APOCALYPSE BRINGER MYNOGHRA

-WORLD CONQUEST STARTS WITH THE CIVILIZATION OF RUIN-

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Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra: World Conquest Starts with the Civilization of Ruin, Volume 7

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Prologue

THE tabletop RPG forces had threatened Mynoghra with seemingly insurmountable power. But Takuto had done the impossible and defeated them, at the price of losing consciousness. Desperate to get her beloved master back, Atou decided to summon a new Hero and get him to fix Takuto.

Her Hero of choice: *Eternal Nations'* most notorious and most glorious troublemaker.

Gleeful Spin Doctor Vittorio was a Hero despised by every player to have the misfortune of encountering him, and he lived up to his infamy in spades. At the same time, he left a huge mark on the world that would change the very nature of Mynoghra…

Vittorio founded a Takuto-worshipping religion called the Cult of Ira and marched the cultists into the ruined capital of the Divine Nation of Lenea to proselytize his doctrine and carve out new territory. In the process, he ran up against the Scribe Saint and Inquisitor Krähe Imlerith, who'd been dispatched to Lenea from the Holy Kingdom of Qualia. Vittorio had employed a slew of eccentric strategies that Atou could never have carried out, as she worried over Takuto. But Vittorio had entirely different goals from Sludge Atou.

What Vittorio wanted was the deification of *Takuto Ira*.

Vittorio understood that Takuto's loss of consciousness was a result of his nature as the "Nameless Evil God," and he attempted to utilize the game system to bring his ideal Takuto into the world. As a nameless, colorless existence, giving Takuto a name—a reason for existence—Vittorio could color and shape him to his heart's desire.

It should have been the perfect plan to bring about the perfect embodiment of Vittorio's ideals in his master—and his master alone.

His plan failed.

If that wasn't bad enough, he learned that Takuto had orchestrated everything from the beginning. Everything from Vittorio's plan, his ideas, and the events he would trigger…

Eventually, Takuto was revived as planned, and Vittorio was finally put in his rightful place beneath him.

But that only signaled the beginning of a new disturbance…

Chapter 1: Resume

A period of peace was about to arrive in Mynoghra after all the strife surrounding Takuto's loss of consciousness that had culminated in Vittorio's machinations and a battle with the Scribe Saint. Or it *should* have.

It seems fate just loves to mess with us. Takuto sensed a new disturbance was hot on their heels as he attempted to parse the intentions behind the bold and fearless declaration given by the latest enemy to confront them—Chaste Witch Vagia.

"So, it seems that the invitation from the other day was the real deal." Takuto's words echoed through the Throne Room.

"It does," Atou replied, confirming the reports in her hand as she stood beside his throne. "It seems official missives have been dispatched to every country, including Phon'kaven, requesting their participation in the conference. We don't have enough information on Qualia to say they were contacted for sure, but we have received reports that the request has been sent out to other countries on the Dark Continent."

Witch Vagia had made a bold and ridiculous declaration on a global scale the other day. A few days had passed since then, and information giving legitimacy to her claims had begun to trickle in at Takuto's fingertips. He'd finally obtained some information on the Succubus Army behind the proposal. But the information only went so far.

Under normal circumstances, they should have also looked into what had happened to the Elves and the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals. But since their resources were tied up in the various conflicts plaguing Mynoghra, they lacked information.

Takuto was frustrated that he'd been slow to act because he'd been preoccupied with bigger problems. Alas, he didn't have time to regret the past. He thought of the cards he had on hand and lightly tapped his armrest as he formed his next strategy.

"Hmm, what's her angle?" Takuto murmured.

Atou silently watched over her master as he pondered the matter. She knew commenting would only disturb her king. Whether she commented or not, he would eventually come to the answer he sought on his own. It wasn't simply Atou's faith in Takuto that made her think that, but a proven fact.

"A conference inviting all countries and powers… An All-Faction Conference, perhaps?" Takuto continued to pursue one line of thinking.

If he took the proposal from the Succubus Army—from Witch Vagia—at face value, then she was putting on a grand summit for all of Idoragya's major powers. Regardless of the intent behind the invite, they must have wanted Mynoghra to participate after making such a lofty and showy proposal to the whole world. But the truth was, Takuto wasn't keen on the idea.

It didn't take a genius to know that it was stupid to enter enemy territory without first knowing your enemy. It had been incredibly risky for Takuto to invade the Divine Nation of Lenea to get Atou back. A nation's vassals wouldn't be able to sleep well at night if their ruler kept haphazardly wandering into enemy territory. Besides, a ruler—a Commander—should not be fighting on the front lines, period.

Takuto often had to remind himself of that. He told himself he should not mistake what he was good at—what his strengths and weaknesses were. Moreover, since Mynoghra's policy of pursuing an Ascension Victory included reviving Isla, compromise and change just weren't an option for them.

In other words, their end goal involved becoming hostile with every faction anyway.

Setting aside what motives the other factions had for participating, the peaceful negotiations advocated by Witch Vagia were nigh impossible for Mynoghra to adhere to. At the very least, to

get the Ascension Victory, the other Players would have to surrender to Mynoghra.

With all that in mind, the conference was not very appealing for Mynoghra.

"But with such a dearth of information, it'd be a shame to miss the opportunity to learn more about our opponents," he reasoned. "Honestly, I'm curious what interesting games are participating, and that'll be crucial information for forming future strategies too. That said, it *is* risky."

Atou responded with a soft smile and a nod that seemed to suggest he should do what he thought best. Seeing her smile, Takuto responded with one of his own—the one he'd started getting a little more used to using as of late. Then he took a deep breath.

"It's a conundrum, all right. What's the right move here?" Takuto voiced his concerns, sounding more than a little like he was enjoying himself.

It had already been long decided that Takuto and Mynoghra's policy was world conquest. But there was good enough reason to think twice about just upping and declining to participate in a world conference so they could go about running their empire in isolation.

The enemies they must someday defeat were powerful. They all utilized different abilities, and each one brought about changes to the world that were equivalent to working miracles.

In the matchup against the Game Master, Takuto's clever strategy allowed Mynoghra to snatch up victory in the end, but it might've ended in utter defeat had he not known about TRPGs. With this in mind, he was taking a serious risk by continuing to give the first move to an opponent he had no intelligence on. He still didn't know how many people in this world were in the same position as him—how many Players were out there.

If possible, this is where I'd like to gather intelligence—without the risk.

"Looks like the best option here is to use the Botchlings…" Takuto slowly lifted his gaze to the ceiling. He made eye contact with the baby-like monstrosity clinging to the beam; it had been trying to get his attention for a while now.

This creature was a Botchling—one of the Mabeast units summoned to serve as Takuto's bodyguard. Two of these units currently existed in Mynoghra, and they were the most powerful common units they had at their disposal.

Naturally, since he had summoned them to protect himself, Takuto would rather not send the Botchlings away from his person. But their skills were extremely powerful and useful. Possessing combat abilities and special skills on par with a Hero unit, Takuto was certain they would live up to his expectations.

"Oh, I get it. You're going to have them serve as your body double, King Takuto!" Atou, Takuto's confidant, who'd never left his side since his resurrection and dogged him like a mother wolf protecting her pup, nodded in agreement with his choice.

We've gotten closer in a lot of ways, Takuto thought, feeling a little nervous around the girl nodding in front of him.

"It'd be more than a little painful to lose one with how expensive they are to produce… That being said, the fact that they can be produced again makes them a disposable card we *can* toss aside and replace," Takuto said, laying out his thoughts. "I think it's a bad idea to fall behind because we're being too cautious, so a certain degree of proactiveness is a must."

Depending on the location where they were produced, the Botchlings could possess a variety of unique skills. The Botchling Takuto had made eye contact with excelled at camouflage and concealment. Using its Mimic skill, it could transform into Takuto, and using telepathy and shared vision, it could even be controlled like a walkie-talkie. This was the method Takuto had employed as a countermeasure when Vittorio was scheming to elevate Takuto into his ideal being. At the time, Takuto used the Botchling to nullify the ritual by intentionally shifting the object of worship away from himself, but…

Looking at it from another perspective, Takuto realized he could also use the Botchling as an external terminal to interact with the wider world from the comfort of home.

"That's a brilliant idea," Atou said. "Elder Moltar and the rest of the Dark Elves can rest easy knowing you are safe at home… And of

course, I will also feel relieved!”

“Now that I think about it, we’ve both been in an awful lot of near-death situations since coming to this world,” Takuto agreed. “I’m not about to put myself in danger again by participating.”

“I was planning on stopping you if you did!” Atou declared.

“Hahaha!” Takuto couldn’t help letting out a strained laugh, being on the receiving end of Atou’s deadly serious gaze. “I wouldn’t blame you if you tried…”

Takuto understood how she felt. If she had offered to participate as his proxy, he would’ve done everything in his power to stop her too. When everything was said and done, it was firmly settled that Takuto would not directly participate in this conference. Now, all they had to do was figure out how to gain the maximum benefits within the limitations they had set.

“To be honest, I’d rather not take any action and just stay holed up to focus on Domestic Affairs,” Takuto admitted. “But this is a golden opportunity to gather intelligence. If all the factions are really going to get together, then at least we’ll know what kind of forces we’ll have to face in the future.”

That’s what it all boiled down to. Whether it was the RPG forces or the TRPG forces, one of the reasons Mynoghra had fallen behind their enemies until now was a lack of information. Attending this All-Faction Conference was risky in itself, but if they could get a rough idea about the forces that had come to this world, it’d make world domination much easier in the future. And so, Takuto was gradually leaning toward participating. The biggest concern he had was the potential issues that might arise from Mynoghra’s participation.

“Anything to do with the other Players brings a whole host of problems,” he sighed. “Because it’ll inevitably involve talking about games and other worlds, we can’t easily discuss it with the Dark Elves, and trying to dance around the topic seriously stresses me out.”

“That’s what I’m here for! Just ask, and I will show up anytime, anywhere to hear you out, King Takuto! Your Atou is the one and only person you can talk to about that stuff, after all!” Atou proudly clapped her hand over her heart.

Takuto chuckled softly at her adorable gesture, but his expression stiffened as he realized she'd smoothly erased a certain person from the equation. "I'm delighted to hear you say that, and I'll be counting on you when the time comes, but aren't you forgetting a certain someone?"

"Oh dear, does such a person exist? I unfortunately can't seem to recall…"

"R-Right then…"

They were discussing the Hero who was absent from the room —Gleeful Spin Doctor Vittorio. He was someone Takuto could consult about matters relating to their prior world. But it was fair to say that the relationship between Atou and Vittorio was as bad as they came. The cause of their falling out lay with Vittorio's despicable personality and penchant to get under other people's skin. It was far from ideal to have the people serving as the central pillars of government at odds with each other, but Takuto was resigned to the fact that he could do nothing to bridge the gap between them.

It'd be cruel to order Atou to change her opinion, and utterly pointless to order Vittorio to fix his attitude problem. Thus, the best solution was for Takuto to mediate so that the two of them didn't argue.

On the bright side, Vittorio isn't always in the Accursed Lands, so that helps. Speaking of, where the heck is he right now?

Designed to be uncontrollable by the Player, Vittorio was out and about running amok within Mynoghra's domain, causing all sorts of trouble wherever he went. The power play between Takuto and Vittorio had safely reached its conclusion already, but Takuto knew Vittorio wasn't the type to just fall in line.

What kind of crazy problem will he bring me next? Thinking about it was both depressing and exhilarating. As Takuto's thoughts lingered on Vittorio, he noticed Atou's downcast face. She seemed to be contemplating something. From the looks of it, she had hit upon a problem with Takuto's plan.

"Back to what we were discussing," she began. "I think it's an excellent idea to send the Botchling as your standin, but don't you think the conference itself may be a trap set by the enemy? It's true

that this conference might involve all the major forces, but if the host is considering going to war with the world, as we are, then it's a golden opportunity to strike while everyone is gathered. If they do attack, we risk losing a very valuable Botchling…"

"Exactly. Being able to learn about our enemy means they can do the same to us. There's a high chance they'll be able to draw out information on our game and abilities, and if things go bad, we might even get stuck with a nasty debuff. And we can't write off the likelihood of war being declared on the spot. But even with those possibilities, the benefits outweigh the risks."

"How so?" Atou cocked her head, finding Takuto's explanation confusing. She was genuinely curious.

Expecting this reaction from her, Takuto nodded and explained in terms his confidant would easily understand. "Simply put, we can produce another Botchling, but we might not be able to recover from the damages that will come from not knowing our enemies."

Realization dawned upon Atou's face. She was so wary of losing a Botchling and letting others learn about Mynoghra that she forgot the most important thing. A lack of information had caused Mynoghra to lose Isla, have Atou temporarily stolen away, and even led to Takuto's loss of self.

It was thanks to Takuto's genius that he had turned around situations where one wrong move would have resulted in certain defeat, but it would be foolish to assume that they would be fine the next time and the time after that. They needed to secure information this time, even if it meant jumping into the water with bloodthirsty sharks circling. Even in the worst-case scenario, it'd be worth losing a Botchling to get that information.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained, right?" Atou realized. "And if those gains mean the difference between Mynoghra's future survival, then venture in we must…"

"Exactly," Takuto said, nodding in firm agreement.

Takuto loved the way Atou was able to grasp the whole picture after he offered a slight explanation, even if she didn't get it at first. He also cherished the time he spent talking with his greatest confidant more than anything else. Every time felt like a secret

rendezvous, and whether they realized it or not, they were closer than ever.

"I now see the full picture behind your plan, King Takuto. I can't deny we've suffered from being too passive, so it'll be nice to go on the offensive to stir things up for once."

With how close he felt to Atou, Takuto decided he would broach the next subject with her and her alone. "Say, Atou…have you ever seen god?" he asked out of the blue.

Atou blinked at the abrupt topic shift and took a good look at Takuto's face. He returned her confused look with a serious one. "Uh…god, you say? That clown-who-shalt-not-be-named liked to call you god, King Takuto, but I take it you are talking about something else entirely, right?"

Takuto nodded and looked up at the ceiling. He waved his hand to send a signal.

"King Takuto…?" Atou called his name when she sensed the Botchlings receding into the distance. Having spent as long together—well, it was hard to judge how long exactly, but that was beside the point—as they had, Atou understood why Takuto would send his bodyguards away. What confused her was how this could be such an important and sensitive topic to warrant it. One that Takuto deemed it necessary to send away the NPC units that were loyal to him and had no will of their own…

Suddenly realizing she was only staring absently and hadn't yet answered his query, Atou rushed to reply. "F-Forgive me! Um…I don't think I know anything about this god. Probably…?"

The reason for her ambiguous response was that Atou only had vague memories about her origins. *What in the world was I doing before I came to this world?* she wondered. She certainly remembered spending time with Takuto *in Eternal Nations*. She undoubtedly had memories of the wonderful days they had spent together since coming to this world, despite the hardships and difficulties they had faced along the way.

But the memories in between were vague, as if there was a gaping hole there.

Should she reveal this to him? It was certainly a strange issue to have, but she felt like she was letting it bother her too much. Most likely, there was nothing in between at all. Probably.

As Atou was wrestling with this dilemma, Takuto had taken her answer and run with it, going on to explain his concerns.

"…Do you remember what that succubus lady—let's just call her Vagia now—said? She brought up a god during her little skit the other day."

"If I remember correctly, she mentioned the 'God of Expansion,' right?" Atou recalled. "I'd never heard of such a being before that."

God…a supernatural being. The embodiment of transcendence that exists beyond human understanding. God is sometimes compared to the collective consciousness of humans or the universe itself, and it was the being currently bothering Takuto the most.

"I had always assumed that our current situation is being influenced by some being beyond imagination," he said. "To start, it's bizarre enough that you and I were transported to another world with our physical forms intact. It'd make more sense if this is the work of someone rather than merely a natural phenomenon."

"So, you mean to say that a 'god' is behind our presence here and all the enemies we have fought up until now?" Atou summarized.

"That's my theory at least."

Atou's face clouded over.

So-called gods existed within *Eternal Nations* as well. A good example of this is the Nameless Evil God, a concept that Takuto himself embodied. There were several other gods in *Eternal Nations*, but they were merely units, Commanders, or key characters in the story campaign. In other words, they were simply a part of the stage dressing.

But what Takuto was discussing was the real deal. A being who controls the creation and destruction of the world, rules over phenomena and concepts, and is positioned above all things. Not the kind of being spoken of in games or stories, but a much, much larger being.

Atou felt an unusual sense of unease as she grasped the magnitude of what Takuto was insinuating.

"That's why I just can't see where this All-Faction Conference will lead," Takuto said. "If nothing else, I'm pretty sure it won't simply end with everyone becoming buddies."

"…King Takuto, do you believe this conference is happening at the behest of some god?" Atou asked, her voice mired with worry.

They would fend off any hostile being, even another Player. But when it came to a true god—a divine being with the ability to bring Takuto, Atou, and everyone else to this world…well, that was a different story.

The unknown is scary, and not knowing can lead directly to death.

Atou was a Hero, and she stood before Takuto, defeating all his enemies. Who could blame her for experiencing a moment of weakness over the fear of the unknown?

"It's dangerous to assume that this God of Expansion is something we can understand," Takuto said. "Or that it's even the one powerful god I'm concerned about."

Atou nodded.

The god that exists behind the Players. What purpose did it have in inviting everyone to this world?

She had a sea of questions, but Atou's determination and feelings remained steadfast. *No matter what happens, I will be with you, King Takuto…*

Atou was *Takuto's* Hero after all.

"That said, what we need to do is pretty simple. First, we need to increase Mynoghra's national power, then aim for the Ascension Victory to revive Isla."

Atou quickly nodded. Takuto was satisfied with her response. He expected her to be baffled by his revelation. It was only natural to struggle with the concept of some god pulling the strings in the background. In fact, Takuto struggled with the whole idea too. It felt like there was some fog hiding the finer details, and he was speaking of something vague and dreamlike. But now, it was this strange feeling that led Takuto to his conviction.

Now that I think about it, the TRPG forces I clashed with in Lenea had blathered about receiving some sort of mission from god. And from what the Elfuur Sisters said, that was likely the case for the Demon Lord's Army as well.

Witch Erakino and her master, Player Keiji, seemed to be concealing information about this god. Takuto never figured it out. The Demon Lord's Army also mentioned a god several times without ever getting into the finer details. And then it came up again in the message from the Succubus Army. Although there was little information to go on, clear conclusions could be drawn.

Since Vagia called her god the "God of Expansion," there must have been an incident that confirmed this name. Some god—or gods—is clearly interfering with the other factions too—there's plenty of evidence to prove it.

The question is, why isn't there a god interfering with Mynoghra—with me*? In my battle with the TRPG Player, there was definitely some kind of major clash on a higher plane. Which means we aren't* not *under the protection of a god, right?*

What in the world are they thinking? I would love to speak with him or her, if possible.

Takuto fell deep into thought. His mind whirled with the possible intentions of a divine being. What kind of being was his god? What did that being want from him? Why didn't it directly interfere with Mynoghra? He sank deeper and deeper into thought, and when he finally reached the bottom, the depths of a darkness he had never reached before, something appeared before Takuto's eyes—

"King Takuto! KING TAKUTO!" Takuto's whole body jerked at Atou's incessant call. Her eyes went wide when she saw his overreaction. "You've been stuck in thought for a long time. Are you all right? Would you like me to fetch you something to drink?"

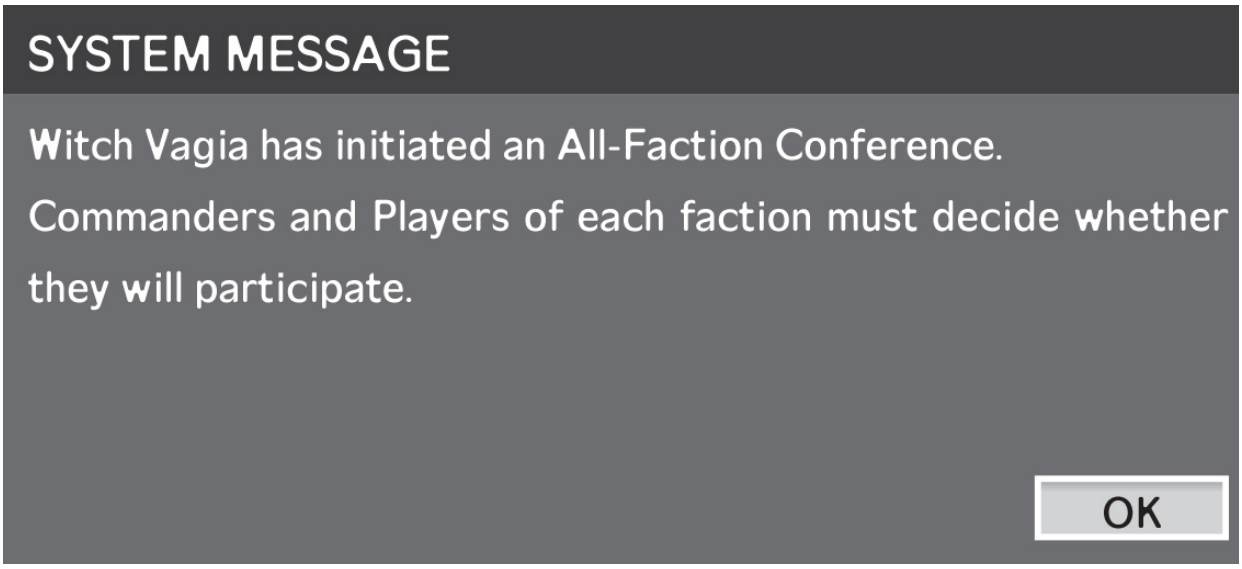
"Ah, uh, sorry," Takuto said in a purposefully cheerful tone, hoping to hide his inner turmoil. "I got lost in thought for a moment there. Yeah, I'd love something warm to drink. Mind getting it for me?"

"It's easy to get lost thinking about such a difficult problem… I'll be right back with your drink."

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"GOD…huh?"

After making sure Atou was gone, Takuto let out a long sigh and leaned back into his throne. Everything was a mystery to him at this point, but he couldn't shake the cloying premonition that things were about to become incredibly troublesome.


SYSTEM MESSAGE
Witch Vagia has initiated an All-Faction Conference.
Commanders and Players of each faction must decide whether they will participate.
OK

PROBLEMS involving Players. Problems involving gods. Takuto had a never-ending supply of things to worry about. And on top of all that, he had to manage his empire.

They say a surefire way to keep a player from getting bored with a game is to pack it full of events, but Takuto was getting a little fed up that this world was reenacting games to that extent.

There was a knock at the door, followed by Atou's voice announcing her arrival. She'd returned with drinks for them to take a break with.

Guess I'll reset my mood with a drink, Takuto thought as he watched Atou enter the room with someone else.

"Thank you for waiting, King Takuto," Atou said.

"Please forgive the intrusion, Your Majesty."

"Oh, good to see you, Emle. Welcome, welcome," Takuto greeted.

Emle came into the room carrying the tray of drinks. Takuto welcomed any of his officials at all times, but he thought it strange that Emle would come on her day off.

"I thought it wouldn't do us much good to stew in our thoughts, so I decided to prepare some sweets for our break. Emle just so happened to be having some fun in the kitchen at the time, so I brought her with me," Atou said, explaining the reason for Emle's presence.

"S-Sorry, I couldn't help myself…" Emle said meekly.

"Haha. The more the merrier," Takuto said. **"Since you guys went out of your way to prepare all this, why don't we take a break in the council room?"**

Taking a closer look, Takuto noticed a venerable array of homemade sweets lining Emle's tray. She appeared to be thoroughly enjoying her cooking hobby in the Palace's large kitchen. Takuto was pleasantly surprised to learn that someone was making use of the barely used kitchen. *Maybe I should try my hand at cooking to take my mind off things?* he thought as he sipped the cup of coffee they'd prepared for him.

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WHEN your brain is overworked, you crave sweets.

The tea and sweets Atou and Emle had prepared for Takuto satiated that craving, increasing his blood sugar levels and granting him an energy boost. As someone who understood the changed state of his body, Takuto was surprised to learn that he still had the same physiological functions as a normal human from his prior world. His thoughts turned to the Nameless Evil God, and the boost he'd received from the prayers directed his way by the Cult of Ira.

Am I really human or not? he wondered. He wasn't particularly attached to remaining human if there were no consequences, but on the other hand, he'd rather avoid any changes if they came with baggage. Takuto suddenly realized that he really should look into the circumstances surrounding himself when he got the chance, and that would add yet another annoying task to the pile.

"By the way, I noticed you two have been locked up in the Throne Room since morning," Emle said, attempting to find something to talk about just as Takuto had finished his drink and sighed contentedly. "What were you working on?"

It was a great conversation starter, but Atou was at a loss for how to explain the unusual topics they had been discussing.

"Um..." Takuto began awkwardly.

"Oh! W-Was I not supposed to ask about it?!" Emle panicked, quick to catch on to the wrong thing. "I-I'm terribly sorry! I'm such a dunce when it comes to these things!" Her face turned a deep shade of red as she apologized profusely.

"St-Stop it! What are you imagining?! Don't get the wrong idea, Emle!" Atou rushed to deny whatever it was Emle had misconstrued about their time together, her face taking on the same red hue.

"Nah, we were just discussing the invitation from the Succubus Army. Since it also involves the Land of Gods, we wanted to hash out the details alone," Takuto calmly explained the situation to clear the misunderstanding.

He wanted to avoid making all the decisions alone with Atou since they had recently decided on a policy of involving the Dark Elves in managing the empire. Emle seemed to be operating under a weird misunderstanding, and he'd hate for that to lead to Elder

Moltar and Gia kicking up a fuss. That's why Takuto had implied this time was an exception, and one which the Dark Elves had no business getting involved in.

It had become the norm for Takuto to keep things vague when it came to topics related to the Players.

"Is that so?" Emle responded. "And here I was, l-letting my imagination run wild… Please forgive the indiscretion! How silly of me… King Takuto and Lady Atou would never do such things together… Me and my naughty imagination!"

"D-Don't worry about it," Takuto coughed. He realized from her reaction that he was worried for nothing.

The young Dark Elf woman became even more flustered once she realized her mistake. Takuto was honestly curious just what kind of things she was imagining, but he'd rather not stir up that hornet's nest, so he decided to pretend it never happened. He was relieved neither Elder Moltar nor Gia was there to make things worse. Those two loyal hounds would have criticized Emle, forcefully exposing her indecent thoughts. That would have been unbearably embarrassing for Takuto, so he was glad to be spared that horror.

"Still, how odd that it's come to Succubi now… They are things of legend to us," Emle said, regaining her calm. "I never thought they would appear for real. And they even made use of that giant projection that surpasses any illusion spell known to man… Is it possible they also hail from the Land of Gods?"

"It's possible," Takuto said. **"There are things about the Land of Gods you mustn't learn about. That's why I was consulting Atou in private."**

"A valid reason, my king. However, please know that we Dark Elves are also doing everything in our power to be of use to you."

"I know. Don't worry, I promise we won't decide what direction to take without telling you," he assured her. **"We rely on all of you, after all."**

"Actually, Emle," Atou chimed in, "without your people's dedication to the empire, King Takuto and I would never be able to sleep. Your work is a necessity."

"As it stands, we're all lacking sleep…" Takuto said wryly.

Was that a good enough explanation? Takuto was still trying to figure that part out. He wanted to share as much information with them as possible, without oversharing the more troublesome details. The Dark Elves seemed to at least recognize their enemies as formidable, and that was as good a place to start as any.

Takuto took a bite out of one of the sweets Emle had baked. The sweet aroma and sweeter flavor spread through his mouth. It had been made with generous amounts of high-quality butter, milk, and flour. Unfortunately, Takuto wasn't a sweets expert. Hence, he had no idea what exactly he was munching on, but he figured it must've come from one of the several Earth recipe books he'd made for her with Emergency Production.

His mind grew clearer as the sugar circulated through him, and he sighed. **"The All-Faction Conference is still a ways off, anyway, so let's discuss it in detail with the others during an official meeting. Actually, since Emle's here and all, why don't we have an impromptu progress report now? What do you two think?"**

They were going to dive right back into discussing their plans after their break anyway, so it seemed like a great idea to casually throw around ideas over snacks and drinks. Atou and Emle perked up at the suggestion.

"I'm for it. I'll relay all the information that has come in so far," Emle said.

"Since we're taking a break and all, why don't we breeze through the digests, King Takuto?"

It was necessary to confirm the current situation before they delved into the particulars with Elder Moltar and the Dark Elves later. Takuto felt a greater need to ensure he had time to parse the information, as he had just recently recovered from being sick. He didn't actually feel ill or anything, but that didn't change the fact that he had been in a quasi-comatose state for a long time. To be on the safe side, he wanted to confirm the facts first to make sure his brain was still running on all cylinders.

"To begin, I would like to address the outcome of our latest battle with the Qualian forces in the ruined zone of the former Divine

Nation of Lenea," Emle explained. "Some sort of awakening occurred in the Scribe Saint as a direct result of her battle with Lord Vittorio. We failed to take control of the Southern Province as originally planned. On the bright side, the Trade City of Seldoch, which borders the Lawful Continent, was successfully absorbed into our empire. We have taken control of the entire region, and it now acts as a buffer zone against Qualia."

"Yeah, that fits with Vittorio's report and the information we were able to confirm ourselves," Takuto said. **"The Scribe Saint is a loose cannon we need to be cautious of, but it appears she's uncontrollable, so there are plenty of ways we can handle her."**

"Qualia likely has their hands full rebuilding the ruined region of the former Divine Nation of Lenea, so it seems safe to assume they won't directly interfere with us anytime soon," Atou said.

Gleeful Spin Doctor Vittorio's covert attempts to seize the territory left unclaimed by the ruined Divine Nation of Lenea brought major changes to the continent as a whole, and to Mynoghra. One such change was the acquisition of a new territory for Mynoghra: a major city bordering the Lawful Continent and parts of the Divine Nation of Lenea itself. This was a tremendous achievement that increased Mynoghra's national power, but also brought a whole host of issues.

"Speaking of which, I'm curious about the newly obtained city," Takuto said, hesitating before asking his next question. **"So, uh, how are things there?"**

"I'm afraid your fears are very much founded, my king… It's quite the bed of chaos," Emle said.

"I knew it…"

The biggest issue was that the territory they had acquired was simply too large to be managed effectively. Takuto was forced to face the truth he already knew. It was both a happy and headache-inducing problem to have.

"We're rushing to train personnel, but expansion is outpacing us in spades. I believe this will be the chief problem brought up at the next meeting," Emle explained.

"I can see why. We only just recently got a handle on things in Dragontan," Atou said. "If we're not careful, it may exceed the current population of Mynoghra."

In the game, when a city is incorporated into your empire, it falls into chaos for a few turns, but this is chaos on an empire scale… Takuto gazed blandly into the distance as he scoured his memories. He'd been made all too aware of how different the game was from reality, but he'd never expected the main difference would be the paperwork. Then again, even the advanced science, technology, and administrative systems of his prior world struggled to resolve this ever-present issue completely.

People loved to tout how human lives would be completely changed once commercial AI got on track, but he doubted the eternal bond between man and paperwork could ever truly be severed.

"I think applying makeshift solutions to the problems as they arise is our best option right now," Takuto said. **"Fortunately for us, the residents of Seldoch are all members of the Cult of Ira. They're subservient to Mynoghra, so let's take our time to make some adjustments and integrate the governing systems that were previously in place when it belonged to Lenea. It's a great way to put Vittorio to work on something while we're at it."**

"Ha, you think that clown will work?" Atou asked, not hiding her scorn for Vittorio from her voice.

"I'll make him work. Even if I have to force him."

Vittorio was uncontrollable by design. This was one issue where Takuto was glad to see some discrepancies between the game and reality, because at least this Vittorio was somewhat willing to listen. Emphasis on the *somewhat*. He probably would've been utterly impossible to get under control if Takuto hadn't recently shown him who was boss.

Vittorio was a pain to deal with, but his talents spoke for themselves. Especially on the Domestic Affairs front. His skill set specialized entirely in getting under people's skin, but manipulation and Charisma-based skills required a high level of intelligence to

properly execute, so he came equipped with the wisdom to match his skills. It was no fluke that he was running the Cult of Ira behind the scenes.

"His smarts are the only thing he has going for him, after all," Atou said. "He would actually be useful to Mynoghra if he'd just stop creating more problems than he solves."

"Well, that's just part of his charm," Takuto deflected Atou's complaints.

Thick lines creased Aou's brow; it sounded to her like he was defending Vittorio. *Oh shoot, this is a telltale sign I've soured her mood,* Takuto quickly realized. He started putting together what he'd say to make her happy when a knock came at the door.

"Come in."

Atou and Emle exchanged looks and nodded. Emle went to open the door. Elder Moltar stood on the other side.

"Pardon the intrusion. Your Majesty, a problem we can't resolve on our own has cropped up. A traveler staying in Dragontan is seeking an audience with Mynoghra's king." Elder Moltar shot Emle a withering look when he saw the half-eaten sweets lining the council room table.

I better come up with a good excuse for her later, Takuto thought, pitying the future that awaited his aide. Meanwhile, Atou sought more information from Elder Moltar.

"There should normally be no reason for the king to meet with a complete stranger, so I assume there's more to this traveler, Elder Moltar?" she prompted.

People came day and night seeking an audience with the king of Mynoghra. More than a few people were arrogant enough to try to strike a deal with an evil being. Dragontan was rife with merchants, mercenaries, bards, and people of unknown origins struggling to catch a glimpse of Takuto. Dealing with those people not worth the king's time fell to the subordinates under Elder Moltar. They were all turned away at the door, naturally.

Elder Moltar coming in person to report on this traveler meant he deemed it a matter of importance.

Who in the world could it be? Takuto couldn't think of anyone important who would want to make direct contact with him. *What name will surprise me now?* Takuto waited for his trusty sage to utter that name, feeling a wave of excitement course through him.

"I'm afraid so," Elder Moltar nodded. "This traveler is clothed in an attire unlike anything we have ever seen before, but he carries himself like an elite warrior. What caught our attention the most was that he refers to himself as *the* Hero."

Deep lines creased Takuto's brow. *Great, looks like I'm going to have to put the Botchling straight to work as my body double.* He couldn't even let out an annoyed sigh with Elder Moltar standing before him. Not like sighing would make the situation better…

Takuto realized that the wheels of fate were turning at a much faster speed than any of them imagined.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

Mynoghra's assets:

【Cities】

Capital	Accursed Lands
Cities	Dragontan
	Seldoch

【Units】

Hero	Sludge Atou
	Elfuur Sisters
	Gleeful Spin Doctor Vittorio
Common	Long-legged Bug, Headhunting Bug, Brain Eater,
	Giant Pitcher Plant, Spirit of Ruin, Botchling

【Foreign Powers】

Phon'kaven	Ally
Holy Kingdom of Qualia	Cold War
Divine Nation of Lenea	Defeated
El-Nah Alliance of Elementals	Cold War

OK

Chapter 2: The Hero

DRAGONTAN had developed remarkably since joining Mynoghra. Thanks to the spread of the Cult of Ira—the religion Vittorio founded to worship Takuto as a God—the town had developed at an incredible speed and uniqueness, becoming the second-largest city in Mynoghra. It brimmed with such life and vitality that it was hard to believe this town belonged to an evil nation. Its very existence showed off the power and authority of King Takuto Ira to the masses.

However, Town Hall, the heart of Dragontan's administrative body, was enshrouded in a solemn energy for the first time in a while. For on this particular day, Takuto would be meeting with a certain figure there.

The person in question was "The Hero." Someone thought to have a connection to the RPG forces and the *Brave Questers'* Demon Lord Army.

What was their reason for making contact with Mynoghra?

If the whole thing was just some sort of scam or joke, Mynoghra could breathe a sigh of relief and move on—no harm, no foul. But the sheer fact that Takuto had agreed to an audience with this person made it clear that there was more to this.

The dark, cloudy skies seemed to hint at what the future held.

◇◇◇

IN Town Hall's reception room, the very same room where the Brain Eaters had once carried out a horrific massacre, Takuto and Atou faced the boy and girl who'd requested an audience with them.

Tension thick enough to cut with a knife hung in the air.

Determined to slice his way through the oppressive atmosphere, the young man broke the ice first. "Ahem, sorry to bother you! Seriously didn't think I'd get to meet the head honcho on my first go. Um, you're Mynoghra's king, right? Is that what I should call you? I know you're a king and all that jazz, but I suck when it comes to formalities, so I hope you can bear with me being all casual like."

"…I don't mind," Takuto said.

The young man speaking so flippantly looked to be around seventeen or eighteen years old. He was either the same age as Takuto or a year older. Being close in age, Takuto didn't feel like they needed to stand on ceremony with each other. At first glance, he looked like a normal teenage boy, but his distinctive appearance betrayed his position as a fellow Player.

Now that I think about it, this is my first time seeing a Player in person. Well, as in person as viewing him through a Botchling can be. He doesn't seem that different from me, so I gotta wonder if he's also a top player for Brave Questers*.* Takuto quietly observed the young man.

The young man also had raven-black hair and obsidian eyes that were uncommon in this world. He wore a navy-blue school uniform with an unfamiliar but relatively common design in Japan. And then there was the sword hanging from his hip that looked like it was plucked straight from *Brave Questers*.

He flashed a charming smile that only those with excellent social skills can wield. And then there was his overly friendly personality that had him marching right into your bubble without a care for personal space. This young man, who called himself The Hero, seemed like the kind of person who would be the protagonist of a story or appear as a male lead in a shoujo manga.

He almost seemed like too much of a perfect character that Takuto considered the possibility it was a disguise or illusion, but the Botchling stealthed in the rafters could use the Detect skill and hadn't alerted him to anything so far. Unless this Hero was using some sort of highly advanced and special ability, there was no question he was there in the flesh, unlike Takuto.

Ugh, a top player and extrovert at the same time…the worst kind of opponent for me, Takuto lamented, letting his thoughts wander.

"King Takuto, he's definitely the same person as that time," Atou telepathically relayed to Takuto from where she sat beside him on the sofa, bristling with open hostility.

When Takuto had received the report that someone calling himself the Hero had requested an audience, he could guess who it was. Yes, this was the same young man who'd burst onto the scene and gotten involved in the battle between the Demon Lord and the Elfuur Sisters.

Having watched him through his shared vision with Atou at the time, Takuto had no doubt he was *Brave Questers'*—the RPG faction's—Player. That was why he had accepted this audience and attended it on high alert. He made every preparation to ensure no harm would come to his person should his opponent decide to get violent.

"Let's watch and see how this plays out first," Takuto responded telepathically. *"I'll give you orders telepathically if I need you to do anything, so can you remain vigilant and not say anything until then?"*

"As you wish, my king. Please order me the second you need anything!"

After finishing his exchange with Atou quickly enough so it wouldn't look suspicious to their guests, Takuto decided to approach his first real contact with another Player peacefully.

"First, let me start by expressing my gratitude for you coming all the way to my territory," Takuto began. "I'm Mynoghra's Commander, Takuto Ira. Perhaps it would be easier to understand if I introduced myself as an SLG Player?"

"Y-Yeah! That's helpful!"

Takuto honestly had no confidence in roleplaying as king. Not to mention, he was becoming rusty at adhering to the stiff formalities since he had been acting as himself more and more in front of the Dark Elves. However, maintaining the tension would put pressure on his opponent and help keep him from slipping up by

letting his guard down. With all of that in mind, Takuto spoke and carried himself as the King of Ruin, and it seemed to gain him the initiative against his opponent.

Takuto hated the idea of letting another Player anywhere near the Accursed Lands, where the heart of Mynoghra thrummed, so he was relieved he was able to distract from the oddity of a king holding an audience in a reception room within a town hall.

"Man, I feel kinda bad about this. You know, asking to suddenly meet like this and all. I just can't seem to get used to this kinda atmosphere! I suppose I'd count as an RPG Player? The name's Yu Kamimiyadera. My last name's a mouthful, so just call me Yu. Nice to meetcha!"

"That'll depend on where the conversation goes from here," Takuto replied curtly. "All right, RPG Player Yu Kamimiyadera, given our opposing positions, we certainly aren't on friendly terms yet. Would you care to tell me what led you to seek this meeting?"

His opponent might be The Hero, but he hailed from the RPG faction. In other words, the Demon Lord's Army that Mynoghra defeated not too long ago would fall under his system's jurisdiction. He was an enemy they were at war with—a war the RPG faction started.

Takuto couldn't fathom how this Hero could come to his domain all chummy if he understood the situation. But Yu had also come to the Elfuur Sisters' aid—however unwanted his help was—during the final stage of their battle with the Demon Lord.

The relationship between the Demon Lord's Army and the Hero isn't a friendly one in the games. The Hero wasn't in a position to summon underlings and dominate them like the King of Ruin was. Takuto's understanding of Yu's game system was what eventually led him to speak with the Hero.

So, how will he explain himself? Takuto wondered. This was his first time experiencing such an exchange, even with the various situations he'd gone through with *Eternal Nations* and the other games. Whether they were fighting or joining hands, nothing would start until he gauged his opponent's stance.

"Ack…er…well…you see…uh…" Yu fumbled for words, dashing Takuto's expectations.

Apparently, Takuto's intimidation tactics had worked a little too well.

Am I being too cautious of him? Or is this an act? If he's from a similar background to me, maybe he's not used to negotiations or tense situations? Several scenarios raced through Takuto's mind. He was about to offer the Hero a lifeline when someone else beat him to the chase.

"Master's nervous! Um, you can do this, Master!"

"Y-Yeah, I can! Thanks!"

The girl, who'd been sitting silently beside Yu, offered him words of encouragement. She sat directly across from where Atou sat beside Takuto.

Takuto discreetly observed the girl who'd had less presence than air until she'd spoken up.

…She's got quite the look going for her.

The lone girl appeared to be slightly younger than the Hero. She was clad in a raggedy, tan dress and sported a collar, looking very much the part of a slave. However, she seemed close to Yu and sat right beside him on the couch as if that were her natural place. They seemed too friendly to have a master-slave relationship. It would be more accurate to describe her as being like what Atou was to Takuto—a highly trusted confidant.

But if they're close, why is he making her dress like that? At least she seems to be decked out in some good accessories…

Whether they were some sort of magic item or equipment, the accessories she wore on both hands looked valuable. So why were her clothes rags? Takuto also questioned why she didn't have any weapons.

A variety of doubts and suspicions crossed his mind, but it was too soon to jump to conclusions. The one thing he knew for certain was that as long as this girl served the Hero, he shouldn't underestimate her. He'd have to withhold judgment until they learned more.

On the bright side, the slave girl's words of encouragement seemed to have given Yu the courage he needed. He now faced Takuto with a determined expression belying his prior meekness. Seeing that, Takuto decided to wait for him to move things along instead of helping out.

"I have come here with one simple proposal for you, Your Majesty. I want us to join forces against that Succubus." Yu finally broached the main topic.

Join forces against the Succubus, huh? I'd be happy to do that, but it brings up more questions than it answers, Takuto thought, keeping his face a perfect mask of calm despite his internal frowning. Even Yu must've thought his proposal was on the crazy side because his smile grew more awkward by the second.

"Master, Master! Now! Now's the time for your catchphrase! Hurry up! This is your cue card!" The girl held up a memo pad for Yu to see. She seemed to be trying to do it discreetly, but it was easily visible to Takuto and Atou.

"Huh? Seriously…? All right… Ahem!"

Yu took much longer than Takuto felt necessary to review the contents of the cue card before quietly muttering, "Got it." Then he took on a theatrical air and spread his arms out wide.

"Allow me to introduce myself officially. My name is Yu Kamimiyadera. My assigned god is the Jokester God, and my exclusive game is *Brave Questers*. I am but a pawn to a pathetic god that has come to this world." Yu recited his lines as if he were acting out an epic scene from a story.

Faced with his assertive personality and confident expression, Takuto was left feeling like Yu really was the type of person he struggled to get along with.

Hero

Our hero will drive away the darkness.
Let's fight the Demon Lord's Army to protect the world!

The game protagonist controlled by the player.
The Hero is a useful character with comprehensive melee skills and the ability to use support and healing magic.
In addition, he can use Hero-exclusive equipment and items, making him the most rounded out character in the party.
However, he is inferior to specialized characters such as Mages and Warriors in areas of expertise, so he will need to make up for his shortcomings with allies.



Takuto was speechless. Yu had rendered him speechless. Not because he was intimidated by his introduction or anything like that. No, it had everything to do with his smug look of satisfaction and the way the slave girl looked at him with stars in her eyes, as if she were gazing upon a prince straight out of a fairy tale. And then there was his incredibly embarrassing catchphrase that sent Takuto internally rolling around on the floor, clutching his face.

Whether they knew about Takuto's severe case of secondhand embarrassment or not, the Hero duo dove headfirst into their own little world.

"A-Amazeballs! You are too cool for school, Master!"

"Huh? R-Really? Aw, shucks. Guess my coolness came out again!" Yu chuckled haughtily.

"Yes, you're amazing! Your coolness will resonate throughout the known universe, Master!"

While Takuto was desperately trying to claw his way out of the pit of secondhand embarrassment they'd thrust him into, the culprits took their excitement to the next level. The way Yu's ego got all inflated from a girl flattering him was definitely inappropriate in the moment, but it was incredibly effective at showing off his humanity and approachability.

Finally regaining some semblance of calm, Takuto also found himself slightly drawn to Yu's humanlike reactions. Regardless, since Yu had given an official introduction, it was only right for Takuto to introduce himself in kind.

"Just as I introduced myself earlier, my name is Takuto Ira, and my exclusive game is the SLG *Eternal Nations*. Putting it into this world's terms, it might make more sense if I introduce myself as the King of Ruin who rules over Mynoghra," Takuto introduced himself in a way that wouldn't embarrass him.

He didn't know what this "exclusive game" terminology meant, but he couldn't show his lack of knowledge by asking. He assumed it just referred to the specific game system they operated under and rolled with it. Given the circumstances, Takuto's introduction didn't have the same impact as Yu's did, but it's not like they were competing for shock value here.

More importantly, he was distracted by the panicked telepathic message Atou sent him. She wanted to know why he revealed the name of their game.

"Are you sure you want to show your hand here, King Takuto…?"

"Yeah. My name's already out there, and anyone familiar with the game would be able to guess it or its genre with one look at how many units we've got."

With Mynoghra becoming a widely known name, they'd already lost the advantage of keeping their game's name a secret. Atou thought it'd be difficult to guess it was *Eternal Nations* just from the name Mynoghra, but Long-legged Bugs and Brain Eaters roamed Dragontan like it was their nest. Then there were all the distinct buildings, capped off by the notable Flesh Trees.

It was only a matter of time before someone figured it out. Even if they didn't know the game *Eternal Nations*, a perceptive person should quickly guess they were dealing with a simulation game. Trying and failing to come up with a good cover story and giving his opponent the upper hand seemed more problematic. Takuto was up against a Player. It was important to give the impression that they were on equal footing and that there was no weakness for them to take advantage of.

Atou seemed convinced by his explanation and maintained her silence as ordered.

Still, this has taken a problematic turn, Takuto thought, biting his inner lip. *What am I supposed to do about this whole assigned god thing?*

Yu mentioned the Jokester God being his assigned god. This alone was proof that there were gods behind the Players, and reinforced Takuto's assumption that this world was a place of proxy war between the gods. It was invaluable information, but the damning truth was that Takuto didn't know who his assigned god was. Or if he even had one.

"Huh, don't know that game…" Yu said, taking a long pause to ponder the name. "Actually, to tell the truth, I don't know much

about games in general. Oh, but I do know about *stimulation* games!"

"It's simulation," Takuto corrected dryly.

Yu's attention was drawn to the type of game. *Maybe I should play into that and give him a light explanation about* Eternal Nations*? If that draws his attention away from my god, then all the better,* is what Takuto thought, but his plan fell apart before he could even enact it.

"Oh yeah, Master, what kind of god do you think is assigned to Lord Takuto Ira?"

"Right, right! I totally forgot about that. What kinda god do ya got? A complete weirdo like me?"

She had to go and bring it up…

Takuto didn't know if the slave girl had brought up that inconvenient topic intentionally or coincidentally. But he couldn't blame them for being curious when he didn't announce his god in kind. Yu might've asked about it eventually if she hadn't pointed it out. The odds were stacked against him in this case. Takuto racked his brain as Yu looked to him for an answer.

Now, how to answer him? This is my first time even hearing about assigned gods. I assumed that might be a thing, but it's been confirmed in an unexpected way.

Takuto had personally experienced some great power intervening during his battle with the TRPG forces. He felt it was safe to assume that was the gods going at it. He was aware that using the TRPG mechanics to gain the Game Master's Authority was a serious violation of this world's rules. There would normally be some kind of penalty for breaking the rules. Following that train of thought, it seemed valid to assume that it was a penalty imposed on Takuto by the TRPG god, clashing against a penalty prevention measure by the SLG god. And if that was true…

Then I definitely have an assigned god. And if I do, I wish he'd hurry up and come see me. Takuto seriously wanted to complain to and blame his god for him always being on the back foot because he never told him anything. *And now Yu's asking if my god is as weird as his. That's basically bragging that he has a direct line of contact*

with his god. If he screws up—or maybe even if he doesn't—he's receiving information from this god.

Yu had come to Dragontan seeking to join forces with Takuto against the Succubus faction. It wasn't a long shot to assume he'd made that decision based on some external information he'd received. The Hero duo were very likely receiving preferential treatment and benefits from their god.

Takuto was deeply envious of this arrangement and gave it extra thought.

First things first, my god's name. Do I make one up? Not like I have any means to confirm what it is. It'd be perfect if my god makes contact to correct me. With that in mind, Takuto opened his mouth to utter the name he'd thought up on the spot, but…

"…***The Nameless God***."

The words that slipped forth from his lips had a familiar ring to them.

…Weird? I mean, I guess this name fits, but…

The Nameless Evil God was the name of the Hero Commander unit Takuto had taken on the nature of when he arrived in this world. It was also an ability that was temporarily sealed due to its unique and ambiguous nature of being able to become anything or anyone.

If Keiji Kuhara had become the Game Master and Yu Kamimiyadera had become The Hero, then Takuto would be the Hero Commander: The Nameless Evil God. So it was a little strange that The Nameless God was the name that'd rolled off his tongue.

It does sound like a godly name, so it fits, I guess? Throwing around The Nameless God and The Nameless Evil God could confuse my enemies, too. This seems like a better cover story than trying to come up with a crummy fake name.

"Anyways, just remember that name," Takuto added for good measure.

The Nameless God.

Takuto had identified his assigned god by that name. He'd made up the name to prevent his opponent from noticing his lack of intel, and his bluff seemed to work.

"Huh. Your god's got a funny name too," Yu said. "That seems to be a thing for the gods!"

Takuto envied his carefree attitude. He was so nonchalant about the whole thing when these so-called gods were having a field day messing with their lives. Maybe they were even snickering away somewhere, watching as they conversed…

Takuto was worried sick about this headache of a problem, but he also realized there was no point burning himself out worrying about something he couldn't resolve. He'd save it for later. He might end up leaving it on the back burner indefinitely, but it was what it was…

At any rate, what mattered right now was negotiating with Yu. Clearly this conversation was going to have a huge impact on Mynoghra—on Takuto's future.

"So, what do ya think?" Yu asked. "Wanna take down the Succubi together? We seriously can't get along with them. We're destined to go at it."

An appealing proposal. Gaining a Player as an ally was the best kind of ally you could ask for. Especially when Yu's RPG forces brought a whole host of unique magic and abilities with them. Takuto didn't know the specifics about his system yet, but it obviously had its own advantages.

But he couldn't just agree.

"I'm intrigued by your offer, but I have questions first," Takuto said. "We were attacked by the Demon Lord's Army before. I don't know what your relationship is with them, but we can't leave this incident unaddressed. Resolving it comes before we can proceed with any talks."

Takuto addressed his concerns with a biting tone and watched closely for Yu's reaction. He wasn't seriously criticizing them for the Demon Lord's actions. He was purposefully hitting a sore spot to garner their thoughts, plans, and hidden agendas from their response.

"Er, sorry about that, man! Our god just went ahead and summoned the Demon Lord's Army on his own. They're outside of my jurisdiction, anyway. Right? The Hero commanding the Demon Lord's Army would break the fundamentals of the game. That's no *Brave Questers*, that's for sure."

"So, you're saying that *Brave Questers'* Demon Lord Army didn't attack Mynoghra intentionally? You expect me to believe that?" Takuto asked, letting skepticism coat his voice.

"Sounds like they were originally prepped to test my skills, so I feel real bad it turned out the way it did."

"Do you honestly think I'll believe such a convenient story? Please don't underestimate me," Takuto said, raising his voice in a show of irritation.

At the same time, he sent telepathic orders to Atou. Tentacles erupted from her back and directed their points at Yu and the slave girl, as if she were acting in accordance with her king's volatile emotions. Of course, Takuto had arranged this and ordered her not to actually attack. It was little more than an act to put on pressure.

Now, how will they react? Let's give it one more push.

"Besides, while it appears you want to work with us, you haven't indicated how that would benefit us. Now that I know you can't control the Demon Lord's Army, I can assume your fighting strength is limited to you and your companion there. For as strong as The Hero may be, don't you think there's too much of a difference in strength between us?"

Yu started showing slight signs of panic as Takuto put on the pressure. *Slight* being the key word here. He seemed more flustered over the conversation growing more complicated by the minute than panicked over the danger they were in.

In other words, Yu had measures in place to escape if things became hostile with Mynoghra. Takuto felt offended at being underestimated, but accepted it as the confidence a Player would have if they'd been granted all the abilities of The Hero.

"Now, now, I'm confident it's a juicy offer. Ain't it easier to go at things with two forces instead of one? Am I right, or am I right?"

"You're absolutely, positively right, Master! One plus one equals two!"

Hmm, he's completely unbothered even after I've provoked him, huh?

Takuto had strictly ordered Atou not to attack. He also instructed her to unleash her murderous aura to provoke them—to no effect.

Considering Yu had defeated the Demon Lord with a single blow during his battle with the Elfuur Sisters, he had proven he wielded considerable power. Continuing to antagonize him would only serve to worsen Mynoghra's position. Takuto wasn't interested in picking a fight either.

"It never hurts to have more numbers on your side," Takuto conceded. "Greater numbers pose a greater risk of chaos among your ranks, but there is undeniable power in numbers. I think I see the problem now—you're a two-man team. So you thought it'd be better to join up with Mynoghra—another army-controlling faction—to better counter the Succubus Army. Now what?"

Takuto posed his question to mean: now what benefit does that bring us?

He'd figured out his opponent's circumstances. They lacked manpower—an army—and they seemed absolutely certain they would clash with the Succubus Army for whatever reason. But that only scratched the surface of what Yu wanted from this partnership. Takuto framed his question to get across that he was still willing to hear them out and that he didn't see much merit in working with them yet.

But before Yu could answer Takuto, Atou sent him a panicked telepathic message.

"King Takuto? Are you considering working with them if the conditions seem right? We know nothing about this person—and he's a Player. It feels like playing with fire…"

Atou voiced concerns that matched perfectly with Takuto's and that made him happy.

"Don't worry. I'm just trying to gauge his response. Besides, I doubt Players can ever get along in the end. Not only is his

background suspicious, but we don't know what he's hiding…"

"True. Your Majesty's anger is based."

Had Takuto let too much of his focus shift to his conversation with Atou? Or was it just a coincidence? Yu had cleanly cut their telepathic conversation short with his comment. His tone and aura seemed no different, but the mood had shifted.

"So I came prepared to give you this as a token of our sincerity."

Yu spoke as if he admitted he was in the wrong for coming out of the blue. And what happened next was enough to take even Takuto by surprise.

Where and when did he bring that out?

A sword appeared in Yu's hand before Atou could even react, despite being on guard. Sheathed in a scabbard decorated without being too ostentatious, it emitted a faint glow reflecting the sunlight slanting in through the window.

Takuto gasped the moment he saw it. For the first time since the start of this meeting, he let his mask slip to show his surprise. Atou had a similar reaction beside him.

Why is it *here?* That question echoed on repeat through Takuto's mind, dominating his thoughts.

"I call this guy the Hero's Sword, but you've got a different name for it, don't you?" Yu asked.

He's right. There's no mistaking this for the Hero's Sword. It's… it's…!

"I believe your name for it is—"

It shouldn't be here. He shouldn't have it. What's going on? How do they even know we need it, and why is that what we need?

Yu had brought what could essentially be considered Mynoghra's Achilles' heel. It was of such overwhelming value to them that it more than merited considering an alliance. For it was none other than—

"The Regalia Sword."

This sword was one of the key items required for Mynoghra to achieve an Ascension Victory and regain everything they had lost. One piece of the victory conditions called Regalia…

Ascension Victory

Victory Conditions

～ Extol thy victory. Celebrate the joys of reaching a new dimension. The gates to the Land of Gods hath opened, and thou hath attained an eternal existence within God's love.～

Ascension Victory is a victory that can be achieved by completing certain conditions called Regalia. There are multiple types of Regalia, and one of the victory conditions is to research what kind and how many of them you need to obtain. Regalia do not necessarily always take the form of items, but may also refer to the unlocking of some kind of achievement.

The requirements and difficulty levels vary depending on the difficulty set for the game session.

The following is an example of the many potential types of Regalia:

- Creating a specific item
- Acquiring a specific item
- Acquiring a specific person
- Unlocking a specific technology
- Creating a sovereign empire
- Defeating a specific unit

Silence filled the room. Then Takuto's blood boiled. He realized he'd been had. He was dealing with a far more dangerous entity than he'd imagined. Tension coursed through both sides of the room.

"Whoa, buddy! Put a lid on that bloodlust of yours! You're scaring my companion!" Yu spread his arms to shield the slave girl beside him. His shounen protagonist-like behavior worked wonders to help Takuto regain his calm.

Takuto clicked his tongue. Attacking his opponent here was a terrible idea. He might lose the Regalia in the process.

The Ascension Victory is a special victory you can get in *Eternal Nations*. It's the most difficult victory in the game, achieved by fulfilling a handful of conditions called Regalia. Among the complex conditions, such as defeating unique units, founding a sovereign empire, and erecting specific buildings, is the acquisition of a treasure item.

One such item is the Regalia Sword.

Why in the world does the Hero's Sword from Brave Questers *count as one of our Regalia? And why the heck can I instinctively tell it is indeed our Regalia?* Takuto wondered.

Their games should have no overlap whatsoever under normal circumstances. Takuto had fought several battles with the TRPG and RPG forces, but he had never sensed a connection between them like this before now. That's why he accidentally let a moment of silence lapse when Yu presented the sword.

But in a sense, this was a good opportunity for Mynoghra. Not only could they glean all sorts of information from this interaction, but above all else, if they could obtain this Regalia, then they would be one step closer to an Ascension Victory.

Takuto doused the excitement burning within him at this unexpected revelation and waited for events to unfold, keeping his calm.

"What I want you to take away from this is that I seriously wanna be friends with you, King Takuto. Our goals have absolutely nothing to do with you guys, after all."

"I'm dying to know how you know we're after the Regalia and why the Hero's Sword can fill the slot of the Regalia Sword, but… I'll admit, this is an appealing peace offering. But are you sure you want to offer it?" Takuto asked. "The Hero's Sword is a pretty critical item within *Brave Questers* as well."

As the name suggests, the Hero's Sword is a weapon that symbolizes the protagonist's status as the Hero. The games have other, more powerful weapons, so it's not the best piece of equipment. More than its purpose as a weapon, it's an item that plays a vital role in many ways, as it's needed to progress through the game and for events with certain characters.

Takuto didn't know what mechanics were at play with the *Brave Questers*' system governing Yu as a Player in this world. But he did know that this sword, which acted as a trigger for various events in that series, was not something to be casually given away.

"…Not to change the subject, but we and you came to this world at the hands of the gods. We're on the same page there, right? So, assuming this world is a game, what do you think the conditions for clearing it are?" Yu asked with an uncharacteristically serious expression.

Takuto never thought about such a thing before. It was news to him. No…his understanding of it had just now shifted into something different. The very fact that Yu was asking this question showed that, even if there were conditions for clearing the game, they weren't as easy to understand as one would normally think.

"…Defeating all opposing factions," Takuto ventured. "In other words, being the last faction left on the playing field. Or is it something else?"

"Nope. The right answer is: only God knows."

"What does that mean?"

It was clear from his initial question that the condition for clearing the game was not simply surviving until the end, but Yu's answer was about as vague as they came. Takuto nodded along to encourage Yu to keep talking.

"Right? I wondered the same thing. According to our idiot god, most of the gods participating in this game aren't in it to win it. But

they aren't just killing time with no thought behind their participation either."

"Because the gods are all-powerful, it's difficult to guess their true intentions. Is that what you mean?" Takuto guessed, trying to reason it out despite not being entirely convinced.

"Exactly," Yu nodded.

If each god has their own agenda, why did they choose to make us fight in this world like this? And besides that, there are way too many complicated things being thrown into the mix with all this game system business and Players being brought to this world. Or is the game itself their goal? What comes after the game? Takuto contemplated the gods' intentions and what were behind them as he let the slave girl's praise for her master doing so well at explaining things go through one ear and out the other.

Takuto remembered that there were all sorts of *Eternal Nations*' players whose goal was to clear the game under special conditions, such as imposing extra restrictions on themselves and additional challenges. But those types were still generally after winning the game, once they cleared those extra conditions. Then perhaps the gods were more like the type of gamers who enjoy the act of playing the game itself. Recalling the subset of gamers dubbed "enjoyers", who didn't care whether they won or lost, Takuto considered that was a valid case for the gods, too.

"What you do in the process is what matters. At least, that's what the gods want from us," Yu said.

"In other words, the gods aren't looking to see us win, but to see what we can accomplish in this world?" Takuto asked.

"That's what I think."

It sounds like Yu hasn't been told by his god what the victory conditions are either, Takuto realized. *Which means he's planning to fight the Succubus faction purely for his own sake and the survival of his faction.*

"This Hero's Sword is a good example of that. It's a key item in the *Brave Questers'* series, but it serves no purpose for our goals. That's why I was cool with going outta my way to offer it to you. It's

a hecka rare treasure, y'know? Though you might already be aware of that!"

"I'm aware," Takuto nodded.

An undeniably valuable gift, and one that attested to Yu's sincerity. And it would be a great shame to turn it down now. Takuto wanted to secure the Regalia Sword, and an alliance with the RPG Hero was appealing, if there were no hidden agendas. Setting aside the Succubus Army, there was an advantage in numbers if they teamed up.

"I don't know what your goal is, Your Majesty," Yu continued. "That idiot god didn't tell me that much. But he *did* say we should be able to get along, and that's why I came to you. Actually, when I put it like that, I feel like that idiot god is using me real good. Kinda pisses me off."

The gods' goals were a mystery. Yu likely didn't know anything more, and shaking him down probably wouldn't result in obtaining any more useful information. Takuto wasn't particularly skilled at observing people, but that didn't mean he was bad at inference or deduction. If nothing else, he understood what Player Yu Kamimiyadera was after.

I see. So survival comes above all else, huh? Everyone is afraid of dying, and this world poses a constant threat to life. On the other hand, is it unusual for someone to gamble using their abilities? I don't want to take that kind of risk either… If he's like me and came to this world knowing nothing while playing a game, then our goals might be more aligned than I thought.

"King Takuto, how do you wish to proceed?" Atou asked telepathically. *"If worse comes to worst, we can always get a different Regalia. I think we can play it safe here if you want to…"*

A certain number of Regalia were necessary to obtain the Ascension Victory. However, that also meant they only needed to fulfill the set amount required. Put simply, they could skip some of them. If they turned down Yu's offer and lost out on obtaining the Regalia Sword as a result, they could make it up with a different Regalia. But they had no reason to look a gift horse in the mouth.

"I wish we had more time to gather information or to consider it… I don't know if that's what they were after from the start or not, but it's pretty cunning," Takuto responded.

Based on the information they had and the general flow of the conversation, it seemed unlikely Yu was conspiring against them. But Takuto wanted more to convince him—a big enough reason to convince him of why the other party was going so far.

The current situation was too one-sided in Mynoghra's favor. Even if the person known as Yu Kamimiyadera was someone who put survival and pacifism first, he hadn't given a strong enough motivation for it. After all, he was the embodiment of THE HERO. Even if he was just playing the role granted to him by *Brave Questers*, he was still some kind of top player or someone with unique skills on the inside…

And, surprisingly, the final piece he needed to convince him came from an unexpected place. The idea struck Takuto when he shifted his gaze to check on Atou and her gaze silently asked him what he planned to do next. He was now convinced he knew exactly what was motivating the Hero sitting in front of him.

"*Brave Questers* had an original character system, if I recall right," Takuto said.

"Gah!!" Yu's loud reaction confirmed Takuto's suspicions.

Brave Questers is an epic game series that has surpassed many other RPGs to become a masterpiece, boasting a unique system. It's called the Original Character System, or OC System for short.

In addition to the Hero and his companions, the player can create their own original character to adventure with them. At first, the OC is weak and almost useless, but with the right build, they can become a special character who can keep any foe at bay, becoming your strongest companion.

Secretly giving the character the name of your crush and playing the game with them—a tradition repeated with every new game released in the series over the years and across the world.

Looking at Atou reminded Takuto of the OC system.

The tragedy of losing your save data was made all the more bittersweet because of that system… Takuto had never used the OC

system, so he hadn't experienced said tragedy for himself, but considering there were still people to this day—when it's much harder to lose save data—who bemoaned the same tragedy on the Internet, he figured there had to be many more in the past who wept the loss.

Seems like I might've been overcomplicating this. Setting aside the entity behind Yu, he seems like a fairly easy-to-read guy. Takuto glanced at the slave girl.

"Could she be…the OC waifu of your dreams?"

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!" Yu shouted at the top of his lungs. He cradled his head in his hands and writhed around on the sofa.

"M-Masterrrrrr! Your head! Does your head hurt?! What's ailing you all of a sudden, MASTERRRRR?!"

Takuto thought this with TRPG Player, Keiji Kuhara, as well, but all the Players so far seemed to be as human as they came. Takuto came to a funny realization that maybe it was just the top players from Eternal Nations who lacked humanity. With that, he made up his mind.

"Very well," Takuto said. "We accept your offer to work together. However, the main purpose of our alliance will be defense, not active hostility toward other forces. That works for you too, doesn't it?"

"W-Well, if we're being honest, yeah…"

"Wait, wait, what's going on here, King Takuto?" Atou asked telepathically. *"Why did you suddenly decide to accept their offer? You were being incredibly cautious up until a minute ago…"*

"Either way, it's too early to decide at this stage, I'd say. Let's prioritize securing the Regalia first and remain on friendly terms with them publicly."

"I-If you say so… By the way, what's this OC waifu thing? Some sort of key character?"

"Nah, I wouldn't say it's a key character—or maybe it is? Could it be one?" Takuto wasn't too sure himself. *"I-I'll fill you in on it later."*

Setting aside the special feelings boys of a certain age have toward the character, Takuto would have to explain in detail to Atou why he decided to work with Yu later. Then he would have to fill in the Dark Elves who made up his empire-management council…

Takuto had suffered greatly once before at the hands of the TRPG Witch, Erakino. That whole incident had become a source of trauma for the Dark Elves who were present for it. To them, other Player factions were the devil—their archnemesis. Even if he explained the circumstances and benefits of the alliance, it wouldn't be easy to convince them.

Obtaining the Regalia Sword and a Player ally. While Takuto would have to remain vigilant, the gains were immense. But the price he'd have to pay in return would not be small either.

As the conversation rapidly took on a more complicated turn, Takuto found himself feeling more than a little depressed wondering when his days of peace and quiet would come.

"Um… What's an OC waifu, Master?"

"N-Nothing! It's nothing at all!"

Takuto looked at Yu, who was frantically trying to distract the slave girl from that topic. Atou was Takuto's favorite character of all time, and to an outsider, he must have seemed abnormally attached to her too, so he couldn't really criticize Yu for similar behavior.

Original Character System

This is one of the most iconic systems in the masterpiece RPG series: Brave Questers. At the beginning of the game or during the early stages, the player can add an original character to the party. They can choose this character's name, settings, appearance, fighting style, and more. This character will then adventure with the party.

They start as the weakest character throughout the series, but because there is no limit to leveling them up, you can develop them into one of the strongest characters with perseverance.

※ Warning: In Brave Questers 3, if you set the gender of your original character to female, they will join the enemy's side for a period of time.
※ Warning: In Brave Questers 7, if you set the personality to "freewheeling," they will come out as having a lover in the middle of the game.

Chapter 3: Persuasion

<Accursed Lands, Mynoghra's Palace: Council Room>

AFTER receiving an urgent summons to the council room, the Dark Elves listened to Takuto's explanation without masking their dissatisfaction.

"As far as this matter is concerned, I cannot fully agree with Your Majesty's decision," Elder Moltar said.

Takuto had filled them in on his arrangement to form a cooperative relationship with the RPG Player, Hero Yu. Elder Moltar's response about summed up the council's opinion on the matter. Takuto understood they weren't protesting for show or on a whim and took their reaction in stride.

"Yeah, I knew you would object out of concern for me... What do you think, Vittorio?" Takuto tossed the baton to Vittorio, who'd shown up at a meeting and listened without kicking up a fuss for once. Takuto figured he might as well take advantage of the Gleeful Spin Doctor's presence.

"Oh dearie me, is moi's opinion even necessary? If the almighty Takuto Ira, who's far mightier and more marvelous than moi, is present, I reckon there's no need for my shallow thoughts on the matter. You don't have to say it! I know Mynoghra doesn't need moi… Woe is me, I'll just slit my wrists…won't anyone stop me? Oh, woe is me!!"

Vittorio made a joke out of everything, and that made him the ideal candidate to stir up trouble. Takuto had every right to make the final decision, but he felt it was wrong to bulldoze over the Dark Elves' opinions right out the door. Not because he was concerned about their feelings, but rather because he didn't want it to come

back to bite him down the line. He wanted to persuade them using both the carrot and the stick.

Atou was not present. She was bound to side with the Dark Elves on this one, and with Vittorio there, they would go at it like cats and dogs and turn the meeting into a waste of time.

"You don't have to slit them yourself, Vittorio. There are plenty of people here who would gladly do it for you. Like the Elfuur Sisters over there. You can let them cut your life short if you like. Anyway, back on topic. I believe this alliance has its advantages, but I'm open to hearing different opinions."

"*Ah non*! Now those *sauvage chats* are staring at my wrists like they're fantasizing about gnawing them off…" Vittorio said with great pomp before smoothly switching gears into the next topic. "As for this Hero, isn't that just a pretty word for a murder hobo who curries favor with those in power to put food on the table and clothes on his back?"

"…I didn't think of it that way. I see. Since they don't have a kingdom backing them, they need to earn their own living."

The plan was to have Vittorio bring up other advantages to the alliance and convince the Dark Elves, but he'd offered a surprisingly interesting take. From day one, Takuto had lived a comfortable life, wanting for nothing as the king of a burgeoning nation. He could even instantly prepare food and supplies with Emergency Production, so he couldn't deny that he might've viewed what it took to survive in this world lightly.

"Defeating monsters where he comes from gets him gold, but it's worthless scrap metal in this world, ha!" Vittorio chortled.

"Hmm. Maybe we should upgrade the inn he's staying at and give him an allowance? I don't know what kind of impact improving their opinion of us will have, but it's a clever move."

"Well fed, well bred, to get into their head, *mon dieu*!" Vittorio chirped. "Pragmatic needs are surprisingly important! Not everyone can stifle their primitive cravings to live by nobler intentions!"

The Dark Elves' stance seemed to soften as they listened to Vittorio's argument. *Is that the reason?* they began to wonder. They viewed Yu Kamimiyadera as a being from another world with inexplicable powers, just like Witch Erakino and her cohort. He was no different in their eyes from the Demon Lord's Army and the TRPG forces who had put them through hell.

It was no wonder they stubbornly insisted that working together was out of the question. The hidden purpose of this meeting was to gradually ease their perception and lead them in the direction Takuto wanted. Although it went without saying Takuto was still fully cautious of the RPG faction…

"Besides, we've already accepted the Regalia," Takuto said. **"I'd rather not offend someone who's paid every courtesy toward us. Treating him rudely just because he poses a potential threat would call my dignity as king into question."**

"Decorum, smecorum. Why not borrow and bilk?" Vittorio proposed.

"That doesn't set a good precedent…"

Takuto wasn't personally opposed to the idea. He shot it down because of the death glares the Dark Elves shot at Vittorio for even suggesting that Takuto should break his promise. Takuto viewed double-crossing and betrayal as facets of war. The same did not apply to the Dark Elves. They held Mynoghra's King Takuto Ira up on a pedestal.

To them, their king was the evilest, mightiest, and most infallible absolute being. The entire race strongly shared this image, and that was the reason they had been fiercely loyal to Takuto. In a sense, they also had delusions about who *Takuto Ira* was. And any action that might shatter that illusion had to be avoided at all costs. Otherwise, the empire would crumble beneath their feet…

"Now that you mention it, why didn't they go to another country for support?" Emle asked. "Wouldn't El-Nah—the current Succubi nation—or Qualia have been just as valid as Mynoghra?"

"*Ah non*!" Vittorio answered without a moment's delay. "If a boy his age went to a kingdom of sexy succubi, he'd be gobbled right up.

Nom-nom-nom. And don't even mention Qualia! It's a religious state, full of *extrême* restrictions!"

Emle didn't bring up any of the neutral nations because they lacked national power. By process of elimination, Mynoghra, which had established peaceful relations with the neutral nations, would be the safest bet for the Hero duo to seek aid from. Looking at the facts that way, Takuto started to feel like Yu was in a surprisingly difficult position himself.

"It's too early to make a judgment call either way," Takuto said. **"Keeping an eye on them at all times and our guard up is an absolute must, but otherwise, would you guys mind going along with this plan for now?"**

"I have my concerns, but they can be set aside for the greater good of the nation," Elder Moltar responded on behalf of his people. "The Regalia he brought as an offering to our king is essential to achieve Mynoghra's greatest wish. All that remains is for us to be extra vigilant to ensure nothing happens to His Majesty."

The Dark Elves were leaning toward being in favor of the plan now. They had given reluctant approval, but Takuto didn't care as long as they approved. Besides, there was no knowing how their relationship with Yu would turn out in the long run. As long as Mynoghra was united on its decisions, all was good.

"In that case, my king, please allow me to add Lord Vittorio as one of Hero Yu's watchdogs," Gia requested.

"You want Vittorio? Why?"

Takuto could understand the rationale behind adding Vittorio to the guard detail, but he was more intrigued that the request came from Gia, who despised Vittorio with a passion. He pretended not to understand why and received an amusing response in return.

"It frustrates me to no end, but Lord Vittorio's abilities are the real deal. His observational skills and eye for reading people are unmatched by all but you, Your Majesty. Taking that into account…I believe he's the optimal choice for monitoring such a dangerous person."

"I see…"

A very reasonable request, indeed. Vittorio's various abilities specialized in disrupting cities and confusing and brainwashing units. However, his own backstory of possessing the art of winning people's hearts made him well suited to identifying people's subtleties. He wasn't quite a spy unit, but it wasn't a tall order to have him find and identify suspicious activity. He came across as reliable as ever, pushing aside his personal interests and advocating choices that benefited the country and the king during this meeting.

However, as well and good as that all sounded…

There's no way in hell Vittorio himself would take on watchdog duty like Gia wants, so there's no hope of this request going through! Takuto had to stifle a laugh.

Gia still had much to learn. His first mistake: trying to include Vittorio in the plan from the outset. It was better to modify the strategy later if Vittorio's interests just so happened to conveniently align with theirs. That was the best way to handle the Gleeful Spin Doctor.

Unfortunately, Gia's amateur attempt at wielding Vittorio resulted in him becoming Vittorio's newest plaything.

"I'm moved to tears! Oooooh, how you've touched moi's hearrrrt! What loyalty! What trust! Sir Gia! Oooooh, Monsieur Giaaaaaaaa! I've been wrong about you all this time!"

"Gah! Stop shouting! Stop spitting! It's gross!"

"Does this mean it's a-okay to bury the hatchet between us, Monsieur Gia? Are you and moi besties now? *Mon poto*? Friendsies forever? Bros before hoeeeeeeeeees?!"

"Seriously, stop spitting everywhere! Did you even hear what I said?! You're capable of keeping watch, right?!"

"Hm, hrm, hummmmmm? Who knows? Do you think I can? *Non*, it might be *c'est impossible* for moi! Yup, no can do, Monsieur Gia. And soooo, it's all up to you. He who suggests it, ingests it!"

"Stay still! Today I'm going to slice off that face of yours to stop it from spouting any more gibberish!"

"Oh dearie me! Such violence!"

Gia and Vittorio began bickering. Elder Moltar and the others looked on in exasperation.

Now that it's come to this, I doubt we'll be able to resume the meeting any time soon… Takuto was resigned to matters not proceeding. Then he realized he'd already achieved his main objective for the meeting, so he stood to end it.

He'd managed to sweep the problematic matter under the rug. He'd been worried about backlash from the Dark Elves, but he'd been able to convince them of the most difficult part, so the rest should fall cleanly into place.

"…All right! Why don't we take a break? I'm heading back to my room, so call for me once things are settled here."

Takuto withdrew from the room, leaving the chaos for the others to handle. The Elfuur Sisters, who'd jumped on the opportunity to sneak out when Takuto did, took up positions on either side of him and voiced their opinions.

"What do you think will happen this time, Your Majesty?" Caria asked.

"You look like you're having a blast, Your Majesty," Maria commented.

"Hmm, good question?" Takuto's expression as he gave that vague reply was one of someone who was having the time of their life, just as Maria had observed.

◇◇◇

TAKUTO didn't know what happened after he left, but the meeting ended there for the day and was set to continue the following day. He found a day's delay within acceptable limits, but the following day came with an unexpected problem.

"Have you all calmed down now?"

"Please accept our humblest apologies, Your Majesty…"

The Dark Elves apologized one after another after reflecting on their actions. Seeing as Elder Moltar and Emle bowed their heads apologetically alongside Gia, they must have felt responsible for not stopping his outburst.

"You better be sorry! The lot of you are pathetic! How could you let that clown goad you into kicking up a fuss and waste precious meeting time?! As long as *I* am here, I won't tolerate such a disgrace before the king!" Atou declared.

Yes, she was the problematic element that had joined today's meeting.

"Atou."

"Yes, King Takuto?!" Atou directed a sunny smile his way. Perhaps she was trying to assure him all would be well with her there.

Takuto had no idea what she based her confidence on, but he needed to double down and remind her to behave to avoid all hell from breaking loose. **"Atou, no matter what happens, don't lose your cool, either. All right? You are the only one I can ask this of. A certain somebody won't listen even if I ask…"**

"Of course! You can always count on me!"

The more confident Atou was, the more worried Takuto became. But they were addressing a problem that faced Mynoghra as a whole, so they couldn't leave Atou out of the discussion.

We'll just have to push through like this, Takuto thought, resigning himself to the inevitable chaos to come. Then he switched gears and looked around the room at the guilt-ridden Dark Elves. Vittorio, the other guilty party, was humming away as he folded an origami crane with two legs. Takuto decided to leave him alone.

"To wrap up what we discussed yesterday, we will go forward with cooperating with Hero Yu, while remaining highly cautious of him. This is a decision that has been made in the best interest of Mynoghra," Takuto announced.

The Dark Elves didn't object this time. Partly because they had been convinced by the prior meeting, but also because they were too ashamed after yesterday to speak up. Vittorio had goaded them into arguing for this purpose, but it really was a reprehensible tactic.

Takuto continued to explain the plan while chuckling on the inside. He wanted to keep the ball rolling in this manner to convince them to agree to his true objective—participating in the All-Faction Conference.

Takuto had already decided Mynoghra would participate. They couldn't keep falling behind on the information front, and participating was a part of his arrangement with Yu Kamimiyadera. Odds were high that this conference was a trap set by Witch Vagia of the Succubus Army, but even so, there was no way he was going to miss this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to learn about the other Players.

He was determined to push this decision through, even if he had to force it. But he also had an ace up his sleeve that would convince—nay, give the Dark Elves no choice but to agree.

"All right, now that we've settled the matter of our alliance with the Hero faction, I would like to discuss another matter with you."

All eyes turned to Takuto. He looked at each of their faces in turn and then solemnly broached the topic.

"As you all know, the Succubus faction recently announced they are holding an All-Faction Conference. I plan to participate. This is normally a matter I should have consulted you about first. However, as this is a matter of grave importance to me personally, you will have to forgive me for taking a different approach to making this decision. You cannot change my mind."

"Yes, sire!!"

The Dark Elves instantly agreed and bowed their heads because Takuto was especially assertive with his word choice and tone. This might be the first time he spoke in absolutes to his subordinates. He usually always showed a level of consideration to them. Realizing the determination and importance of this decision, the Dark Elves immediately comprehended the danger of objecting.

Even so…even knowing that! If there was even a slight chance the king might be in danger, it was the duty of his subordinates to offer counsel, even if it was disrespectful to do so. That was one form of loyalty. The first to cross that line was Elder Moltar.

"I understand the situation. We understand that it is a matter of great national importance and of equal import to you personally that you attend this conference hosted by the El-Nah Alliance of

Elementals. They have been a source of concern for a long time, indeed."

Elder Moltar kicked off the debate, and Gia took the ball from there.

"However, Your Majesty! Please forgive me for speaking out of turn, but I firmly believe it is far too dangerous for you to undertake this expedition! Naturally, we understand that there are aspects to your relationship with the Hero Yu that are beyond the comprehension of our mortal minds. Nevertheless, there is too much risk in you accompanying someone you have only recently allied with to the wolves' den! As your humble servant, I simply cannot agree to this."

As Gia said, it was a risky venture. Not only was there a risk of Yu betraying them along the way, but even if *he* didn't, the conference was to be held in the Elven capital. In the heart of enemy territory. No vassal worth his salt would approve of their king participating.

But Takuto already had a countermeasure in place, which was why he was firm in his decision.

"I know. I am in full agreement with your concerns. That's why I don't plan on going *myself*."

The Dark Elves responded with confusion. "What in the Accursed Lands do you mean?" was the simple question that spilled from many of their lips. The king himself had only just announced he was going to participate in the All-Faction Conference. And yet his following statement contradicted that. They groaned in confusion, unable to understand his intentions.

Takuto flashed a boyish grin, like a child whose prank had just succeeded. Then he directed his gaze toward the Gleeful Spin Doctor, whom he'd dragged to today's meeting, like he was the answer to their questions. **"And there you have it, Vittorio. Good luck."**

"Hruh?" Vittorio returned his gaze with a dumbfounded look, as if he'd been caught off guard.

Takuto arched an eyebrow at him, knowing the jester of a Hero had to have expected this was coming, even if he pretended

otherwise. He decided to explain his intentions anyway for the benefit of the Dark Elves.

"Your abilities were made for times like this, wouldn't you say? I won't let you claim to have forgotten your Disguise skill."

Vittorio's Disguise skill worked like the Botchling's Mimic skill. Simply put, he could transform into any person and remain undetected. In addition, while Vittorio couldn't take combat actions, he had the ability to revive back at base when he died. It wouldn't be an exaggeration to say his abilities felt like they were made just for attending this dangerous conference.

"Mm-mm! Hold it right there, *mon dieu*! I've already put in a request to use up my vacation days that've been piling up! My schedule is packed for that day, as I already made plans to go on a long trip with my precious cult family!"

"You'll be free to toy with people from the other factions, though?"

"*Sacre bleu*! Now I'm torn!"

Between the Botchling's Mimic and Vittorio's Disguise, Takuto could send doubles for himself and Atou. Vittorio could revive if he died, and Takuto was willing to lose a Botchling if it came to that. This way, he could enjoy the maximum benefits without taking on much risk. Takuto believed this was an efficient strategy.

With the Botchling's Mimic, Takuto could speak through it remotely. With Vittorio's Disguise, he could act just like *Takuto Ira* and respond at the drop of a hat to any unforeseen incidents.

Right now, Vittorio was making a fuss as he was apt to do, but if he got motivated, he would absolutely carry out his mission. Sending in Vittorio and the Botchling was the most efficient and safest plan. Takuto explained this strategy to everyone in a way they could understand.

"P-Please hold on a minute, King Takuto! Slow down! Please repeat! Did you just say body double? That this nauseating piece of filth will transform into either me or you?!" Atou closed in on Takuto in a complete panic. She was in such shock at his decision, she was

half in tears. Of course she would be. She and Vittorio got along worse than cats and dogs.

Sludge Atou hated everything about Vittorio—down to the last fiber of his very being. It was beyond scandalous for her archenemy to serve as their body double. If Vittorio refused to transform into her, then he would transform into her beloved Takuto. And if he refused to transform into Takuto, he'd gleefully transform into Atou and act out his deranged take on her. Both options sucked.

Worst of all, this was a decision Takuto had made as king and could not be objected to. Now she knew what it felt like to be trapped like a rat. Despair fell over her beautiful features.

"*Hõ hõ hõn*," Vittorio cackled. "I see how it is. Then without much ado~~~!"

Being so obvious about her revulsion was only asking for him to poke at it. An absolutely, positively gleeful smile stretched across Vittorio's face. Then he began moving both hands in a bizarre dance.

Before long, his outline began to distort and, in his place, appeared—

"Hehehe. How do I look, Atou? It's me. Your beloved master, *Takuto Ira*."

Before Atou's eyes appeared Takuto Ira in all his likeness, except with the uncanny detail of the most lewd and shady expression possible warping his face.

"UGYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!"

"Oh Spirits!"

Atou fell to her knees, letting out the least ladylike scream ever heard by man. The Dark Elves and even Takuto, who knew her the longest, pulled wry faces at her extreme reaction. But Atou couldn't care less about what others thought of her. Her head jerked up at lightning speed, and she lunged at the fake Takuto Ira with all the menace of a cat ready to tear into its enemy.

"H-Hey! What in the blue blazes are you doing, you nasty clown!!!!!!! O-Of all the people, why would you transform into King Takuto! Your disrespect knows no bounds! How utterly rude! Rude! Rude! Disengage that disguise at once!" Atou demanded in a fit of rage.

"Huuuh? What's that, missy?" Fake Takuto cupped a hand behind his ear. "It seems moi's hearing has gotten bad of late. I can't seem to comprehend the piercingly shrill hysterics of little girlieeeees!"

"Grrrrrrrrrrrr! If you didn't look like King Takuto, I would punch you in the face right now…"



Vittorio cackled as gleefully as could be wearing Takuto's appearance. Meanwhile, Atou's tentacles had erupted and were swaying menacingly with her desire to impale him.

And this is why I hate holding meetings with both of them present, Takuto sighed. Readjusting the meeting's end time in his head to make up for the delay, Takuto decided to prioritize calming Atou first.

"Now, now, Atou. Take a deep breath. I couldn't come up with a better plan than this. Enduring this farce is worth it if it guarantees our safety. You don't want things to end up like last time, do you?"

"Urgh… I don't, but… but…. King Takutooooooooooo!" Dismayed, Atou clung to Takuto, tears welling in her eyes.

Takuto patted her back and fixed his gaze on Vittorio disguised as him. His Disguise skill worked perfectly. It was easy to tell them apart because Vittorio was acting like a buffoon, but if he seriously acted like Takuto, it'd be impossible to tell the difference.

After the TRPG faction's surprise attack on Mynoghra, they had learned the hard way that disguises created by the game system were nearly impossible to uncover. This disguise would not be seen through unless their opponent had some kind of Detect ability.

The system guaranteed that Disguise skills worked, and that was a key factor in their upcoming strategy.

"Now I'm getting excited! It's looking like this All-Faction Conference is going to be *sensationnel* and thrilling!"

Vittorio was now on board with the plan. Takuto's greatest concern with this strategy was how Vittorio's whims would play into it, but it appeared he'd successfully baited the Gleeful Spin Doctor with the allure of messing with other Players.

"However," Elder Moltar interjected, "I have my doubts about letting him go alone. Some people may look down on Mynoghra if the king attends without an entourage."

"A Botchling will go with him," Takuto said. **"The Botchling has Mimic, which allows it to transform into any of us. With that, we can maintain the appearance of a master**

and retainer attending together. Hero Yu will be attending with just his retainer as well, so we won't look out of place."

"All right, then…" Elder Moltar reluctantly agreed. He couldn't tolerate anything that defiled his king's majesty, but he understood Takuto's logic. He still thought that it wouldn't hurt to bring along some lesser servants.

However, Atou voiced the same question before the old sage could.

"But, King Takuto, is there really a need to have the same numbers as that Hero? I can understand leaving the Dark Elves home to keep them safe, but you could bring some of our disposable units to act as meat shields at least…"

"Look, Atou, even that would slow us down. Besides, think about where we're going. Bringing incompetent subordinates will only get in our way."

"Don't you dare speak using King Takuto's face and voice, you damn jester! I'll rip you to shreds!" Atou flared.

"Yuuummy! Insult me more, baby!"

"Atou, language…"

"Ah! I-I'm terribly sorry, King Takuto!"

"I never get tired of watching good ol' sludge tits here," Vittorio trilled.

Takuto didn't mind that Vittorio took over explaining for him. He actually preferred him to, but he wished he wouldn't rile Atou up every chance he got. But if Takuto tried to mediate here, he had a feeling it'd only send them back to square one, so he decided to force them back on topic.

"Vittorio," he said, his tone serious. **"We still have plenty of time, but I want you to prepare in the meantime. As for training your Disguise… Well, I suppose that relies on your skill, so it shouldn't really matter?"**

They still had a while until the date and time of the All-Faction Conference. If they could believe the invitation, then the Succubus Army was going to need time to convince all the factions to participate. Mynoghra could prepare in the interim.

They could strengthen their ties with Phon'kaven and consider their next policies. They could also exchange information with Yu and gain knowledge about things they didn't yet know. Mynoghra had a lot of events queued, but they still had some leeway before things got chaotic.

"Hm-hm-mm-hm. In that case, I guess I'll go check up on little Yona'Yona!" Vittorio declared. "And what will the great and mighty King Takuto Ira be doing in the meantime?"

"I think I'll work on Seldoch since you obtained it for us. Oh, but maybe I should go and meet Yona'Yona in person? It seems a certain someone has been pushing a whole lot of unreasonable demands on her."

They had plenty to do, but the most pressing issue was managing their own country. Takuto needed to get some policies in place, even rough ones. Especially for the newly acquired Trade City of Seldoch and its surrounding territories. He wasn't about to neglect his new territory just because he'd landed it and could move on to obtain more. It wasn't going to be easy managing such a large territory, but the rewards would be just as large if he put in the work.

For Mynoghra to conquer the world and reign as the supreme power, they would first need to solidify control over Seldoch.

"Good luck!" Vittorio encouraged him as if he were completely uninvolved in the affair. Miffed beyond belief by his attitude, Atou flayed him with a death glare.

Exhaustion hung heavily on the face of every Dark Elf. They were likely to lodge separate complaints about this later—every single one imploring Takuto not to let Vittorio and Atou attend the same meeting ever again. They didn't have to make the request—Takuto would strive to make sure it didn't happen again, regardless.

"And there you have it…"

Takuto earned several sympathetic looks when he ended the meeting on that uncharacteristically vague remark.

They had plenty to do. The most critical was confirming the strengths and weaknesses of the RPG Hero Duo. This was a matter

that could potentially affect the future of Mynoghra and should not be taken lightly.

Takuto steeled himself and wondered if he had overlooked anything.

But the tension from Atou and Vittorio's bickering still lingered, interfering with his ability to concentrate. *Seriously, nothing good ever comes of putting Atou and Vittorio in the same room…* He was mentally drained, but was willing to overlook it because they had a solid plan in place. Or at least that's what he told himself as he shifted his focus onto the next set of problems.

Eterpedia

<<Disguise>> <<Mimic>>

Skill

Temporarily changes the unit's appearance to that of a unit specified by the player.

※ After the transformation, the unit will behave as it appears.
※ This skill can be seen through by units or buildings that possess any kind of Detect abilities. Once detected, the disguise is instantly removed.

Interlude: Dragontan

THE day after Mynoghra decided to attend the All-Faction Conference, Takuto promptly busied himself taking care of the small tasks that had been piling up. He was currently visiting the town of Dragontan. Seldoch ranked higher in the priority list, but he figured he should get Dragontan out of the way since it'd take less time.

His objective was to assess how the town was operating and identify any issues he could resolve. Takuto's current policy for Dragontan prioritized its stability over development.

He entered the familiar Town Hall and told the overly flustered civil servant, who'd offered to escort him, to get back to work as he headed to the mayor's office.

He knocked on the door and heard the call of "Come in."

"Hi there, Mayor Antelise. How are things?" Takuto casually greeted her as he slipped inside the room. Shock bloomed on Antelise's face when she met him at the door. Takuto was pleased to see that her complexion looked significantly healthier than the last time he had seen her.

"Oh my! King Takuto Ira! If you had sent word of your visit, I would have gone to greet you myself! Please come in and have a seat right over here. Spirits take me, I can't believe I failed to welcome our great and mighty king properly…"

"Don't worry about it," Takuto said lightly. **"I'm the one who showed up out of the blue. And it's not that big of a deal, anyway…"**

"But as your humble servant, I must admonish you for coming without any of your entourage."

"No worries. This is a double. I'm using this trip as a test run," Takuto said as he deactivated Mimic on just one part of

his double's body. He'd already mastered this level of control over the Botchling double.

"Whoa!" Antelise cried. "So this is one of your subordinate's abilities at play, I see. Now that's a relief. Forgive me for offering unnecessary advice."

After learning about the test run, Antelise finally understood the purpose of his unusual visit. Takuto might've casually dismissed her concern for his safety, but this felt like far too careless of a visit even for him—especially when Atou, his constant companion and guard, was nowhere in sight.

Did something happen? Is there a special reason for this visit I'm not privy to? Antelise had worried, but it all made sense when he explained it away as a test run for his body double.

Meanwhile, Takuto was more than satisfied with this exchange. The real Takuto was sitting in his private quarters in the Palace in the Accursed Lands. Chatting with Antelise was none other than his body double, whom he puppeted to act as much like him as possible by utilizing the full extent of his shared vision and telepathic connection with the Botchling.

The one downside was that puppeting the double left his real body defenseless. It posed no real problem, however, with Atou and the Elfuur Sisters closely guarding him.

There was a one-second delay when he puppeted the Botchling, but conversations went smoothly regardless. In that sense, it wasn't a long shot to say that *Takuto Ira* himself was there in every way but physically.

I started this whole body double thing on a whim, but it's more useful than I expected. Looks like it will have plenty of uses after the All-Faction Conference is over, Takuto realized.

It wouldn't be wrong to say he'd gained a new power in the form of his body double. Previous battles made it clear that no matter how powerful the abilities granted by the game system were, if the Player was defeated, it was all meaningless. In other words, it was difficult for each faction to decide when and how to use their Player.

Players could use game-breaking abilities, but their defeat spelled the defeat of their entire faction. For this reason, Players needed to keep their real location a secret. In that respect, the TRPG Player, Keiji Kuhara, was a truly formidable opponent. Takuto still didn't know what had happened to him, but he'd succeeded in keeping his location a secret until their encounter. Some may label Keiji a coward for that, but sometimes that kind of cowardice is crucial to securing victory.

I should learn from his cowardice, Takuto had thought. And it was by emulating Keiji's cowardice that he'd added body doubles to his tactic list. Takuto was convinced that this new tactic would become an even more powerful card for Mynoghra to play in the future.

"Your Majesty, how has it been working?" a voice suddenly asked.

Takuto didn't even need to check to know Mayor Antelise had spoken to him. He appeared to have lost himself in his thoughts once again. *It's a bad habit of mine to get lost in my thoughts in the middle of conversations,* he realized.

"So-so. Still not completely used to operating it," Takuto said, wanting to make up for making Antelise wait. **"You've been doing an amazing job as mayor. I'm very pleased with your work. Keep it up."**

"Oh my Spirits! It is a joy beyond my wildest dreams to be of use to you. Please continue to give me orders, Your Majesty. I will dedicate my very life to governing Dragontan for you."

"Thanks. I'll have to go all-out with your next bonus," Takuto smiled.

Doling out just rewards and punishments is an important aspect of governing any kind of organization—whether on the business or national level. Antelise was particularly fond of liquor, so that made Takuto's job of rewarding her especially easy. He'd raise her salary as well, naturally. People who work hard should be lavished with rewards and bonuses—that line of thought was only natural to Takuto.

"Hehehe. I'm looking forward to it!" Antelise let out a giddy laugh. "So, what are your plans for today, Your Majesty? Fortunately, the administrative side of things has finally stabilized, so I don't believe there are any problems I need to waste your time with…"

"Like I said, my main objective for today is putting this double through its paces. I also wanted to get a more detailed look at how things are faring in Dragontan. We've had a parade of problems lately, which have led to me neglecting things outside the Accursed Lands. I want to be more proactive about management whenever I have the time."

That being said, there wasn't much for Takuto to inspect. As far as buildings were concerned, there weren't any urgent projects after what he'd already taken care of with Emergency Production.

Keeping everything running smoothly. Takuto's goal was for the town to be stable, and his primary purpose for this visit was to confirm everything was going accordingly. At the end of the day, just like he'd casually come to see Antelise, his true intention for this visit was a casual inspection of Dragontan.

"I see. So that's what you have in mind. Then, allow me to show you around. With the new buildings constructed at your orders, this city has developed to the point where it's hard to remember what it was like before," Antelise explained.

"You sure you have the time? If you're too busy, you can leave it to someone else," Takuto offered.

"It's all right. As I previously informed you, things have settled enough for me to step away. Besides, showing Your Majesty around is a great honor I would never entrust to another if I have the choice!" Antelise leapt from the sofa with a determined blaze gleaming in her eyes.

Takuto had heard about her tendency to slack off, but it seemed like she really had extra time rather than just a desire to skip out on work this time. With that settled, Takuto readily entrusted the role of his guide to her.

Considering the current problems plaguing Mynoghra, he wouldn't be able to inspect his cities very often. One of the real

pleasures of 4x strategy games is checking on your empire's cities. This was a rare opportunity. Takuto was excited to get a good look at the town of Dragontan, which he had developed from the ground up.

"Oh, and…if possible…I wanted to personally consult you about matters pertaining to Lord Vittorio and the Cult of Ira," Antelise began.

"P-Please go easy on me…" Takuto's voice cracked.

The Cult of Ira, which Vittorio had founded, was rapidly gaining traction. It had spread throughout the Dark Continent to the extent that there was no one who did not know its name. At the same time, this rapid spread was bound to bring about its own share of big problems. The cultists were so devoted to Takuto that the word fanaticism could not even begin to describe them. Even Takuto didn't know how far they'd go…

"Oh, I know, why don't I summon Miss Yona'Yona?" Antelise suggested. "I'm sure she would be happy to receive your summons, Your Majesty."

"Oh yeah, she was left in charge of the cult, wasn't she? How is she doing?" Takuto asked.

Lector Yona'Yona was the proxy leader for the Cult of Ira. She was the unlucky beastgirl Vittorio had discovered and dumped all the annoying cult work upon. However, since she was such an earnest girl, it was easy to leave her as the leader of the cult.

Takuto felt terrible leaving everything to her, but he didn't object either. It'd be a nightmare if his objection led to Vittorio volunteering to lead the Cult of Ira himself. Yona'Yona carried Takuto's hopes of keeping Vittorio in check entirely on her shoulders, and she was doing everything in her power to live up to expectations.

"She has a promising future when it comes to the practical side of the work, but what's really impressive are her tactics when it comes to leading and managing people," Antelise explained. "When I go through her, things get resolved immediately, so I'm really grateful to her. This town has more or less established itself as a

religious city, so I would say it'd be nigh impossible to run as smoothly without her acting as Lector."

"Good to know. It sounds like Vittorio picked the right woman for the job."

"So, would you like me to summon her then?"

"Yeah, please do since it's a good opportunity."

The Cult of Ira was a huge religious organization Vittorio had created from nothing. It was no longer confined to the framework of religion alone—it had a variety of influences across the continent.

Thinking about the Cult of Ira, which had strangely become inseparable from Mynoghra, Takuto absently pondered the best direction to take it in the future.

◇◇◇

TAKUTO left Town Hall and began his inspection of Dragontan with Antelise as his guide. The once ramshackle and desolate town now brimmed with astonishing prosperity. Buildings unique to Mynoghra, such as the Flesh Trees, the Sumptuous Meat Forest, and the Grotesque Zoo, showcased its influence as an evil empire. At the same time, the new dwellings and various shops supported the town's development and prosperity. Happy and energetic expressions colored the faces of the people passing by in the streets. They had already excavated the all-important Dragon Vein Mine, and with a faint green light, it produced an endless supply of Mana from the earth.

Takuto sensed great potential from Dragontan as it showed growth worthy of being Mynoghra's second city.

In the middle of his tour, Takuto spotted a massive building in the center of town where a large mansion had once stood. The first thing that caught his eye was the twisted and intricate spire. And then the numerous windows that were arranged chaotically, as if they had been deliberately designed to be non-uniform. Ringing from only the gods-know-where was an eerie bell that resonated deep in the heart. This building that pierced the skies clearly

reflected the evil culture of Mynoghra and gave off religious undertones.

Takuto raked his gaze from the spire down to the foundation of this looming structure, which he had no recollection of. Then, as if he had come to the foregone conclusion that there was nothing he could do about it, he asked Antelise about it in a slow, deliberate tone.

"Mayor Antelise, what might *that* be?"

"The Cult of Ira's cathedral: Dumeli Tula, my king," Antelise whispered, sadness filling her voice. She seemed to utter the words with all the repugnance and humiliation she felt toward it.

Yeah, I had a feeling that was the case. And I'm equally sure a certain jester had everything to do with it, Takuto sighed. He really didn't want to know the details. His workload was only going to increase with the knowledge.

"How does this fit into our town plans?" Takuto asked.

"It's completely not in the plans. To begin with, as the mayor, I never even granted permission for it to be built," Antelise groaned.

"So, it's an illegally built structure. Let's demolish it..." Takuto said.

There were no two ways about it—this building was a Cathedral from *Eternal Nations*. A Cathedral could be constructed in the religious capital when a nation founded a new religion, but Takuto remembered it came at an insane cost. Vittorio had definitely used his ability to order its construction arbitrarily, but Takuto was curious where he'd scrounged up the resources. Then again, considering the wild fanaticism driving the Cult of Ira and the illicit assets recently acquired from Seldoch, the answer to that question seemed self-evident…

Takuto let out a long-suffering sigh.

Well, at least now his inspection of Dragontan served a real purpose. What with the construction and governance all going smoothly, he thought it'd be fine to leave the town be, but an unbelievable bomb had been lying under the surface all along.

It must have been too difficult for Antelise to bring it up to him. Takuto could sympathize. If he were in her shoes, he would have felt

too distraught trying to figure out how to explain its existence, so he couldn't fault her. After all, cleaning up after a Hero unit's blunders fell to none other than their Commander—Takuto.

And it seemed awkward feelings over the giant, looming Cathedral weren't Takuto and Antelise's alone. A groan teeming with distress and despair came from directly beside him. The groan came from the goatgirl who had been giddily showing Takuto around with Antelise ever since she was summoned to Town Hall. Her merry smile had vanished the moment they came to this building.

It was none other than the Cult of Ira's Lector, Yona'Yona. She was also a key material witness to the unauthorized construction of this fantastical building.

"Baah, I'm so sorry! So, so, so sorry!" she bleated. "I can't believe the construction of this unholy Cathedral went against Your Unholiness's divine will! The responsibility for this lies solely with me! Please, please, O unholy god, be satisfied with just taking my head and mounting it on your wall!"

"No worries. You did nothing wrong, Yona'Yona. You're doing your best given the circumstances. Don't throw your life away like that," Takuto rushed to pacify the girl before she could throw herself facedown at his feet.

She'd have a much easier time if she just blamed everything on Vittorio. The fact that she viewed not reeling him in as her responsibility was both her strength and weakness.

"I-I'm undeserving of such kind words… I… I… O unholy goooooooood…!" Yona'Yona began sniffling.

"I'll never get used to that form of address," Takuto said wryly.

The Cult of Ira was a religion Vittorio had arbitrarily created to worship Takuto as a god. It was also a means of collecting the power that arose from concentrating worship and prayer on Takuto alone. As a religion founded on an overabundant use of Vittorio's persuasion-based skills, every single cultist was a fanatical believer.

They were all crazy people who would gladly offer their head on a platter to Takuto if he ordered it, so he wasn't too keen on spending much time with them. And now the Lector and acting

leader of said cult was weeping as she clung to Takuto. Fortunately, there weren't too many people around, so they weren't drawing a ton of attention yet, but Takuto wished she would stop before things got worse.

In all honesty, what he wanted was for her to stop her blubbering and start explaining how the Cathedral came to be.

"Anyway, I suppose it would be safest just to approve and sanction the building now. I know I joked about demolishing it, but that'd be more of a pain at this point. I'd rather spend that energy on something more productive. Still, were you really unable to do anything about this, Mayor Antelise?" Takuto asked the mayor since Yona'Yona wasn't going to be of much help. At least the mayor still had a modicum of calm left.

"Not a thing, sadly. The people who live in the area are Ira Cultists who have been bribed, so when the government tries to intervene, they protest day and night in front of Town Hall…" Antelise explained.

"Who's the instigator?" Takuto asked. **"Never mind, I know it's Vittorio. I can't let him get away with something this big, so I think it'd be best for all involved to make him take responsibility. How about you summon him, and we behead him as a warning?"**

"I have repeatedly called for him, but he hasn't shown up once… Forgive the imposition, but would you mind summoning him as well, Your Majesty?" Antelise requested.

"I'm pretty sure he won't show up for something like this even if I call for him…" Takuto shrugged.

"H-He won't…?"

Vittorio was a man of many follies. Takuto could understand the intent behind each of his wacky actions, so it didn't bother him too much, but the same understanding couldn't be expected of others. The higher a person's position in the government, the more serious and responsible they tend to be. Be it the Dark Elves, Antelise, or Yona'Yona, those who were seriously devoted to Mynoghra and Takuto couldn't tolerate Vittorio's misdeeds. They took the chaos

caused by his rampant behavior as a personal failure and struggled with it mentally.

Looks like this is the spot for me to step up and help them out, Takuto decided.

"Well, it's inevitable for Vittorio to screw things up. That jester falls under my direct purview, so I'll take over this matter. On that note, if he ever shows any signs of stirring up trouble again, report directly to me about it. I won't make you take responsibility for anything he does."

The first problem to resolve was where the responsibility lay. Antelise was responsible for all of Dragontan, and Yona'Yona was entirely responsible for the Cult of Ira as its de facto leader. Of course, they were partially responsible for letting the Cathedral get built without informing him, but Takuto sidestepped that inconvenient factor. Nothing would get resolved otherwise.

Making exceptions wasn't favorable for any organization, but when it came to Vittorio, exceptions became the rule, unless you wanted to be in for an even bigger headache. And so, Takuto chose his words carefully to make sure the two women wouldn't feel even more depressed. He spoke his next words out of consideration for their positions as well.

"Anyways, as much as I can't approve of the way it got built, it looks like everything came together in the end, right? I assume it's working as it should, but what do you have to say on the matter, Antelise?" Takuto asked the mayor.

"You assume correctly, sire," she answered. "As you can see, this bizarre, splendiferous, esoteric building is more than worthy of serving as our Cathedral, and it has become an important holy site to the followers of Ira. Its existence has led to an uptick in pilgrims coming from within and without the country, which naturally contributes to Dragontan's economy…"

"It's become a holy site believers feel the need to make a pilgrimage to, eh? So, it's serving as a proper place of worship, since the cult has outright banned idolatry," Takuto concluded.

"Y-Yessh," Yona'Yona said, biting her tongue out of nervousness. "B-Believers in Ira come from all over the continent to visit this grand Cathedral. Th-Things will get a bit complicated if the mighty Ira himself were to denounce Dumeli Tula— Oh, forgive me! I wouldn't dare speak in opposition to His Unholiness's divine decisions!"

"Yup, I know," Takuto said casually. **"I can see the problem with that."**

Takuto had been going over the building's purpose with Antelise to ensure she didn't feel solely responsible for it and potentially order its removal later without consulting him. But through that conversation, he learned of a hidden benefit that hadn't even occurred to him.

Simply put, the Cathedral had become a hot destination for people to visit. Believers came to the Dragontan Cathedral to pray to Takuto, effectively maintaining peace in Mynoghra. With how fanatic the cultists were, they would have pushed their way right through the Accursed Lands to the Palace where Takuto resided if they hadn't had Dumeli Tula as a place of worship instead.

When I think about it like that, I better jump on approving this Cathedral as a place of worship for the Cult of Ira and throw my full support behind it. I initially wanted to limit it before it became too powerful, but that'll only make my life more difficult in the long run.

Vittorio likely had built the Cathedral because he knew it would eventually come to this. Not asking for permission or even reporting on it was just a part of his rotten personality. But seeing as he was continuing to do things in a way that was hard to understand but kept everything moving along as it should, just went to show that the Gleeful Spin Doctor was in peak condition even after coming to this world.

"I see. I'll think about what to do with this Cathedral a bit more before I decide," Takuto said. **"Oh, don't get me wrong, you guys. I'm not holding you accountable for this."**

I need to carefully consider how much backing and approval I want to give the Cathedral and the cult.

The Accursed Lands, the capital of Mynoghra, wasn't suitable for conducting trade, so he preferred developing Dragontan in that direction as Mynoghra's second city. The Cathedral would inevitably serve as a catalyst for growth and make a significant contribution to the town's development. But Takuto wasn't interested in transforming it into a religious capital. He wanted his second city to excel in economics and production. Now he needed to strike a balance between using the influence of Dumeli Tula without overshadowing and shrinking the town's commercial activity.

Vittorio had gone and presented him with yet another difficult task. And it was a task he was very much looking forward to resolving. As a lover of all things Domestic Affairs, Takuto delighted in tasks that required him to use his brain to run the empire. He hated how much combat-related activities had taken him away from good old Domestic Affairs lately. He thought it wouldn't be such a bad idea to take a short break to enjoy this problem.

Well, it *was* a bad idea.

His mind had been so preoccupied with the joys of Domestic Affairs, he'd entirely neglected to pay attention to his surroundings.

"C-C-C-C-Could you be…our unholy god?!" a high-pitched voice called out to Takuto.

It was a miracle he hadn't been spotted sooner—by the cultists. The first person's commotion spread at the speed of light, and people with a crazed glint in their eyes appeared out of the woodwork. They surged around Takuto like an addict spotting the sweet source of their addiction.

"Oh, crud… This is seriously bad news!" Yona'Yona warned.

"Run, Your Majesty!" Antelise shouted. She wasn't kidding around. She was seriously worried about Takuto's safety. "A festival is about to begin!!"

"Why does everyone look so unhinged?!" Takuto shouted back. **"And wait, why a festival?!"** He was confused about the mob suddenly holding a festival, but there was no time for him to figure it out.

"O-Obviously because God Ira has descended upon his unholy cathedral of Dumeli Tula!" Yona'Yona cried. "Such a grand and

glorious event will surely be spoken of for generations— Omigosh! Does this mean I'm currently experiencing a myth in the making?!"

"Yona'Yona! Can't you do something about the— Ah, crap! She's lost it like the others!" Takuto groaned.

"Oh no, Your Majesty!" Antelise cried out. "They have completely blocked our escape! Believers are coming from the woodwork, *literally*!"

"C-Cultists are way too scary…"

In the end, Takuto escaped from the cultists into the back alleys and disengaged the Botchling's Mimic skill to prevent being discovered. When he checked with Antelise about it later, he learned they had held the Takuto Ira Graces Us with His Unholy Presence Festival after that. He didn't go near Dragontan for a while after that.

Eterpedia

Cathedral

Building

Sect: Cult of Ira Name: Dumeli Tula
Ruin Mana +1
National Believer Growth Rate +10%
National Magic Production +20%

Cathedrals are special buildings that can be built in a religion's main city of operation. They have powerful effects, but only one can be built per religion, and they are expensive. In addition, Cathedrals cannot be destroyed by enemy occupation and will remain in the city even if the city's affiliation changes.

DURING the afternoon of the day that he managed to escape from the Ira cultists in Dragontan by deactivating his double's disguise, Takuto attended a regular meeting at the Palace. Being able to be in two places at once was just one of the many perks to having a body double. The Botchling on its own had high Strength stats and a nice lineup of skills. Takuto's prospective strategies expanded tenfold with the double's addition.

"All right, my inspection of Dragontan more or less went as expected, so I might as well decide on our policies for Seldoch while I'm at it."

The meeting consisted of Mynoghra's empire-management council members. While Mynoghra had made progress in recruiting useful personnel from outside the fold, such as Yona'Yona and Inquisitor Krähe Imlerith, only a select few were allowed to participate in the council meetings.

The council only consisted of the longest-serving members who had remained loyal since the founding of Mynoghra: Elder Moltar, Gia, Emle, and the Elfuur Sisters. The only others allowed to attend were the Dark Elves, who handled clerical tasks such as taking notes and distributing materials, but they had been present since the start as well.

Takuto had a feeling that the current system would eventually have to change. Their administrative capacity couldn't keep up with the empire's growth. He wanted to respect the Dark Elves' long-term loyalty, but they were reaching their limits. This was made all the more evident by the sheer size of Seldoch—their most recently obtained territory.

"The newly acquired city of Seldoch and its surrounding territory is a fertile and temperate region with few natural disasters. It has a large population, so it'll undoubtedly contribute to increasing our empire's national power," Takuto said.

Joy blossomed on the council members' faces. Considering the hardships they'd faced to get to this point, this was an achievement worth celebrating. The acquisition of new territory is extremely

valuable to any nation and something worth rejoicing over. However, they couldn't revel in their happiness for long.

"However, now that Mynoghra has finally stabilized its control over part of the Accursed Lands and the area around Dragontan, I have no doubt that we will require administrative skills beyond our current limitations to manage our third city," Takuto announced.

Another problem came hot on the heels of their last one. All the joy slipped from the Dark Elves' faces, replaced by grimaces and concerned frowns. Proof they understood what Takuto was telling them.

"So, rather than making any sudden, drastic changes to their government, I believe it would be safer to maintain the current system and slowly shift them over to a Mynoghra-style of governance. What are your thoughts on this?" Takuto asked.

Seldoch encompassed a vast territory that spanned from the borders of the Lawful and Dark Continents to approximately half of the now-defunct Divine Nation of Lenea. Takuto mostly referred to Seldoch itself because it was the most prominent city in the territory they had acquired, but there were many towns and villages in the surrounding areas that also needed to be managed.

Normally, it would be impossible to immediately govern a newly acquired land plundered from another nation without issue. Citizens don't typically take kindly to being absorbed into an enemy nation. Squashing insurrections and revolts would be on the meeting agenda instead of this peaceful discussion if not for Vittorio's subversive use of the Ira religion. Every single council member shared that understanding.

"There is no denying that Seldoch is on an entirely different scale from Dragontan," Elder Moltar conceded. "Haphazardly trying to minutely control things from a distance won't end well. I despise how incompetent I am to do anything about this problem, but I must concede to His Majesty's point."

"The empire's expanding at a frightening speed to begin with. Moreover, both Dragontan and Seldoch were acquired

by converting or occupying land from other countries. There's not a whole lot we could do to improve things," Takuto pointed out.

All the territory Mynoghra had acquired thus far had to be incorporated from an outside source. Normally, small settlements develop into cities over time through pioneering, but this was not the case for Mynoghra. The development of Mynoghra as an empire was built on exceptions and deviated from the norm. Elder Moltar spoke as if his incompetence was the cause of their limitations, but managing a nation was about more than the actions of one person.

"Besides, Seldoch is practically on the front lines. Or rather, it belonged to an enemy nation until we acquired it. We have to carefully consider the risk of it being recaptured—even if we plan never to let that happen," Atou said, listing additional problems with Seldoch and its surroundings.

Gia firmly nodded his head in agreement, sharing in her concerns.

The newly acquired region of Seldoch shared a border with the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals and the Holy Kingdom of Qualia. A vast mountain range ran through the center of the Lawful Continent, separating El-Nah and Qualia, but the mountain range ended in the frigid region to the north and in the region to the south that connected to the Dark Continent, allowing passage between the two allies. And because the heavy snowfall to the north made it difficult to traverse, El-Nah and Qualia routed almost all travel through Seldoch.

In other words, Mynoghra's newly acquired territory was just as important geographically. It only made sense that both El-Nah and Qualia would want to retake it. If nothing else, they would never be okay with leaving it in the hands of an evil nation like Mynoghra.

"Fortunately, thanks to the spread of Ira, the people of Seldoch are particularly fond of our country," Elder Moltar said. "We couldn't ask for more as the reigning government."

"That's the one thing we don't have to worry about," Takuto agreed. **"It appears there's no need to enact any conciliatory policies, so let's keep our investments to a**

minimum and focus on strengthening our position for now. We can buy ourselves some time if we construct a Flesh Tree and a Chapel for the Cult of Ira."

The move Vittorio made on the Divine Nation of Lenea was extremely crafty and ruthless. He used his skills to forcefully convert the residents to the Cult of Ira. This normally would never work. In *Eternal Nations*, the enemy nation's religious units would have taken measures to prevent conversion, and if it were peacetime, believers in the Holy God Arlos would have acted.

Vittorio could only pull off this tactic because the TRPG forces—Erakino, the two Saints, and the Game Master—had made such a mess of things that it bred utter chaos, which he could take advantage of. The opportunity to acquire land and a city of this scale would likely never come again. It was an unforeseen and unexpected burden to bear, but if they could overcome the struggle, the reward would be immense.

And if he couldn't overcome an obstacle of this level, then could he really call himself *Takuto Ira*? Takuto was determined to make it work.

"But, sire, who will you put in charge of Seldoch? We can make use of the current government, but I strongly believe that we need to appoint a governor who can exercise authority over the region," Elder Moltar pointed out.

"Yeah, that's the problem right there..." Takuto sighed.

Takuto was determined to make it work. He was. But there were some areas where reality hadn't quite caught up with his determination. And that was the problem of assigning the right personnel. He couldn't keep putting off the decision and hope it'd work itself out. At the bare minimum, it was necessary to appoint a person to be in charge of the region as Elder Moltar suggested. And it needed to be someone capable, so they could more easily promote the policies of appeasing the people and assimilation.

A harsh request for Mynoghra, which was perpetually short on good personnel.

Between the size of the territory, population, and the dangers of it bordering our enemies, a Hero would be best for the position.

But I'm not giving up Atou, and Vittorio is out of the question. Isla would've been perfect for the job, but I can't change the past… Antelise doesn't work either. With how dedicated she's been to Mynoghra, I don't want to add to her burdens, and then there's the matter of her origins.

It was easy to forget, but Antelise was originally the heir to a powerful clan in El-Nah. She ran away from home because she hated the old Elven customs and responsibilities, and she eventually ended up in Dragontan. That made her a bad match with the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals. Takuto didn't know the state of things in El-Nah, but he knew it was a bad idea to send Antelise anywhere near it.

Who else… Yona'Yona doesn't work either. She lacks practical skills and experience. Besides, I need her to run around keeping the fanatic cultists in check as their de facto leader. Tying her down to one city is out of the question. Takuto pondered his options.

Oh, what about that former Qualian Inquisitor we recruited recently? Krähe Imlerith was it? Would she work? He considered it briefly before shooting down the idea with a shake of his head.

Krähe didn't lack practical skill or experience. She seemed like an earnest, hard worker, and her former job had a lot of politics and paperwork involved, so she would be quick to pick up on governing work. But she was a former Inquisitor and a traitor to Qualia. She was bound to provoke Qualia. Besides, Takuto planned to have her lead the Paladins of Ira, Paladins who had fallen to the dark side, so he had to reject her as a potential candidate.

Well, crap. We really don't have the right person for the job. Anyone else wouldn't live up to the position in terms of strength or qualifications… If only I could find someone who could at least meet one of the requirements… I don't see any other options, so maybe we should send promising people on short-term assignments there? Takuto would have to closely check their policies each time, but it seemed like that was the only option at this point. *If you want to develop new talent, you need to give inexperienced people a chance to gain experience…*

As Takuto was considering all of this…

"Your Majesty."

"Kingy."

"We will go do our bestest in Seldoch!"

"Our bestest!"

The Elfuur Sisters, who had been quietly listening to the meeting, suddenly made an unexpected proposal.

Takuto's eyes rounded at the idea he hadn't even considered. **"You girls will go?"** he found himself asking in surprise.

The sisters responded with big nods.

Takuto was bemused by their sudden offer, but he quickly switched to considering the pros and cons of putting the two of them in charge. *Ugh, I wanted to keep them here a little longer so they could learn more at my side, but they are almost too perfect for the job.*

It made perfect sense for the twins to be appointed as the Overseer of the new territory. They already held high positions within Mynoghra and were being trained to be future leaders, so they more than met the renown and talent requirements. They also held the skillsets and powers of a Hero unit, even if it had been obtained through unusual means.

Being able to appoint the two of them together made them a lot more flexible than appointing only one person. In many cases, having two people in charge tends to create factional dynamics that can lead to the worst possible outcomes. However, considering their relationship, Takuto had no reason to worry about that with the sisters. He was a little worried about the practical aspects, but the girls were smart enough to understand Takuto's ideas, and it wouldn't be a problem if he gave them some support personnel.

When all was said and done, appointing the Elfuur Sisters as the Overseer of the Seldoch region would be a godsend for both Takuto and Mynoghra.

After running that analysis in an instant, Takuto concealed his loneliness and questioned the girls, who seemed pumped that this was their big moment to shine. **"Are you sure you want to do this? With your power as Witches, it shouldn't take too long to return home, but you won't be able to make frequent**

visits. Will you be all right not being able to see everyone all the time?"

Takuto was the one who wasn't all right with not being able to see them all the time. The twins nodded again, not seeming to mind or think much about that aspect. Takuto scanned the room. Elder Moltar and the Dark Elves seemed surprised but supported the idea. They seemed to think that the girls should work in a position that was commensurate with their abilities, even if they were still children.

Atou also showed her approval with several firm nods. Perhaps she was delighted at the prospect of being able to be closer to Takuto as his guard with the twins removed from duty. Or maybe another thought powered her support for the idea. Either way, she was clearly not on his side in this matter.

He couldn't find a flaw in the rationale or strategy of appointing them. The only flaw was the internal conflict caused by his own loneliness…

I suppose I've got no choice here, do I? At least it's not like I'll never see them again, he tried to convince himself. He was just about to give consent when the twins spoke before he could.

"We wanna prove that we can be even more useful to you, Kingy!" Maria exclaimed.

"We feel that we can become even stronger if we are in an environment where Your Majesty and everybody else can't easily spoil us," Caria added.

"Yeah! We'll get stronger!"

They want to become stronger, huh?

A noble and pure desire drove the girls. But their innocent-sounding words revealed that they were driven by more than that.

"Besides, we cannot accept defeat ever again," Caria stated.

"They won't get the bestest of us ever again," Maria echoed the sentiment.

The image of the battles these cheerful, smiling girls fought in Lenea and the losses they had suffered crossed Takuto's mind.

Losers lose everything. Even their dignity…

Inspired by their determination never to lose again, Takuto vowed never to forget that same desire.

◇◇◇

<Seldoch City Hall >

"AND so, we are counting on you," Caria said.

"Counting on you," Maria echoed.

The bright voices of the twin girls echoed through the building, which had formerly been the holy church's administrative office. Only the sign had changed.

"Uh-huh…"

The young woman, who was sitting on a sofa that was a little lacking in style for receiving guests but common in Qualia's culture, which valued honorable poverty, responded to the sudden proposal with an indescribably deflated look.

The young woman's name was Krähe Imlerith. She was a former clergywoman who held the important position of Qualia's Inquisitor and accompanied the Scribe Saint Nerim. She was also a defector who betrayed the Holy God Arlos and showed allegiance to Mynoghra in a previous battle with the Scribe Saint over the territory in the Divine Nation of Lenea.

As a woman who found herself in a challenging position, Krähe struggled to process the proposal the Elfuur Sisters had just made her. Of course she would struggle with it, when what they asked of her was…

"It's nothing complicated," Caria said.

"Uh-huh. You just hafta teach us when we're in a pickle," Maria added.

…to serve as an advisor to the new Overseers of Seldoch, the Elfuur Sisters.

Krähe understood the situation. The territory Mynoghra had recently acquired was massive. Managing it would be more than these two young girls could handle on their own. They needed

someone competent and knowledgeable about the customs and inner workings of the region to be their advisor.

But they want me for that job? It was this particular point that stumped the usually calm and collected Krähe.

"Um, are you absolutely certain about this?" she asked. "Not only am I a newcomer to Mynoghra, but I am also a turncoat. I believe there will be a backlash from others if I am placed in too important of a position…"

"There's no one who'd object. Or rather, there's no one in a position to…" Maria said.

Krähe was unwittingly convinced. The Elfuur Sisters held high positions in Mynoghra. Apart from the king, Takuto Ira, the number of people who could object to the decisions of these two young girls could be counted on one hand. And it was also a true statement that there was literally no one in a position to object.

Krähe was highly educated when she took up the mantle of Inquisitor. Even without the finer details, she could roughly guess the problems Mynoghra was facing. Simply put, the twins' proposal was reasonable and difficult to contend.

"Even though Big Sista and I have learned lots at His Majesty's side, there's still muchest we don't know. So, we'll be in a real pickle if we don't get help from you, Miss Krähe, with all of your practical experience," Caria argued enthusiastically.

"But not all problems can be solved with logic alone…" Krähe countered, needing to give voice to her biggest concern, even if it sounded timid.

She knew firsthand the nightmares that could be caused later by disregarding the human aspects of an organizational body, such as a strict hierarchy and following the rules. Sure, she was speaking out of a desire for self-preservation, but since she was driven by the goal of getting Nerim back someday, she desperately wanted to avoid unnecessary problems.

But she had forgotten a fatal piece of information.

"But if you don't help Cary and her Big Sista, it'll be straight to Dragontan for you?" Caria pointed out.

"Hm? What's wrong with that?" Krähe asked,

It was such a vital piece of information.

"That's where the great perverted clown haunts," Caria replied.

"That's bad news…very bad news."

Of all the things she could forget about, it had to be Vittorio's existence. Since he primarily worked out of Dragontan, Krähe risked running into the Gleeful Spin Doctor if she turned down her assignment in Seldoch.

Krähe was one of Vittorio's many victims. Ever since the day Qualia had dispatched her to Lenea as an Inquisitor, she had her life ruined time and time again by that unhinged Hero.



Shaking her head, Krähe forced herself to forget the slideshow of bitter memories that flashed through her mind. Then she turned her pleading gaze to the Elfuur Sisters.

"You are now a follower of Ira who has turned from the holy teachings of Arlos. A fallen clergywoman, who stands before us as a Paladin of Ira. Just because you became a citizen of Mynoghra does not mean you have completely changed on the inside. As somebody who knows the people of this land well, we desperately need your assistance, Miss Krähe," Caria argued.

"And you might see the Scribe girl again if you're here too," Maria added.

"Nerim…"

Vittorio vanished from Krähe's thoughts, and in his place came the image of a precious girl, smiling faintly. Krähe had turned her back on Arlos to save that girl. All she did, she did for her. That was Krähe's sole purpose for being here.

"She is truly a kind and gentle soul. What should I do to save her?"

It was unusual for Krähe, someone who was often criticized for being overly strict and domineering, to seek help from others or reveal her weaknesses. She could sense herself becoming more emotional since joining Mynoghra. Her lament just now was a manifestation of that. She'd heard that the twins had also lost someone dear to them recently and hoped they might have the answer.

And they did have an answer.

"The civilization invited to heaven will live forever with ultimate happiness and unlimited peace…"

"What does that mean?" Krähe asked.

"There they will not experience hardship or pain, the dead will revive, loved ones will be reunited, and all will share in their happiness together…"

Krähe couldn't resist intently listening to Caria's sonorous recitation. It sounded like a poem of some sort, but not one Krähe knew. There was something about those words that powerfully drew her in.

"His Majesty said that there is a real heaven and that if you go there, you will meet those you have lost."

Krähe sucked in a breath.

She finally saw a path to save Saint Nerim.

Krähe had met the King of Ruin once already. She hadn't forgotten the awe she felt in his presence. Nor the primal fear and reverence she felt toward his empyreal being. Just as a tiny insect cannot fathom the full extent of a Titan, a tiny human cannot fathom the King of Ruin.

Feeling like her heart was gripped in a vise, she came to understand one thing: she was standing before a true god.

And that god declared there was a heaven.

Unlike the Holy God Arlos, who only took and gave nothing in return to Krähe, the King of Ruin was a mighty being who extended a helping hand.

Krähe's heart sped up and her cheeks flushed crimson with her mounting excitement.

"Even without this heaven business, His Majesty is almighty. You might not have to wait too long before you can be friends with the Scribe girl again, you know?" Caria said.

Do you truly believe that? Krähe didn't give voice to her question. She thought it was foolish to even utter it aloud. As someone who had glimpsed the King of Ruin's power, she could now accept Caria's statement as fact.

"But there's a problem," Caria shared.

"What problem?"

Krähe's heart lurched. *What in the realm could the problem be? What could possibly be standing in the way of that precious child living in a safe and peaceful world?*

Emotions Krähe barely noticed existed deep within her began to bubble to the surface. Now that she was a citizen of Mynoghra, anger was one of the driving forces that compelled her.

Hurry and tell me. I'll purge the problem with my sword right now.

Caria staidly spoke the answer to Krähe's darkening thoughts, "We are still far too weak."

Her words doused the flames of wrath burning within Krähe. A feeling of helplessness suddenly engulfed her, but she took a deep breath to suppress it.

Caria was referring to herself, Maria, and Krähe.

If I had been stronger, would the outcome have changed? While they had never spoken of it with each other, all three of these young women shared that same tortuous thought. It was a different time and person they had wanted to save, but they still shared in the despair of having lost someone dear to them. And in the desire for more power. It was through this shared feeling of loss that the twin sisters opened up to Krähe, and it was this that led her to trust them too.

Weakness is a sin.

Each of them had tasted the bitterness of committing this sin and needed to overcome it no matter the cost. And there was a path to overcome it, even if the road there was fraught and tenuous.

"Miss Krähe, you can use Holy Sword Artes, right?" Caria asked.

"Yes, I can. The position of Inquisitor was only available to me once I had my qualifications as a Paladin. I have all the skills required."

"And what about the art of fighting and weapon handling?"

"Not even a question. I am trained in the art of fighting both the human and inhuman… And I even have skillsets I have been sworn to secrecy about."

Inquisitors master a diverse set of skills. Many of the skills fell more under the domain of the Paladins, but Krähe had even mastered a variety of techniques an average Mesial or Under Paladin couldn't even dream of competing against.

"Oooh, awesomeness!" Maria chirped.

"Now that sounds promising, Big Sista!" Caria exclaimed.

"What does?" Krähe asked, though she had a rough idea of what the twins were after.

They wanted to make up for their lack of experience with skill.

When Saint Nerim offered her memories to the Holy God and faced Vittorio, Krähe had an opportunity to closely watch how the

Elfuur Sisters fought when they joined the fray. If she were to describe their fighting style in a single word, it would be amateur.

Yes, they were physically more formidable than any mortal. But their moves lacked refinement, and Krähe had the strong impression they fought relying solely on their strength to get them through. Of course, even with that impression, Krähe was absolutely positive she could never defeat them, so they were clearly powerful despite their lack of experience.

It was just that Scribe Saint Nerim was leaps and bounds beyond that.

The twins stood no chance as they were.

And that was exactly why they saw a sliver of hope in learning new skills. Krähe was convinced it was a reasonable approach as well. Even so, there were a handful of problems with it. While she painfully understood the desire to gain more power, Krähe hadn't forgotten the tenuous position they were in.

"But haven't the two of you been appointed as Seldoch's Overseers? It's wrong to neglect your duties."

Yes, before all else came work. Work first, self after.

It might have something to do with Krähe's stickler personality, but it felt wrong to neglect the work she was given to pursue power. It made more sense to her to complete one's work first and then use one's free time to train.

But before she could lecture them, the twins devised a clever plan to counter her rebuttal.

"No worries. That is what you are for, Miss Krähe," Caria said.

"Birds of a feather, flock together," Maria said.

So, this was their objective, Krähe thought, her brow knitting together. But she couldn't bring herself to get angry at such young girls. When she was still a Qualian, she might've lashed out at them out of her discrimination against Dark Elves, but she was now a bona fide citizen of Mynoghra.

The moment she met with Takuto Ira, the King of Ruin, and was accepted as a citizen, all prejudice against other races had vanished. So, to Krähe, the people before her now were nothing more than difficult younger superiors to deal with. She began to

sense that they were exploiting her inability to object harshly to them.

"Oh, since we've got the opportunity, why don't we teach the Paladins of Ira the Mynoghra way?" Caria suggested. "They could be excellent opponents in mock battles. And so would you, Miss Krähe."

"Time to get Spartan on them! No mercy!" Maria cheered.

The girls cleared the obstacles standing in their way once again.

As someone who'd already fallen to the temptation of power, Krähe was thrilled at the prospect of being able to reach deeper into its depths to obtain more. Besides, making the Paladins of Ira more powerful would directly aid in Mynoghra's growth and prosperity. And that would serve as a foundation bridging them to the heavens they sought.

Krähe no longer had a reason to refuse.

"And so, we mustest grow stronger. Stronger than anyone or anything. So that we never lose what matters again. And in order to do that, let's work our hardest together," Caria said.

"Let's do our bestest together," Maria echoed.

The twins invited her with the same bright, innocent voices.

"I-I will help you to the best of my meager ability…"

Krähe no longer had any option but to accept their invitation with a nod.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

The Witches of Regret, the Elfuur Sisters, have been appointed as the Overseers of Seldoch.

Time is required to recall the units before you can control them again.

OK

Chapter 4: Imprudent

IF the true power of SLGs lies in the collective weight of nations, then the true power of RPGs lies in the individual might of heroes.

In a corner of the Dark Continent south of Dragontan, Yu cut a Hill Giant roaming the land in half as easily as if he'd swatted a fly. Then he waved at Takuto as though it had taken no effort at all. Feeling a little put off by Yu's cheerful behavior, Takuto raised his hand lightly in response.

We're exterminating Barbarians under the pretext of demonstrating our strength to each other, but…he's even more of a monster than I was expecting. Hiding his admiration for the Hero's skills, Takuto settled his gaze on Yu leisurely strolling toward him.

This wasn't even the "real" Takuto. It was his Botchling body double. His actual body was chilling back in his Palace, calmly watching events unfold from the comfort of the Accursed Lands. An alliance was no reason for Takuto to let his guard down around someone. And so, Takuto dispatched his remotely controlled Botchling body double to all engagements with Yu. His obsessive-compulsive level of caution was only natural given everything he had experienced.

"And that's my current power level. No matter how many stray monsters come my way, I can easily wipe the floor with them!"

"A-Amazeballs! You're the awesomest, Master!"

Hero Yu defeats his enemies, and the slave girl lavishes him with excessive praise. Just how many times had Takuto been forced to bear witness to that? At least he was able to determine that Player Yu Kamimiyadera possessed combat abilities far beyond measure.

"It's definitely beyond what I'd imagined," Takuto remarked. "You could insta-kill anything on the Four Generals' level. I can see why you were able to defeat the Demon Lord when you took him by surprise."

We'd need a solid strategy for one of the Hero units to take him on, Takuto realized. *Shouldn't expect any less from a Hero—or a Player.*

They weren't enemies at the moment, but that could change at any point. Yu would be a formidable opponent if they did eventually cross swords—one who would require ample strategizing to defeat. That said, he wasn't without his weaknesses.

"Yeah, but strength alone doesn't make me invincible. There's one real big problem I can't overcome," Yu confessed.

"Sheer numbers…" Takuto supplied.

To be superior individually also means to be inferior in numbers. If you change the battlefield, individual units can easily be overwhelmed. Actual war rarely comes down to fair one-on-one battles.

Yu seemed to understand that very well.

"Yup," Yu nodded. "You see, Heroes are overpowered monsters when it comes to small groups, but it's a losing battle when they come at you in large numbers. I can look out for myself and one other person, but it's impossible to protect more than that. Author power makes it all work out in the stories, but my powers are based squarely on the game mechanics. This is where RPG mechanics really come back to bite you."

"Not even a Hero can fight twenty-four seven. That's a fact you can't reverse."

"You need to eat and bathe. And sleep is a must, obviously. And when it comes to numbers, if they attack you in endless waves, you'll end up losing your mind before you give out physically."

The Hero was strapped for cash—or to be more specific, he was struggling with the practical side of living in this world without backing. Takuto speculated that to be one of Yu's greatest weaknesses.

Unlike starting as a nation like Mynoghra, the RPG Hero has a weak foundation for his day-to-day life. It didn't matter how ridiculously powerful he was if he didn't have logistical support. And that was why he reached out to Mynoghra first. Takuto had determined that was one of Yu's motives for this alliance.

Mynoghra would offer numbers and logistics, and he would offer his individual strength. It felt a bit like Mynoghra was giving more than it was getting, but Takuto viewed it as a necessary expense for his future plans.

"Uh-huh! That's right! I want Master to live a more peaceful life! I'm personally fine as long as I have Master by my side…"

"Thanks. As long as I have you…I'm happy too!"

"You're so wonderful, Master…"

Although Takuto had only known him for a short time, he felt like he'd come to understand Yu's character quite well. If he had to define him, he'd say he was honest, honorable, possessed a strong sense of justice, and the type to naturally draw people to him. If they were in school together, Yu would definitely be nominated class president, and if someone were being bullied, he'd protect that kid and go straight to confronting and condemning the bully. He was the poster child for that type.

And yet, for all that, he wasn't a stick in the mud, had a soft spot for the ladies, and was also kind of a smooth talker. Takuto had the strong impression Yu must've been popular in his past life, but he'd feel inferior if it was true, so he didn't dare ask about it.

In any case, Yu's full attention seemed to be on the OC slave girl, who was the archetype for guileless innocence and lived for her master.

Takuto seriously related to Yu coming to this world with someone he adored. It was one of the reasons why he decided to ally with Yu, but he was too embarrassed to admit it.

"Flirting in public! How scandalous! PDA is wrong, I say! Don't you agree, King Takuto?! Relationships between men and women must be wholesome!"

"I-I suppose they should, Atou. Yeah, you're right!"

Atou was always complaining about Yu and his companion's relationship, going on about how indecent and immoral it was. A piece of that might have stemmed from her wariness of them as potential enemies, but it seemed more due to her dislike of the fact that their relationship deviated from the wholesomeness she expected.

The problem was that the logical side of Takuto always pointed out how his relationship with Atou didn't differ much from that of the boy and girl before them, so he was relegated to only giving vague responses every time the topic came up.

What Atou was to Takuto was probably what the slave girl was to Yu. For all he knew, Yu might have the same exact motives Takuto did when he first arrived in this world. If nothing else, this reminded Takuto that the slave girl was incredibly dear to Player Yu, which increased her overall importance.

"All right, I don't see a point in you continuing this, since I doubt we'll run into any opponents worthy of testing your skills," Takuto said. "So, what should we do next?"

Should he consider that a pleasant surprise or within expectation? They were carrying out the Barbarian extermination under the pretext of testing their abilities, but they quickly ran into the problem that the Dark Continent Barbarians were not a suitable test for Yu.

It goes without saying that the hostile Demi-humans living on the Dark Continent were incredibly dangerous. For any normal country, they posed enough of a threat that they would cause casualties to your army if you didn't bring enough force to eliminate them.

But that only applied to what was normal.

They were nothing more than sand before the wind when it came to Takuto, a skilled Commander with a powerful army at his disposal, or Yu, a bona fide Hero with a vast array of spells and techniques in his arsenal. Ultimately, they were left feeling disappointed, even after showing off to each other a little bit.

"Hm, if only I were better at doing it on command, I could have shown off a buncha stuff for you, but I suck at that kinda thing.

Sorry!”

“I get it.”

Takuto couldn’t really complain when he put it like that. All the more so when he wouldn’t know how to handle the situation himself if he were in Yu’s shoes.

Perhaps sensing his disappointment, his reliable confidant flashed a feisty smile and proposed an idea of her own. “If I may, King Takuto? How about I have a mock battle with this Hero? I’m sure there are some things we can only learn about each other by fighting…”

“Hmm…”

He couldn’t have asked for a better offer. Yu would have an easier time calling on his abilities if he were up against Atou, and she would be able to better gauge his strength that way. However, Takuto still didn’t trust the RPG faction, so he wasn’t keen on the idea. And most of all, he had a terrible feeling about the maniacal gleam in Atou’s crimson eyes.

Atou hasn’t had the chance to let loose lately, so maybe she wants to let out some steam? Or maybe she’s still holding a grudge from when he interfered with her fight with the Elfuur Sisters? I doubt she’ll forget herself, but she might go out of control a little. Takuto was hesitant to make a decision.

“I don’t mind it myself,” Yu said. “Mm, we just need to keep from going overboard, right?”

“Yes, exactly. But please be aware there may be unforeseen accidents. Of course, that shouldn’t be a problem if you are powerful enough to parry all of my attacks.”

“Oh boy, am I glad to hear that! I was a tad worried about what would happen if I accidentally hurt you.”

“…Hurt *me*?”

The conversation progressed without Takuto’s input. And in a very bad direction at that. It seemed that Yu, who’d naturally brushed off Atou’s provocation, had instead succeeded in rubbing her pride the wrong way. Atou was so angry right now, even Takuto was reluctant to talk to her. Takuto gave up then, thinking her anger would never abate unless he let her get it out of her system.

Takuto sighed. "…All right, let me repeat, this is only a mock battle to gauge each other's strength. Don't forget it. Begin!"

The two Heroes charged at each other at Takuto's signal. Yu wielded his katana, and Atou her Holy Sword. The fight began with the peel of metal clashing, and Takuto knew at once that both sides were testing each other's strength and self-restraint.

"Wowie… A-Amazeballs!"

Takuto nodded in agreement with the slave girl's exclamation.

Swords sliced through the air and collided in a cacophony. The swells of battle were so violent and fierce, they didn't allow an outsider's interference, even though it was a mock battle conducted with a modicum of restraint. Any superficial attempts to stop them would end poorly. Takuto certainly didn't want to get in their way.

Both are still not even breaking a sweat, and they don't miss a beat, eh? Guess this means he's strong enough to match Atou at her current level, Takuto deduced.

Sludge Atou's skills were the type that paid off in the end game. Her strength grew with time, and she could build up an extensive list of skills by plundering them from the enemies she defeated. And although Takuto tended not to think about it much, her combat abilities increased with the amount of mana Mynoghra had.

Atou was being strengthened by the amount of Ruin Mana Mynoghra's Palace produced. She should now be able to instantly react to situations where she'd lagged behind before—like with the TRPG's surprise attack. That was how much stronger she had become.

And yet, they were evenly matched…

Once again, Takuto was reminded to remain wary of the potential danger of this friendly, charming Hero.

"You can do it, Master!"

Beside Takuto, the greatest original character Yu could think of cheered him on.

Now that I think about it, I keep referring to her as the slave girl, but I wonder what her actual name is? As Takuto was idly thinking of such things, the battle came to an end.

Stuck in the ground a short distance from the pair was Yu's katana. However, judging from the fact that Atou had her tentacles out, her win was a direct result of her using her tentacles in a moment of panic when she thought he was going to land a hit. Seeing as the heated tension between them had dissipated, it seemed they had a tacit understanding that their battle would only be fought with swords.

It was complicated to say who had won, but if Takuto had to call it, he would say Atou lost for breaking the rules.

Relieved the battle had ended without bloodshed, Takuto decided to speak to them. Naturally, he knew better than to touch on anything related to the outcome or their difference in strength, so he stuck to a safe topic.

"You both did amazing. I think you more than demonstrated your strengths. At the very least, noob Players and NPCs won't be a match for either of you. Thanks for fighting, Atou."

"No need for thanks… I suppose you are right. Thank you very much for the match, Mr. Kamimiyadera. And please allow me to apologize for earlier. It was my fault for carelessly provoking you."

"Hm? Nah, it's no skin off my back. I know what my personality's like. I've got a penchant for pissing people off, so I'd be grateful if we could let bygones be bygones."

It seemed the bad blood between them had been resolved. Takuto was relieved to see it.

"Oh yeah, I can use all sorts of spells too," Yu said. "You're familiar with *Brave Questers*, right? Then you should be good if I just explain the useful ones to you later, yeah?"

Takuto wanted to know as much as they were willing to disclose. Knowing what someone is capable of is sometimes a necessity, but never is it unnecessary.

Unfortunately, that was all they could do for today. The sky was turning red. The sun was close to setting.

I wanted to confirm the scale and power threshold of his magic, but I'll leave that for another day. Takuto decided to wrap up for the day and asked one last question about something he wanted confirmed now.

"Yeah, I'll ask any questions I might have about magic and anything else as it comes up. By the way, about your Original Character…this girl here—"

"Yes! I am my Master's slave! His number one slave!" The girl raised her hand enthusiastically. An impressive reaction.

"Ah, yeah," Takuto fumbled. "About your number one slave… what's her name? Is there a reason why you have never called her by name until now, Yu?"

Takuto felt like they had to clear this up sooner rather than later. He wasn't sure how to react if Yu had named her after his crush or something, but he vowed not to laugh at him…

"Er, I chose an embarrassing name, so can you let me keep it my little secret? I guess we could go with a nickname… How about… Ai?"

"Ouch, did you happen to go with a weird name at the time?" Takuto asked.

"AGH! God! WHY DIDN'T I GO WITH A MORE NORMAL NAME AT THE TIME?!" Yu lamented. "If only I had known! If only I had known it would come back to haunt me like thiiiiiis!"

Apparently, Yu had given his precious slave girl an unconventional and inconvenient name. He likely had his fetishes, seeing how adamant he was about keeping her fully decked out in a slave getup. The only problem was that he never foresaw a future where his Original Character would be exposed for all the world to see.

"Whatever is the matter, Maaaster? Is there something wrong with my name? I adore the name you gave me. After all, it's—Mmph! Mm, mm!"

Yu covered her mouth. "Don't say another word, Miss Ai! I'm always telling you that's the greatest sin of my middle-school years! Every time I hear it, I die a little on the inside! I'm serious. Please bear with the pet name! Okay?!"

I feel your pain, Takuto thought, sympathizing with him. He might have found himself in a similar situation if *Eternal Nations* had allowed the Hero units to be renamed. *I don't know what our relationship will be in the future, but I'll be nice to him for now.*

"Huh. I wonder what in the world the name could be. You seem to have some idea though, King Takuto…"

"Give the man a break, Atou. Pretending not to know is a form of kindness."

"I-I suppose…"

"I mean it. Pretending not to know is the number one way for no one to get hurt."

Yu had a polar opposite personality from Takuto, and was more the type he usually didn't get along with, but Takuto felt a sense of camaraderie with him when it came to these things.

"Ph-Phew. I feel like I just let you in on something incredibly humiliating, but I'm grateful you didn't comment, King Takuto… Alliances are awesome!" Yu exclaimed.

"Well, even if we weren't allies, I think it's only right not to comment on such things. All right, how about we get back on topic? Ultimately, the reason you proposed an alliance despite how powerful you are is because you were concerned about being overwhelmed by sheer numbers, right? You think it will be too tough for just the two of you against the world?"

"That's pretty much the gist of it. I don't need to absolutely annihilate my enemies to achieve my goal, but the same doesn't go for them. So, I was hoping to ally with whoever's goals don't interfere with mine."

I see. I think I understand the situation now. Takuto considered this revelation. *If what Yu says is true, then we need to be even more cautious of the Succubus Army. They're insisting this is an All-Faction Conference for peaceful negotiations, when it's really most likely just a ruse to ensnare us… Though the same could apply to Yu, too. Either way, it'll all become clear at the conference. I'm glad my doubts won't have to linger much past that.*

"I heard the Succubus Army has absorbed the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals and is building up a massive army," Takuto commented. "I can see why you'd be wary of them if they've ensnared the Saints and the Elves."

"Yeah, I hear the Succubus Army's Player has already teamed up with another Player," Yu said. "The Elf Saints are teamed up with

two Players. Going up against them is nightmare mode for a Solo Player with no army."

"Hold on, I've heard nothing about that," Takuto said, his tone and expression growing serious.

What the heck is this guy springing on me out of nowhere?! Takuto wanted to scream. Yu screwed up his face as if to say, "What? Did I do something wrong?" Did he really mean no harm by not sharing this sooner? *That's critical information, dude! You should've told me the moment you came asking to team up! Or at least after we've officially teamed up!*

Takuto kept his angry accusations to himself out of consideration for their still-fragile alliance. He also felt like it was his fault for failing to ask sooner. Truth was, they should have attempted to learn more about each other's situation earlier. But he'd avoided having any overly detailed discussions with Yu out of an abundance of caution. Now he was paying the price.

What was even more problematic was that Yu had no real sense of danger, and he seemed prepared to take responsibility for this monumental blunder with a casual apology.

"Huh. Did I forget to mention it? We're up against three Elf Saints and two Players, plus some naughty Succubus ladies. Crazy dangerous, huh?"

It's more than crazy dangerous. I nearly attended a conference hosted by a major tag-team of enemies without being prepared for it.

All of Takuto's preconceptions had been turned on their head. At first, he thought this alliance with Yu was a trap or scheme set by the RPG faction, but it turned out they were up against a rock and a hard place themselves.

Takuto heaved the biggest sigh. Not many people could cause him this much mental anguish. He had come to foolishly believe having allies was a wonderful thing after he allied with Phon'kaven, but it was looking more and more like Pepe was just a lucky first.

"Let me guess, you're the type to act on impulse?" Takuto couldn't help saying.

Maybe Yu had picked up on the sarcasm in his voice, or maybe he just realized the information he'd forgotten to share was actually crucial to their survival. Whatever the case, he began to panic, waving his hands in front of him and trying to cover for himself.

"Th-That's not true! Right, Ai?!"

"That's right! Master always acts with deep thought and great insight! Master is amazing! Um, I can't really pinpoint what about him is so amazing, but all I can say for sure is that he's amazing!"

"Thanks, Ai! Those words alone are enough to make me stronger than anyone!"

If words are enough to power you up, put some points toward your Intelligence please. Takuto strongly wished that could happen, but it seemed Ai's encouragement didn't have that effect.

Between Vittorio and Yu Kamimiyadera, there was a sudden uptick in people who gave Takuto a headache these days.

Isla…it seriously hurts to have lost you. In more ways than one.

The crazier ones would have been put in their place with Isla there to balance them out. And even if she couldn't completely rein them in, she would have struggled alongside Takuto. How he missed the sole Mynoghra Hero with a conscience.

"All right, let's head back to the meeting room and deep dive into this new information. I'll introduce you to the people from Phon'kaven too, so play nice with them," Takuto said.

Then again, if Isla was present, there was only one thing she would say to Takuto: "If you are truly my king, this should be a piece of cake for you."

Put another way, she'd want him to do his best as the great and mighty King of Ruin.

"Oooh! International introductions! Sounds awesome!"

"It is awesome, isn't it, Master?!"

"Mwahaha. Have you finally realized how great and awesome my king is? A king always thinks about his kingdom and sees two to three steps ahead!" Atou boasted.

It is what it is. I'll just have to put my best foot forward with the thought that Isla is watching over me. Takuto sighed as he watched the excited trio chatter away noisily. It would have been

great if he could have joined in on the fun, but this was another one of those situations where reality hadn't quite caught up to his determination yet.

Eterpedia

El-Nah Alliance of Elementals

Empire

Alignment: Holy・Evil
Commander: Chaste Witch Vagia
.....
Distinct Features: 《Forest》《Spirit》
《Corrupted》

NO IMAGE

Description

The El-Nah Alliance of Elementals is the empire of Elves who worship forests and spirits. They possess a powerful military thanks to their unique Spirit Artes and their affinity with the forest. They have strong defenses by means of the massive forest they live in and the support of the Spirits residing there. They also have powerful units known as Saints.

They are currently under the control of the Succubus Army led by Chaste Witch Vagia, drastically changing the empire's true nature.

Chapter 5: Colloquy

UTILIZING a body double opened up the ability for Takuto to go more places. This new tactic was none other than a gift from heaven to Takuto, who strove to err on the side of caution when there were enemies with unknown abilities lying in wait. He was going to make full use of this tactic and then some.

And so, Takuto was currently visiting the Phon'kaven capital of Crescent Moon. He put his new mobility to use by going straight to see Pepe in hopes of resolving the stagnant relations between their two nations.

"Hi there, Pepe. Long time no see. Sorry for suddenly dropping in. I wanted to talk to you in person," Takuto said.

"Don't worry about it, buddy! I'm always disappearing at random, so I'm good to talk until the sun sets!"

"I-I see. I know I shouldn't comment on another country's affairs, but try not to make your people worry too much," Takuto advised.

"No worries! It's all good!"

Just like Takuto, Pepe was the Commander of Phon'kaven. He wasn't as big of a target as Takuto, but his position still put him in danger. Whether he was self-aware or not, Takuto seriously worried about the boy being cool with casually conferring with the leader of another nation who showed up unannounced, even if they were allies. Setting aside that worry, Takuto decided to thank Pepe for all the things he had done for Mynoghra since the last time they had talked.

"Anyways, I wanted to thank you as the king of Mynoghra for your aid during our conflict with the Divine

Nation of Lenea. Your support was just what we needed. Thank you."

"Well, we owe you guys a lot for all you do for us. What you asked for was a small price to pay in return. The northerners are mean to us, so we were happy to prevent them from coming here too!"

"Not even you can befriend them, Pepe?"

Takuto was offering his official thanks and acknowledgment of their actions as the King of Mynoghra. It was only thanks to Phon'kaven holding military exercises in the borderlands that they were able to restrain a division of Lenea's Paladins during Mynoghra's conflict with the Divine Nation.

For Takuto, the battle with the TRPG forces was a close one that required speed and stealth, so Pepe's flashy maneuver was a helpful distraction. The original plan was for Phon'kaven to dispatch their army and take effective control of the borderlands, but they ended up ceding the land to Mynoghra.

Is it really okay for us to keep receiving and not giving much in return since Dragontan? Did we worsen our alliance with this arrangement? Takuto worried about all these things and then some, but once he pulled back the curtain, he found the reason lay elsewhere.

"By the way, how's the gun training and land cultivation going?" Takuto inquired.

"Right! That's it! That's what I've been wanting to thank you for!" Pepe exclaimed. "Those…Spirits of Ruin, or whatever they're called, that you lent us have been doing such a good job making Phon'kaven's lands more fertile by the day! Now we no longer have to spend a small fortune buying food from traveling merchants! Their looks leave a lot to be desired, but they're amazing regardless! So I'd love to talk business with you regarding that and similar matters, Takuto!"

The ability to cultivate barren land—that was why Phon'kaven ceded their newly acquired fertile borderlands to Mynoghra. What was the trick to cultivation? Putting the Earth Mana and Earth Military Magic to full-scale use.

Earth Military Magic was a highly effective magic that strengthened a nation domestically by enhancing and improving its lands. The Dark Continent was rife with barren terrain where crops struggled to grow, but by using this magic, it was possible to transform the barren land into fertile land where crops could grow.

Phon'kaven currently had its hands so full cultivating the land around its capital and cities; having to deal with a newly acquired territory far detached from the rest of its territories was nothing more than an unwanted burden. And so Phon'kaven came to the consensus that it would be more profitable to sell the territory they had obtained amid the chaos of war to the neighboring Mynoghra.

They made off with a lot of additional guns and ammunition in the deal, but I suppose that's cheap when bartering for land. There are only major disadvantages if we fall out with Phon'kaven now. It's far more beneficial to keep them friendly and powerful, since they aren't tied to any Players.

"I'm happy taking things in this direction. So why don't we get this all put into an actual contract during the official negotiations later? Do you mind doing the legwork on your side to make that happen, Pepe?"

"Happily! It looks like things are still tight between our countries!"

Both Commanders nodded with satisfaction. Takuto was pleased that his relationship with Phon'kaven remained strong and that his various concerns had been resolved. Pepe was happy that Phon'kaven was continuing its lucky streak and that there were still many opportunities on the horizon to further increase its national power.

"Glad to hear it," Takuto said. **"Things are getting tense across the continent, after all. It's best to get along with who we can, while we can."**

Both nations adhered to this policy and had no ulterior motives at the time.

"You're talking about the big lady from the other day, right? She had huge boobies!"

Their conversation moved on to a new topic. Takuto wanted to gather more information on this front, so it was a blessing that Pepe brought it up first. He wanted to find out how Phon'kaven and the other Dark Continent nations had taken the recent proposal.

"I agree. Everything about her was…huge. What are your thoughts on her proposal, Pepe?" Takuto prompted.

"I would love to be friends, but who knows? I plan to send an envoy at least!"

"An envoy, huh?"

"I want to be cautious of interactions with the northerners. I don't have a personal issue with the north, but there are a lot of people on this continent who despise them. I'm sure the other nations feel the same."

It was a surprisingly passive and unmotivated response. Or maybe it was the right call considering Phon'kaven's situation. As a neutral nation located far from El-Nah, there wasn't much benefit for Phon'kaven to proactively march into their lands for a conference. And from what Pepe said, the other neutral nations had taken a similar stance.

"But I will say while most aren't all too interested in this All-Faction Conference thingamajig, I believe there are many people who want to speak with Mynoghra's Takuto Ira."

Oh? Takuto masked his surprise about this subtle proposal. It was easy to get the wrong idea with how amiably he was able to converse with Pepe, but Mynoghra was an evil empire through and through. They merely kept relations with Phon'kaven because it benefited them.

Why would the other neutral nations want to cozy up to Mynoghra? Avoiding the embodiment of evil tends to be one of the basest instincts of living creatures. Phon'kaven was the exception to the rule because they had a common enemy in the Demon Lord's Army that resulted in their alliance.

Hm? Have even the neutral nations with territory in the remote hinterlands begun to panic? I should see what else I can learn.

"They want to speak with *me*, eh? That reminds me, you've had a fair amount of contact with the other countries

on this continent, right? This is an excellent opportunity to hear your opinions on them, Pepe. Care to tell me?"

Takuto had gathered some intelligence on the Dark Continent nations. However, many of their capitals were located even farther from Mynoghra than Phon'kaven's, and they were insular countries to start with, so his investigations hadn't netted much yet.

He planned to leave them alone unless they opened a line of communication like Phon'kaven had, but as Mynoghra continued to grow, so too would the opportunities for first contact. If nothing else, the Succubus Army's preposterous All-Faction Conference increased the odds of it.

Takuto organized the information he had about the other countries and tried to reconcile it with Pepe's explanation.

"Good question. Let's start with the Maritime Nation of Sutharland," Pepe began. "It's a Dwarven country that's grown in strength mainly through fishing in the coastal waters and maritime trade."

"I've heard of them, but a Dwarven maritime nation really doesn't fit my image of dwarves. I've always had the impression that dwarves were all about mining and technology," Takuto commented.

"I have no idea what kind of image you have established, Takuto, but it seems Sutharland was originally an inland country. But as you've seen, this continent is as barren as they come, so it seems their search for abundance eventually led them to the seas."

Heh. Takuto kept his awe to himself. It was his first time hearing of a dwarven maritime nation, so it upended his image of them, but that made Sutharland even more intriguing. Seeing as he'd never heard of any of their people coming to Dragontan as merchants or anything else, they seemed to be a relatively insular and obstinate people. At least that part fit his preestablished image of dwarves.

"But your impression of them being into technology might not be that far off the mark. Every single one of their ships is huge and the coolest! Rumor has it they've even established trade with other continents."

“Ooh. Now that’s interesting.”

Takuto had exaggerated his surprise, but he was genuinely concerned. If they were technologically advanced enough to have established trade with other continents, then it was possible they were a much larger nation than he’d thought. They were definitely bigger than Phon’kaven. But it was also a fact that they weren’t big enough to be a threat. If they were that large of an empire, they wouldn’t have been driven to the coastal areas, and it wouldn’t be strange if they were at war with Qualia or El-Nah in search of richer lands…

Takuto was starting to have a clearer picture of the Dark Continent and the neutral nations that called it home.

“Also, there are a couple of smaller nations that are city-states where the one city itself counts as a whole country. One’s multiracial like us, and the other is a country made up of people who committed crimes or lost in political struggles in the Northern Continent. Both are much punier than us!” Pepe declared.

It sounded like there were about five countries in total on the Dark Continent: Sutharland, Phon’kaven, the two city-states, and Mynoghra. As they were constantly persecuted by the Lawful Continent to the north, they lacked national power and population numbers in comparison.

Sutharland’s technology and maritime trade were attractive, but Takuto couldn’t care less about the city-states. If this were an *Eternal Nations*’ session, they probably would be destroyed before he knew it or end up destroyed as a test run for new units.

Still, they could be useful. It’s too early to tell.

“I see. Thanks for telling me. Also, don’t go calling them puny in front of anyone else, okay?” Takuto advised.

“Everybody, including the puny countries, are immensely curious about Mynoghra,” Pepe said, buckling down on his use of puny. “It’s been especially encouraging for them to see how friendly of a relationship you have with us. Why don’t we all get together for a meal sometime? I want to eat your food again, buddy!”

“Well, I’ll happily invite you over for a meal anytime, but seeing as you’re suggesting it, I take it you’ve already

laid the groundwork for this to happen?"

Pepe was really pushing the point. Takuto had a feeling Pepe was making a request here. As it was, Pepe dropped everything to meet with Takuto when he showed up. His excuse that he always wandered off wasn't a lie per se, but there was definitely a solid reason for Phon'kaven's de facto Commander to make this much time outside of official hours for Takuto. And now that reason was made clear—Pepe's greatest concern was what the future held for Mynoghra and the neutral nations.

"More like all the countries I just mentioned have been hopping on my back, clamoring for me to set up an opportunity for them to meet with Mynoghra as soon as possible. They're actually actively waiting for your reply, buddy! If you hadn't dropped by today, I was planning to go see you myself."

"Hmm…"

"Everybody's desperate. It seems like the big-boobed lady left a huge impact on them, and not just with the sheer size of her boobs."

"Ah, that's why…"

It all made sense now. There was a simple reason why he hadn't realized it sooner: he'd become desensitized to this stuff with all the crazy things happening around Mynoghra because of the Players. To Takuto, the Succubus's little act was just a flashy event, but the same couldn't be said for the normal people who had been living peaceful, albeit poor, lives on this continent.

"There is no magic I know of that would allow you to project yourself directly onto the entire continent," Pepe said. "Same for the others. And even if it did exist, it can't be easy to use. That's why I think everybody's in a right panic."

In other words, from the neutral nations' point of view, they were being summoned by an unknown force with mysterious and powerful abilities. They didn't know what was lying in wait for them, so they wanted to use Phon'kaven to make a connection with Mynoghra, who possessed equally mysterious and powerful abilities.

I guess this is a case of whether it's better the devil you know than the devil you don't.

From his experience leading a nation in real life—and not just in a game from his past life—Takuto sympathized with the leaders of the neutral nations who were likely so stressed out by this situation it was burning holes in their stomachs. But he had neither the need nor the obligation to concern himself with their wellbeing.

After all, Takuto was Mynoghra's Commander and a game player who only pursued what was in his and his empire's best interests.

"What do you think, Takuto? Isn't this the deal of a lifetime?! Don't let this opportunity slip you by!"

"Pepe, you come up with the worst ideas…"

"But don't you love this kind of stuff, Takuto?"

In his own way, Pepe was also thinking up ways to take advantage of the situation. Takuto was terribly fond of his innocent approach to things. Childlike nature is just another form of mercilessness.

For the next few hours, Pepe and Takuto talked enthusiastically about the future of this continent. No one knew the exact details, but the exhilarated laughter they shared throughout the exchange told the whole story.

Eterpedia

Spirit of Ruin

Magic Unit

Strength: 7 Move: 1

《Ruin Affinity +1》《Evil》

※ Unlocked with Six Major Elements

Description

~Inevitably called a spirit due to its nature, though it's utterly hideous.~

The Spirit of Ruin is a Magic Unit unlocked by researching the Six Major Elements.

They aren't any different from regular Mages, but since they have an affinity for Ruin Mana, their combat abilities are strengthened by increasing the amount of Ruin Mana.

And since they have an aptitude for all magic attributes, you can have them learn Military Magic depending on your strategy.

Chapter 6: Travel

THE hectic yet fulfilling Domestic Affairs time passed Takuto by in the blink of an eye. In its place, the day of the All-Faction Conference was fast approaching. Naturally, it was taking place in unfamiliar enemy territory. Arriving early with plenty of time to spare was crucial to gathering information.

Takuto was currently traveling to the meeting location indicated in the missive delivered to Mynoghra by the Succubus Army's envoy. Three companions joined him on this journey. The first was his confidant, Atou. Followed by Hero Yu and Slave Girl Ai—the RPG duo he'd formed a temporary alliance with.

Although it bears mentioning that this Takuto was actually his Botchling body double, and Atou was actually Vittorio in disguise. They hadn't informed the RPG duo about this arrangement, and saw no need to. After all, the real Takuto was back at Mynoghra's Palace concentrating on controlling the Botchling and giving instructions to Vittorio.

The party of four was in the northwesternmost part of Mynoghra's newly acquired region of Seldoch. The central mountain range dividing the Lawful Continent ended there, making it a key interchange between Qualia and El-Nah. A simple, paved road ran from there all the way to the Elven Forest looming in the distance, subtly attesting to the importance of this route.

But no matter how vital a transportation hub this location once was, it no longer showed any signs of its former traffic. As part of Mynoghra's domain, located on the border with a country dominated by Succubi, it was now one of the most dangerous regions. Any merchant with common sense would hesitate even to mention it, let alone go near it. Which was why Takuto's party of four was the only

ones walking down the road that was easily wide enough for several carriages to pass through.

The voice of the King of Ruin echoed through the quiet, abandoned trade route. **"From here on out, we are entirely in their domain. Well, this is supposed to be a meeting for all the factions, hosted by the Succubus Army. I doubt they will spring a surprise attack on us right off the bat, but we should stay on guard just in case."**

"Yeah!" Yu agreed heartily. "We're traveling as a small party this time, so we can always just flee if we come under attack. I have more than a few escape spells in my arsenal. I'm sure we'll be fine!"

"That's right! That's right! No enemy is a match for Master!" Ai cheered.

"I hope so. Anyway, we're supposed to meet up with our guide a little farther in, so let's go on foot up to there," Takuto said.

Their party consisted of the bare minimum number of people. Since he didn't know what lay in wait, Takuto didn't want to endanger a single Dark Elf. It might've seemed strange with Takuto and Atou attending alone, but it appeared more natural with Yu and Ai accompanying them. Everyone would view it as an agreement to participate in pairs.

"But, King Takuto, what exactly is the intention behind this supposed All-Faction Conference? Whether it's a trap or a setup to foster friendship, they seem to be going a tad overboard…"

"Inviting all the factions has the advantage of speeding things up, whatever the reason. This is one of those things where we won't know the answer until we pull back the curtain and take a look…"

Vittorio had posed his question disguised as Atou. He was so frighteningly skilled at pretending to be Atou that it left Takuto feeling uncomfortable.



Then again, Atou must've had some extremely complicated feelings about it herself. Takuto hoped she would forgive him for utilizing such distasteful tactics for political means.

At any rate, they had formed an odd party made up of two men and two women, traveling the road to El-Nah that hugged the central mountains on the outskirts of Mynoghra's Seldoch region.

Feeling the gentle breeze caress his skin, Takuto scanned his surroundings for threats and spoke to Yu. He wanted to share information while they still could.

"By the way, Yu, you said that you can't get along with the Succubus faction. I remember you mentioning they had attacked you. I know it's a little late to ask, but would you mind telling me more about that incident?"

He should have asked sooner, but Takuto had been unsure about his relationship with Yu, so he couldn't bring himself to ask until now. Perhaps it was because a part of him still couldn't shake off his preconceived notion that Players were destined to fight each other. Or maybe he'd just determined it would be too troublesome if Yu sought information of equal value in return if he bombarded him with questions.

Not even Takuto was capable of always reading what move his opponent would take next, nor did he always draw the correct conclusions. But he was capable of—and willing to—do things over. So he decided to resolve this burning question now that they had gotten to know each other better.

Well, I doubt I'll learn anything too important… Takuto figured Yu's answer would fall within what he'd already theorized had happened, but it didn't hurt to ask.

It could be crippling if it turned out he let a vital piece of information slip him by just because he didn't ask. As it was, Yu already had a rotten record of not revealing crucial information since he forgot to tell Takuto that another Player had teamed up with the Succubus Queen.

"Hm? Yeah, I guess… It should be fine now that we've come this far together. You know Kigou?"

“Wasn’t that the name of an already defeated Player? I learned about it through a general World Message, though.”

The abrupt announcement from the Succubus faction had left a lasting impression, but another important event had occurred around the same time. A World Message had flashed into Takuto’s mind, notifying him that a Player named Masato Kigou had been terminated. Since the notice referenced a Witch and Player that Takuto was unfamiliar with, he assumed the incident took place far away from Mynoghra. But Yu mentioning Kigou’s name suggested he was somehow related.

The answer to Takuto’s questions slipped with surprising ease from Yu’s lips.

“Huh. So that’s how it works. Guess that means every Player knows that he’s been eliminated from the game? Crap…”

“Don’t tell me…”

“Yup. I killed Kigou.”

A beat of silence. Tension ran between them but passed in an instant.

Takuto steadied his breathing, then slowly shifted his gaze from the long road ahead to Yu. **“Why?”** he asked.

He was not asking “why” he would do something so inhumane as kill. Takuto wanted to determine the intent behind the killing and the events that had led up to it.

He didn’t think this overly friendly duo was capable of killing off another faction for no reason—something they should be avoiding in general as peace seekers. Of course, they could be capable of something like that if everything until now had been a lie. But Takuto had a feeling something drove him to it.

“I guess you could say they launched a one-sided attack against me, and I didn’t have a choice,” Yu answered. “There was a misunderstanding between us, but we operated on completely different frequencies from the start, so we would’ve clashed eventually anyway. I think you probably would’ve hated his type too, King Takuto.”

“Care to tell me what type, just for reference?”

"The type that thinks men are stepping stones and women are trophies? Deluded bastards who think they're special, and that everyone else is a dull, foolish bottom feeder they will happily sacrifice for their goals."

Ick, Takuto cringed. He hated that type the most. He didn't hate them for being self-righteous, egocentric pricks—he hated them for being utter morons.

"Oh yeah, there's that one guy every so often who gets a taste of power and runs wild. The unthinking nitwit who wins millions in the lottery and somehow ends up burning through it all in a few years and lands themselves in debtors' prison."

"I mean, I honestly wanted nothing to do with him, either," Yu said. "Players are, like, in possession of some insane powers, right? I'm not saying *Brave Questers* is inferior to other games, but it's terrifying when you don't know what they will—or can—do."

Takuto nodded. He understood. He understood painfully well. He'd experienced the nightmare for himself more than once, and one of those times was inflicted by the not-so-inferior *Brave Questers*.

Takuto no longer underestimated the other Players. If Yu operated by the same understanding, then he would've never considered going after another Player. Especially when his sole goal was to enjoy living happily with Ai. The disadvantages far outweighed the advantages.

"I feel you there. I'm painfully aware of the threats posed by the game mechanics each Player has at their disposal. So, was it just a bad case of luck that Kigou came down on you and you couldn't get away?" Takuto asked.

"Ai caught Kigou's eye in the worst way, man. Then that prick had the nerve to say, 'I'll let you go if you leave that woman behind,' all while he ogled her like a piece of meat. As a man, you've got no choice but to fight when someone says that about your woman. Don't you agree, Your Majesty?"

Was Kigou a ham actor in a school play? Or some hackneyed villain in a third-rate fanfiction? Whatever the case, Takuto

sympathized with Yu. Kigou's actions sounded so contrived it was easier to believe Yu was making it up, but Takuto knew that type of scum truly did exist in reality.

"I won't deny it. But I'm glad it seems like you were able to terminate him for good."

"Yeah. I made sure to deliver the final killing blow. I didn't have much choice, since I was afraid letting him go would just land me an even bigger enemy hellbent on revenge."

Then we've got no problem. All is well. Takuto's impression of Yu improved when he realized the Hero didn't leave any loose ends by offering his enemy half-hearted and misplaced pity. Just like how there were reckless idiots who let power go to their head, there were also idiots who ineptly apply a false sense of justice or show sympathy, only to panic when their decisions blow up in their face later.

I'm glad Yu's not that type. If he hadn't dealt the finishing blow, we'd have another problem to worry about. But wait… Takuto suddenly reconsidered that train of thought. Something niggled at him. Lines began to crease his brow. *Something doesn't add up here. I asked him why he's at odds with the Succubus Army. Why did he bring up a Player he's already finished off?*

While Takuto was baffled by the small thorn of incongruity, Yu continued his story.

"So, here's where it gets bad. Kigou's game just had to be a Trading Card Game of all things."

Trading Card Games—a type of card game in which players compete against each other using cards with various illustrations and effects. Gameplay in TCGs is typically turn-based, with each player starting with a shuffled deck, then drawing and playing cards in turn to achieve a win condition before their opponent, often by reducing their opponent's hit points by using cards to summon monsters, cast spells, or attack with special effects.

Trading Card Games' strategic gameplay, and the rarity and collectability of the cards themselves, has attracted many players from all walks of life. It's a distinct and passionate genre, with

tournaments held all over the world, and rare cards that can sometimes be worth enough to buy a multimillion-dollar mansion.

Takuto was somewhat familiar with TCGs too. He never could afford to buy a pricey rare card, nor did he build decks to compete with, but he enjoyed looking up cards online and watching tournaments. He had a smattering of knowledge on the genre. Of the countless TCGs out there, he listed off a few that he knew.

"TCGs, huh… Was it *Animetic Universe*? *Blood and Crystal*?"

"What was it again?" Yu pondered. "It was something-something-Kings."

"*Seven God Kings*? I'm personally not a fan because it's so deeply associated with finance speculation. I'm a big fan of the gameplay and setting, though…"

One game came to mind: *Seven God Kings*, colloquially known as SGK. It's unique even among TCGs. The cards themselves have acquired commercial value, and as such, many of them are by far the most expensive out there. At one time, wealthy people were so crazy about collecting the cards that it was rumored they were storing SGK cards in their safes instead of gold bars.

As someone who found value in the game itself, Takuto was bitter about the sharp rise in prices and the popularity boom that had nothing to do with the actual game. He was frankly displeased to hear Yu mention it.

We might've come up against SGK characters, huh? Glad we didn't have to, since it has a lot of unbalanced magic and monsters, but I'm surprised Yu took them out. I would've liked to have seen a SGK character in the flesh at least once, but I suppose that's out of the question now.

The *Seven God Kings* Player, Masato Kigou, had already been eliminated from this world. In which case, his game should've been eliminated as well.

What kind of background did Kigou have? What was his Witch like? Takuto was curious, but their time had come and gone, and there was nothing he could do about it now.

"Woo-hoo! You know it! What a relief, man! Now I can stop worrying about not knowing anything about it!" Yu whooped.

"…Hm? What do you mean? Kigou was eliminated, wasn't he?"

The warning alarms that had muted with his interest in the *Seven God Kings* came blaring back on. Something damning was going on in the background. And his so-called ally was about to make what that was clear. Sweat trickled down the forehead of Takuto's body double and his real body in the Accursed Lands.

"Yeaaah, about that…" Yu hemmed and hawed. "It seems when I defeated Kigou, his deck somehow remained in this world, ahaha! And then the Succubi ladies made off with it!"

"You freaking idiot!!"

Takuto nearly snapped. Actually, judging by his furious tone, he did snap. As someone who spoke relatively politely to everyone, this was a rare case of him using slang and raising his voice. That just went to show how shaken he was by this devastating news. Yu should be grateful he didn't piss him off enough to cuss him out.

"I'm sorry, man! I'm so sorry! I mean, I thought it'd disappear! That it'd be done and gone when I defeated him! Then, for some reason, the cards he was holding just fell to the ground! I was thinking, 'Oh, it's a trading card, so is that how it works?,' when the Succubus scooped it up!"

"I-I'm terribly sorry! It's all my fault!" Ai interjected. "A Succubus lady nearly captured me, so Master prioritized rescuing me instead! That's why he couldn't think about going after the cards. And by the time we realized it, they ran off with them…"

Yu and Ai apologized profusely with tears misting their eyes. This wasn't a matter that could just be brushed off because they were kind enough to apologize.

"Okay, let me get this straight. Does this mean the Succubus faction is actually made up of the Succubi and Elven Armies, three Elf Saints, two Players and two Witches, and to top it all off, they even have the freaking SGK system at their disposal?!" Takuto roared.

"R-Right you are…ahaha! When you put it like that, sounds like we're majorly screwed! Let's treasure this alliance of ours forevermore!!!"

"Damn right! Don't you dare betray me! I'm not kidding!"

"I-I won't! Don't betray me either, King Takuto!"

"How the hell am I going to betray you under these circumstances?!"

Crap. We're screwed. Royally screwed. It's very possible the enemy has far more powerful forces than I anticipated. Growing pissed off with the breeze that remained gentle despite his turmoil, Takuto racked his mind to recall what he knew about the *Seven God Kings'* system.

In the Seven God Kings*, cards require mana with the corresponding element to be played. Conversely, without mana, nothing can be done. …But wait! This world has Dragon Vein Mines!* Eternal Nations *can use them, so it wouldn't be strange if the* SGK *system could use them as well.*

All the pieces began to fit perfectly together.

Since the *Seven God Kings* is a game primarily designed for players to duel against each other, it specializes in individual battles, similar to RPGs, and is weak against sheer numbers. On the other hand, individual battles allow for complex, strategic moves, making it difficult to counter your opponent's tactics. After all, there are a ton of abilities and spells that can be used to directly attack the opposing player.

You would be devoured on the spot if you let your guard down for even a second.

Counterspells, giant-killing, one-turn kills, endless combos… There are as many strategies as there are cards in your deck. Such was the nature of Trading Card Games.

We're in deep. Real deep. I know why the Succubi are so fixated on El-Nah now. A Dragon Vein Mine must exist somewhere in their vast territory. There's no way of knowing how many they have, but if they can dig up at least two, then it should be possible to

create an infinite summon combo with a mana-producing card! … Damn it all!

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!" Takuto let out a voiceless scream.

Watching him suffer, Atou whispered beside him with an enraptured expression and voice. "Hehehe. Things are starting to get exciting. Your Atou is truly looking forward to how you pull through this one, King Takuto."

Atou encouraged him with an ear-to-ear smile that the real her had never shown him before. Takuto couldn't even glare at her—at the Vittorio inside of her.

Meanwhile, Takuto's reaction seemed to have alerted Yu to the danger at last. His face was whiter than a sheet as he repeatedly muttered, "Crap, crap, crap."

"Oh no, Master. Please do your best. Your Ai believes in you!"

"Please do your very best, King Takuto~♪!"

The two girls cheered on their masters, one sounding distraught, the other delighted. The masters in question were too shaken to register what they had said. The RPG Hero and the King of Ruin writhed about all too pathetically for their lofty titles.

The Seven God Kings Tier List and Rankings

Welcome to the world of the Seven God Kings!

The Seven God Kings is a trading card game published by ■■ Company.
Currently on its 11th edition, there are thousands of cards and endless strategies.
It has been translated into every language, and tournaments are held around the clock.
This website mainly publishes the performance rankings of each card and the latest trading prices.

Fascinating characters and an exciting world are waiting for you!
It's time for you to battle with the Seven God Kings too!

Chapter 7: Vixens

APART from that one distressing incident, where the importance of implementing HORENSO—report, communicate, and consult—at all times was thoroughly reinforced in Takuto, their journey was going about as smoothly as could be. Takuto's party had safely entered the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals—Succubi controlled territory—with the guidance of their Succubus escorts, whom they had joined up with near the border to Mynoghra. From there, they traveled on foot to the nearest Elven town—now a Succubus town.

"So this is an Elven city ruled by Succubi, eh?" Takuto remarked.

The townspeople shot him curious and cautious looks. Feeling their gazes boring into him, Takuto also observed his surroundings without reserve. Not that he could see much beyond the towering trees. Between the intricate forest and the three-dimensional framework of the town built into it, he definitely would have gotten lost without a guide.

As this was an Elven town occupied by Succubi, it was built in the middle of a forest. Much of its foundation and design was based on Elven culture. Many of the buildings gave Takuto déjà vu. Of course they would, what with the Elves and Dark Elves being closely related races. Their treetop buildings shared many of the same features. The only differences were the architectural designs and the color scheme. The Elven buildings tended to have white and green color schemes. Sunlight filtered through the trees, gently illuminating the town.

It was the kind of townscape you would get if you reversed the alignment of Mynoghra's capital in the Accursed Lands. Well, except for one standout feature…

"W-Wowzers! S-Sexy ladies everywhere…" Yu let out a cry of joy.

Succubi—a race that didn't belong in an Elven nation—dominated every corner. They sized Takuto's party up with heady gazes, flashing them suggestive smiles. They were provocative enough to get Takuto blushing in the Accursed Lands, and he was only looking at them through the Botchling. It must have been unbearable for Yu, who was there in person. Even now he was preening like the young man he was, flashing awkward smiles back at the ladies.

But the young man's fleeting fantasy came to a swift end.

"M-A-S-T-E-R Y-UUU!"

"Eeep! Sorry, Miss Ai! I swear I'm not ogling them! I'm innocent! Innocent, I say!!"

It's like a scene straight out of a shounen rom-com, Takuto idly observed. He was also relieved to see it. It'd be downright terrible if Yu were seduced by the Succubi and fumbled right out of the gate. Takuto was grateful to Ai for acting as the ultimate cockblock by pinching Yu's cheeks.

Ai's strength was still an unknown. According to Yu, she served primarily as a support fighter. But regardless of her combat prowess, Takuto hoped she'd continue serving as Yu's conscience, keeping him grounded.

As his allies played out a scene from the completely wrong genre, Takuto examined his surroundings as Mynoghra's King and an *Eternal Nations'* Player.

A city reflects the nature of its nation.

Did they treat their citizens like slaves? Or pamper and manage them like sheltered young ladies? This reality is reflected in the expressions and health of the people and is not easy to fake.

In that respect, Takuto's observations of this Succubi town left him feeling a bit taken aback. At his side, Vittorio-disguised-as-Atou seemed to share his reaction.

"This is unexpected. I thought the town would have collapsed into depravity and decadence, but it seems to be fully functioning on the surface."

"You thought so too, Atou? I thought for sure that the men would've been sucked dry husks or turned into livestock, but there's no signs of that happening. Granted, there are a whole lotta couples who are going all in on public displays of affection…"

"They do seem extremely lax in the public morals department, but it doesn't quite align with what we know to be Succubi nature."

The Elves appeared happy; they didn't give the impression they were being abused under the occupation. On the contrary, there were many young male Elf and Succubus couples, romantically strolling the streets while holding hands. There were even a couple of middle-aged Elf men being cornered by several Succubi that were trying to woo them. Some couples were even showing off their passions for each other so openly in public, Takuto had to avert his eyes. Still, while their public displays of affection were on the extreme side, they hadn't fallen into outright disorder and depravity.

They're being carefully managed. Takuto's caution toward the Succubus Army jumped the rung to an even higher level.

Their attention drawn by Takuto's conversation, one of the Succubi silently accompanying Takuto's party as a guide finally spoke up.

"This is only the natural outcome, guests. Our goal as Succubi is not exploitation, but prosperous coexistence. We didn't come to this world to act like locust."

A slender Succubus with an icy aura. She lacked curves for a Succubus, but that actually added to her sex appeal. Her name was Freesia. She had introduced herself as one of their escorts, and from her appearance and the way she conducted herself, she seemed to be someone of a high position. Unlike the Succubi in town, who had similar looks, she stood out as unique.

She reminds me of the frigid career woman type, Takuto thought after hearing her haughty explanation.

"Do you believe that's the will of your queen?" he asked.

Prosperous coexistence was a grand old slogan, but what they were doing was similar to the relationship between Mynoghra and the Dark Elves. Takuto wanted to know what the leaders were

thinking, including their thoughts on relationships with other civilizations.

"Yessie, Queen Vagia always says, 'You mustn't overlook the pitiful ones.' In other words, our ultimate goal as Succubi is to live happily ever after having sex together with everybodyyy."

Their second Succubus escort answered his query.



Her name was Goliath. In direct contrast with Freesia, this petite Succubus had a cutesy aura. Perhaps she was on the timid side, because she seemed somewhat tentative as she joined the conversation. She certainly didn't live up to her name…

"…I see," Takuto said.

The escort Succubi were assigned to Takuto's party on direct orders from the Succubus Queen—Witch Vagia. Takuto didn't know her intentions, but she must have held a very important position to be able to act as the empire's Commander. And since these Succubi also held important positions within the Succubus Empire and acted on the orders of their queen, then their words had legitimacy.

Setting aside their ultimate goal, Takuto was glad to have learned what motivated the Succubus faction at this stage. But he also understood he was facing down the barrel of one of his worst-case scenarios.

The Elves had been absorbed by the Succubus Army all too easily. As things stood, he wouldn't be able to instigate the Elves to revolt and carry out guerrilla warfare within the country to weaken it. He had always considered the possibility of them being subsumed, but the Elves being fully assimilated into the Succubus faction was a worst-case scenario.

"Prosperous coexistence… D-Does that mean the Elves living in this country get to have raunchy sex with hot Succubus every single da— OW! Ow, ow, owww! St-Stop! Stop it, Miss Ai! I'm sorry!"

"You stupid, perverted Master!" Ai cried. Then she muttered, "Seriously, if you just said something, I would do those things for you, Master…"

"Wha? What did you just say?"

"Nothing!"

The useless RPG duo was having a blast on their own as usual.

What are those idiots doing? Takuto swallowed the insults that were on the tip of his tongue. Even if they were idiots, they were power horses as individual units. Both Yu and Ai had admitted that they sucked at strategizing. Takuto just had to take all the thinking onto himself.

The right man for the right job. It's more important to assign people to the tasks they can do rather than focus on what they can't.

In that sense, Takuto still had a job to do. Collecting as much information as possible before the All-Faction Conference. He had a strong feeling that something was off about this occupied town, and he believed figuring out what that was would be key to cutting his opponent off at the heel.

"Come to think of it, I don't see any women. Elf women, I mean, not Succubus… What happened to them?" Takuto asked.

"Hm? Enjoying the yuri life, cultivating themselves, and stuff? Living for their hobbies and taming petsss?" Goliath drawled.

Wow, they're really living it up, aren't they?! Takuto screamed on the inside. Actually, his real body back in the Accursed Lands ended up shouting the words out loud.

Given the nature of Succubi, they should only be interested in men. Since there were no Incubi around to feed on women, Takuto assumed the Elven women were in a tricky position. However, contrary to his expectations, the Elven women were simply elsewhere, and the Succubi were doing what they could to keep them happy. The Succubus Queen's policy was for everyone to live happily ever after together, and it was looking more and more like that was more than just empty lip service.

"Fortunately, the Elven women have come to terms with their situation," Freesia explained. "Of course, there are some who can't accept reality. They have formed a political activist group and are holding daily demonstrations outside the council building to release their pent-up frustrations."

"I-I see…"

"I can see the Elves are being well cared for. But if I may ask, why did you resort to invasion tactics when you are willing to be so considerate of other races, like the Elves? You could have founded your own country in some empty territory and used your beauty and charm to lure in immigrants," Vittorio-Atou asked, continuing the

queries in Takuto's place. He must've assumed Takuto was temporarily out of action from the astounded look on his face.

Vittorio jumping in here was a huge help to Takuto. While he had better insight than Vittorio, there were plenty of things he overlooked. Being able to tackle the problem together with Vittorio would help him gather a more varied selection of information. Vittorio's question just now was a perfect example of that. Takuto also wanted to delve deeper into that topic, but was afraid asking too many questions would make them clam up. They were more likely to answer Atou, who hadn't said much.

Well, if what they've said so far is anything to go off of, I have a feeling it's going to be another absurd reason. Vagia seems to have a rather comedic personality. And looking at the rest of the Succubi here, I'm guessing they came from a gag game. It'd make sense they'd avoid unnecessary death if they do.

Takuto was starting to get a rough idea of who he was up against. If nothing else, he was narrowing down the options.

But then the two Succubi scrunched up their faces like they couldn't comprehend the question. This wasn't the look of someone who didn't understand the phrasing or wasn't allowed to answer. It was the dumbfounded look of hearing a concept for the first time. Of being faced with an idea beyond comprehension.

"Oh dear," Vittorio-Atou said. "Was the question too difficult? I am asking why you chose to *invade* El-Nah. If you could have achieved the same result, wouldn't you have preferred to take a more moderate approach first?"

Even with Vittorio's elucidation, the two Succubi remained baffled. They even exchanged glances this time, seeking in each other how they could possibly answer this query.

It was at this point that Takuto realized his opponent did not have simple and clear-cut circumstances, but that they were operating according to their own distinct rules and concepts.

After a few long beats of silence, the two Succubi answered in a way that seemed as though they were trying to insist their reasoning was correct.

"No, that's incorrect," Freesia said. "We never even considered it."

"Expanding is the correct path for the livinggg."

"I see what your logic is now. My query was unreasonable. My apologies," Vittorio-Atou said, ending the conversation. It seemed Vittorio had nothing more to ask of them.

Takuto stifled a sigh. It was now clear that it would be impossible to find a compromise between the two empires at this point.

Now I see. This is a tough one.

At the start, the two Succubi had pointed to themselves and claimed that they were not locusts. But if they harbored no qualms whatsoever about their excessive need for expansion and proliferation, their claims rang hollow.

Is their ecology closer to that of an insect? More in line with the hive-minded ants and bees? And to make matters worse, they're the chimera-type that assimilates others to expand their forces… Reminds me of the type of creatures that infiltrate spaceships in science-fiction horror movies. Eugh.

Takuto shifted his gaze to the traffic in town. The Elves and Succubi looked happy at first glance. But to Takuto, the scene felt like a temporary dream shown to victims inside the stomach of some great, unknown beast.

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THE rest of the journey went peacefully. They had stopped at two towns along the way. Neither were all that big. They were similar in size and population to Dragontan. Stopping to rest wasn't a problem—the real ordeal was the Succubi's intense attempts to seduce the men and crawl into their beds at night. Even those nights turned out uneventful, thanks to the stern warnings from their escorts, which scared off the others. Takuto tried to view the ordeal in a positive light, since it gave him insight into Succubi behavior.

Unfortunately for Yu, he had a little incident that strained his relationship with Ai for a time. Seeing as they quickly made up and

were back to their usual flirting, the Succubi's temptations seemed to have only added a little spice to their relationship and not much else.

Though Takuto was relieved that the trip was peaceful, he knew that the more uneventful things were now, the worse the fallout would be, so he remained vigilant.

Several days had passed since they entered the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals. The Elven and Succubus nation was covered in forests and woodland, making it difficult to pinpoint their exact location, but judging from the distance they had walked, they had roughly reached the middle of the territory. At long last, they had reached Khan-Nah, the former Elven capital, now ruled by Queen Vagia of the Succubi.

Now the game begins for real, Takuto thought. *I'm looking forward to seeing what they have to say and what grand agenda they have in store.*

The Elemental City of Khan-Nah. The Elven empire had a council-based government run by representatives from each clan that made up their alliance. Strictly speaking, they had no capital city. Instead, they treated Khan-Nah as a capital of sorts for convenience, since it was where the World Tree was located—a giant tree that served as the cornerstone of their nation. Of course, the city was El-Nah's largest in terms of size and population, so it essentially acted as capital in everything but name.

The trees made it difficult to gauge the true scale of the city, but it had significantly more traffic and much older trees than any of the towns they had visited so far. More than anything else, the sheer number of buildings in the trees and their intricacy announced to all who laid eyes upon it that this was a massive city.

I can tell things are not going to turn out well, but I can't walk away now, Takuto bemoaned as he followed his escorts. He already knew what the outcome of this conference was going to be.

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“ATOU, do you know what my policy is for this conference?” Takuto asked.

“This visit is for peaceful purposes, and unless the other side takes action, we are strictly forbidden to intervene…right?”

“Bingo. I’m glad you know without me having to tell you.”

“I’m pleased to hear that, my king.”

“That being said, don’t neglect to gather intel. I want to get a firm grasp on what game systems the other Players have, including the Succubus Army’s.”

“Mm-mm-mmm! That’s our true objective here, eh? A simple case of know your enemy and know yourself! In that case, I shall keep the tomfoolery to a minimum, mon dieu*!”*

Takuto reminded Atou of their purpose upon being led into the anteroom, while holding the real conversation with Vittorio telepathically. They didn’t know who was listening. Being able to hold sensitive conversations telepathically without the risk of being overheard was a huge advantage.

The pretext for this conference was peace talks.

While Takuto always considered how to take advantage of any opportunities that might arise, he wasn’t going to make the first move here. He had no choice but to conserve his best cards as long as everyone believed without a doubt that it was really him and Atou at the conference. Takuto had decided to play it safe for now.

“According to the reports, the other factions have already arrived. The conference begins tomorrow… I wonder who will be there. I’m dying of curiosity,” Takuto muttered to no one in particular.

Vittorio-Atou nodded in response, leaving the room silent.

Players had been summoned to this continent for some reason. And the All-Faction Conference they would supposedly all be attending was right around the corner.

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LOCATED in the center of El-Nah's capital city of Khan-Nah was the Tetrarchy Council's deliberation chamber. Takuto's party was escorted to the building where the Elven clan leaders used to decide their nation's policies.

Built at the top of the ginormous World Tree, which was said to be the center of the world, the majestic, overwrought structure showcased the Elves' power, and its abundance of nature paid homage to their way of living in harmony with the elemental spirits. Its pale green luminescence and dense magical energy fully indicated the value of this spot as a Mana Source.

Mynoghra's Palace generated Ruin Mana. The Deliberation Chamber built into the World Tree also generated Mana, although it did so on a much larger scale. Mynoghra's Palace couldn't even compete at its current level.

They sure are openly inviting the enemy into the Elves' most important facility… Then again, they could be presenting that as the concession they are making for the rest of us to come. And also a show of their confidence that their position won't falter even if a commotion happens at their heart… Whatever the case may be, we're about to find out.

If nothing else, the Deliberation Chamber was a fitting venue to host a grand event such as the All-Faction Conference.

The members of the other factions were all shown to the large, round table. Yu was the only face Takuto recognized. He didn't know the people from Qualia, and Phon'kaven's envoy was an unfamiliar face. Pepe stuck to his word that he was sending an envoy in his place. As for the rest…

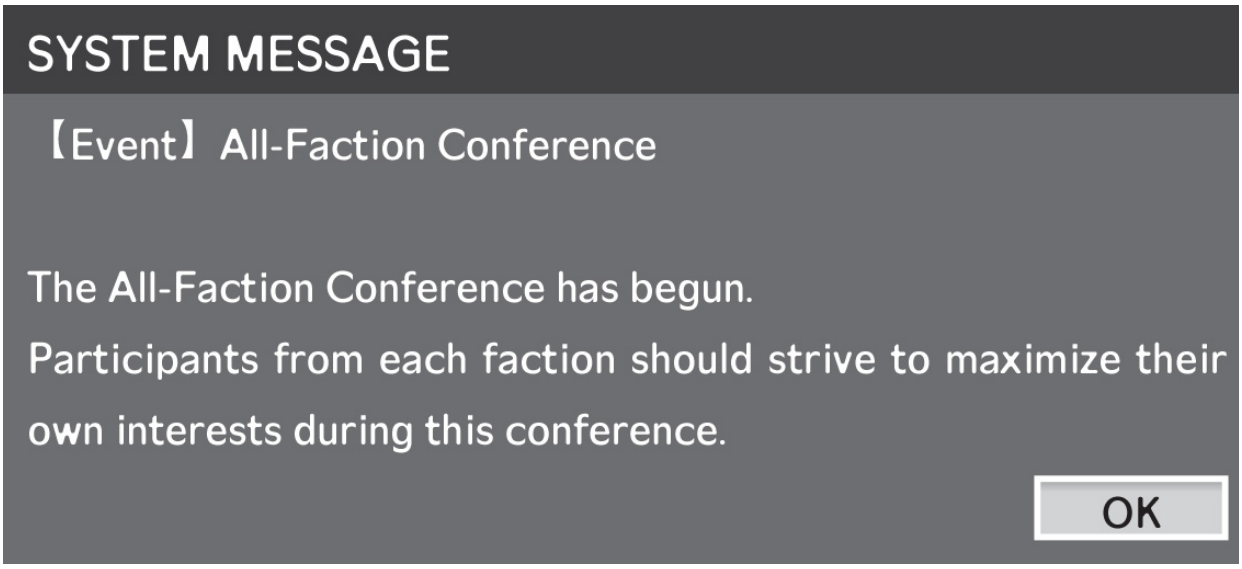
There are fewer people than I expected. And what's that?

Takuto wanted to know what the other Players looked like, but he didn't see any at the table yet. Several empty seats had curious stone objects set on the table in front of them. He had a pretty good guess what they symbolized when he saw that one of the objects was shattered. He was about to telepathically share his theory with Vittorio when the door to the room opened with a loud creak. Freesia and Goliath entered the room.

“Welcome to the conference venue. You have my heartfelt gratitude for your participation in the All-Faction Conference, darlings~♡.”

A Succubus he was both familiar with yet meeting for the first time appeared behind the other two.

Thus began the conference that would decide the fate of the world.


SYSTEM MESSAGE
【Event】All-Faction Conference
The All-Faction Conference has begun.
Participants from each faction should strive to maximize their own interests during this conference.
OK

Eterpedia

Noble Succubus

Combat Unit

Strength: Unknown Move: Unknown



Description

Noble Succubus rank second in the Succubi hierarchy.

They belong to the aristocratic class, and under the orders of the Queen, they manage the lower-ranking Succubi. They also play a central role in running the Succubus empire.

The higher a Succubus's rank, the higher their Strength becomes, and Noble Succubus can possess Strength and Wisdom that rivals that of a Hero unit.

However, their taste in men varies widely, and some Succubi end up bankrupt after falling for a useless man and giving him all their money.

Chapter 8: All-Faction Conference

THE All-Faction Conference officially began. All the attendees felt a certain tension as they waited to see how the event would unfold. If nothing else came of it, they wanted to know what led Witch Vagia to host the conference.

"Oh dear, are you all nervous, darlings?" she cooed. "Relax and let Vagia here lead you through it♡. Don't be nervous just because it's your first time. Only your nethers need to be stiff, ehe♡."

Witch Vagia took her seat as she made those silly, lewd comments. Freesia and Goliath took up position behind her. Takuto was right to assume his two escorts held high ranks, seeing as they were allowed attendance directly behind Vagia. They fell into a similar position as Atou was to Takuto and Ai was to Yu. It was clear they had enough power to serve as a Witch's guards.

Witch Vagia… Her Player still hasn't shown up. Are they hiding? Or are they her puppet…? Takuto wondered.

Based on the trend up until now, it was customary for there to be one Witch to every Player. Takuto had Atou, and the GM Keiji Kuhara had Erakino. Even the defeated Player had a Witch called Worthless Witch Munin, and Ai seemed to fill that slot for Yu. If you went by the trend, then Players were male, and they all had a female Witch accompanying them. But Takuto didn't have a big enough sample pool to guarantee that was always the case. He needed to keep in mind the possibility that someone else might be hidden among them.

Takuto remained silent as he observed Vagia and analyzed the situation. *Her outfit is definitely straight out of a hentai game.* He was exasperated by the Succubus Queen's outfit, an inviting smile on her plump lips. She wasn't completely naked, instead going for

the sex appeal of exposing her skin in all the right places, making her more tantalizing than if she were fully exposed. Her curvaceous figure made it impossible to know where to look.

She was the perfect Succubus Queen, but he thought she lacked too much in class to head up the negotiating table. But even this woman who embodied sexual desire understood that this room had already become a battlefield. After realizing the attendees were waiting for the show to go on, she slipped into her role as host and proceeded with the conference.

"What am I going to do with you lovelies? Since I'm the one who suggested this event, I suppose I'll start off with the introductions. Ahem. How do you do, representatives of all the nations? And I haven't forgotten about you adorable Players, either ♡. I am the sexy new ruler of this land! The Queen of the Succubi and King of the Elves! Chaste Witch Vagia, at your service!" Vagia announced, hopping to her feet and striking a pose that showed off her voluptuous bosom.

The two Succubi behind her clapped, and Vagia blew kisses to each attendee.

Are we going to go around introducing ourselves now? Will I be able to introduce myself without fumbling it? Takuto fretted, his mind straying for a moment until it was drawn back to an unexpected divulgence of crucial information.

"Oh, and just so you know, the game system I brought with me is ADV. My game's name is *Doki Doki ☆ Succubus World That Time Succubi Came to the Real World*♪!"

"You're from *DokiSuckU*?!" Yu shouted aloud.

They're from DokiSuckU? Takuto thought at the same time.

Affectionately known as *DokiSuckU*, *Doki Doki ☆ Succubus World* is a famous adults-only game. It falls under the adventure game visual novel genre. One day, Earth is conquered by Succubi who invade from another world, and the protagonist has to make out with all the different Succubi to save the world. It's a gag-game targeting adult men.

The game system is nothing to write home about. Or rather, it would be unreasonable to expect a complex game system to be implemented into this type of adventure game, which is centered around 2d graphics, voice acting, and simply reading the story.

In other words, *DokiSuckU*'s game system posed little threat. No matter what cheats or hidden tricks they employed, there was no way for them to directly attack Takuto's group…

Still, I can't believe we're up against a hentai game…

Takuto honestly thought adult games were out of the question, so he was more than a little taken aback by its presence, which was so out of its league when it came to the battles being fought in this world. But realization quickly dawned, overshadowing his surprise.

Crap! That's why they targeted the Seven God Kings' *deck! Damn you, Yu! It's your fault for not eliminating the game system along with its Player!*

The Succubus faction had no special abilities. The only thing they had going for them was coming from an adult game with a Succubus setting. Succubi are a powerful race that modern mankind cannot possibly defeat, and they have overwhelming numbers. That should have been their only weapon. But no longer.

They now had a powerful army, powerful abilities, enormous amounts of Mana from El-Nah, all topped off by the *Seven God Kings'* system… There was no telling how much damage would be done if they set their sights on you.

"Ehehe♡! D'aw, it appears some of you know about *DokiSuckU*. I would love to get all hot and bothered talking up a storm about our favorite games, but we didn't get together for that, so we'll just have to save that for next time, lovelies. Now since we're here, why don't we get to know each other better? Freesia, can you introduce everyone, dear?"

"Per Her Majesty's orders, I shall commence introducing each person in attendance…"

Guess it's only normal for everyone to be introduced first? Takuto was delighted by this turn of events. His primary purpose for attending was recon, after all. *Now if only everyone would spill their*

guts and share in great detail about their abilities and game systems, my day would be made…

Takuto discreetly scanned the room. He could see several people seated at the table, along with the objects placed on the empty seats. At first glance, they looked like clay sculptures made by students in art class, but he narrowed his eyes when he noticed that one of them resembled dice.

I'm curious, but I'm sure it will come up in due time. As for the other attendees… I see Phon'kaven is participating like they said. Did the other neutral nations from the Dark Continent skip the conference because of its location? I thought Sutharland would send someone at least, but I don't see anyone who looks like a Dwarf, so I guess not.

As anyone could have guessed, few nations from the Dark Continent—primarily the neutral nations to the south—chose to attend.

I understand the two smaller city-states skipping, but I'm surprised Sutharland, the most powerful empire on the Dark Continent aside from Mynoghra, isn't here. I assumed they would send an envoy since Phon'kaven did… Then again, Phon'kaven must be wary if they sent one of the Staff Holders instead of Pepe.

Takuto assessed the Dark Continent attendees in an instant, then shifted his gaze to the participants from the northern Lawful Continent.

The Succubus faction members are a given, but I see the Elves have sent someone too. Doesn't look like a Saint, though. A nominal standin, maybe?

The Saints were the holy nations' most powerful fighting force. The El-Nah Alliance of Elementals naturally had Saints of their own. Takuto thought they would send a Saint or two to showcase their power, so it was strange to see neither the Succubus-dominated El-Nah nor the Holy Kingdom of Qualia had sent one.

El-Nah has the Succubus Queen Vagia and an old Elf man for its representatives. And Qualia has a…clergyman. He looks pretty high-ranked, so maybe he's one of the three Popes?

Noticing Takuto's gaze, Qualia's representative jerked back in his seat, fear stiffening his expression. For all his expensive-looking and ostentatious adornments, he seemed to be a coward. Takuto looked away to keep from scaring him too much. Then he contemplated his reaction and presence.

Is Qualia being as cautious of this conference as the neutral nations? That kingdom's greatest strength is its Saints. They only have two Saints left. It's possible they thought that sending either of them was too risky in case anything went wrong back home. Considering Mynoghra is also using doubles, it's ironic that Yu is the only one honorable enough to participate for himself.

The Lawful Continent had equally few participants. Apart from the two major empires, the northern continent lacked the variety of smaller nations and races of the southern continent. It was an All-Faction Conference in name only—the number of attendees was far too few to represent all the factions on both halves of Idoragya.

Two factions from the Lawful Continent and three from the Dark Continent are here, huh? You could say all of the big names are present at least, but there's something more important than that.

Introductions for each faction proceeded as Takuto analyzed and assessed the various information. The old Elf announced he was participating as the representative of his race, and the clergyman stated that he was indeed one of Qualia's three Popes. The Phon'kaven envoy apologized for being just a representative and expressed their hopes to make friends with everyone.

Finally, it was time for the last person. Takuto's turn.

"Introducing King Takuto Ira of Mynoghra," Freesia introduced him.

Sensing everyone's eyes on him, Takuto carefully gave the self-introduction he had been repeating in his head since the conference started. **"Nice to meet you. I'm *Takuto Ira*. Some call me the King of Ruin."**

Someone gulped loudly.

His succinct introduction filled the room with a weird kind of pressure. The Qualian Pope and Elf representative scowled, and

nervous tension rippled through the taut expressions of both Phon'kaven's envoy and the two Succubi guards.

Takuto despised this awkward atmosphere and wished they could just move on, but no one said anything. His nervousness burgeoned.

Wait, did I screw up somewhere?! But I didn't say anything weird… Takuto's pulse raced. His face was about to turn scarlet with embarrassment, but he schooled his features to make sure he didn't humiliate himself in front of the other leaders. *Somebody hurry up and say something!*

A few seconds of silence ended up feeling like an eternity. Takuto was about ready to say something—anything—to put an end to his misery, when…

"Is that…it? This is a gathering meant to deepen everyone's friendships, so isn't it a little naughty of you not to say anything else♡?" Vagia said to him.

Takuto was grateful she cut through the awkward atmosphere and continued the conversation, but it wasn't in a way he could handle properly.

"What else should I say?"

"…!"

Takuto's terse reply rubbed Vagia the wrong way yet again. Even he could tell he'd upset her. He didn't mean any offense. With so many non-allies in attendance, he wasn't going to stupidly announce his god or game name, nor was he obligated to do so. On the other hand, it was tactless to string together words that insult the other party in a confrontational manner.

Sure, it would have been great if he could say something clever, but Takuto always struggled with proper communication. He'd shown some progress in his interactions with the Dark Elves and his subordinates, but his communication skills still scraped the bottom of the barrel.

His question was actually an entreaty. He wanted Vagia to take the conversation in a better direction because he was too nervous to speak. That was all he intended by it, but…his intentions were rarely

conveyed correctly. Especially since, while Takuto himself wasn't aware of it, he was currently perceived by others as fathomless darkness.

His presence as the King of Ruin inspired fear in all living things, so it was inevitable that he intimidated the attendees just by being there. He had spent so much time with Yu Kamimiyadera, who naturally dispelled the darkness around him and wasn't bothered by evil auras, and the subordinates who already knew his temperament, that he had completely forgotten one crucial thing.

Takuto Ira remained someone who would bring ruin to the world.

"Yeah…that's just the kind of person you are."

…What does she mean? That's not a normal reaction.

Takuto noticed something was off, and it wasn't the discomfort she was feeling in his presence. He'd locked onto the way she'd referred to him as if she had known him all along. As far as he was concerned, he had never had any contact with Vagia. Even before he came to this world, he'd never met anyone like her during his short life lived within the confines of a hospital. There was only a slim chance she was someone he had interacted with online through games.

It was a tad disconcerting, but Takuto set it to the side as he had nothing else to go off of. All that mattered right now was that his self-introduction was done and over with. It wasn't the smoothest interaction, but Takuto was just glad it was over.

"This now concludes the introductions of everyone present."

Freesia executed a crisp bow, drawing the introduction phase to a close. Tension returned to the room.

The attendees had indeed finished their meet-and-greet. Normally, this was where Vagia or her two Succubi attendants would act as the MC and announce the agenda for the conference. However, everyone in the room vaguely sensed that the introductions were not over yet.

Their gazes naturally drifted to the mysterious objects placed on top of the empty seats. A strange stone statue sat there, clearly placed for some purpose.

"Okay, it looks like everyone present has finished their introductions. Buttsies, aren't all you lovelies just writhing with curiosity? Worrying those dirty minds of yours about those who are not here ♡! Naughty, naughty! Relax, darlings. I will properly walk you through it, so don't get pushy! Sex is an art that requires proper etiquette. The ladies don't like it when you breathe down their neck."

"Good pointers," Yu mumbled, becoming convinced about the wrong things.

Takuto cut him a look before readying himself for what he assumed was the heart of this conference.

There were three objects. One resembled dice. If Takuto's prediction was correct and these objects represented the missing Players, then the dice was a standin for the TRPG Player, Keiji Kuhara. Takuto had defeated but not killed him during their fight. He had neglected to follow up on what had happened after that, so he was a little curious.

It seemed Keiji had indeed survived. Takuto was certain Keiji would hold a grudge after what happened, but he likely wouldn't resort to petty revenge so soon after being put in his place. Still, Takuto couldn't be too optimistic with how overpowered the Game Master abilities were.

Takuto turned his gaze to the broken object next. It had been shattered into pieces, symbolizing the Player behind it had been defeated. The Player who fit this description was Masato Kigou, the one killed by Yu Kamimiyadera. He was the first elimination, the Player who came to this world with the *Seven God Kings* system.

Looking closely, Takuto saw that some of the shattered pieces resembled card designs. It didn't seem like a long shot to assume that it was Kigou's.

Which leaves the last one as the real problem…

The final object had a strange design. An orb filled with weapons, shields, necklaces, and other items. It was unclear what kind of game it represented. The sword and shield gave it away as some sort of fantasy game, but Takuto didn't want to form any preconceptions, so he withheld drawing definitive conclusions.

What mattered was the fact that there was a new force he knew absolutely nothing about—another Player, hidden from him.

"As you know, a lot of powerful beings called Players have come to this world♡. I'm sure you have noticed by now, haven't you? All the people with incredible powers! This event is being held to let the world know about these Players and for them to meet. Although it seems a few deigned not to participate, ehe♡."

Gasps rose from the Qualia and Phon'kaven representatives. This news must have been a bolt out of the blue for them. Qualia had suffered much at the hands of Erakino and Mynoghra. And although Phon'kaven had allied with Mynoghra, the threat posed to their existence by the Demon Lord's Army was still fresh in their minds. They also witnessed firsthand the insane powers possessed by Mynoghra.

These almost godlike beings were lurking in far more corners of the world than they could have possibly imagined. Learning this naturally sent them into shock and despair. However, they already understood that they were no longer the major powers at the table.

The Players. They had gathered here to strike some kind of deal. Although Qualia and Phon'kaven were allowed to participate in the conference, it was as if they were being blatantly told they were nothing more than a sidepiece. As if to drive home that point, Vagia spoke before Qualia's Pope could voice his complaints. She was clearly addressing the Players instead of him.

"These little stone statues represent those who declared they wouldn't participate or couldn't come. Personally," Vagia drawled, "I wanted to meet them in the flesh and get to know them better♡. They said they were just too busy, so I prepared these in their stead."

I wish she would've told us that was an option… Or maybe it was prepared as a last-minute compromise for anyone who was too stubborn to come? That would make sense at least… I wonder how they work?

Vagia seemed inordinately invested in this conference. Apparently, it was essential that all the Players participate in one

form or another. Since nothing was done to represent the neutral nations that chose to skip, it was clear that they didn't matter as much as the Players did.

"So does that mean those strange objects connect the audio between the absent Players and this venue?" Yu asked. "Can they hear us too?"

"That's right! *All* the secret little conversations we've been having up until now are being listened in on, hun♡! They can hear us with the clarity of the highest quality wiretapping device♡."

"Hmm," Yu hummed and fell silent.

If they were following the general order of these things, it should have been the absentees' turn to be introduced. Yu probably wasn't happy that they remained silent. Even if one of the objects had been destroyed and its Player was no longer in this world, the other two should still work. Was there a reason why there was no reaction from them?

Hmm… Should I prod them here? I'm not great at these things, but now's not really the time to whine about that.

"Then would you introduce them to us?" Takuto requested. **"It would be cruel to leave them out of the conversation."**

Takuto wanted to know their names at least. Keiji he could leave or take, but the other statue represented an unknown Player. He hoped one of Vagia's subordinates would step forward and introduce him like she had done for the others in attendance, but…

"You heard him. What would you like to do?"

Once again, his plan didn't unfold the way he'd hoped. Vagia had redirected his question to the absentee participants instead of fulfilling the request. Silence was all that answered her. Apparently, the statues had no intention of naming themselves. They were quite the cowards compared to Yu and Takuto, who had ventured into the Succubus's love den despite the danger…

Takuto was exasperated by their cowardice, but didn't think it was the wrong move. Cowardice can sometimes be a rare gift.

Still, I'm opposed to giving out information without getting any in return after going the extra mile myself.

Takuto's primary goal was to collect as much information as possible. Information on the Players was of the highest priority. It was worth the risk to get what he could.

His mind made up, Takuto prodded things along in Yu's place, since he was sullenly sitting back in his chair, arms crossed.

"The silent treatment, is it? But the dice more or less gives you away. It's been a hot minute, hasn't it, Kuhara? I see you also chose to attend this All-Faction Conference. Where are you right now? Have you been eating well? Are the two Saints in good health? Won't you be kind enough to let me hear your voice?"

"…!" A sharp inhale.

"It's so mean of you to give me the cold shoulder after all we have been through, Ku-ha-ra."

He got a reaction from the object. Takuto was all smiles on the inside. It was only the slightest of inhales, but it more than conveyed the other person's fear. Keiji had to be wary of this conference if he wasn't willing to talk. Plus, his reaction when Takuto spoke to him proved he had an aversion to him.

Kuhara's GM abilities scare me, so I'm happy to learn he's terrified of me. I might be able to use this to my advantage later…

Just as Takuto had deduced, the Player known as Keiji Kuhara had a visceral aversion toward Takuto Ira. One could even say he feared him. Keiji's spirit was utterly crushed during their battle. Takuto's side also felt a certain aversion toward Keiji, as Mynoghra's victory had been a narrow one…

"…! —!!!!"

Signs of an argument came through the dice statue. Was someone else with Keiji? Takuto assumed it was the two Saints. Their whereabouts were unknown, so it was natural to assume they were hiding together.

I'm curious, but I'll leave him be for now. Kuhara doesn't seem interested in saying more, so focusing on the conference comes first.

Takuto decided, shifting his focus away from Keiji just as a question was directed his way.

"…Who's that?" Yu asked, sullenly seeking an explanation about Takuto's little exchange.

Oh yeah, I asked Yu about the time he defeated Kigou, but I didn't tell him much about when I took down the TRPG forces, Takuto realized. *I'll fill him in, though just on the parts I don't mind everyone else finding out…*

"The tabletop RPG Player. I killed his Witch, but he escaped."

"Oh, the guy who cuckolded Atou? Too bad you couldn't kill the bastard!"

"He did *not* cuckold Atou. Word it better if you don't want to piss me off."

Takuto was about to lose his temper, but he knew if he snapped here, Vittorio, who was standing behind him disguised as Atou, would be utterly delighted. He suppressed his mounting rage to prevent that. If he had a stat for stress resistance, it just leveled up.

"Ack!" Yu panicked. "Sorry! I'm seriously sorry, man! You'll just laugh it off, right? Hahaha! Anyways, we now know one is this Kuhara guy, but is there actually a Player behind the other object? Haven't heard a peep from it. Is it defective?"

"Kuhara is a shy guy, so we can write off his silence as a given. But I was wondering the same thing myself."

"Hmph," Yu snorted. Ai said nothing behind him.

Yu's unusual display of annoyance seemed to indicate he disliked people like Kuhara and the other Player who kept themselves hidden and made their move behind closed doors.

He definitely won't get along with Kuhara, who stayed concealed during his whole fight with me. Fortunately, there are no plans for the two of them to meet any time soon, but I'll pair Yu up against him if we ever clash again, Takuto decided.

"Is that guy playing the silent game, too?" Yu accused the unknown Player. His voice brimmed with irritation. While his attitude wasn't exactly explosive, it didn't help the tension.

Takuto glanced at Vagia. She watched over the proceedings with an amused expression. She seemed to have no intention of mediating or intervening.

After what felt like forever, he actually replied. *"I can hear you… But I don't intend to share about myself. Sorry, but I ask that you respect my decision."*

"Uh-huh, sure…" Yu replied dryly.

The unknown Player's voice sounded like that of an adult man. He sounded older than the rest, but not on the level of an old man or someone who would be their fathers' age. He sounded like a man in his twenties or early thirties. That would be a safe assumption as long as he wasn't making use of a voice changer or some sort of disguise skill.

He sounded cautious. At this rate, Takuto's party would be one-sidedly handing over information without gaining anything in return. Takuto decided to put on the heat to see if he could squeeze out anything more.

"You could at least tell us your name. We can't just go around calling you Anon," Takuto pointed out.

"That's truuuue. Then why don't we just call him Mr. H? That's what I call him, ehe♡!" Vagia answered in place of the final Player. That was a bad sign.

Takuto instantly guessed the position this Mr. H held. *I figured they wouldn't give much away with him being their ally, but they're even hiding his name? They must be very close allies if the Succubi are prioritizing his privacy even when it means worsening their standing with us.*

It would have been one thing if the Player had told them to call him Mr. H—but it came from Vagia. And they were even keeping his name a secret. This strongly suggested that the Succubus faction was saving this mysterious Player known as Mr. H as a trump card.

If nothing else, this made it clear that the conference host had no intention of revealing their hand and engaging in friendly talks. Takuto realized that the possibility of this being an enemy trap was far higher than he initially thought.

But the conference only just started. I should wait and see how it plays out. I'm not the type to point these things out myself, anyway. Of course, he wouldn't hesitate to speak up when necessary, but that was another matter. His current policy was to see how things developed.

"Well, all that's left now is for us to deepen our bonds through this conference♡. I eagerly welcome us getting extra close, darlings."

With those unsettling words from Vagia, the floor was open. Who would be the first to talk? Takuto settled in to be a spectator, while a certain someone who must have been feeling irritated by the whole situation fired the first shot.

"Tell us what you want first. What's the purpose of this conference? I'm not convinced it's just to become all buddy-buddy. I know that ain't happening with you at least," Yu Kamimiyadera spat at Vagia, unable to hide his displeasure.

A predictable reaction given his impulsive personality. Vagia didn't take offense either.

"Ehehe. Don't be such a spoil sport. Our goal is what we have been saying all along: permanent peace. And to build a new order♡."

"Peace, you say? Ain't that impossible? Has the world ever been free of war? I mean, *our* world."

Never, Takuto answered internally.

Since the dawn of time, the world has never been free of conflict. When people gather in large numbers, conflict on some scale is inevitable.

Yu was just pointing out reality. What Witch Vagia spoke of was too idealistic and premature. It was dangerous to take what she said literally.

"But even more people will become victims if we allow conflict to continue like this, darling♡. What do you have to say about that? Don't you think you are at least partially responsible? It's not like you can't have known what the Demon Lord's Army did."

"Ha! You can't blame me for what the Demon Lord's Army did when they ain't my subordinates," Yu spat. "Do you honestly believe they'll do what I say?"

“Don’t you think the same tragedy will repeat itself if you don’t decide to do something about it?” Vagia pressed. “Leaving them to their own devices can be viewed as you neglecting your duty, darling♡.”

“You think that’s my fault? Lousy argument from the faction that crushed the Elven empire. I had nothing to do with the Demon Lord’s Army, but you went and invaded a nation and dare to claim it was for order with a smug look on your face? A little convenient, don’t ya think?”

“Let’s just say it was unavoidable and leave it at that, hun♡. Oh, but there wasn’t a single victim, you know? With our abilities, it’s easy-peasy to take over and rule a country without any casualties, ehe…♡.”

Their verbal exchange continued.

As far as Takuto was concerned, they were both at fault. In that regard, so was he. All of them had built their current standing upon the sacrifice of others. Takuto felt this wasn’t a matter to be criticized.

All living things take from others in one form or another in order to survive. Many of the ingredients making up their meals had come from living things at some point.

Vagia’s argument rang hollow. Takuto mentally cheered Yu on, hoping he’d draw more information out of the Witch as he devised a plan to walk away with the most gains from this conference.

“Whatever you say, I don’t like you guys,” Yu asserted. “Besides, do you honestly believe your new order and all this peace stuff will actually work out?”

“I believe that the people here have the power to decide that, ehe♡.”

“We’re going in circles here!” Yu threw his hands up in frustration.

Takuto took a moment to consider what Vagia said. It was true that the Players possessed powerful abilities. With the game system and the existence of subordinate NPCs, the nations that originally

existed in this world were no match for them. In fact, El-Nah had been captured and Qualia was in dire straits.

Still, could peace truly be achieved if all the Players agreed? It sounded an awful lot like a snake oil pitch to Takuto.

"People are capable of understanding each other♡. No matter how painful and suffocating the wounds in their hearts, they can support each other. All is possible…with sex!"

"I hate myself for almost agreeing for a moment…" Yu groaned.

"Boo, bad Master!"

She's awfully fixated on peace. Putting aside the intent behind it, does the word peace embody Vagia's psyche or something? Takuto observed Vagia without losing focus on the lambent conversation. The way she spoke in circles and how she communicated with Yu made it clear she had ulterior motives. But she also seemed impatient. Panicked, almost.

If they truly sought peace, they should simply conclude this conference as a meet-and-greet and sign a provisional pact of nonaggression. From there, they could take their time interacting until they improved their relationships enough to tackle creating a new order together.

It was far too soon to try to force everyone to sign on to a new order and vow for peace.

Something else is at play… Takuto had a bad feeling. *Could it be…* Catching onto something, Takuto finally decided to voice his opinion, partly to back Yu as well.

"Seeking peace is important. But what he—what Yu Kamimiyadera is saying is also logical. Even if everyone here is sympathetic to your cause, that doesn't mean that others will agree to your policy. Especially since we have *sponsors*."

"Right that. I know my god will throw a right fit," Yu agreed.

Takuto was concerned about the existence of the gods. Yu declared that the purpose of this game was in the journey, not the victory. But he also said that it was unclear what the purpose was. If

the journey was what mattered, then the gods should prefer more dramatic developments.

Perhaps it was death and conflict the gods sought rather than victory?

And that was why Vagia was so hung up on peace. That's what it looked like to Takuto.

"Is it really possible for a new order to exist that satisfies everyone? In a way that *everyone* is satisfied," Takuto repeated.

Vagia's pretty lips uttered the answer that wasn't all that far off the mark from his guess.

"Ultimately, by ending this game."

Tension jolted the room.

Only the Players accurately understood the meaning of her words. They all already understood that their situation was created by the gods for some purpose.

But is it truly possible to end the game? Not to mention…

"Hold on. How exactly do we do that? That's important here."

Yu shared Takuto's same misgivings. He immediately questioned Vagia. Takuto wanted to ask the same thing. Not that the Succubus faction hadn't already prepared a pretty sounding answer…

"End the game, silly. It's a smidge complicated, but not impossible. Simply put, all we have to do is surrender without deciding a winner♡."

"Surrender… Are you trying to kill the game early?" Yu asked.

Eternal Nations also had a surrender system. In the game, surrendering means you lose, but what would happen if every Player surrendered at the same time?

Takuto didn't know what refusing to play the game would entail. He didn't take Vagia at her word, but still found the concept fascinating. He shifted his gaze back to her and gave his chin an upward jerk to signal she should continue. He wanted her to present why she believed she could convince the gods to play along.

"The game can end if the Player wishes, darling. Although this world is run by the gods, there are rules in place. Common rules that must be adhered to, defined by the governing god known as The Board God. Consequently, none of the gods can overtly intervene with the world♡."

In other words, they can *intervene if it's not overt.*

It was impossible to examine everything that had happened around Takuto until now to see how much divine intervention was involved, but Vagia's theory was somewhat convincing. If the gods had been able to intervene unchecked, things would be far more chaotic. Besides, if the gods valued the journey over victory, then they would want to avoid needless large-scale intervention.

"And one of the most important things in this board game is to respect the Players' decisions. The gods will have no choice but to agree if everyone desires it from the bottom of their hearts."

Takuto replayed what Yu had told him back in Mynoghra. It was highly probable that the gods were so-called game "enjoyers." They were probably getting a kick out of observing how each of their Players—their pawns—danced in the world. If that were the case, then abandoning the game and ending in peace with everyone should also be an acceptable route. It lacked excitement and thrill, but if viewed as a piece of entertainment, it could be accepted as one of those anticlimactic endings that crop up sometimes…

"It's not like you'll die or disappear or anything because we suspend the game♡. Why not just ask your assigned god? You have all spoken with your gods, even if it's at different frequencies, right?"

Yu nodded, so Takuto rushed to do the same. His hands grew cold and clammy with the worry that they would find out he was lying, but they didn't notice. Now he had another, very important problem to figure out.

I haven't spoken to my assigned god…

This was where Takuto was faced with his greatest handicap. If he could just communicate with his assigned god, his problems could be solved by talking to him. He would have to think about how

to handle this later. Things should be okay as-is for now. Since, unfortunately, his assigned god never tried to get in touch with him.

Maybe he sucks at communicating like me? Takuto mused idly before lobbing his next question at Vagia.

"Just because we end the game doesn't necessarily mean peace will be achieved after, does it?"

"You just poked my soft spot, aah♡. But can't you just feel it? As long as the game on the board continues, fate will forever direct everything toward us fighting, darling."

That makes sense… Her comment made everything clear.

"I'm sure you can both think of situations where that applies, no, little Hero boy and boy-king *Takuto Ira*?"

Takuto thought they had run into an incessant amount of trouble since coming to this world, so it made sense if that was all due to yet another mechanic of this world. Mynoghra's initial plan was to increase its national power through Domestic Affairs without letting anyone know about its existence. Their starting territory, the Accursed Lands, was the perfect environment to remain undiscovered. Yet despite their attempts to stay out of things, they were dragged into various events and enemy encounters, and now they were faced with a conference that would decide the fate of the world.

People often say that too many coincidences is not a coincidence at all, and it appeared that what was happening to and around Mynoghra was no coincidence either.

Going by that logic, the incidents with the Demon Lord's Army and the TRPG faction were all intentionally set up from the start? No…the way she phrased it makes it sound more like the odds of us clashing are increased. So, they directly influence the probability variation…RNG. It figures beings that call themselves gods would mess with things on a grand scale…

Every Player who came to this world had been involved in some sort of conflict right out the gate. Takuto had his fair share of conflict, Yu had his fatal run-in with the TCG Player, and the TRPG Player, Keiji Kuhara, also fought Qualia and Mynoghra. The Succubus

Army immediately invaded the Elven empire. Only the mysterious final Player's experiences were a mystery, but as far as Takuto was aware, every Player had experienced conflict in one form or another.

It was almost as if they were fated to clash, as Vagia claimed… And that same Witch was also alleging that they could void that fate if they so wished.

"That's why my proposal isn't merely an ideal or a pipe dream," Vagia insisted. "Big changes will happen to us if you accept. That's our guaranteed future, darlings♡."

Simultaneously resigning from the game would cancel out their fate to clash. And then the creation of a new order and peace would follow.

It sounded good on paper. If only his god were there to give their stamp of approval, but Takuto had to give up on that prospect. He could have always had Yu confirm the situation with his assigned god, but the credibility of third-hand information wasn't even worth considering.

At any rate, Witch Vagia's brand of peace was clear. Takuto now understood why she opted to hold an All-Faction Conference. Everything would be over if all the Players could reach an agreement.

"And for all you lovelies who haven't been able to keep up, you should consider this proposal a godsend for your people♡. Allying here will significantly reduce the likelihood of further pointless conflicts arising. At the very least, neither me nor my ally, Mr. H, want to fight, ehe."

Vagia apologetically directed the conversation toward the nations that had been left out of all the Player talk. The subject matter was utterly incomprehensible to them. Only confusion lingered on their frowning faces. But they picked up on the most important factor: whether they reached an agreement today or not would greatly affect the course of the world…

And there was one person who would determine that fate sitting at their table…

"What are your thoughts on this? Dear King of Mynoghra, *Takuto Ira*♡," Vagia purred.

"My thoughts?"

"Yes, you. What exactly is your goal? Isn't peace appealing to you? This is reality, not the world of a game♡. No matter how much protection you have from the gods and the game, once you die, it's game over for good. No reloads. I don't know if there's an afterlife or not, but one definitely isn't prepared for the losers."

This was the second time since the conference started that Vagia drew attention to Takuto. Perhaps he was the only natural choice to ask for an opinion at this point in the conversation. The general atmosphere seemed to indicate that the other Players, including Yu, could eventually be persuaded. Mr. H had already allied with Vagia, so he was likely on board with her plans.

The greatest loose thread and threat to Vagia's plan was none other than *Takuto Ira*. And unfortunately for her…she was right to worry about him.

I might have considered it earlier on…

Takuto didn't want to die either. He had come to a new world with a healthy and fit body. If agreeing guaranteed peace, then he would have happily picked the route that led to him living it up with Atou in Mynoghra.

But that route had been blocked off already.

Takuto wasn't naïve enough to change his mind now, nor was he weak of will to waver.

"Now that I think about it, I never did ask about your goal," Yu chimed in. "Since you teamed up with me, I guess you're more of a peace seeker than I thought?"

"Seeking peace isn't wrong," Takuto said, reiterating his earlier comment.

"Oh! I see! They call you the King of Ruin, so I thought you'd be thinking more about bringing ruin and all."

"I'd get defeated by the Hero if I was thinking such things."

Takuto chose words that deflected away from his true answer. He meant what he said to Yu; it's just that his priorities had changed. And what had taken the slot of his number one priority was unlikely to be unseated.

"Then you agree to our terms?" Vagia asked.

"No," Takuto said without missing a beat.

With just one word, he refused. Firmly.

Sometimes it's easier to get your point across by being clear-cut instead of clumsily beating around the bush. Vagia's vicious scowl proved he made the correct choice.

"Can I ask why?"

"No particular reason. If I had to give one, perhaps it's because I'm the King of Ruin and an evil being? I've become a bit interested in destroying the world."

Refusing would result in open hostilities. In which case, he had no reason to give information to his enemies. Takuto had already gathered a great deal of valuable information from this conference. He didn't need to make unnecessary excuses and expose his weaknesses.

Takuto glanced to his side. He couldn't read Yu's expression. Yu had made it clear from the start that he was opposed to this proposal. Seeing how he listened to Takuto's words, which could be interpreted as a declaration of war, without complaining, it seemed they were on the same page.

You can't underestimate a Hero's intuition. My other, unstated reason is that this whole proposal is shady as hell.

People who present you with a great opportunity and give all sorts of reasons to force you into making a hasty decision are generally con artists. Takuto was familiar with those tactics. He wouldn't have accepted Vagia's deal either way, even if he wasn't thinking about Isla and the Ascension Victory.

"And you can't be convinced to change your mind? I'm willing to compromise where I can."

"Then how about you all lose and come under my dominion? Don't worry, my kingdom is kind to its vassals."

"We…can't do that."

See, there's the truth, Takuto snorted.

If the goal was *just* to end the game, then it shouldn't matter who won in the end. The result would be the same whether it ended with everyone's surrender or a single person becoming the winner. The supposed goal here was to prevent things from ending in bloodshed. No matter who wins or loses, if no blood is shed, then it'd be peaceful.

But Vagia was quick to shoot down his counterproposal.

Either she absolutely needed to end the game with everyone's surrender, or she didn't trust the man known as Takuto Ira. Whatever her thoughts might be, they mattered not to Takuto, who'd already decided to be enemies.

"Too difficult for you to fall under Mynoghra's umbrella, eh? Then how about this? Why don't you tell us Mr. H's name and game as a gesture of good faith? I might consider it if you do."

"Not happening," the orblike statue suddenly spoke.

Takuto was knocked off-kilter by the sudden interjection, but laughter bubbled up within him when he realized the voice belonged to Mr. H himself.

"Pft! Bahahaha!"

"…What's so funny?"

"Sorry, sorry. I was surprised you joined the conversation, is all. Um…Mr. H, I presume? I apologize if I offended you."

Not much information can be gleaned from words alone. The meaning behind the words can change significantly when looking at the other person's face and gauging their expression.

Regardless of that, Takuto could easily guess just how angry Mr. H was from his remark.

"I wasn't making my proposal to a coward who doesn't have the guts to come here himself. I was speaking to Witch Vagia." Takuto intentionally provoked him.

Anger leads to recklessness, and recklessness leads to mistakes. Mistakes lead to confusion, and confusion plus mistakes lead straight to death.

Since Takuto had already decided they were his enemies, he set out to provoke them as much as possible to see if anything amusing came of it.

The Player known as *Takuto Ira* often described Vittorio, his direct subordinate, as a troublesome person who thrived on riling others up. But did the pot really have the right to call the kettle black? He was currently living up to his title as the one true master of the Gleeful Spin Doctor, as he was currently spinning his own way right under his opponent's skin.

"How about it? If you tell me Mr. H's name and game right now, I will happily accept your proposal. I will surrender for the sake of peace and deepen our ties for a brighter future. A truly marvelous plan, indeed. You have won me over with your genius."

Takuto clapped his hands, amplifying how suspicious he came across. Anyone should be able to tell at a glance that he wasn't serious, but Yu—the only one who did take him serious—immediately raised his voice in opposition.

"Hold your horses there, King Takuto! I ain't willing to join them for that!"

"Now, now. Just remain my silent partner for now, Yu."

Takuto found he really was an easy guy to work with because that's all it took for Yu to shut his mouth and go along with him. He seemed to have much stronger feelings about his alliance with Takuto than even Takuto had realized. Or maybe he was just acting in accordance with his plan to leave everything to Takuto when it came to politicking because that wasn't his strong suit…

Takuto buckled down on his strategy to provoke them. He was going to dig in until he dragged out their ulterior motives. They were obviously looking down on him.

"Witch Vagia. You seem to have viewed me as a threat from the start. I am incredibly curious to know what made you deem me a threat, but please trust me. I am trustworthy," Takuto said, looking straight into her eyes.

Vittorio's enthusiastic remarks loudly pierced his brain through their telepathic link, but Takuto ignored them to concentrate on

Vagia. If you are going to do something, do it thoroughly. That was Takuto's motto.

"I can't accept your proposal. It is an appealing one, though♡."

"Oh? And why's that?" Takuto asked, feigning surprise to an exaggerated level. He figured as much. He would have answered the same in her shoes.

Still, he deliberately put on a show. As if to prove just how much of an untrustworthy farce her peace proposal was.

And that finally got a clear rejection out of Vagia.

"Because…you have already decided to annihilate us all, haven't you?"

"…Who knows?"

Takuto hadn't decided that part just yet, but he sensed the necessity for it. Not only did he not trust Succubi, but this Vagia person was as troublesome as they came. She was the type to plan her next move. Make strategies. She wasn't the type to make decisions on the spot like Keiji. She was no amateur. She was a huntress who slowly, vigilantly kept her fangs hidden until she'd already devoured her prey. Sensing her nature was what led Takuto to decide he needed to eliminate the Succubus Army—the ADV faction.

"So long as there is an axe left to grind between us, we won't be coming to any kind of agreement."

"I love me some good ol' grinding action though, aahn♡. I hope it goes on forever," Vagia said in a sultry voice.

"And it's those types of comments that make you untrustworthy."

The talks broke down just as he'd predicted. The only thing left to do was to return home safely, but that was unlikely to happen as predicted.

Vagia seemed to have finally accepted that her plans had ended in vain, for she let out a long, long-suffering sigh, her voluptuous breasts bouncing with the soft movement.

"But I want to understand you," she said with all seriousness to Takuto. "Those are my true, unadulterated feelings."

“The idea that we can understand each other by talking sounds beautiful at first, but in reality, it’s just arrogance, Witch Vagia.”

“What a shame…”

Thus, the curtain closed on their peaceful negotiations. If the rest played out as Takuto predicted, then his opponent would play their next card now. He really hoped he was wrong this time, but he understood the odds were against him. So he shifted gears and prepared to deal with what came next.

“But I think you will change your mind when you hear what I have to say next, darling♡. For you see, I’ve prepared a surprise that will make even THE Takuto Ira say yes, ehe♡.”

“Now that’s intriguing. Do tell.”

Yup, here it comes, Takuto thought, relieved he hadn’t misread the situation. It would have left a horrible taste in his mouth if Vagia had proposed peace with nothing but good, pure intentions. But obviously there was no chance of that. Just as Takuto had suspected, they had prepared to screw him and the others over.

Takuto signaled Yu with his eyes and sent telepathic instructions to Vittorio.

Witch Vagia was a Succubus. As long as that was the case, it would be nigh impossible to suppress the Succubi instinct for excessive expansion… Moreover, since time immemorial, Succubi have excelled at deceiving and screwing men.

“We, the El-Nah Alliance of Elementals, will now enter into a permanent alliance with the Holy Kingdom of Qualia and the Player Mr. H♡. And as the leader of the alliance, I, the Witch Vagia, hereby declare the establishment of a new order, the *Lawful Continent Alliance*.”

Mr. H and the Elves were a given, but even Qualia was in on it, huh…?

Judging from the bitter demeanor of the Pope of Qualia, it seemed that not everyone had agreed to it, but the kingdom had obviously approved joining.

The power balance of the entire world had been decided at this moment.

What an incredibly dirty and solid move, Takuto thought idly despite the tense atmosphere. They had cut their opponents off at the heel and advanced the situation in their favor. He wanted to give them a hundred points if this was a test. If only it had been his ally instead of his enemy who had scored here…

"With that settled, as the leader of the alliance, I propose that all the nations on this continent embrace a new order and peace, woof♡," Vagia declared triumphantly.

Takuto just stared back at her expressionlessly.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

An alliance has been formed.

【Lawful Continent Alliance】Leader：Chaste Witch Vagia

Factions:

ADV / Mr. H / The Holy Kingdom of Qualia

/ El-Nah Alliance of Elementals

Until the alliance is dissolved, combat between allied nations is prohibited. In addition, declaring war on other nations will involve all allied nations. This decision can only be made by the leader.

OK

Chapter 9: Breakdown

VAGIA made a bold declaration. Takuto could take it as a proclamation of war. In fact, his opponent now had the absolute advantage. Takuto always kept this outcome as a possibility in the back of his mind, but he was still a tad surprised the worst-case scenario had unfolded so soon.

If we're talking in Eternal Nations' *terms, then they are on course for an Alliance Domination Victory. I should have just ignored this stupid conference… No, even if I hadn't participated, this alliance would've formed. It's better to have found out sooner rather than later, so I guess that's the silver lining here?*

"Wh-What do we do, King Takuto?! They're blabbing about some sort of Lawful Continent Alliance thingy! I-I never expected that!"

"You shouldn't speak when you are confused. Keep quiet for now."

"R-Righto!"

Yu had lost his composure alongside Ai. Apparently, he was taken by complete surprise by this outcome too.

Takuto ignored him. He had more pressing matters to attend to first. With this situation, this declaration, conflict was unavoidable. So, he should either bring back whatever information he could or inflict some damage on his opponents first. He wanted a souvenir for having come this far and wasting his time. Even in this tense situation, Takuto did not lose his composure.

"Going straight to forming the Lawful Continent Alliance? Really? A drastic move. I can see why they would feel daunted with the power difference, but I'm still surprised you were able to form an alliance with Qualia too."

"Even enemies can be united in a tight embrace with the right threat, woof♡. It wouldn't have been this easy if a certain moody somebody hadn't put his grubby hands on the Divine Nation of Lenea's lands."

"I see. Perhaps my greed misfired on me. Nevertheless, considering your nature as a Succubus, you will eventually infest and devour everything. I have to wonder if everyone from Qualia and the absent Mr. H agree to your real terms? What say you? Isn't it foolish to take what they say about world peace at face value? Succubi are cunning predators."

"Trying to drive a wedge between us is a fool's errand, hun♡. We are as strongly bound as a man and woman on their wedding night, ehe. In other words, we have built this alliance by allowing a certain degree of compromise♡."

Cunning, indeed…

Takuto's plan to sow distrust ultimately failed. Of course, he never expected it to succeed in the first place. A person's attitude and demeanor are another source of information. He was simply trying to see how she reacted to uncover what else she was hiding. Unfortunately, the only thing he learned was that this strategy had been meticulously prepared over a long period, bringing his worst premonition to life.

"Our relationship is built on more than a one-night stand, darling♡. It's upsetting that you think you can weasel your way in to exploit our avarice. This isn't NTR time."

It hasn't been long since the Succubus Army came to this world. At the very least, they have only recently started to take action. And yet, in that time, she was able to form such a rock-solid alliance? The same goes for her tactic to assimilate the Elven empire…her moves are too perfect and seamless.

Doubts flooded Takuto. But he wouldn't be able to resolve them here. He still didn't fully understand the game system she had at her disposal. It was possible she used some kind of skill to form this alliance, or even put her Charm skills to use to pull it off.

Takuto slightly nodded and then jerked his chin up, urging her to go on. Indicating she should go ahead and say whatever else she wanted to say.

"Qualia approves of this alliance," the Qualian Pope said.

"I approve, too," Mr. H chimed in.

Oh? Not a peep from Kuhara… So he's been left out of the loop, too. Did she approach him first, and he declined? Or was he excluded from the beginning? Takuto didn't know the answer, but it was a piece of information that provided some relief.

It would be horrible if this souped-up alliance counted even the TRPG Player among its members. Takuto loved games with difficult enemies and challenging goals, but he was absolutely not a fan of embarrassingly crappy games.

"I dare say you have pulled off an awe-inspiring feat here. You've brilliantly brought together people with incompatible alignments, and created a large force that includes Players, Witches, and Saints. Your ingenuity is worthy of praise. And so? I can pretty much guess what you will say next, but please, go right ahead and humor me."

Takuto assumed an insolent attitude and roleplayed as the King of Ruin, but in his mind, he was already thinking, *Whatever happens, happens.* He was already working on how to make his escape, after all. Several options were available to him, and he was even prepared to toss one of his cards if his hand was forced. Vittorio could die, but his future plans required the Botchling, Hero duo, and Phon'kaven's people to escape with him…

Let's see, should I let Vittorio loose to start a commotion? Or is it better to have Yu cast one of his Haste spells from Brave Questers*? No, it might go faster if he uses an AOE teleportation spell that will apply to the Phon'kaven envoy as well…* Taking advantage of the fact that his opponents were intimidated by his roleplay as the King of Ruin, Takuto formed his strategy at lightning speed.

It was an intractable situation, but he anticipated things would turn out this way. *I can still salvage this.* So determined *Eternal Nations'* top player on the world leaderboards.

"As you can see, the time to settle matters with combat is well and truly over, ehe♡. Not even *you* can make a move here, even if you are Mynoghra's king and *the* Takuto Ira capable of maneuvering the armies of evil at will. Take a deep breath, I promise we aren't going to suck you dry…much. We simply want you to accept the peace we desire, darling♡."

You are going to suck us dry, you harpy. Takuto barely stopped himself from saying that aloud. Yu was on the verge of uttering something dumb beside him too, but Ai covered his mouth with her hands. Takuto thought they were getting close to the edge of making a scene, but he was grateful they didn't turn the moment into a joke, so he didn't warn them off this time.

"How about it? It's not like we are going to kill your people just because you surrender. All that's going to happen is that lots of sexy Succubi are going to move into your territory and everybody will live happily ever after having nonstop sex, ahh♡," Vagia moaned.

"I'm afraid it is not as simple as you make it sound… Both Yu Kamimiyadera and I have goals of our own. And while I haven't heard about it from him directly to say with absolute certainty, I'm pretty sure the same goes for Kuhara. You expect us to abandon our goals and submit to you. It's not like it's a matter that can be settled by just us saying yes."

"Are you worried about how your gods will react? You can relax on that front, then♡. My god, the God of Expansion, will settle the matter with them. The gods don't care about the outcome. They aren't so narrow-minded as to punish their game piece based on whether the result is good or bad. They are playing games on a completely different scale. You will surely breathe a sigh of relief when you discover your worries were unfounded, darlings♡."

Liar.

No one in their right mind would believe those words from their enemy. Besides, Takuto had been penalized once before when he tried to seize the GM's authority during his scuffle with the TRPG faction. He could already see just how many lies were laced into her

words. It's fine to tempt with sweet-sounding words, but this was becoming a sloppy negotiation.

"Nobody has to suffer, hun♡. Forget about the difficult stuff and give in to the comfort." Pushing up her ample breasts with her crossed arms, Vagia called for Takuto and the others to surrender to her.

The fact she seemed to be focused solely on Takuto despite there being other undecided factions was a sign of how much she viewed him as a threat. Takuto could even see the impatience and nervousness straining her otherwise lascivious and playful expression.

Is this conference a big gamble for her? I'm honored that she still views me as such a significant threat, despite the power imbalance with her alliance. So, what does she know that I don't?

Vagia was acting as if Takuto was already the reigning ruler of the Dark Continent. In terms of war potential, Mynoghra definitely sat at the top of the Dark Continent. But even if she wanted to ignore the non-Player affiliated neutral nations, she still had RPG Hero Yu and the TRPG GM Kuhara to contend with. One was there in person, and the other god knows where. Yet her attention never strayed from Takuto.

Discomfort settled over Takuto like a lump in his throat. He had experienced some of the worst crises in his life because he had ignored his instincts. He would not make the same mistake again. Takuto carefully ingrained the discomfort he gained from this conference into his mind.

"With that said, this is my last warning to everyone here—or well, I'm already allied with everyone on the Lawful Continent, so this warning only applies to you Dark Continent kitties♡. Join our alliance. You can't possibly overturn the difference in power between us, ehe."

A final declaration.

An explicit declaration of war. An absolute demand that asks for nothing less than a yes. The moment they rejected this invitation, a new battle would begin.

And yet…
Welp, guess I'll just run away.
Takuto didn't hesitate.

Discover a Popular New Title!

Doki Doki ☆ Succubus World

~That Time Succubi Came to the Real World~

【Description】

Succubi have taken over the world?!

Earth was destroyed in just seven days by succubi who invaded from another dimension. Guns and missiles don't work. Not even poison. But mankind has found the one and only way to weaken them and make them submit!

Men, now is the time for you to rise up!

Release Date: 4.1.xxxx

Price: 9,800 Yen

Genre: Succubus Spanking Adventure

Publisher: Rabbit Software

The Succubus faction demanded their surrender.

Takuto wasn't surprised. However, the scale of the situation was far more troublesome, so he was forced to respond differently from what he had planned. But he wasn't the weak-minded type to lose his composure over irregularities.

Anything is possible. The lessons he had learned from bitter experiences had given him mental fortitude and an iron will that didn't allow for unpreparedness.

Takuto quietly rose from his chair, looked Vagia straight in the eyes, and answered, **"Thank you for your passionate invitation. I unfortunately have to decline. Neither I nor they will join your alliance."**

He didn't answer that way as a matter of etiquette between nations. He was sending a signal to Hero Yu and his allied nation's envoy, indicating that he was about to make his escape, and they should join him.

He had also used breaks in the conversation to telepathically alert Vittorio as well. Vittorio's sheer delight at his declaration they were going to run with their tails between their legs vexed Takuto to no end. Fortunately, Takuto's inner state of mind remained elusive to Vagia. For the first time, her expression turned stern as she seemed to be carefully picking her next words for Takuto.

"Oh my. What a naughty boy you are for giving a lady the cold shoulder♡. Will you at least tell me the reason for your refusal?"

"Hmm..." Takuto rubbed his chin, pretending to consider it. Meanwhile, he cast Yu a sidelong glance. Yu was also looking at Takuto. It seemed they were on the same page.

"Yu Kamimiyadera here is the Hero from an RPG, you see. He's of a completely different alignment from me, what with me being the King of Ruin and all. We should get along like oil and water..."

Vagia frowned, seeming not to follow where he was going with this.

Takuto could see the unconcealable humanity in Vagia from her constantly changing expressions. **"Despite our different**

alignments, I realized we get along great once we started talking," he continued, controlling the conversation like a pro. **"Our personal principles and goals go great together, and you could say we allied because we are on the same page in many senses. One great example of this is our stance toward other Players."**

"The camaraderie between boys is hot stuff♡! I'm so jealous!" After a pause, Vagia said, "All right, tell me what your stance is." She was no longer trying to keep up pretense and cut eyes at Takuto.

Grinning wryly at her, Takuto raised his hand, signaling Yu to give their answer.

"I'll kill you if you underestimate me," the boys said in unison.

The Deliberation Chamber exploded.

"What?!"

"Your Majesty! This way!" Freesia shouted.

"D-Destroying the floor is too much! And what the heck is with your appearance?!" Goliath cried.

Showing his true worth as THE Hero, Yu pulled a legendary axe from his item bag and destroyed the floor with an explosive hit. At the same time, Takuto canceled Mimic on part of his body and slammed his distorted, powerful arm, a combination of man and beast, into the floor.

The result was evident. The Deliberation Chamber, built with the wisdom and superior technology of the Elves, had collapsed from its foundation, and now it was only barely supported by the branches of the World Tree.

"Vittorio!"

"Already here, *mon dieu*! Mufufufu! Reinforcements will come if we don't make haste posthaste!"

Takuto got the chills hearing Vittorio's word choice and tone come from Atou's mouth, but he had to grin and bear it. For Vittorio's tentacle had already scooped up the dazed Phon'kaven envoy. He wouldn't be able to use that tentacle to secure the envoy

if he disengaged his Disguise. So Takuto kept him under strict orders to maintain Atou's form.

"Man, I love flashy action! It's so easy to go along with! Take this! *Flama*!!" Yu chanted.

The explosion spell from *Brave Questers* rocketed forward and easily repelled the Succubi with explosive force, putting distance between the two sides. They caught on to Takuto's plan. The Succubi guards waiting nearby flocked into what was left of the room. Takuto could sense a large number of Succubi headed their way from all directions. A fast escape would be wise.

Takuto deftly jumped from branch to branch of the giant World Tree toward Yu, and by the time he landed near him, the Hero seemed fully prepared to make their escape.

"Negotiations have broken down. Let's get out of here."

"Man, I wanted to have a little more fun, but it's your call! Okay, Ai, your turn!"

"Yes, Master! Everyone to me! Wide-area teleport! *Telesfulla*!"

Telesfulla was an Event-only spell that could teleport characters standing within a certain distance around the caster. Takuto heard about it from Yu, but it was quite the cheat skill to be able to use magic that was normally unavailable in the game. With this spell, they could safely teleport everyone away.

A magic circle emitting a faint light appeared on the tree limbs beneath their feet. Seconds before the quickly activated spell was about to send Takuto's party to the Dark Continent without giving their opponent time to pursue…

"2 Null Mana, 1 Forest Mana, release. Activate the Spell Card: Primeval Forest Barrier."

〈! 〉Vagia intercepts!

Activates Spell Card: Primeval Forest Barrier.

〈！〉Ai's spell failed.

A single phrase from Vagia sealed their escape.

"Wha?! Wh-Why?! My spell!" Ai cried.

"Telesfulla failed?! How?!" Yu shouted.

The spell failed. Their presence there proved as much. Yu and Ai were stupefied by the abrupt development, not knowing what had gone wrong. But Takuto understood exactly what had happened.

"That's a card from *Seven God Kings*. You put it in play at the worst possible time."

Takuto spotted a card with a familiar illustration clasped between Vagia's slender fingertips.



The defeated system stolen by the Succubus Army: Trading Card Games.

Takuto scoured his memories of the *Seven God Kings'* online database that he used to browse. If he remembered correctly, Vagia had just played a Spell Card with the effect of preventing your opponent from escaping. Originally, it was meant to prevent summoned monsters from evading or turn freeze new summons, but…it was really troublesome to see the ability activate in accordance with the flavor text on the card.

I recall the effects of the Primeval Forest Barrier only last for one turn, so it should wear off soon, but that's long enough to be fatal for us under these circumstances.

It was unclear how long one turn lasted in this world and if the turn system varied based on the game. But it clearly lasted for more than a few minutes. Enough time for the army of Succubus to fall on them.

Vagia's instant reaction to Ai's teleportation spell was brilliant. She had predicted they would use such a spell and prepared for it. Takuto hated well-prepared enemies.

"As you well know, we Succubus don't have any of the mysterious spells or abilities the rest of you do. We hail from an *eroge*, after all, woof♡. Our abilities only activate when we are doing something erotic. But with this, it's a diff-er-ent story. I was lucky enough to get my hands on an SGK deck, ehe♡. It's costly to use, but we were blessed to find raw Mana Sources within El-Nah!"

The Succubus Army has seriously annoying synergy with El-Nah! The Mana produced from the Dragon Vein Mine is limited, so the SGK cards that consume Mana will eventually become unplayable. The question is when that time will come.

The *Seven God Kings* also has a way to increase Mana by using mana-producing cards. But Takuto didn't know whether she had those cards in the deck, and she hadn't given any indication of it so far. So for now, he needed to be wary of sorcery and summons that could be activated immediately. The fact that they had to be cautious of interference and attacks of the same scale for the next

few turns was a trying predicament that even Takuto didn't want to deal with.

"Don't you worry your dark little heart, darling. I promise it won't hurt♡. It will be over before you can finish counting the stains on the ceiling, aahn…"

Takuto's party was up against ten people at this point. Freesia and Goliath, plus the nearby common Succubi guards racing to join the fray. Qualia's Pope had fallen out of sight when the Deliberation Chamber was destroyed, and that destruction made it hard for the Elves to reach them up in the treetop. The stone statues they were using to communicate with the absent Players had also gone missing.

Wait, Vagia is holding Mr. H's statue… I need to remain vigilant of what he'll do, too.

Mr. H. was easy to overlook because he made his presence as inconspicuous as possible, but he was another Player. One who was a complete unknown.

Of course, Takuto's party had to be wary of the Succubi, but since they didn't know when Mr. H would intervene, they needed to be extremely cautious of him.

"Master, let's do *it*!"

"Mnnnn!" Yu groaned. "But we're in a serious pinch. It's too dangerous to do *it*—"

"Boooo! The Succubi vixens are going to steal you away from me, Master! They are going to cuckold my master! You're mine! *Mine!* I won't allow it…I won't…"

"Yummy-yum, a *yandere*! Such heavy and oppressive love on display…" Vittorio squealed as he watched Ai's aura darken.

Seeing how Yu rushed to pacify her, it was clear what kind of relationship they had. Shady relationship dynamics aside, they were obviously not going to be of much help right now. Meanwhile, the Phon'kaven Beastman had passed out inside the tentacle's grip and become nothing short of a complete burden. Takuto hadn't expected much of the envoy, but it would have been nice if he could've at least taken care of himself.

"Welp, I'm ready to go if you are, King Takuto! This was destined to happen sooner or later! It's just happening sooner!"

"And here I was counting on *Brave Questers'* magic to help," Takuto sighed. **"Do you really not have any spells or abilities that can resolve this? Isn't it the Hero's special right to make the impossible possible?"**

Takuto was asking him about the power of Forced Events. He didn't know if that was something Yu could activate himself, but that would be his only way out of this. Regrettably, Takuto didn't know of any Events throughout the *Brave Questers'* series that would be useful here.

"Sorry, man. Can't escape until that Barrier thingy is taken care of," Yu said, answering exactly as Takuto had expected. "Make your move, King Takuto."

Yu was telling him to make his move before it was too late. Takuto was well aware he couldn't buy them any more time by talking.

His hand forced, Takuto concentrated on aligning his senses with the Botchling to take more accurate control of it. Half of its body trembled and transformed into a deformed baby, letting out a strange cry that corroded souls.

"Haa, if I must, I must..." Takuto sighed.

"Ehehe. You will experience the Succubi's special techniques with your whole body, darlings♡."

The battle was about to move to the next stage.

《Primeval Forest Barrier》 Spell Card

Null Mana: 2　Forest Mana: 1

Prohibits the opponent from summoning or using spell cards during the player turn in which this card was used and the opponent's next turn.

~Entering the forest is easy. Leaving is impossible.~

※ Card is banned from official tournaments.

Latest Price:　￥125,000
Highest Price:　￥850,000

Chapter 10: Crushing Blow

THE King of Ruin and the Hero who will save the world. The common Succubi soldiers flinched when faced with the explosion of intimidating pressure coming from the two Players.

The All-Faction Conference held under the guise of peace talks had already broken down, and all hell broke loose between its members, who had abandoned words for swords.

"I'll go first! Take thisssss!"

With blinding speed, Yu switched from his axe to a sword and slashed at Vagia. An attack that exceeded the reaction speed of mortals, making it difficult even for supernatural beings to follow. The way he instantly aimed for the enemy leader's neck without regard for the danger was truly worthy of the title of Hero.

A second before the fatal blade could claim the life of the Succubus Queen, it was interrupted. Metal scraped metal in a thunderous peal as the tall Succubus—Freesia—intercepted the blade with her spear to protect her queen.

His first attack blocked, Yu wordlessly launched a second strike, but it was intercepted as well.

"Naïve boy. You have to try harder to take down a Noble Succubus," Freesia said.

"Then how about this?"

With a whoosh, Yu sheathed his sword. Then he crouched, sending out a wave of murderous intent that paralyzed the Succubi. A flash, followed by an explosive shockwave that exceeded the speed of sound, blew away debris from the Deliberation Chamber and the leaves of the World Tree.

The shockwave subsided, revealing the outcome.

There, dripping with sweat, stood Goliath, the tiny guardian Succubus who'd managed to block Yu's attack with her giant shield.

"Ph-Phew," she panted. "N-Noble Succubus are Succubi aristocrats. We are the shield and spear that protect the queen. W-We aren't weaklings."

Goliath fumbled her words and spoke timidly, but her strength was not to be underestimated.

"That's right! Even ladies have spears ♡," Vagia declared, cheering on her two brave subordinates.

But seeing as their expressions remained taut and strained, they more than understood the last exchange of blows in no way indicated they had the upper hand. Even Takuto calmly watched the fight after witnessing them clash up front and center.

"Not bad. But you aren't much more than minions. You honestly believe you can hold your own against a Player? Don't you think you are the naïve ones for underestimating the entity known as THE Hero?"

The Succubi were about to learn the meaning of those words. Because that deadly move was only a basic "Attack" to the Hero…

"Master! *Elpower*! *Elspeed*!" Ai chanted.

〈! 〉Ai casts a spell.
Hero Yu's Strength increased.
Hero Yu's Speed increased.

"Oooh! Here it comes! Here it comes! This is it…oooooh!"

Ai's support magic amplified Yu's attack strength and speed. His next strike would be so powerful that it would be ridiculous to call it a basic "Attack." Death had come for the Succubi.

"Crap! 2 Forest Mana, release! Activate the Spell Card: Forest Strength!"

〈! 〉Vagia's Turn.
Activates Spell Card: Forest Strength.

"Ghh!"

"Aaaaaah!"

The impact this time was on an entirely different level from the last attack. There was no simple shockwave for them to dodge; only a life-reaping tempest raged chaotically. The two Noble Succubus guards and Vagia could still stand their own, but there wasn't any room for the common Succubi soldiers to join the fray.

"H-He hits like a truck! I knew he would, but he's even stronger than I thought!" Vagia shouted, panic edging into her voice. Composure wasn't in the picture anymore. She was painfully aware that she had unintentionally put herself at a disadvantage in this match-up.

The Hero is the strongest in one-on-one fights.

Yu was putting his power on full display, and it was living up to Takuto's expectations.

She underestimated the RPG Hero. Not only is he strong, but the equipment that boosts his abilities into the triple digits is game changing. He even seems to have undisclosed rare items I don't know about… How much did he play that series?

Brave Questers is a game series in the RPG genre. The weapons and armor used by the Hero can generally be obtained from shops or treasure chests. There are also rare items that enemy monsters have a certain chance of dropping. These rare items, implemented as one of the game's replayability elements, are extremely difficult to obtain. It's common not to get even one item after defeating enemies for dozens of hours straight, and there are even items that can only be obtained after years of trying.

These legendary, rare weapons and armor come with abilities in a class of their own.

Takuto sometimes wondered what the point was of endgame content that made you powerful enough to defeat the Demon Lord in a single hit, but that was just the nature of video games. The difficulty and time it takes to obtain one of those rare items make the sense of accomplishment all the sweeter.

Yu was equipped from head to toe in the physical embodiment of all the time he'd sunk in. Nothing could defeat the Hero once he got serious…

But we can't let it go to our heads. We're pushing them back, but our advantage can be overturned the moment enemy reinforcements arrive. Our weakness is that we can't fight around the clock. We're lucky the Elf Saints aren't here. If they had been, we'd already be in hot water.

Takuto calmly analyzed the situation. He wasn't just sitting back and leaving everything to Yu. He was ordering Vittorio to use his skills to interfere in sneaky ways, and he used the Botchling to protect Ai and the Phon'kaven envoy from the Succubi soldiers. Moreover, he had a reason not to make any major moves yet.

The existence of the final Player.

If he's going to make his move, it'll be soon…

And just like Takuto had predicted, Mr. H made his move out of frustration over Vagia's unfavorable position.

"Miss Vagia, please use it."

"A girl's gotta do what a girl's gotta do…ehe♡. I'll play one of my trump cards just for you boys!"

Takuto assumed Mr. H would use his ability.

What kind of attacks would he unleash? If Takuto knew that, he could learn his opponent's game, and if he knew his game, he could take countermeasures.

Takuto hadn't made his move yet, partly because he trusted Yu to handle things, but also because he was using him as bait to draw out Mr. H's abilities. He chose to stay in the rear, where he could see everything as it unfolded, so that he would be able to support Yu no matter what came their way.

But he was about to learn how bad a decision that was.

Mr. H spoke to Vagia through the statue, and something appeared in her hand. The moment Takuto saw what it was, his eyes widened. He shouted at the top of his lungs, hoping his warning would reach him in time.

"YU! DODGE!"

〈! 〉Item trade done.
Fearsome Scimitar of Hellflame Lv 125

With a *zing*, a line cut through the air. Hero Yu was on the other side of it.

"…Huh? Ghh! *Guaaaaaaaaaagh*!"

"Master!"

Bright red blood sprayed everywhere. It gushed forth from a deep wound in Yu's torso, which had been cut in a straight line. He had leapt back to Takuto's side, his expression contorted in anguish. He was still alive, but he had taken a direct hit.

Ai was frantically chanting a healing spell, so he should survive, but things had suddenly taken a turn for the worse for Team Takuto.

"Will you be all right?" Takuto asked. **"Stand back for a bit."**

"No, I'm fine. This will heal in a jiffy. More importantly…" Yu forced himself to his feet, rejecting Takuto's offer in the process, and glared at Vagia. Anger had replaced his usually easygoing expression. "What did you just use?" he demanded of Vagia. She held Mr. H's statue in one hand and a curved sword of a strange design in her right.

Yu's outfit might have looked like a school uniform, but it was actually the rarest, legendary armor. One specialized in defense, not enhancing abilities.

Vagia's attack had cut through it like confetti in a single strike.

A highly saturated color scheme with an angular design. It's clearly a weapon from another game, although it's a type that's more commonly seen in Western games… Without taking his eyes off Vagia, Takuto analyzed her weapon. He also didn't forget to keep an eye on Yu's status. *He doesn't look good. That was quite the powerful attack…*

Blood poured from Yu's stomach. Any normal person would be on death's door with that amount of blood loss. The color was rapidly draining from his face, turning it a ghastly shade of whitish blue.

Then, right before Takuto's eyes, the wound began to close as if time itself had reversed.

〈! 〉Hero Yu's injuries have healed.

"Master, I've healed you! You are back to full health!"

"Yeah, thanks, Ai."

Healing Magic. It's simple, but powerful.

The fact that Ai was able to fully heal Yu after a crushing blow proved she was an excellent Priest and Mage. *Brave Questers'* magic was in a league of its own.

The Succubus Army didn't pursue Yu over to Takuto's side. They were cautious of Takuto—rightly so.

They had come to a stalemate of sorts.

Vagia's side was considering their next move, and Takuto's side was being cautious of the new attack method their opponent had whipped out. It was Yu, having regained the color in his face, whose muttering broke the eerie silence.

"I'm wearing the rarest equipment. It's not the type to take damage. Frankly, I can take on a Demon Lord class boss without breaking a sweat with it. Something must be at play for me to have taken this much damage."

Yu's gaze was trained on Vagia's weapon. It was a single-edged sword with a convex, curved blade, featuring a design that was inconsistent with *DokiSuckU*. From Mr. H's prior comment, his game and abilities were clearly responsible for the mysterious sword.

"Weapons, huh? A game where you can prepare weapons? There are so many possibilities," Takuto pondered.

"Mm-mm-mm! That's not all, *mon dieu*! It's a game where you can prepare weapons, trade them, and easily damage the Hero's maxed-out gear with them!" Vittorio helpfully added.

A game that could inflict critical damage on Yu. Takuto wished it hadn't happened, but he had obtained valuable information in return for Yu taking one for the team.

Mr. H had been stringently concealing himself until now. He was likely extremely cautious and had reluctantly exposed his ability to aid Vagia. So, Takuto wanted to put the heat on him to squeeze out all the information he could get.

"Vittorio, use Brainwash."

"Mm, if that's what *mon dieu* wants!" Vittorio chanted his spell. *"Now, answer my voice! Now your eyes are spinning round and*

round like a merry-go-round!”

Takuto played one of his cards: Vittorio’s Brainwash skill. Vittorio was a noncombatant. That status didn’t change even when he was disguised as Atou. On the positive side, he could use several of his many skills. Messing with the mind and poking holes in enemy defenses was where he excelled.

“Aaah! Wh-What’s going on?!”

“Ghh! My head!!”

“Ugh…agh…”

〈! 〉The Succubi have been brainwashed.
The Player can no longer influence them.

The Succubi were hit with an unblockable skill. The Lawful Continent Alliance weren’t the only ones with access to various game systems. They were fools to forget it. Just as Vagia said, the Succubus race possesses no notable skills beyond their physical prowess. Vittorio’s Brainwash was even more effective on them because of it.

The Succubi, who had been clenching their heads, rose unsteadily on their feet and turned toward Vagia. Common soldiers had no way to resist Vittorio’s skills—this moment proved that. But Takuto didn’t miss the dead giveaway that happened amid the chaos.

When Vittorio unleashed his skill, the accessories worn by Vagia and her two Noble Succubus guards flashed.

I know a defense item when I see it. Those accessories must also come from Mr. H’s game… Interesting.

“1 Null Mana, 1 Water Mana, release! Activate the Spell Card: Removal!”

〈! 〉Vagia’s Turn.
Activates Spell Card: Removal.

〈! 〉The Succubi have recovered from Brainwash.

Vagia used a Spell Card from the *Seven God Kings*. In terms of forcing them to use up Mana, the situation leaned slightly in Mynoghra's favor, but the scale was forever broken in the Alliance's favor as long as they had no way to counter Mr. H's items. If anything, Takuto was in a worse position after having Vittorio's Brainwash lifted from the Succubi.

He didn't have any other aces he wanted to play yet.

"*Merde*, this is a tough cookie to crack, *mon dieu*. We can cook up the small fry however we want, but the *plat de resistance* will surely resist my other skills as well!"

Vittorio correctly read the situation. If the Succubi's accessories defended against debuffs and abnormal status effects, then Vittorio had lost all usefulness. In other words, Takuto had just obtained another burdensome, yippy bag of meat called a Hero unit. As he said, even Vittorio could deal with the common Succubi, but in that case, so could anyone else in Mynoghra.

The problem was Witch Vagia and her two guardians. They couldn't get out of this predicament unless Takuto did something about them.

"Yu. How about it? Is there anything you want to do about this?" Takuto asked.

"Sorry, man. I honestly can't do a thing to change the situation. What about you, King Takuto?"

"Hmm..."

He had no more cards to play—was a lie. Takuto wanted to assess Mr. H's abilities a little more before he made his move. At least he already had a good idea what Mr. H's game was…all that was left was to confirm his suspicion.

"The equipment we borrowed from Mr. H hits throbbing hard! Even a mighty Hero is powerless against its thrusts, ehe♡."

The two Noble Succubus received their own weapons. The colors and designs were similar to Vagia's scimitar, so it seemed they also came from Mr. H. He had enough items to kit the higher-ranked Succubi as well. Takuto's theory grew into conviction.

“Brainwash didn’t affect you. It also looked like your two guards there were unaffected too. You used a defense item. Did this Mr. H of yours give you that equipment as well? All of the abilities are too off the charts to appear during a game’s main story. Does that mean that this equipment is the core of Mr. H’s game system, or that it plays a key role…?”

“Miss Vagia. He’s dangerous. Eliminate him now,” Mr. H spoke up for the first time in a while. Impatience laced his words. His reaction amused Takuto.

Speech is silver, silence is golden, as they say.

“Miss Vagia. You can’t let this opportunity slip you by. There is always a chance things will go awry. Steel yourself.”

“…I didn’t come here to kill. I told you that at the start, didn’t I? That extends to him too. We can definitely join forces. Let’s aim for the happy ending, darling♡.”

People cannot understand each other intrinsically.

That was what Takuto believed. To him, Vagia’s words were an empty ideal, an impossible pipe dream. If nothing else, she should at least narrow down the people she would share her happy ending with a little more. Not everyone shares the same perceptions or values…

But Takuto didn’t refute her. He had no interest in her happy endings.

Takuto had a goal. What mattered was how he could achieve that goal. And Takuto was undoubtedly moving toward his goal without looking back. He was coming one step closer by dismantling the mystery behind the powers belonging to Mr. H.

“Multiple powerful pieces of equipment with lax equipping restrictions. You can collect as many as you like. Accessories are a part of the lineup… I thought it was a social network game where you stack pieces of equipment to boost your stats, but the fact that each piece has its own ability makes it a game with a more detailed system. But looking at how it relies on SGK for large-scale ability use, it seems like it’s more focused on individual combat…”

Just as a horror movie loses all its appeal when the nature of the monster is revealed, the threat of a game player who has been exposed drops significantly. Such is the value of information and the horror of being unmasked.

"Your genre is Hack-and-Slash. The name of the game is…the renowned masterpiece, *Avicii*. Makes sense why you can use rare items like they grow on trees."

Mr. H's unknown factor became known, his value plummeting like a bad stock.

"Miss Vagia!" Mr. H yelled.

Why he called for her was unknown, but he was clearly shaken from having been unmasked. His panic was practically telling the world that Takuto was correct.

Takuto couldn't help but chuckle. **"I guessed right, eh? You shouldn't speak when you are panicking. You give too much away,"** Takuto advised with a bone-chillingly ruthless smile.

Term: Hack and Slash

Commonly known as hack-and-slash. This refers to a type of gameplay that is primarily centered on fighting enemies, and it is a sub-genre often integrated into other game genres.

As such, the term hack-and-slash applies to a wide range of games.

Typical examples include games that combine elements such as endless battles with enemies and obtaining items to strengthen playable characters.

Chapter 11: Delight

AVICII—a Hack-and-Slash action game where the player powers up by conquering randomly generated dungeons. A fan-favorite game with strong repetitive and addictive elements, and infinite ways to play depending on how you develop your character.

Random equipment is a key feature of the Hack-and-Slash genre. Players challenge levels over and over again in search of powerful items with various abilities that change each time they are obtained.

Most Hack-and-Slash players have a lot of equipment with various abilities in their arsenal.

That was the true nature of Mr. H's game, and the reason why Vagia could inflict enough damage to injure the Hero clad in legendary equipment.

"Brilliant move, Sherlock♡. You got us good. There will be punishment time for you later, Mr. H. Nervous men make the ladies uneasy, you know? That goes for negotiations and sex♡. Be ready for a thorough lesson♡." A seductive sigh slipped from the Succubus Queen's full lips.

She must have realized that the situation had changed when Takuto correctly guessed Mr. H's game. Now she had to abandon her approach to broker her version of peace and just outright eliminate Takuto and his cohort.

"But what good does knowing Mr. H's game is a Hack-and-Slash do for you? Information isn't enough to overcome strength. *Bee-sidez*…" Vagia drawled.

"Dammit. The Succubus troops are literally coming outta the woodwork…" Yu cursed, panic seeping into his voice.

If they were up against common Succubi, they would still be fine. Unfortunately, the amassing troops were of a higher rank than that, though not quite on the Noble Succubus level. They gave off an aura that warned they would not be easy to deal with. Maybe if it were just their level to contend with, Yu could manage. However, every single one was decked out in Mr. H's gear.

They were equipped with Hack-and-Slash items capable of hurting even Yu.

Powerful items usually have level and ability score restrictions. *Avicii* had similar restrictions. In that respect, Takuto was grateful they weren't getting massive power boosts beyond their level, but that didn't make him any more optimistic about their odds. Even if there were equipment restrictions, what they had was still powerful enough to keep any enemy at bay.

"A mixed army of Elves and Succubi, equipped with unparalleled, powerful and rare equipment provided by Mr. H. They are stationed on the border with Mynoghra, darling♡. Once I give the command, they will swarm into the Dark Continent♡."

Vagia had yet another vicious plan up her sleeve.

A slight frown creased Takuto's brow. He had considered the possibility. Not even Mynoghra's military could withstand a surprise attack from an overpowered mixed army of Elves and Succubi.

The situation would've been different if Mynoghra's Research and production had reached its final stages, but Takuto knew wasting time thinking about the ifs was one of the most foolish things in the world.

At Mynoghra's current strength, they couldn't beat the Lawful Continent Alliance on an individual or military level. That much was obvious.

I was wondering why Qualia joined the alliance, but maybe it was because they were threatened by this mixed army. They already lost the war before it started. Takuto thought back to the sour expression on the Qualian Pope's face. Some Succubus had probably already saved the man.

"I don't doubt Mynoghra possesses a powerful army of darkness. The neutral nations of the Dark Continent also maintain considerable military forces. But when it comes to an army of Succubi, superior in every way to mere mortals, and the overpowered gear that enhances them, just how long do you think your side of the continent can hold out, hmm?"

Vagia made a sound argument. Just as she said, Takuto currently lacked the power to force them back.

He could have handled one without the other. The Succubus Army and Hack-and-Slash gear. With those combined into one enemy, Takuto had no choice but to accept the reality that he was in a tight spot.

"This is the end of THE *Takuto Ira*, who put me through so much misery. Hehehe, just give in to paradise already, darlings♡. A harem of naughty, naughty Succubi ladies is waiting to service you!!"

They were surrounded. Succubi cut off every escape route. There was nowhere left to run.

The barrier created by the *Seven God Kings'* Spell Card didn't seem like it would wear off anytime soon, so they couldn't rely on Ai's teleportation spells.

Yu seemed physically fit enough to fight. It was his mind that had fizzled out from all the stress of the dire situation.

Vittorio was utterly useless with his abilities blocked, and even though Takuto's Botchling had combat abilities near Hero unit level, it wasn't enough to turn the situation around.

This looks close to a checkmate, Takuto calmly analyzed.

He wasn't there in person, so he would make it out safe. Vittorio could escape if he killed himself.

The same didn't apply to Yu, Ai, and the envoy. They didn't have any cards up their sleeves to escape like Takuto did, and they had no way to defeat the Succubus Army.

Their enemy wasn't stupid either. If they didn't cooperate with Vagia's so-called peace, she would use any means possible to turn them. Depending on what SGK cards she had in her deck, she might even be able to Brainwash them or change their alignment.

If she could assimilate people, then Takuto couldn't just abandon the Phon'kaven envoy. Anyone who holds a position high enough to be chosen as the leader's representative will naturally know details about the transactions between Mynoghra and Phon'kaven. They would have a lot of knowledge that Takuto wouldn't want to get out.

Everyone Takuto considered a part of his group needed to be brought home safely. That was the bare minimum requirement for his future plans.

"W-We're screwed…"

"Master…"

The circle tightened around them.

Their enemy hadn't pounced yet because they were still wary of Takuto's party. They were exceedingly cautious in everything they did. Takuto knew that it was sometimes better to act on impulse, so he was intrigued by his opponents'—especially Vagia's—obscene level of paranoia.

"Hm-dee-hm. We're in a right fix! Stuck between a rock and a soft place! So, *mon dieu*, whatever are you going to do?" Vittorio asked in that annoying way of his, signaling time was up.

They couldn't buy any more time than this.

Takuto slowly swept his gaze around him, then threw up both hands in exasperation. **"Game systems are really broken, aren't they? No matter how much you strategize, how much power you gather, or how carefully you move, it can easily be overridden. There's no balance."**

"I agree with you there, darling♡. I mean, this is what happens when you throw Eroge, SLG, RPG, and the like into one game. Buuut, it's got nothing to do with me anymore. And it won't have anything to do with you kitties soon, either, ehe♡."

Accepting Vagia's proposal would spare their lives. But what awaited them was life as cattle in a sweet and lascivious world.

Takuto wasn't interested in that kind of life, and his pride as a Player wouldn't allow surrender.

"Come. Take my hand, Mynoghra's King, *Takuto Ira*," Vagia purred. "This sexy lady will especially attend to you right now♡."

"Regrettably, I have to decline. My heart already belongs to someone."

Takuto had already decided to get everything back. He would take back everything he'd lost and lead his people to the heavens. His resolve was unwavering.

He was a top player precisely because he won't stop and can't be stopped.

"With that done and settled, Witch Vagia, it's time to break the game again."

"…What?"

"Great Ritual: Dark Nation."

As soon as he spoke those four words, an invisible force field spread across the entire continent. Yes, it covered the whole continent of Idoragya.

A powerful ritual magic was about to be activated, so strong that it ignored the barrier around the World Tree.

A torrent of magical power raged across the world.

It didn't hurt anyone, and it didn't destroy anything…

But it was clearly trying to rewrite the laws of the world.

"Miss Vagia! He's going to escape!" Mr. H yelled.

"Capture him! Don't let him escape!"

Witch Vagia, her Noble Succubus guards, and the elite Succubus soldiers rushed toward Takuto's group with the mythical, legendary, and master-class weapons that Mr. H had prepared for them.

Certain death was upon them.

Powerful attacks that penetrated even the defensive power of the Hero rained down on them. Every single strike was a critical hit that landed with 100% accuracy.

But…

〈! 〉All attacks are nullified by the Great Ritual.

"What the?! Why! Why isn't it working?!"

The storm of unreasonable attacks failed to stop them, let alone inflict damage. It was as if the downpour of attacks was never allowed from the start…

Vagia's eyes spread wide in surprise. The Succubus Queen had shown emotion several times before, but the expression she had now was particularly emotional, a mixture of anger, shock, frustration, regret, fear, and every other emotion possible to man.

Takuto moved his face closer to hers until they were almost close enough to kiss. Then, as he studied her face with great intent, he let out a laugh that sounded like it came from a place of genuine delight.

"That's the face I wanted to see. I wanted you to thoroughly taste the same injustice I experienced. It's despicable, isn't it? Sucks to be on the other side, doesn't it?"

Vagia jumped back from him like a frightened rabbit. The Succubus guards leapt in between them to protect her. Meanwhile, attacks came at them from near and far, but none could penetrate Takuto's defenses.

Darkness slowly engulfed Takuto's group.

The Succubi kept their distance, watching with eagle eyes so they could deal with whatever came next.

Takuto found their reaction amusing. With a wry smile, he lightly waved at them.

"Relax. This concludes the conference. I must regretfully admit that you had the upper hand this time. I'm putting the fight on hold. Well, it will probably be a long while before we resume…"

Thick, black magical energy gradually engulfed Takuto's party. Before long, their entire bodies were wrapped in darkness.

Just before he was cut from view, Takuto looked firmly at Vagia…

"I won't lose next time."

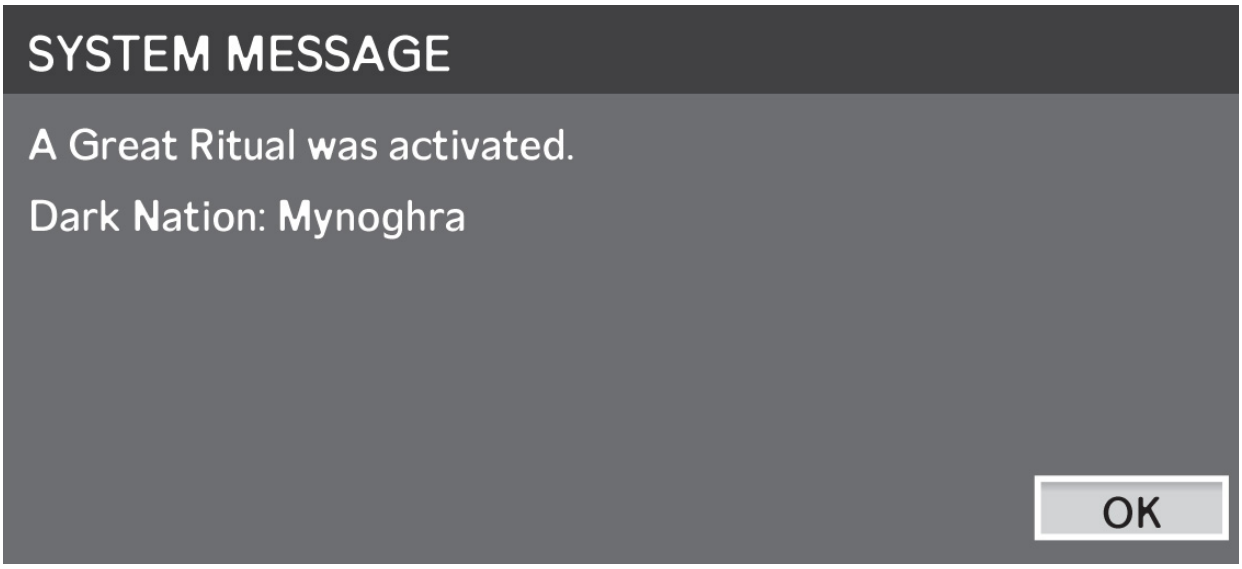
They were swallowed up in darkness, those words echoing in their wake.



The torrent of magical power subsided, and the mass of darkness dispersed.

Nothing existed within that space after.

Takuto’s party had vanished from the Succubus den, where escape was thought to be impossible, as if they had never been there in the first place.


SYSTEM MESSAGE
A Great Ritual was activated.
Dark Nation: Mynoghra
OK

Chapter 12: Disband

YU KAMIMIYADERA found himself in a dire situation with no escape from the Succubi stronghold. Just when he thought it was over for him, it happened.

A mysterious, cockamamie magical power had fallen upon the world, and Yu was swept up and swallowed by deep darkness along with it.

What the heck is going on? Yu barely had a moment to process his initial confusion before the shock at the next scene to unfold before his eyes blew it away.

When the darkness cleared, the familiar, desolate wilderness of the Dark Continent came into view…

◇◇◇

"DID we…escape?"

Yu swept his eyes restlessly around his surroundings. In the distance, he could see a ginormous, gnarled forest and the town he had visited on the opposite side. They were standing on the outskirts of Dragontan.

In other words, they were within Mynoghra's domain.

"Looks like we're safe… Everyone here and accounted for? Phon'kaven's people too? …Good." Takuto looked around and counted the people with them. No one was missing. At the very least, every person and nation Takuto had an alliance with had come.

"But they got us good, *mon dieu*. Not even I, the genius schemer, expected them to be so thoroughly prepared!" Vittorio trilled.

“Seriously. I didn’t think their forces would be that solidly consolidated already,” Takuto agreed. **“I’m glad they were still so cautious of us, though. Otherwise, I would have had to use clown bait to buy time until the ritual activated.”**

“How deliciously cruel!” Vittorio spun off into a little dance. He’d disengaged his Disguise and was back to his usual jester-like appearance.

Everyone, aside from Takuto, grew wide-eyed with surprise at the sudden appearance of a strange man, but Takuto decided to explain it later. For now, he exhaled with relief that his ultimate trump card worked as it should.

“Still, what perfect timing to execute the Great Ritual, which is usually so tricky to time. I’m actually surprised at how ideal it was for the situation!”

“It hurts to have fixed borders, after all. We can’t build any more settlements, so it’s not particularly useful for Domestic Affairs either.”

Takuto and Vittorio were talking at length about what had just happened. Yu got annoyed that they were going off into their own bubble, getting all excited and satisfied about something he had been left in the dark about.

“Hey, man! Don’t leave me in the dark over here!” Yu protested. “What the heck just happened? Fill me in, too, dammit!”

“W-We can worry about that later, Master! The Succubus Army is invading the Dark Continent! We won’t make it in time if we don’t leave now!”

“R-Right! Wait, how the heck am I supposed to defeat them?! They’re like a combo raid of overpowered cheaters!”

The Hero duo was in a complete panic. Phon’kaven’s people were in a stupor.

Now that he had calmed down and taken a breather, Takuto decided it was time to explain the mechanism behind what had just transpired. They needed to know the reason why they didn’t need to worry about the Lawful Continent Alliance’s not-so-imminent invasion…

“It’s okay. Don’t panic. I used a powerful ritual spell called the Great Ritual that can only be played once in my game. It’s an exceedingly powerful ability that each nation possesses. We’re using it to buy ourselves some time.”

“How’s that work?” Yu cocked his head to the side, at a loss.

Ai mimicked the gesture.

It seemed Takuto needed to break it down for them better. Since he hadn’t used the ability in a long time himself, he decided to explain it in detail to make sure he remembered everything.

“The Great Ritual. It’s an overpowered ability the nations from my game, *Eternal Nations*, can use only once a session. Mynoghra’s Great Ritual is called Dark Nation. When it’s activated, Mynoghra and its hostile nations can’t interfere with each other for a set period of time. It’s a nation-spanning barrier that makes it so we can’t do anything to our enemies, and they can’t do anything to us.”

“Oh! So that’s why we came back to Dragontan. It’s not an ability related to escape, but because mutual interference is impossible, people are forced to return to their own countries from hostile ones,” Ai guessed.

“Exactly. Fortunately, we now know exactly what our enemies are after. We can use this opportunity to carefully come up with a countermeasure.”

Ai seemed to catch on faster this time. She nodded several times in understanding, then turned to Yu, who still had a stupefied look on his face, and explained it to him in simpler terms with various analogies.

Takuto took that time to send a telepathic message telling his subordinates to send a guard detail to pick them up. This was to prevent Yu, Ai, and Phon’kaven’s people from finding out about his body double, since in their eyes, they were traveling with the King of Mynoghra himself. When he looked up, he realized Yu had been waiting for him to finish before asking anything now that Ai had helped him understand the situation.

“Okay, I think I get it now. Sounds like some seriously awesome and useful magic. I mean, it affects nations. Nations!

That's an SLG, 4x game for ya… By the way, how long does the spell last? How long does one turn from your game last in reality?"

"Beats me. I'll have to look into it more. If I had to give a time frame, I'd say we can expect it to last at least a year."

"Hmm…" Yu muttered noncommittally, straddling between being convinced and unconvinced by that answer.

Takuto had no way to accurately gauge the length of time either. He might be able to find some information if he looked it up in the Eterpedia in his head, but he had seen too many cases in which the game systems had been altered to fit the real world. If the flow of time in *Eternal Nations* was accurately reproduced, it would take decades, but he had an unfounded certainty that this wasn't the case.

"A year…huh? I can get a lot done in that time… Haa, I guess I'll go train. Can't stay on the losing side forever. Ugh." Yu sighed loudly and kicked a pebble like a frustrated child.

Not being able to do anything against the Succubus Army seemed to have been quite the mental blow to him. Going off grinding monsters until you are powerful enough to face the next boss is RPG basics, but Takuto didn't want him disappearing on an aimless journey again. He at least wanted a way to keep in touch.

"Are you disbanding our party then?" Takuto asked.

"Nah. Mind leaving it as-is, with me able to go off on my own? Like a reserve unit. I promise I'll come back often. I'll make it so we can stay in touch too. And, uh…I'd be overjoyed if you could fund my expenses as well. Just kidding!"

"Of course, as long as you produce results."

Takuto was relieved Yu wasn't leaving for good. The Great Ritual's effects only extended to Mynoghra and its allied factions. Mynoghra and Phon'kaven were already allies, but they didn't have the same solid ties to the RPG Hero faction. Disbanding their party might be viewed by the system as the dissolution of their alliance, removing him from the Great Ritual's protection and leaving him as fodder for the Succubus Army.

But Takuto had worried for nothing. Yu also seemed to see the merits of working with Takuto as his sponsor.

Either way, current circumstances required that they strengthen their forces over the next year, and that applied to everyone here. Even Yu understood that much.

Takuto suddenly wondered what kind of strengthening system the RPG faction brought into this world. Increasing stats with items and other Events from the system? Leveling up by defeating enemies? He wanted to try to incorporate those methods into Mynoghra if possible.

"By the way, can I ask how you train for reference?"

"Uh, it's pretty vague stuff. I'll go meet that guy for now."

"…That guy?"

Who could that be? Takuto wondered. Then he remembered that, unlike him, Yu was able to communicate with the entity that had summoned him into this world.

"The Jokester God. He's a weirdo who's constantly pushing us into trouble, but at the end of the day, he's still the god assigned to me and Ai!" Yu grinned.

Looking at that dazzling, seemingly unsuspecting smile, Takuto couldn't help but hope that the Jokester God would actually grant his wish and not just mess with him.

Eterpedia

Dark Nation

Great Ritual: Mynoghra

The moment it's activated, national borders are fixed, and a nation-spanning barrier is created that makes it impossible for any hostile nation or faction to interfere with each other.

In addition, the state of war at the time the Great Ritual was activated will be maintained, but any units that have invaded each other's territory will be returned to their own territory.

※ This ability can only be used when playing as Mynoghra.
※ You cannot activate it a second time.

Chapter 13: Counterplan

TAKUTO and the group that had returned with him to the Dark Continent dispersed to attend to their own affairs. The Phon'kaven envoy was already back home discussing the conference and ensuing chaos with the rest of the Staff Holders and Pepe. Takuto was also holding an emergency meeting at the Palace in the Accursed Lands to report the outcome and discuss future policy.

"So, yeah, the conference was about as much of a Pandora's box as I'd expected…"

Takuto was in a state of hyper-concentration while controlling his Botchling double, so his subordinates were unable to assess the situation in real-time. This meeting was his first opportunity to report the conference results. After he finished telling them the whole story, the Dark Elves' expressions soured. They'd attentively listened until that point.

They were optimistic about safety because Takuto had sent a double. They had thought that, at worst, they would lose the Botchling and that Mynoghra would be safe no matter what happened. They were unable to react when they suddenly found out that an event that affected the fate of the empire had occurred without them.

Right now, it took everything they had just to process their emotions.

"I cannot believe the Elven empire has fallen so far…" Elder Moltar lamented. "Still, the whole situation doesn't make sense. Qualia is the Holy God's kingdom. It makes no sense for them to join hands with demons like the Succubi, even if they were at a disadvantage."

"Aye. We know their nature all too well," Gia added. "They aren't the type to kowtow to evil without good reason. Viewing us as a threat feels like too weak a reason, if you ask me…"

Takuto had been vague about the Players' abilities. Not because he didn't trust the Dark Elves, but because he was being considerate of the fact that they wouldn't be able to comprehend the logic behind abilities hailing from a video game. Moreover, revealing everything could threaten the authority he held. For this reason, Takuto carefully selected what information to share and explained that the Players' abilities came from the gods they believed in.

Takuto was genuinely at a loss for how to explain away the equipment from Mr. H's game. Each was a powerful weapon or item that could have been at the center of a multitude of legends. Mr. H was a Player with an endless supply of these items. He was a whole lot harder to explain than the RPG Player, who could be put into more understandable terms as a Hero from a fairy tale.

"I'm sure they are hiding things too. No amount of hypothesizing will lead to the answer. It is something we should keep in mind, though. At any rate, it's kind of fortunate that we have narrowed our objectives down to one for now. Never hurts for things to be plain and simple."

Takuto only restricted information when it came to the Players. It was easy to talk to the Dark Elves about Mynoghra's abilities because they understood it all as a part of the King of Ruin's divine powers.

As for the Great Ritual: Dark Nation, Takuto explained it away as a powerful spell he could only use once in his lifetime. The Dark Elves expressed both their gratitude and regret for making their king use such a precious spell, which only made Takuto feel uncomfortable because it was a Great Ritual he would've squandered in an attempt to save it for that perfect moment if he didn't use it now in a time of great need.

"Your power never ceases to amaze me, my liege," Elder Moltar said. "We, your people, will put everything we have into the tasks you have granted us during the remaining time we have before our fated battle with the Alliance."

“Good. It’s fortunate that time is on our side. Let’s do everything we can in this window.”

Having time for Domestic Affairs was a huge advantage for Takuto, and for the SLG *Eternal Nations*. They might not be able to get as much done as they could within the timeframe of the game, but there was still plenty they could accomplish.

Debts must be repaid in full. For them to get payback, Mynoghra needed to become stronger.

“By the way, King Takuto, how long will the Great Ritual last?” Atou asked.

“A year, most likely. It may vary by a few days, but I’m certain it will last about that long.”

“Hmmm…” Atou murmured after hearing his answer.

After parting ways with Yu and the others, Takuto looked into the Great Ritual as soon as he had time. He attempted to sense the flow of magical power, accessed the Eterpedia that existed within his mind, and even meditated and listened to his inner self. He tried all the different methods to measure the most important factor: the grace period.

The duration Takuto had intuited from the start turned out to be correct, and even if it were slightly off, it’d only be by a few days in either direction.

One year.

Everyone understood what that meant. Far too little time.

“A slow and steady build up…isn’t possible in that amount of time,” Elder Moltar said.

“Aye. Considering the sheer size and strength of the enemy’s forces, we need to make drastic changes,” Gia added.

“A year is too short for change on a national scale,” Emle opined.

Gloominess hung over the Dark Elves. Rather than feeling depressed over a premonition of defeat, they had realized that it was impossible to overcome the situation using common-sense methods. They couldn’t think of how to make the impossible possible.

Even coming up with a clever plan and considering it would take several weeks, and they only had a year to do everything. It

was fair to say that the situation was dire. So dire that they wouldn't make it in time if they didn't act now.

Dark despair was beginning to hang thick in the air…

"Hahaha. You have all lost heart so easily. Have you forgotten? You are in the presence of Mynoghra's King of Ruin! Your king already has the means to pull off what you can't even begin to fathom!"

"Oooooh!" the Dark Elves cheered in unison.

Takuto's confidant, Sludge Atou, cleared the gloom. She was the loyal retainer who had guarded Takuto the entire time he remotely controlled the Botchling from his room in Mynoghra's Palace.

In fact, she had done little else but guard Takuto while he was preoccupied with the All-Faction Conference. She was probably trying to draw attention to herself by speaking up. It was an underhanded move, bringing up the king like that, but it was also the smartest move to upend the mood.

"I wish you wouldn't put too much faith in me…"

"What are you saying, King Takuto?! Hardships of this level don't even count as hard if you are on the case! Strategizing should be even easier now that we have a clear indicator of the difference in strength between us."

"True. Better than being caught by surprise later."

Atou didn't doubt for a minute that Takuto had already prepared a way to resolve the problem. Takuto smiled wryly, overwhelmed by her zeal. She wasn't wrong, either. Rather, she had read Takuto's thoughts on the situation perfectly.

Takuto also found it was easier to deal with enemies with defined goals.

"The enemy's goal is clear. They want to bring every faction aside from our own into their fold. Our goal is just as clear. We want to obtain more than enough power to repel and strike back at them."

The Dark Elves each nodded.

What they needed to do was strengthen their military forces for war. They had to prepare single-mindedly for that day they knew

would come.

“The enemy has created a military alliance called the Lawful Continent Alliance. So, we’ll want to form a similar alliance to make up for the difference in numbers.”

The Dark Elves were stunned by Takuto’s declaration. They had always considered the possibility of forming alliances, but there was a difference in weight in what they thought and what came directly from the king’s lips.

Mynoghra was an evil civilization. People naturally avoided evil, shunned it, and at times, even tried to eliminate it. Trying to build an alliance as an empire whose very nature brought out such raw, instinctive reactions was not going to be easy. Whether they tried to establish equal footing or used force to make the other nations understand their position and encourage their submission, they had their work cut out for them.

But if they could pull it off, no other strategy would be more effective against their enemies. If nothing else, an alliance would supply what they lacked.

“In fact, Pepe has recently approached me about the possibility. The tyrannical nature of the Lawful Continent Alliance will force the rest of the neutral nations to the negotiating table.”

The path to making this alliance a reality is in sight—every Dark Elf curiously felt this way when they heard Takuto’s reasoning. Considering the current problems plaguing Idoragya, the neutral nations had plenty of reasons to show a willingness to compromise.

It was easy to forget under the protection of Mynoghra and the powerful entity known as the King of Ruin, but the residents of the Dark Continent were originally weary creatures barely eking out a living in this desolate land.

A drowning man will clutch at straws, as the saying goes, and they were currently drowning. The outcome was obvious.

“Even these wise old eyes of mine failed to see things had progressed that far!” Elder Moltar cried. “Spirits. Your servant Moltar has been exposed to Your Majesty’s vast wisdom many times over, but it truly never ceases to impress me time and again.”

The stage had been set. As long as there were no mishaps during the talks, they should be able to reach an agreement with the neutral nations.

Mynoghra had no sinister designs on the neutral nations either. If they explained how well their alliance with Phon'kaven was going and their lack of evil intent towards the other nations, it should be possible to come together for the clear goal of opposing the Lawful Continent Alliance.

"As long as we gain some level of control of the alliance, the rest will click into place. Ideally, I would take full command, but that will depend on negotiations, I'm sure."

The empire-management council members nodded in agreement with the king's direction.

But there was more to Takuto's strategy. At present, an overwhelming gap in combat ability existed between him and his enemies. Even just looking at their common soldiers, the Lawful Continent Alliance had Elves, Succubi, and Paladins all being enhanced by Mr. H's overpowered equipment. Up against this army, whose combat prowess had been strengthened by several levels, the Dark Continent forces stood no chance, no matter how many modern weapons Takuto supplied them with.

"In addition, I heard that the Maritime Nation of Sutharland, located in the eastern part of the Dark Continent, has some unknown technology used for intercontinental trade. If we can obtain it, we'll be able to produce even more powerful monsters to serve Mynoghra."

"Oooooooh!!"

Takuto had learned through Pepe that there were still many undiscovered lands in this world. A world existed outside of the continent of Idoragya. On this continent, which lacked advanced nautical technology, the outside world was not often discussed, so it was a significant leap forward to discover a country was conducting intercontinental trade. It was worth taking a gamble to see how advanced their technology was, as it could potentially accelerate the

development of Mynoghra's tech tree, which typically required years of research to progress.

"For now, our priority is to make contact with the neutral nations. Whether we're forming a military alliance on the Dark Continent or acquiring technology from another country, we need a point of contact first. I'll ask Phon'kaven to act as our intermediary, but I want you to keep gathering as much information as possible in the meantime."

"Yes, sire! Since we can no longer investigate the northern continent and its holy nations, we will direct all our resources into investigating the neutral nations. I vow we will collect information that will satisfy you, Your Majesty," Elder Moltar promised.

"Good. Pay special attention to people. People who will be important to us, people who can become a fighting force, and those with special skills and abilities are of particular interest to us," Takuto instructed.

Mynoghra still suffered from a severe shortage of personnel. Furthermore, with the upcoming war in mind, they would need a large influx of military leaders and middle managers for operational roles. In a game, these would typically be the named characters. It was urgent to find a large number of capable people of a similar caliber to named characters.

"A year seems like a lot of time at first. But it's also a length of time that passes you by in the blink of an eye if you aren't careful. You are the only ones I can count on for this kind of reconnaissance. I have high expectations of you," Takuto told the Dark Elves.

"Yes, sire!!"

The plan was set.

Mynoghra needed to hold its own conference to build an alliance on the Dark Continent.

Takuto came to the realization that there had been an overwhelming number of meetings and conferences since he arrived

in this world. He was strangely convinced that *Eternal Nations* had cleverly cut that boring reality out of the game.

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AFTER giving instructions to the Dark Elves, Takuto took a brief break in his private chambers. Thanks to adding the Botchling double to his tactics, he now had a wide range of actions he could take himself. If he wanted to, he could run around Mynoghra, taking direct command of every little thing. Takuto had imposed on himself the minimum amount of rest needed. Beyond that, he was going to work himself like a horse for the duration of the year.

"Good work today, King Takuto."

As he stretched to loosen his body, which had become stiff from sitting in his chair for too long, Atou brought him a cup of aromatically brewed coffee. This drink was the gold standard for times of deep concentration. Takuto liked it a little weak, cooled to the perfect temperature, and drinkable in a single gulp.

He accepted the steaming cup and placed it on the desk before turning to face Atou.

"Thanks. You did well today, too… Still, what do we do about this one?"

"You mean the enemy military alliance? I never imagined they would go straight to launching a massive rush battle against us. That's rare even in *Eternal Nations*. Although quite effective when used against the unprepared!"

"Usually, we'd ensure our safety by trying to get the other nations to bring each other down through diplomacy and intentionally creating tension between them, and other such measures we can take from the background. I let my guard down, thinking the Succubus Army and Qualia were too different to ever work together, and this is the result. I should have seen this coming after the TRPG forces teamed up with two good-aligned Saints."

But Takuto thought he was too harsh on himself to consider this his failure. Asking him to be prepared for this nonsensical

possibility was like asking him to prepare for the possibility that every conspiracy theory was true.

Witch Vagia had made careful preparations and bet everything on this conference being a perfect strategy to entrap all her enemies and allies in a single rush. Then again, many aspects of the conference didn't make sense, and Takuto had no doubt there was more to their alliance than meets the eye. They were hiding something…

He had too much to do before he could spend time considering what that something was. At the bare minimum, he needed to form the Dark Continent Alliance and obtain Sutharland's technology, or they would be dead in the water.

At the time, the Dark Elves were so impressed that he didn't dare say anything, thinking it would be a damper. Atou was the only one who understood that even an alliance would not be enough to make up for the difference in their military strength enhanced by game-breaking Player buffs.

Under normal circumstances, he should be racking his brain for a way out of this. If they continued on this path, they were guaranteed to be crushed by the Lawful Continent Alliance's overwhelming power in the future.

Seeing as Takuto was still operating with level-headed calm despite all that, Atou became convinced he had a secret weapon.

"But, King Takuto, you seem awfully calm despite the crisis. Do you possibly have another trump card to play?"

"Hehehe," he chuckled. "You know me so well. In fact—"

Takuto then spoke of his knockout plan to destroy the Lawful Continent Alliance.

Atou was astonished and exasperated by the daring and unexpected tactic.

SYSTEM MESSAGE

With the activation of its Great Ritual, Mynoghra's borders and cities have been fixed.
From now on, contact with hostile nations will be impossible until the specified number of turns has passed.

Turns Remaining: 1 year

OK

Chapter 14: Those Who Rise Up

<Southern Dark Continent, Gramfil, the City-state of Slaves and Criminals >

SHACKS dotted the barren land. It was too much of a shantytown to be called a city, much less a city-state. It was barely hospitable enough for people to survive, and those who did lacked any semblance of energy to call it a life. The city was originally established as a refuge for political prisoners, criminals, and escaped slaves from all over Idoragya. But contrary to the fierce ambition they once held, their refuge had become a place of death and finality for the many listless losers who extended their miserable lives there.

In this ending place where losers tended to wash up, one man did nothing but loudly sob and lament his lot in life.

"Uh-aah…wuaaaaah….!"

He was slightly too young to be called a man. His black hair was shortly cropped, and his clothes were too nice for this country. The design didn't even seem to be of this world.

Was he around middle-school age? Tormented by something, the boy had been letting out anguished wails in his shabby hotel room for the past few minutes.

"It's over. I'm over. It's all over."

Tears spilled ceaselessly from his bleary eyes, and his cries of despair echoed painfully in the dim room.

The boy's name was…

"There's no way this trash could ever win. It's always like this with me. I can't win when it counts. No, I can't even win when it doesn't count, so there's no way I could when it does!"

The young man's name was Keiji Kuhara.

"I'm soooo sorry, Soalina. I'm soooo sorry, Fenne. I knew you had high hopes for me. I know I told you to leave it all to me. I'm soooo sorry for being a pathetic loser! I wanna die! I just wanna die already!"

Keiji's life became that of a loser's once he had suffered defeat at the hands of Takuto Ira. He had picked a fight with another Player without ever showing himself, and ended up losing his subordinate, Witch Erakino, and almost losing all his powers as a result. Ultimately, Takuto had to withdraw so his fangs never turned toward Keiji, but Keiji had lost nevertheless.

"And…and…*aaaaaah*, I can't. I'll remember what happened again. Why am I still alive and well when you aren't? You were the strongest woman! The ultimate woman I created! Your settings, your manner of talking, your clothing, your skills…all of it born from my imagination. The first woman I ever made and loved, even though I can't do anything but lose at gambling!!" he wailed.

But there was an entity that would not allow him to lose. The god assigned to the TRPG faction: the Dice God. Outraged by his disappointing results, the Dice God sealed the majority of Keiji's abilities, turned him into a boy, and hurled him down to the land of man.

Keiji could rot here, or he could rise up and try to make a comeback. Such was the capricious decision made by the dice, and it resulted in Keiji's survival. Although the man himself was already in a broken state of mind…

"I wanna dieeeeeeeeeeeee! Lemme die, Erakino! Just lemme die already, ERAKINOOOOOOOOO!"

But even a loser like Keiji had something left to cling to.

"SHUT YOUR TRAP!"

"Ooooof!"

A powerful kick connected with Keiji's abdomen, sending him tumbling into the rickety wall. Surprised by the sudden attack, Keiji, his face crumpled and distorted with tears, turned toward the culprit. It was a girl he knew well.

“Do you want some cheese with your whine?! Pathetic! You’re still a Player, no matter how much you suck at the game! Sure, most of your abilities were sealed and you’ve been turned into a *shota* as a penalty, but you’re still the Game Master, aren’t you?!”

Witch Erakino.

She was the TRPG faction’s Witch, and the NPC Keiji had created. She was his most trusted and unrivaled subordinate. Her existence was definitively lost during the battle with Mynoghra. And now that Keiji had most of his GM Authority sealed, he couldn’t resurrect any characters.

How could Erakino be there?

“Ugh, sorry, Erakinooo…”

“Penalty Kick!”

“Guaaaah! Wh-What was that for, Erakino?!”

The girl called Erakino landed another solid kick to Keiji’s stomach. Eating a direct hit from an NPC like her would inflict serious wounds to even a Player. But since he got by with just a few tears, a cry of pain, and a word of complaint, she obviously went easy on him.

Her purpose seemed to be to scold this pathetic man into shape. She crossed her slender arms and glared down at Keiji, displeasure written all over her pretty face.

“Injecting you with motivation! And would you stop calling this *aberration* Erakino already?!”

The girl had repeatedly told Keiji to stop. Yet he made the same mistake constantly. This was a reality he couldn’t ignore.

“What you see here is just residue. A remnant of the Witch’s settings. An empty shell left by a bug the Dice God couldn’t be bothered to erase.”

The girl standing before him, as she had in the past, was no longer the girl he knew. She was lost long ago, and what he now saw was merely an afterimage. Her cache.

Erakino was…

“Erakino is…already dead,” she reaffirmed.

She had disappeared right before his eyes, after all.

“Uuaaaaaaaah…” Keiji wept and curled in on himself.

He didn’t normally possess such volatile emotions. To begin with, Erakino’s origins were unique. She was a *character* he had created through tireless trial and error using his GM abilities.

The twenty-second Erakino he’d created. The twenty-second Erakino he’d poured his heart and soul into.

That’s all she was.

But that’s where things went wrong. A man who had been unable to do anything, unable to create anything, whose self-esteem had hit rock bottom, and whose pride had rotted away, had finally created something that he could be proud of. That he could boast about. That’s why he couldn’t forget about the twenty-second Erakino—the girl who was already lost.

“Call this aberration Echo. That’s the agreement. Get it through your thick skull that she is different from Erakino. This is important.”

No matter how much this girl called Echo tried to reason with or scold him, he just continued to moan and cry, unable to forget the woman he’d lost.

The man known as Keiji Kuhara had nothing. Because it was all lost on that day, long ago.

But fate would not allow him to leave.

The time had come.

The time to fight.

“C’mon, on your feet! Suck it up! Get moving! Unlike Erakino, this bug has zero affection for ya. ZERO! Don’t even think about being coddled! We’re heading out as soon as you’re ready!”

The remnant traces of what had once been Erakino. This girl, who should be nothing more than an empty shell, pumped her fist in the air, trying to motivate him to get the ball rolling, just as the woman he once knew used to.

Keiji blankly stared at her with dead eyes. He had about as much motivation as an inanimate object. He was merely swept up in the flow Echo created.

“Blegh. Get ready for what? Where are we going, Era—Echooo? I’ve got no direction…” he grumbled.

"Haa," Echo sighed. "You can't even figure out that much? You're so pathetic, this lil' bug will just have to tell you♪. We're going to go find Soalina and Fenne, duh!"

"…Huh? Why should we?" Keiji snipped, the first signs of life returning to his dead eyes as he voiced his objections.

Keiji didn't know their whereabouts after the decisive fight with Mynoghra. Knowing them, they were likely still alive, but he had no way of knowing where they were or what they were doing.

And how could he possibly go to see them now? It was painful just remembering the days when they naively spoke about their dreams of building a peaceful world together.

How could a man, who had nothing, possibly apologize to these women he was unable to do anything for? His anger at his own incompetence came out in a harsh tone without his realizing it.

Echo grinned at his reaction. "To clean up after your mess, dummy♪. Or wait, don't tell me you were actually planning on setting down roots and living the rest of your pathetic life in this crime city? Ew."

"Ack," Keiji choked. She had him pegged.

He had long realized that things couldn't continue as they were. He'd barely managed to survive so far off of the funds Echo had scraped together for him until now. But even he knew he couldn't keep this life up long.

If anything, Keiji had a lifetime of experience suffering from his gambling habits. He understood the importance of money and knew painfully well just how much it was needed to survive. He was on a direct course to ruination.

Besides, if he carried on like this, it wouldn't just be his ruin…

"That won't work, though, will it? I mean, the Succubus Army will march right in and take over this place, too, if you do diddly♪. And if that happens, poor, poor Soalina and Fenne will go through a hell of a time! Aaaah, thanks to a certain loser not putting on his big boy pants, the two frightened Saints will get dragged out of their hiding place and end up being treated the way all nuns are in crappy, erotic doujin games♪. Oh, the inhumanity!"

"Agh! Ugh…uwaah…"

Tears welled up in Kuhara's swollen eyes and sobs wracked his body. He seemed to be remembering how he was too scared to do anything during the All-Faction Conference. Perhaps he also recalled how he had trembled in the corner of the room when the Succubus messenger arrived and had to be dealt with by Echo.

Whatever the source, the pathetic man was about to pathetically break down crying again. But Echo wasn't going to let him keep it up.

"That's why I'm telling you to stand up, already. Wipe your own ass. Clean up your own mess. Be a man. Become someone who can be glad Erakino died. Don't waste away like some loser. Defeat fate. God is watching you."

"Damn it all…"

Perhaps she'd provoked him just enough to reignite what meager pride he had left. Keiji threw aside the spineless and wishy-washy attitude that had become his norm. He shouted at the top of his lungs and rose from the floor where he'd been a trembling mess.

"*Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaah*! Damn it! I'll do it! I just have to do it, right?! I'll do it for you, you jackass! I'm the world's greatest Game Master! You all just have to get off my back!!"

What man could stand letting things end after having all that said to him? After being made such a fool? He was more driven by desperation and self-abandonment than by pride and stubbornness. But he had undoubtedly started to look forward again, and taking that first step was critical, no matter what brought it about.

Echo cackled when she saw Keiji shouting to pump himself up. "Now that's what I'm talking about! Keep it up! This is what you need. A strong will is what will cut a path through fate and bring you victory."

"Hell yeah! I'm not outta the game yet! Most of my GM Authority was sealed, but I can still roll the dice. Next round is gonna be my big wiiiiiiin!"

Echo's lips curved in the biggest, happiest smile at his words, and she clapped her hands. It appeared she'd gotten the exact outcome she'd wanted. Her innocent joy reminded Keiji so much of

Erakino that it made his heart flutter, but it was no big deal compared to the zeal he now had to get things done.

"You better watch me, Era— Echo! I'm gonna do it! I'm gonna kill them all and win this shitty game! I'll be the last man standing!"

He could at least talk a big game. But the lack of vocabulary and refinement in his words revealed his true character.

Echo sneered and threw out a barbed remark as if to make fun of the fact that he was all talk. "Yeah! You said it! Now use that pep to slaughter the King of Ruin too♪."

"Eeek! The K-King of Ruin! Takuto Ira. *Nooooooooooooooo*!!"

They were right back to square one. Apparently, the name Takuto Ira was a trigger word for him. Keiji crouched right back down in his corner and began muttering hateful things to himself.

"Haa, he's a lost cause," Echo sighed and threw both hands up in defeat.

Her gesture seemed awfully full of human emotion for an empty shell left by a bug in the system.

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MEANWHILE, Takuto was forming a strategy hinged on Keiji's involvement, none the wiser about the Game Master's questionable mental state. He planned to form an alliance with Keiji Kuhara.

When Atou learned of this insane plan, it took her a while to process it. Keiji was someone they had fought with their lives on the line. She assumed he might join their enemy's alliance, but she never imagined allying with him. In all actuality, she even thought that he needed to be eliminated on the spot, as he posed a risk for the future.

But Takuto was of a different mind.

Atou rarely opposed Takuto's ideas. But would this one actually work out? She posed this frank question to her master.

"Is it really possible to win over the GM and Lenea's Saints, even though we were once such bitter enemies?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. As for Kuhara, when I probed him during the All-Faction Conference, he seemed skittish and weak,

so I think we might be able to do something about him if we go in tough."

"…Is he actually usable in a fight?"

Takuto knew what Atou was getting at with her question, even if she didn't say it in so many words.

Keiji Kuhara had been stripped of his Game Master abilities.

When he was settling the score with Keiji, Takuto used the TRPG game system to initiate a disciplinary motion. Through that, he had stripped away his opponent's greatest weapon, his GM Authority.

In other words, Keiji Kuhara had been reduced to a mere TRPG Player who could just roll the dice.

Atou wanted to know if he would still be a useful ally in the fight ahead.

Takuto had naturally already accounted for that.

"There are plenty of ways to make him useful, just like how there was a way for me to strip Kuhara of his GM Authority then and there."

"In which case, it all hinges on whether he will agree to join us or not."

Takuto nodded in the affirmative. He wasn't worried about the TRPG abilities. The problematic factor was how Keiji would react to the plan.

His idea was backed by what Yu had told him about each faction and god having their own goals. The TRPG faction was consistently trying to create a peaceful country when they infiltrated the Divine Nation of Lenea. Obviously, all the massacres and decisions they made during that process were questionable, but they had been acting with relatively good intentions.

If Keiji had a conflicting goal, he wouldn't have allowed such actions. And yet, as the GM, he consistently cooperated and aided Erakino and the Saints in that venture.

If he, like Yu Kamimiyadera and Takuto, had even the slightest desire to live in peace with someone dear to him, then Takuto felt it was worth a shot.

"It'll depend on what Kuhara is after, but I don't think an alliance is entirely out of the question. There's room for negotiation," Takuto said.

But unfortunately, Takuto had defeated Keiji's Witch, Erakino. That was the linchpin concern. If Takuto were in Keiji's position, he would never forgive anyone who took away his Atou. They would need to find common ground…or Takuto needed to bring him the ultimate peace offering…

Guess I'll have to think about that after I find him. And if I'm being greedy, I want the Saints too… But that might be shooting for the moon. They're both sticklers.

Takuto would love to get the two Saints to join his alliance. But he had a feeling they would be harder to win over than Keiji. He decided he would be happy as long as they didn't become the enemy.

"Teaming up with an old enemy is a classic move that's bound to be entertaining. I'm not sure what the odds of it actually happening are, but if we can form an alliance with them, then our forces will definitely be on par with the enemy's."

The GM abilities were overpowered. With them in Mynoghra's arsenal, they would have plenty of ways to take on the Lawful Continent Alliance. With Takuto, Yu, and Keiji, the Dark Continent Alliance would have more Players in its lineup…

"I see. So that's your plan! Now that I think about it, that must be why you urged the Dark Elves to concentrate their investigation into people."

"Yup. Of course, it'd be awesome if we dig up some interesting people to recruit as well."

His all-or-nothing killer plan wouldn't come into play until they actually found Keiji. He was likely somewhere on the Dark Continent, but if he had escaped to another continent through Sutharland, it'd be extremely difficult to find him within the year.

In any case, finding the TRPG faction's location was the first step. All other plans would go from there.

"We'll remain in obscurity for the year. At least it looks like it will be an entertaining year."

The King of Ruin chuckled darkly.

War was on the horizon. That battle would be one of epic proportions that would shake this world to its very core.

Of that, there was no doubt.

Afterword

FEHU Kazuno here. It's been a while since I last greeted you. Thank you for picking up a copy of *Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra Volume 7*. I hope you enjoyed this volume just as much as the others. Now then, I believe you might already know this by the time you've picked up this book, but *Mynoghra* is getting an anime!

Boy, I had such a hard time believing the news at first that I had the unrealistic thought that, "Maybe this is a dream Fehu Kazuno's brain in a vat is having?" I guess you could say that my mind has finally caught up with reality.

Well, there's still a chance this is all just a dream the brain in a vat is having…

In any case, I'm thrilled to be able to share this exciting news with everyone who has supported this series up to this point. This is a new experience for me, so I've been learning as I go, but I've cooperated with the anime's production team with everything I've got as the author. The anime is still being worked on even as I write this afterword. I'll do my best to make sure everyone can continue to enjoy the series. And with that said, it's about time I get to the Acknowledgment Corner.

To Illustrator Jun, the editing department at GC Novels, my editor, the proofreaders, the design company, everyone else who worked on this book, and last but not least, my readers—thank you again! Please look forward to the anime version of *Apocalypse Bringer Mynoghra*.


マイノグーラ
アニメイル決定
Jun
MYNOGHRA IS
GETTING AN ANIME!


祝アニメ化決定!
おめでとうございます!
CONGRATULATIONS ON THE ANIME ADAPTATION!



Welcome to Olivia's Magic Jewelers

By Rinrin Yuki Illust Suzaku

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By Hanami Nishine Illust Rin Hagiwara

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