In Another World With My Smartphone

20

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illustration・Eiji Usatsuka



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In Another World With My Smartphone 20


IT'S
TIME FOR A
GIRLS-ONLY
MISSION!


The old woman sat down next to the world god. They almost looked like a couple.
"IT IS A PLEASURE TO MEET YOU, TOUYA. I'LL BE TAKING ON THE ROLE OF YOUR GRANDMOTHER, IF THAT'S QUITE ALRIGHT."
"THIS, TOUYA, IS THE GODDESS OF SPACE-TIME. SHE WILL BE HANDLING THE REPAIRS ON THE WORLD BARRIER."

Character Profiles



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



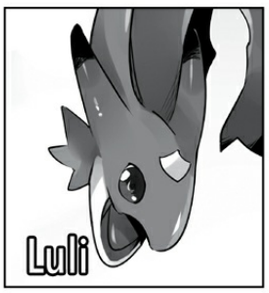
A mysterious girl Touya rescued in Eashen. She had lost her memories, but has now finally gotten them back. Her true identity is Farnese Forneus, daughter of the Xenoahs Overlord. Currently living a peaceful life in Brunhild, and she has joined the ranks of Touya's fiancees.



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

The Worlds of
In Another World With My Smartphone
World Map

The Story So Far!

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

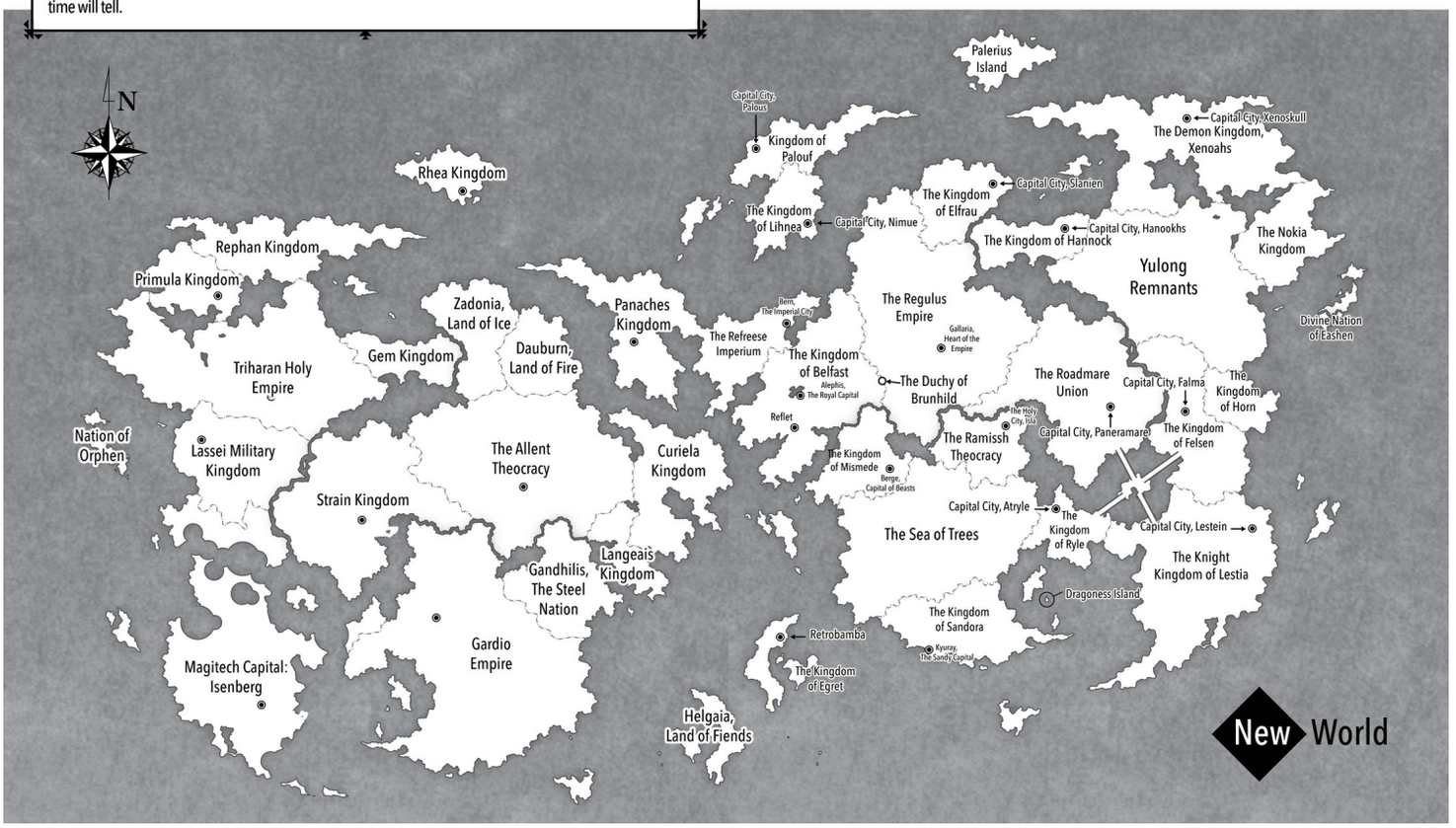


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Chapter I: A Tale of Ice and Fire

I didn’t really want to deal with this if I could avoid it, but I had no real choice.

I headed to the knight barracks, then down the stairs to the recently constructed underground portion. I slowly walked down the spiral staircase until I came to a stone corridor. Eventually, I made it to a small room where two knights stood on duty.

One was working on some documents at their desk, while the other was doing pushups. I recognized their faces. They were two of the demi-humans who had participated in the knight exams a while back. The man doing the paperwork was a wardog beastman, while the woman doing the pushups was a lioness. If I recalled right, they were called Dingo and Ashley.

“G-Grand Duke!”

“Ah, Your Highness?”

“Oh, don’t worry about formalities. I’m just dropping in.”

The dog-headed man stood to attention, while the lion-eared woman fell mid-pushup out of shock. I stopped them from saluting me as I sauntered over to the next room, the jail cell.

“I’ll just be heading in.”

“Of course! Here’s the key!”

Dingo handed me the large cell key that had been hanging up on the wall. I smiled politely at the duo, then opened the thick iron door. Behind the door was the castle dungeon. There were archways to the left and right of me, leading down hallways to a series of sturdy iron cages. The bars were all infused with magic, and the barriers placed around the cells were as powerful as my **[Prison]** magic.

A particular woman was waiting for me in one of these cells, hidden in the depths. There was a tatami mat laid atop a stone-crafted bed in the corner of

her cell, with some bedding on top of that. In a little alcove on the wall sat a leylightstone, which we used as an alternative light source to candles. It shone inside a small cup of water. A pair of glasses sat next to the cup.

In the back of this special cell was a curtained-off area with a shower and toilet facilities. This was certainly a luxurious cell, all things considered. I felt it only fair, given that it was inescapable. Even if the bars were cut or the stone walls were dug through, the magic surrounding this place would prevent anyone from ever getting out.

In the corner of the room sat a purple Gollem encased in ice. My **[Eternal Coffin]** spell wouldn't wear off until I released it, after all.

"Hey. You sleeping?"

"Hm...? I'm not sleeping... But... A-Ah?! That voice! Tou?!"

Luna jumped up, flinging the blanket off her body. Her hair looked scraggly, but her complexion was fine enough.

"You don't look bad, given you've been in here a few days."

"Hmmmmph! You're so mean for keeping me here, Tou... A big meanie..."

"Hey, c'mon now. What other prisons give you a toilet, three square meals a day, and a shower?"

Other places just gave you a jar to do your business in; this was a pretty nice dungeon, all things considered. It was true that she was basically confined to this one space, though.

Either way, I wanted to get my purpose here over with.

"Now then, you're charged with breaking and entering into a royal castle, as well as attempted assassination on royalty."

"I did attack, but I don't remember— Ohhh... That means you're really a royal, Tou?" Luna reached out for her glasses, the two lenses shining softly as she put them back on.

"Not just me. Those two you attacked, remember? They're my relatives, so they're royalty as well."

“Ohhh! Those crazy strong ladies! Were they your sisters?!”

Luna’s motions became erratic. She hopped up and charged over to the iron bars, clasping them tightly in her hands. I took a few steps back.

“One of them was. The other was my cousin.”

“Ohhh! Amazing! Amaaazing! I didn’t get to do much at all, and Viola got beaten right away! I bet those girls could kill me really easily!”

Luna’s body writhed and shivered as she grinned wide and softly fondled herself. Her breathing grew heavier. She really was an irredeemable pervert... It was pretty awful to watch.

“...I don’t really get it, but like... Do you want to die?”

“Mm... I think so! If I can die, I think it’d be fun to give it a go. I don’t really understand. I didn’t wanna die in the past, I know that much. Nia once said that if I keep using Viola’s power, the more things’ll go bad for me, and stuff. And then, in the end, Viola’s gonna kill me, too.”

...Wait, she knows that her sanity’s getting sapped? So, what... Is she hoping that she’ll either get killed by Viola or that someone’ll be able to kill her before it goes too far?

“It’s all your fault, Tou... I thought you’d finally be able to kill me, but you’re being so lazy about it! You limp-dicked bastard, you!”

“...Please don’t call me that.”

“It’s scary when you’re gonna die, isn’t it? I’ve felt it lots and lots and lots. Whenever I feel the pain and the fear, real pleasure comes out after that feeling... So then all the cutting, the stabbing, the slicing... All that good stuff going into me? It hurts so good... Ahhh, I love it. I love how good it hurts! It’s kind of like my body telling me I’m alive... That’s why it’s so good.”

Huh... So the only way she feels alive is by having pain inflicted on her. But each time she does that, her mind breaks down further and it actually brings her closer to the brink of death...

There was no hope for her. Chrom Ranchesse, creator of the crown Gollems, created an entire system of incredible powers. Of course, they all required you

to pay a price for them. It was almost like making a contract with a devil. You gain incredible strength, but something's robbed in return.

In Luna's case, she had eternal life... But even if she could live forever, it didn't matter if her sanity was the price she had to pay. Plus, her ability was automatic. Even if she didn't want to use the crown's ability, it would trigger and regenerate her body whenever she got hurt. Her sanity would be sapped away at the same time, too. Even though she was the Gollem's master, it was pretty sketchy that it forced her to use its power no matter what. She got a pretty raw deal out of it.

"Anyway... I thought I'd be super-duper happy if you killed me, Tou... But now there are those girls, and they're sooo strong, too! This is a little annoying, you know? Who should I have kill me now...?"

"None of us. I have no intention of killing you."

Bastet told me that she helped protect the puretree in Isengard, but that wasn't enough to cancel out her crimes. She definitely needed some form of punishment.

"Huh? Then what are you doing down here...? My, I guess this is one of the perils of relying on a virgi—"

"Enough."

Goddamn, she has no tact at all! Still, after that talk I had with Elluka after the crown's compensation, I want to address what we can do about Luna's.

Usually, you could cancel it out by just trashing the Gollem, but Viola had rapid regeneration... That meant it would be pretty hard to bust. It wouldn't be impossible if I used my divinity, but it would still be a bit much...

"If I told you I could totally obliterate Viola, how would you feel about that? Keep in mind it'd stop your mind from slipping any further."

"You'd obliterate her? Hmm... I don't know... Viola's a nice little one, I think. Actually, Viola's super gentle with me... The little cutie brings me food when I'm hungry, and carries me when I'm sleepy. Viola never asked to be born the way she was, either... If you ask me, the real monster is Viola's creator."

Heh, the creator... He already paid the ultimate price, his memories, after Albus ran wild in the past... In the end, I suppose he got what was coming to him.

If Luna didn't want me to trash Viola, then I had to try plan B. I used a divinity-infused **[Teleport]** to warp into the prison cell. Typically, that kind of spell would be repelled by the barrier, but that didn't stop me. I'd certainly become an unusual creature... Though I'd been one for a long time at this point.

"Whuh?!"

Luna jumped up in shock, but I ignored her and walked over to Viola, still trapped inside the icy coffin. I undid the spell, partially, and the ice thawed down enough to reveal Viola's head and shoulders. "Beep." Viola struggled to escape the ice, but it couldn't do anything with its arms and legs trapped.

"Viola. I'm going to take away the parts of you that make you a crown Gollem. I hope you don't hate me for this, but it's for the greater good."

I touched Viola's head and cast **[Analyze]** on her. I couldn't understand the intricacies, but I could sense the rudimentary functions like power flow. I also sensed the magical pathway that linked Viola to Luna, which was effectively the pathway that created Viola's functions... Given that knowledge, I couldn't fully erase it. But I could still do the next best thing.

"[Cracking]."

I used a Null spell that helped me modify magical programming. It was originally used to tweak magical artifacts. It wasn't actually that useful, though. I couldn't turn a fire staff into a lightning staff, for example. What I could do was make the fireball smaller or bigger, or just prevent the fireball from coming out at all.

I used the spell to meddle with Viola's insides, cutting off all access to her automatic regeneration ability and effectively removing her status as a Crown Gollem.

"There we go. Viola's no longer a crown, just a really powerful Gollem."

"No way..."

“Yes way. Here, try jabbing yourself with this.”

I took out a small sewing needle from my **[Storage],** and passed it over to Luna. Luna shakily held it up, removed her glasses, and immediately thrust the needlepoint toward her eyeball.

“Whoa, stop! Are you stupid?! Don’t stab yourself in the goddamn eye!”

“Hm? Why not? It’s just my eye.”

“I meant for you to just prick your finger!”

This girl was an honest-to-god nutbag. I didn’t trust her not to maim herself, so I snatched the needle back and gently pricked her fingertip. A small drop of blood pooled on her skin. She wiped it away, but more blood pooled out. The wound wasn’t healing.

“You... You really disabled it?”

“Try asking Viola to heal it. Trust me.”

“Oh? Um... Viola, sweetie? Can you heal this?”

“Beep.”

Viola channeled magic energy through to Luna. I had disabled the regeneration ability, but in the process, I’d effectively created a new Gollem skill that a Legacy Gollem might have held. Basically, it was just regular regeneration, and it wasn’t automated. The little needle prick wound closed up in an instant.

“So... what does this mean?”

“It means Viola is now a regular Gollem with healing abilities. It won’t be able to heal anything fatal, though.”

Luna wouldn’t be able to survive the gruesome injuries she’d been sustaining up until now. If she had her stomach gouged open again, or anything else like that, she’d absolutely die.

“And now I need to cap off your punishment. **[Guilty Curse].**”

I reached out and planted a curse upon Luna. I couldn’t just let her go unpunished, after all.

“You won’t be able to derive pleasure from pain anymore.”

“Huh?!”

“Let me show you. Luna... Thank you for protecting the puretree, it meant a lot to me.”

“Nh... Whhah?! M-Mmfh?! A-Ah, wh-what was that sensation just now? It was like a shiver up my spine!”

Luna’s cheeks flushed a deep red as she wrapped her arms around her own body.

Ugh... I’ll never get used to her gross behavior...

“It’s pretty simple, really. This is the punishment I’ve imposed on you. You’ll gain pleasure from the gratitude of others.”

In a sense, I made her more normal, but I probably just made her weirder. Then again, the world was full of people who took a lot of pleasure from things others might not find all that enjoyable. Either way, this curse converted general appreciation and happiness from others into direct physical pleasure that would ripple across Luna’s body.

Most people felt some measure of happiness by helping others. Helping other people often served as a validating action for people, and helped with giving people a feeling of fulfillment and purpose. The curse I placed on Luna effectively gave her that validation... in the form of pleasurable sensations.

“H-Hey, Tou! D-Do it again... Thank me again!”

“Yeah, sure. Thank you, Luna.”

“...Huh?”

“Those words were empty, Luna. It won’t trigger anything if there’s no feeling behind it.”

“Aww...”

I ignored Luna as she fussed and pouted, and freed Viola from the ice.

“But I don’t know how to get people to thank me, Touuuu... Who do I have to kill?”

“Nobody! Why’s that your first assumption?! Just go help people in need!”

Ugh, this isn’t good. I don’t want her doing bad things... I guess if she’s hired as an assassin, she could kill tons and tons of people just so her employer would thank her... Better add another stipulation to the curse that prevents her from committing murder... I’ll make sure it adds exceptions for combat or self-defense situations, though.

Luna had clearly never been thanked in her entire life, so I needed to teach her the best way to earn gratitude.

I summoned a **[Gate]** connected to Brunhild’s main school and dragged Luna there along with her Gollem. There were a bunch of kids playing nearby.

“Oh! Grand Duuke!” “Wowie! Gwand Duke!”

The kids cheered in joy as they stampeded toward us. It seemed like the purple Gollem was attracting their attention the most.

“Hey, Tou! What is this place?!”

“It’s my castle town’s main school. The kids are planting flowers today, I think.”

Principal Fiana, along with Mr. Mittens, walked over from the main school building.

“Meow nice to see you, Grand Duke.”

“Oh my, what brings you here?”

The two of them smiled as they greeted us. They were carrying small gloves and little trowels, seemingly in preparation for the flower planting.

“I’ve brought a helper with me. She has a Gollem with her, too.”

“Oh my, what a pleasure to meet you. You’re here to help us? Thank you so much.”

“Nh— Aah?!”

Fiana’s words of gratitude caused spasms of pleasure to ripple through Luna’s body.

“Is she alright...?”

“Yeah, don’t worry. Her name’s Luna, and she’s just a little shy. Don’t worry if she seems a little jumpy.”

“Ah, I see. It’s nice to have you here, Miss Luna.”

“Y-Y-Yes, good...” Luna breathed heavily as she spoke. I wondered if she was actually okay, since it seemed like her body still wasn’t used to this new kind of pleasure.

“Hey, Miss Luna! Come get the trowels with us! Over here!”

“This way!”

“Huh? No, I—”

A group of little girls grabbed Luna by her hands and dragged her off. Viola hurried after them, a worried expression on its face. Frankly, I could use Earth magic to plant all kinds of flowers and make a lovely little flower bed, but Fiana was trying to teach the kids the value of hard work and co-operation, so I refrained. I decided to join in the old-fashioned way.

A few hours later, we had a lovely little flower bed on the school grounds. Well, lovely by the standards of inexperienced kids, but it definitely had charm.

“We did it...”

“Beep.”

Luna and Viola were just following instructions, but along the way, they started taking more initiative and worked alongside the kids. I was surprised to see a little smile on Luna’s face, even if she hadn’t noticed it.

A little girl with a mud-caked face walked toward Luna. “Thanks shooo much!”

“Nnnh?!”

Luna started twitching and shivering, right on cue.

“C-Could you say that again...?”

“Thanks!”

“A-Auuuh!”

“Are you okay?”

The girl seemed confused by Luna's sudden writhing and gasping.

"Thanks to you, too, Viola!"

"Beep."

Luna swiveled around, shuddering hard and rubbing her thighs together as she shambled towards me.

"T-Touuu... Thish ish baaahd... Nnnh... It feels shhooo good... Mmh... My heart's pitter-pattering... I-It feels better than scooping out a man's eyes, ahhhn... It feels better than being impaled by spears! Ohhh, it's too much... I'm gonna start leaking..."

"Heh. Does it make you feel alive?"

"It really does... Ahh... I never felt this before... I-I'm gonna get hooked on it... You're so cruel, Tou... So bad..."

I mean, it is meant to be a punishment... But I don't really buy that it's cruel given how much you're grinning. Honestly, the way your eyes are rolling back is terrifying, and the fact that you're drooling makes me wanna get the hell outta here.

The pleasure was maybe a little bit too intense for her... I sighed quietly, wondering if I'd made a mistake, as Fiana and a few more children came towards us.

"Alright, class. Let's thank the grand duke and Miss Luna for all their help."

"Ah— Wait, Fiana! You shouldn't—"

"Grand Duke, Miss Luna, thank you for all your help!"

The entire class spoke words of unified gratitude. Their pure, childish hearts were laced with unadulterated appreciation... And they were all focused on Luna and I.

"A-Ah, I'm c-cumming... I-I'm cumming!! Nnhaaah!!"



Luna started squealing like a wild animal before collapsing on the spot. I caught her as she fell, and she grabbed on to my arm. She looked up at me with an expression of pure, babbling bliss.

“T-Tou... Nnh... This is so bad... I-I’m gonna squirt... It’s gonna gush... I-I can’t handle this, aaahn! M-My mind’s b-blanking out, eeehk!”

Luna spoke in a raspy, whispery tone as her body shuddered. This was a bad situation, I could tell that she was definitely close to her physical limit.

The kids here were too pure of heart; I should’ve brought her somewhere with a much more casual expression of thanks.

“Um... Is she okay?”

“She’ll be fine. We’re gonna head back, though. It was nice seeing you all. Take care, everyone!”

I waved off Fiana and the kids, then teleported back to the dungeon cell with Luna and Viola.

“Viola, you can handle her from here!”

“Beep?!”

I left the little purple Gollem behind before charging full-speed out of the dungeon. I could’ve sworn I heard some kind of dripping noise behind me as I fled, but I immediately pretended that I hadn’t heard it.

That was an awful ordeal, but at least I’ve given Luna her punishment now... I can let her go at last. ...It’ll be okay if I let her go, right?

◇ ◇ ◇

Despite the fact that we’d stopped the mutants from causing catastrophic damage, they’d still done quite the number on countries around the world. It was taking a lot of time and effort to repair the damaged towns and cities.

The dwarven-made powered mechanical suits, the Dverg, were instrumental in reconstruction efforts. Frame Gears were too big and cumbersome, and the fact that they required training in the frame units meant that they could only be piloted by particular specialists. The Dvergs had the benefit of being much

easier to learn and control. Plus, Dvergs weren't limited in quantity, so countries all over the world were ordering them via Olba's company.

Olba, ever the shrewd businessman, had predicted this demand in advance of the invasion and stocked up on a large supply of the Dverg units.

"Hmhm... My feelings on the matter are mixed, if I'm honest. It's nice to make sales, but it's sad that it's necessary."

Olba spoke humbly, but the way his ears twitched and his tail wagged betrayed the excitement inside him. He was clearly making an absolute fortune.

Given how well-known Dvergs were about to become across the world, I wondered if I should make a little model of them for the capsule machines. Dvergs were only being employed heavily on the eastern continent, though. On the western side, the brunt of the work was being done by industrial-scale factory model Gollems. I'd headed up to Babylon's hangar, and found myself glancing at all the lined up Frame Gears.

"Guess we won't be using them much anymore, huh?"

"I wouldn't be so sure." Just as I was feeling a little sentimental, Doc Babylon appeared, puffing on her e-cig. Her oversized lab coat trailed behind her.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"It'd be easier if I just showed you."

She pulled out a couple of transparent boards around the size of a notepad each. One had blue dots on it, while the other had red dots on it. They kind of looked like glass panels with polka dot designs on them. I wasn't entirely sure what it was I was looking at.

"Let's say this one here is our world. And this other is Elluka and Fenrir's world. Well, it doesn't really matter which world represents which, anyway... The colored dots are areas with a high concentration of magical energy, now look what happens when they overlap..."

She took both of the panels and placed them atop each other. Some of the polka dots on the map changed to purple spots where the red and blue intersected, leading me to immediately understand what she meant.

“Right. These purple spots are going to be massive mana wells. You’d probably call them mana reservoirs, really. Now the two worlds have coalesced, we’ve got quite a few of these on our hands. And you know what that means, right?”

“Behemoths...”

Behemoths were regular monsters that were exposed to abnormal amounts of magical energy, resulting in them growing to terrifying sizes. Typically, these mana wells would only appear in dense forests, deep under the ocean, or at the peaks of high mountains. The Behemoths born from these instances rarely caused issues for humanity. But even a single Behemoth near a human settlement could be catastrophic.

Palerius Island was once so filled with Behemoths that the people living there needed to keep a constant vigil for their own safety. According to the map display I was looking at, these supercharged mana reservoirs were now all over the place.

“I can’t say it means Behemoths are just gonna start showing up today, though. There’ll already be Behemoths at the sites where the mana wells were originally, anyway. It’ll take a few more years for Behemoths to be born at the new sites, too. Plus, Behemoths fight amongst themselves already. All we need to do is monitor these areas and take action when needed.”

In case it wasn’t completely obvious, a mana well wouldn’t dry up just from the creation of a single Behemoth. Multiple Behemoths could be born to the same species in the same area, which would often result in territorial battles that ended up with one or more dead. That ended up being a more natural method of keeping their numbers culled. However, the surviving Behemoths did end up being pretty strong...

“So you’re saying we need to keep our Frame Gears on standby, eh?”

“Right. Also, that world barrier of yours still hasn’t been fixed, has it? There’s no guarantee our world is safe from extraterrestrial invaders in the meantime. The Phrase could have simply been the first.”

I didn’t really want to think about that.

According to the other gods, I had sufficient divinity to fix up the world barrier, but my sisters told me that if I screwed up I could end up causing an even worse situation. Since the Phrase invasion incident so heavily involved a wicked god, God Almighty was going to let one of his guys fix the barrier. Because there hadn't been a god assigned to this world before me, they weren't really allowed to interfere. But now that I was in charge, it was apparently okay to patch it up.

In other words, I couldn't fix it myself for fear of screwing up, but I could ask some of the gods I knew for their help. There was only one issue. None of the ones I knew seemed to have the ability to fix the barrier, either.

Moroha, Karina, and Takeru were definitely not viable options. Karen and Suika didn't exactly seem the types for it, either. There was Kousuke and Sousuke to consider, but their areas of expertise were pretty far removed from something so intricate. Gods like them were specialists in one particular field, and they basically sucked at everything that wasn't in their jurisdiction.

God Almighty told me that he'd send someone to help me out at some point... I just had to hope it was someone who wasn't a raging maniac or a peculiar eccentric.

I headed back down from Babylon and caught my phone ringing in my pocket. I raised a brow at the caller ID. It was Silhouette of the Black Cats. I wondered what she wanted.

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She wanted to discuss something with me, so I headed to the Strain Kingdom's main commerce city, since that's where her HQ was. The city was the second-largest in Strain, and it was home to Silhouette's Moon Parlor, which also doubled as a base for Black Cat activity.

It was noon so the neon lights weren't blaring, but the place looked gaudy as ever... Given that it was a brothel, that wasn't too surprising.

"I wonder what she wants, I do..."

"Hmph... Better safe than sorry..."

Yae and Hilde were clinging to either side of me. There was an unspoken rule

among me and my fiancees that stated I needed to be accompanied by at least one girl whenever I was called out here.

I could understand it, given that even I felt pretty seedy visiting a location like the Moon Parlor. The place smelled like sex, and had a totally shady atmosphere... Now and then, I'd see half-dressed girls walking through the hallways, too.

The beefy bouncer outside the entryway bowed his head and let me in right away. It was a little bit disgraceful that a brothel bouncer recognized me enough to let me in, given I was supposed to be royalty... I decided to ask Silhouette to meet me elsewhere next time, since I didn't want any rumors of me being a brothel patron getting out. At least having Yae and Hilde with me helped combat the idea a bit.

We made it to Silhouette's office on the top floor, only to be greeted by a black panther and a little black cat outside the door. The panther was a summoned beast that Silhouette had called forth with my help a while back. If I recalled correctly he was an elemental creature, a lightning panther.

"This way, Grand Duke."

The lightning panther (Shade, I think his name was?) led us toward his master. Shade was a particular kind of beast that could also communicate, so that was pretty handy.

Silhouette sat in her office, sipping a cup of tea.

"Welcome, my friend. Oho, you've brought different girls this time, have you? You must be quite the vigorous man."

Silhouette grinned slightly as Yae and Hilde exchanged worried looks. I wished she wouldn't tease my fiancees, because I was the one who had to deal with them afterward...

She invited us to sit on a nearby couch, so we complied and immediately got down to brass tacks.

"I was thinking of expanding the influence of the Black Cats to an international level."

“Uh... I thought you guys were already international.”

“Ahh, sorry. I meant intercontinental, I wish to expand our operations to your nations in the east.”

In terms of intercontinental travel, far more people visited the eastern continent from the west than vice versa. This was because people from the eastern continent only really had ships (at varying speeds, some of the faster ones employed wind mages to create favorable gales), while those on the western continents had flying machines and transportation Gollems as well as ships. I also speculated that the differences in culture contributed to this emigration difference. The western continent, the former Reverse World, is home to a naturally curious people who wished to learn more about magic. On the other hand, the people of the eastern continent were very cautious when it came to all this strange magitech stuff from the west.

The very idea of Gollems, which were effectively powerful artifacts, being part of daily life was a confusing thing for them to wrap their heads around. Basically, the westerners were actively seeking to interact with the east, while the easterners were still a little bit apprehensive. Silhouette seemed to be especially eager to expand her own influence.

“So you’re saying you want to start opening brothels in the east?”

“I sure do. Some regular inns, too. We’re trying to run a proper business and all that. My methods are complex. We want you to speak to the countries on our behalf. I’d rather avoid a Zabbit situation repeating.”

Zabbit? Oh, right... That guy from Papillon who kept harassing Silhouette, or whatever.

I remembered seeing him in Allent’s capital city once. He was hassling some orphanage there but he ended up fleeing.

I could understand why Silhouette was trying to make it as a legitimate business. Brothels were often easy targets for criminal underworld types, so it made sense she’d want to avoid any existing crime families trying to integrate her business into theirs.

“So what exactly do you want me to ask, here?”

“I want you to get approval from the monarchs in the east. I’m sure the inns will be no issue, though there may be trouble with the brothel permission.”

Quite understandably, too. Brothels tended to be used as fronts for other sketchy activities, like under-the-table loans or human trafficking. Many brothels were home to trafficked or kidnapped women, too. Though in Silhouette’s case, many of the girls were quite high on the social ladder and simply enjoyed sex work. Problematic customers were also ejected from the premises pretty rapidly.

There were even talks about starting up a brothel in Brunhild’s castle town... I considered it a necessary evil, since readily-available sex establishments would decrease the rate of criminal sexual assault. Either way, it was a bit of a pickle.

“I don’t think the inns will be an issue, yeah. The brothels are gonna have to depend on each country’s personal policies. You definitely won’t get one in the Ramissh Theocracy, I can tell you that much right away. As for us... Would you be opposed to Brunhild’s government managing it?”

I squirmed slightly as the two girls either side of me swiveled and glared. *It’s not like that! I don’t wanna build one because I want to make use of it or anything...*

“Well, I’m sure we’ll be able to work something out. Anyway, now we can move on to the main matter of discussion.”

Huh? That wasn’t what you even called me over for? Just how opportunistic are you?!

“As you know, we still have ties to some of Papillon’s old less-than-scrupulous ventures, and that includes the black market. We found something of particular interest there a while ago.”

Silhouette produced a hefty old parchment-paged tome and laid it out on the table. It looked so old I was surprised it hadn’t crumbled away into dust.

“This book is known as Shuraf’s Encounters. It’s the autobiography of a man named Shuraf Sikes, a priest in Dauburn from long ago. This book contains the truth behind Dauburn and Zadonia’s conflict.”

“Huh? You serious?”

The Nation of Ice, Zadonia, was the long-time enemy of the Nation of Fire, Dauburn. They weren't entirely sure why they were enemies, but the reason was apparently contained in this book.

"I'll cut to the chase. Public knowledge dictates that each country thinks the other stole their offering to the gods, yes? This book states that the offering was never stolen at all. It was never even made to begin with."

I remembered hearing about an offering, and apparently, the offering was supposed to be a live sacrifice. According to High Priest Shuraf's writings, Dauburn was approached by a fire god (like just a powerful spirit) and told to offer up the king's son as a living sacrifice. But the king didn't want to give up his son. He told the god that his son had been stolen away by Zadonia, in the hopes that the sacrifice would be called off.

"So he blamed the other country, huh."

"Indeed. He must have thought that Zadonia would face the god's wrath instead of Dauburn if he shifted the blame to them. But, by unfortunate coincidence, a god of ice appeared in Zadonia and asked for the king's son as well. The king of Zadonia, not wanting to give up his child, did the exact same thing the king of Dauburn did... He blamed the other country."

That was definitely a terrible coincidence; I couldn't believe both sides tried to evade the sacrifice in such a ridiculous way. That made the situation even stupider to me.

"Ultimately, the gods took their wrath out on the countries for the missing sacrifices, so nothing changed. Zadonia became a frozen wasteland, while Dauburn became a blazing hell. Then, the gods left. The truth was only known to the upper echelons of each nation, and obviously, they'd never reveal the truth of what they allowed to happen. Shuraf, the Dauburnian priest who was entrusted with the secret, didn't like having to keep it to himself. It's no surprise, really, given that the lies led to years and years of conflict between the two nations. This book is likely the result of him no longer wanting to keep it on his conscience."

It definitely wasn't surprising that the priest was so disturbed by the secret, since it resulted in so much bloodshed and needless conflict. Personally, I was

weirded out by these gods (who were likely just spirits) who asked for human sacrifices. I doubted that I'd get any information from asking the current Flame and Ice Spirits, but I figured it'd be worth following up on at some point.

"Either way, I doubt the countries care about the origins of their animosity anymore. Shuraf's Encounters was found in an old spirit church in the Allent Theocracy. It was written in Holy Spirit Script, likely to obscure the contents, and it almost worked, too. Nobody in the current era can really read it. I doubt the current royal families of either country know about the truth, either."

That made sense enough to me, since it was never meant to be published or anything. It was basically the priest guy's diary, something he never wanted people to actually read. If he had written it in an easier language, he might've been able to stop the conflict... But I had a feeling that revealing the truth would have definitely made him an enemy of both states.

"So how come we only just found the book?"

"We didn't. I've had this book for quite some time. The only issue was deciphering the contents. But, a short time ago, I had the perfect opportunity to read it."

"Huh? What do you—? Oh. Now I get it."

Silhouette's grin made me realize how she'd been able to read the book. It was the Mochizuki Touya app. She likely used it to access the **[Reading]** Null spell. The app included a little readme file with a list of available Null spells, after all. The app was no longer in service, but apparently, she'd managed to fit in some light reading while it was still active. That made me wonder what others around the world might have done before their app usage ran out...

About two days elapsed between the defeat of the Phrase invasion and the end of the app's service... Who knows what they could've achieved in that time...

"S-So... you need Touya-dono's help, you do?"

"Well, Touya. You're known for your mediation abilities between nations at this point. I want you to resolve the conflict between Zadonia and Dauburn. A lot of my workers actually come from those countries. The children of that

country struggle to survive, and those that grow up to be adults are deployed for pointless warfare. Given that the cause of such suffering for many of my girls is something so ridiculous, I'd rather have it all cleared up."

"She's right, Touya... If the royal families of the two countries don't even know why they're fighting anymore, then this is just senseless violence..."

Hilde frowned as she spoke. As a royal herself, she clearly had strong opinions on this. I couldn't blame her, a king shouldn't make his people suffer, much less for generations.

Personally, I didn't really think it was my place as a grand duke to interfere in national disputes. Plus, as this world's custodian, I only really had to interfere when something could threaten the structural integrity of the planet. That being said, this world was soon to become a vacation spot for the divine. An argument could be made that having this world remain as peaceful as possible would make it a better destination.

God Almighty told me to work my hardest with this planet so that I could look back on it at the end and pridefully say that it was the best world it could be. Even if I didn't have any obligation to deal with this conflict, it would likely be for the best if I did.

"Alright, then. I'll give it a shot. At the very least, I should be able to undo the harsh environmental magic in each country."

"Hurray, Touya-dono!"

"Ah, thank goodness... The people will be saved, after all!"

Yae and Hilde smiled widely, heaving sighs of relief. Personally, I felt they were celebrating a little prematurely. It wasn't like I'd done anything yet.

The main issue would be convincing the royal families that Shuraf's Encounters was a legitimate testament... They'd likely see it as me coming in as an outsider and wanting them to admit their own family's mistakes. I didn't think it was a mistake to reject a demand for human sacrifice, though. In fact, rejecting a god (or at least something posing as one) took a hell of a lot of bravery.

However, it was their fear of retribution that caused them to shirk the blame

off to the other nation, and their own cowardly attitudes are what ultimately caused their countries to become cursed. Then they continued peddling a false narrative until the truth was lost to time. In my opinion, that was the biggest mistake of all. As a result, the two countries had been constantly butting heads for the last several hundred years...

Either way, the best course of action now was to speak with the Flame and Ice Spirits. In the worst case, I could get them to come down to earth and pose as the fake gods that the countries had worshiped in the past.

“Thank you so much for your help in this matter. That being said, I’m not entirely sure how it’ll work out... Their hatred really runs deep. Whenever they meet to sign ceasefires or treaties, they get so heated that they never actually get around to the signing. It’s just a lot of screaming and shouting.”

Hearing that didn’t exactly make me hopeful. I wondered if maybe I should just abduct the two kings and let them duke it out until they were satisfied. I often found that older people were too set in their ways, so perhaps talking to their children would be the best way to patch up this matter.

Still, the time for pondering had passed. I had to live up to my reputation and end the conflict. My first stop on this new journey would be the spirit realm. We waved our goodbyes to Silhouette and left the Moon Parlor.

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“Huh? I asked for a human sacrifice? That doesn’t sound like me...”

“Doesn’t sound like me either... But it wasn’t really us, anyway, it was a previous incarnation from hundreds of years ago...” The Flame Spirit sighed softly as she spoke, as did the Ice Spirit by her side.

I’d entered the spirit realm to try and get more answers, but the two of them were pretty vague. Reasonable, given they had no memories of the era I was trying to learn more about.

“Would you girls maybe know anyone who knew you back then?”

“Um... You’ll probably wanna hit up Fire Sis for that. I think she used to know my old self.”

“Same here, but with Her Wateriness. I think she was quite close with my older incarnation.”

The Fire and Water Spirits, eh? Guess that makes sense, the pillar spirits take longer to reincarnate, after all.

I warped to another area of the spirit realm. The spirit realm had previously been a formless milky-colored void with glimmering lights in the distance, but now there were hunks of land floating around. They were like teeny tiny planets, really.

I asked the Earth Spirit to make them, since occupying a completely empty space always felt weird for me. Pillar spirits sure were incredible, though; she managed to form these tiny planets in no time at all. After they were created, spirits started to settle on them and claim little areas for their own. As I touched down on one of the larger mini-planets, the Earth Spirit rose from the ground to greet me.

“It has been some time, milord. Come with me.”

The Earth Spirit had the same kind of dazzling green hair as the forest spirit from the sea of trees, it shimmered as she smiled and turned to lead me into a wooded area. There was an open clearing inside the woodland, with a charming little pavilion built inside. The Fire Spirit and the Water Spirit were sitting by a table, teacups in hand. They certainly got along well for being opposing elements. But, if I recalled correctly, the Light Spirit and the Dark Spirit were also sisters. Perhaps this was just a case of opposites attracting, or maybe them being two halves of the same coin.

Either way, I needed to focus on my primary objective here. I explained the general gist of Zadonia and Dauburn’s conflict and the fact that it was likely to do with the previous incarnations of the Flame Spirit and the Ice Spirit.

“Huh?! A living sacrifice? No way my little flamey would do something like that! The last flame incarnation was about the same as the current one, honestly. Though she could get a little... HOT-TEMPERED. Ahahaha!”

“...Quite. The same should be said of the Ice Spirit. I’m sure she wouldn’t have done something so heinous. It doesn’t seem right.”

“What, seriously...? Then maybe there’s a misunderstanding somewhere...”

The answers the Spirit of Fire and the Spirit of Water had given me were even more confusing. If the spirits hadn’t demanded human sacrifices, then I couldn’t begin to think how this had all started... Before I could start pondering again, the Fire Spirit spoke up once more.

“Oh, come to think of it... around five hundred years back, I remember the Flame Spirit being really mad... She was raging because she’d found someone suited to become a spirit medium, but something went wrong... I think?”

“A spirit medium?”

“Basically a mortal with a strong spiritual side. They can bond with a spirit and even manifest the spirit within them; they’re quite exceptional and rare people. I’d say they’re about a tier above regular spirit contractors in terms of potential.”

The Earth Spirit answered my query.

Manifesting...? Like possession or something? That’s pretty interesting, I imagine that’d let them make full use of a spirit’s power, too.

“So wait... When the spirits demanded a sacrifice, you don’t think they meant...”

“Yeah. She probably wanted the king’s kid to be a medium for her. Spirit tongue isn’t well understood by people who aren’t capable of contracting with us, so it’s possible they misunderstood what she was asking...”

The Fire Spirit patted her hands together as everything clicked into place.

Ugh... So I guess she meant to say something like, “Please give me your child so I can use them as a spirit medium,” and they probably only heard the “give me your child” part...

“Ah, I see now. And when each of the spirits asked why the kings refused to hand over their children, they were lied to... We spirits can read human emotion, so we can tell when we’re being deceived. It wouldn’t be unusual for those two spirits to become upset after being so brazenly lied to after a simple request...”

The Water Spirit nodded slowly as she spoke. It all made sense now. The spirits had simply offered to grant power to the children of the two kings, and they were instead met with strange, nonsensical lies. Their anger wasn't exactly unreasonable in that case. They probably saw a lot of lost potential in the two princes.

Plus, since they could read human emotions, they probably knew that the kings had the intention of using the spirit's power to punish the other country. That probably didn't help their moods one bit.

"Damn... If there hadn't been a misunderstanding, the kings probably would've agreed."

I was sure they would've jumped at the chance to make their children powerful spiritual mediums. If it was a more magically advanced society instead of the Reverse World, they might have had people around who could better decipher what the spirits were saying... This was all basically the equivalent of butt-dialing someone and hearing muffled parts out of context.

Still, now I knew enough to get a feel for the actual truth of the situation. Whether or not the two countries would believe it was another matter entirely. And even if they did believe it, they'd have to swallow their national pride in order to accept it.

The situation was difficult, but I resolved to go and meet the two kings.

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I'd never actually interacted with Dauburn or Zadonia before, so I decided to find a third party to bridge the gap between me and them. I settled on the Allent Theocracy, since it bordered both nations. Plus, Allent was a nation that revered spirits as divine, and has had a long history of worshiping them. The country had never had any direct contact with pillar spirits, though.

"Ah, yes, we have a history of accepting refugees from both Zadonia and Dauburn. The lessons they brought with them have taught us to be very careful when dealing with the sanctity of the great spirits. B-But... Touya, are you truly capable of summoning the great pillars?"

"Yep, sure can. Want me to do it now?"

“N-No! Th-That’s okay! That’s quite okay!”

Allent’s holy king went pale in the face as I spoke. I wasn’t surprised that he’d gotten so surprised. Pillar spirits were a far realm above regular ones, after all.

We were riding in a Gollem carriage straight toward Dauburn’s blazing capital city, Burn. I looked out the window and saw nothing but desert for miles and miles. It was just an endless stretch of sand. There was the occasional oasis, likely the result of the spirit’s residual power being weaker in that area.

The Gollem carriage we were in wasn’t wheeled, either. It was a specialized multi-legged carriage, like the one used by Mr. Sancho when I first met him. It was an all-terrain vehicle that made traveling across sand a total breeze. The tips of its legs had been fitted with flat parts to prevent sinking, but the jostling for everyone inside honestly got pretty bad at times.

I’d stopped by briefly in Dauburn and Zadonia before via my **[Fly]** spell, so I could have easily just warped us there... But I didn’t think suddenly appearing in the nations would be good from a diplomatic introduction perspective.

I didn’t really think the journey would be this bad though... I think I’m gonna barf...

“**[Refresh]**... Hrk...”

《Are you alright, my lord?》

《Yeah, I’ll be okay... Just gotta keep applying **[Refresh]** to myself...》

Kohaku, in her tiger cub form, looked merry as ever as she sat by my side. Apparently summoned beasts didn’t get motion sickness.

“I must admit, Grand Duke Touya... I’m not entirely sure if we’ll be welcomed warmly. We have a relationship with Dauburn and Zadonia, but I wouldn’t say we’re friendly.”

Two other Gollem carriages were traveling with us. One was in front and one behind. It was only natural to bring escorts with us, since we were two world leaders heading toward a country that could be described as neutral at best. Other than Kohaku, I’d brought along Nikola from our knight order, as well as five knights. They were all in the carriage behind us, though I feared they’d be

getting motion sickness, too.

"I don't mind if they're not friendly, I just need to talk to their king. Everything that happens from there depends on them, really. I promise I won't cause Allent any issues with this, though."

"I'm sure it'll be fine... You're the hero who vanquished that wicked god, after all. I can't say that King Dauburn will be the most accommodating of men, but I suppose in the worst-case scenario you'd just crush the country or something..."

Dude, c'mon... Don't just assume I'd handle it so easily! It's not like I'd just take them out with a couple petty insults or anything.

Still, there were definitely some world leaders who needed a good foot up their asses, like that piggish king from Sandora. I hoped that Dauburn's leader wasn't anything like that jackass.

We finally arrived at Burn, the blazing city, before passing through a fanciful arch and heading toward the castle. The city looked quite like Mismede's capital. The buildings were all constructed in a similar mudbrick style. But if I were to compare the two places, I'd say that the people here looked a lot more lethargic. Everyone had bags under their eyes, a symbol of the psychological toll the generations-long conflict against Zadonia must have been taking on them.

Rag-clad children sat in the shadows of buildings, looking forlornly at their own feet. If you asked me, the lack of smiling children was a damning indictment of this nation's failings.

Dauburn's royal castle was built by the bank of a large oasis. It looked very old and was constructed from layered bricks, with no fancy spires or anything like that. It wasn't especially gaudy or even pretty, but the sturdy construction gave off a powerful vibe.

Once we made it through the castle gate, we kept on going a little while before stopping in front of a fountain. I let the holy king get out first, then hopped out of the carriage with Kohaku. It was crazy hot! The Gollem carriage had air conditioning, so it was almost like stepping out of heaven straight into hell. It wasn't a humid heat like Japan's, either. It was a dry heat.

I decided to secretly use a water spell called **[Cooling]** on myself; that definitely helped. A burly man in red leather armor came to greet us. Next to him stood an elderly man in a red robe. Dauburnian soldiers wielding red spears stood by their red Gollems, all lined up either side of us as we walked up the mudbrick steps. It felt like they were putting on a display, like peacocks. I wondered if the gaudy red show was meant to intimidate us or something.

“A fine welcome to Dauburn, Holy King Allent. And... you must be Brunhild’s grand duke, yes?”

“That’s right. My name’s Mochizuki Touya. It’s a pleasure to meet with you, and thank you for allowing us passage.”

The beefy armored guy, who was probably some kind of general or military leader, raised a surprised brow as I spoke.

“Is something wrong?”

“No, I uh... You just speak pretty humbly for a king... Uh, sorry for the rudeness.”

“I started off as an adventurer, so I don’t really feel the need to hold myself above other people. Maybe I should apologize for not acting royally enough, ahaha.”

The military man almost went wide-eyed at my response, but he shot back a grin toward me. Apparently, he liked my style.

He looked like he was almost forty or so. He had short black hair and light brown eyes, and a scar ran along his jawline. He definitely seemed to be some kind of military veteran, he didn’t strike me as someone who was highborn. He’d probably worked his way up the ranks from a common background.

“Well, let me properly welcome you to Dauburn. I’m Glenn, general of Dauburn’s principal army.”

“Nice to meet you, General Glenn.”

He didn’t list his surname, which meant he definitely wasn’t a noble. After a moment of pause, the old man by Glenn’s side bowed his head to me.

“And I am Dauburn’s prime minister, Rosso Phoenix. A pleasure to meet you.”

The old man, Rosso, seemed like he was about to lose his glasses when he bowed his head. He deftly pushed them back up his nose. He was clearly of noble birth, which made sense for a prime minister. I couldn't read much from the old guy's expressions. There was no smile on his face or warmth in his actions. He just seemed to be acting out of duty.

"Now, if you'll follow me. His Royal Highness is waiting." The holy king and I followed after Rosso and Glenn, while Kohaku trailed behind me a little. Behind her were Nikola and my knights, along with the holy knights of Allent and their silver Gollems.

The castle's interior was much like the exterior, built solidly and non-flashy. It was quite charming, in all honesty... But I couldn't help but feel like the place was a little bit run-down and weathered. It kind of made you think maybe the place should be closed for renovations, or at the very least reminded you of its age.

The country definitely felt like one struggling with poverty, which made sense. Between the constant skirmishes, the scorching heat, and the poor international relations, it was obvious they wouldn't be blossoming. No matter how things turned out between me and the king, I was going to get the flame spirit to do something about the environmental disasters here.

We made it to a doorway deep within the castle halls, where two red Gollems stood. They opened the door, and Glenn stopped to lean on a nearby wall. Apparently, this was as far as he could go.

The large room had a long table in the middle, which was adorned with candlesticks and flowers. I noticed some noble-garbed men standing by a great throne, along with some rougher men who wore armor similar to Glenn's. They were likely the top brass of the nation.

At the far end of the room, atop the throne, was a man. He looked to be in his late forties, and he had facial hair that covered both his upper lip and his jawline. His head was adorned with a piece of cloth bound by a band. If I remembered correctly, it was an Arabic headdress known as a keffiyeh. His clothes were clearly of fine making, a flowing robe embroidered with red and gold stitching, along with a stomach-warming strap tied around his rotund belly.

A gold-plated dagger sat about his waist.

The man was none other than the king of Dauburn, Jaharade Bier Dauburn. Seated right by his side was a younger man dressed in similar attire. If I had to guess, I'd say he was around twenty years of age. He had a keffiyeh on his head, and his skin was dark, though not as dark as his eyes. Much like the king, he wore a golden dagger about his waist. He was likely the prince.

"A warm welcome to Dauburn, Holy King of Allent and Grand Duke of Brunhild. What little we have to offer in terms of hospitality is all yours."

King Dauburn gestured for us to sit down. He had a smile on his face, but I could tell he was trying to ascertain our intentions. I could understand his suspicions; I was fairly young to be ruling a country, after all.

The holy king and I sat at the other end of the long table, which left quite an amount of space between us and our host...

"Now then, what can we do for you? I assume you've come with a purpose?"

The king of Dauburn immediately cut to the chase. He clearly wanted to know what my intentions were with him, and it was fairly obvious he was only entertaining me because I'd come with Allent's backing.

Either way, I didn't forget my purpose. I began explaining Shuraf's account, and the truth I'd uncovered about the conflict between Dauburn and Zadonia. As I continued speaking, I could see the government officials growing angrier and angrier with me. Eventually, one of the men, a military leader with a thick mustache, crashed his fist into the table and looked at me with raging eyes.

"How dare you! Did you come here to mock us?! Our land is cursed because those monsters in Zadonia stole our offering to our god! How dare you come here and act as an apologist for them! Did they send you with this seditious material?!"

"No, listen. It's a misunderstanding, that's what I'm saying. The king from back then simply misunderstood the god's wishes and thought it wanted a live sacrifice, it's just—"

"Enough with this sacrilege! How dare you insult our leader's ancestry! You think some backwater duke can charge in here and attempt to shame us into

submission?! Did you think we'd let you go unscathed for such an affront?!"

The furious man reached for his sheathed scimitar, prompting Nikola and my knights to reach for their own.

I quickly raised a hand, telling my soldiers to stand down. I looked back at the angered military man. He was glaring at me pretty intensely, but I was actually kinda mad, too. I didn't appreciate him calling me backwater, or acting like I was an unfit leader.

"Let me start over from the top. There was no god, it was a powerful spirit. The ruler of this country back then misinterpreted its demands, shifted the blame to the other country, and misled the people. I'm not holding any of you accountable for that, it's hardly your fault. Zadonia did the exact same thing. I wanted to bring the truth to you, in the hopes that the two countries would learn to get along better."

"Pah! You suggest we join hands with Zadonian vermin?!"

"Don't make us laugh, you child! Why would we ever want to bridge connections with those lowlives?!"

"Like we'd ever forgive those thieves."

The roaring members of government gradually gave way to the king, who rose from his seat.

"Grand Duke... I must admit you surprised and interested me with your topic today. However, you've crossed a line. There is a saying in our country that says the new recruit who talks too much will not have a long career. Those who stick their necks out to butt in may find that neck slit. Understand?"

I definitely understood. There were a few phrases like that back home. In general, there was safety in silence.

"Zadonia is our oldest foe. We cannot make peace with them. Only when Zadonia, the country of thieves who stole from us, is vanquished, can we know peace."

"And when will that be? Ten years? A hundred? Has your history of war brought either nation anything but tragedy? If you keep this up, both of your

countries will be ruined.”

“Enough of your insolence, boy!”

The mustached man stepped in front of the king, roaring out in fury as he drew his blade and charged toward me.

“General Jhaghil, stop this at once!”

The general ignored the words of his young prince, and recklessly swung his blade at me.

“Kohaku.”

《As you command.》

Kohaku, who had been curled up by my feet, instantly transformed into her true form and let out an immensely intimidating war cry.

“Gh-Gheeh?!”

The charging general was blasted backward by Kohaku’s shockwave. Kohaku’s true form sparked fear in the government officials, who stood up from their chairs in a panic. Glenn, who’d been standing by outside, charged into the room after hearing the sudden commotion.

“Your general drew his weapon first. All I did was retaliate, and non-lethally. I will not apologize for what just happened.”

“This only happened because of your provocation, boy!”

“Father, stop this at once!”

The prince’s words caused the king to briefly come to his senses, and he took out his frustration by bashing a fist against the table. I couldn’t believe how bad their manners were. Were they trying to start an intercontinental war? The prince clearly had a better grasp of the situation than his father and the others.

“I didn’t come in to provoke you. I only spoke the truth I uncovered. Even if this story about the misunderstanding is false, do you legitimately believe that constantly keeping your country at war with Zadonia is the right thing to do? Do you understand that your people are struggling just to survive? Don’t you realize that if Allent wanted to invade your territory and take it, they could

likely do it with no resistance at all?”

“H-Hey now, don’t pull me into it, Grand Duke...”

The holy king smiled softly and shook his head. It definitely wouldn’t be hard for Allent to conquer Dauburn, though. All they’d have to do is tell Zadonia to make a joint attack and that’d basically be manageable with little major effort. The opposite would be true for Zadonia’s case as well. That was why it was painfully obvious that they kept a neutral relationship with Allent in order to placate the holy king. The country reeked of desperation.

“Ghhh...”

The reality of the situation was reflected on King Dauburn’s face. He clearly wasn’t blind to the things I’d said. Silhouette had told me that he was a short-tempered and short-sighted man who didn’t think of future consequences. Given that his meetings with Zadonia always turned into yelling contests, it was likely that the king of Zadonia was the same type of man.

If I was the king, I’d punish the general who tried to slash me, and formally apologize about the incident. But I had a feeling he’d do something more stupid, like point over at me and yell...

“Arrest these interlopers!”

Which was exactly what he did. I wondered if he intended to arrest the holy king as well.

“[Prison].”

“Gwuh?!”

“Buh?!”

The Dauburnian soldiers smashed into the wall of the magic barrier around me and fell to the ground. The knights from Allent were surprised to find themselves encased in the barrier, but Nikola and my knights were perfectly calm about it. It was kind of funny how they’d just gotten used to this kind of thing.

“At any rate, we’re off to Zadonia now. I’d appreciate it if you took what I just brought up into consideration.”

“Hm?! You’re going to invade our nation alongside Zadonia and Allent, then?!”

“Dude, do you have mud bricks where your brain should be? We’re just going to tell them the same story we told you. Try focusing on your own country’s welfare before worrying about the activities of others.”

“Grr... You little brat...!”

King Dauburn gnashed his teeth together in fury as his fists clenched hard. He was quite the character. The holy king let out a small sigh as he watched King Dauburn’s hissy fit.

“King Dauburn, please take it from me. You’d do well to listen to his words. We do not intend to bring harm to your nation, but things hinge on you right now. Will you be known as a wise or foolish leader in the history books? Now is the time for that to be decided.”

With that, we stood up from our seats and left the room. The **[Prison]** around us only blocked hostile people or Gollems, so we walked out of it without a hitch.

After we left the room, General Glenn followed after us to bow his head. It seemed like the country still had some good men in it, at least. To me, that made stopping this war even more important.

Just as I was about to get back into the Gollem carriage, I turned toward the voice of hurried footsteps behind me.

“P-Please wait a moment!”

For a brief second, I thought we were being pursued by soldiers, but it was just the young prince. General Glenn was by his side.

“Yes?”

“Please, I must ask you forgive my father for his attitude. I have a request to make of you. If you are headed to Zadonia, please take me!”

“Huh?” I raised my brow before glancing at the holy king. His brow was raised as well. I had assumed everyone in the top brass of Dauburn would view Zadonia as an enemy, so him asking to go there was peculiar.

“Prince Hakim, we are headed to Zadonia to discuss the same issue we just brought up with your father. Are you certain you wish to come with us, even knowing that the king of Zadonia may have the same reaction as your father?”

“I am certain, Holy King. I want to put a stop to this war. In order to do that, I must understand the other side. There must be people in Zadonia who feel the way I do. It is my hope I can come with you to meet them.”

That was definitely interesting. The prince was clearly more forward-thinking than his father. I glanced over at Glenn, who gave me a small nod. The two of them certainly seemed serious, at the very least.

“Say uh... Holy King, won’t Dauburn claim we kidnapped their prince or something?”

“Why worry about that now, Grand Duke? The Dauburnians effectively declared war on us just now, anyway.”

The holy king raised a fair point. I didn’t exactly care about forging peaceful relations with Zadonia at that point, anyway. They needed time to cool their heads before I’d talk peace with them.

“Alright, then. General Glenn, do you want to come as his guard? I won’t let him get hurt, but I thought I’d offer anyway.”

“Aye, if that’s permissible.”

Then it was settled. I was a little worried we’d have a formation of soldiers coming after us, so I snapped my fingers and opened up a **[Gate]** beneath our feet, moving us along with the Gollem carriages to another location.

After a moment of falling, we found ourselves in an environment much like the sprawling desert we’d been in not too long ago. Except it was all snow instead of sand.

Damn, that’s surprisingly bright... Man, my eyes are— Aaagh! It’s so cold!

I quickly cast the **[Warming]** spell on everyone, because our asses were about to freeze off.

It was quite the sudden shock to have scorching heat turn to blistering cold in the span of a second, but we were now in Zadonian territory. We’d contacted

Zadonia in advance, so now all we had to do was hop into the Gollem carriages and make our way to the capital city, Zado.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Gwuh?!”

The bald general was blasted backward by Kohaku’s shockwave. Part of me started to think that Zadonia and Dauburn could probably get along really well; they were shockingly similar.

“You little brat! How dare you speak ill of my great country!”

The king of Zadonia was as thin as a beanpole, which made him largely unintimidating despite his yelling. He had white hair, an equally white mustache-and-beard, and wore a silver rapier about his waist. A bulky cape flowed down his back, embroidered with fine blue and silver threads. The prince of Zadonia, Frost, sat by his side with a frown on his face. He was a pale-skinned young man who wore the same cape as his father. He had silvery hair and piercing almond eyes. Honestly, he was the very vision of a fairytale prince... in all the ways the pumpkin-pants prince of Panaches was not.

Prince Frost, incidentally, had been the one to guide us to the meeting room. He was quite the friendly young lad, and warmly shook Prince Hakim’s hand upon learning his identity. The friendly gesture had certainly shocked General Glenn.

I asked him about his surprising friendliness on the way to meet his father, and he explained that he felt similarly to Prince Hakim, and wanted to end the war that had plagued their nations for hundreds of years. But no matter how many times he advised his father to bring the war to an end, he never listened. Apparently, the king just yelled at him about it and ended the conversation.

That was why I could understand the frown he wore at the moment. After all, one of their generals had just tried to charge at me, even though I was a friendly envoy from another country. His father hadn’t done anything to calm the situation down, either. I’d be ashamed, too.

“Father! Don’t you see? We must make peace with Dauburn! Surely you must know that only the elderly nobles care about maintaining the grudges at this

point. Our people are going hungry, they freeze to death in their homes, and for what? Our pride? Even if we conquer Dauburn, Zadonia will end up dying anyway!"

"Enough, son! Do you hear yourself? Where's your Zadonian pride, eh? Our ancestors would be ashamed of you, lad! No backbone to speak of!"

"But if the grand duke is speaking the truth, then all of this is the fault of those ancestors to begin with! I'm ashamed of you, Father! For letting our people suffer for your pride!"

"You foolish child! To think you'd be so easily swayed by seditious materials!"

...Damn, they sure are arguing a lot here. There's nothing seditious about what I said at all!

The king of Zadonia, much like the king of Dauburn, had a very short temper. He'd grabbed his son by the collar and looked like he was about to punch him. The son clearly had a similar temperament. He was glaring at his father as if to goad him into punching. I didn't really feel it was my place to butt in, but I didn't want to see anyone getting hurt on my account.

"[Teleport]."

"Whah?!"

The king's punch met with thin air, causing him to stumble forward after his son vanished. Prince Frost was equally confused, having been warped to my side in an instant.

[Teleport] wasn't supposed to be a spell that could affect things other than the caster, but I'd recently developed the ability to use it on objects and people in my line of sight, so long as they weren't moving too quickly. This power was also somewhat limited, however. I could only move one thing at a time and I couldn't move them very far. The power had likely come from my awakening as a proper god, or at least that was the only thing I could think of as the cause.

"Looks like Zadonia's a lost cause, too. Can't say I'm surprised, though."

"M-Maybe there's still a chance?"

The holy king tried to cheer me up, but I could sense the defeat in his tone.

“There’s not much to be done here. The kings clearly don’t care all that much about their ancestry. They’re just using it as an excuse to justify their personal grudges. It’s probably because they’ve been in constant conflict since they were young men.”

Personally, I’d have appreciated it if they just beat each other up one-on-one rather than keeping their entire countries at war. The hate they had for each other clearly ran deep, though. It was pretty obvious that neither wanted to stop until the other was utterly crushed... From what I’d heard in idle hearsay, the skirmishes between Dauburn and Zadonia had increased ever since the two men took their respective thrones.

Zadonia and Dauburn had many historical conflicts, but there were also periods of ceasefires or even something similar to neutrality between the two. During these periods, there was a tense kind of peace, and while no actual treaties were signed, it was clear the rulers back then hadn’t wanted to maintain war while their own citizens suffered.

However, these guys didn’t care about what happened to their people; it was a total mess. They were like a cat and a dog.

“They’re a little like Kohaku and Luli, actually...”

《Please do not compare me to this...》

Kohaku sent me a telepathic protest when I muttered my thoughts. I felt bad, but I wasn’t exactly wrong. Either way, the king of Zadonia was in the middle of a fit, so I couldn’t see him talking to us any time soon. That was why I decided to do the next best thing.

“Hey. Prince Hakim, Prince Frost. Would you two like to discuss the future of your countries with me? I’ll set a venue for us to talk.”

The two princes glanced at me, then each other, and they nodded.

“We’d love to!” the two replied in unison. With that, I decided my business in Zadonia was concluded. Plus, I was starting to get annoyed at the Zadonian soldiers and Gollems bashing on the sides of the **[Prison]** I’d erected. They were noisy as hell.

“Hold it! Just what do you intend to do with my boy, hm? Sell him out to

Dauburn?!”

“Father, you’re clearly incapable of forming proper sentences right now. If you won’t look to the future for this country, then I will in your stead.”

“Silence, you selfish little whelp! You’d do well to keep quiet and do as I command!”

“Shut up, old man! You gotta quit treating me like a little boy!”

The duo started bickering again. I definitely felt for the prince, but I also understood the king’s perspective. His son would always, at least a little bit, be his little boy in his eyes.

“The time for talking is clearly over. Grand Duke, Holy King, take me with you!”

Prince Frost grumpily turned around and headed out the door. He clearly had a short fuse, too... Like father, like son.

“Coldie, you can accompany us.”

“Aye.”

Prince Frost nodded as he spoke to a man in silvery-blue armor. The man bowed his head and followed after the prince. He was the prince’s personal knight, Coldie. He’d been with the prince when he guided us to the meeting room. He didn’t speak very much and seemed to be in his forties. He gave off the vibe of a calm old man, but according to General Glenn, he was a brutal swordsman known as Zadonia’s Shiverblade. He certainly seemed to care more about the prince than the king, though.

We all left the meeting room. I didn’t want anyone chasing after us, so I released the **[Prison]** I’d cast and created a new one with an expanded range. It covered the whole room we’d just left, preventing them from following us out. The spell was certainly one of my most versatile, I loved using it both to keep enemies out and to keep enemies trapped inside it. I’d set it to disappear after ten minutes, but I had a feeling the Gollems and soldiers would continue banging up against it until it eventually deactivated.

As we walked, Prince Hakim started speaking to Prince Frost.

“Er... Is it alright to leave your father in that state?”

“It is, yes. My father bases his every action on his hatred for your father. I refuse to have any part in it, not when it’s bringing my people to ruin.”

Prince Frost’s words caused Prince Hakim to react with a small laugh.

“...Did I say something funny?” Prince Frost narrowed his eyes slightly, clearly somewhat irked by the strange response.

“No, my apologies. It’s just that I felt a close connection to you just now. My own father is driven solely by his hatred of yours, so I feel similarly to you.”

“I suppose you’re right... We’ve both endured difficult circumstances, then.”

Frost smiled back at Hakim. I was glad to see that the sons of two bitter foes could still smile with each other. Still, it wasn’t like I could just delay ending the war until the current kings died.

When we returned to our Gollem carriages, the holy king pulled me aside to ask a question.

“You said you’d be establishing a venue for them. Would that be Brunhild?”

“Yeah, seems the easiest place for it. Neither Dauburn nor Zadonia would be able to get to us all the way there. Plus, I can open up the game room for them, give them a chance to bond, and all that.”

“In that case, Grand Duke... I’d like to impose on you a little with a request...”

Holy King Allent leaned over and whispered what he wanted into my ear. I was a little taken aback by how petty his request seemed in the grand scheme of things, but I didn’t say anything. Sometimes being a world leader meant tolerating silliness from others.

◇ ◇ ◇

“Goodness, the cookies are delicious! Aria, you must try them!”

“Don’t talk with your mouth full, Leti... Ah, they are quite nice, though...”

Two sisters sat side by side with big smiles on their faces. They were chowing down on Lu’s homemade cookies. These girls were Ariattie Tis Allent and Leticia Tis Allent, the granddaughters of Allent’s holy king. Ariattie was eighteen, while

her younger sister Leticia was seventeen. They were daughters of Allent's crown prince, the holy king's son.

Aria wore a light green dress and had wavy golden hair. She had a gentle demeanor about her that made it easy to relax. As I watched her, my gaze fell to the magnificent pearl necklace around her neck. And then my gaze dropped again to the even more magnificent things beneath it... They were huge. I quickly corrected my gaze, however. Elze and the others were with me and I didn't want to get beaten up. Leti, whose assets were lacking in comparison to her sister, had golden hair in a short cut. She was the picture of youthful vigor. Her dress was a light pink, but it was cut shorter to allow for ease of movement. Unlike her sister, Leti was constantly asking questions and seemed to have no shortage of energy.

What the holy king had whispered into my ear was a request. He wanted me to bring these girls along to Brunhild with the two princes. Apparently, the holy king had made the girls quite curious about Brunhild's facilities and culture the last time he'd come home from one of our League of Nations meetings. Since they'd asked him about it so much, he saw the perfect opportunity to send them over. Though there was another motive at play as well, so it wasn't just to sate the girls' interests. To put it bluntly, neither Prince Hakim nor Prince Frost were engaged to be married. They were engaged to some noble girls at one point, but they ended up breaking it off as they were angry with their respective fathers for deciding the engagement without their consent. It must have been rough growing up with fathers like that; I certainly wouldn't have been able to stomach it.

"Princess Ariattie, please try the cream soda."

"Oh my! It's so sweet yet refreshing!"

"Princess Leticia, just what is this?"

"Oh umm... It's called chocolate, I think? It's a little bit bitter, but it's super yummy!"

The four of them were seated around a small table, each trying out the array of snacks that had been placed before them. I was happy to see they were getting along well.

I was seated at a different table, enjoying a nice cup of tea with the holy king. He was certainly content with the situation.

“...Y’know, I kind of feel like this situation turned out pretty heavily to your benefit.”

“Hoho... Even if that is so, it’s not a bad thing, is it? Assuming this works out, the relationship woes between Dauburn, Zadonia, and my own country will be solved in a single sweeping motion.”

I’d underestimated how cunning this old bastard could be. It was true that this would be helpful from a political aspect, but I didn’t feel comfortable matching up people who may not necessarily get along.

“Prince Frost looks rather infatuated with Princess Ariattie...”

“Aye, and Prince Hakim seems smitten with Princess Leticia. Been a while since I’ve seen the lad this happy.”

Glenn, along with Coldie, sat on either side of the holy king as they spoke and sipped their tea. I was just glad that they hadn’t decided to pursue the same girl, since that would’ve been an absolute nightmare if this had turned into some kind of twisted love triangle situation.

“Oh my... This is quite the situation, you know? It’s not love at first sight, but there’s certainly a seed of love being planted, you know? With the way things are going, I could see them warming up...”

“Tsk... Of course you’d show up...”

I groaned slightly as I heard Karen’s ever-familiar voice. My eyes shifted to the side slightly, meeting with her grinning face.

Of course she’d show up when there’s a love talk going on... Like a cat to catnip or a moth to a flame, that’s her all over. Geez.

“I’m neither cat nor moth, you know?!”

“Yeowch!”

Karen had brought a fierce karate chop down upon my head, which could have been avoided if she hadn’t been reading my mind without permission!



I clutched my head in pain, but Karen had already started walking towards the young lovebirds. It seemed like she'd found her targets and wasn't about to let go. If Karen got involved in your relationship, then it wasn't going to end at a fling. They'd either fall head over heels or separate entirely, there was no other option. But I didn't mind; Karen generally knew what she was doing. I turned to the Holy King with a burning question.

"Even if this works out with the princes, what about their fathers?"

"Well, ideally we could have the princes ascend the thrones, but that's easier said than done..."

He was definitely right about that. I didn't think the kings would be eager to relinquish their thrones to their sons this early. In the worst case, we'd just have to wait until they died, but it was entirely possible they'd disown the princes by then. As I grumbled my concerns, the Holy King continued speaking.

"I do not believe that Dauburn or Zadonia would disown their sons, as they are the sole remaining heirs... However, we can't discount the potential of it happening. There have been many cases in the past in which kings have disowned their children and selected a successor from outside the bloodline."

Personally, I hoped the kings wouldn't be stupid enough to do that, but they didn't exactly seem like the most level-headed of men.

"Well, maybe we could figure out a way for the princes to gain more power and, oh, uh... I guess it's not really appropriate to talk about this in front of Glenn and Coldie, huh?"

"Nay, Grand Duke. I support the prince and believe he can do better for the people of Dauburn. The only ones who wish to maintain the war with Zadonia are the old folks in the nobility. The regular nobles and the commonfolk want to put an end to the fighting already. A lot of people get radicalized in their youth to fight for their country, but as they get older their rage is directed toward the nation that keeps forcing them to fight. Plenty of people have been fleeing the country for Allent, too... It's a mess."

Glenn certainly didn't mince words, but I could see the sadness in his eyes as he looked down at his teacup.

Coldie nodded slowly and spoke up as well.

“I feel the same about Zadonia. Even if we won the war, we wouldn’t be able to handle Dauburn’s land. Most people don’t care about the war, either. If we look at Allent, we see a land with fair weather and fertile farmland. It’s only natural we’d lose so many people to migration for greener pastures.”

“Honestly, the migrants from your countries cause my nation no end of trouble. We’d love to gladly welcome them, but we do not have the resources to house and feed them all. Many have become bandits in our mountainous regions as a result. It has been quite the trouble for our people, and it has only gotten worse since the ascent of the current two kings.”

I understood the holy king’s anguish. From his perspective, it’d probably be better if Dauburn and Zadonia just collapsed. Though if that happened, there’d be a huge flood of refugees flowing into Allent, and he probably didn’t want that, either.

“So basically you’re saying the commonfolk of either country would be happy to lose their kings?”

“As someone born to commonfolk, I would be happy to see Prince Hakim in power.”

“As someone who sees the plight of the commonfolk, I would endorse Prince Frost’s immediate succession.”

Glenn spoke a little more vaguely, but Coldie seemed resolute. At the rate things were going, I feared maybe a coup was on the horizon. A forced succession through military action would only cause more long-term suffering. I wasn’t sure what to do at all.

I looked at the budding young couples talking to Karen and let out a small sigh. If only the kings of Zadonia and Dauburn could become that friendly.

“Maybe I really do need to kidnap them and use the suspension bridge effect...”

“I’m not sure that sounds like a very good idea, whatever it is...”

The holy king sounded a little frightened by my muttering, but I decided to

ignore him.

I'll get Doc Babylon to help me prepare for it... I'm sure there are some tools in the storehouse, hehe... Yeah, I'm getting a pretty good idea, now... Hehe... This is gonna work for sure...

"Touya-dono is making his frightening face again, he is..."

"Yep, that's Touya for you."

"I'm getting rather used to this..."

I heard Yae, Elze, and Hilde commenting from the nearby table, but I paid no heed. The two kings had been quite rude to me during my first meeting with them, so I felt it was only fair to help give them a little perspective.

◇ ◇ ◇

Jaharade Bier Dauburn woke up in a white room. He didn't recognize his surroundings, and could only really notice a dim light source from the ceiling. He wracked his brain to figure out how he could have arrived here. All he remembered was angrily downing some cheap booze and passing out. Now he was here.

"What is this?!"

The room was arranged as a perfect cube, and it had only a single door. But the door had no handle, and it wouldn't budge no matter how hard he pushed against it. He wondered perhaps if the door had a sliding mechanism, but that yielded no result either.

He was trapped like a rat. The moment the King of Dauburn realized this, he immediately jumped to the baseless conclusion that Zadonia had done this to him. After all, Zadonia was the sworn enemy of Dauburn. That Mochizuki brat could wield unusual magic, he did not doubt that Zadonia and the boy had conspired to capture him. They'd killed his boy, and now they were going to kill him. The fury and anguish bubbled up in the man, so he started to violently kick the doorframe.

"Bastard! Release me! You'd imprison a man while he's unconscious?! Fight me like a real man!"

Despite his screeching and hollering, no reply came. He walked to the other side of the room and charged towards the door, slamming his full weight into it. It didn't budge an inch.

"Shit, damn it! You dare make a fool of me?!"

His breath grew ragged and uneasy, but the door didn't open. King Dauburn stepped back and looked around the cubic room. He suddenly noticed a square button on the floor in one of the corners. He then noticed three other buttons in the other corners.

He stepped on one of the buttons. Nothing happened. He stepped on the other buttons, and tried to work out some kind of sequence. Nothing happened.

He paced around the room until he was exhausted, and eventually he simply sat down on the floor. But the moment he sat down, the floor began to rumble and vibrate. The wall to the left of the door began to sink down into the ground, showing him what was on the other side. When the rumbling subsided, he saw another white room past the wall. It was identical to the one he was in; they'd been placed side by side with only the wall diving them. His eyes widened in anger when he saw the man in that room. The man in that room's eyes widened in anger as well. They were both seated in their respective rooms, apparently having performed the exact same actions.

"You bastard!" King Dauburn snarled, scrambling to his feet.

The man he saw was his worst enemy, after all. Junas Lem Zadonia.

King Zadonia also snarled and scrambled to his feet, muttering something inaudible as he pointed. King Dauburn knew that he was being insulted, so he balled up his fists and charged toward his hated foe. King Zadonia did the exact same thing, charging full-pelt towards his lifelong enemy. Neither of them stopped to consider why they couldn't hear the other. Until it happened.

"Hngh?!"

"Gngh?!"

The two men slammed full-speed into the reinforced glass that divided their rooms. They ended up hurting themselves pretty badly as a result.

“Ghhh...”

“Hnnn...”

Both men rolled around on the floor, squirming in pain as they clutched their wounded faces. The entire scene was being watched by a few unimpressed individuals, hidden from sight.

◇ ◇ ◇

“...Touya, do these men have brain damage?”

“If they didn’t before, they probably do now.”

Doc Babylon and I were huddled around a monitor watching the whole mess play out. She was completely exasperated by their stupidity, and it hadn’t even been ten minutes.

Once the men recovered from their injuries, they started to hurl insults at each other from behind the glass. Apparently they didn’t care that neither could hear the other.

“You utter bastard! How low must you have sunk?! Too scared to beat me in a fair fight so you had that brat capture me, eh?!”

“You utter bastard! How low must you have sunk?! Too scared to beat me in a fair fight so you had that brat capture me, eh?!”

“You miserable lout! You couldn’t rely on your own strength so you had to use that backwater brat’s power instead?! Pathetic!”

“You miserable lout! You couldn’t rely on your own strength so you had to use that backwater brat’s power instead?! Pathetic!”

“No wonder Zadonia’s falling to ruin with a man as petty as you at its head!”

“No wonder Dauburn’s falling to ruin with a man as petty as you at its head!”

Part of me wondered if these guys were secretly twins or something because their insults were in perfect sync.

“Touya, I’m starting to think we’d have a better chance at getting dogs to ballroom dance than getting these idiots to work together.”

“Well, a cornered dog might end up working alongside a cat if the situation

calls for it. Let's watch them and see how it pans out."

I grinned slightly at the two men, who apparently weren't done bitching at each other.

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It had been an hour since King Dauburn had started yelling at his sworn enemy, but his throat was drying out and he was starting to realize the futility of his situation. He realized that no matter how hard he yelled, there wasn't much point in it if the other man couldn't actually hear it. But seeing King Zadonia yelling inaudibly at him caused his frustrations to surge.

King Dauburn started to actually take stock of the situation. His enemy looked as though he was imprisoned as well. Could it be that he'd been kidnapped, too? Could he not be the perpetrator of this act?

Just as doubt began to settle in King Dauburn's mind, he noticed that one of the four corner buttons in his room had started to blink. He raised a brow in surprise and moved to step on it. Nothing happened. It blinked again, so he repeated the motion. Once again, nothing happened. He looked over to King Zadonia's room through the glass, seeing that his foe was staring at his own blinking button in the corner of his room.

King Zadonia moved to step on it. Nothing happened. Much like King Dauburn, he tried again, to no avail.

King Dauburn felt a competitive nature rise up in him as he saw King Zadonia stepping on the button, so he started to step on his own as well. When the two of them stepped on the button at the same time, the doors in their respective rooms slowly rose up around ten centimeters.

"Oho?!"

King Dauburn dashed over to his door, trying to pull it upward with all his might. It didn't budge.

"Hgh... Ngh... Ghhh!"

He spent several minutes wrestling with the door, but it seemed to be an impossible task. He glanced to the side and noticed King Zadonia straining

against his own door.

“Pfft. What a fool, he’s just wasting his strength!” King Dauburn sneered as he spoke, completely ignorant of the fact he was describing himself only a few minutes ago.

King Zadonia noticed something, turning away from the door. King Dauburn suspiciously tracked his enemy’s movements and saw that another button was blinking in the other room. King Dauburn turned around, wondering if the same had happened in his own cell. Sure enough, one of his buttons was blinking. He moved to step on the button right away. Nothing happened. He tried a few more times, and the door eventually moved up again. He looked over and saw King Zadonia stepping at the same time as him.

“Hoh... Does the door only move upward when we both step at the same time?”

The next button in both rooms began blinking, inviting the kings to take their next step. The two kings glared at one another, but clearly they had the same idea despite the glass blocking their voices. They stepped on the next button at the same time. The doors moved up again, just a little bit. The two of them had proven their theory, so they moved to step on the final button at the same time.

A rumbling rang out as both doors opened fully.

“Tsk... His opened, too? That’s annoying...”

King Dauburn wasn’t super happy about the idea of helping his sworn enemy. At the same time, King Zadonia was doing the exact same thing in his own room.

King Dauburn’s door led to a long hallway that stretched out a long way. He kept up his guard as he proceeded down the hall, and eventually found himself at a staircase leading upward. The king noticed light emanating from above, and it was clearly from a natural source. He’d clearly been confined underground, but now he had a way out. He charged up the stairs and found himself emerging on a sandy shore. A shining sea stretched out far along the horizon. Wherever King Dauburn was, it was neither his nation nor Zadonia.

“...Just where is this place?” muttered the king, but he suddenly turned in shock as he realized another man had said the exact same sentence. It was King Zadonia.

“Bastard!”

“You fiend!”

Each man grabbed the other by the scruff of the neck, then they both flung out a punch. They fell to the sand, taking turns clambering over each other to punch each other in the face. They snarled and growled like wild animals, completely lost in the throes of fury.

“Return my son, you spineless coward!”

“Your son?! Why don’t you return mine, you filthy thief?!”

“Your country’s filled with thieves, maybe look at yourself before criticizing me!”

“Shut the hell up, your people are all liars!”

The two men continued screeching at each other, jabbing each other over and over again. Their actions were grisly and boisterous, something you wouldn’t expect from royalty.

“W-Wait, hold on!”

“Shut it! You think I’ll hear you out after all this?!”

“No, really! Look over there!” King Zadonia yelled out through bruised and swollen lips, pointing behind the equally battered King Dauburn.

“You think I’d fall for that?!”

“Hngh!”

King Dauburn shot his right fist forward, bowling the other man over with a clean hit. As King Zadonia tumbled backward, King Dauburn turned around and saw the grand duke of Brunhild sitting on the beach. He was casually lounging beneath a parasol. Donning a pair of sunglasses and holding a tropical drink in his hand, the man was the very picture of peace. He was wearing a Hawaiian shirt, though neither of the kings would know that. There was a little white tiger

cub by his side.

“Wh—?!”

“That’s... what I was trying to point out!”

“Ghugh?!”

King Zadonia had come back in full force with a heavy dropkick to his enemy’s back. King Dauburn staggered forward and fell face-first into the sand.

“Pretty pathetic, aren’t they, Kohaku? They sure ain’t very kingly.”

“Right you are, my liege.”

“Don’t talk about me that way!” screamed both kings in unison as they charged toward the sneering grand duke.

But a creaking sound rang out, and the two men collapsed into a dug-out sandpit. They’d fallen for a completely basic pitfall trap. Even though it was only a simple mechanism formed of a dug-out area and some weak plywood boards, they’d charged headlong into it. They weren’t hurt by the fall as the pit was only two meters deep, and the bottom had been padded with slime cushions. The sand on the sides had also been packed properly, so it wouldn’t cave in.

“If you fail to look at the situation around you, it’ll end up biting you in the ass, fellas. Though I’d say your asses are plenty bitten at this point, right?”

“You little twerp! Who do you think you’re messing with?!”

“Don’t you dare talk ill! Who are you to trap and make a fool of me?! What are you after?!”

“That’s for me to know and you to find out.”

The grand duke flashed a cruel grin and disappeared. Unbeknownst to the two, he’d shown up to direct their hostility toward a third party instead of each other, but he was clearly having fun jerking them around.

The two kings started clambering out of the pit, but it took them far longer than it should have. Why? Because whenever one man got a little further than the other, he was pulled down by his resentful foe. The men finally escaped, but covered in sand and muck.

“Gah... That little twerp has to be a demon!”

“W-Wait, what’s with the rumbling?!”

King Zadonia growled, but King Dauburn had picked up on the fact that the ground had been shaking every so often. He turned around and saw a terrifying sight. A massive, monstrous turtle with a black serpent coiled around it.

“GRAAAAAARRRGH!” The two men screamed as one, jumped up to their feet, and started running away with snot dribbling down their noses. The giant tortoise kept hot on their tails, stomping ahead as if to crush them. It was slow, but it took great strides, so unless they ran full-pelt they’d be caught by the beast. Desperate for their lives, the two men dashed as hard as they could.

“Our master certainly works us hard, doesn’t he?”

“He sssaid he’ll give usss a deliciousss feassst later on, ssso let’sss jussst grin and bear it for now.”

“Fair point. I’m looking forward to that tasty shortcake...”

“I’ll be sssavoring the deliciousss pudding.”

Sango and Kokuyou continued charging after the kings, maintaining just enough speed to never actually catch up with them. Ideally, they hoped, the two kings would run out of energy with which they could hit each other.

“J-Just where... are we...?” King Dauburn, finally spent of all energy, fell to the sunset-dyed sands with his arms spread out. King Zadonia, wheezing and groaning next to him, begrudgingly spoke up in response.

“How would I know...?”

“I wasn’t... asking... you!”

“You wanna... Fight?! You bast... Hh...”

The two of them rose up slightly to glare at one another, but they fell flat on their backs in no time at all. They were well and truly out of energy.

“I’m so hungry...”

The two muttered the exact same thing, causing them to scowl at each other. After a short pause, they simply looked away and grumbled.

Eventually, they found themselves more sleepy than hungry, and the two promptly passed out. Normally they wouldn't do something so reckless as falling asleep near a hated foe, but a little bit of sleeping magic happened to make its way over their heads. The snoring men were approached by a young man and a tiger cub.

"They certainly dozed off fast."

"People from the reverse world have a lower magical resistance, that's all. Anyway, let's get started on phase two of the plan."

Touya took out two sets of shackles and chains from his **[Storage],** and quietly sang to himself as he clasped them around the ankles of the unconscious men.

"...You seem to be having fun, my liege."

"Who, me? Not at all... This is all to help them become better friends. There's no way I'd be enjoying this, Kohaku. No way in the least. Maaan, it sure is tough being a villain, haha."

Touya dismissed the words of his animal companion and began to focus his magical energy on the two men.

"Brand, o Dark. Sinful Brand: [Guilty Curse]."

He'd applied special curse magic to them, though perhaps calling it that was a little bit too villainous. In this case, it was simply a way to curb their behavior. This spell could do all manner of things to people if they broke the taboo placed upon them. It could even rob someone of their life if used the wrong way. As such, this magic was considered forbidden by any civilized nation.

"Are you sure you aren't going too far?"

"I'm sure it'll be fine. This is all setup, after all. It'll pay off."

The grand duke grinned wide, though his words did little to ease the tiger's anxiety.

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King Dauburn felt the shifting sands beneath him as he woke, proving that the previous day's events weren't just a bad dream. As he tried to stand up, still weak from his earlier exercise, he noticed a strange metallic jingling sound from

his right ankle.

“What in the world...?”

His right ankle had been shackled and tied to a fifty-centimeter chain. Attached to the other end of the chain was another shackle, one clasped around the left ankle of the still-sleeping King Zadonia.

“Mmmh...?”

King Dauburn yanked on the chain, wiggling King Zadonia’s leg and causing him to stir from slumber. The man awoke to the sight of his hated enemy, and he immediately noticed he was clasped in irons. King Zadonia wearily scrambled to his feet, casting a scowl over at his foe.

“What happened here?!”

“How would I know?!”

The two of them snarled, each man gripping the other by the scruff of his collar. Thankfully, they weren’t actually stupid enough to believe the other man was responsible for this particular incident. They just wanted to vent out their frustrations.

“Does this mean I have to stay by your side?! I’d rather spend a full day vomiting!”

“I feel the same! But if you’re so repulsed, then go drown yourself!”

“How about you drown yourself?!”

The men started yelling, gradually escalating the situation until they began wrestling again. King Dauburn got the upper hand, straddling King Zadonia and raising his fist. He brought a punch crashing down towards the other man’s cheek, and... Found himself tumbling backward as if struck by some invisible force.

“GWUH?!”

King Zadonia was equally confused by this sudden turn of events, but he saw an opportunity to inflict some pain. He pulled back his unchained leg, ready to deliver a nasty kick to the broader man’s belly.

“Hngh?!”

But, just as King Zadonia’s foot made contact with King Dauburn’s soft tummy... King Zadonia clutched at his own stomach and fell to his knees. He was assaulted by a strange sensation as if he’d just been kicked very hard.

“Urgh...” King Dauburn slowly stood up again, looking at his hunched-over foe. Gradually, the dots began to connect in his head, but he needed to be certain. He gave King Zadonia’s back a swift kick, only for an invisible force to strike him in the back instead. He fell face-forwards into the sand.

“Ouch...”

This was all the proof he needed. He didn’t know why, but any damage taken by King Zadonia would instead be felt by him. He saw the skinnier man charging toward him, fists balled up, and quickly tried to raise his hand in an attempt to make him stop.

“Wait! Wait! If you hit me, you’ll be hurting yourself!”

“I don’t believe your nonsense, you— BWAUGH!”

King Zadonia performed a roundhouse kick, striking King Dauburn square on the neck. The moment the strike landed, King Zadonia was roughly knocked sideways.

“Idiot. I was trying to do you a favor.”

“Hrgh... Just what is this?!”

“Can’t say for sure, but that brat must be responsible for this. If I hit you, it hurts me! If you hit me, it hurts you! That little brat and his weird magic must be responsible for this!”

King Dauburn gently prodded at his own cheeks; he felt it just fine, but King Zadonia didn’t. Therefore, there had to be rules. The sensation might have only been transferred if it caused pain beyond a certain threshold.

King Dauburn suddenly smacked himself clear in the cheek, eager to test his theory. It still hurt him. He looked over and saw King Zadonia clutching at his own face, wincing in pain.

“B-Bastard! What was that for?!”

“Relax, you baby. It was just a little test. Interesting, though... Even self-inflicted pain is transmitted over to— OW!”

King Dauburn’s right arm suddenly started to sting really badly. When he glanced over to see the cause, he saw King Zadonia pinching himself in the arm.

“So the pain really is sent over, interesting... Or is it more apt to say that our senses of pain have been— AUGH!”

King Dauburn slapped himself on the cheek, knocking the wind out of King Zadonia’s sails.

“Why?!”

“Silence! This is just retaliation for what you did to me!”

“You started it, asshole!”

The two men scrambled, fists at the ready. However... they stopped just short of actually hitting each other. They jumped back and instead opted to punch themselves in the nose. They both screamed out, assaulted by the dual impact of their own punches and their enemy’s punches at the same time. They fell down to the sands, but immediately got back up and began punching themselves in the stomach.

“Bastard! Bastaaard!”

“You stupid asshole! Take this!”

The sun rose clear in the sky, shining down on the bizarre scene of two men ruthlessly beating themselves up.

◇ ◇ ◇

“...Touya, I think these men might actually be stupider than non-sapient animals.”

“...Yeah, uh, gimme a minute. I didn’t actually plan for them to start doing this.”

Doc Babylon was just as exasperated as I was. I’d chained them together in order to force them to work as a team, but I hadn’t really expected them to start hurting themselves to spite the other. The whole point of the curse was to

make them share their pain. If one of them was hurt, they'd both be hurt. If one of them died, the other could even die. I thought they'd begin taking things more carefully, but, uh... apparently not. I didn't think they'd start swinging at themselves instead of each other.

"...Why are they even hitting themselves, anyway? They'd generate an equal level of pain by hitting each other."

Doc Babylon was right, the pain was functionally the same no matter which one of them took it. I wondered if they were hitting themselves because it meant their enemy wouldn't be able to dodge, there'd be a guaranteed chance of the other guy getting hurt. Frankly, I wondered if they were capable of that much thought, though...

I let out a disappointed sigh as I observed the men on the monitor.

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"Huff... Puff..."

"Wheeze... Wheeze..."

The two men were laying on their backs, unable to take any more of the pain. The scorching sun above glared down at them as the heated sand lightly toasted their bodies. As they did, their pain began to fade away. This was the result of Healing magic cast by Touya, though the two certainly wouldn't have ever been able to guess that. Their tummies rumbled as they lay flat on their backs. It'd been a while since either of them had eaten, and if they didn't find food they'd run the risk of starvation. The two of them slowly rose to their feet.

"Guess I can catch some fish..."

"Guess I can forage for nuts..."

The two of them glared at once another, then immediately turned away. The two of them stood back to back before they started to move. King Zadonia headed toward the forest, while King Dauburn headed for the sea. The chains connecting them, however, had other plans. Once they had marched a suitable distance away from each other, they both fell face-first into the sand below.

"THE HELL WAS THAT FOR, BASTARD?!"

“THAT’S MY LINE, SCUMBAG!”

The two of them snarled at one another, butting heads like ferocious animals.

“Do you enjoy getting in my way, wretch?!”

“Don’t make me laugh! You’re the one getting in my way! You can’t just catch a fish that easily, idiot!”

“Pfft. I had a feeling you wouldn’t understand. I suppose it makes sense given your rivers are all frozen over. I’ve captured many fish in the flowing rivers of my fine oasis, ever since my youth. With my talent for spearfishing, I’m sure I’ll have plenty of—”

“Spearfishing? How are you going to do that without a spear?!”

King Dauburn realized that his enemy had a point, and simply grunted in annoyance. There were certainly no spears in the vicinity.

“You’ve no spear, no hook, no rod! How were you planning on catching fish?! With your hands?! Are you going to tell me you were going to catch seaborne fish with your bare hands?!”

“Grr!”

King Dauburn had never tried to catch fish with his bare hands before, so he definitely wouldn’t be able to pull that off. Loath as he was to admit it, his long-time enemy was right.

King Dauburn let out a defeated sigh. This only prompted King Zadonia to go on the offensive.

“And another thing, how were you going to eat the fish? Were you going to eat it raw? We can’t just create a fire from thin air! Has all that heat in Dauburn boiled your brain?! Foraging for wild nuts and fruits is the optimal solution, you oaf.”

“GHHHH! Well, Mr. Big Brain, how exactly were you planning on identifying the stuff you find, huh?! How would you know what stuff’s safe to eat and what’s not?!”

King Zadonia realized that his enemy had a point, and simply grunted in annoyance. He was royalty, so there’s no way he’d be able to do that. He had

the finest cooks in his nation prepare all of his food, and he even had his food taste-tested. He could recognize basic fruits, but had little to no knowledge about which herbs, nuts, or wild plants were safe. The same was true for King Dauburn, though. They were both sheltered royals who knew little of survival outside their majestic walls.

“Honestly, why’d you even suggest foraging in the forest?! You wanna screw up and poison yourself on a regular day, fine! But don’t drag me along with you, I don’t wanna die because of that twerp’s magic and your stupidity!”

“I know some basic fruits and nuts! We won’t know unless we look, will we?! Or do you actually want to starve out here?!”

“You son of a—!”

The men were interrupted by their rumbling stomachs. The two of them sighed slightly, acknowledging their identical predicament. For a brief moment, their eyes met, but they quickly looked away from each other again. The two stayed as far apart from each other as possible, silently walking towards the forest in perfect unison.

“There we go. They’re Persimmo fruits.”

“Yeah, I recognize them. We imported them from Allent once.”

The two men eventually found a tree with red fruits growing from its branches. Persimmos were fairly common, but they couldn’t grow in the extreme climates of Dauburn and Zadonia.

The persimmos shimmered in the daylight, looking remarkably enticing. Unfortunately, they were far too high up. “Should we knock them down with stones?”

“You fool. We won’t be able to hit such small fruits from down here. And even if we did, there’s no guarantee they’d fall.”

“In that case...”

The two of them stared quietly at the massive tree. Ordinarily, this kind of tree would be easy enough to climb, even for children. But the shackles around their feet made things a bit harder.

“We have to try.”

“Mhm.”

The two men stepped towards the tree, their tummies rumbling in unison. This was the first thing they’d consciously decided to work on together, though neither man had actually noticed that detail. They slowly, but surely, started to scale the tree. To their surprise, the chain connecting them didn’t weigh them down, as if unaffected by gravity.

“Ack!”

“Ghah!”

King Dauburn lost his footing, causing him to tumble backward off the tree. Naturally, this resulted in King Zadonia falling as well, due to the chain binding them together. The curse triggered, prompting the men to feel the impact of two falls.

“Fool! Watch where your feet are!”

“I was watching!”

The two grumbled and immediately made for the tree again.

“Here. Place your foot on this part.”

“Here, shuffle over a bit. It’s a little dangerous there.”

The two of them slowly scaled the tree again, giving each other advice here and there. Eventually, they made it to the fruit. The branch creaked slightly, bending below their weight. Given there were two grown men atop it, that wasn’t too surprising.

“Hold on, we need to be careful.”

“I know that! Quit whining and—”

King Dauburn had reached out for the fruit, unable to finish his sentence before the branch snapped. The two men stayed there in agony, having just felt the pain of two drops from the height of a two-story building. But eventually, their gazes settled on the fruit, which had fallen along with the branch. They each grabbed one, wiping it on their clothes to clear any muck, and immediately

bit into it. A sweet flavor danced along the tips of their tongues as they greedily wolfed down their reward.

“Ohhh, it’s nice...”

“Mhm...”

The two of them silently ate the rest of the fruit, going through two each in the blink of an eye. The taste of the fruits had likely been amplified by their extremely hungry states. They looked up and saw more of those tantalizing fruits on higher branches.

“We need more.”

“We do.”

The two men stood up and once again headed for the persimmo tree.

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“Looks like they came together for that, at least.”

“Yeah, just as planned. Glad we put the tree there. I’m gonna have to fix up that branch, though.”

We watched the two kings on the monitor, but we weren’t all that impressed. It’d taken them far too long to get to this point, and they hadn’t really made much progress at all.

I grumbled quietly, staring at the object atop the main desk in Babylon’s research laboratory. It was a small box, around thirty centimeters tall and forty centimeters wide. Inside the box was a small diorama of an island. This was the island the two kings were currently on. It was a simulated world created through a fusion of Space-time magic and barrier techniques. There was an artifact similar to it in the storehouse, which I’d actually been sucked into a while back... That sure was a rough time... There was a board game and everything... This one was a safe pocket dimension, though. There was nothing meaningfully dangerous inside. Ideally, the two kings would learn to co-operate on the island and become better men.

“How are the princes doing?”

“All good on that front. Can’t really see it going wrong. Only the kings and

their top nobles were in support of the war, so the populations are supporting their princes.”

Since the kings of Zadonia and Dauburn were now missing, their sons were acting as leaders in their absence. The people of each nation had only been informed that the kings had taken ill, but obviously, I told the princes the truth. I was honestly a little worried since I thought they’d object to me having that kind of control over their fathers, but they seemed okay with it. The holy king of Allent agreed, too, saying it was natural to discard a king who refused to serve his people. I personally thought that was a little extreme, but it was at least understandable.

I wondered if the two princes had already written their fathers off as lost causes... However, I decided to just hope that they had faith in me to reform their dads. That would make me feel better, at least.

The two princes had called for a ceasefire with each other, and they’d begun preparing for negotiations. The older nobles had expressed dissent towards the idea of peace, but they were quickly silenced by the savvy young princes. Apparently, they’d done their share of investigating, and found that many of the nobles had been dipping their hands into the national treasury, or taking shares from war supply convoys. They’d basically been making constant profit from the never-ending war machine. Thus, the nobles didn’t actually care about the people they were fighting. They just wanted to fill their own pockets. That meant the only people in all of Dauburn and Zadonia who actually cared about the war on principled grounds were... the kings.

Just like in the tale of the Emperor’s New Clothes, these men had their warped worldviews validated by those below them for insincere reasons. It was pretty pathetic, to say the least.

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“OIIINK!”

“AUUUUGH!”

The two men yelled out in unison, fleeing from a tri-horned boar that had come out from the forest depths.

They'd set out a pathway earlier, so all they had to do was run toward the sweet spot without slipping up. All was going according to plan.

"Make sure to time it right!"

"Yep, I know! Three, two, one!"

King Zadonia counted down, prompting both men to leap over a certain something. The charging boar behind them didn't jump and found itself tumbling into a large dug-out pit.

"GRAAARGH!"

"We did it!"

The two men cheered merrily as they looked at the fallen boar. It had been pierced by various wooden stakes they'd left at the bottom. The two of them snaked rope-like vines around the boar's legs, pulling it up out of the pit. It was quite the bulky creature to shift, but the two of them were so excited by the prospect of fresh meat that they diligently worked together for it.

It had been two weeks since they woke up on this mysterious island, and they'd gotten used to a hunter-gatherer lifestyle. They'd found an area with lots of easily-sharpened rocks, so they'd managed to fashion spears and arrowheads by combining various materials. The two of them had even managed to build a proper campfire and even a spit for cooking food.

The two kings had no idea that a certain grand duke had secretly been leaving convenient objects for them, dropping off useful raw materials like obsidian for them, or casting Fire magic at just the right moment, but that wasn't something they necessarily needed to know. They'd faced danger together, risking life and limb. They were hounded by that tortoise-snake combo a few times, and they were even terrorized by a blue dragon... But, gradually, island life was starting to grow on them.

The two of them hauled the boar back to their beachside camp, where they carved it up with their obsidian knives. They then began roasting it. They didn't know this, but the creature they'd killed was a tri-boar. It had flesh so succulent that it could even be enjoyed raw, and its native habitat was southern Lestia. It had been airdropped to the island via a certain spell, of course.

“What are we doing today?”

“We should go fishing. We’ve got spears now, after all.”

“Oh yeah, you old bastard. You’re supposedly good at it, right?”

“Bet your withered old ass I am. I’ll catch us a tasty one, for sure.”

The two men laughed together, happily munching on their meal. In the span of only two weeks, their relationship had completely changed. The two men, in tattered clothes and unkempt hair, couldn’t possibly be recognized as kings at a glance. They were just fellow castaways, trying to live their best lives possible in their new home.



The (not actually) harsh environment where they had (not really) struggled to survive had given them a newfound lease on life. The two cheerily picked up a spear each and set off for the water's edge. But, before they could do that, a familiar sight appeared before them. The grand duke of Brunhild was sitting on the beach. He was casually lounging beneath a parasol and holding a fruity drink in his hand.

They narrowed their eyes on sight, their rage toward the man who'd brought them to the island impossible to quell. The two of them charged in perfect three-legged unison toward the lounging boy.

"You wretched little—"

"You wretched little—"

Much like the boar, and much like the first time they'd seen Touya on the island, the two men went plummeting into a pitfall trap.

"...I'm surprised they fell for that a second time, my liege."

"Come now, Kohaku. They might not have changed in that way, but they're certainly different in some other ways."

"If you say so."

Touya took off his sunglasses and casually wandered over to look into the pit. He looked like a typical tropical tourist in his Hawaiian shirt and beach sandals.

"Been a while, boys."

"You little shit! How dare you!"

"Come down here and see if you can talk so big!"

The two spewed insults up at the young grand duke, but Touya was just impressed they had that much fight left in them.

"Now, now, fellas. I actually came here to show you something."

"And what's that?"

A video began playing, projected into the air above the pit. It showed a battlefield. Two factions were engaged in gruesome conflict. One side wore red leather armor, while the other wore blue mail armor. Dauburn and Zadonia

were engaged in total war.

“What is this?!”

“Why are they fighting on such a scale?!”

The two countries were going all-out, both armies brutally clashing against each other. The two men had never seen their conflict represented in this way before, so it was no wonder they were so baffled.

The video showed soldiers impaled on spears, families crying over the corpses of their fallen loved ones, children stumbling through scenes of carnage, while the bedridden and sickly failed to escape.

The two kings silently watched the video, sheer horror on their faces. They’d stood on battlefields before, but only ceremonially. They’d barked their orders and retreated. They’d never had to face the reality of an actual fight before. The scene in the video switched, showing two young men clashing blades against each other. Though they were clad in armor, the two kings immediately knew who they were looking at.

“Hakim?!”

“Frost?!”

Their sons were evenly matched, but it was clear they were fighting with intent to kill.

“Why are our boys out there?!”

“Well, from what I understand... each country thinks the other kidnapped their king. Guess you guys must’ve been well-liked, huh?”

“You monster! You did this!”

“Don’t you feel any remorse?!”

The two of them looked heartbroken as they screamed out at the grand duke.

“Your boys are clashing with each other, just like you wanted. Aren’t they the same as you?”

“No! They’re only fighting because of a misunderstanding! You’re the enemy here!”

“Is that right? I’m sorry, but weren’t you the ones who constantly told your sons that the other side needed to die? Isn’t this the outcome you were hoping for the whole time? Oh, don’t look away. It seems like this fight might be reaching its conclusion.”

The two princes held their swords up, each scanning the other for weaknesses. They rushed forward, passing each other as their blades flashed. Each sword found its mark, and the two men had their bellies sliced open. Blood and viscera fell from their gaping wounds.

The two boys dropped to their knees and fell forward, a crimson pool forming beneath both parties.

“Hakim?! No!”

“F-Frost?! It can’t be!”

“Oh, too bad. Looks like it was a stalemate again.”

The two kings glared at Touya, furious at him for treating the death of their sons so lightly.

“YOU ANIMAL! GIVE HIM BACK! GIVE MY SON BACK!”

“WHAT DID HE DO TO YOU, HM?! WHAT DID MY BOY DO?!”

“Hm? Shouldn’t you be thanking me? If you’d been out fighting instead, then it might have been you two who died rather than them. Try being a little appreciative.”

“What do you—?!”

The two tried to speak back, but the strangely frightening aura released from the grand duke stopped them in their tracks. They were overwhelmed by a sensation far scarier than anything they’d encountered on the island. They were like frogs being stared down by a snake, very much aware that they were nothing more than potential prey.

“Don’t give me that shit. You two have been complicit in this war from the start. Did you never think about how you could die? Or did you think being royal makes you immortal? Think about how many times you two nearly died here. Life can be snuffed out so easily.”

The video switched to a feed showing Zadonian and Dauburnian citizens. They were starving, shivering. The video changed to show images of the two kings eating lavish meals. Images of weary soldiers returning from battle came next, followed by pictures of the two kings pettily arguing with each other over small matters.

Remorse and shame began welling up in the two men.

“...Did we do this...?”

“I... Yes... But, Frost... My boy...”

The two men stared at the ground, seemingly reflecting on the truth they’d just come to realize. Tears began to well up in their eyes, and they sobbed for the sons they’d lost. Their immediate grief mingled with their shame, creating raw feelings of guilt and devastation.

They quickly became overwhelmed by the torrent of emotions. And, with that, they lost consciousness.

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“Think that’ll be enough?”

“I should think so, yes.”

Kohaku answered my half-question as I finished casting **[Sleep Cloud]** on the two men. They were out like a light.

“Man, they sure seemed repentant...”

I snapped my fingers, undoing the **[Invisible]** spell on the two men nearby. It was Hakim and Frost.

“I wondered why you had us stage that mock fight with each other, but...”

“I never thought my father would cry...”

The two princes looked down at their fathers, muddled expressions on their faces. The video I’d shown them was obviously fake. I’d made the two princes stage a fake fight, and even went so far as to include fake blood and special effects. The other scenes were taken from memories of the citizens of both countries.

“I might’ve gone a little overboard, but this should work. If they still want to fight after all this, then I’m done. That might sound a little cold, but they’d be truly hopeless in that case. I’d just leave them to you.”

“Fear not, I promise you that Dauburn will never repeat its mistakes.”

“Indeed. I’ll bring peace to Zadonia, even if it means imprisoning my father.”

The two princes seemed determined. I wasn’t worried about them, to be honest. They seemed to be fast friends, and they had those Allent princesses connecting them as well.

“Right, then. Let’s put an end to this.”

I rolled up my sleeves as I headed toward the snoring, drooling, sleeping kings.

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“Mnnnh...?”

King Dauburn awoke in his bed. Birds chirped outside, and he felt soft linen beneath his body. It was the same as usual... except it wasn’t. For the last two weeks, he’d woken up with sand beneath him, to the sounds of crashing waves. As his thoughts began to uncloud, he quickly jumped out of his bed.

“I-I’m home?! Isn’t this my room?!”

It almost seemed too good to be true. But, indeed, this was his room. He was back in Dauburn. He didn’t know how he’d gotten there, though. He quietly looked around the room.

“Was it... a dream, perhaps?” he muttered to himself as his eyes scanned the room, eventually, his gaze fell upon a certain object on the bedside table.

“That’s...”

He picked it up, and it jingled slightly. It was a metal clasp with a tiny piece of chain attached to it. There was no doubt about it, this was the shackle that had been around his ankle. He rolled up his nightgown, seeing a discolored patch of skin where the sun had been unable to tan his ankle. That meant it wasn’t a dream at all.

“Wait... Hakim!”

King Dauburn fell to his knees, grief overwhelming his form. At that moment, the very son he was mourning walked through the door.

“Morning, Father. Nice to see you’re awake.”

“Hakim?! H-Hakim!! Y-You’re alive, my son!”

“...Of course I’m alive... Should I not be, or something?”

“No, no! You should be! I’m just glad to see you! I truly am, my boy!”

King Dauburn reached over and embraced his son tightly. Prince Hakim, who hugged his father back just a little, filled him in on what had happened over the two weeks of the king’s absence. Now that the king was back, all authority would be returned to him.

“I’ve drafted a temporary ceasefire with Zadonia, since I didn’t want to fight while you were away. But what do you want us to do now, Father? Some of the nobles were saying it would be best to resume hostile action...”

Prince Hakim cleverly asked his father in a way that would be able to gauge intent. The king sat for a while in silence, but eventually spoke in a clear and present manner.

“Hm... Let us head to talk with them.”

“...Very well, Father. I’ll let everyone know.”

King Dauburn was, strangely enough, smiling. The look on his face was one of exuberance and determination.

Thus, a few days later... A camp had been established on the Lezalia plain, a stretch of land between Zadonia and Dauburn with a fairly normal climate. Though, traveling only a few kilometers in either direction from the plain resulted in harsh environmental conditions. The upper echelons of Dauburn and Zadonia were at this camp for a meeting. Prince Hakim and Prince Frost were, naturally, present as well.

The two kings eventually came into the main meeting room, taking a seat opposite one another at the table. They glared at each other for a short while, before King Dauburn finally spoke.

“Looks like you survived, you icy bastard.”

“Looks like you did too. Tell me, were you born this much of a loudmouth or did the desert heat fry your brain?”

The two kings started hurling insults at one another, causing their retainers to grimace slightly. The two of them stood up from the table, staring each other down with scrutiny. Everyone present assumed the situation was about to explode, but then something strange happened.

“Snrk...”

“Heh...”

To everyone’s surprise, the kings started snickering.

“Gahahahaha! So you made it, you piece of shit!”

“Wahahah! You too, you hardy old bastard!”

The two of them started laughing like idiots, sending everyone else in the room into absolute shock.

“Do you know how many nightmares I’ve had about that island?! It was the worst!”

“Me too! Man, it was awful!”

The two of them joked around, patting the other on the back and smiling wide. These men, who had a cat-and-dog relationship their entire lives, were suddenly palling around like old friends. Nobody at the table believed their eyes.

“I actually came here to make a formal declaration!”

“Well isn’t that funny! I came here for the same reason!”

The two of them winked at each other before turning around to their respective retainers and speaking the words they’d been wanting to say ever since they came back from their hellish vacation.

“I’ll be abdicating the throne to Hakim. These peace talks are his responsibility now.”

“And I’ll be having Frost take my place as well. Zadonia’s fate rests in his

hands.”

The two men merrily announced their retirement. The former kings couldn’t help but smile, knowing that their hate was behind them.

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“And then what happened?”

“Prince Hakim and Prince Frost ascended to become kings. The two countries are working hard alongside each other now...” I answered Yumina’s question as I leaned back against the couch.

Things had finally calmed down. Though it honestly ended up taking a while longer than I expected. It seemed to me that older people found it harder to admit fault.

The two countries became friendly, but the former kings still had it out for me. They didn’t tell their sons not to associate with Brunhild, though, which fortunately meant they now knew how to separate personal grudges from national policy.

“What about the Allent princesses?”

“All seems to be fine there. They should be getting engaged to the Dauburn and Zadonia guys soon enough, actually.”

“Wow! That’s lovely!” Lu peeked her head out from her book to smile at the good news.

I wasn’t quite as happy as the girls were, in all honesty. Even if it was nice overall, it still felt a little too engineered by the holy king. Part of me felt like he’d basically played me like a fiddle.

I made a strange kind of engagement gift gesture by asking Flame Spirit and Ice Spirit to mellow out the harsh environments of Zadonia and Dauburn, so things would slowly start to become better for their countries.

Hilde let out a little laugh as she placed her pen down.

“I’m glad that it was settled, I must say. I didn’t like the idea of a war still going on when we’d just brought about peace.”

“Yeah, that’s true. Though this world isn’t exactly a paradise yet.”

There was the looming issue with the Behemoths, the fact that the world barrier still wasn’t fixed, and then there was the rebuilding effort for countries that were hit harder by the Phrase. But worst of all was the stack of papers in front of me...

I picked one up and read it over.

“So, uh, who’s Earl Darlwein?”

“Ah, that’s one of mine. He’s an earl from Regulus. Oh, let me think... My great-grandfather’s younger sister married into his family.”

“So what’s your family’s current relationship with them?”

“Largely nonexistent. But they still have some royal blood in them, so they’re in the line of succession.”

“Guess that’s a name for this pile, then...”

I placed the earl’s name into one of the ranked boxes we’d set out. These boxes were brought out to establish hierarchy when it came to seating at my upcoming wedding.

Three of my fiancees were princesses, so there were a lot of people we needed to invite out of courtesy. Yumina, Lu, and Hilde were sorting through the names. I was helping, sort of. Technically, Sue and Sakura should’ve been included, but Sue fell under the same umbrella as Yumina, and Sakura was an illegitimate child, so they didn’t technically count.

I didn’t personally like ranking my wives, but public opinion stated that Yumina would be first queen, Lu second, and Hilde third. After that would come Sue as fourth, then Leen in fifth, Sakura in sixth, and Linze, Elze, and Yae after that.

Apparently Linze, Elze, and Yae’s positions were determined by the order in which they confessed to me. I didn’t have any hand in the ranking. The girls had figured it all out independently. Still, the ranking would only be for the sake of public appearances. We all agreed that they had equal footing in the relationship. Social formalities sure were a pain in my ass... I didn’t really care

about selecting which guest sat where...

I wondered if Yae's family, along with Elze and Linze's, would be okay mingling with so many nobles and royals. Given how nervous Elze and Linze's uncle was the last time, I half-expected him to collapse on the spot at the wedding.

"Uh... Marquis Pollon?"

"He's in charge of Lestian finances. He's been close to our family since my father's younger days."

"Then he goes in this box..."

Just as I was obeying Hilde's instructions, Karen suddenly appeared out of thin air right next to me.

"Touyaaa!"

"What?!"

This irritating god-sister of mine had given up on any kind of subtlety, and now just teleported around whenever she wanted. It still scared the hell out of me!

"Damn it, Karen! I told you not to teleport like th—"

"There's no time to lose, you know?! We need to go!" Karen grabbed me by the arm before I had any time to react.

Huh? What? What's going on?

"H-H-Hold it, Karen! Where are you taking me?!"

"To the divine realm, you know?! Sorry, Yumina! I need Touya! Emergency family meeting!"

"Uh, okay...? Have a safe trip..." Yumina slowly nodded, shivering and clearly somewhat disturbed by Karen's erratic behavior.

Sorry, what?! A family meeting?! With who?! What for?! But, before I could even ask, I'd been whisked away to the land of the gods...

Oh. My. God!!!

Chapter II: The Pantheon

“Hm? Where are we?”

The place Karen had brought me wasn’t the usual endlessly expanding room with the old man in it. We were in front of a massive temple surrounded by huge marble pillars. It towered over the immediate landscape, though there was nothing beyond it but a sea of clouds.

A tremendous series of stairs stood before the entrance to the temple. The sky above was clear as day, not a single cloud there... Though there were plenty of clouds at our feet. The only thing up above us was a circular rainbow, with a blue inside it deeper than anything I’d ever seen before.

“This way, you know?”

Karen grabbed my hand and started to walk toward the stairway.



“W-Wait a sec! Where are we?”

“This is the Pantheon, you know? It’s a public area for all the gods, where we can interact with each other while off-duty. It was made by the creator. Everyone here is either a god or a beneficiary of one, you know?”

The Pantheon? Kinda sounds like Pandemonium, but that’s the royal castle of Xenoahs, so it’s probably just a coincidence.

Karen dragged me through the entrance, and suddenly our surroundings changed. We were supposed to be in a building, but the place looked more like a castle courtyard. There was a green lawn, plants here and there, and a large fountain too.

“What the hell...?”

“There are a lot of different kinds of rooms here, but how you get around is random. You can take any path through this place and wind up anywhere, you know?”

That didn’t exactly sound very productive. I kind of wondered why the gods were such weird people...

Various individuals were hanging around the courtyard area, some turning their eyes toward us with curiosity. I assumed they were gods, while some of the animals like one sparrow I’d seen were divine beneficiaries. My latter assumption was soon proven wrong, however, as the little bird flew down and perched on Karen’s shoulder.

“Hey, Love God. Is that the newbie?”

“It certainly is. I’m afraid we’re in a bit of a hurry, god of flight. We’ll talk later, you know?”

“Ahaha, how unusually curt of you.”

Oh damn, he’s a full-on god... Sorry I made the wrong assumption.

“Apology accepted. It was an easy mistake to make for the uninitiated. Let’s have a nice chat next time we get a chance, eh?”

“Huh? Oh, uh... Okay.”

The god of flight flapped away on the breeze. Apparently, he'd been reading my mind, but that was natural, given his divine status.

"It's been billions of years since the god of worlds has taken on a beneficiary, you know? You're a little bit of a celebrity as a result. But there's an issue we need to take care of, first. It's a little sensitive..."

"H-Huh?! Did I do something wrong?"

"Of course not, you know? It's just... Well, we can talk about it when we get there."

I had no idea what the current situation was. Karen continued dragging me through the courtyard until we passed through an archway to another building. Or at least, it was supposed to be another building...

Somehow, we ended up in another outdoor space, if you could even call it that. I could see the ever-present sprawling clouds in the distance, but there were blooming flowers beneath my feet. I could see a few ivory pillars, much like the ones from outside the Pantheon, jutting out of the ground here and there. Since the pillars were alone and not supporting anything, they kind of reminded me of Egyptian obelisks.

The surrounding area was so beautiful, it almost felt like heaven... Though, given that I was in the divine realm, heaven was technically a few steps beneath the place. Probably, at least. I didn't really know.

"Took ya long enough, lad."

"Huh, Kousuke?"

The god of agriculture suddenly appeared before me. Karina, goddess of the hunt, stood by his side as well.

"Things are going okay here, for the most part. The combat god and the sword god have helped hold back some of the rowdier ones, but it's still pretty awkward as a whole..." Karina sounded exhausted, but I had no idea what she was talking about.

"Guys, uh... Can you just tell me what's going on already?"

"Mmh... It'd be better to let the world god fill ya in on that. We're comin' with

ya, so let's just keep goin'."

Kousuke started walking, and I had no choice but to follow. We walked along through the flowers until eventually we passed a series of cherry blossom trees with their faint petals dancing through the air. I noticed a few others sitting and enjoying the sight of the blossoms. They looked our way as we walked past them. Presumably, they were gods as well.

It felt a little weird, in all honesty. It was almost as if they were sizing me up like a piece of meat... I could've just been worrying too hard, though.

"Ah, welcome."

"Ah, hic! Whelchome! Ahahahahah!"

God Almighty sat beneath a large sakura tree. He was seated atop a large woven mat. Suika, the god of alcohol, sat by his side. She was hugging a large bottle of sake to her chest. Sousuke, the music god, was strumming a harp a little ways off from them.

"Sorry for calling you out on such short notice. Please, have a seat."

I sat down on the mat and found myself surprised by its incredibly comfy texture. It was certainly far beyond any other I'd sat on in either of my lives.

"Well, lad. I held a banquet here today with the other gods. I wanted to bring them all together and discuss the plan for the divine resort, and all that business. Now that you have taken charge of the world, it all looked possible, after all. Everyone got a tad too excited at the news, however... They all kicked up a fuss about the opportunity to revel in a mortal realm."

"Oh, right. So you just told everyone they'd get a chance to get a vacation in human form?"

"Yes, that is correct. However... During the discussion, your wedding ceremony ended up coming up as a topic... I happened to mention that the love god, sword god, and a few others would be in attendance as your family, and... well... many of the others protested, stating that they wished to attend as well..."

Huh? What...? How'd my wedding even come up?

“It’s just how it is, you know? Some gods want to come to the wedding as your family members, so they can try out human bodies in advance! Basically, it’d be like a forward squad, you know? Or like... special guests?”

“Huh? Seriously?”

“We did not want to decide on your family without consulting you. That is why I decided to call you here. We were thinking of filling the empty positions of siblings, parents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and other such roles...”

“W-Wait up! You can’t just expand my family that rapidly!”

I already had eight gods down there as my family members, though only Karen, Moroha, and the world god were direct family. Plus, even though I was now in another world to them, my parents were still alive. I didn’t really feel comfortable addressing another person as mom or dad. The grandpa thing was fine, since I already had a couple of those to begin with.

“I agree, you know? I don’t really want any weird ones taking the parent role because then they’d be my parent, too.”

“Wait, weird ones? What do you mean?”

“Like the god of flight we saw earlier, you know? How do you think people would react if you called a bird your dad?”

“...They’d think I’ve totally lost it, I imagine.”

“I’m glad you get it.”

Yeah, I didn’t exactly want a little songbird as part of my immediate family. Plus, when I looked closer, some of the gods hanging around the area had strange forms. Some of them had bird heads or feline features. They kind of resembled ancient Egyptian gods... Certainly a far cry from the more human ones I was familiar with.

It was true that werecats existed among the demonkin, so they probably wouldn’t raise too many eyebrows down there, but... I definitely couldn’t walk around with an anthropomorphic cat and tell everyone she was my mom.

“Wouldn’t it be fine if they weren’t my direct family? They could be old friends or neighbors, maybe people who helped me out or I helped out in the

past... It'd be pretty normal to invite people like that over, right?"

My words prompted all the gods in the surrounding area to raise their arms in celebration and cheer. It scared the hell out of me.

"That's what I'm talkin' about, new guy!"

"Hell yeah! We can all go down!"

"I wanna stretch my legs on mortal soil, dang it!"

What the heck, how come so many wanna go down...? Don't these guys have jobs to do?!

Not every god was so enthused, apparently. The two factions were effectively split into gods who wanted to go down immediately, and gods who didn't really care and figured they'd check it out later.

"Is that okay, you know? Everyone'll end up going down at this rate... We'll be here to support you, but you'll have to take care of any problems they might cause, you know...?"

"Huh?! Wait, nobody mentioned potential problems!"

Karen's whisper immediately worried me, and I realized what I'd agreed to. Obviously, a bunch of excited, rowdy gods would be trouble down there.

"Oi, calm down an' all that. Even if the new lad's world becomes a resort for us, that doesn't mean we can jus' go raise a ruckus wherever. If we disrespect the rules've that world down there, we'll be disrespectin' him. An' by extension, we'll be disrespectin' the world god right here. Got it?"

Everyone fell silent in response to Kousuke's words. I was glad to have a god with some degree of common sense on my side.

"Well then, Agricultural God. How are we gonna decide who goes down, eh?"

A monstrously massive man, who stood at least two meters tall, spoke up. He wore a Greek-style chiton tunic that flowed down from his left shoulder, the uncovered parts showed off his rippling muscles and washboard abs. The strangest thing about the musclehead in front of me was that he kept posing like a bodybuilder as he spoke.

“We’ll be decidin’ that right now, god of strength. That’s why we called the kid here.”

The god of strength, huh...? Well, with a body like that, I’m not really surprised.

“So, how many people do you think would work?”

“Uhh... I’m not really sure... Karen... What do you and the others think?”

I couldn’t really come up with an answer to the world god’s sudden question, so I turned to Karen and the others. I personally thought divine stuff should be handled by divine people, even if I was technically one of them now.

“Mm... We don’t want too many, you know? Maybe ten maximum.”

Ten sounded reasonable enough... so long as they behaved, at least.

“Oh, a modest proposal. Perhaps the ones who behave the best while they are down there can stay as backup for you all and Touya?”

“Oh, that’s a good idea, you know? Then we’ll be able to handle more than ten on the next visit!”

Karen grinned, nodding along at what the world god had proposed.

Wait. More than ten? Next visit?

“Are you sure that’s okay? I don’t want any of them running wild...”

“I am sure it will be fine, my boy. They all want to try out living human lives, after all. If something truly absurd ends up happening, you have my promise that I will help you. Given that you are still in your trial period, it would only be fair that I step in should divine matters get too much.”

Hrmm... I guess it’ll turn out okay if I have the old man backing me... It should be fine, right? Right?!

“Well then, ten it is? They will not be going down immediately, fret not. They will go down one by one a few times before the wedding proper, however.”

“Huh? I guess that’s fine, then...”

...Guess we’ll have more gods down there soon... It’s kind of crazy how many there are already, though. Putting the world god aside, a total of seven lived in

my castle.

"Ah, on this matter... One of the ten has already been decided. After all, I still owe you on my promise. I told you I would be sending someone to fix your world barrier, yes?"

"Oh yeah, you did."

The boundary line or barrier that defended our world was shredded up thanks to the Phrase, and somebody with extreme finesse was required to patch it up.

Well, I sure as hell can't do it, and Karen and the others down there are a little rough around the edges too... I'm glad that the old man's found someone useful for a ch—

"Owwwww!"

"Sorry I'm so rough, you know? But you should know how easy it is to read thoughts in this realm."

Karen pinched at my cheeks. I wish she'd warned me in advance, at least!

"...Now now, you two... At any rate, I will be sending the chosen god before any of the others, is this alright?"

"Of course it is! I asked you for help in the first place, after all."

"Thank you, then. With that settled, I shall have you meet the candidate."

God Almighty clapped his hands together, and an old woman appeared out of nowhere. She had white hair and looked to be at least (physically) seventy years old. Her white kimono gave her an air of grace. Despite her Japanese aesthetic, her eyes were a deep blue.

...Why do I feel like I know this woman? What's this sense of familiarity?

"That's because I'm like you, dearie. We are both beneficiaries of the world god's divinity."

"Ah, that makes sense."

The old woman smiled softly, reading my mind as if there was nothing strange at all about it. *Damn it... do I have to get used to this or something?*

The old woman sat down next to the world god. The two of them almost

looked like a couple.

“She will be handling the repairs on the world barrier. This, Touya, is the god of space-time.”

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Touya. I’ll be taking on the role of your grandmother, if that’s quite alright.”

My grandma, huh? That’d make her the world god’s wife down there... They do look pretty nice together, though.

“Oh my, do we?”

“That is a touch embarrassing, aha...”

The two of them laughed bashfully.

...Welp, got my mind read again. Guess my inside voice is my outside voice now. That’s just life.

“So, uh... space-time? Does that mean you control... space and time? Sounds kind of obvious when I put it like that, huh?”

“Indeed, that’s what I do. Barriers around worlds need to be repaired by having the raggedy parts removed and resewn, but that would leave large patches of your world undefended from external influence. That’s why we decided that it would be best if I used my ability to simply rewind your barrier. It is far easier a task than creating a new one, dearie.”

Hah... That makes sense! When the black and white crowns (Noir and Albus) ran wild, they repaired the barrier, too. So I guess she’ll just be able to do what they did.

“Rewinding it all in one go could cause more than a few wrinkles, so I’ll make a gradual task of it, a bit like sewing or weaving. For as long as I need to do that, dearie, I hope you don’t mind my intrusion at your home.”

“Oh, of course not. That’s completely fine, thanks. What about your name, though?”

“Ah, yes... Tokie will suffice. Mochizuki Tokie shall be my mortal name. Though you may call me granny.”

“Granny, huh...?”

“That’s right. I look forward to staying with you, Touya.”


神

The god of space-time... Or uh, Granny, smiled softly.

...Man, just looking at her sets me at ease. She's definitely a proper god in every sense of the word. Ack, better not think anything too incriminating... I know you can hear me, Karen!

"By the way, how are we gonna decide who gets to come down to the mortal world?"

"Our traditional method is drawing lots."

So basically a lottery. That makes sense. Stuff like drawing lots or omikuji are definitely traditional enough, so I can see why gods would opt for that kind of method.

The prospective gods all seemed to agree it was fair, too.

"Now remember, you cannot use your divinity to cheat. I will know if you do. No clairvoyant sight, and no bolstering your own luck. Touya shall make the lots in order to prove impartiality."

Huh? Me? I mean, I guess if I have to...

About a hundred gods showed up to try and test their luck. That seemed like way too many volunteers... The gods really had more free time than I thought. The old saying said that curiosity killed the cat, but perhaps in this case boredom killed the gods.

I decided to start drawing up the lottery, designing a basic omikuji-style box. A hexagonal cylinder with a small hole in the middle. You could fill it with thin sticks and shake it until one came out.

Once I created the box, I put the little sticks inside. There were more sticks in the box than participants. But only ten of these sticks had gold-painted tips. Those would be the winning lots. I closed the lid on the box afterward, and that was that. I passed it off to Suika and had her handle the rest.

"Alright, hic! Line up, line upppp! Now if you dohn't, hic, follow the ruhles you'll be dishqualifieeed! No, hic, yummy mortal boozes for you! Aaahahaha!"

Quite a few of the gods gulped in concern at the prospect, which made me desperately hope none of them won. It was bad enough having one little

resident drinking gremlin.

The gods started shaking the box, one at a time, and drawing their lots. Despite being discouraged by their loss, they'd go back to the end of the line and wait until they could try again. They all kind of quietly prayed as they shook the box, which was funny to me given that they were all divine beings. I was pretty surprised by how into it they were all getting.

"This is rather fun, isn't it?"

"Indeed it is. Such merrymaking opportunities are sparse here, after all."

I turned around to see that a small table had appeared out of nowhere, and the elderly couple (the space-time god and the world god) were calmly sipping tea together. It was nice to see how calm they were together.

I suddenly heard a jingle, much like the level-up sound from a famous JRPG. I turned around and found the source was Sousuke playing the trumpet.

"We got a, hic, winnerrr!"

"HELL YEAH!"

"Bweh..."

The lucky winner was none other than the beefy god of strength I'd seen earlier. He proudly held his gold-tipped stick high, flexing and posing as he basked in the limelight.

...Yeah, I'm just gonna pawn this guy off on Takeru. No way we're gonna be able to handle him.

"It'll take them a while, dearie. Why don't you sit with us?"

"Oh, thanks..." I sat down, and Granny Tokie poured a cup of tea for me. The tea stalk in it was floating upright, a sign of luck. That being said, I'd noticed that whenever a god had poured me a cup of tea, that had happened... Was that perhaps just something that gods could do?

I sighed quietly, dispelling such strange ruminations as I drank my tea. It really hit the spot.

Man... Please, don't let any weird ones draw the lucky lots...

“I am afraid I cannot interfere, my boy.”

“...I know...”

Damn it, my thoughts got read again... Aw heck...

Chapter III: Shadow of Nokia

“Nokia sent an envoy?”

“That’s right, yes. They wish to meet with you.”

I was a little bit surprised by the sudden news from Kousaka, our prime minister. Nokia was a country east of where Yulong had once been. It was a secluded country that didn’t interact with any other, save for a little bit of trade with Xenoahs. It was similar to Horn in that it only traded with an immediate neighbor, but Nokia was far more strict about its isolation policies. The reason for that, much like it was with Horn, was the former nation of Yulong.

Nokia was a country formed by those who’d sought to escape the oppressive Yulong regime. They’d used terrain to their advantage, defending themselves against Yulong by hiding behind a huge mountain range. Because of their geographical and political reclusiveness, visitors to and from Nokia were practically unheard of. Even during the Phrase invasions and the whole crisis with the mutants, they’d kept to themselves and didn’t ask for aid. Therefore, it was only natural for me to be surprised about them sending an envoy. I was very curious about what they wanted.

It was a tiny country, after all. They certainly didn’t have any specialty exports, so I couldn’t think why they’d be here. I wondered if it was related to the league of nations, but I felt like they’d have tried to broach that through Xenoahs.

“Well, guess there’s only one way to find out what they want.”

“Very well, then.”

I decided to meet them after an hour. Before that, I had to change into my ceremonial garb. I didn’t exactly like the outfit, but I was told to wear it when meeting with royal representatives from foreign lands. With all that said and considered, though... I actually wore casual clothes around other world leaders, for the most part.

The outfit was basically a formal suit. I wasn't a huge fan of flashy capes or fur-lined cloaks, so I had Zanac make me something stylish and sleek. It was woven from rare magic beast fur fibers. It let my ass breathe, which I truly appreciated. I wore a simple black coat on top of the ensemble. If I added a top hat to the mix, I'd have looked like a stereotypical English gentleman from some country... Er, that country being England.

Lapis, our head maid, called out to me. We made our way to the audience hall. The envoy from Nokia hadn't yet arrived. Commander Lain, along with her direct subordinates Nikola and Norue, stood by in the room. Baba, Yamagata, and Naito were there as well. On top of that, we also had Tsubaki and Leen (who was there as court mage). We'd really rolled out the red carpet.

These were the most important people in Brunhild as far as official duties went. We also had a few regular knights lined up for the sake of keeping up appearances. Paula the stuffed bear toddled around at Leen's feet, and Kohaku was curled up in her heavenly beast form by my throne.

"Man, we really went all-out on this, huh?"

"We don't know their intentions, darling. I feel that this kind of welcome is appropriate. We wouldn't want them thinking less of you, would we?"

As I moved to sit upon my throne, Leen positioned herself to my left and gave her opinion. Even with that reasoning given, I wondered if all this was really necessary. After a short wait, three individuals entered the hall. One man walked in front of the other two. He wore a robe and cape with yellow-red color tones and seemed to be in his mid-twenties. His hair was brown and cut short. In all honesty, he looked pretty average. That being said, he was surrounded by armed knights and diverse individuals, so many people would look ordinary by comparison.

The two people trailing behind him wore green robes that covered them from top to bottom, including their lower faces. It was hard to discern their sex at a glance. One had black hair, while the other had chestnut hair. Their hair was also cut fairly short, but they both gave off a feminine vibe. The two of them stood immediately before me before lowering themselves to one knee.

"I-It is, er, our pleasure to meet you, Grand Duke. I am a diplomat from Nokia,

and my name is Faro Jantje.”

“Please rise, Ambassador Jantje. Allow me to bid you welcome to Brunhild. I am the grand duke, Mochizuki Touya.”

I sat upon my throne and spoke to him in a lordly manner. My instincts told me to go over and try to shake his hand, but Kousaka had expressly forbidden that kind of behavior. He told me that being too friendly off the bat created complicated relationships down the line.

“Now, Ambassador. What brings you to our lord’s fair nation?”

“Ah, erm... That’s, well...”

Kousaka immediately cut to the chase, skipping all formalities and asking the visitor for his business. The ambassador only murmured and muttered in response.

He kept saying things like “Uhm...” and “I, uh, well...”, completely failing to bring anything of note across. I wondered if this guy was really qualified for a diplomatic position.

“A-Ah! I hear y-you’ll be having your wedding before long, Grand Duke! C-Congratulations on that front!”

“Uh... Thank you...?”

...Did he just come to congratulate me on my wedding? Why would they send an ambassador for that when a letter would have sufficed?

Everyone around me seemed stunned and confused. I wondered if the people of Nokia just had no idea how to deal with outsiders due to their lack of outward contact.

“Y-Yes! W-We’ve heard that y-you’re marrying nine women! A very, e-er, sturdy number, Your Majesty! We t-truly respect your bold nature and virile charm! I-I am not s-surprised to hear it, as the tales of your womanizing h-have even reached Nokia’s borders...!”

“Ahaha... Right...”

I forced a smile on my face and laughed at his words. Leen tried to hold back her laughter. I glanced around and saw every last one of my people (except

Kousaka) desperately holding back their own laughter as well.

What the hell, man? Did you come here to try and publicly embarrass me or something? Or are you trying to get me to hit you?

"...Please be more clear with your intentions, Ambassador."

"A-Ah, yes. Sorry. W-Well..."

Kousaka cleared his throat, stone-faced as ever, and implored the ambassador to continue speaking.

Yeah, there's gotta be more to this visit than just congratulating me.

"W-Well, Grand Duke... we are here today to ask if, w-well... you'd be interested in a t-tenth bride!"

"Sorry?"

The atmosphere suddenly turned cold, or at least the vibe from the girl to my left had turned icy in an instant. When I glanced at Leen, the grin on her face had completely vanished. Her expression was difficult to read, but it was obvious she was in a state of deep contemplation. Paula moved away from her feet and shuffled behind the throne. Kohaku, still laying down, scooched back slightly from me.

C'mon, you guys...

"What exactly are you proposing, Ambassador?"

"Well... Please take our offer seriously. We wish for you to marry Nokia's second princess, Pafia Lada Nokia."

Oof... I had a feeling this kind of thing would happen at some point. But I kind of figured most countries had given up on the idea of marrying me into their families once they realized nearly half of my current fiancees are royals... Though, maybe Nokia doesn't know that part.

"W-We won't ask that you take her as a primary wife or anything. We'd be content even with her as a concubine, or a low-ranking mistress... Princess Pafia is an educated woman with a fine grasp on literature and military history, and also a fine beauty. I am certain you would find her of use."

“I’m sorry, but I already have more fiancees than I ever thought I’d have, so I don’t think I can—”

Just as I was about to let them down softly, the cloaked individual with chestnut-colored hair stood up and looked at me. She was a woman, and one around my age group. She had to be sixteen at the very least, but my gut told me she was around seventeen. Her short hair swished a little as she moved forward.

“Please, Grand Duke. You can merely consider me a beneficial retainer. I would ask that you at least consider adding me to your list of potential brides.”

“Wait, then, you’re...”

She removed her robe, revealing a colorful exotic outfit with red and white markings covering it.

“I apologize for my delayed introduction. I am Pafia Lada Nokia, second princess of the Nokia Kingdom. It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance, Grand Duke.”

The girl, who had a surprising degree of fire in her eyes, bowed her head as she spoke.

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With her chestnut hair cut short, her narrow eyes, and her small grinning mouth, it would have been more accurate to call this princess a beauty rather than a cutie.

The second princess of Nokia, Pafia Lada Nokia, stared me down. The fight in her was quite something. She certainly wasn’t looking down on me, so I wasn’t intimidated or provoked by the action, but at the same time, I couldn’t exactly say that it felt good.

“We hear what you’re saying, Princess Pafia. But this isn’t a matter you can only consult the grand duke on. I and the rest of his fiancees would need to confer on it as well.”

Leen, who’d been standing to my left, smiled as she walked forward. She seemed to be in diplomacy mode, given her way of speaking.

“Forgive my impertinence, but who are you? Am I to presume you are one of the grand duke’s betrothed?”

“Forgive my late introduction. I am the former clan matriarch of the fairies, the greatest court mage of Brunhild, and a fiancee to the grand duke. You may call me Leen.”

Leen gave a small, elegant curtsy.

...Greatest court mage? You’re the only *court mage...*

“Lady Leen, I would ask that you consider adding me to your numbers. I’m sure your country would benefit from it.”

“My... Even if it would be a boon for our nation, the grand duke didn’t choose to marry us for profit alone. I’m not entirely sure how to treat this offer.”

“Then tell me, upon what does he base his choices for a partner? Is it literacy? Martial prowess? Beauty? Breeding? I am certain that I have sufficient skills, and that my lineage is of potent enough stock.”

“Well, I must say... You certainly sound confident in yourself. But I have heard that Nokia doesn’t communicate with the outside world very much. Perhaps if you look around a little more, you may find the world a wider place than you had initially believed.”

Uh... This ain’t good. I can already see the sparks flying between these two. Please... someone save me...

“...We cannot give you an immediate answer, since your request is rather sudden. Ambassador, is it quite alright if you give us time to deliberate?”

Kousaka broke the silence by addressing Ambassador Jantje, who had been nervously watching the exchange the entire time. He immediately began to nod his head at a rapid speed.

“V-V-Very well! P-Please take your time to consider it! We’ll be warmly awaiting your response!”

“Head Maid, take the ambassador and his companions to a guest suite.”

“Of course. Please, follow me.”

Lapis ushered the visiting trio away. They turned and left with our maid, but not before the princess turned to give me one last parting glance. I sensed the determination in her gaze. When the three of them were out of earshot, I let out a loud groan. This was a real pain in the ass.

“I didn’t think they’d come looking for marriage...”

“Indeed, I am rather surprised as well...” Kousaka gently stroked at his beard as he muttered those words. Everyone seemed surprised. None of the countries we’d interacted with so far had done anything quite like that.

“I feel like they’re trying to unify with me, rather than Brunhild...”

“Can you blame them? You’re a gold-ranked adventurer, and you’re a renowned hero who saved this entire world. You command legions of giant metal soldiers, and you’re known to have the ability to talk peace between almost any nation. I’m sure many covet what you have.”

Kousaka was right. This was clearly a marriage based around getting access to my abilities. If I was tied to Nokia through family, then they probably thought I’d do as they wished.

“That’s why I find the situation strange. Nokia is an isolated country. They only do bare-minimum trade with Xenoahs, and they’ve never shown up at a conference despite our invitations. Why would a country that kept to itself even during the mutant invasion suddenly decide it wants to make a political marriage to Brunhild? What would they want Touya’s power for?” Leen folded her arms, calm and analytical as she spoke. I was surprised she wasn’t angrier.

“We’ve seen something like this coming for a while, darling. I’m certain they’re planning to seduce you.”

“Really...? I don’t think that’d work, though...”

“They’ll try it later, I’m sure. Lock your bedroom door tonight, okay? Put down a few barriers in case they have magic or some kind of artifact that’ll let them bypass walls. If you actually put your hands on her, it’ll be harder for us to turn down the proposal.”

Wait, hold on a sec?! Why are you acting like I’m gonna succumb to her?!

“H-Hold on, Leen! I’m not putting my hands on anyone. If she comes to my room, I’ll just have her removed.”

“Darling, you’re forgetting the most important thing here. She’s a woman. She’ll be alone in a room with you. It’ll be your word against hers in that situation. Think about it, even the ambassador won’t be able to deny the possibility of you coaxing her there in the night. It’s well-known that you can use teleportation magic, so the rumors will likely spread that you warped her to your bedroom.”

“Whaaat?!”

That sounded insane to me... Surely that wouldn’t happen.

“Well, if they tried to frame the story that way, we could flip it on them. If we plant a knife on her, we could easily make her out to be an assassin.”

“Whaaat?!”

“To be honest, I’m sure they’re aware of those kinds of risks. I have my doubts that she’ll try and visit you in the night. But I want you to keep an eye out, just in case. It’s still possible they could make use of some kind of artifact in order to seduce you, after all.”

...I’m divine, so I don’t think artifacts will work on me, but even thinking about the prospect is unnerving.

I decided that setting up a **[Prison]** around my room would probably be fine. That way nobody would be able to enter unless they had something in the same league as my divinity.

“By the way, darling... What did you think of her?”

“Oh? Hm... She’s definitely beautiful, but she didn’t really seem to care much about emotional connection. I saw a fire in her eyes, but it wasn’t directed at me. She only looked at what I have and what I wield. She definitely didn’t come here out of romantic feelings, so I don’t really want to get involved with her.”

I didn’t think the girl was solely a tool. I was sure she had many good parts to her, but I definitely hadn’t fallen for her. Nothing even close to that. In Lu and Hilde’s case, I knew off the bat how they felt for me. They didn’t yearn for my

status or my strength, they just liked me. Pafia was a whole other kettle of fish.

Also, it kind of felt like she had a lot on her shoulders. Like she was burdened by responsibility or a sense of duty that came with being a princess. I definitely didn't think she was a bad person, just dedicated to her cause.

"I felt the same about her. By not truly loving you, she's failed to meet the criteria required for becoming one of your fiancees. I've already ruled her as completely unsuitable, and I don't see my stance changing."

Leen started tapping on her smartphone as she spoke. I wondered what she was doing.

"I have a small meeting to arrange with the others."

Oh boy, another meeting of the brides-to-be, huh? I remember the time when Pam wanted me to get her pregnant... Though Leen wasn't around for that, come to think of it.

Leen was busy with her texting, so I walked over to Tsubaki.

"We need to gather intel. Can you get me some information on Nokia and our guests?"

"Very well. I'll send a few of our agents out to Nokia at once."

As soon as I gave Tsubaki her orders, she vanished in a flash. Our intel operatives had access to various tools, including teleportation artifacts long thought lost. With those at their disposal, I had a feeling it'd only take them two days to reach Nokia and come back. No matter how difficult Nokia's terrain was to navigate, it couldn't hold a candle to the harsh training that Takeru and Moroha imposed upon all our knight order members. I knew they'd come back with what we needed. Not that they actually needed to come back to relay the information, they'd be able to call us from Nokia, after all.

It was easy to just outright refuse the proposal, but something bugged me about all this... And so, I decided it was time for a little sleuthing of my own.

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"Sorry, couldn't tell you. We don't speak much with Nokia, in all honesty. Even if a coup happened there, we wouldn't know until the new government

told us about it. Again, sorry... We've just kind of had no reason to take an interest in them."

"Right..."

I tried asking the overlord of Xenoahs about Nokia, but his answer was about what I'd expected. They only shared a small portion of their border with Nokia, and they were both fairly isolated nations. It only made sense that the two countries wouldn't pay much attention to each other.

"Before the last conference, we did extend an invitation for them, but they said there was a civil matter in their country that needed to be taken care of..."

"Huh... You think there might have actually been a coup?"

"That sounds like more than a simple civil matter... That being said, it is true that many Yulongese citizens spread out to the surrounding nations after the country collapsed... Yulong is despised in Nokia, and they have harsh terrain like we do, but I'm sure they must have gotten at least some refugees. The immigrants might have brought trouble with them."

Hrm... I guess that's possible, sad as it sounds.

The Yulongese people liked to exaggerate stuff. They'd inflate the number one-thousand to one million, and then probably inflate that million to a billion. It was common knowledge in this world that if a Yulongese person quoted you a number, it was probably ten times smaller in reality. They were pretentious people who had the habit of licking their wounds, too. If those kinds of people moved to Nokia and started telling them strange rumors and untrue things about the outside world, it could put the country into a panic.

"Did any refugees come to Xenoahs?"

"Yup. Some weird rumors were going around, but they didn't last. No demonkin trusts the words of a Yulong dog, after all."

Just about everyone felt that way. People from Yulong had little to no credibility. The eastern countries (Eashen excluded) had several issues that were all caused by Yulong in the past. Xenoahs, Horn, Felsen, Hannock, Lestia, and so on all had no reason to trust or believe in the words of Yulongese people.

Nokia was a country that had been founded by those who'd escaped Yulong's violent and cruel regime. It went without saying that they hated the Yulongese, so I couldn't imagine them buying any cock-and-bull stories that their immigrants might have tried to start. We simply lacked enough information to work with.

After we finished the talk about Nokia, the overlord started to ask me a ton of questions about Sakura. It was a real pain in the ass, so I gave him a few general updates then ended the call.

Apparently, every time he tried to call Sakura, it went something like this:

"Ah, Farnese! How are—?"

"Fine..."

"And what about Fiana—?"

"My mother's fine..."

"Would you perhaps like to—?"

"I'm busy. Try again later. Bye-bye..."

And then, she'd hang up. Sakura really had no mercy for her father... That being said, the fact that she'd actually been picking up his calls was a step in the right direction.

Sakura was working as a helper in the school along with her mother. She was in an assistant teacher role, helping kids learn about music. One of our knights, Spica the dark elf, often accompanied her there. Ordinarily, Sakura would spend her afternoons at the school along with Spica. But today was different. All the girls had gathered for their little round table conference about the current issue.

"This is just like the Pam situation, so they definitely won't let her into their ranks..."

Pafia definitely didn't have any real romantic feelings for me, I knew that much. It was obvious. In any situation with real love involved, my idiot sister would've appeared out of nowhere with a huge grin on her face. But she was nowhere to be found. I hoped that she wasn't sitting in on the meeting

between my fiancees. That would definitely have caused needless complications.

I grumbled and worried for a little while until a call came in from Leen.

“’Sup?”

“Ah, darling? We’ve decided that we’re all meeting with Princess Pafia tomorrow. I’m the only one who’s met her in person, so we felt it unfair to judge her as a group until we’ve all met with her.”

“You say that, but I’m pretty sure you’ve all made your minds up.”

“Now, now, she deserves a fair chance. She’s a foreign royal, so we can’t just reject her for no good reason.”

That made sense. Giving her a flat-out rejection would be pretty uncivil. If we didn’t care about formalities, then we’d have just turned her down at the first meeting.

“Either way, darling. Don’t meet with the girl until we speak with her, okay? No need for any complications, after all. I think it’d be better if you had some company tonight... Eheh... Want to spend the night in one of our rooms?”

“N-NO THANK YOU I’M OKAY.”

Leen suddenly switched to a teasing tone of voice, causing my heart to beat out of my chest. I stammered out a reply and ended the call. It was true that staying with one of my fiancees would prevent Pafia from doing anything, though.

“Still... I think I have a better solution to all this.”

I started scrolling through my contact list and made a call...

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“And that’s pon.” I picked up the mahjong piece discarded by Emperor Regulus.

Alright, if I hang on a little longer I’ll get chinroutou...

“I must say, I didn’t expect you to call us to play mahjong... Not that I’m complaining, I didn’t have anything else going on.”

The beastking of Mismede picked up a tile as he spoke. I was currently sitting around the game table with the beastking, Emperor Refreese, and Emperor Regulus. I'd invited King Belfast as well, but he said he needed to look after Yamato. Apparently, the little prince still cried through the night.

"It's not bad to play once in a while, right? Plus, I kind of can't really hang at my place tonight, anyway."

"Oho? Did you upset Lucia and the others?"

"You can't do that, Touya. The most important thing in a marriage is getting stuff right at the start. If you don't put your foot down at the very beginning, you'll have to tiptoe around the relationship later in life."

C'mon, man... I'm not married yet... Still, Emperor Refreese's statement probably came from personal experience. I'd heard he was completely powerless against his wife behind closed doors.

I didn't want to make Emperor Regulus worry too badly. Lu was his daughter, after all. And so, I decided to quickly explain the situation.

"My, that is a surprise. I didn't expect Nokia to play that kind of hand at all."

"Yeah, sounds suspicious to me. Especially since they're usually so isolated."

"It's not that strange for countries to try and make connections through marriage, to be fair..."

If I recalled correctly, Princess Thea of Mismede had recently gotten engaged to Prince Redis of Refreese. That would make the beastking and the emperor of Refreese bound through those ties. Beastman discrimination was quickly becoming a thing of the past, especially in more progressive countries like Refreese. I wondered if people were more tolerant there because there was more overall happiness there compared to other countries.

"Is it that big of a deal, Touya? What's one more wife when you already have nine?"

"It is a big deal, yeah. I don't really want to get myself wrapped up in a politically-focused marriage."

"It might not be bad, though. Many people I know only got to know their

partners after marriage.”

Really? I can’t really see that working out so well, Beastking... But uh... different strokes for different folks, I suppose.

“First, I just need to figure out what they’re up to... Ah, that’s pon.”

I picked up a tile.

“Ack, a chinroutou?!”

Welp, that’s my cue. I’ll just take a tile... I quickly discarded one that I didn’t need.

“Tsk tsk, you must always pay attention to the flow of the game... Ron! Suuankou tanki. Read it and weep.”

“Agh?!”

“No fair, Emperor!”

“Whew, that was close... I might’ve actually lost out more if you hadn’t made that move.”

Damn it... I should’ve focused on reading him better while I was biding my time. Well, whatever. The night’s only just getting started!

I felt a little bit sorry for the knights who were here with their monarchs, but I needed them all here in the game room until morning. I’d cast a **[Prison]** around my bedroom in my absence, just in case. Plus, I had plenty of witnesses who could place me here.

I got ready for the next game as my thoughts began to wander... *The girls are meeting with Pafia tomorrow, huh...? Wonder how it’ll work out.*

I started sorting through the mahjong tiles, quietly hoping things would turn out okay.

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“Oof...”

My body hurt all over when I woke up, probably because I’d slept hunched over the mahjong table in my chair. I quickly cast **[Refresh]** and **[Recovery].**

“So, how’d it go?”

As I walked down the corridor out of the game room, Kougyoku flew over to me and perched on my shoulder. I’d asked her to have a few of her owl allies spy on Pafia’s people through the night.

“Nothing unusual to report. They didn’t leave their rooms or cast any unusual magic.”

“Huh, really...? Maybe I was too paranoid, then.”

Kougyoku’s report was disappointing, in all honesty. But I started to actually think about the situation for a moment, and kind of realized it’d have been nuts to expect a princess to do something so reckless.

“She’s meeting with the fiancees today... I sure hope nothing weird happens.”

I sighed slightly as I walked further down the corridor.

“...Oh... Something weird happened.”

I quietly mumbled to myself as I reached the training field and saw what was going on. Two girls faced each other, each wielding a wooden sword and shield. One of the girls was Princess Pafia. The other was Hilde. They had a little audience made up of my fiancees, Ambassador Jantje, and the princess’ handmaid, Lycia. Moroha and Karen also happened to be in the area.

Hilde and Pafia faced each other in the middle of the training grounds.

“Is this alright?”

“Of course. If anything, it’s more than alright. I want you to use your full might against me. I don’t plan on holding back.”

Hilde raised her concerns, but Pafia smugly grinned. She was certainly confident. Apparently, this all started because Pafia wanted to show off her martial prowess to the girls. She had the confidence, but I couldn’t help but feel that was about to be shattered. I sent a glance over to Hilde, trying to tell her not to go too hard. Hilde nodded back at me, hopefully understanding what I meant.

“Alright, you two. Fight!”

Moroha, who was the referee for the match, raised her hand into the air and then swung it down. In the blink of an eye, Hilde jumped in and swept her sword upward. She'd disarmed Pafia instantly.

"Wh—?!"

Pafia was too stunned to react as Hilde held the wooden blade to her throat.

Ah crap, Hilde! That glance earlier was to tell you to go easy on her, not to give it everything you've got!

"Hilde wins."

Moroha announced the results of the bout. After a few short moments, Pafia's disarmed blade clattered to the earth. It had clearly been knocked a considerable distance upward...

I looked over to find Ambassador Jantje and Lycia staring in absolute shock. That was a pretty reasonable reaction. The entire thing had happened over the span of a second, so I was sure they had no idea what Hilde had just done. From their perspective, Hilde's motions were imperceptible.

"H-Hold on! I just slipped, that's all! Let's go again!" Pafia yelled out, desperate not to be outdone.

"Well, if she wants it... Do you agree, Hilde?"

"That's fine..." Hilde said as she walked back to her starting position.

Moroha raised her arm again, prompting the two girls to take battle stances. Pafia's expression was no longer smug. Instead, she looked tense and almost fearful.

"Fight!"

Moroha swung her arm down, and Pafia held her shield up in a flash. Hilde, however, didn't charge in like last time. The two of them sidestepped in a circle, maintaining distance from each other. Hilde gradually closed the gap, pointing her sword towards her enemy the entire time.

I wondered if she was planning to fight on the defensive this time around. Hilde maintained a stoic expression, but it was clear that Pafia was getting impatient with the flow of the battle. It wouldn't be long before she...

“Hiyah!”

...Charged forward with her sword, thrusting at her foe. But Hilde was undeterred, simply shrugging the blow off with her shield.

“Gh!”

Pafia charged in with a follow-up strike, then another. She was definitely a skilled swordswoman, there was no doubt about that. I had a feeling she was stronger than Yae was when I first met her, but she was still no match for Hilde.

Hilde kept blocking each strike with her shield, almost toying with the girl while barely exerting any energy. Pafia was the only one making large motions, which meant she was starting to run out of stamina. Hilde seized an opening, swooped in, and disarmed Pafia like it was nothing. Just like last time, she held her wooden sword to her enemy’s neck.

“...Do you yield?”

“...Yes, I yield.”

Hilde’s voice was low, and Pafia quietly accepted her own defeat. Part of me wanted to tell her that she’d done well, but I had a feeling she might think I was being snide.

“You’re powerful, Miss Hilde. I’ve never seen anyone handle the blade as well as you.”

“Not at all. I am but a mouse when compared to Moroha, a true lion. There’s always a bigger fish.”

Hilde’s words prompted Pafia to look at Moroha in awe.

“Don’t beat yourself up too much, Hilde. I’d say you’re at least a kitten compared to me.”

“A kitten, you say...?” Hilde smiled awkwardly. Personally, I thought it was pretty high praise, coming from Moroha of all people. Comparing yourself to one of my eccentric family members was never a smart idea, anyway.

“So, now what? You said you’d show us your magic after your swordsmanship, right?”

“That I did! I’ll show you all! I may have fallen behind in swordplay, but my magical prowess is simply uncontested.”

“You’re gutsy, I’ll give you that.”

Moroha gave Pafia a light compliment. The girl didn’t seem completely crushed, but that was probably because she was more confident in her magic.

Hilde picked up Pafia’s discarded gear and walked over to me.

“Nice work, Hilde. How was the fight?”

“I’d never seen her fighting style before; it was interesting. She’s certainly a strong fighter, just not quite strong enough.”

After Hilde talked a little, Elze and Yae came over with a wooden dummy. It was the target for the magic contest. The wood it had been carved from was particularly hardy stuff from Mismede. I wasn’t sure what spells Pafia had at her disposal, but breaking or even burning it would be hard. Although, if she had a slicing-style spell like **[Aqua Cutter],** that’d probably do the trick.

“Alright, go for it. It’s fine to break the target.”

“Very well.”

Moroha gave Pafia a small pat on the back before moving back. Pafia pointed both hands at the target, magic energy swirling within her. The quality and amount of her magic was actually pretty impressive. If we talked about this in RPG terms, she had the makings of a fine Spellsword.

Suddenly, things changed when Pafia’s right hand started emitting bright sparks, while her left conjured up a swirling gale. I almost couldn’t believe it. She was using two different types of magic at the same time. She quickly clasped both hands together and launched the combined magic forward.

“Rage forth, Lightning and Wind! A Dazzling Cyclone: [Plasma Storm]!”

A whirling vortex appeared around the target dummy, followed by strike after strike of lightning. I hadn’t expected that. It wasn’t immensely powerful, but it was a legitimate compound spell. She somehow knew an ancient magic spell that hadn’t fallen to the decay and downgrade of modern magical convenience.

The charred dummy shook around a bit before collapsing to the ground and

splitting into pieces.

“How’d you like that?!”

Pafia turned around, smugness written all over her face. But she frowned slightly when she saw that we weren’t all that shocked. It wasn’t that I wasn’t impressed or anything, it was just that I was so used to weird and over-the-top stuff at this point that the best reaction I could muster was “Neat.”

“**[Plasma Storm]**... It’s a spell that fuses Light and Wind magic. Though I feel she was too heavy on the Wind.”

“I agree. She didn’t bring out the full potential of the Light magic. I think if she gets the balance right, she could make it twice as powerful.”

Leen and Linze exchanged opinions on the spell, prompting Pafia to adopt a startled expression. She clearly hadn’t expected anyone here to so easily identify the mechanics of her spell.

Leen and Linze turned toward each other and started playing rock, paper, scissors. Linze lost, so she let out a little sigh and started walking toward the demonstration area. Pafia backed off as Yae and Elze hauled in a new wooden dummy.

Much like Pafia had done, Linze brought both arms forward toward the doll. One hand produced Ice, while the other produced shimmering beams of Light. She effortlessly merged both magic elements together, making Pafia’s earlier movements look juvenile in comparison.

“Shimmer forth, Ice and Light! Multi-Colored Ray: [Prisma Rainbow]!”

A shining laser shot out from Linze’s hands. The upper half of the doll was vaporized in under a second, but the laser kept going until it bounced off the nearby protective barrier and scattered away into the air. The icy particles inside the beam gleamed in the sunlight, creating tiny rainbows in the sky.

“What?!”

“Ooh, pretty!”

Pafia looked utterly devastated, while Sue beamed merrily. The utter contrast between their expressions made me want to laugh.

“Princess Pafia, where did you learn your spell?”

“Hm? Ah... It was in an old book we unearthed from a dungeon ruin in Nokia...”

“Oh my... Nokia just got a little more interesting...”

Linze’s interest appeared to have been piqued. In the olden days, notable mages would protect their work by keeping them stored in strongholds. Many of them had castles or towers, but most just settled on dungeons. After all, you only needed rudimentary Earth magic to dig one out of the ground. It certainly wouldn’t be odd to find powerful tomes in ancient ruins. In Doc Babylon’s case, she built the floating fortress to house all her great works.

We returned to the small terrace, and Yumina raised her voice toward Pafia.

“Well, we know your strengths now. But we’d like to get to know you better. Would you join us for tea?”

Pafia just nodded quietly, apparently still in shock at her utter defeat. I was about to follow them when Leen suddenly stopped me.

“It’s time for a girl’s talk, darling. We’d appreciate it if you stayed out. Lycia is fine to participate as well, but we’d also appreciate it if Ambassador Jantje kept his distance.”

The ambassador seemed reluctant to leave his princess, but Lycia calmed him down. The group of girls made their way into the castle. The ambassador went off on his own, so I walked back to a different part of the castle when Tsubaki suddenly appeared from the shadows.

“What’s the intel?”

“Well... According to our findings, King Luhm Ladeaux Nokia is on his deathbed.”

“Seriously? Is he sick?”

“The cause is unknown. He’s in critical condition, however. He has two daughters. The older sister, Lefia, and the younger sister, Pafia. The protocol says Lefia will succeed the throne if their father passes.”

Given the lack of a male heir, that made sense.

“I can tell what you’re thinking, and it’s not that. Lefia will succeed uncontested because Pafia died three months ago.”

“What?!” *She died?! Then who’s the girl in my castle right now?!*

“...So there’s a fake here?”

“It’s possible that this person is a fake using Nokia’s isolation to her advantage in order to win your favor... But that sounds extremely careless. Princess Pafia is confirmed as deceased. She fell into a ravine with her horse on an excursion, and her body was recovered.”

If a body was recovered then there’s no doubt about it. This person’s a fake... Did she maybe impersonate the princess without realizing she died? This seems pretty sloppy. Complicated, too. If I had accepted her as my bride, then wouldn’t I have had to go to Nokia at some point? At that point, the people of Nokia would confirm that she’s a fake, so why even bother going to all this trouble? Or was she planning to drag out the formal meetings until I’m fully hitched...?

“That’s only preliminary information, there’s also—”

“My lord!” Commander Lain cut Tsubaki off. She was running full pelt down a nearby hallway, her rabbit ears swaying as she moved. I didn’t really think her frantic behavior was fitting for a commander... If it was that urgent, she could’ve just called me on the phone.

“Please hurry, we need you in the greeting room. An ambassador from Nokia is here!”

“Huh? But we just waved off Ambassador Jantje. Why would we go to the greeting room when we already greeted him?”

“No, no! Not him! Another ambassador!”

...Another?

“This ambassador said we’re harboring someone impersonating their princess! That we need to hand them over at once!”

So that means she has to be a fake, right? Ugh, this is too confusing... I’ll just head to the greeting area for now...

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“Do they have ID?”

“Yes, I verified it with the Xenoahs overlord’s information. The medallion he presented looks legitimate... But so does the one presented by the other ambassador.”

As I walked down the hallway, I confirmed a few details with Lain. At the very least, it seemed like these potential impostors hadn’t killed anyone for their credentials.

“So Jantje’s medallion’s identical to the real thing?”

“It is, sir. It’s certainly unusual for there to be more than one in circulation...”

It wasn’t that odd for larger countries, but Nokia only did business with Xenoahs, so having multiple signifiers for foreign interaction seemed highly unusual. I also wondered how this new ambassador had learned we’d been visited by a fake one. Nokia was isolated from outside affairs, so it was a little peculiar. I wondered if they had a spell similar to **[Search]** or something.

“Guess I’ll find out more by talking to them.” I entered the chamber and saw five men. They immediately took a knee and bowed their heads. One was a middle-aged man with a portly body, while the other four were fairly plain young men in leather armor. Presumably, the four were escorts.

“Your Majesty. My name is Dryfe Chyomah, ambassador of the Kingdom of Nokia.”

Kousaka raised his voice to begin my formal introduction, but I stopped him with a wave of my hand.

“Let’s skip the formalities. Ambassador Dryfe, I’ve heard that you want us to hand over Princess Pafia and Ambassador Jantje, but what exactly is going on here?”

“...Haaah, yes... That girl in your care right now is a fake. The real Princess Pafia died three months ago during an excursion.”

Hm... That matches up with what Tsubaki told me... I looked Ambassador Dryfe up and down. He was a chubby man with a white beard. On the whole, he was quite stout, with a little smile curved at the edges of his mouth. But I could

tell from the tired bags under his eyes that he probably wasn't smiling on the inside. He had a ring on his finger and a jangly bangle on his arm, probably as a ward against magic or dark forces.

"Ambassador Jantje has the same credentials as you, what about that?"

"...Faro Jantje was an ambassador in the service of Nokia, that much is true. The medal he carries is legitimate. He was out conducting operations in Xenoahs and was due to come home, but for some reason, he's now in the company of a pretender princess..."

"So now you want him back?"

"Indeed."

Hmm... So Jantje is a legitimate diplomat to Xenoahs... This is pretty weird, though. How'd they manage to track him here?

"How did you learn about the fake princess?"

"...This is an off-the-record admittance, but our country has recently begun to gather intelligence on the outside world beyond Xenoahs. Ever since the fall of Yulong, we have decided international trade would be a viable route."

"So you have spies."

"...If you really must put a label on it, yes. By chance, one of our agents came across Jantje and the others en route to Brunhild. We headed out via our fastest mode of transportation the moment we heard the news."

What he said made sense. Nokia was a country that was isolated more due to its surroundings than anything else. Now that Yulong had fallen, it was logical to reach out to other countries for support.

"I understand the allegations against this supposed fake, but we have no way of verifying what you're saying is true. We can base our understanding on what Xenoahs has told us, and what you've told us. If indeed Jantje was ambassador to Xenoahs, then that lines up with the information we've received from them about the legitimacy of his medal. But we still can't take you at your word. Do you have anything from your king?"

"...The king is currently unwell. Princess Lefia is taking care of state affairs at

present. However, the princess doesn't know about this situation. We are currently working on orders from our nation's Marshal, Caezar Nortelis."

He's unwell? Guess it makes sense they wouldn't mention the part where he's dying. But how does neither the king nor the current acting sovereign not know about this?

"Princess Pafia was a beloved sister to Princess Lefia. Our marshal believed that learning about this heinous impostor would only serve to further damage her wounded heart. Ah, I should also mention that Marshal Caezar is engaged to our Princess Lefia."

Hmhm... I guess it makes sense. If my sister just died, my father was on his deathbed, and I had to deal with governmental affairs on top of that, then learning someone was impersonating my sister would probably be too much to bear. But, at the same time... something just doesn't feel right here.

Ambassador Dryfe's eyes were darting around here and there. He seemed fairly unfocused and antsy. His responses to my questions were also surprisingly blunt.

"There's no real way we can pass judgment here. Both you and Jantje have the medal signifying you're legitimate ambassadors, so we can't really say for sure that he's here illegitimately."

This was a matter for Nokia to decide, not Brunhild. Something was still unsettling me, though... Dryfe's demeanor in general was pretty creepy and unusual. Though I did know it was unfair to judge a book by a cover.

"...Then we will judge. Will you hand over the impostor and the others?"

"Well, I mean, I guess I—"

"We profusely refuse your request."

"Huh?"

I turned around toward the sudden voice. Yumina was by my throne. The other girls weren't with her. I wondered if something had happened.

"I've heard the entire story from Pafia. The true story. Return to Nokia and tell your marshal this. If he's going to run, he should do it now while he still has

a chance. I hope you understand the message, Ambassador.”

Yumina glared down at Dryfe, not mincing a single word. It was really unusual for her to be this stern... Just what had Pafia told her?

“Touya.”

“Y-Yes?”

“Look him over with your divine sight.”

“Huh? Okay...”

Let’s see here... Divinity flowing, annnd... There we go... Wait, what?! There’s a dark substance inside his body... It’s kinda like smoke or gas, but it’s filling every bit of him.

“What did you see?”

“Uh... like a gassy miasma inside of him. What is it?”

“He’s not himself. There’s something possessing his body. My mystic eye noticed it off the bat. There are two beings there instead of one.”

In response to Yumina’s words, Ambassador Dryfe rose to his feet. His unfocused eyes, now looking far more hollow than ever, glared back at us.

“...Wrghh... WrEtCHes... Pahhfffia... If OnLy... diED, hnn...”

Another voice started to come from Ambassador Dryfe. Though it was more apt to say it was a second voice being overlaid upon his own.

“The ambassador’s possessed?”

“It seems that way, yes. My mystic eye’s showing me a dark presence inside him, but not in the man himself. I think that Dryfe himself is probably a fine man, but not whatever has a grasp on him.”

That meant the person I’d been speaking to probably wasn’t Dryfe at all. Still, possession like that was rare. There were certainly a lot of monsters that could possess people, but they only compelled people to rampage and act out on their base instincts. From what I’d seen so far, Dryfe hadn’t done any of that. He’d come here and acted far too rationally for a traditionally possessed man. Which could only mean one thing...

“Are you a summoned beast?”

“M...y name... is IpTimUS... My LoRd CaEZaR... EnTRustSteD me... To KiLL thAT wReTchED... PaFiA...”

Iptimus? This guy sure is a chatterbox... It’s pretty rare for a summoned beast to be able to hold a conversation like this.

Usually, it took a hell of a lot of magic to keep a summon maintained for a long period of time, but by infesting Dryfe’s body, he could probably siphon off the man’s magic. It effectively turned the summon into a parasitic organism that could pretend to be the man while maintaining deep cover.

“Well. Now we know who we should be trusting.”

The four guardsmen from Nokia had taken up arms. Each one of them brandished their weapons at us. I looked over them with my divine sight, and sure enough, they also had some of the dark miasma in their bodies.

Lain and the others immediately brought their weapons out. I decided to take matters into my own hands, but Linze suddenly jumped out and cast **[Banish]** on the group, much to my surprise. I felt a little bit disappointed, since it’d been a while since I’d gotten to use that spell.

“Hrk... Brhgh... Blaaarghh?!”

The men screamed as what I could only describe as black bile started flowing out of their mouths. It was disgusting... Kind of reminded me of ectoplasmic goop.

After they were finished vomiting, all five men fell to the ground. If it was just an undead monster then that spell would’ve killed it, so that was proof this was a powerful summoned beast.

“You... YoU yOu YouUyouYouUYoUuU!!!”

The five misty fragments all merged into a single being, a Specter. Apparently, Iptimus had been a single entity the entire time, but it could split itself to possess multiple people at once.

Two golden, gleaming eyes emerged from the whirling smoke. I wasn’t entirely sure what to do with the Specter in front of me.

“[Boost]!”

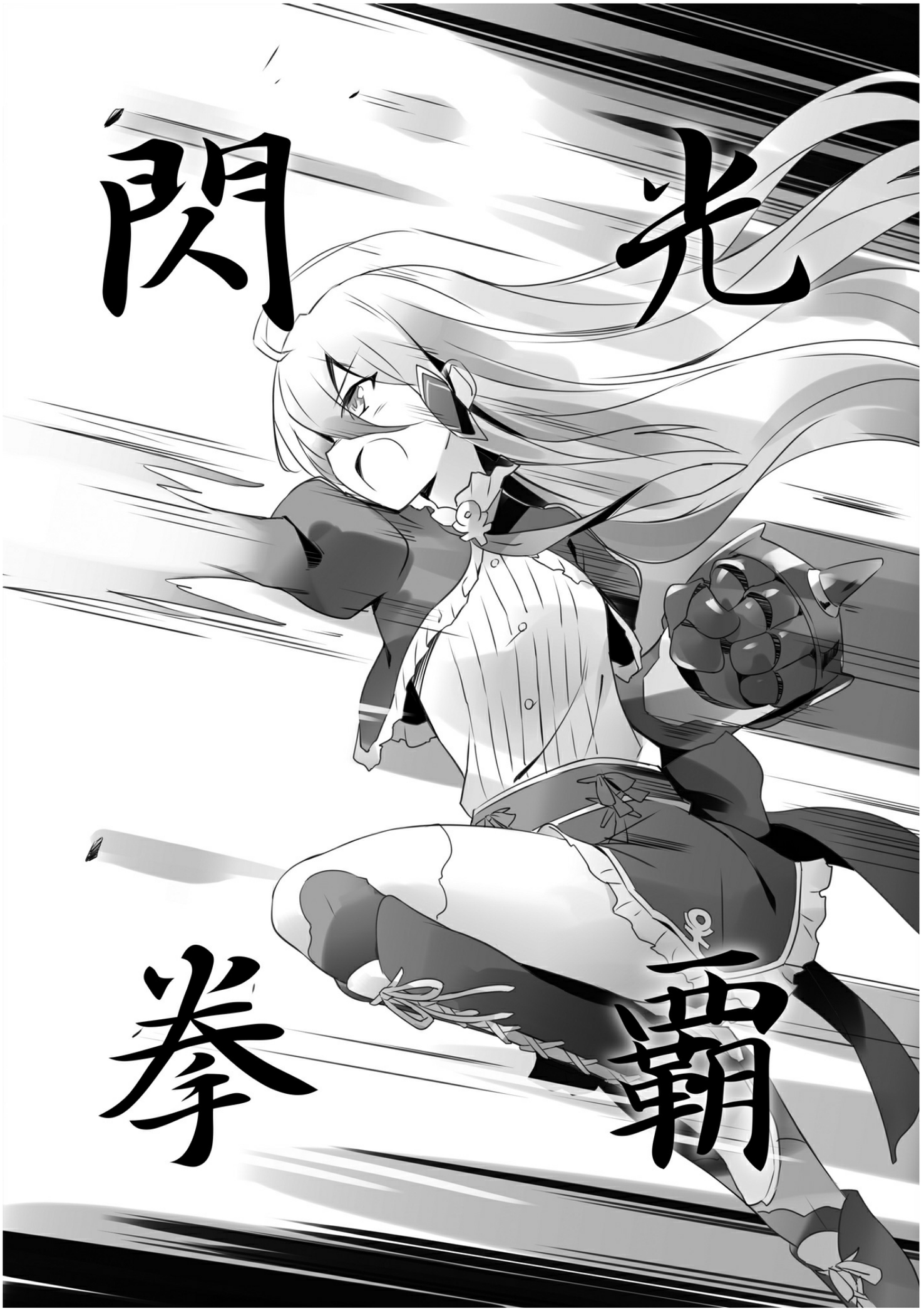
Elze jumped out from behind her sister, kicked off the ground, and charged toward the Specter. She had her specialized gauntlets equipped.

“FOol... BringiNg fiStS to a SpeCTer?! You’Ll maKE a FiNE nEw hoST!”

“The only fool here is you.”

Elze’s gauntlets shone with awesome power. These gauntlets represented Elze’s will, and I’d recently enchanted them both with every magical element possible. Even a Specter couldn’t avoid damage from it.

“Divine Combat Art: Luminous Flashfist!”


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“GRAAARGH!”

Elze’s fist drove through the Specter, scattering it into tiny tatters of light. The monster’s misty form began evaporating into thin air.

“LoRd CaE...ZaR... ForGIvE... mE...”

He transmitted one final thought to his master before vanishing. I was certain that Caezar knew exactly what had just gone down. Advanced summons maintained psychic links with their contractors, after all.

That certainly landed us in a predicament.

“Touya, please cast **[Recovery]** on these men.”

“Huh? Oh, sure thing.”

I was too lost in thought to notice Yumina trying to get my attention, so I hopped up from my throne. Then, I cast **[Recovery], [Refresh],** and **[Area Heal]** on the fallen men. They’d be back on their feet in no time.

“Sir Dryfe...!”

Ambassador Jantje walked into the room alongside Nikola. Yae, Lu, and the rest of my fiancees appeared as well. Princess Pafia, along with her handmaid Lycia, was with them. The trio from Nokia looked over the five fallen men.

“They’ll be okay. They’re just resting for now. Their bodies were possessed by a spectral creature, but they’re physically fine.”

“To manipulate people like this... Caezar... I’ll never forgive him!”

Princess Pafia clenched her teeth, a look of rage upon her face. There was still the matter of determining whether or not she actually was the princess, though.

“Ambassador Dryfe... Or rather, the thing possessing his body, said you were an impostor. He said that the real Princess Pafia died in an accident three months ago.”

“That’s untrue. I am absolutely the second princess of Nokia, I swear it. That death was a falsified incident conjured up by Marshal Caezar. The body they recovered was a double.”

Geez... That definitely kind of makes more sense, all things considered. I'd have a hard time trusting the Caezar guy after all this, anyway.

"So Caezar was responsible for the accident?"

"He was. He sought to kill me, the last obstacle in his path, and take over Nokia through his engagement with my sister. I uncovered his plans by chance, so I fled Nokia. I went to the only place I knew of the outside world, Xenoahs. It was there that I met Jantje."

Pafia's gaze turned to the man by her side. In response, the man awkwardly spoke up.

"I-I was on my way home to Nokia from Xenoahs, so I had little grasp of the situation... but I trusted in the princess. I-I always had my suspicions about the marshal, if I must be honest."

Caezar had apparently built significant influence in Nokia over the last few years. He was seen as a rising star in the military branch by many. But others were confused about the speed of his ascent, and the strange behavior of those that got too close to him.

"Dryfe was one of the people who suddenly started acting strange. He was such a warm and gentle man, but one day he was a completely loyal follower of Caezar. He began to make political decisions that directly benefited Caezar as well... The rumors said he acted like a man possessed. It was honestly hard to watch..."

Well, that's because he literally had been possessed. I don't think anyone would act normal if they had weird ectoplasmic spectral shit inside them.

"Princess Pafia needed a powerful ally to stand against the marshal. That's why she came to us, Touya."

"...She could've just asked normally, then..."

Why bother selling yourself as my wife when you could've just been honest?

I sighed slightly at Yumina's words before Pafia bowed her head to me.

"I-I'm so sorry! I-I-I had just heard that you were a notorious lover of women, s-so I thought the fastest way to earn your favor would be to enter your

harem...”

“Gimme a break, here!”

Why do rumors like that keep cropping up?! Has someone got it out for me or something?!

“Touya, we talked it over and we’d like to lend Pafia our aid. We want to go to Nokia by ourselves for this.”

“Wait, Yumina... Just you and the girls? Why do you want to do that?”

I wondered what had prompted this.

“Well, darling. I’m basing all of this on what we heard from Pafia and the Specter we just saw, but... I’m assuming that this Caezar fellow is a manipulation mage. He’s effectively a subtype of necromancer that uses others as puppets through Dark magic...” Leen replied in Yumina’s stead, but I wasn’t fully convinced. I wasn’t familiar with manipulation mages, but Linze suddenly cut in with more information.

“I read about it in Babylon’s library. Manipulation mages possess those with weak wills, strong negative feelings, or just those with room in their hearts for corruption. It would make sense he’d be able to take control of a government, since they’re usually filled with either ambitious, spineless, or complacent men.”

Oh yeah. I think I read about that, maybe? Instead of controlling corpses, this type of necromancer controls living people by exploiting them through ancient forbidden magic.

“So this guy’s been using his magic to increase his status and power within Nokia?”

“It doesn’t just stop there. This wretched man has also manipulated innocent women to his own ends. He’s a scumbag who cares little for morals, clearly.”

The way Hilde spoke was downright indignant. She was a knight princess, and all about fairness, so it made sense she’d be so disgusted. I could see the spark of rage burning in her eyes.

The power to manipulate others would inevitably lead to someone using it to

their own ends. It seemed like Caezar was doing exactly that.

“I heard that Caezar has even offered up women to nobles that support him. And that he toys with girls until he gets bored of them, and then he just discards them.”

“We cannot allow this to happen. He’s an enemy to all women!”

“That is right, it is. Toying with the lives of others makes you irredeemable, it does.”

Elze, Lu, and Yae all seemed just as incensed as Hilde. I kind of felt a little awkward, since I was capable of that manipulation magic, too... That being said, it wasn’t as if I’d used that power or anything.

“Fortunately, it seems that King Nokia and the first princess had strong enough wills to resist his control...” Leen spoke up, gesturing toward Pafia. The princess continued that train of thought.

“Caezar has swayed the nobles, forcing my sister to become his betrothed via their influence. Most of the people in our government had their own ambitions, but they’ve all been twisted into supporting Caezar now. My father, now on his deathbed, is too ill to do anything to stop him... And if my sister didn’t manage to warn me, then I’d have been killed! My sister let me escape, saying there didn’t need to be any more sacrifices beyond her. But when I escaped with Lycia, we were chased by the marshal’s men. We ended up tumbling from a cliffside into a river...”

So that’s why he assumed she was dead... But then, why produce the fake body?

“...Do you think he staged a fake corpse to upset Pafia’s sister?”

“When your emotions collapse, little holes can open up in your heart. Weaknesses can appear in your mind. These tiny gaps are the perfect places for darkness to fester...” Leen folded her arms as she replied. Paula copied Leen’s motion, folding her arms and wandering around. I kind of felt like she was glaring at me.

Don’t get uppity with me, stuffed toy... Just because I know these spells doesn’t make me a bad guy!

“Doesn’t that mean the first princess could already be Caezar’s puppet? Why doesn’t he just do away with her?”

“I doubt it. My sister isn’t that weak, even in the face of grief. Even if she was told I was dead, she’d hold herself together for the sake of her nation. That’s why Caezar decided to marry her no matter what her feelings on it were. When my father passes, she’ll succeed the throne. And by right of marriage, he’ll be king. He needs her.”

“So if she dies after she’s ascended the throne, he’ll have complete control...”

Pafia nodded her head. This was a truly despicable plot.

I asked Jantje why he hadn’t gone to Xenoahs for help before coming to Brunhild, but apparently, the overlord had gotten into a really bad mood the last time I’d been brought up in conversation. That was why he didn’t want to disturb the overlord, and just came straight here. It wasn’t like Brunhild had a bad relationship with Xenoahs. The overlord was just sensitive when it came to me and his daughter... Still, now we knew the truth of what was going on in Nokia.

“But why just you guys?”

“A monster who uses women should be judged by women... We’ll snip his thing off...” Sakura spoke coldly as she made a scissor gesture with her fingers.

“We’re going at the behest of Princess Pafia of Nokia in order to verify the truth of this situation. In solidarity as women, we feel we have to. At the very least, Caezar’s summoned Specter ran wild in our royal palace and attacked one of us. He has to pay for that, and we’re the ones who’ll make him do so,” Hilde stated.

...I think Elze was the one doing the attacking there, not the Specter.

“Did you just think something bad, there?”

“N-Nope, not at all!”

Elze shot me a death glare. In all fairness, the Specter did say it was going to possess Elze... so she could go for a self-defense plea.

“I still think I should go... If he manipulates people, what if one of you gets

possessed? Plus, what about Sue? She's so young!"

"You can't treat me like a child forever. I'm a proper lady now, I'll have you know. So have a little faith in me, okay? Don't you believe in me, Touya?"

"No, I uh... I believe in you..."

Sue narrowed her eyes at me. She'd been pretty angry as of late whenever anyone babied her. Despite my worries, I decided to trust them.

"Worry not, dearie. I shall accompany them."

"Huh?"

I heard a fluttering sound, and a kindly old voice called out from behind me. I turned and saw the goddess of space-time herself, wearing a hand-knit shawl. I wasn't sure what to think.

"Granny?!"

"I would like to stretch these old bones once in a while. Plus, I will be able to provide easy transportation for everyone with my powers."

The old lady smiled gently, as if she was talking about dropping off a group of kids at the mall.

"I know you care deeply about your fiancees, dearie, but protecting them is not the only way to show your love. You need to believe in their own strengths as well. There will be many situations like this in the future, so it is best to get used to them. Do you understand?"

Granny Tokie had a point. If I was going to be the divine administrator of this entire world, then there'd be many situations where I'd want to help, but would be forbidden by the rules to directly interfere.

Yumina and the others had the divine blessing from me, Karen, and other members of my family. With Granny Tokie by their side, what did I really have to worry about?

"...Alright, fine. Just take care, okay? Don't overdo it."

"Relax, Touya! Don't worry so much, or you'll turn into one of those fussy husbands."

Guh... You don't have to put it like that, Elze... Isn't it enough that I begrudgingly agreed?!

"Don't you worry, Princess. We're here to help you, and we're all in this together."

"Thank you... Thank you so much, everyone...!"

Leen's words prompted Pafia to burst into tears. She bowed her head as she sniffled. Lycia and Jantje bowed to Yumina and the other fiancees, too.

"...Whew... If Touya saved Pafia on his own, she'd definitely be brought in as the tenth bride..."

"Yeah, exactly. It'd just be a repeat of when he met Lu."

"Y-Yeah! That kind of situation should be mine alone!"

"Is it really so bad if Touya has more wives?"

"You're too naive, Sue. If there are more wives, we'll have to share him more."

"Yes, we should not give up our slices of pie, we should not."

"In the end, it's better for everyone if we take out that scumbag ourselves."

I could've sworn I overheard some disturbing murmuring from my brides-to-be, but surely I was just hearing things.

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"And that's basically how it went..."

"Dang. You have it rough, Touya."

Ende greedily gulped down his juice before asking the barkeep for another. We were at a tavern named The Warmaiden's Wing. It was bustling with people. I'd called Ende over, so we sat together at the far end of the bar so I could chat with him about recent events.

There were a few of my knights around, so I'd changed my appearance with **[Mirage].** I didn't want them too tense in a casual environment, after all.

"I think it's important to give women time to talk amongst themselves,

though. It’s been the same at my place, too.”

“That right, Ende?”

“Yeah. Melle, Ney, and Lycee all go out on their own pretty often. And, unlike a certain someone, I’m not always worrying about where they are.”

Guh... Don’t bully me, bro. My situation’s a little more complicated than the girls just going out on a shopping trip...

“A man needs to be secure in himself, Touya. Girls like security in a guy, you know? It’s about confidence. It’s about standing firm, too. You feel me on that, man?”

“...I don’t know if I wanna hear that from a guy who got kicked out of his house on account of a slumber party.”

“Ugh...” Ende groaned slightly as he leaned forward.

Melle and the other Phrase girls had befriended Micah from the Silver Moon Inn, Fleur the waitress, Rebecca and Spica from our knight order, Sonia the adventurer, and Est from the Red Cats. They were all having a sleepover at Ende’s place today, and the poor sucker was here with me because he’d been booted out.



“I’m glad that Melle made friends, at least... But hey, why don’t we tear up the town tonight? We could have a guy’s night.”

“Sorry, I already had a guy’s night recently.”

“What, why didn’t you invite me?!”

He hadn’t really missed out. Mahjong was more an old guy’s game anyway. I made a mental note to invite him next time, though.

Man, these potato chips are pretty good. Guess I’ll have a couple more.

“Thanks for waiting, here’s your drinks.”

The barkeep walked over and dropped off a cup of fruit juice by Ende. He then placed down a bottle of alcohol and three drinking glasses. I didn’t know why, since I certainly hadn’t ordered it.

“Uh, I didn’t—”

“Hic! Eeeheheh... I’ve been, hic, wahnting to drink this Regulus booze for a while. But I haven’t had much pocket money lately... Well, time for, hic, my first sip!”

The annoying little gremlin herself, Suika, appeared in a nearby seat. Much to my chagrin, she reached out for a glass of booze. She inhaled the scent of the drink, then downed the whole glass in one go.

“Did I say you could drink during work hours?”

“Eheh... You’re, hic, just treating me to some booze! It’s a good thing!”

“Don’t you remember the promise you made?”

“Uhhm... I-I haven’t been drinking as much at night...”

Suika was the goddess of alcohol, but she looked like a little kid. I didn’t want any misunderstandings, so I’d banned her from going out to drink at night. She was banned from going to taverns and bars unless she had very important business there.

“That’s why, hic, I came here today! Because I heard you and Mr. Ende were her—”

“You just wanted to drink, Suika.”

“Th-That’s just a happy little coincidence! That’s all it, hic, is!”

Suika laughed her irritating little laugh. Still, she’d already ordered the booze, so there was no helping it.

“...Only for today, okay?”

“Yahoo! That’s our Touya!”

Suika took another gulp of the previously forbidden brew.

“Phwah! That’s the stuff! I can feel it soaking through me!”

“...You drink like an old man.”

She seemed to be having a great time. Even Ende was laughing a bit at her antics. I wondered if this strange, warm atmosphere was part of her ability as the goddess of alcohol. Somehow, I felt like I was at home.

“So why’d you come all the way out here? Couldn’t you have just called me on the phone?”

“Eheheeeh... As soon as I, hic, heard you were in the tavern, I had to come running! There’s a, hic, another god coming down soon, you know?!”

“Huh? One of the invitees is coming down early?”

“Nope, hic! Not an invitee! He just needs to talk to you directly!”

...You’re talking pretty casually about a literal god descending into the mortal realm... But who the hell could come down here so casually? Isn’t there a system where you need permission?

I sipped at my fruit juice a bit more before asking.

“Uhh... It’s the, hic, god of destruction!”

“WHAT?!”

“Bwaugh!”

I sputtered, sending a mouth full of fruit juice all over Ende.

The god of destruction, of all people?! The one that’s supposed to erase no-longer-necessary or out-of-control worlds?! Why?!

“Wh-Wh-What?! Tell me why the god of destruction’s coming down!”

“Huh? Hic, because they’re a good drinking buddy!”

...That is definitely not the reason.

“I’m being serious, Suika...”

“Well, hic... If I had to guess... I’d say they’re coming to check on how you shape up. Because they’re also a, hic, one of Gramps’ beneficiaries.”

Huh, really...? That’d make them a direct superior to me, then... But what’s their intent?

“Touya, I feel like I just heard something I really shouldn’t have heard. Is the world gonna get wrecked, or something? I’d like some advance warning so I can take Melle away with me.”

“No, it’s fine... Probably.”

Ende had an expression equally exasperated as it was amused.

No matter who this god of destruction is, I’m sure they won’t trash the world for no good reason... Probably...

I wondered if this was like the new employee at the office being harassed or hazed by his seniors. Yumina and the other girls had their own struggle to face, but apparently, I had my own to deal with, too... All I could do was gulp down my juice.

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“Hmph. So Iptimus failed... Pathetic. Defeated by a woman, of all things? I’ve no room for trash like that in my employ...”

The man cursed the failure of his summoned beast. He stood on a balcony, overlooking a great city as a cold wind blew from the mountains. Shembhala, the capital city of Nokia, was a rugged city nestled between several rocky peaks. The yellow triangle flag, a symbol of the nation, fluttered here and there around the castle town.

This man was the country’s marshal, leader of all its armies. He wore a jet-black robe and had a fine jade necklace around his neck. The other pieces of

jewelry adorning his body were coral, agate, gold, and silver. All of this gaudy equipment served to highlight his affluence. He was a tall man in his mid-thirties, with copper-red hair and a small mustache. His gloomy eyes shone with a faint light as they looked down upon the castle.

A ratcheting sound came from behind him as a door was opened. He found himself joined by another man. This man had a hunched back, but the blue robe he wore signified his status as a military officer. A direct underling to the dark-robed man.

“You called, Lord Caezar...?”

“Iptimus has fallen. Pafia seems to have sided with Brunhild. That filthy little cretin... She should have just been a good little dog and obeyed me...”

“Fret not, my lord... Brunhild is no match for you. You hold in your hands the proud Elks legacy, do you not?”

“That is correct.”

The hunched man in the blue robe spoke without moving his lips. That was because it wasn’t him speaking at all, it was the Specter that inhabited his body. The man himself had long been placed into a dormant state. He was little more than a puppet for Caezar’s whims.

“You’ll take over where Iptimus failed, Zebeta. Go and infest Pafia’s body. If you can’t do that, then kill her.”

“As you command.”

“Ah, and take care of the bitch in my bed. Have her clasped in irons and sold to our usual broker.”

The small man, infested with the Specter named Zebeta, glanced over at the naked woman sprawled out on Caezar’s bed. She wasn’t sleeping, she’d been rendered unconscious. The whites of her rolled back eyes were visible. She was the daughter of an influential count who had fallen so deeply into Caezar’s debt that he had committed suicide. Upon learning of the count’s death, Caezar simply took the girl as a substitute for what had been owed to him.

“Are you sure? It must have taken great effort to get your hands on this one.”

“I’ve no use for women that refuse to submit. She was worth a single night of pleasure, nothing more...” Caezar waved off his subordinate’s question and left on more important business.

Zebeta, now alone in the room, took a closer glance at the girl. Her body was bruised and lacerated, evidence of whip strikes upon her supple flesh. She must have resisted Caezar until she passed out from the pain.

Caezar’s methods were shockingly brutal. The girl may have been given over to pay her father’s debt, but her will hadn’t been broken. Her current sorry state was the result of her unyielding spirit.

“You are far too brutish, my lord... If you only learned how to better exploit mental weaknesses, you’d become an expert manipulator...” Zebeta muttered a few small criticisms of his master’s tactics as he hoisted the woman over his hunched back. From the look of things, her injuries would leave lasting scars.

The Specter sighed quietly. Former noble or not, she wouldn’t sell for much with such nasty-looking wounds.

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“Hohoh... So this is the Nokia capital, it is...” Yae glanced around her immediate surroundings, eyes brimming with curiosity.

Shembhala, Nokia’s capital city, was pretty similar to Mismede’s, in that it had no walls and was an open environment. But the housing structure was more like Eashen’s in style, featuring many wooden buildings with pillars and white plaster walls. Many of these buildings flew yellow, triangular flags from their rooftops.

Yumina, Lu, Elze, Linze, Yae, Hilde, Sakura, Sue, Leen, Princess Pafia, her handmaid Lycia, and a small stuffed bear took a few steps into the city streets. Thanks to the goddess of space-time, Tokie (who was also with them), they’d gotten there in an instant.

Pafia was wearing a hooded cloak for obvious reasons, but the others did not need disguises. Nokia was an isolated country, so it didn’t have much diversity when it came to ethnic groups or multiculturalism. The girls definitely stood out based on their clothing alone, so their first mission was to acquire native Nokian

outfits.

Pafia only had a few pieces of clothing with her in Brunhild, and they didn't fit any of the other girls. Therefore, they just decided to buy some in Shembhala.

"Let's shop here."

The store they'd chosen was quite large, and Lycia was quick to guide the girls toward suitable outfits. There were various articles of clothing on the walls and shelves. There were also various accessories, hats, and scarves.

"Nokia's clothes are so vibrant!"

"Yeah... Looks like the fashion here is about wearing lots of different colors, rather than just one..."

Lu and Linze murmured to each other as they looked at the clothing. Obviously, they didn't want to go for random colors, though. They still needed to match up nicely.

"There are lots of accessories here, too. I dunno if I like jangly, bangly stuff..." Sue grumbled slightly as she looked at the armbands and necklaces on display.

"Different jewels mean different things here. For example, in the case of men and women, agate means you're single, while jade means you're married. There are also gender-specific ones. The tiger's eye gemstone means you're the firstborn son, for example, while this amethyst would mark you as the firstborn daughter."

"Interesting. So you can learn a little bit about someone by the jewelry they wear..." Yumina seemed enthralled by Lycia's explanation.

Princess Pafia's outfit didn't have any particular meaning to it, though. She hadn't exactly been dressed for friendly territory.

They spent a long time mixing and matching fabrics, outfit pieces, hats, and so on. If Touya were there, he'd have surely become exasperated long before they were finished.

After deciding on her own clothing, Tokie moved in to assist Sue, who seemed to be struggling.

"This should suit you, sweetheart."

“Thanks, Granny!” Sue exclaimed as she gave Tokie a big hug.

The elderly woman had a very sweet and caring temperament, so Sue had immediately come to adore her. She was even thinking of learning how to knit just like Linze and Melle could.

Eventually, everyone finished picking out their clothes. Princess Pafia and Lycia opted to remain in their hooded robes. She still wore her regal outfit underneath, but she didn’t want to be identified as the princess. After all, there was no telling how far Caezar’s sight stretched. Lycia kept her hood up for similar reasons.

If Touya had been there, he’d have been able to solve the problem of possible recognition via his **[Mirage]** spell. There was also **[Invisible],** but that would’ve made coordination difficulty for the group. It also wasn’t a great spell to use in crowded areas.

Yumina and the others paid for their clothing and left the store. Even in the busy street, the size of their group stood out a little bit. Thankfully they didn’t turn too many heads, however.

“Guess we got our destination, then...” Elze fiddled with her collar slightly as she glanced over to Nokia’s royal castle.

Nokia’s royal castle was a majestic structure with towering walls of white plaster. It looked like it was built into the mountain itself. The foundation was apparently built on the site of some ancient ruins, and according to Pafia, there were several unexplored dungeon depths beneath the castle itself. One of these dungeons had housed the magic tome that had information about the **[Plasma Storm]** spell inside.

“We need to find a way to contact my father and sister first...”

“But we can’t do that, can we? Doesn’t that marshal have everyone under his thumb?”

“The people in there are his puppets, they are. The castle itself is a den of vice now, it is.”

Hilde and Yae gave less-than-hopeful responses to Pafia’s concern. The people in the castle would surely recognize Pafia at a glance. They had to be

careful, or Caezar would discover them and unrelated individuals could end up getting hurt. Those under his control weren't necessarily bad people, after all.

"If Touya were here we could just teleport inside, but..." Linze muttered slightly, casting a gaze over to Tokie. The kindly old goddess opened her own mouth in response.

"It's true that I could send you all into the castle if I wished it, my dears... But would that be a victory well-earned? You told Touya that you could take care of it yourselves, so you should try and do it without relying on me too much."

"...Yes, it'd be a little bit pathetic of us to take that option."

"Indeed. Let's do this without Grandmother Tokie's help, girls. I'm sure we can do this."

Everyone nodded in agreement with Lu. After a few moments, Sakura raised her hand.

"...I could use my **[Teleport]** to get us inside... It's way more handy than **[Gate]** in this situation, anyway..."

"That's true, you don't need to have already been somewhere to teleport in... But can you take multiple people at once like our darling?"

"...Mm... One or two at a time, maybe..."

"We don't know where we'll land, right? What if we appear right in front of Caezar..."

"Mmh..."

[Teleport] was a spell that depended on its caster's senses to determine placement. To use an analogy, you could think of the destination as a trash can located far away. You could try throwing some trash at it, but your chance of hitting the mark exactly wouldn't be high. You could still wind up near it, though. If you got lucky you'd make it to the right spot, but there was always a chance of missing. Obviously, you could refine the accuracy with repeated practice, but since Sakura didn't know the layout of the place she was basically firing blind.

[Teleport] wasn't useful for longer distance travel precisely because it relied

on a sense of distance and spatial awareness. That didn't make it useless, though. If you didn't care about getting exposed or landing in the wrong place, it was a very useful spell.

"We don't want to come out in the wrong place and heighten their security measures."

"Could Yumina or Sakura summon a creature to scout the place out in advance?"

"...I have magic power from the grand duke in my ring, and that's directly connected to Mr. Mittens... If I summoned something else, it might cause him to be un-summoned, so I can't... Mr. Mittens isn't good at being sneaky, either... He's a very noisy cat..."

"I also don't have any contracted summons that can be used for covert operations... It'd take a while if I tried to randomly summon something, too..."

"Oh, I see. Sorry, Touya always summons exactly what we need. I thought it was easy..."

"Yeah... Touya can summon whatever he needs to, but for most normal people, it's a randomized process."

"Hmhm... Then we are at an impasse, we are."

"Oh, uhm..." Princess Pafia hesitantly raised a hand. She was actually outside the brainstorming circle, so her sudden intrusion caused Touya's fiancees to raise their eyebrows.

"Erm... There's actually a secret passage that leads to the castle. We could use it to sneak into the castle undetected... I-I'm really sorry I didn't mention it sooner! I just couldn't find a chance to get a word in..."

Pafia immediately felt scrutinized by nine silent stares.

"...Ahem. Could you tell us more?" Lu cleared her throat and spoke up.

"It's an emergency escape passage in case of enemy attack. I don't know all that much about it, I don't even think it's been used before..."

Nokia had been an isolated kingdom since the very first day it was founded. The mountains gave it near-perfect protection. Even though Yulong had

attacked Nokia several times in the past, those attacks had never penetrated as far as the capital. It was no wonder that they'd never had to use their escape route. After all, such methods were only last-resort options for when a country was about to fall.

Just about every castle in the world had an escape route built into it somewhere. Belfast's castle had one, as did Brunhild's. Brunhild's castle was inspired by Belfast's, so the escape route was in a similar location.

Either way, Princess Pafia proposed that the girls use this route to sneak into the castle.

"It is a royal escape route, it is... Is it okay for us to use, is it?"

"We don't really have other options at this point. The passage is part of an old dungeon, anyway. It probably isn't the safest exit. Once this is all over, I'd like to have a better one built."

In an ideal situation, they'd have been able to consult with Nokia's king, but as things stood, the country was infiltrated by an opposing force. Pafia believed that if they sat around worrying about trivial matters, then they wouldn't make any progress. If they sat around doing nothing, then Caezar would win by default. The most important thing they had to do was secure the safety of the king and the first princess.

"So where do we enter this passage?"

"There's a mine owned by my family. It's just north of town. That's where we'll be able to access it."

"Cool! Let's get going, then!"

"Hold your horses, Sue. Princess Pafia, did you say it was owned by your family? That means it'll have guards. We should wait until nightfall."

"Yumina's right. It'd be too suspicious if we went as a group in the middle of the day. Plus, the castle will probably be emptier at night."

Sue was raring to go, but she was quickly shot down by Yumina and Lu. The little lass wasn't exactly happy about it, but she understood the gravity of the situation.

“So, where to now?”

“We should find a place to sleep until nightfall...”

Elze’s question was immediately met with a response from Sakura. She definitely had a point. They needed to conserve their strength for the conflict ahead.

“Why don’t we eat first? I’d love to try some of Nokia’s cuisine!”

“I agree with Lu-dono, I do! You cannot fight on an empty stomach, you cannot! Hunger is the enemy, it is!” Yae excitedly bounced up and down at the mere mention of food. She and Lu were a deadly combo whenever the subject of cooking came up.

Yae had tried many of Lu’s experimental dishes back in Brunhild. Lu loved to cook, but she hated the idea of wasting ingredients purely for her own curiosity. That was why Yae was the perfect complement to her cookery skills. The ravenous samurai was willing to eat just about anything. She was also a very honest critic, which Lu greatly appreciated.

It was only natural that the two of them would take an interest in Nokian cuisine, even if for different reasons. None of the girls disagreed, so they decided to head toward a restaurant.

“Perhaps you’d like to try our mutton. We have a dish here that features spiced lamb wrapped up with vegetables in a thin skin, almost like a cloth bundle. There are quite a few lamb-based dishes in our country. I know a good restaurant that serves them...” Lycia suggested some food.

Pafia had been born and raised in the capital city, but she’d never visited any of its restaurants. Lycia, on the other hand, had a keen eye for the best eateries in the area. She’d dined in the capital often during her days as a trainee. She was still from a noble family, however, and didn’t have comprehensive knowledge of the city.

They all decided on a restaurant and enjoyed a tasty dinner together. Once they finished, they found temporary lodging where they could rest incognito until nightfall.

After that... Their long night would begin.

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The twelve women moved under cover of darkness, each one doing their best to muffle their steps. The night wasn't pitch black, so the moonlight above still provided some visibility. That was why they were taking extra caution. The moment they were caught would be the end of their advantage.

They'd managed to sneak into the mine area with little difficulty. Apparently the area had long since been mined of any valuable ore, and thus security was sparse.

"This way. There'll be an entryway to the ruins beneath the castle..."

The girls, following Princess Pafia's lead, made their way to a corner of the cliff face. It looked slightly different from the natural outcroppings, suggesting Earth magic had been used. As they came closer, they noticed a small tunnel that was almost impossible to see. It was only around three meters high, and stretched downwards into the pitch-black cave.

Linze was quick to remedy that problem, conjuring up a small beacon with her **[Light Orb]** spell. The girls used the little guiding light to see as they began their descent. Eventually, they came to a wider area and a small pathway.

The pathway led toward a fork in the road. One left path, and one right path. Pafia stopped at the intersection.

"Should be here... There's a secret passage straight ahead. I don't know if it can be opened from this side, though..."

"There is a passage here, there is? It looks like an ordinary wall, it does..." Yae murmured to herself as she ran a hand along the wall in front of them. Leen also touched the wall, tapping a finger against the surface at different parts.

"It's certainly a rock wall. No **[Mirage]**-like tricks to be had here... I wonder how it's supposed to be bypassed."

"There's a spellstone behind the wall that reacts to a trigger from the royal family. It should activate a mechanism to open the door."

"Aha, that makes sense. It's Earth magic."

Leen nodded at Pafia. Gimmicky traps and mechanisms that used Earth magic

had been used by many countries since ancient times, so it made sense that this was one, too.

“What should we do? Smash it up?”

“Shall I cast **[Explosion]**?”

Elze clenched her fists, while Linze readied a spell. It was only natural that the twins would come to similar conclusions.

“I don’t think destroying anything would be a wise idea. We don’t want to leave evidence of our entry, after all...” Yumina chimed in as the voice of reason, as Sakura picked up a small stone and began rapping it against the rock wall. Sue, curious about her intentions, spoke up.

“What’re you doing?”

“Hitting the wall with a rock...”

“I... That’s not what I meant!”

“I’m finding out the depth of the wall based on the echo. It’s barely fifty centimeters thick... I can definitely get through here, hold on... **[Teleport]**...”

Sakura vanished without any warning.

“Ah!”

Everyone other than Tokie was surprised when Sakura reappeared after a few seconds.

“It’s okay... There’s a passage through the other side... There aren’t any monsters, either. I can take us two at a time...”

“Wh—?! S-Sakura-dono?!”

“Sakura?!”

“**[Teleport]**...”

Without even giving them any time to process the decision, Sakura grabbed Yae and Hilde before vanishing with them. She decided to take the two swordswomen first, just in case of any screw-ups on the first try.

Sakura came back in a flash, this time taking Leen and Lu. She then took Lycia

and Pafia, Yumina and Sue, then Elze and Linze. Tokie simply teleported herself.

"...That was exhausting..."

Despite her declaration, Sakura wasn't all that worn out. **[Teleport]** consumed more magical power depending on the distance you covered. It was true that increasing the number of people taken with you took a toll on the cost of the spell, but it was basically negligible given how short a distance they'd traveled. Sakura's exhaustion was likely more of a mental one, brought on by the constant focus she needed to keep on her target coordinates.

"Hmhm... Yep, these are dungeon ruins, alright!" Sue looked around, just to confirm their surroundings.

Now they were on the other side, they could see the spellstone contraption that would open the way with enough magic power.

The underground passage looked remarkably similar to the dungeons on Brunhild's remote islands. The walls and flooring were made of shaped stone, clearly the product of Earth magic. Even without Linze's **[Light Orb],** there was a faint light emanating from their surroundings.

"Did they compound Light magic into the Earth magic constructions...?"

"Yes, this is definitely a compound construction. It must date back to the ancient civilizations."

Linze and Leen were quick to marvel at the craftsmanship. They all continued walking down the passageway.

Yae and Hilde took vanguard positions, leading the gradual walk. The passage was about four meters high and four meters wide, so they had room to swing a weapon around if need be.

Yumina started chatting with Pafia along the way.

"You said this was an ancient ruin?"

"That's right. It's an ancient dungeon, to be precise. The main entrance is right beneath our castle."

"It's rare to have a castle linked to a dungeon like that... Is it okay? Has there ever been an issue with monsters making their way up from the depths?"

“We’ve never had a problem. There are several barriers and wards in place to keep monsters at bay. There may be a few monsters down here, though, but they’d only be weak ones like Slimes.”

Yumina, Elze, Linze, and Yae stopped in their tracks. They began to look around uneasily, jittery expressions on their faces. Pafia was confused by the reaction.

“...Crush any and all Slimes you see...”

“Right. Maybe we should hunt down each and every one of them, just in case...”

“Kill every last one of them, I say...”

“This is a kill-or-be-killed situation, it is...”

The four girls had a look in their eyes, it was one that spelled dread, discomfort, and indignation. After all, they’d had a particularly bad incident involving a few Slimes a long time ago. Princess Pafia, unaware of that sealed, slimy past, backed off a little. She was more than a little confused.



“A Slime, get it!”

The moment Sue noticed a small green Slime, Linze cast **[Ice Needle]** without a second thought. The little Slime was turned into a pincushion, dying almost instantly.

“Scary...”

“Green Slimes are an enemy to all women. They’re just as bad as Caezar.”

“They are?”

“Green Slimes eat fabric. That includes clothing. That makes them an enemy to any woman’s decency.”

Sue was a little confused, but Leen quickly set her straight. Confident in her new understanding, Sue kept on walking with the group.

There were a few forks in the road here and there, a few stairways to clear, but the group marched on. Princess Pafia had a great understanding of the right route, so they made little to no wrong turns. It wasn’t a matter of if they’d make it, it was simply a matter of when. It was a little amusing to Pafia, though. She’d always imagined using these halls to escape her castle, not invade it.

“Another fork...”

“Uhhm... We need to take a left here.”

Hilde asked for directions, but it took Pafia a few moments to reply. After all, she had to follow her memorized path backward.

“We’ve been going a while... I think we have to be nearly there, right?”

“Yes, we’re almost there. I’m sure we’re by the castle basement.”

“I see... Then we’d better proceed with caution.”

Linze, who wasn’t very physically fit, seemed pleased to learn that they didn’t have much dungeon diving ahead of them. They hadn’t seen any Slimes or monsters for a while, which was proof they’d entered the protective vicinity of the castle’s barriers and wards.

After a short while, Yae and Hilde stopped. Everyone behind them stopped as well.

“What’s up?” Lu took a few steps forward to see what was ahead. There was a small flight of stairs ahead, but it didn’t lead anywhere. There was a roof above them.

“Have we reached our destination, have we?” Yae walked up a few of the stairs and tapped on the ceiling.

“There’s an echo. That’s a thin roof...” Sakura’s comment caused Yae to investigate the ceiling a little more closely. She found a thin seam running along the middle.

“It should lead to the old royal audience room...” Pafia suddenly spoke up.

“I see, I do... Then I just need to do this, I do! Hup...!” Yae placed both hands flat on the ceiling and pushed upward. It actually budged slightly and rose. But, thin or not, it was still a massive stone slab. Try as she might, Yae could only heave against it. Her face turned bright red.

“HNNNNNNGH!”

“Y-Yae? You look like you’ll pop a blood vessel!”

“HAAAUGH!”

Hilde’s concerns caused Yae’s concentration to break, and she fell to her knees. Sensing a chance to show off, Elze stepped forward.

“Don’t worry, Yae. I got this. I’ll lift it up in one good go!”

“Gwuh... That was too difficult, it was...”

Yae rose to her feet, passing Elze and letting her take a shot. Much like Yae had done, Elze put her hands flat against the surface of the ceiling.

“[Boost]!”

A massive rumbling sound rang out as the stone was shifted. Elze had succeeded in lifting it over her head. Elze saw a dimly-lit room through the now-opened exit. She shifted the slab to the side, creating a full opening for the others. It wasn’t until she’d turned around that she realized she’d crawled out of the fireplace. The room was certainly unused; it was barely even furnished. Not even the fireplace she’d come out of had anything decorating it.

Elze took a few glances around to check if anyone else was there, then turned around.

“Coast is clear, girls. You can come on up.”

“Muffle us, o Wind. A Silencing Force: [Mute].”

Leen responded to Elze’s words by casting a spell around them all. It would block any noise from the room they were in. It was a similar spell to Touya’s **[Silence].** Leen had learned it in Babylon’s Library.

Everyone clambered out of the fireplace, one after the other. Except for Sakura and Tokie, who simply teleported upward.

“Alright, so we broke in.”

“Woo! What next, guys?”

“We’ll find my father and Lefia. We must get them to safety. And then we’ll take Caezar on...!” Pafia clenched her fists together as she spoke. There was a raging fire in her eyes.

“Then... where’s the king?”

“He should be on the third floor, at the end of the corridor. Uhhm...”

As Pafia answered Elze, she walked over to a nearby window, just barely opening the curtains.

“Look over there. The furthest room from here, on the third floor.”

Pafia pointed toward the castle wing left of the courtyard.

“That’s not that far.”

“I could use **[Teleport]** to get there, it’s in range...”

Sakura could glance enough through the far-off window that she had a good idea of how to land there. Unlike **[Gate], [Teleport]** was a spell that couldn’t be blocked by barriers or warding talismans. The only issue was not knowing whether or not the king was alone.

“It should be okay. Even my father’s close confidants and personal maids weren’t allowed in. Caezar decreed that only me, my sister, and our royal physician could see him. The physician was one of Caezar’s puppets, though...”

The doctor might have been possessed to kill the king at any point, to effectively keep him as a hostage. Or Caezar might have been holding out for the king's heart to weaken to the point of being a manipulation candidate.

"Then, Sakura... you should take Pafia. Ah, and take Leen as well. She can cast that **[Mute]** spell over there."

"Okay... Got it..."

Sakura took Pafia and Leen by the hand. Paula, intent on tagging along, grabbed on to Leen's leg. Sakura focused her vision on the distant window.

"[Teleport]."

In the blink of an eye, the trio (and Paula) were moved toward the king's quarters. The room was just as dimly lit as the one they'd been in before. It had a large canopy bed up against the far wall.

"Muffle us, o Wind. A Silencing Force: [Mute]."

Leen immediately activated the spell, but her voice alerted someone in their vicinity.

"Who's there?!"

A clattering sound alerted the girls, and they turned to find an individual standing by the bedside. It wasn't the king. The voice belonged to a girl. The king was still laying down in his bed; this was someone who'd been sitting by him. Before Leen could begin to cast a spell at the mystery person, Pafia ran over to them.

"Lefia!"

"P-Pafia...? You're safe?! Y-You're alive?!"

Leen couldn't fully make out who the person was in the darkness, but she could infer that it was Pafia's sister. The two sisters pulled each other into a tight embrace. It was, after all, the first time they'd seen each other in three months.

Caezar had fabricated a story about Pafia being dead and even produced a fake corpse. But Lefia refused to allow herself to falter. Despite the fake evidence presented to her, she refused to believe it. Even though the fake

corpse looked much like Pafia, Lefia knew it couldn't have been her. She cradled her sister like a long-lost treasure, finally returned to her arms.

As she stepped into the moonlight, Lefia's form was revealed. She looked much like her sister. She was clearly in her twenties and wore a traditional white Nokian dress. Her hair was the same color as Pafia's, but it was long enough to reach down to her waist. Though her eyes didn't burn with the same ferocity as her sister's, it was clear that she had a strong will.

"I'm good, Sakura. You head back."

"Right..."

Sakura nodded at Leen and teleported away. Less than thirty seconds later, she reappeared with Elze and Linze in tow. She vanished again, bringing the rest of the girls two at a time. Lefia was bewildered at the sight.

"Pafia... J-Just who are they?"

"They're here to help us. They're all betrothed to the grand duke of Brunhild."

"R-Really?! Even that elderly woman?!"

"A-Ah, no. That's his grandmother..."

Tokie had appeared out of thin air, much to Lefia's amazement. Pafia was quick to dispel her sister's misunderstanding. Perhaps the girl was a bit of a natural airhead. Lefia looked at the nine fiancees, almost speechless.

Ever since Yulong's destruction, there'd been more stories from the outside world. But most of these stories were about the enigmatic grand duke of Brunhild, who had allegedly brought Yulong down himself. There were far too many stories to list.

Some rumors said he'd single-handedly taken down an ancient evil. One rumor said he'd led an army against a horde of Dragons. Another said he'd kidnapped a princess from Xenoahs, and destroyed an entire army in the recently-discovered western continent. It was hard to tell which rumors were true, and which were false.

But the most prominent rumor of all was that he was a notorious womanizer. Lefia's impression of Brunhild had largely been negative as a result of these

rumors. After all, Caezar was a womanizer as well... And he was truly scum.

But apparently, she'd thought wrong. Apparently, this grand duke was a man who was welcoming to women of all kinds. These brides-to-be certainly looked happier than the women Caezar had gotten involved with.

"You must be Princess Lefia."

"Ah, yes."

"Your marshal, Caezar, used a summoned beast in our territory in an attempt to target us, along with our fiance. As such, we are here to bring him to justice. That's our ostensible reason, at least. We're actually here because your sister seemed like she needed help, I hope that's alright..." Yumina spoke in a surprisingly cheeky manner, offering the princess a smile.

In response, Lefia bowed her head. After all, this was their best chance at defeating Caezar. There was no great ally she could've asked for.

"Thank you so much! As the first princess of Nokia, I pledge my truest thanks to the Duchy of Brunhild!"

"BrUnhiLd... BRuNhILD... DeSpiCAbLe... DesPiCaBLe...!"

A voice suddenly reverberated around the room. But the room had been soundproofed with **[Mute],** meaning it had to have come from someplace within.

"Over there!" Yumina screamed and pointed at the king's bed. A white, hazy substance was floating up from the bedridden man's mouth.

The white blur grew larger and larger until two golden eyes appeared in the mist. The spectral form looked almost identical to the one they'd seen back in Brunhild.

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"My NaMe is GaLaVeLLuM... LoRd CaEZaR's mOSt faITHfuL seRvaNT..."

"Impossible... How could Father have been possessed?!"

"It taKeS liTTlE to hIJaCk a BodY... I inHaBit THiS oNe on CaeZaR's coMManD... ReaDy tO snUff it ouT aT aNy moMEnT..."

The Specter mocked Lefia, who looked horrified. This monster was clearly another of Caezar's summons.

In order to control various summoned beasts of a specific species, you needed to make a contract with a more powerful monster that served as their leader. Specters like these often had their own factions and groups, so Caezar had likely contracted with the leader of one such group, and thus had access to a great number of them.

"Well, let's drag you all the way out..."

Leen glared at the spectral mass before casting **[Banish]** on it.

"GuWeEh?!"

The light emanating from Leen's palm reached the Specter, exorcizing it from the king's body. It fully emerged from the bedridden man's mouth, drifting closer to the center of the room.

"WrETch... A mEre liTtle GiRL daREs caST suCh A tHiNg on mE?!"

"I'm no little girl, you monster. I'm probably older than you, to be honest."

Leen began chanting another magical incantation as the Specter floated upwards towards the ceiling. She wasn't about to let him go that easily. She held a hand forward, and five orbs of light concentrated at each of her fingertips.

"Come forth, o Light! Shining Duet: [Light Arrow]!"

"GrAuGh?!"

The beams of light shot out in the form of beaming arrows, piercing the Specter's misty form and shredding it apart. To Leen, killing something so weak was as trivial as crushing a bug.

"Hmph. All you could do was hide. Don't act so high and mighty if you're going to die so easily."

Seeing Galavellum obliterated prompted the two sisters to snap out of their terrified stupor. They immediately rushed towards the bed.

"Father! Can you hear me?!"

“Now now, dears. Don’t jostle him. The Specter was sapping his energy, so he’s quite powerless right now.”

Tokie gently separated the girls from their father’s arms. She then walked forward and placed two fingers atop the old man’s head.

“I’m not sure how much he has been weakened, but he seems stable. He’ll surely recover within a few days.”

“Oh, thank goodness...”

While the two princesses heaved sighs of relief, Yumina and the others turned toward the door in concern. Thankfully, they had Sakura, who was able to hear further than the rest of them. She’d noticed that things had gotten noisier within the main area of the castle. **[Mute]** blocked all sounds that came from the room, but it still allowed the people inside to hear things going on outside of it.

“If that Specter was one of Caezar’s summons...”

“Then he must know we are here, he must.”

“There’s probably a whole group of them on their way, huh...?”

They’d lost the element of surprise. They were stuck in a room with Lefia, Pafia, and Lycia to worry about. Not to mention the king himself. It’d be a bit difficult to fight without the risk of collateral damage.

“I suppose there isn’t any helping it, dearies. I will take care of the non-combatants here. Please, go and fight to your heart’s content...” Tokie suddenly spoke up, as if she’d read everyone’s minds. She was the goddess of space-time, and barriers were intrinsically linked to spatial force. If she really wanted to, she could create a barrier even more powerful than Touya’s **[Prison].**

“I don’t feel good relying on Granny like that, though...”

“We don’t have any other option, Sue. Let’s just take these guys out.”

“There are lots of footsteps coming this way... Let’s brace...”

The noises outside were now loud enough for everyone to hear. Their enemies were close by. Yae and Hilde stepped up closest to the door, unsheathing their blades. Elze took the gauntlets from her waist and quickly put

them on.

Tokie murmured something, and the area around the king's bed suddenly shimmered in a pale light, almost like Touya's **[Prison]** spell. It was likely some kind of highly-advanced barrier.

"I'll just obscure their forms while I'm at it..." Tokie waved her hands, causing herself, the king of Nokia, Lefia, Pafia, and Lycia to disappear. Even the blanket the king had been under was now flattened as if he wasn't there at all. This was a form of magic far beyond simple illusion. It was as if space itself had been compressed and superimposed.

"That's incredible!"

"Ahaha... Flattery will get you nowhere, my dear..." Tokie's disembodied voice rang out to answer Linze's amazement.

At that moment, several armed men came barging into the room.

"Let's get to a better fighting position! Yae, Hilde, Elze, push them back!"

"Very well, Yumina-dono!"

"You can count on us!"

"Chaaarge!"

On Yumina's command, the close-combat trio charged toward the incoming foes. Yae and Hilde had blades that were powerful enough to slice through steel like butter. But the real benefit came from Touya's **[Modeling]** spell, which allowed them to make their blades dull or sharp on command. In other words, they could pinpoint manipulate just how lethal their strikes were.

Obviously, it would've been bad if they killed Nokian soldiers in their own castle, self-defense or not. That was why Hilde and Yae chose to dull their blades. At worst, they'd break some bones, but it was better than the alternative.

"Guhgh?!"

"Gwaugh?!"

"Hngh!"

The three girls beat down their enemies one after another until they made it outside the room.

The corridor outside the king's quarters was a narrow one. More and more soldiers came down the hallway to their right, while there was only a solid wall to their left. Yae and Hilde clashed with the incoming soldiers while Elze turned to face the wall.

"Elze-dono!"

"I'm on it! **[Boost]**!"

Elze swung back her fist and punched the wall. It didn't stand a chance. As the obstacle crumbled, a cold breeze rolled into the corridor. The courtyard became visible below. It was nice and spacious.

Linze suddenly burst out of the bedroom, unleashing her magic at the hole where the wall had been. She cast **[Ice Wall],** creating a huge chunk of ice. Truly capable mages were capable of manipulating the shape of their conjured ice, so Linze expertly crafted the wall into a slide.

Elze was quick to acknowledge the gift her sister had just provided and promptly slid down to the courtyard. Linze, Yumina, Sakura, Sue, Leen (with Paula), and Lu then slid down to the courtyard. Hilde and Yae, who had been holding the soldiers back, came down last.

Their pursuers attempted to charge out toward the icy slide. However, Yumina began chanting a spell just in the nick of time.

"Come forth, Earth! Barrier of the Mother Soil: [Earthwall]!"

A massive hunk of rock jutted out of the courtyard's ground, smashing the icy slide and covering up the hole in the wall before any soldiers could make it through. The men quickly realized that they couldn't break through, so they doubled back and headed down toward the courtyard.

"Looks like we don't need to worry about fighting space here." Lu drew her twin blades as she spoke.

The girls could see the soldiers through the castle windows. There was another group running across the courtyard. Upon seeing them, Yumina was

struck by a strange sensation. The Nokian soldiers they'd encountered in the castle wore light leather armor, while the ones headed toward them in the courtyard were clad in full armor one might expect from a cavalry trooper.

The design of the armor was unlike any Yumina had ever seen before. It was jet black all over. They had the visors of their helmets raised so their faces were visible, but they were completely devoid of expression or emotion.

"They are possessed, they are! Linze-dono, we need you!"

"Roger that. **Come forth, Light! Shining Exile: [Banish]!**"

A magic circle appeared on the ground beneath the incoming soldiers, but they were completely unaffected. Their dark armor almost pulsed with wicked energy as it repelled Linze's Light magic.

"It didn't work?!"

"That's no ordinary armor. They must be lost artifacts from the past..."

"Correct. These sets of armor are remnants of an ancient civilization. They're known as the Antimagic Suits. Try all you like, but your spells will be ineffective!"

Leen's postulating was confirmed by the man standing behind the black knights. He was a tall man with red hair and various pieces of jewelry on his body. A jet black robe covered him from neck to toe. The man was none other than Caezar Nortelis, marshal of Nokia's military.

"I'm surprised to see so many of Brunhild's bitches here, but no matter. Where is Pafia? You will tell me at once."

To Caezar, women were entities that belonged on their knees. He didn't care for such things as equality between sexes. His warped mind simply demanded subservience from those he viewed as naturally lesser.

"Heh. So you're Caezar? Man, I knew you weren't gonna be much of a charmer, but I didn't expect you to have an ass for a face."

"Sis... I agree with you, but you shouldn't say it so brazenly... Besides, I think his personality's probably worse than his appearance."

Elze started belittling Caezar the moment she saw him, while Linze made a

perfectly backhanded comment. It was clear that the twins shared opinions when it came to him.

Caezar, apparently unprepared for that kind of backtalk, glared at them with fire burning in his eyes.

“You sluts! Who are you to insult my venerable self, hm?!”

“Venerable?! Ahah... He said he was venerable, he did! Hilde-dono, did you hear that?”

“Yae, you shouldn’t kick a man when he’s down. Especially when he looks so meek... Pff...”

Yae burst out laughing, barely unable to contain herself. Hilde attempted to keep her composure as the samurai boisterously patted her on the back. The display made Caezar’s blood boil.

“..Tk... Ghhh.... Very well, then. If you will not tell me where Pafia is, then I will take you by force and make you tell me! I’ll lay punishment and disgrace upon you all until you beg for me to kill you!”

“...You’re really lucky, Caezar. If Touya was here, he’d have thrust his fist into your face halfway through that sentence.”

“Mm... He definitely would’ve done that. Thankfully, we’re more patient, and we can handle a little bit of chittering now and then. Though it is nice when he fights for us.”

“You’re right about that...”

Yumina and Sakura nodded along with Lu’s assessment, fondly thinking about their fiance.

Veins started bulging on Caezar’s forehead. He’d never been so relentlessly disregarded or mocked before. By nature, he was a man with a short fuse. He’d always looked down on women, and no woman had ever treated him with contempt. But in the face of all this mockery, he was like a volcano on the verge of violent eruption. The only reason he hadn’t exploded at them yet was due to his sense of pride. He didn’t want them to know that they’d gotten to him. Unfortunately for him, it was already showing on his face.

Caezar looked over the group of girls, eyes focusing on the smallest one. She would make an easy target, surely. But the smallest of the girls, Sue, simply tilted her head when he looked her way. “You look kind of mad, Mister,” she said. That was the last straw.

“ENOUGH OF THIS! SEIZE THEM!”

On Caezar’s frenzied command, the black knights advanced towards Yumina and the other girls.

“Alright, then. Let’s take out the trash.”

Elze grinned before kicking off the ground and charging into the fray. She caught one of the knights on the jaw with a brutal uppercut. The knight she struck fell backward and slumped to the ground. Even if they were possessed by Specters, their bodies were still human. Taking damage would make it harder for their bodies to move, and concussive blows would end up rattling them. After all, a mounted soldier was made less efficient if he was knocked off his horse.

The Specter didn’t directly manipulate the body like a puppet. It was more like they commanded the person to move their body by force.

“YoU...”

“Not that smart, are you? Guess the summons take after their summoner.”

The fallen man’s mouth leaked ectoplasm as the Specter escaped, but Elze was quick to jab a light-infused fist straight through it.

“GraAuuRgH?!”

“Looks like trashing you’s easy once we get you away from that armor, huh?”

The Specter split apart, destroyed by the strike.

Another knight came up from behind Elze, ready to strike. But, just as he was about to leap... He found that both of his feet had been fused to the ground with ice. Linze had used **[Icebind]** to trap him in place. Unfortunately for Caezar and his soldiers, the girls knew how to deal with enemies that could resist direct attacks.

“Get him, Sis!”

“Thanks for the assist, Linze!”

Elze spun back around with a half-turn and kicked the knight square in the chest. It was a move that Touya had shown her in the past.

The black knight, with his armor kicked in, fell flat on his face. No ectoplasm leaked out this time, though. The cowardly Specter inside must have seen what happened to the last one that tried escaping.

“They are not any different to regular soldiers, they are not.”

“Yeah, at least they don’t fire beams like the Phrase did...”

“They can’t regenerate, either!”

Yae, Lu, and Hilde started knocking down more knights, not wanting Elze to have all the fun.

“Strike forth, Earth! The Fool’s Abyss: [Pitfall]]!”

“Come forth, Water! Cleansing Downpour: [Waterfall]!”

“Come forth, Lightning! Pure Sparking Javelin: [Thunder Spear]!”

Yumina used Earth magic to create a large pit beneath a group of knights. Sakura then filled it up with her Water magic. After that, Leen launched a volley of Lightning magic that struck not at the knights, but the water itself.

Direct magical attacks were a no-go, but indirect electrocution was more than acceptable as an alternative. The frazzled knights, unable to even move after such a horrible shock, simply slumped backward in the pit.

Some of them leaked out of their host bodies in a desperate attempt to escape, but every single one was wiped out by Sue’s **[Shining Javelin]** spell. The more men that fell, the angrier Caezar became.

“Zebeta!”

“You rang, my lord?”

Caezar yelled out. A hunched, robed man suddenly appeared by his side.

“What is the meaning of this?! You told me those armor sets would give us an advantage!”

“They do, sir. They give us the advantage of having our conventional weaknesses nullified. It doesn’t improve physical strength... Though, a Specter-infested human actually has twice the muscle output compared to a standard human...”

“Enough excuses! Do something about this!”

“Very well. Let us use #8.”

Zebeta’s suggestion made Caezar reach into his pocket to produce a small box-like container. He opened up the lid and removed a small sphere, about four centimeters in diameter. It had ‘#8’ written on it.

“This should do it...”

Caezar, in the throes of his angry tantrum, smashed the little sphere against the ground as hard as he could. The sphere was a container that employed storage magic, so shattering it was the only way to release what was inside. The tiny orb shattered against the floor, and an enormous Dragon appeared in its place.

“Wh-What in the...?!”

“It’s a Steelhusk Dragon, my lord.”

The Dragon before them was unlike any found in the wild. Its entire body was outfitted with armor plating, wiring, and circuitry. In short, it was a cyborg. To the people there, it just looked like an armored Dragon, though.

It was around fifteen meters long. It had no wings, which meant it was probably an Earth Dragon once. It had four bulky legs, and its feet were tipped with steel claws. Its back was lined with spikes from head to tail, but even they weren’t as menacing as the cyber-beast’s fearsome fangs. Its eyes glowed a faint red, suggesting that they were actually camera lenses.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me...”

The hunchbacked man opened his mouth, and an ectoplasmic goop rose from his insides. Now released by his parasite, he fell to the ground in a heap. The hazy substance that had squirmed its way out of the man then entered the Cyber-Dragon’s body.

A fan mounted on its back began to slowly whir, and the enormous creature began moving. Apparently, it was absorbing mana from the atmosphere.

The Dragon craned its neck upward and let out a hideous roar. Its camera-eyes glowed a bright and piercing red. A plume of smoke, or perhaps steam, spewed from its mouth. This unholy fusion of biology and technology somewhat reminded Yumina of Babylon's gynoids.

"Now then, young ladies! Which of you wishes to spar with me first?!"

A voice came from the Dragon, almost carried by the steam it was exhaling. It was a similar voice to the one that had come from the hunched man.

The Steelhusk Dragon was originally created by a master craftswoman. It was considered an upgrade on her original creation, the Dominant Resonance Needle. Instead of hijacking a Dragon's mind, she had cyborgified an entire living specimen. Deborah Elks, the original inventor of this hybrid creation, had hoped that someday it would be used to defeat the Phrase invasion.

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The Steelhusk Dragon was a magic weapon created five-thousand years ago by Deborah Elks. To be more accurate, it was a biological weapon. The result of a Dragon that had been brainwashed until it no longer had a will of its own, then fitted with cybernetic augments. It was supposed to be deployed against the Phrase invaders, so it went without saying it was at least strong enough to shatter them.

Caezar had now deployed it against Touya's fiancees, and his spectral servant Zebeta inhabited its body.

"Now..."

As it spoke through steaming breath, Zebeta had the Dragon extend its left foreleg. The ankle, or wrist, depending on how you looked at it, split off and fired the Dragon's foot toward a nearby castle wall. It smashed the building apart in seconds.

"Ooh!" Caezar cheered, clearly amazed, as the left paw was pulled back via a wire rope and reattached to its limb.

“It seems my motor controls are all attuned properly... Well, then...”

Zebeta looked down through the Dragon’s camera eyes, keen to pick out its first target. Reducing their numbers one by one was the intelligent, tactical choice. Eliminating the weakest of them with the ‘strike claw’ function would weaken the group as a whole, and significantly damage their collective morale.

With that in mind, Zebeta had the Dragon’s pointed foot launch right out at Sue. But, just before the Dragon’s fearsome claws could pierce Sue’s body, she deftly twirled out of the way without a single care in the world.

“What?!” Zebeta unintentionally cried out in confusion. It hadn’t expected someone so young to have such dexterity.

“You’re too slow! Moroha’s way faster than that! You couldn’t even swat a fly.”

All the other girls agreed, but they didn’t bother speaking out. They all saw the Dragon’s claw as it flew out toward Sue, and from their perspective, it was easily avoidable.

“Tch... Then how about this?!”

The Dragon rose upward and began firing out projectiles shaped like crescent moons from its shoulders. The cutters, apparently formed of mithril, danced around the air as they closed in on the girls. But Hilde and Yae were quick to block them, taking care to use dulled blades so that they could knock the incoming projectiles to the ground. After all, if they’d sliced the cutters in half they’d just have twice the problem to deal with.

“It certainly has a lot of features, it does.”

“Yeah. I wonder if Doctor Babylon would be interested in it...”

Hilde laughed softly in response to Yae’s comment, but neither of them knew that Babylon had actually seen this thing before. She most certainly wouldn’t have been interested in it, as her only comment on it five-thousand years ago was “This is a half-baked piece of crap, Deborah. I hate it.”

One of the main reasons Babylon gave for her criticism was that it wasn’t easily mass-produced. You needed an entire Dragon to create the foundation

for the damn thing, so making a whole army of them would be incredibly difficult. Not to mention the fact that brainwashing and forcibly cyborgifying a whole bunch of Dragons would probably piss off most of their species, and could even end up causing a major conflict between humanity and dragonkind.

Babylon figured that the Dragons would kill humanity before the Phrase could if they got angry enough about it. True enough to the good doctor's fears, Deborah abandoned the project precisely due to fear of retaliation from dragonkind as a whole. This Dragon was the last remaining relic of that early attempt.

"Come forth, Water! Ballistic Bubbles: [Bubble Bomb]!"

Linze's spell summoned forth soapy bubbles that impacted against the Zebeta-infested Dragon. They burst against the metal plating, rocking its body.

"Ghh! You little..."

Zebeta had the Dragon fire out spines from its back, popping the surrounding bubbles before they could explode.

At the same moment, the Dragon's body swiveled around to strike Yumina and the other girls with its tail. A direct blow from such a thick, armored appendage could surely kill a human on impact. But unfortunately for Zebeta, that wasn't going to happen. The tail swipe was effortlessly blocked by a gauntlet-clad girl.

"Wh-What?!"

"Y'know, I really have noticed that I can take a lot of punishment lately... Maybe that's the trait I ended up manifesting. I've got a real sturdy body!"

Elze grinned slightly as she kept a tight hold on the tail, which was thicker than a log. There were special abilities that manifested in those who served as beneficiaries of the divine. In Yumina this had manifested as foresight, in Sakura it had manifested as enhanced hearing, and in Lu it had manifested as an unparalleled sense of taste.

It wasn't fully accurate to just call Elze's body sturdy. It was more that her body could infuse itself with residual divinity. This enhancement was strong enough to be considered a lesser version of the Apotheosis ability that Touya

and the other gods could unleash. For the sake of simplicity, it would be easier to call it her battlegarb, as she basically ‘wore’ the divinity she’d been blessed with in battle.

“Oh my... That is quite fitting for Elze-dono, it is.”

“It’s somethin’ alright... I gotta say it feels pretty similar to **[Boost],** so I can go in hard with it!”

“Gaugh?!”

Without missing a beat, Elze bent the tail in her grip and began twisting it. The appendage snapped off and was promptly kicked into the distance by the brawler.

The Dragon’s sudden loss of its tail caused Zebeta to lose balance and stumble.

“What is the meaning of this, Zebeta?! Do something! You can’t seriously be losing to women, can you?!” Caezar was fuming, steam practically shooting out of his ears. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing.

However, before Zebeta could try to attack again, Hilde kicked off the ground, leaped up high, and brought her sword down on the Dragon’s neck.

“Lestian Sacred Sword: Third Shear!”

“Wh—”



Before anyone could even blink, the Steelhusk Dragon was decapitated. Its head rolled around on the ground. Its body slumped downward, sparking and hissing at the neck-stump. Zebeta clearly had no control over it anymore.

“Wow! Good job, Dragonslayer!”

“I think it’s offensive to dragonkind to call that thing a Dragon, personally...”

Sue and Sakura offered their own thoughts on Hilde’s feat. Sakura had a point, though. This creature didn’t even bleed. It might have been a Dragon once, but it definitely wasn’t at this point.

“GhHh...”

A blurry shadow emerged from the Dragon’s body. It quickly moved toward Caezar and floated by his side.

“You idiot! How did you lose?! You useless dullard! How could you lose to a bunch of little girls?!”

“...#3...”

“What?!”

“Produce #3 from Elks’ Legacy! Do it now...”

“H-Huh? Okay...”

Caezar panicked in response to Zebeta’s urging, and quickly produced a little crystal orb engraved with ‘#3.’ He threw it to the ground, and a set of armor similar to the black knights’ equipment appeared. This set was transparent and crystalline, however.

“Hm?”

“Is that...”

Yae and the others stopped in their tracks. They all recognized the armor... or at least the material it was made out of. The crystal armor floated in the air before affixing itself to Caezar’s body. It wrapped itself around his arms, his chest, his belly, his lower body, his legs, his neck, and then his head. Caezar’s body was outfitted, head to toe, in phrasium armor.

“O-Ooh...! This is phenomenal!”

“This is an armor crafted from a Phrase lifeform, Lord Caezar. It is impervious to magic and harder than any blade. Truly it is the perfect equipment for you, my lord.”

Zebeta explained the situation. Caezar looked less like a traditional knight and more like a sci-fi warrior in power armor. Despite the heavy look and defensive nature of the gear, it was incredibly easy to move around in. The armor had seemingly been enchanted with weight-reducing magic. Even the shield on his back and the sword at his waist felt lighter than air.

“Ooh! Incredible!”

Caezar drew the blade at his waist and swung it against a nearby wall. The blade effortlessly cut through the hardy construct as if it were butter.

“Muhaha... Muhahahaha! Incredible! Now there’s nobody in this world who could possibly stop me!”

Caezar was originally a simple soldier in Nokia’s army, so there had to have been a reason for his quick rise to the rank of marshal. And, indeed, that reason was the Elks Legacy. Caezar had stumbled upon it quite by chance in a northern Nokian ruin. He accidentally dropped and destroyed one of the little orbs inside, the one marked with a ‘#1’ symbol. After that, everything changed.

From within the little crystal ball came a Specter that called itself Zebeta, a summoned beast who’d been sealed for five thousand years. Its purpose was to teach whoever discovered Deborah Elks’ inventions exactly how to use them.

Caezar wasted no time. He learned the arts of possession from Zebeta, freely taking advantage of individuals higher in status than he was.

Before long, the power went to his head. He viewed himself as a chosen inheritor, the only one in the world capable of leading the babbling masses.

His ultimate goal was to rule Nokia, destroy its neighboring countries, and then move to conquer the entire world. Even though he could only turn others into puppets, he truly believed himself a capable, inspiring leader. He thought it would be easy to win the hearts and minds of all mankind, that ruling over the world would be a simple feat. And so, he couldn’t afford to fall here. He needed to properly punish these insolent girls for daring to disrespect such a

magnificent man as himself.

Caezar turned toward the girls, brandishing his phrasium sword and shield.

“I will ask you one final time. Where is Pafia? If you tell me, I’ll let you escape with your lives. You’ll live comfortably as my slaves.”

“You should really look at yourself in a mirror before you try to act intimidating. You look like a clown.”

Leen’s scathing comment didn’t go over too well with Caezar, but even Touya had decided to make the Brunhild knight armor out of mithril instead of phrasium. In terms of raw aesthetics, having a see-through armor just made you look ridiculous. It wouldn’t have been so bad if the armor made people completely invisible, but it didn’t, so it just looked goofy as hell, like they were encased in a block of ice.

“What’s with that creepy look on your face, anyway? You look like you could strangle a puppy.”

“He’s definitely the type to lose sight of his surroundings when he gets angry, isn’t he?”

“I don’t think men like that should get involved in politics.”

“He is getting ahead of himself, he is.”

“Of course he is, he’s an idiot...”

“Don’t kick him while he’s down, Sakura.”

Each disparaging word from the girls only caused Caezar’s frustration to intensify.

“Fine, then! I’ll just carve some sense into you whores!” Caezar snarled, charging forward and flailing his sword around.

“He really is short-sighted, he is.”

“I agree. If he paid any attention to our weapons he’d have noticed by now.”

Yae and Hilde brandished their blades, their crystal material reflecting the sunlight. It would be obvious at a glance that they were crafted from phrasium, but Caezar was in such a delusional state that he could barely tell.

The raging man charged in with his sword, but Hilde's sword effortlessly blocked it. Blocking wasn't exactly the right word, though... Caezar's blade had been sliced cleanly in half.

"Wh—?!"

Without missing a beat, Yae leaped upward and flaunted her beloved katana.

"Kokonoe Secret Style: Flying Swallow Rend!"

Caezar could only look up in despair as Yae's blade caught the light. In mere moments, he found his crystal armor sliced apart and on the ground. Yae had effortlessly disrobed him, not leaving a scratch on his actual body.

Despite the fact that they both had phrasium equipment, the amount of magic energy strengthening Yae and Hilde's weapons was far higher. Unlike Caezar's blade, theirs could truly cut through just about anything.

"H-How can...? How can this be?!"

Caezar, now completely defenseless, dropped the broken blade he was holding. Elze took this opportunity to charge in with a brutal uppercut, ramming her fist into Caezar's chest.

"Buzz off, freak!"

"HAUGH?!"

Elze held back enough to stop her blow from shredding Caezar's body, but the strike was still fierce enough to knock him over ten meters into the air. The beaten man's face contorted in agony, but from the corner of his eye, he saw someone standing on the third-floor balcony outside the king's bedroom.

"This is for everyone you've hurt and manipulated, you monster!"

"Pa...fia...?!"

"Rage forth, Lightning and Wind! A Dazzling Cyclone: [Plasma Storm]!"

Princess Pafia unleashed her compound magic upon the airborne man. As it closed in, Caezar screamed out in desperation.

"Z-Zebeta! Do something! Help me!"

"I'm afraid I must decline that request, my lord."

“Wha—?!”

Caezar was dumbstruck, he hadn’t expected his obedient servant to say no. But he had no more time to process those feelings, as he was struck by a storm of lightning right after.

“AUUUUUUGHHH!!”

After the initial blast, he crashed down hard into a nearby wall. Thus, a man who once gripped an entire nation fell down to the ground like a hammer. His unconscious but still-breathing body lay twitching in a small crater. The little box he carried was broken, and its crystalline spheres scattered around him.

“Great job, Pafia. Thank you, Grandmother Tokie.”

Yumina smiled as she ended the call on her smartphone. Yumina’s foresight had given her a vision of Elze launching Caezar into the sky. That was why she’d had enough time to call Tokie and have her position Pafia for the final blow. She thought it was only appropriate for him to be taken down by a fellow Nokian.

“I am sure you will be executed for this, I am...”

Yae looked down on Caezar, his unconscious form still smoldering, before she turned her blade toward Zebeta.

“I am not impressed by cowards who forsake their masters, I am not.”

“Now, now, madam. He was never truly my master at all.”

“Hm?”

Summoned beasts were typically enslaved to those that called them forth. They were duty-bound to obey their masters unless the terms of their contract were broken. The girls had assumed this was the case for Caezar and Zebeta, but they all seemed shocked by the Specter’s sudden denouncement.

“My one and only master is Mistress Deborah Elks. I served this fool only at her behest...”

“Deborah Elks? Don’t we know that name...?”

“She was the craftswoman who created that mind-controlling needle that was being used on those Dragons, no? But wasn’t she over five thousand years old?”

Leen raised a brow in surprise as she recalled the information Cesca and the other gynoids had given her.

“I was ordered to serve whoever found her legacy, though it seems he has proven unworthy...”

The shimmering Specter displayed no physical signs of emotion, but its voice came out as one of frustration and general weariness.

“You should remove the golden bangle on his arm. The possessed should be freed after that...”

Paula toddled over to the fallen man and began prodding and poking at his bangle until it fell off. At that moment, all the fallen black knights let out a loud wheezing sound. Spectral mist flowed out of their mouths and vanished into thin air.

Paula shivered in fright, jumped up, and quickly clung to Leen’s leg. Leen crouched down and took the bangle from Paula, she squinted. It was an ancient magic tool, that much was certain. Just by handling it, Leen intuitively knew what kind of artifact it was.

Many of her fellow fairies had a keen eye for magical equipment like this, but recently Leen had felt her understanding of magic tools had become far more acute than normal. This new ability of hers, her appraising gaze, was the manifestation of the divine blessings she’d been receiving.

“I see... So this is the source of the magic power that kept all those Specters maintained. Now that it’s disconnected from him, he can’t keep them around anymore.”

“Indeed... That man had little talent for magic, and even less so for manipulation. That’s why I had him make use of the artifact, to make up for his natural shortcomings.”

That meant that every Specter that Caezar had ever summoned had been sent back to wherever it was they’d come from. Zebeta was maintained by the box containing the Elks legacy, so it was unaffected. Unfortunately, the box had shattered when Caezar fell to the ground. It was only a matter of time before Zebeta faded from the world as well.

Zebeta, however, considered this a mercy. For five thousand years, it had been bound to that box, like a genie confined to a lamp. After finally awakening, it had no option but to serve a vile and childish man. Zebeta did not relish being ordered around like a servant. It wanted to complain to Deborah for creating such a burdensome duty, but she was long dead.

“Women are being held in Caezar’s home and the castle basement... Free them, if you would. I’ll be taking my leave now, thank you...”

Zebeta, no longer able to maintain its existence, blew away like dust in the wind. The Specter was finally free...

When the evening breeze died down, nothing remained of Zebeta.

“...I’m not sure how to feel about that.”

“I’m just glad it wasn’t hostile...”

“No point worrying. We got the baddie and dealt with the real trouble, right?”

Elze grinned down at Caezar’s unconscious body. He was completely powerless now. The nobles he’d been controlling had been freed, and the king woke up since the spectral parasite had been dealt with. He’d likely be sentenced to life imprisonment or executed for his crimes against the state. But before any of that, he needed to pay for his crimes against women.

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When Caezar awoke, he was in a dimly-lit room. To be more precise, he was in a dingy underground prison cell. He had none of his ceremonial jewelry, which immediately signified that his political status had been stripped from him.

“Zebeta! Come out! Do you hear me, Zebeta?!”

Nobody answered him. He clicked his tongue in irritation and attempted to call out a summoning circle. His magic didn’t work. That should’ve been obvious. He was in a prison, so there were countermeasures against that.

“Damn it...! Those Brunhild sluts did this, didn’t they?! Just wait until I get my hands on them... I’ll torture them to death!”

Caezar immediately devolved into a self-gratifying toxic tirade. He’d

completely lost himself to his frustrations... Or maybe he'd just always been that way.

In the midst of his raging, Caezar suddenly heard a sound from inside the cell. He stiffened up out of fear. He could distinctly make out the sound of breathing... There was an animal in the cell with him.

Caezar narrowed his eyes, noticing a vague silhouette in the corner of the chamber.

"A... horse...?"

It certainly appeared to be a horse. But there was something different about this one. It had a horn jutting out of its head. It was a Unicorn.

"Why is there a Unicorn here?!"

Caezar was utterly terrified. He knew that Unicorns were docile and calm around virgin maidens, but had heard stories of how terrifyingly violent they were towards men. But, for some reason, this Unicorn didn't move to attack Caezar. It simply stared at him in a manner that made the man very uncomfortable.

The Unicorn slowly started walking toward Caezar, who desperately tried to scurry back. Unfortunately, the cell wasn't that large, so he found himself backed up against the wall.

"E-Eep!"

With a loud thud, the Unicorn slammed its hoof against the wall next to Caezar's face. He was trapped. You certainly never saw Unicorns in the wild do this kind of thing. Something was clearly off.

"Mmm... I prefer my men with a little more muscle definition... I'm not all that picky, though... Let's get a better look!"

"Wh-What are you—?!"

The Unicorn bowed its head down, catching Caezar's clothing with its horn. In one fell swoop, it ripped off half of the man's outfit, exposing his upper body.

"Ohmygosh! You have a pretty good bod, now that I see it better. I guess you've got more of an otter build going on? That's pretty nice. It's kind of a

turn-on...”

“Wh-Wha...? E-Eek?!”

The Unicorn licked Caezar’s bare chest. There was clearly something wrong with this creature. It wasn’t right in the head. Before Caezar could even ask what the hell was going on, the bottom half of his clothing was torn off, along with his underwear. For the first time in his life, he felt vulnerable.

“G-Get away! D-Don’t touch me! Stop!!”

“It’s okay, sweetie. It won’t hurt. I’ll be real gentle, okay?”

“Wh-What’s that supposed to mean?!”

Caezar, now completely nude, scrambled to his feet and ran to the other side of the cell. The Unicorn gave chase, resulting in them both running around in circles. Caezar screamed out for dear life, but his resistance only made the Unicorn more excited.

“Zebeta?! Zebetaaa! Please come back, Zebetaaaaaa!”

“Geez... Calling out for your ex while we’re fooling around? I’ll make you forget that Ze-beta, and show you what a real alpha stud is like...”

“NOOOOOO!!”

That day, everyone in Nokia castle ignored the screams that rose up from the dungeons.

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“I see. So everything’s fine, then?”

“It is. The king of Nokia’s being extra mindful of his health, though. They’re going to have Princess Lefia formally succeed him, with Pafia serving as her administrative aide.”

I was pretty relieved to hear Yumina’s story. Apparently, Caezar had been sentenced to death for his treasonous designs, and the people he’d manipulated had gone back to normal. As for the remaining crystal orbs that contained Deborah Elks’ legacy... Princess Pafia had them all destroyed in a controlled explosion. I thought maybe that was a little extreme, but she

probably feared a second or third Caezar could arise if that kind of ancient technology went unchecked.

“I’m just glad you’re all safe.”

“Oh, were you worried?”

Leen grinned at me.

“No way, I wasn’t worried in the least. I knew it’d all be fine.”

“My liege, were you not constantly checking your phone out of anxiety for the last day or so?”

“Shut up, Kohaku!”

Kohaku was sitting on Yumina’s lap, and she really needed to learn when to keep quiet... It was true I was wondering why I hadn’t heard from any of the girls, but I wasn’t super worried or anything...

We were all sat around the balcony table. The girls had just finished telling me what happened. Suddenly, Elze turned toward me with a wry smile on her face.

“Don’t be such a worrywart. I told you we’d be fine.”

“No, I know... It’s just a little hard to explain. Having you all away from the castle just felt... unsettling, I guess?” I never felt that way when I went off to adventure alone, so it was probably just uneasiness related to the girls not being home. I didn’t want to sleep knowing they could be in the middle of a fight, and I had to actively resist the urge to call them.

Though honestly, it was a bit of a wakeup call for me. I realized that I’d probably made the girls feel that way whenever I went on my solo missions.

“Either way, good job, girls. Looks like Nokia’s gonna be a bit more open to the outside world.”

“We tried our best, we did. Ah, Touya-dono... There is something I have been wondering about, there is.”

Yae glanced over toward the person facing Granny Tokie, who was sitting on the couch. I understood her curiosity...

“You’re looking mighty healthy, ya space-time hag.”

“Ohoho... Call me that again, you little rascal, and I might split your skull open. Or perhaps you would settle for having your mouth sewn shut?”

The two of them jabbed at each other, but they seemed to be doing it in a friendly way. This was probably just their usual way of interacting with each other. Granny Tokie called the guy a little rascal, but he didn’t look little. Far from it. He actually looked about the same age as Tokie herself, but his body was huge and beefy. He was layered with muscle. He’d give Baba more than a run for his money. He had black eyes, shaggy hair, and a bushy beard. For the most part, he resembled a Japanese man. Even his clothes were Japanese in style. He had geta sandals on.

“Is this another god, perhaps?”

“Yeah... I guess... Didn’t expect him to arrive so soon, though.”

I answered Linze’s question with a weary smile.

“What god is he, exactly?”

“Well... he’s uh... the god of destruction, hahaha...”

“What?!”

My response to Hilde’s question caused all the girls to freeze up in shock. It’s not like I couldn’t understand why. Lu shakily set her teacup down before rigidly turning her head and opening her mouth.

“G-G-God of, um... d-destruction... you said? What’s he here for?”

“How am I supposed to know? He just showed up, asked for a drink, and now he’s here.”

A large flagon of ale sat on the table in front of the god of destruction. He merrily gulped from it as Suika, everyone’s favorite gremlin from hell, snickered obnoxiously by his side.

“H-He’s not going to be taking the role of Touya’s father, is he...?”

“Heavens... The god of destruction as our father-in-law...?”

“Gotta admit the guy looks pretty tough.”

“C’mon, girls. I don’t think that’s what’s happening here.”

That definitely wasn't the case, or at least I hadn't wanted it to be. The guy's role in my extended family was just another uncle. Though it was pretty hard to imagine him playing the role of Uncle Kousuke's brother, given how peaceful and gentle he was. The two of them looked pretty far apart in age, too.

Oh, Granny Tokie's calling me over.

"I'm gonna go talk to him."

"Good luck, Touya-dono..."

"I won't need luck, it's just a conversation!"

I laughed off Yae's foreboding comment before heading over to the god table.

"Please take a seat, dearie."

Granny Tokie insisted, so I took the seat by her side. The god of destruction sat across from me, taking a big ol' sip from his flagon.

"Want a drink, laddie?"

"Ah, no. I'm not much of a drinker."

"Gotcha."

The god of destruction simply shrugged, then gulped down more booze.

"So, let's get down ta brass tacks. Wanna follow in my footsteps, lad?"

"Uh?"

Follow in your what, now?

"I'm askin' if you wanna be the new god of destruction."

"What?! Huh?! No! Wh-Why me?!"

What the hell, man? I only just enrolled in the company! Why're you trying to put me on the fast track to a senior position I don't even want?

"I don't mean right now. Just when I retire from active duty, aye? Ya gotta think about yer future, kid. You got the makin' of a destructor about you. The way I see it, yer definitely the kinda person who could keep his cool while puttin' an end to an entire race or whatnot."

A little quick to judge, aren't you? I wouldn't say I'm destruction material... I'm

definitely not the type who'd merrily trash an entire planet! You'd have to be a real monster, and that's definitely not me.

"Y'get a lotta perks as the destruction god, kid. Y'can do whatever ya want if it's within the means've your job, and ain't nobody gonna boss you around. Plus, the job lets ya have a little wiggle room on destruction excuses, so you can extinguish any planet y'might find distasteful."

"Uh... that sounds a little bit wrong?!"

Oh crap. This guy's definitely not a good god... Almost sounds like he's been abusing his position...

"Don't misunderstand him, dearie. The god of destruction is a highly important post. Worlds far removed from divine jurisdiction always go awry, they become monstrous places that could threaten other worlds down the line. Thus, it is necessary to end those worlds, and create new ones from their ashes."

Tokie elaborated a little. I'd never really considered the idea of creation from destruction.

"Well, y'can dwell on it a while. We can wait til this world ends, aye?"

"...Don't say that!"

This world isn't going anywhere anytime soon, buddy. We worked hard to avoid it coming to that.

The god of destruction finished off his booze, then slowly stood up.

"Right-o, then. Business is over, so I'm goin' down to the tavern. Booze goddess, let's hustle."

"Woohoo! Hey, hic, Touya! Gimme money!"

"What?! When'd I become your personal piggy bank?"

I personally found the idea of the god of destruction getting wasted in my town to be unpleasant. But I ended up folding after he told me that he'd go home in the morning... He also told me if I didn't fork over the cash, he'd do everything within his power to obtain cash through alternative means. So basically, I was extorted...

I sighed quietly as I handed over the money to Suika, reminding her to call me if any trouble came up. Hopefully, I'd actually be able to solve any issues those two could cause.

The optimist in me believes that the god of destruction will follow the rules... Unless he gets drunk and forgets where he is... Still, saying "But I was drunk!" is never an excuse! Getting wasted and swearing or being violent isn't the alcohol's fault. You shouldn't ever drink so much that you become that way, honestly. Know your limits.

You tended to find that people who used that kind of excuse just wanted to shift the blame. Personally, my sympathy in those cases only went to the people who brewed the alcohol, as their labor was wasted on idiots. Still, for all her flaws, I had a feeling Suika wouldn't let anything bad happen.

The drinking buddies merrily skipped out of the room. Seemed like they were headed straight for the tavern by the guild.

Wait, didn't I say I'd meet Ende there...? Ah, whatever, I'll just skip. It's not like we haven't hung out together lately. I'm sure he'll be able to drink with Uncle Takeru or something... It'll be fine.

As fate would have it, that's exactly what happened. Kind of. It wasn't just Uncle Takeru there. Karen, Moroha, Uncle Kousuke, Karina, and Sousuke were there, too. Ende was thrown into a terrifying divine sea of drink and merrymaking. But, apparently, he was physically incapable of getting drunk, so he didn't exactly have a good time.

"I tried to call you, Touya! Did you turn your phone off on purpose?!"

"Only one sacrifice was necessary, Ende..."

"You're the worst!"

What can I say, I'm a busy man. I don't have time to entertain the fickle whims of the gods.

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"Hrmm..." I groaned slightly as I scrolled through the website on my phone.

I'd been researching the necessary planning for the wedding, but apparently

there were a lot of things I had underestimated... It wasn't like I had to abide by Earth's cultural norms, but there were still a lot of things that made me sigh. I'd distilled all the necessary things down to a single list:

- Propose. (This one's obvious).
- Inform the fiancee's parents and receive their blessing.
- Choose a venue and a date for the wedding.
- Acquire a wedding ring.
- Determine where you'll be living together.
- Decide on your honeymoon destination.
- Figure out what's happening at the wedding.
- Figure out who you're inviting to the wedding.
- Report your marriage to your place of employment.
- Pick out a wedding dress.
- Decide on the souvenirs for your wedding.
- Draw up the wedding invitations.
- Arrange photography and video for the wedding.
- Figure out the wedding reception venue.
- Choose the menu for the wedding reception.
- Arrange the bouquet.
- Figure out seating.
- Figure out who'll be giving the speeches.
- Ensure the wedding ring is properly sized.
- Do a hair and makeup rehearsal.
- Take pre-wedding photos.
- Prepare the bride's letter to her parents.

And so on...

I understood that this was a once-in-a-lifetime event, but it was still a lot of work... Fortunately, we already had the venue sorted, along with where we were living. Didn't need to worry about informing work, either. Plus, Kousaka and Lain were handling most of the actual legwork, so it wasn't too bad for me.

That being said, I still had a few things to deal with.

"Gotta sort a wedding ring... I've already given them engagement rings, so the

wedding bands need to be simpler... Hrm... Orichalcum is a little too flashy... Maybe mithril's silvery finish is elegant enough?"

Apparently, this world's standard was mithril wedding bands for royalty and nobility. Some nations separated by sex, though. The groom's band was orichalcum, while the bride's was mithril. It was difficult to think about, so I decided to put it off a bit.

"Gotta think about the honeymoon..."

I actually had an idea about that one. I wanted all my fiancees to meet my parents. Obviously, I was dead back there, so I was going to have them meet my folks in a dream. I also wanted to show the girls my homeworld. I could use my divinity to move to other worlds, and my former world was no exception.

Honestly, that was one of the biggest perks of joining the pantheon. I never thought I'd be able to go back to the place I was born...

"Then there's the wedding ceremony itself..."

It wasn't just any old wedding. This was going to be a huge gathering of world leaders. I needed to take several safety measures to keep them all in good health, but I also needed to maintain a good public image.

I didn't know if it was too dramatic to say or not, but Brunhild's honor was basically on the line. I didn't care so much if it was just my image, but I couldn't have Yumina and the others besmirched. The day had to go perfectly. That was why we couldn't afford to cut corners. Kousaka was handling most of the guest list, but I had my own special guests to deal with as well.

"The god of strength... Uh... let's just say he's an uncle who loves bodybuilding. And, uh... the god of glasses... Let's just say he's an uncle who loves glasses..."

I absentmindedly typed down my ideas on my smartphone. I didn't really know how to go about this at all... I didn't feel confident enough to just decide their roles off the bat... That wasn't an excuse, either!

"Oh!"

My phone suddenly started vibrating. It was an incoming call from Lapis.

“’Sup.”

“Your Highness, Mr. Zanac is here to see you. The dresses appear to be ready.”

“Oh, gotcha. I’ll be right over.”

I quickly answered then ended the call. Just to be clear, I hadn’t ordered any dresses for me. It was my fiancees’ wedding dresses. I quickly sent out a group text to the girls, it was easier to do that than send out individual messages.

I finished up my business at my desk and left my room. By the time I made it to the fitting room, everyone was already staring at their dresses. The maids were on standby to help the girls into them. They sure were fast... The girls all looked spectacular in their dresses, though.

“Can I touch?”

“Are your hands clean?”

“They are.”

I gently touched the hem of Elze’s dress. It was smooth and had a mesh-like texture, quite different to Linze’s.

“Are they made of different stuff?”

“But of course! Each have their own unique properties incorporated into the design. They’re crafted with impeccable precision and care. Fashion King Zanac never cuts corners!”

Zanac proudly puffed out his chest as he spoke. His brand had become pretty big since the first time we’d met. There were even store branches in Refreese and Regulus.

Yumina and the others wore Fashion King Zanac branded clothing quite a bit. They’d become pretty popular around the world... Though nobody knew that the designs were taken from other fashion lines back in my world. When the other world leaders saw the outfits at the league of nations meetings, they immediately ordered some for themselves. From there, it had a knock-on effect, and the various noble families of the world started wearing those outfits as well.

“We’ll need to make final sizing adjustments. That means you gentlemen need to leave.”

“R-Right...”

Lapis, our head maid, ushered Zanac and I out of the room. I didn’t bother questioning it.

I sat with Zanac and discussed a few things, learning that he’d begun to incorporate zippers into his clothing. That certainly took me by surprise.

“Where’d you learn that kind of technology?”

“Ahaha. Whatever do you mean? The contraption was on the first outfit you ever sold to me.”

Oh... Right! My uniform’s pants. Heh... Kind of funny that the basis for zippers in this world are from one of my old outfit’s crotch, though...

Apparently, they’d been working hard with the dwarves to forge zippers en masse. I was impressed. Just as we were discussing more details about the zippers, the doors opened and the girls began to file out.

“Huh? Can’t I see you girls in the dresses?”

“You’ll have to wait until the rehearsal, Touya. Best to keep you on your toes, no?”

Yumina grinned a little after saying that.

Hrmm... I’d rather not be kept in too much suspense...

“Your Hiiighneeesss... It’s time to taaake your measuremeeents...”

Cecile, our maid, called out to me from within the fitting room. I’d almost forgotten that I needed to sort out my outfit, too. I asked them to keep it as plain as humanly possible, but I wasn’t sure how it’d come out. Hopefully it wasn’t as gaudy as the first outfit Zanac had proposed... I didn’t really appreciate lamé fabric, it was much too flashy for my tastes.

Still, there was no helping it... Brides were the stars of their weddings, after all. The groom was just an accessory. I sighed softly, walking into the fitting room to meet my fate.

Interlude: Ceremonial Preparations

“Now flip it in one go.”

“Okay... Augh?!”

Ende’s pancake flipped up into the air, hit the side of the frying pan, and landed on the countertop. Another resounding failure... I wondered how many it’d been at this point. Lu, who was trying to teach him, simply frowned. Ende was surprisingly clumsy.

“Touya, could you—?”

“Hell no. I’m not eating another pancake!”

You’ve made way too many mistakes, Ende! I’m not being a human garbage disposal anymore!

I was honestly shocked by how bad Ende’s dexterity was. He’d fumbled meal after meal all morning. He’d come to learn from Lu because the three Phrase girls had begun demanding that he make them home-cooked meals.

I was inclined to wonder why, as the man of the house, Ende didn’t simply demand that the women do the cooking for him... But that was a rather old-fashioned way of looking at things. Gender equality meant that men and women had equal opportunity to be bossed around by their partners. Plus, Lu seemed keen to teach, so I had no problem letting her go for it.

They’d started out with something simple, a fried egg. But Ende was way too cumbersome, so he kept smashing the eggs instead of cleanly cracking them. I told him to finely tune his attacks on the egg, to treat it like an enemy combatant with a weak point. He got the hang of it after that, but it was still annoying.

Once he got over the first little hurdle, he was able to fry the egg fairly easily. Unfortunately, he immediately got stuck on making pancakes afterward. He cracked the eggs just right, but stirred them so fast that they splattered everywhere. Then, he overheated the mix and burned his second attempt. And

on his third try, he failed to flip it and it flopped over pitifully. Even I could do better, and I was hardly a kitchen wizard.

Of course, I was the one who so graciously stepped forwards to eat the wasted products. Frankly, it was difficult to go through. They were either undercooked or burned. They weren't so bad that I couldn't eat them, but they sure as hell needed a lot of maple syrup. Kohaku was with me earlier, but she managed to get away... If only I were as lucky.

In the end, I decided that Ende should just use the **[Storage]** on his phone to store his crappy pancakes. The moment he turned around again, I quickly used **[Teleport]** to get out of dodge.

Blegh... I'm gonna get a stomachache...

I groaned my way down the corridor until I came across Sue. She looked different than usual.

"Oh, Touya! What do you think?"

Sue did a little twirl in front of me. She was wearing a colorful tribal outfit with bangles decorating her arms. If I recalled correctly, it was the tribal garb of the Nokian people.

"Looks good on you, Sue. Really cute."

"Hurray! I bought this stuff at the Nokian capital! It's nice to wear different things sometimes, isn't it?"

She was right. Sue looked very different to her usual self. It was honestly pretty surprising how much of a different vibe you could give off based on your clothing.

"Where's everyone at?"

"The courtyard! They're checking out the ceremony area that Cesca and the others made."

We weren't going to hold our wedding in a church. Instead, we planned on the ceremony being in the castle courtyard.

Brunhild's castle was, much like Belfast's castle, home to a very large courtyard area. There was room for plenty of people. The church in town didn't

have enough space for all our guests, and it was technically an embassy for Ramissh, anyway. There were also security concerns, since most of our guests were important foreign dignitaries. The castle courtyard was both secure and spacious, so it felt like the best bet.

In other words, it was a garden wedding. When I mentioned that to Cesca, she jumped at the chance to help plan it. After all, she was in charge of Babylon's garden. She quickly took charge of the whole thing, enlisting Julio as her assistant. I was a little apprehensive at first, but I knew that she had incredible skill when it came to floral arrangements, so I decided to let her go for it. That being said, I left Kougyoku behind to supervise, just in case.

"It's gonna be great! Why not come see, Touya?"

"Sure, I'll swing by."

Sue took me by the hand and dragged me off to the courtyard. When I walked through the archway to the courtyard, my eyes rested upon a completely unique sight. A beautiful altar sat in the middle of the courtyard along with a large white staircase. There were arches and white fences all over the place, and several pure white seats arranged just like they would be in a church. Flowers bloomed and crawled all over the courtyard walls, creating a magnificent scene around me. The place had been completely transformed.

A gorgeous red carpet was laid down in front of the altar, which continued on down the aisle. Cesca, Yumina, Linze, and Elze were standing atop it.

"Oh, Touya?"

"Sue dragged me along. The whole place looks amazing..."

I couldn't help but stare at the altar. It was somehow flashy yet subdued at the same time. We'd be making our wedding pledges in front of the spirits right here...

The altar was wide enough for ten people to stand before it at the same time. It had all kinds of plants atop it, from vines to roses. It definitely gave off an exotic vibe.

"Is it all ready?"

“Certainly not, master. We’ve many flowers to prepare, petals to scatter, and stems to prune. Certainly a great deal left to do.”

Cesca bowed her head as she spoke. I was impressed by her moxie, but I didn’t want her going too overboard with it. If it became too flashy, I thought maybe it’d come off as tacky... But, on the other hand, a wedding was a once-in-a-lifetime thing, so maybe it was better to go to the extreme? It wasn’t really for me to say.

“Ah, I have a request for you.”

“What is it, Cesca?”

I tensed up when the gynoid spoke, since her requests were usually weird or disturbing at best.

“Could you call upon the Flower Spirit?”

“Oh, huh...”

Spirits dwelled within everything, so naturally there was a Flower Spirit as well. They were subordinate to the Earth Spirit.

If we had a Flower Spirit helping us out, things would go a lot more smoothly. I certainly saw no harm in asking, at least.

“There are some flowers that aren’t currently in seasonal bloom, so if we had a Flower Spirit’s help that would be useful.”

“Makes sense. I’ll see what I can do.”

Cesca’s request was shockingly tame, so I decided to call a spirit immediately.

“Rise, Flower Spirit, in the name of the Celestial Spirit King.”

As I finished my utterance, a tornado of flower petals rose up from the ground. When they subsided, a small girl stood in their place. She had pale reddish hair that curled slightly in places, and a frilly dress that reminded me of a budding flower. The impression she gave off was one of elegance and grace.

The Flower Spirit bowed her head, clutching at the hem of her dress to perform a little curtsy.

“I have come, in accordance with my duty. How may I serve you, Your

Opulence?”

“I’d like for you to help prepare this wedding ceremony, if that’s alright.”

“But of course. It is my honor to assist in the wedding of the Celestial Spirit King himself.”

The spirit smiled and walked to Cesca’s side. The gynoid wasted no time at all. She pulled out a floor plan and went over it with the spirit. Their conversation immediately transformed into a flurry of technical jargon, so I just decided to leave them to it.

“Hey, where are Yae and the others?”

“Ah, they’re off at the training field. They’re looking over the Frame Gears we’ll be using for the ceremony.”

“Ah, right...”

I was a little taken aback by how casually Linze mentioned that we’d be using giant war machines in our wedding ceremony, but this was my life now. Apparently, at some royal or noble weddings, it was customary for knights to line up and raise their swords, much like the act of presenting arms back in my world. The practice was customary in Lestia, which meant Hilde wanted us to have it as part of our ceremony as well. But then talks about it got out of hand, and before I knew it we were having our Frame Gears line up.

My wedding wasn’t just the ceremony itself, but also a Brunhild festival, it seemed. People from all over the world were coming to appreciate our culture, and we planned on having a big parade through the castle town.

Given that the Frame Gears ended up becoming a Brunhild cultural icon, it would have been silly not to use them. I walked over to the training grounds and saw several Chevalier units lined up facing each other in a row. They held their halberds skyward, crossing them over each other’s in mid-air.

“Mech Three, Mech Four, synchronize better! Again!”

I heard Lain’s voice, augmented through her Smartphone’s **[Speaker]** function, echo outward. She wasn’t going easy on them at all. I felt a little bit bad that everyone was working so hard just for a wedding ceremony, so I made

a mental note to bring them some alcohol later.

Yae and Hilde were standing with Lain, so I walked over.

“Ah, Touya-dono. It is good to see you, it is.”

“Man, this sure is something... Do we really need this?”

“Of course we do. In Lestian culture, this kind of display is to grant blessings of courage to the wedding party on their new adventure together. It ensures that they overcome all challenges in their way.”

Hilde smiled proudly as she spoke about her cultural norms. It was definitely an eye-catching display.

We were going to have Frame Gears posted at the entrance of the castle town. The ostensible reason was to keep up appearances, but we also wanted to intimidate potential wrongdoers. I didn’t exactly want to do it, but the officials of Brunhild thought it was the best way to display our power. Royal weddings were a prime time to showcase national influence, so we really needed to ham it up. Frankly, I’d have preferred a more private affair.

“We’ll make sure it’s perfect before the ceremony, Your Highness. You can count on us.”

“Oh, right... Don’t worry too hard. Just do your best...”

I could only muster up a half-hearted response to Lain’s resolute promise. I didn’t get involved any further, her judgment was generally sound for matters like this.

“I really cannot believe we are getting married, I cannot. It feels so real now, it does...”

“Just now, Yae?”

“We have always been together with Touya-dono like a family, we have. It feels almost strange to finally make it official, it does.”

“Ah, I see. I very much agree with that. We were fellow women, sharing in trials and tribulations... But now we’ll be family by law.”

We’d certainly be a very big family. Never in my life did I think I’d end up with

nine brides. It was honestly a little nuts thinking about my upcoming married life.

“Hey, where are Leen and Sakura?”

“Over there, they are.”

Yae glanced over toward the rest area. Leen and Sakura were sitting there with troubled looks on their faces. I wondered what was up with them.

“What’s up with them?”

“They need to decide who’ll be walking them down the aisle. We decided on our fathers, but as for them...”

Ah. That explains it.

When we were deciding on our ceremony stuff, I showed the girls videos from weddings back home. Then, I let them pick and choose ideas. There were a few things like wedding cake and music for the ceremony, but all the girls decided they wanted to do the walk down the aisle. They liked the idea of being ‘given away’ by their fathers. The sight of a father, representing the past, walking his daughter towards her new future, seemed like a novel concept to the girls.

Unfortunately, there were a few issues. First up, there was Leen. Elze and Linze’s father was dead, but they had their Uncle Joseph to give them away. Leen, however, was a fairy. Pretty much all of her extended family was long gone from this world.

To be more specific, they were in a realm known as Avalon, where elder fairies went to live out their last years. So basically, Leen had nobody to walk with her.

Sakura did have a living father, but she was hesitant to actually get him involved. I was inclined to agree. I had a feeling the overlord would start blubbering and crying on his way to the altar. That wasn’t exactly the kind of feeling you wanted to foster on your wedding day.

I walked over toward the duo.

“Have you two decided yet?”

“We have. I’ll ask the beastking to hand me off. He was a long-time ally of

mine, and I did once serve his court. It was between him and Paula, really."

Upon hearing of her exclusion, Paula dropped to her knees and mimed out cursing at the heavens. I couldn't picture any scenario where being given away by a teddy bear was a good idea.

"And Sakura?"

"I want my mother..."

"Are you sure about that? Your father might feel a little... I dunno, excluded? It's your call, but you do have a dad who'd be willing."

"Mm... That's what my mother said, Grand Duke..."

Sakura had apparently already asked her mother for guidance. Fiana probably felt uneasy about the situation in general. He wasn't the best at expressing himself, but Sakura's father clearly cared about her, at least...

Just as I was thinking about him, the overlord himself called me. The phrase 'Speak of the devil and he doth appear' sprang to mind.

"Hello, there."

"Ahhh! Grand Duke! Is my little Farne there?! Put her on!"

He immediately started screaming down the phone at me. My ears were taken by surprise, and I couldn't help but wince.

"Why call me if you want to talk to her? Just call her phone..."

"I tried that! It kept ringing out!"

Yeesh...

I turned to Sakura. She was staring blankly at me. Judging from her face, she'd used her keen hearing to listen to our conversation.

I asked the overlord what it was he wanted exactly, and he said he'd heard from Fiana about the walk down the aisle. I didn't want to be the messenger between the two, so I switched the phone to video mode and pointed it towards Sakura. Unfortunately, the video just displayed the overlord screeching with his face pressed up against the camera. He looked really stupid, and I wished he'd back up a little...

“Fiana said I should walk, Farne... Shouldn’t I—?”

“I’m walking with my mother.”

“Nooo! You can’t just walk with your mother! Isn’t it customary to walk with your father?! Tell her, Grand Duke!”

“Huh? I mean it is... The brother or mother could give the girl away in absence of the father, but...”

“The father will be absent, then...”

“D-Don’t say that!”

The overlord sniffled and moaned to counter Sakura’s reluctance.



Leen suddenly turned to address Sakura.

“You have a father who can walk with you, which is a blessing in itself. The gesture is seen as you leaving your father’s side for our darling’s side, no? If you refuse the gesture, it might suggest you’re reluctant to get married.”

“Hrm...”

“Farne, please! I beg of you to trust me on this! I promise I’ll be the best aisle-walker you’ve ever seen! I promise!”

The video feed showed the overlord begging on his knees. He definitely didn’t look like the master of all demonkin. I saw his bodyguard in the corner of the video feed. He was cringing.

Sakura turned her head to the side, pouting a bit. Her cheeks were ever-so-slightly tinged pink.

“...Fine, whatever... If the grand duke says so...”

“Ooh! Farne!! Th-Then...”

The overlord expectantly turned his gaze toward me. I pretended to mull the decision over for a while.

“Maybe Fiana would be best...”

“Noooooo!”

“I’m kidding, relax.”

The overlord stared blankly at me, rage building behind his eyes. I might’ve gone a little overboard.

I confirmed that he’d be allowed to walk Sakura down the aisle, and he immediately jumped up and started celebrating. Sakura clearly found the sight distasteful, so she ended the call.

“Hmph... It should’ve been my mother...”

“Well, maybe... But like Leen said, it’s a ceremonial thing. Leaving your father’s protection and standing by my side for a new future, right?”

Frankly, I was glad she said yes. He never would’ve stopped nagging us about

it. We'd allowed him to walk, so hopefully he'd calm down now.

The beastking also happily agreed to walk Leen. I was surprised at how pleased he was to have been asked.

Either way, that settled the aisle issue.

"Now, the rings..."

I needed to prepare wedding bands. They were different to engagement rings, since they'd be worn for life. They were also technically meant to be more aesthetically simple.

What to do... I could make nine simple rings from mithril or orichalcum... Oh wait, I need to make ten since there's one for me, too...

I got lost in thought, but a sudden call from God Almighty snapped me out of it.

"Hello?"

"Oho. Touya, my boy. Could you come and talk to me?"

"Huh? Now?"

Did I do something wrong? Is something up? I beat the wicked god, so things should be fine... Or maybe he's just trying to prepare me for my divine duties...

I told Leen to tell the others I'd be unavailable for a little bit, then I opened up a **[Gate]** to the divine realm.

"Ah, welcome. Please take a seat."

"Oh, sure." I sat down as God Almighty poured me a cup of tea. The stalk inside stood upright, as usual. Apparently that was just what it did here.

"I was doing some thinking, my boy... And I wondered if you would consider leaving your wedding bands to me."

"Huh?! How come?!"

I wondered if that was really okay.

"You are getting married, no? You are a member of my family, Touya. I would like to get you a gift. So I thought perhaps something you would wear on a daily

basis would be a nice idea. The other gods wish to bestow gifts upon you as well."

"Isn't that a little much?"

I thought maybe it'd be a little extreme to have rings blessed by the gods. After all, sacred treasures were objects that had the potential to bring forth wicked gods.

"That will not be an issue. If you wear your ring as a god, and your wives wear their rings as beneficiaries of divine blessing, then there will be no risk of wickedness accumulating within them. They need negative energy to turn, after all."

That was certainly true. My smartphone counted as a sacred treasure, but it was always safe in my hands.

"Since it would be unbecoming for the gods to grant you these gifts down in the mortal realm, I will have the pillar spirits impart them to you."

"That works for me. I was actually going to ask one of the pillar spirits to officiate the wedding."

That was a happy little coincidence. Brunhild didn't have a state religion, so for the most part we just kept stuff neutral and generally defaulted to honoring the spirits of nature. The fact that I ruled over those spirits was a little awkward, though.

"Well, at any rate. I need one thing from you before I can create your ring."

God Almighty produced a small, smooth stone from the sleeve of his kimono. It just looked like an ordinary white-grey stone, one that could easily fit in the palm of your hand. It was also flat enough to skim the surface of a lake if thrown properly.

"What's this thing?"

"A divinistone. It has no effects on its own, but develops unique characteristics when it encounters divinity. We use them for all kinds of things."

Apparently, the stone took on different properties depending on the god who fed divinity into it. No two gods could create the same effect, so the possibilities

were truly endless.

“I could make it myself, but I thought perhaps you should have a part in it. After all, it is something for you and your brides.”

That made sense. Helping to develop the material for our rings sounded lovely enough to me.

I took the stone from God Almighty and found it was remarkably heavy.

“So I just pour divinity into it?”

“If you pour in your divinity and mix it with your feelings, it should increase in purity. Try to think of your brides-to-be.”

I can do that... Elze, Linze, Yae, Sue, Yumina, Leen, Lu, Sakura, and Hilde...

I closed my eyes and remembered the first time I ever met them. I quietly mulled over the memories and bonds we’d forged together.

When I opened my eyes, the stone had transformed into a shimmering platinum. It looked completely different to how it did before.

“Wow...”

“Ohohoho... Truly splendid. I am sure this will make fine material.”

God Almighty took the stone from me, glancing it over carefully.

“So you’ll forge this into rings?”

“The other gods will infuse it with their own blessings, and I will then ask the god of forging to refine it. After that, I will have the god of crafting work on the design, and the god of polishing work on the metal. It will take some time, but I assure you they will be ready by the event itself.”

This really sounds like it’s overboard... It’s not like I’m not grateful, but man... This is a lot.

“This is the first time in many thousands of years that one of our own has gotten married. Everyone wants to take part in the revelry. It is a true rare event that a wedding receives this level of divine attention, I must say.”

“Ahaha... Is that right...”

I quietly looked down at my shoes. I really did wonder just how much free time the gods must have had, given that they seemed ready to party at a moment's notice. Still, they were gods... I had to have some kind of faith in them. Plus, they were probably just happy to celebrate, so I decided to graciously accept their offering.

"Ah, that reminds me. I asked the god of alcohol to fetch me some wine for our jubilations, but it would appear she drank it all herself."

"Did she, now..."

That drunk little gremlin was getting worse by the day. I sighed softly before opening up **[Storage]** and pulling out a few bottles of alcohol for the old man. This was hardly enough to make up for the incredible gift he'd just given me, though.

"Much obliged, my boy. Leave the rings to me. I assure you we will produce something impeccable."

"J-Just not too impeccable, please..."

I left the divine realm behind with an awkward smile. I wasn't quite sure what to expect, but I was glad he was happy...

When I returned to the castle, I found Lu still helping out Ende in the kitchen.

"Oh, Touya! Check it out, man!"

"Oh, nice."

Ende proudly presented me with a plate. It had pancakes on it. They certainly looked nice and fluffy, and they were certainly shaped like pancakes... He'd actually done it.

"Wow, it's a miracle."

"Don't be rude. It was easy when I got the hang of it. It just happened to take a while."

"That's an understatement..."

Lu heaved a sigh. She looked exhausted.

I cut off a bit of the pancake and tossed it into my mouth. It tasted just like a

regular pancake. I was glad to see he'd at least learned something.

"Now I can cook Melle and the others a hearty breakfast!"

"I'm not so sure about that... It's just pancakes and fried eggs..."

From my perspective, Ende needed to learn a bit more. His journey with Lu was really only just beginning.

"Anywho, I've gotta get ready for dinner, so let's call it for today. We'll talk about more recipes later, bye!"

Ende charged off, my comments failing to wipe that bright smile from his face.

...He's not... He's not going to cook pancakes for dinner, is he? Then again, knowing those weird Phrase girls, they'd probably be fine with that.

"Hey, Lu. On the subject of cooking, have you figured out what we're serving for the wedding party?"

"Ah, yes! I've sorted out just about everything except the cake, now."

That's Lu for you. She's really something.

Since she had **[Storage]** at her disposal now, she'd taken to baking several cakes and storing them via the spell for freshness. I'd shown her a ton of wedding cakes from back home as reference, but she ended up getting really into it. She was even getting experimental and creating her own unique cakes.

I was pretty amazed by how far the wedding preparations had come overall... In just a few weeks, I would be married.

I'll be getting married soon... Oh man, am I really ready for this?

...I guess I shouldn't have proposed if I'm not ready for this. That was a pretty stupid question. You'll be fine, Touya... You just have eight more wives than you ever thought you'd have.

After the wedding, it'd be time for the honeymoon... I already knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to use my divinity to take the girls to my home planet. I wanted to show them all kinds of places.

Heh... I bet Lu's gonna love the cuisine...

“Mm? Something on your mind?”

“Nope, nothing at all.”

Lu noticed I was lost in thought, so I just smiled and waved her off. I was really looking forward to our trip. I happily left the kitchen, thinking of everything that was yet to come.

Afterword

Here we are again. I hope you've enjoyed the twentieth volume of In Another World With My Smartphone.

We're twenty volumes in, huh? It feels like volume ten only came out just yesterday, but looking at the physical books on my shelf is proof enough that that's not the case. I feel pretty proud of how far we've come.

The first volume was released in Japan five years ago now, and I started writing the webnovel two years before that. Pretty wild that I've been writing Touya's adventures for seven years of my life now. I'm proud, but not arrogant, or anything! I'll keep working as hard as I can.

The first half of this volume covered the story of the kings of Dauburn and Zadonia. I honestly really enjoy them both (as characters, not for their personalities). They really hated each other, so they had no problem undermining one another. The idea of putting together an incompatible duo made for some comedic situations, so I hope you enjoyed reading about them as much as I enjoyed writing them.

The second half of the book features the heroines as the main characters. That was because I wanted to write something where Touya wasn't at the forefront, and I thought it would be good to spotlight the girls. I wanted to put them up against a really nasty kind of guy, even though he didn't end up being much of a threat.

An all-girls story is pretty neat, huh? I want to write another one like that if I get the chance.

Anywho, the next volume will finally feature the wedding. Oh, and the honeymoon, too! I'm looking forward to seeing all the girls in their wedding dresses.

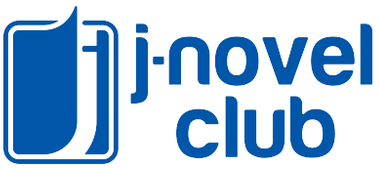
The wedding might be the big draw of the volume, but they'll be having their honeymoon in our world. I can't wait to see how people react to Touya and his

wives causing a ruckus in the modern world.

Anyway, time for my usual thanks.

Eiji Usatsuka, you have my deepest gratitude for going a full twenty volumes drawing illustrations for me. It means more to me than you may imagine. And, of course, I'd like to thank K and the Hobby Japan editorial department, along with everyone involved with the publication process. Last, but certainly not least, I'd like to thank my readers, along with everyone who follows my work on Shousetsuka ni Narou.

Patora Fuyuhara



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In Another World With My Smartphone: Volume 20

by Patora Fuyuhara

Translated by Andrew Hodgson Edited by DxS

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Ebook edition 1.0: August 2020