we get him?"* Kanarg exclaimed.

*Uh-oh, that's a death flag...*

Azagralith roared, his powerful voice sending shockwaves through the air. For a second, I just stood there frozen. The force of the roar sent Kanarg and Sha-Lau flying back.

Azagralith, his body still engulfed in flames, leaped forward, closing the distance in a direct line toward me. But I was ready for this.

“Transposition,” I yelled, switching places with Kanarg. The Dragon King, initially blown away, skillfully twisted his serpentine body to regain his stance and meet Azagralith’s fiery assault head-on. The two colossal beings met again as the impact shattering nearby trees and tearing up the earth. Dust and debris swirled, creating a barren landscape of exposed red soil more than ten meters wide.

“Sha-Lau!”

*“Master!”*

The wolf king and I moved as if with a single mind. He snatched me from the air and threw me toward Nahan, then made a U-turn and dashed back toward Azagralith.

At that moment, my consciousness had already detached from my body, merging with Sha-Lau’s. In the brief instant of contact with the Phantom Wolf King, I had activated Familiar Synchronization.

Now, Sha-Lau and I were united. My physical body would be caught by Nahan, allowing me to focus entirely on the battle alongside Sha-Lau.

My Familiar Synchronization level was at 3. This mode doubled the maintenance MP of a familiar, meaning that using it in a state of tripled familiar awakening would consume an additional 408 MP.

That was nearly all of my remaining MP, but...

I was ready to gamble it all, to bet everything on the combined strength of Sha-Lau and myself.

Azagralith’s towering form loomed before me.

With Familiar Synchronization 3, I gained the ability to not only merge with my familiar but also to cast my own magic through his body. And of course, the most potent spell for close combat was...

“Accel.”

Sha-Lau's and my combined consciousness sped up. Azagralith turned to us, extending his left hand to grab us, but Sha-Lau twisted gracefully away, evading the demon general's grip and diving into close range.

Sharp claws gouged Azagralith's left eye, and Sha-Lau darted away before the monster could react.

As my consciousness returned to normal...

A deafening scream filled the air.

Turning back, I saw blue blood streaking down Azagralith's face. The giant flailed wildly in pain. Dragon King Kanarg was blown away and crashed into a large tree, which snapped in half from the impact.

"You've done well, human!"

Clutching his crushed eye with his left hand, the demon general turned back to us. With a casual flick of his right hand, a massive axe—larger than Azagralith himself—materialized out of thin air.

"So, you've forced me to draw my weapon."

*Okay, now he's serious...*

The real battle was about to begin.

## Chapter 214: The True Power of the Demon General

The demon general Azagralith brandished his gigantic axe, as if daring us to come closer. Then, he began to chant a spell.

*So, he uses magic, too,* I noted. From our previous encounter, where he'd approached us as a mist, I knew he possessed special abilities or magic. And now, summoning weapons from the air only confirmed it. Plus, having effective combat magic...

It dawned on me how much Azagralith had been holding back until now. And even with his restraint, we had struggled.

But now, this formidable foe was serious.

However, there was no room for fear. This battle was a point of no return—either I would emerge victorious, or I would perish. Steeling my resolve, I gave my command.

“Charge, Sha-Lau.”

*“Yes, Master.”*

I watched from behind Sha-Lau's eyes as he dashed through the air, straight for Azagralith.

Nahan's serpent of flame struck the demon general, but he emerged from the explosion almost unscathed.

“Fire has no effect on me now,” Azagralith declared. He had cast a fire resistance spell!

“Then we'll take him down with our fangs!” I declared through Sha-Lau.

Sha-Lau and Kanarg coordinated their attack, closing in from both sides. Azagralith, one-handing the huge axe, first countered Kanarg's approach. The Dragon King narrowly dodged the quick strike but lost momentum in his charge.

In that brief moment, the Phantom Wolf King Sha-Lau closed in, slipping inside the range of the axe.

*Now's our chance!*

"Accel!"

Once again, our consciousness sped up. The Phantom Wolf King aimed his razor-sharp fangs at the ogre's flank. But at that moment, Azagralith's left hand was already thrusting toward us.

I watched as the demon general's lips moved in slow motion. "Too... easy..."

This gave me a bad feeling, but there was no time to issue a command while in accelerated consciousness. Still, I had to react... and fast.

I seized control of Sha-Lau's body and hurled us sideways.

Just then, a thin, fan-shaped veil, bearing all the colors of the rainbow, appeared in Azagralith's left hand. It was a spell I recognized well. Fortunately, it vanished before hitting Sha-Lau.

Then, the acceleration of our consciousness ended.

"Deflection, really?!"

"You did well to dodge. I'll commend you for that."

This was alarming. Azagralith had even mastered Deflection, one of our trump cards! Before I had much time to think about it, a follow-up axe strike came hurtling toward us. In an instant, Sha-Lau transformed into lightning, zipping behind the demon general to evade the attack.

Seizing the momentary gap, Kanarg leaped in, but Azagralith skillfully maneuvered his great axe, blocking the Dragon King's claw with the shaft of his weapon.

"A mere interlude. Let me show you some more of my magic," the demon general declared, quickly chanting a short spell.

The blade of the great axe began to glow a brilliant white, rapidly cooling the surrounding air.

*An ice blade...*

Azagralith swung the axe vertically. Kanarg narrowly dodged it, but the shock wave sent him flying. The magically chilled axe struck the ground, slicing into the earth as effortlessly as a heated knife through butter...

The ground cracked in numerous places, and a moment later, it split wide open.

“What the...?”

The earth itself crumbled into tiny fragments, which fell away. With a single strike, Azagralith had shattered the floating fortress’s bedrock into dust. The demon general laughed uproariously as he fell toward the forest below.

“What are you doing? This is your fortress!”

“Hilarious, truly hilarious! With you as my opponent, I can unleash my full power.”

“Are you insane?!”

His laughter fell somewhere between hysteria and madness—either he was intoxicated by the battle’s fervor, or he was revealing his true nature. As we floated dumbfounded, Azagralith plummeted toward the forest beneath the floating fortress, crashing into the ground and raising a cloud of dust.

Of course, such a fall wouldn’t be enough to kill him. Almost immediately, a dark shadow burst out of the dust cloud.

“He can fly?!”

Well, I guess it was only natural for him to have some means of flight. Within moments, Azagralith had soared dozens of meters into the air, swooped down toward Kanarg, and swung his axe.

The Dragon King responded adeptly to this sudden attack, meeting the axe with the claw of his right foreleg...

His claw was cleanly severed, blue blood spraying into the air. The slender dragon was thrown back, but he let out an angry roar.

“Not yet! Make me feel more alive!”

Azagralith pursued the off-balance Kanarg...



“Transposition.”

Through Sha-Lau, I caused us to swap places with Kanarg—which meant Sha-Lau narrowly avoided Azagralith’s charge.

The moment our distance from the demon general increased, Heavenly Turtle Nahan unleashed a beam of light, aimed straight at Azagralith. However...

“Deflection.”

The attack rebounded away from Azagralith. In a panic, Nahan erected a barrier to protect both himself and my immobile body.

“The trajectory is too simple,” I told Nahan.

*Damn it, Nahan is too busy protecting me. That’ll limit his ability to launch full-scale attacks.*

“We’re down an attacker, but... Nahan, stay back and be on standby.”

*“There seems no other way. May fortune be in your favor.”*

“Right. Keep watch over the area around here.”

While I communicated with Nahan, Kanarg and Sha-Lau continued the battle with Azagralith, gradually decreasing their altitude.

Glancing up, I noticed the floating fortress drifting away from the mountain peak, and at the same slowly descending.

*Is Azagralith really willing to permanently destroy his own stronghold? Seems like he’s pretty serious about this battle with us. What is this guy thinking?!*

“Delightful!” Azagralith shouted as he fought his two opponents midair. “This is the most enjoyable feast I’ve encountered since descending to this land!”

*To us, this is a desperate struggle, but to him, it’s like a game.*

*No... it might be more than that. For Azagralith, the act of battling itself is a profound test of skill and will. A battle maniac with overwhelming strength; that’s the true essence of the demon general Azagralith.*

Until now, he hadn’t found an opponent capable of challenging his strength. And then he encountered me and my familiars. Whether we liked it or not was irrelevant to him; he was just thrilled to fight with all his might.

It was incredibly frustrating, but this realization brought me some amount of small relief. There would be no chance of the enemy sensing disadvantage and fleeing. After all, the demon general Azagralith had already lost an eye and sustained multiple injuries, but he just kept going, laughing with pleasure.

This was a straightforward, no tricks sort of duel.

Enveloped in the red glow of Haste, we clashed with Azagralith again and again. In the air, then plunging into the forest and descending to the ground, the battle spread destruction across the forest. Azagralith's derisive laughter echoed from tree to tree.

"We won't let you have your way forever!" I called to him.

Sha-Lau unleashed a barrage of lightning strikes. Each bolt followed a different trajectory, homing in on the demon general. This was probably one of the spells that was still beyond our limits.

*"Even if he uses Deflection, it won't matter now."*

Sha-Lau was right; while Azagralith could deflect one or two bolts, it was impossible to reflect them all. But Azagralith...

"He's weak."

Almost as if anticipating the attack, he had been sweeping the ground with his axe at the same moment the lightning was released. The upturned earth blocked the lightning from reaching its target. The bolts that hit the dust exploded, sending purple sparks everywhere and filling the air with the scent of ozone.

*"Here he comes, Master."*

"Accel."

As expected, the pitch-black giant burst through the wall of dust and debris. We could have distanced ourselves from him considerably, but...

This was also an opportunity.

"Charge!"

*"At your command!"*

With that, we engaged once more, seizing the opportunity to turn the tide.

Sha-Lau transformed into lightning, propelling himself forward. In a fleeting moment as he passed Azagralith, he struck with his front claws. This time, his target was the demon's right ear—which he sheared off cleanly.

The acceleration of our consciousness faded.

“Wonderful strife! Don't you think so?!”

Even as blood spurted from the side of his head, the demon general continued to laugh boisterously. He still seemed to be thoroughly enjoying himself, even as he switched to a counterattack.

From a distance, Azagralith swung his great axe. Transformed into an icy blade, it expanded vertically, becoming a colossal scythe-like weapon that struck at Sha-Lau.

Having just landed, Sha-Lau bore the full brunt of the attack and was sent flying. He landed with a dull, heavy impact.

I couldn't deploy my Deflection since Accel had just worn off. We were completely vulnerable, caught at the very moment our movement stopped.

“Ugh... ughhh...”

Sha-Lau's massive body had been tossed through the air, and because of our link, I felt the excruciating pain, too. It felt like we'd been torn apart. I couldn't help but scream.



The Phantom Wolf King quickly started using healing magic, but what he used was Regeneration, which would take time for full recovery. I had specialized healing magic for familiars, which could complement Regeneration and help us recover gradually if used several times...

*No, that won't work. We can't afford the luxury of a leisurely recovery. Starting a war of attrition with Azagralith would be suicidal. We need to focus on striking back, even if just a little.*

Just as I'd gathered my thoughts for a counterattack, a pained groan came from the demon general. Glancing down quickly, I saw Kanarg entangled with Azagralith, coiled around the giant's body like a rope, constricting him.

Kanarg's sharp fangs pierced through Azagralith's right hand, the one gripping the axe. The massive ogre involuntarily dropped his weapon.

"Nicely done!"

Azagralith then grabbed Kanarg's head with his other hand. A grisly crunching sound, audible even to me, followed. Kanarg's scream filled the air.

"Kanarg!"

*"It's futile, Master,"* Sha-Lau said, steadying himself.

The head of Dragon King had been crushed, like a tomato under pressure.

*"It's a fatal wound,"* Sha-Lau declared solemnly.

## Chapter 215: Farewell

**W**hen a familiar under an exclusive contract is killed, the summoner can never summon the same familiar again. It's a final parting. Exclusive contracts grant immense power, but if you form one, you have to accept that risk and think carefully about when to deploy the familiar.

The Dragon King Kanarg was dead, and I could never summon him again.

Our time together had been brief, yet he had been a true comrade. I caught a glimpse of Kanarg's crushed head, his form fading away, and clenched my teeth.

Mourning would come later. Kanarg had bought us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with his life, and it was our job to seize it. Here and now, Azagralith must be defeated. No matter what.

*"Let's go, Master."*

Without me needing to tell him, Sha-Lau lunged forward. Azagralith—his stance broken, weapon on the ground at his feet, still entangled in the fading remains of Kanarg—was vulnerable.

Sha-Lau's and my intentions were one.

*"Accel."*

Once again, our surroundings seemed to slow down, and Azagralith's turn toward us seemed to happen one frame at a time.

The demon general extended his remaining hand, getting ready to cast Deflection. But...

*"Deflection!"*

I cast it, too. Both our spells activated at the exact same moment, and our thin veils collided—the spells canceled each other out.

A look of astonishment crossed Azagralith's face.

I knew this would happen from my discussions with Mia. We had conducted several Q&A sessions, and it was she who had first suggested the idea of Deflection cancellation.

*Mia, you've saved my life again,* I thought, feeling an overwhelming warmth in my chest. If she were watching this battle from somewhere, I wondered if she would smile and say, "Just like I said."

Sha-Lau continued his charge, biting fiercely into Azagralith's throat. Clamping down with all his might, he tore through the soft skin under the jaw, sending blue blood spraying wildly.

Azagralith let out a chilling roar as he attempted to pry Sha-Lau off with his left hand. But this hand lacked the strength that had crushed Kanarg's head. His right hand hung limply, devoid of power.

The demon general fell to the ground, rolling clumsily as he desperately tried to dislodge the Phantom Wolf King. We were just as desperate, determined to end this.

"Sha-Lau, can you use an attack spell right now?"

*"If you're prepared for self-destruction."*

"Then do it," I commanded without hesitation. We had to win here, or there was no future. How could I face Kanarg, who'd sacrificed himself, or Mia, who'd given us this chance, if we retreated now?

So, in a deadly gamble, I declared, "Power Spell."

A Rank 8 support spell, Power Spell significantly enhances the capabilities of a spell for just a few seconds.

"Now, Sha-Lau. Even if this means parting ways with you here, we go for the win."

*"Understood, Master!"*

In the next instant, Sha-Lau unleashed an electrifying magic attack, engulfing even himself in the process.

My Power Spell amplified the attack, and it pierced through Azagralith's throat, spreading throughout his entire body. At the same time, it tormented

Sha-Lau, but still the Phantom Wolf King unleashed another blast of lightning. And then another.

That was his limit.

Sha-Lau released his teeth from Azagralith’s throat and staggered away, exhausted. Smoke poured out of the dark ogre’s body, his muscles twitching uncontrollably.

He didn’t attempt to stand up again.

His lips moved. No sound came out, but somehow, I understood what he was trying to convey. I could sense the words he wanted to say with his last breath.

“Well done,” the great berserker finally muttered and then... expired. Content, he closed his eyes and relaxed his body completely. His form vanished, leaving behind a white gemstone.

A token worth a thousand tokens, symbolic of the Four Heavenly Kings.

I leveled up and found myself in the White Room.

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After the battle...

There was nothing in particular to do in the White Room, and the thought of being alone in it was disheartening. Maybe I was no longer comfortable being alone.

I quickly sat in front of the PC, ready to go back.

KAZUHISA	
LEVEL: 56	SUPPORT MAGIC: 9
SUMMONING MAGIC: 9	SKILL POINTS: 2
ENHANCED SUMMONING: 4 (Familiar Enhancement 4, Familiar Synchronization 3, Reduced Mana Cost for Familiar Maintenance 1)	





The aftermath of the battle was devastating.

Every tree had been toppled, and the ground was gouged open with exposed earth and pockmarked with craters. In the distance, I heard a resonating crash—the floating fortress must have fallen to the earth. Had all the ogres on it perished?

Perhaps not. Mage Ogres can use flight or slow-fall magic. The smarter ones might have escaped and even helped their subordinates to do the same. But right now, I had neither the time nor the energy to go after them.

After swiftly collecting the white gemstone, I used Deportation to send Shalau and Nahan back before the Familiar Awakening expired. This would give me a bit more MP leeway.

To be honest, I hadn't been feeling too good since the battle. I had a terrible headache, and everything felt hazy. Maybe it was from using vastly more MP than my body could handle, or maybe it was some kind of aftereffect.

"Mia. It's over," I muttered, looking up at the sky.

*Can she hear me? I wondered. Did she see what happened? What will become of Mia Tagamiya now? When will I see her again? Is there anything I can do besides wait?*

As I stared at the sky, things started getting louder around me. Ogres had probably spotted me.

"Summon Paladin."

With the MP I had left, I summoned two Paladins for counterattack. They charged into battle, their swords clashing, while I stood motionless.

All I wanted to do in that moment was sleep. But I had to return to the World Tree. Leen, ever vigilant, was probably monitoring this mountain with her familiars. Soon, she would find me.

After a few minutes, the Paladins returned carrying nine blue gemstones. I realized absently that, a few days ago, defeating nine ogres in such a short time would have seemed impossible.

Then, a hawk descended from above.

“Is this my ride?”

I dismissed my summons and stepped onto the magic circle created by the hawk. The familiar sensation of disorientation accompanied the teleportation. A moment later, the air changed, and...

I was back at the World Tree.

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Arisu and the others had returned to the World Tree before me. Apparently, right after Mia and I disappeared, they had been ejected from the dome-shaped building. The dome had then lost its rainbow shimmer, making it inaccessible.

They had considered entering by force, but...

That’s when Leen noticed the disturbance at the floating fortress. Someone was wreaking havoc there. They decided to leave a hawk at the Temple of Tepat and retreat to the World Tree, monitoring the area around the school’s mountain.

That was when they saw me, with my three familiars, engaged in a fierce battle with Azagralith. They had lots of questions about why I’d been at the school and why I had exclusive contracts with Nahan and Kanarg.

“What exactly happened?” Yuuki asked.

*Ah, so you’re not asking about Mia first.* I supported my unsteady body with sheer willpower and bowed my head.

“Mia... she’s gone somewhere far away.”

“Hmm, could you elaborate...? No, never mind for now. Just tell me one thing. Is she...?”

“She’s alive. That much is certain. She chose to leave on a journey. I’m sorry, Yuuki-senpai. I couldn’t protect her.”

Yuuki silently clenched his fists, a mix of emotions on his unmasked face. Then, his expression fading, he embraced me. His arms were strong.

“Thank you for doing your best for my sister.”

His tone was different from usual, but there wasn’t a hint of falsity in his words. He truly understood how much Mia had meant to me and how much I’d done for her.

“I want you to have this,” I said, trying to hand him Mia’s watch, but he shook his head.

“If Mia gave that to you, I want you to keep it.”

“Okay,” I nodded and closed my eyes. I had reached my limit. My consciousness began to slip into darkness.

Arisu and Tamaki were shouting.

*It’s okay, I’m just really tired. So incredibly... tired...*

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Thus, the fifth day of my journey in another world came to an end. I had gained so much information, yet I hadn’t begun to sort through it all. I wasn’t even sure what to do next...

Tomorrow would come anyway.

A tomorrow without Mia.

Goodbye, Mia. I love you.

〈To be continued in *Another World Survival: Min-Maxing My Support and Summoning Magic*, Volume 9〉

## Side Story: The Wandering Mia

They say that euglena originally didn't have chloroplasts. Over the course of its long evolutionary history, it ingested algae that had chloroplasts and eventually incorporated them into its own cells. This adaptation allowed it to move like an animal while performing photosynthesis like a plant.

Biologists call this process endosymbiosis.

As I, Mia Tagamiya, reflected on what was happening inside me, I was reminded of this story I read in a book one time. The phenomenon that happened between *it* and me bears a striking resemblance.

Did I consume *it*, or was I absorbed by *it*?

Honestly, I wasn't quite sure.

The knowledge that flowed from *it* mingled with my memories as Mia, blurring the lines of my identity. Most likely, the current me is both Mia and *it*—not quite human, nor entirely of *its* species.

Currently, *it* and I are experiencing some miscommunications.

I basically had two choices: increase my dependence on *it*, or evolve into something neither Mia nor *it*, deepening the transformation.

I chose the second option. It was a rather risky gamble, and it involved enduring quite a bit of pain, but it was the only way. Otherwise, I wouldn't have been able to save everyone. I couldn't have become a strength for Kazu.

I understood that much.

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First, I'd had to dismantle my own psyche.

It was difficult, but absolutely necessary. To fundamentally change who I was as a living creature, I couldn't stay how I was—it would have led to instant

madness.

Initially, the very concept of a life form bound by time and space was too limiting. To achieve what I wanted, I needed to break free from a lot of constraints.

As I stopped being myself, I reached into the realm where *they*, the species of *it*, existed. And I was overwhelmed.

The massive influx of information shattered the barriers of time and space, breaking my individuality into pieces. In retrospect, this was probably *their* way of welcoming me, but it led to a lengthy process of reassembling myself.

As a side effect, I acquired some unique powers. I also had time to process the new knowledge *they* had given me.

In that way, the specific path I needed to take became clear. The past and future connected perfectly. I understood the bizarre rules that governed this world and what they really meant—which was frightening.

Yet, I also felt that changing these rules was as natural and straightforward as getting out of bed and yawning in the morning.

“I’m in trouble,” I muttered to myself. “Rewriting the rules of the world is so easy. What should I do?”

Even as I said this, my mind was already made up. I was only one person, but I made plans to help Kazu to the best of my ability. I knew exactly what needed to be done.

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It was after all of this happened that I gave birth to the life I had been carrying inside myself. Although it took some effort to get ready to raise her, this precious life, the crystallization of the bond between him and me, grew up healthy and strong.

There was some hesitation in involving my beloved daughter in my fate...

The way I am now, I can’t meet him. My feelings for him can only be entrusted to her. With this thought, I watched my daughter play, running and

laughing carefree in the meadows.

*Just a little longer, just a bit more time.*

*Wait for me, Kazucchi.*

*For you, for everything important to you, for that sole purpose...*

*I will fundamentally reshape this world.*

*That's right.*

*It means I'm the one who...*

## Afterword

**H**ello, I'm Tsukasa Yokotsuka.

I'm pleased to present the eighth volume of *Another World Survival: Minimizing My Support and Summoning Magic*. The final battle in this volume, which was particularly well received in the web version, is something I'm excited for you to enjoy.

Spoiler warning for the main story.

I generally write this series with a focus on battle scenes. It might be more accurate to say that the narrative is constructed to connect one combat scene to another. I try to be creative with each fight...

The final battle in this volume emerged when I was listing the protagonist's abilities and thinking about variations in combat. Suddenly, it struck me:

*Wait, couldn't he win against Azagralith with these abilities?*

Based on this realization, I restructured the subsequent developments...

Originally, the battle with Azagralith was supposed to happen toward the very end, but it ended up in this volume. As you've seen, the outcome was quite eventful. I hope you enjoyed it. Oh, and Mia's departure was planned. The timing shifted a bit—it was supposed to happen a little later.

The story is finally drawing to a close in the upcoming ninth volume. Please stay with me until the end.

## Back Matter

**Author: Tsukasa Yokotsuka** While managing his duties as an admiral in a certain naval-themed browser game, Tsukasa Yokotsuka started posting stories on the novel publishing website Shousetsuka ni Narou, thinking it would be nice to become a novelist. That's how he began, and it has led him to where he is today. His admiral duties are currently in a state of splendid stagnation (as of December 2016).

### **Illustrator: Manyako (MANYAKO)**

Born in Saga Prefecture and residing in Tokyo, Manyako is a freelance illustrator primarily working on illustrations for books and games (as of December 2016).





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